

IN BETWEEN SPECTACLE AND POLITICAL CORRECTNESS: *VAMOS CON TODO* – AN AMBIVALENT NEWS/TALK SHOW¹

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Abstract

Vamos con todo is a mixed-genre entertainment programme transmitted in Ecuador on a national television channel. The segment of the programme that we examine in this paper focuses on gossip and events surrounding local/national celebrities. Talk as entertainment is central to this segment which is structured around a series of ‘news’ stories announced by the presenters and mostly conveyed through (pre-recorded) interviews. Extracts of these interviews are ingeniously presented to create a sense of confrontation between the celebrities concerned. Each news story is then followed-up by informal ‘discussions’ among the show’s 5-6 presenters who take on the role of panellists.

While *Vamos con todo* incorporates various genres, the running thread throughout the programme is the creation of scandal and the instigation of confrontation. What is of particular interest, however, is that no sooner the scandalous stories are presented, the programme presenters attempt to defuse the scandal and controversy that they contributed to creating. The programme thus results in what viewers familiar with the genre of confrontational talk shows in Spain, for example, may regard as an emasculated equivalent. In this paper we explore linguistic and other mechanisms through which confrontation and scandal are first created and then defused in *Vamos con todo*. We consider the situational, cultural and socio-political context of the programme as possibly playing a part in this disjointedness. The study draws on the literature on television discourse, talk shows and (im)politeness in the media.

Keywords: News/talk shows; Confrontational talk; Media discourse; Television discourse; Ecuadorian television.

1. Introduction and aims

Televised talk shows have a rather long history particularly in American, British and German television, dating back to the 1970s or perhaps even earlier (cf. Gregori Signes 2000; Hess-Lüttich 2007).² The last 20 years or so, however, have seen, as we know, the growth of a subgenre of audience-driven talk shows (and other programmes) that have one key feature in common – spectacle as the basis for the entertainment offered –

¹ The study forms part of a broader project on (im)politeness in media discourse, funded by the Spanish Ministry for Science and Innovation (FFI 2009-10515) and the European Regional Development Fund.

² The reader is referred to Munson (1993) and Gregori Signes (2000), for example, for a history of television talk shows whose origins can be found in radio programmes dating back to the 1930s.

and spectacle in these talk shows is most often to be found in “the emphasis upon display, revelation, shock, and confrontation” (Richardson & Meinhof 1999: 131-132) (see also, among others, Brenes Peña 2011; Culpeper 2005; Gamboa Cetina 2001; Lorenzo-Dus 2009). This is a trend that is currently not limited to television but can be found in other types of media, including computer-mediated communication (cf. Fuentes Rodríguez 2009; Fuentes Rodríguez & Alcaide Lara 2008; Sibilía 2008).

With respect to talk shows, the word *confrontainment* (cf. Holly 1994, cited in Hess-Lüttich 2007: 1365) has been coined to refer precisely to those shows that offer entertainment on the basis of confrontation. The label of *confrontalk* is also used by some to describe “hot” or “controversial” talk that characterizes some talk shows (cf. Munson 1993: 7), whereas *talk theatre* (cf. Grindstaff 2002) is used to highlight the staged nature of this kind of talk. Another allied term is that of *infortáculo* ‘infortacle’ (Cebrián Herreros 1998), used to refer to programmes that present information (*información*) as spectacle (*espectáculo*). Finally, ‘exploitative’ is another term that has been employed by some, altogether appropriately, to describe the voyeuristic quality of certain programmes (Richardson & Meinhof 1999), or because they focus on humiliating the participants (Culpeper 2005). Confrontation in the face of disagreement or other types of conflict is created in many of these programmes in a variety of ways, such as the expression of negative emotions like anger or contempt in the form of face attacks, shouting etc. (cf. Lorenzo-Dus 2009); verbal as well as nonverbal means are enhanced by clever editing of the raw visual material (Richardson & Meinhof 1999). Colloquial expression is also the norm in many of these programmes, creating a fictional closeness among participants in the show and with the different audiences involved.³

Talk shows of the type described here from American, British and German television have received considerable attention.⁴ Less attention from a discourse analytic perspective has been given to broadcastings in other languages such as Spanish although there is a growing body of work, particularly with reference to Peninsular Spanish (cf. Bernhardt 2006; Brenes Peña 2011; García Gómez 2000, 2008; Lorenzo-Dus 2007).⁵ This paper sets out to examine *Vamos con Todo* (VCT), from Ecuadorian television, as a variant of confrontainment or infortacle.

VCT is a mixed-genre programme with two more or less distinct segments (see Section 2): The first, which interests us here, focuses on ‘information’ largely limited to gossip surrounding national celebrities including, for example, actors, TV presenters and footballers. The second segment offers a range of other kinds of entertainment such as comedy sketches, live performances of bands, etc. The ‘informative’ segment can be described as a cross between a news programme and a talk show – a news/talk magazine (Munson 1993: 8) – in that it is structured around the presentation of a series of ‘news’ stories, with follow-up ‘discussions’ among the show’s presenters. The news

³ Different authors (cf. Gregori Signes 2000) have considered this with reference to Fairclough’s (1995) work on the conversationalisation of media discourse as well as Hutchby’s (1996) discussion of the quasi-conversational nature of talk radio.

⁴ For overviews, see for example, Richardson & Meinhoff (1999); Hess-Lüttich (2007); and Lorenzo-Dus (2009).

⁵ The reader is also referred to Gamboa Cetina (2001) for a brief account of the development of talk shows in Spanish, produced and aired in the Americas, with a focus on features of two Mexican talk shows.

stories are conveyed mostly through pre-recorded interviews with celebrities. As such, this part of the programme aims to combine presenting information with expressing opinion. All of this is done tabloid style, given the selection of topics and stories and the sensationalizing treatment they get. The stories are mostly around the wrongdoings of/to the famous (e.g. someone having made damaging insinuations about a celebrity, a celebrity not having repaid a debt incurred with a close relative) as well as rivalries between the famous (e.g. former colleagues in a dance group say unpleasant things about each other; two salsa singers refer to each other in their songs mockingly). There are also stories about celebrities' love lives which dwell on the intimate; indeed, VCT, like other tabloid talk shows makes the private available for mass consumption (Imbert 2005). And even positive news stories within VCT seem to build on the negative (e.g. a celebrity couple leading a harmonious relationship after having experienced a rough period).

While VCT is, as we have indicated, a mixed-genre programme, it has the instigation of controversy and confrontation as its running thread: The programme and the presenters instigate confrontation and controversy with most of the news stories that they announce. Nonetheless, there is a certain incongruence or ambivalence embedded in the programme in that, when discussing the stories, the presenters seem rapidly to backtrack, ending each story in a rather conciliatory and harmonious manner. To put it in another way, there is a certain mismatch between the sensationalizing treatment the stories initially get and their ultimate resolution.

What we aim to show in this paper is how the disjointedness that we describe for VCT is brought into being, that is how VCT is first constructed as spectacle and then how controversy and confrontation are defused through misfires (or unintended actions) as well as through certain purposive actions of the presenters. For this, we draw on work on television discourse (cf. Richardson & Meinhof (1999); Hess-Lüttich (2007); Lorenzo-Dus (2009)); (im)politeness theory (cf. Spencer-Oatey, 2000) as well as conversation analysis (cf. Hutchby 1996), albeit to a lesser extent. We take well-established Spanish talk shows that focus on similar themes as VCT as a point of reference. To our knowledge, there is no Spanish programme directly equivalent to VCT; however, there are a number of talk shows or programmes with a talk show element where confrontainment, like in VCT, is a key ingredient. These include magazine-style programmes such as *La Noria* that contain interviews with celebrities, and talk shows on their own that focus on gossip such as the daytime show *Sálvame*. Confrontation in programmes like *Sálvame*, unlike in VCT, tends to be kept constant from start to finish.⁶

We found that the incongruity that we identified in VCT is closely linked to the dual role that the presenters/panellists adopt: That of inciters⁷ when they present the stories, and that of appeasers or conciliators when they discuss them as 'panellists'. We also found that it is partly the consequence of the format of the programme, as we

⁶The reader is referred to Fuentes Rodríguez and Placencia (2013) for a description and analysis of these talk shows.

⁷Brenes Peña (2011: 89) uses an allied term, that of *el excitador* (literally, 'the exciter') to refer to the role of the host (*el presentador*) in the talk shows that she examined. With respect to reality shows, Chambat and Ehrenberg (1993) (cited in Abril, 1995: 93) already noted a similar role of presenters, that of 'animators' (*animadores*).

will attempt to show. As to the rationale behind the ambivalence identified, we suggest in the conclusions looking into both the socio-political context in which programmes are produced and aired as well as viewers' expectations, which are entrenched within particular socio-cultural contexts.

In brief, through the examination of VCT, ultimately, we aim to illustrate the influence which confrontational television has had further afield, beyond the English-speaking world and/or the European context, and more specifically, how confrontational may be 'domesticated' (Venuti 1998) to suit particular socio-cultural and socio-political environments. While Venuti (1998) uses the term *domestication* (vis-à-vis *foreignization*) to refer to the translation strategy of making the text familiar to the target readership by minimizing the strangeness of the foreign text, we are extending the use of the term here to refer to the appropriation of a particular television genre – the (confrontational) daytime talk show – and its adaptation to a particular socio-cultural/political environment.

Below, we first briefly describe some features of VCT and the data employed for the present study (Section 2); we then consider the VCT's format vis-à-vis the format of other day-time talk shows (Section 3). In Section 4 we examine the linguistic and other mechanisms employed in the (re)creation of controversy and confrontation in VCT and, in 5, we consider, as we have said, misfires and mechanisms employed for the defusing of controversy/confrontation. Finally, in Section 6, we take a look at the socio-political and socio-cultural context of VCT.

2. Some features of VCT

VCT, as we have indicated, is a mixed-genre entertainment programme in Spanish from RTS – a private national broadcasting channel. The show started in 2004 and, having grown in popularity, it is currently aired in a 2-hour daytime slot, 5 days a week, with two versions of the programme produced for two different regions in Ecuador. Here we look at the initial version, produced in Guayaquil, based on the analysis of a sample of programmes broadcast in the autumn of 2009, selected at random: 3 in total (one aired in September, one in October and one in November).

The programme is conducted by a group of 5-6 permanent presenters (see Image 1 below) who also perform the role of panellists in certain sections, that of hosts, in others, and, in some sections, also that of audience. Additionally, they are the spokespersons for certain product placement campaigns and they become actors within the comedy sketches that they offer. The title of the programme – *Vamos con todo*, literally, 'we have a go at everything' – seems aptly to reflect the range of roles the presenters perform, as well as the range of content that the programme offers. The presenters are supported by a team of reporters who go to different locations to interview celebrities although some of the presenters also take part as reporters, presenting their own pre-recorded interviews during the programme.

Image 1: Set of VCT with presenters



The programme, as we have also indicated, has two more or less distinct segments: One that focuses on ‘information’ surrounding celebrities (*la farándula*), and one that offers a range of other, more traditional forms of entertainment such as comedy sketches. Both segments are interspersed with publicity and greetings that the presenters send to celebrities or ordinary folk on their birthdays, for example, or on their hometown anniversary festivals, as well as the occasional public service announcement (e.g. about a lost pet).

The ‘informative’ segment, which lasts approximately one hour, is constructed around the presentation of a series of ‘news’ stories that unfold through (mostly pre-recorded) interviews with celebrities, carried out by the presenters themselves or field reporters, as indicated above. A ‘discussion’ among the 5-6 presenters/panellists in the studio follows each news story. The news stories concentrate on gossip, that is, private matters relating to a third person who is absent, providing some sort of evaluation of the behaviours that are described (cf. Ben-Ze’ev 1994; Blum-Kulka 2000; Taylor 1994). The focus is often on behaviours that are considered inappropriate or unacceptable and, which therefore, elicit negative evaluations. As a result, there usually is *an offender* (Egins & Slade 1997: 299). Nonetheless, as we will see, while the show attempts to construct the behaviour of some celebrities as inappropriate, inviting interviewees to provide negative evaluations, the interviewees do not necessarily align themselves with that stance of the programme.

3. VCT vis-à-vis other talk shows

We indicated earlier that VCT is a mixed-genre programme. In terms of its talk-show quality, VCT conforms to broad definitions of talk shows, such as the one provided by Gregori-Signes (2000: 8) with reference to Livingstone and Lunt’s (1994) work: “Talkshows, as the name indicates, are programmes which provide both talk and entertainment for the audience or, what amounts to the same thing, entertainment through talk”. Also, VCT, like other talk shows (Gregori Signes 2000; Mincer & Mincer 1982) draws on two main interactional formats: Talk or conversation and the

interview format. Likewise, VCT brings together news and entertainment, a feature of talk shows that García Gómez (2008), for example, highlights (see also Timberg & Erler 2002).

There are, however, many different types of talk shows (cf. Munson 1993; Richardson & Meinhof 1999; Gregori Signes 2000; Hess-Lüttich 2007; García Gómez 2008; Cebrián Herreros 1998) that have borrowed from diverse formats. Munson (1993: 7) highlights this when he says with reference to American television, that “[t]he talkshow ‘genre’ ... has come to assume many ‘messy,’ hybridized variations in the thousands of talkshows that air locally and nationally – even internationally – in any given week”.

Carbaugh (1988), for example, distinguishes between two basic categories: Issue- and personality-centred talk shows. On the other hand, Richardson & Meinhof (1999), make an initial distinction between daytime and evening talk shows. The latter are celebrity talk shows normally broadcast in the evening, whereas the former are talk shows with ordinary people, normally aired during the day. In these daytime shows, ordinary people are the ones who provide material for the show by talking about their “experiences” and offering their “views” (Richardson & Meinhof 1999: 124). Within the latter category, Richardson and Meinhof make some further differentiations distinguishing, for example, exploitative from non-exploitative talk shows although they admit that these are not clear-cut categories.

Looking at the interactional format, García Gómez (2008) also distinguishes between two basic strands of talk shows: Audience discussion debates, referred to by some as audience participation debates (cf. Lorenzo-Dus 2007) and talk shows based on the interview format (see also Cebrián Herreros 1998).

With reference to Carbaugh’s (1988) categorization, VCT is mainly not an issue- but a personality-centred kind of talk show. Similarly, but with some caveats, VCT would fall under Richardson & Meinhof’s (1999) celebrity talk show category. VCT shows, however, are aired during the day and unlike Richardson & Meinhof’s evening shows, they tend to focus on wrongdoings rather than celebrities’ achievements. With respect to García Gómez’s strands, VCT belongs to the second strand, albeit with some caveats too. Talk shows based on the interview format tend to be associated with testimonials; however testimonials are not so central to VCT. In VCT, it is not so much about participants’ experiences but, as we have highlighted, the focus is on what they know about others and how they perceive others.

Regarding the participants, the presence of a guest or guests in the studio is normally a distinguishing feature of talk shows. This does not of necessity happen in the segment of VCT that we are examining; it is more common for ‘guests’ to be brought into the programme via pre-recorded interviews, as already highlighted. The element of the interview is nonetheless central to VCT as the talk derived provides the material for discussion among the presenters. Also, this pre-recorded interview talk is ingeniously used by the programme producers to stage the drama surrounding the famous, giving the illusion of confrontation: Two or more separate interviews around the same story may be presented in one programme, one after the other, with the different actors in these stories seemingly being encouraged to address their ‘opponent’ directly (see below); this is in order to create some sort of opposition sequences (cf. Hutchby 1996).

Another difference concerning the participants is that, while in some talk shows there are guest panellists (cf. Brenes Peña 2011),⁸ in VCT the same presenters assume the role of ‘discussants’. Yet another feature characteristic of many talk shows is that there is an audience in the studio that participates in co-constructing the show. There is no such audience in VCT, although the (co) presenters in some sections appear to perform the role of one by, for example, collaborating in the co-construction of the story as controversial, heightening its interest for viewers. This can be seen in extract 1 below both in the exclamations the co-presenters produce as well as in the comments they make while the story is being announced (see also Section 3).

Extract 1 (October)⁹

Presenters: Gabriela, Jessenia, ‘Felipito’

Gabriela: más adelante Patricio Moreno pues realmente el actor pues no le gustan las polémicas, él siempre se mantiene al margen de eso, trata de no involucrarse en escándalos, pero SE METIERON CON SU FAMILIA
‘later on Patricio Moreno this actor does not really like controversy, he always steers clear of this, and tries not to get involved in scandals, but THEY INTERFERED WITH HIS FAMILY’

Co-presenters: [Exclamations]

Gabriela: y cuando alguien y yo creo que a todos nos llega un momento en que se meten con nuestra familia, ahí sí (.)
‘and when someone, and I think we all face a time at one point where someone interferes with our family, then (.)’

Jessenia: brincamos
‘we jump’

Gabriela: todo cambia
‘everything changes’

‘Felipito’: duele
‘it hurts’

Gabriela: duele y duele muchísimo
‘it hurts, it hurts a lot’

Jessenia: es que brincamos como gatos en celo
‘the thing is that we jump like a cat on heat’

Gabriela: entonces Patricio Moreno advierte al Vaquerito que NO se meta con su familia
...
‘so Patricio Moreno warns El Vaquerito not to interfere with his family ...’

4. Creating *confrontainment* in VCT

In this section we look at various mechanisms and resources employed in the construction of VCT as spectacle, and more specifically, as a type of *confrontainment*. These include linguistic, paralinguistic, body language as well as structural means. We also consider some mechanisms of audiovisual manipulation.

⁸ In the programmes Brenes Peña (2011) examined, such as *Sálvame*, there is a host (*el presentador*) and a set of fixed guest panellists (*los colaboradores*).

⁹ We have opted for an orthographic broad transcription (see Appendix for conventions employed).

4.1. Linguistic means: Choice of lexis with a focus on “*la polémica*”

The term *polémica* ‘polemic’ from the Greek πολεμικός, meaning ‘warlike’ (derived from πολεμος ‘war’),¹⁰ is one of the buzzwords for presenters as well as members of the team of assistant reporters. At the start of the programme, when the main stories are announced, there is usually a first mention of *la polémica*. This is, for example, what one of the presenters says in the opening section of one of the programmes:

Extract 2 (October)

Gabriela: vamos a comenzar el segmento de información (...) más adelante (...) Dios mío santo es que realmente **las polémicas** no faltan en *Vamos con todo* y como ustedes [co-presenters] decían (.) es un programa de colección porque vamos a tener artistas internacionales pero vamos a pasar al **lado polémico**
 ‘we are going to start the information segment (...) later (...) oh my holy God the thing is that *Vamos con todo* is not short of *polémicas* and like you [co-presenters] were saying (.) this is a collection programme because we are going to have international artists but we are not going to turn to the polemic side’

As we can see, the presenter (Gabriela) highlights the fact that, while there is an entertaining side of the programme in the more traditional sense of the word, with various artists performing (as her co-presenters had just announced), there is also a side that focuses on *polémica*, a term that encapsulates the idea of controversy and confrontation. She later advises viewers to record the programme not only because of the performances of international artists, but also because of its *polémica* element, suggesting that viewers will find the programme most appealing:

Extract 3 (October)

Gabriela: tienen que grabar el programa del día de hoy porque también se viene **la polémica**
 ‘you have to record today’s programme because there is *polémica* coming up too’

Reference to *la polémica* appears again when the presenter announces the first news story, and subsequently, when new stories are announced or when the audience is reminded of what is to come, as in the following examples:

Extract 4 (October)

Gabriela: pero ahora rápidamente empecemos con la información porque **la polémica** entre Harry Zúñiga y Wilson Ordeñana va tomando cuerpo (...)

‘but now let’s quickly start with the information because the *polémica* between Harry Zúñiga y Wilson Ordeñana is taking shape (...)’

¹⁰ See, for example, the Online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com>) or, in Spanish, Corominas and Pascual (1981 vol IV, p. 593), “POLÉMICA, femenino del adj. *polémico*, tomado del gr. πολεμικός ‘referente a la guerra’, ‘pendenciero’, derivado de πολεμος ‘guerra’” (‘*Polémica*, feminine form for *polémico*, taken from the Greek πολεμικός, ‘referring to war’, ‘quarrelsome’, derived from πολεμος ‘war’, our translation).

Extract 5 (November)

Papparazi: perfecto:: vamos a continuar también con más **polémica** y mucha más información de farándula y tenemos al periodista Oscar Ugarte que no quiere ahondar en polémica alguna con el imitador Hugo Rivas pero ...
'Great we are also going to continue with more *polémica* and much more information on celebrities and we are going to hear Oscar Ugarte, journalist, who does not want to further go into *polémica* at all with Hugo Rivas but ...'

Polémica is also the buzzword for the programme's reporters, as can be seen in this extract of an interview with a dancer – Karín – who is embroiled in a row between two rival dance companies:

Extract 6 (October)

Reporter: coméntanos qué opinas sobre **la polémica** ahora de tu ex (.) eh compañero eh Harry Zúñiga y ahora Wilson.
tell us what you think of the current *polémica* between your ex (.) eh colleague eh Harry Zúñiga and Wilson.

Indeed, the term **la polémica** is used by both presenters and reporters alike in a taken-for-granted fashion. Some interviewees also assume this notion to be entirely natural, thus collaborating in the co-construction of the programme as confrontational. This can be seen, for example, in the reply that Karín, the dancer, gives to the reporter's question in the above extract. Interestingly, her reply is addressed directly to Harry – the character with whom there is a 'dispute' – rather than the interviewer, as if she was talking to him:

Extract 7 (October)

Karín: (...) no sé ni siquiera por qué empezaste **la polémica** tú porque tú la empezaste así te hayan ido a buscar (...)
(...) I don't even know why you started the *polémica* because you are one who started it even if someone went to find you (...)

The presenters also talk about polemicalizing a topic or a story when they say *polemicemos* 'let's polemicalise' or *polemice* 'polemicalise'.

Counting the use of the word *polémica* in one of the programmes examined, we found that it was repeated 18 times. Indeed, highlighting, stirring or inciting 'wars' between different celebrities is what the 'information' segment of VCT seems to be about. The war metaphor itself appears in some of the presenters' comments when they talk about, for example, *la guerra de egos* 'a war of egos' between two artists. In some cases, allied metaphors are extended to national newspapers reporting about the programme, as in the following headline: *El programa Vamos con todo se convierte en un 'ring de pelea'* 'The programme *Vamos con todo* turns into a 'boxing ring' (Hoy Digital, 2 April 2009). The focus on confrontation in VCT can be seen more evidently when we look at the structure of the programme. We consider this next before looking at other linguistic means employed in the creation of confrontation.

4.2. Structural means

The ‘information’ segment of VCT is built mostly around *polémica* or ‘war’ stories, followed by a ‘discussion’ among the presenters, as we have indicated.¹¹ We attempted to capture this on a chart, based on one of the programmes examined, with a timeline (see below). The placing of the stories one after the other seems to have a cumulative effect and is thus central to the construction of the programme as confrontational. At the start, the ‘juiciest’ stories, that is, stories 1 and 2 on the chart, are announced (00.36). This is in order to “whet” viewers’ “appetite”, to use Richardson & Meinhoff’s (1999: 142) expression. Follow-up announcements are then continuously made (see 25.45, 26.20, 40.18, 40.49, 42.50, 51.48, 52.32, 56.40, 57.34, 58.19), possibly in order to hook late-coming viewers as well as to keep everyone on board by heightening the anticipation of the main stories.

Más adelante ‘later’ is the catchphrase in these announcements. As a matter of fact, there is a brief video-clip entitled *Más adelante* with a montage of the highlights of the programme and a voice over announcing the main stories –stories 1 + 2 on the chart. This clip is shown twice towards the end of the programme (minutes 42.50 and 58.19). The climax is reached when the central stories are finally unfolded in full at the end of the first part of the programme (minutes 58.41 and 62.59). This is presented as *el momento cumbre*, ‘the high spot’ of the programme.

Chart 1: Structure of ‘information’ segment of VCT (September programme)

P= Presenter(s)/panellists; G=Gabriela; F=‘Felipito’; J=Jessenia; Pz=Paparazzi; L=Licenciado Dupleint; Pm=Paloma; V= video / BVC = brief video clip produced by the VCT (assistant) team

Time line in minutes	Presenters	Actions	‘War’ #
00.00	All P	Opening: Presenters greet the TV audience and do some small talk.	
00.36	P (G)	Anticipates ‘war’ 1 between Patricio Moreno (actor) and ‘El Vaquerito’ (tabloid journalist). Anticipates ‘war’ 2 between Ventarrón Quiñónez (footballer) and his brother and sister-in-law.	1 2
01.40	P (G) + V	Announces ‘war’ 3 between Tomás Delgado (actor) and his ex-wife; this is followed by video report on actor’s predicament.	3
03.29	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists.	
09.00	P(F) + V	Announces the next scandalous situation surrounding a celebrity (El Abogado) and his love life (<i>las andanzas</i>) with a potential ‘war’ (‘war’ 4) between the celebrity’s ‘girlfriends’; this is followed by video report.	4

¹¹ As Gregori Signes (1998: 77) observes with respect to American talk shows, there are some VCT shows that are more confrontational than others. Within the same show, there can also be segments that fall within the celebrity talk show aimed at promoting artists rather than highlighting their personal problems or other aspects of their private lives. Finally, VCT, like the American talk shows Gregori Signes refers to, presents special programmes that deviate from the confrontational/conflictive norm. For example, there are special programmes on national days that celebrate a particular town.

13:03	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists	
14.12	P(J) + V	Announces 'war' 5 between Armando Paredes (footballer) and actor with negative consequences for Paredes's current pregnant girlfriend; this is followed by pre-recorded interview with a witness (Dr Love, actor) of alleged events involving the footballer.	5
16.30	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists.	
21.22	P(Pz) + V	Announces interview with Martín Calle, actor, with a potential 'war' ('war' 6) between actor and his ex-girlfriend, Carolina Jaume (presenter); this is followed by pre-recorded interview.	6
24.00	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists.	
25.45	P(G) + BVC	Anticipates 'war' 1, followed by brief video clip of interview.	1
26.20	P(G) + BVC	Anticipates 'war' 2, followed by brief video clip of interview.	2
27.20	P(Pm)	Announces interview with Carolina Jaume (presenter of new programme) and Toni Corral, with a possible 'war' ('war' 7) between rival programmes shown at the same time, followed by pre-recorded interview.	7
29.04	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists.	
32.14	P(J) + V	Pre-recorded interview with el 'Muñeco de la ciudad' Vito Muñoz, sports commentator, seeking support to further promote 'war' 5.	5
36.00	P (F)	Announces interview with Luis Chiriboga (President of the Ecuadorian F. A.); this is followed by pre-recorded interview where support is sought to further stir 'war' 5.	5
38.00	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists.	
40.18	P (G) + BVC	Announces 'war' 1; this is followed by video clip of pre-recorded interview.	1
40.49	P (G)	Announces 'war' 2; this is followed by video clip of pre-recorded interview.	2
41.14	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists.	
42.50	BVC	Video clip MAS ADELANTE anticipating 'wars' 1 + 2.	1+2
44.00	P (Pz) + V	Announces news story on Gustavo Navarro (actor) who had been ill; this is followed by pre-recorded interview with Gustavo Navarro in which a 'war' (war 8) between two other actors –La Mafia and Andrés Pelaccini– is highlighted.	8
45.23	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists.	
47:00	P (Pm) + V	Announces news story on Ray Bayona (salsa singer); this is followed by pre-recorded interview.	
49.11	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists.	
51.48	P (G) + BVC	Anticipates news story relating to war 1, followed by video clip of recorded interview and then 'war' 2.	1
52.32	P (G) + BVC	Anticipates news story relating to 'war' 2, followed by video clip of recorded interview.	2
53.33	P (F)	Announces news story on the rights of artists, followed by pre-recorded interview with professor of communication.	
55.00	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists.	
56.50	P (G) + BVC	Anticipates news story relating to 'war' 1; this is followed by video clip of the pre-recorded interview.	1

57.34	P (G) + BVC	Anticipates news story relating to ‘war’ 2; this is followed by video clip of pre-recorded interview.	2
58.19	BVC	Video clip MÁS ADELANTE anticipating ‘wars’ 1 + 2	1 + 2
58.41	P (J) + V	Announces news story relating to ‘war’ 1; this is followed by full pre-recorded interview.	1
60.02	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists.	
62.59	P (Pz) + V	Announces news story relating to ‘war’ 2; this is followed by full pre-recorded interview	2
65.02	All P	Comment among presenters/panellists.	

4.3. *Other linguistic means*

In addition to the lexical choices considered in 4.1, we identified the use of questions and other speech acts for different perlocutionary effects. For example, in announcing news stories, interest and suspense are created through the use of certain questions, as in this extract:

Extract 8 (September) (Gabriela = presenter)

Gabriela: entonces Patricio Moreno advierte al Vaquerito que **NO se meta con su familia por qué razón?** (.) eso lo vamos a conocer más adelante pero también te dije que estábamos llenos de información chicos porque más adelante vamos a escuchar las declaraciones en contra del Ventarrón Quiñónez (.) **y saben quién habla en contra del Ventarrón?**

‘so Patricio Moreno warns El Vaquerito not to interfere with his family why is this? (.) we will find out later but also I told you guys that we had lots of information because later we are going to hear statements against Ventarrón Quiñónez (.) and do you know who speaks against Ventarrón?’

Co-presenter: quién?
‘who?’

Gabriela: su propio hermano
‘his own brother’

Co-presenters: [exclamations]

Gabriela’s questions in this extract seem to belong to the category of attention- and involvement- rather than information-eliciting questions (Ilie 1998: 987); they appear to function as what Ilie terms ‘expository questions’; in other words, they are employed to get the audience “to focus on a controversial issue and/or to problematize it” (Ilie 1998: 980) and they are not really intended to elicit a verbalized response. Nonetheless, we can see in this example that Gabriela’s co-presenters pretend that the second question at least – *y saben quién habla en contra del Ventarrón?* ‘and do you know who speaks against Ventarrón?’ – is an information-seeking question, producing a reaction (*quién?* ‘who?’) and then showing surprise or shock with exclamations when they hear the answer. As such, through this kind of interaction, the co-presenters collaborate in the co-construction of the announcement and of the story itself as shocking or worrying;

that is, with their collective reply, they contribute to heightening the interest of the programme for viewers.¹²

Other questions that stand out are those produced by reporters in the interviews with the famous. Some of these questions, usually posed at the beginning of an interview, involve certain presuppositions, as though the reporters know exactly what their interviewees' feelings are, often exaggerating them, as in this interview with an actor:

Extract 9 (September)

Reporter: estás bastante molesto con Wilson Saúd con el El Vaquerito por qué?
'you are quite annoyed with Wilson Saúd with El Vaquerito why?'

Actor: bueno sí estoy incómodo ...
'well I do feel uncomfortable ...'

In other words, questions of this type presuppose that there is a problem, and a grave one; however, from the answers most interviewees give to such questions, one can see that the situation usually was not as severe as presented, as in the above example, or in some cases, it is strategically dismissed as unproblematic by the interviewees (see Section 5).

Other questions seek to elicit evaluations of the celebrity offender or the scandalous situation; this is in order to further fuel the controversy. One way of doing this is by eliciting advice for a celebrity, an action which may trigger a negative evaluation, as in the following extract from an interview with another actor where Armando Paredes, the footballer referred to earlier, is brandished as a liar:

Extract 10 (September)

Reporter: qué le puedes decir a: Armando Paredes si te está viendo
'what can you tell Armando Paredes if he is watching'

Actor: bueno o sea que: la mentira no es buena y que: tenga la suficiente valentía para hablar a las cámaras () decir que él estuvo presente esa noche en la fiesta y no mienta o sea (.) porque va a quedar como un mentiroso.
'well that lying is no good and that he should be brave enough to talk to the cameras () say that he was at the party that night and that he shouldn't lie (.) because he's going to be seen as a liar'

These questions, also presented sometimes in hypothetical terms (i.e., *que le dirías* ... 'what would you tell him/her ...'), appear to encourage some interviewees to speak as though they were addressing their 'opponent'. This is a mechanism that creates the impression of direct confrontation with the target person. In the following example, Peluquín, a clown artist, directly addresses his artist 'friend' issuing a warning about the consequences of certain accusations that he had made:

¹² This would be a case of what Richardson & Meinhof (1999: 138) refer to as 'collective speech acts': Audible responses from the audience as a group through which sympathy or censure for 'victims' or 'sinners' is offered. In VCT, in the absence of an audience, the co-presenters seem to assume the role of the audience, albeit in a limited manner.

Extract 11 (November)

Clown: qué te pasó ñaño? ubícate hermanito yo sé que de pronto esto te va a dar mucha pantalla pero al revés hermano; sé que vendrán problemas legales porque el Sr. Calvache es una persona honorable y muy respetable ...

what happened brother? You need to assess your situation. I know this [event] may give you a great deal of exposure but it's the other way around brother; you're going to have legal problems because Mr Calvache is an honorable and highly regarded person ...

With respect to other speech acts, the presenters themselves offer evaluations of the events in the stories presented that contribute to intensifying the controversy. These evaluations, suggest, for example, that emotions are running high and that the rows are going up a notch:

Extract 12 (October)

Presenter se pone mal la cosa
'things are turning nasty'

Extract 13 (October)

Presenter: las cosas están tomando una tonalidad oscura y efervescente
things are taking a dark and lively turn

Extract 14 (October)

Presenter: las cosas se ponen feas por ahí
'things are turning ugly'

Also, it is interesting to see, for example, that seemingly inoffensive actions such as asking someone to send greetings to somebody else can constitute a provocation. We can observe this in the extract below from an interview with Vito Muñoz, a sports commentator, referred to as *El Muñeco de la Ciudad* 'the city doll'. The reporter asks him to send greetings to the programme and to Sofía Caiche, a model, who is expecting a child by a celebrity footballer (see above). The sting is that the woman in question used to be Muñoz's girlfriend:

Extract 15 (September)

Reporter: ... ahora queremos que le mande un saludo al programa y especialmente a a alguien que tuvo que ver con su vida Sofía Caiche que esta embarazada de Armando Paredes
'... we now would like you to send greetings to the programme and especially to someone who had something to do with your life, Sofía Caiche, who is pregnant with Armando Paredes's child'

So far, we have mainly focussed on how the presenters contribute to constructing VCT as a confrontational talk show. The celebrities interviewed also play an important role in this respect: A number of them perform face attacks to discredit their 'opponent' or the

target person. These are usually not direct attacks in the sense that the ‘opponents’ are not engaged in an interaction in the studio; however, the interaction is publicly staged via the placing of pre-recorded interviews with the different actors in a story, side by side in the same programme (or across programmes). An instance of a face attack can be found in extract 10 above, for example, where the actor interviewed is accusing the footballer in the story of being a liar. A similar kind of face attack can also be found in another example where Wilson, dancer and director of his own dance company, is responding to negative comments that another dancer and former employee of his had allegedly made about him. Among other things he repeatedly refers to his rival as *este ser* literally, ‘this being’ thus belittling him without getting into the sort of vulgar insults that other talk shows use (cf. Brenes Peña 2011).

Extract 16 (September)

Wilson: yo no quisiera contestarle la verdad a este ser ... yo no le voy a contestar nada más a este ser ...
‘to tell you the truth I wouldn’t want to reply to this creature ... I’m not going to reply anything else to this creature ...’

These are attacks to the person’s *quality* face (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 14), that is, the person’s desire to be valued in terms of his/her “personal qualities”. On the other hand, other attacks encountered address the person’s professional role and thus sense of public worth (cf. Spencer-Oatey’s notion of *identity* face), as in extract 17 below. In this extract taken from the same interview above, Wilson is told about Robert Sánchez, a dancer at a rival dance company, who is claiming that Robert and the other dancers in this new company are better dancers than Wilson’s. Wilson’s reply is a simple question which, nonetheless, implies a critical public attack on this dancer’s standing in the dance world:

Extract 17 (October)

Wilson: quién es Robert Sánchez (.) no sé (.) no sé cuál es Robert Sánchez
‘who is Robert Sánchez (.) I don’t know (.) I don’t know who Robert Sánchez is’

In other words, by asking who Robert Sánchez is, Wilson is implying that he is a nobody in the dance world. More or less subtle face attacks of this kind abound in the programme.

We are not normally able to assess the reaction of the person concerned to the comments made so we do not know whether the person felt offended or not; nonetheless, the performance of actions as in extracts 16 and 17 above may be regarded even as more face-threatening in that they are done publicly and the opponent is not present to defend himself/herself.

4.4. *Paralinguistic means*

In the *Más adelante* brief video clips mentioned in section 4.2 above, where an anonymous presenter does the announcing, the use of vowel lengthening for emphasis is quite noticeable:

Extract 18 (September)

Má::s adelante:: Patricio Moreno:: advierte:: al Vaquerito: que no se meta con su familia:
a::::demás El Ventarrón Quiñóne:z enfrenta:: acusacione:s de su propio hermano::

‘Later Patricio Moreno warns El Vaquerito not to interfere with his family. Also, Ventarrón Quiñónez faces accusations from his own brother’

This mechanism, together with volume, tempo and intonation, and the images that are presented, appears to be employed to heighten emotions and interest. It has echoes of football reporting when the game is approaching a crucial moment and the possibility of someone scoring a goal is imminent. Indeed, this kind of clip is shown as the climax of the first part of the programme approaches, that is, close to the time when the full stories are to be disclosed (see Chart 1 above).

4.5. *Body language and the theatrics of VCT*

Richardson & Meinhof (1999), among others (cf. Lorenzo-Dus 2009), highlight the role that body language plays in creating conflict talk in talk shows. They describe, for example, “bodies sitting well forward on chairs, eyes focused hard forward towards challengers, energetic hand gestures [...]” (Richardson & Meinhoff 1999: 138). In VCT, as we have indicated, the opponents do not usually get to talk to each other, so only some of the elements that these authors consider are relevant. Energetic hand gestures can certainly be observed in the pre-recorded interviews, accompanying face-threatening acts (FTAs), that is, functioning as a kind of upgrader (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper 1989) of the FTA expressed verbally.

It is also interesting to look at the body language of the presenters in VCT. For example, we notice their use of a certain hand gesture involving the shaking of one hand to punctuate the seriousness of a situation. It is a gesture which children, for instance, commonly use to convey concern when they or someone has done something wrong, meaning *ya nos fregamos/ya te fregaste* ‘we/you are going to be in trouble’. In VCT, this hand gesture is accompanied by verbal exclamations on the part of the co-presenters in the form of *uy* ‘oh’, through which concern and disbelief are conveyed, dramatizing the event.

4.6. *(Audio)visual means*

Richardson and Kay (1999: 141) also observe that ‘[n]o analysis [of daytime talk shows] would be complete without some attention to the visual character of these shows, and to a consideration of what is done to the raw video material after filming and before transmission’. In VCT, the editing of the raw material indeed appears to play a

crucial role, particularly in announcing news stories where video clips are employed to provide the gist of the story. Cuts of the pre-recorded interviews are made, and the end result is very brief video clips that focus on emotive moments such as the enactment of a face-threatening act (e.g. ... *a mí me puedes bailar encima del mate pero a mi familia no* ‘... you can do anything to me, but leave my family alone’), or the expression of disbelief in the face of someone’s wrongdoing (e.g. *nunca nos imaginamos tampoco que nos iba a hacer este tipo de cosas de coger el dinero y (.) de desaparecerse* ‘we never thought he’d do a thing like this to us, taking the money and disappearing’); in other words, the clips serve to foreground the ‘problem’ situation.

In these clips, one can also observe that an element of confrontation between ‘opponents’ is embedded through the manipulation of images: While the interview to a celebrity is being shown, images of his/her opponent are momentarily superimposed, often captured in some kind of argumentative pose. Unsurprisingly, in places, music is also employed to contribute to the dramatic effect created by the images that the viewers are presented with. This goes along with Requeijo Rey’s (2011: 67) observation, for example, that music is one of the spectacularizing mechanisms used in reality shows in her study.

Last but not least, the confrontational aspect depicted in the video clips is reinforced with the type of subtitles provided when the clip is shown in full, as in image 2 below (*Karín respalda a Wilson y arremete contra Harry Zúñiga* ‘Karín backs Wilson and lashes out against Harry Zúñiga’):

Image 2 (October)



Other examples of such subtitles are *Patricio Moreno advierte al Vaquerito que no se meta con su familia* ‘Patricio Moreno warns Vaquerito not to interfere with his family’ and *Controversia entre Wilson Ordeñana y Harry Zúñiga* ‘Controversy between Wilson Ordeñana and Harry Zúñiga’.

5. Defusing confrontation – misfires and purposive actions

Having looked at a variety of mechanisms employed in the ‘hying up’ of the news stories in VCT and the creation of controversy and a sense of confrontation, we now look at misfires that result in a lack of confrontation or controversy, that is, through which the sting is taken out of scandalous stories. We also look at purposive actions on the part of the presenters that result in the defusing of conflict. This is unlike what happens in prototypical confrontational talk shows from Spanish television such as *Sálvame* (cf. Brenes Peña 2011).

As we indicated in the previous section, one of the means through which controversy and confrontation are created and enhanced is through the questions that the

presenters or reporters ask celebrities. Not surprisingly, some celebrities simply refuse to collaborate in developing *polémica* by either not answering the question or by providing positive rather than negative evaluations of the ‘offenders’ or the scandalous story. This is what we refer to here as a misfire, since the aim of the programme is to stir controversy and confrontation. This kind of misfire is obviously outside the control of the producers of the show: Celebrities know what the ‘game’ is and a number of them simply refuse to play their part. We can see this in the following extract from an interview with a prestigious actor where various of the questions he is asked appear to be aimed at eliciting negative evaluations; yet the actor only provides positive ones. For example, the first question relates to the story of a footballer who has gone into a rehabilitation clinic. The actor’s positive evaluation (first turn below) seems to force the reporter to quickly move onto the next scandal (i.e., ‘the celebrity pregnancy’) and so forth.

Extract 19 (September)

- Reporter: bueno y también qué piensa sobre ahora lo de Jaime Iván Kaviedes que está dentro de una clínica de rehabilitación (.) usted como gente de farándula
 ‘and also what do you think about the matter of Jaime Iván Kaviedes who is in a rehabilitation clinic (.) I’m asking you this as you are [also] a celebrity’
- Actor: me parece muy chévere me parece muy bien que haya tomado la decisión si él tomó la decisión qué lindo más eso es de admirar eso es de aplaudir ()
 ‘I think it’s great I think it’s very good that he’s taken that decision if he took it himself even better that’s something we should admire we should applaud’
- Reporter: bueno y el nuevo embarazo de la farándula en este caso Armando Paredes con Sofía Caiche?
 ‘fine and how about the new celebrity pregnancy that of Armando Paredes with Sofía Caiche?’
- Actor: bueno yo también le conozco mucho tiempo a: Sofía y chévere ñañita si es así bienvenido sea eso es (.) obra de Diosito.
 ‘well I’ve also known Sofía for a long time it’s great my friend if it’s that way it’s something to welcome (.) it’s God’s doing’

We can also see this with reference to extract 15 above, where the reporter (i.e., one of the programme presenters) asks the celebrity El Muñeco to send a greeting to his ex-girlfriend, now expecting a child from someone else. He refuses to comply with the interviewer’s requests:

Extract 20 (September) (continued from extract 15 above)

- Muñeco: no tampoco voy a hablar de eso
 ‘no, I’m not going to talk about that either’
- Reporter: () aunque sea mándele su felicitación
 ‘you could just congratulate her’
- Muñeco: no ... no tengo no tengo por qué hablar de la vida privada de las demás personas ...
 ‘no ... I don’t have to talk about other people’s private life ...’
- Reporter: no le no le no le
 ‘won’t you won’t you won’t you’
- Muñeco: no voy a hablar Jessenia por favor ya (.) no insista
 ‘I’m not going to say anything Jessenia (.) please stop insisting’

In relation to the main stories, we found that despite all the build-up, and maybe precisely because of all the build-up, once revealed, they represent an anticlimax insofar as they prove to have little substance; this is because once the full context of the story is provided, the alleged wrongdoing appears somewhat mitigated or even nonexistent. For example, one of the main stories, referred to earlier, relates to the rivalry between two salsa singers, Gustavo Enríquez, known as El Buitrón ‘the big vulture’ and Joel Alléguez. The latter appears to have targeted the former by addressing him in one of his songs with the line *pícate buitrón* ‘bite yourself *buitrón*’, although it is not clear that the singer is really referring to Gustavo Enríquez. Nonetheless, El Buitrón seemingly takes offence and appears in a video clip in VCT saying *te has metido con el buitrón y el buitrón te va a picar* ‘you’ve meddled with El Buitrón and El Buitrón is going to bite you’. In isolation, this utterance can be taken as a threat inciting confrontation. Nonetheless, in the full video clip this attack is toned down when Gustavo Enríquez expresses his admiration for Joel Alléguez, the other singer, by saying, for example, that he is *un profesional a carta cabal* ‘thoroughly professional’.

In addition to misfires, we identified actions on the part of the presenters that consistently result in the defusing of conflict. This, as we pointed out earlier, is unlike what happens in prototypical confrontational talk shows (cf. Brenes Peña 2011). We observed earlier that the presenters take on a dual role: That of inciters as well as appeasers. As presenters, they are inciters: They first announce a story as controversial and “hype it up” in various ways, as we illustrated in the previous section. On the other hand, as panellists, they are the appeasers or conciliators in that there seems to be a general tendency in their ‘discussion’ to toning down the controversy. They do this by hedging criticism of others and justifying their actions. This can be seen in the following extract where one of the presenters (Paparazzi) criticizes Karín (dancer) for the comments she had made regarding her former boss (Harry). The presenter compensates for his criticism by indicating that he has got a great deal of affection for Karín (first turn). Among the other presenters, Paloma and Gabriela go to the dancer’s defence while ‘Felipito’ displays agreement with Paparazzi’s criticism; however, he too minimizes his criticism by providing a justification, that is, by attributing Karín’s ill-advised remarks to her young age.

Extract 21 (October)

Paparazzi: ... porque eh resulta que: Karín bailó con Harry y a(x) ahora está bailando con Wilson pero a mí me resulta malo que una persona ojo yo la quiero muchísimo yo (.) a Karín la quiero y la conozco de hace años, no de ahora sino desde hace años entonces lo que pasa es que de repente como que si yo trabajo en en alguna de las empresas en las que he trabajado, salga de esa empresa y hable mal de esa empresa ...

‘... what happened was that Karín used to dance with Harry and now she dances with Wilson but it looks wrong to me that someone, mind you, I have a great deal of affection for Karin I love Karín and I’ve known her for a long time so what happens is that it’s as if I’d been working for a certain company, one of the companies that I have worked for then I leave and I start speaking ill of that company ...’

Paloma: pero ella no dijo nada para Harry ella solo dijo que no se acuerda de él ...

- but she didn't say anything about Harry she only said that she cannot remember him ...'
- 'Felipito': ... yo le atribuyo yo le atribuyo eso a la edad es muy joven Karín y creo que todavía todavía no puede entender un asunto más profesional creo yo ...
'... to me it's down to her age Karín is very young and I think she cannot quite yet understand that it is a matter of professionalism ...'
- Gabriela: ... pero en este caso Karín lo único que ha hecho es defenderse o un poco si siente mal por por algo que dijo Harry bueno lo está diciendo ... yo creo que Karín en todo caso se portó a la altura ...
'... but in this case Karín has only tried to defend herself or if she is upset about what Harry has said she is saying it ... I think Karín has behaved professionally...'

Similarly, in this other extract, after the presenters harshly criticise a newspaper for presenting the latest 'Miss Ecuador' in a negative light, one of them seems to offer the newspaper a way out, minimizing somehow the criticisms made earlier:

Extract 22 (November)

- Gabriela: pero yo creo que errar errar es de humanos y si pues las personas encargadas de hacer esta publicación le pusieron las las orejas de burro y dijeron todo lo que dijeron de Sandra eh lo importante también sería rectificar okay se equivocaron pero te digo eh cualquiera eh comete una equivocación quizás lo mejor es saber reconocerlo ...
'but I think that humans are fallible and if those in charge of that publication presented Sandra with donkeys' ears and said all they said about her uh it is important if they rectified this. Yes, they made a mistake, but I tell you, anyone uh can make a mistake perhaps what's best is to be able to recognize one's mistakes ...'

Also, the imperative in VCT seems to be to end each discussion in a positive, often politically correct tone. This may involve questioning the very controversy that the presenters/the programme constructed by saying, for example, that only the parties concerned know the answer (extract 23 below), at the same time, claiming impartiality and showing commitment to the 'truth':

Extract 23 (September)

- Yessenia: por eso Palomita yo creo que aquí lo necesario para no hacerse tantas hipótesis en en en torno a este caso, pues lo importante sería aquí entrevistar tanto a Tomás Delgado y a la señora eh Valencia creo la ex-conviviente del actor
'that's why Palomita I think that what is needed in order to avoid making different hypotheses around this case what would be important is to interview both Tomás Delgado and Mrs Valencia I think the actor's former partner'
- Licenciado: Ortiz, Ortiz
- Yessenia: ...solamente ellos conocen la verdad de todo este asunto pues si es una exageración o no, eso lo va a tener que decidir el juez eh competente
'...only they know the truth about this whole matter if it's an exaggeration or not that's something the judge having jurisdiction would have to decide'

This can also be seen in the following extract where one of the presenters expresses agreement with both warring parties, thereby avoiding criticizing any of them.

Extract 24 (October)

Paparazzi: una cosita eh yo estoy de acuerdo en muchas cosas eh con Harry pero también estoy de acuerdo en muchas cosas con Wilson ...
'just one thing I agree with Harry on many matters but I also agree with Wilson on many matters ...'

Finally, another mechanism is to offer friendly advice, as in extract 24, and/or express hope that things will work out well. Concerning the footballer's alleged lie to his pregnant girlfriend, this is what two of the presenters say:

Extract 25 (September)

Paloma: ... tienen que sentar[se] y conversar claro ...
'... they have to sit down and talk and clarify things ...'
'Felipito': ... pero creo que como dijeron hace un momento ustedes mismos... pienso que tienen que conversar
'... but I think that as you said yourselves a little while ago I think they need to talk'

Likewise, these are two of the presenters' comments on the rivalry between two dancers:

Extract 26 (October)

Jessenia: ... yo yo aspiro creo y espero que en algún momento ellos ya bajen sus armas es que han sido de grueso calibre por cierto ...
'I really hope that at some point they will lay down their weapons which by the way have been pretty heavy ones ...'
Paloma: yo estoy de acuerdo con Jessenia creo que el tiempo el tiempo dirá todo y los dos claro ya fueron grandes amigos y esta pelea eh está claro por algo que nosotros no sabemos pero en todo caso fue una amistad y hay un cierto cariño y creo que el futuro sí los dos si los dos van a limar las asperezas sí
'I agree with Jessenia and think that time will tell, the two were once great friends and this row is about something we don't know about but in any case there was a friendship and there is certain affection and I think that in the future they will settle their differences'

However, there seems to be a gender element in this orientation to harmony and a positive-tone conclusion: The presenters who usually express their hopes for a reconciliation and for things working out tend to be the women, and two of them – Paloma and Jessenia – in particular. The male presenters are less active in this respect but they do not contest such a resolution either.

6. The socio-political and socio-cultural context of VCT

The programmes analyzed in this paper were recorded, as previously indicated, in 2009. This is the year when a commission from the Ecuadorian National Assembly drafted the

communications bill (*Proyecto de Ley de Comunicación del Ecuador*) in accordance with the new requirements of the 2008 Constitution. Some of the terms of the bill, often referred to in the press as *Ley Mordaza* ‘Gag law’, have proved to be highly controversial, resulting in an ongoing dispute between the government, lead by President Rafael Correa, and private media groups and opposition parties (cf. Dávila, 17 April 2012; Jurado Vargas, no date). This polarization has extended to ordinary citizens. One of the points of contention is, for example, the membership of a regulatory body (*Consejo Regulador*) to be set up to regulate programme contents on television and radio, as well as in the written press. The membership of this body, as proposed, is seen by some as facilitating direct control of the media by the Executive (cf. Yépez Martínez, 1 August 2011).

Discussions of the draft communication bill which has not been passed to date have taken place in the context of the government’s direct intervention in the media through controversial measures such as the setting up of a public television channel (Ecuador TV), seen by many as a governmental propaganda instrument, the use of seized private media (e.g. TC Telecentro and GamaTV) to legitimize the government’s discourse,¹³ as well as the (temporary) closure of private (anti-governmental) media such as the long-established television channel *Teleamazonas*.¹⁴ The threat that certain of the terms of this bill pose to freedom of speech in Ecuador has indeed been highlighted by human rights groups (e.g. Human Rights Watch) (cf. Artículo 18 de la Constitución, 4 July 2011) and international organisms such as OEA (Relatora de la OEA preocupada, 9 December 2009) and Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa (Honorato, 23 April 2012).

It is in this context that the regulation and censorship of *programas basura* ‘trash programmes’ has increased in Ecuador in recent years. Laura Bozzo’s talk show *Laura de todos* which used to be aired on TC Telecentro, one of the seized television channels, is one instance of this: It was taken off air in August 2009. According to Marco Jácome (see Castañeda 2012), from CONATEL (Consejo Nacional de Telecomunicaciones) (previously CONARTEL, Consejo Nacional de Radiodifusión y Televisión), this was done on the basis of complaints received from members of the public, which are considered by *Unidad Administrativa de Monitoreo* ‘Monitoring Administrative Unit’. This unit is responsible for issuing a technical-legal report. Jácome’s comments, however, suggest that the intervention of President Rafael Correa may have also played a role in the decision taken:

En el 2009 el programa de Laura Bozzo fue sancionado debido a varias denuncias realizadas por la comunidad ... esta presentadora ya tenía antecedentes penales por injurias

¹³TC Telecentro and GamaTV were seized in 2008 from the Isaías Group, together with other of their assets. This was a measure ordered by the Agencia de Garantía de Depósitos (AGD), a governmental entity created to ensure that savings lost during the 1999 financial crisis were restored to savers. Filanbaco, a bank with members of the Isaías Group as main shareholders, was one of the key actors in this crisis. It was announced in 2008 that TC Telecentro and GamaTV would be sold on, but they have continued to operate with government-appointed administrators. Their editorial line can be described as ambiguous in that, while their main programming policies do not appear to have changed, a pro-government leaning can be discerned in their news programmes, for example.

¹⁴This channel, known for the critical stance towards the government by some of its journalists, was sanctioned and closed for three days in December 2009 on account of an ‘administrative irregularity’ (cf. *Teleamazonas clausurado*, 22 December 2009). President Correa subsequently made an unsuccessful attempt to have the channel closed permanently.

y falsedades al aire, incluso el Presidente Correa se manifestó en contra del programa ... (Marco Jácome, interviewed by I. Castañeda, 6 June 2012).

‘In 2009, Laura Bozzo’s programme was subject to sanctions on account of complaints from the community ... this presenter already had a criminal record for libel and untruths on air, even President Correa spoke out against the programme ...’ (Marco Jácome, interviewed by I. Castañeda, 6 June 2012).

The more rigorous stance adopted by Conatel [Conartel], to television programming under the current government, in 2009 also saw programmes like *The Simpsons* being considered for censorship (*Los Simpson*, 2 July 2009).¹⁵ As we have indicated, this is the year in which the programmes analyzed in the present paper were recorded, soon after *Laura de Todos* was taken off air. It is not unreasonable to think that the socio-political climate and the events described in this section could have had an impact on the contents and tone of VCT’s late 2009 editions.

With respect to the socio-cultural context of VCT, we highlight in this paper the incongruity stemming from the treatment of the news stories reported: Confrontation is heightened when each story is presented but it is then quickly defused, with each story ending in a conciliatory and harmonious manner. As we have remarked before, this is unlike what is observed in tabloid talk shows in Spain, for example, where no attempts at defusing confrontation are made by presenters (see section 4). With reference to Placencia’s (2008) study on middle-class Quiteños’ negative responses to convivial directives (e.g., invitations and anticipated insistence at leave-taking from social gatherings), we suggest that there may be a cultural element in this apparent last-minute orientation to harmony observed in VCT.

On the basis of ethnographic observation and interviews and a corpus of naturally occurring interactions, Placencia (2008) noted that, in interactions among family and friends, middle-class Quiteños avoid directly refusing certain convivial directives (e.g. invitations and anticipated insistence at leave-taking from social gatherings). They use certain token (e.g. offering assurance to comply but not complying) and avoidance (e.g. slipping away from social gatherings) politeness strategies to deal with such directives when they do not want to comply with them. This is to avoid direct refusals which may threaten both speaker and hearer’s face. While Placencia notes that avoidance of direct refusals can be found in different socio-cultural contexts, she also notes that more directness in refusals has been found in the case of North Americans as compared to Latin Americans (Félix-Brasdefer 2003), for example. The tendency that she identifies would be consistent with behaviours that have been described in relation to other Hispanic cultural groups in Latin America where confrontation or direct negative responses also appear to be avoided (cf. Félix-Brasdefer 2006).

Placencia’s (2008) study focuses on interactions between family and friends; nonetheless, a preference for what can be referred to as conflict avoidance may extend

¹⁵ *The Simpsons* was aired by Teleamazonas, the same television channel later sanctioned in 2009 by Conatel [Conartel] and closed for three days. *The Simpsons* is a programme which attracted large audiences at peak viewing times. While the reason given for removing it from daytime programming was the fact that its contents were deemed inappropriate for children and adolescents, it is not unlikely that there could have been political motives behind this censorship given Teleamazonas’s unfavourable attitude towards the government.

to other contexts such as talk shows. Constructing confrontational news stories, but ending them in a harmonious manner may be a way for the producers of VCT to deal with the demands of the tabloid talk show genre, where confrontation is a key ingredient, and the perceived cultural preferences of Ecuadorian audiences during daytime programming. This is an area open to further exploration.

7. Summary and final remarks

In this paper we described VCT as a variant of confrontainment as we know it from Spanish talk shows, for example. Ultimately, we wanted to illustrate the influence which confrontainment television has had further afield, beyond the English-speaking world and/or the European context and how programmes of this type may be domesticated to suit particular socio-political or socio-cultural environments.

We highlighted that while confrontation in VCT is built up step by step in different segments of the programme by the presenters, the interviews that they bring in, as well as through the different audiovisual resources employed, it is then defused by the presenters themselves. Harmony is therefore restored at the end of each story in what seems to be a politically correct fashion. The end result is a certain ambivalence and incongruence in the programme as the programme does not fully meet the expectations of spectacle that it purports to offer. We therefore describe VCT as a sort of emasculated version of American or European talk shows, possibly intended to appeal to different audiences, without offending or alienating any particular audience too much. Indeed, some of the presenters' comments when announcing the stories or in the transition from one story to another or to another element of the programme seem to show a need to engage and retain different audiences, including those who are avid for scandals:

Extract 27 (October)

Jessenia: ... no solamente hay polémica en este programa también hay cosas agradables buenas ...
'... there isn't only *polémica* in this programme but there are also pleasant things good things'

.
. .

Jessenia: ... mejor vamos a cambiar estas cosas amargas por algo dulce ...
'... we're better off switching from these sour things to something sweeter...'

Through these comments, the presenters acknowledge that the *polémica* elements of the programme are unpleasant (and yet they still show them precisely for their shocking or distasteful quality). However, they make sure to remind the viewer that the programme is not made of such 'unpleasant' things alone.

As it is, the programme generates mixed views and mixed reviews in different forums online with some people offering harsh criticisms of its contents and others

congratulating the channel for the kind of entertainment that the programme provides.¹⁶ The positive comments, and the success of the programme, more generally, given its continuity, would be a reflection of the fact that a certain confrontation culture, albeit focusing on the banal, which VCT (re)creates seems to have installed itself in Ecuadorian society too, at least among certain sectors of the populations.

In terms of the presenters' ultimate pursuit of harmony, in addition to the situational element – that VCT is a day-time show that can be watched by adults and children alike – we have suggested that there may be a cultural element playing a part: The programme may reflect and recreate a certain orientation to conflict avoidance as has been proposed for other spheres of interaction in Quiteño society (cf. Placencia 2008). The Spanish confrontainment programmes on the other hand, would reflect a greater tolerance for confrontation (cf. Brenes 2011) and impoliteness (cf. Lorenzo-Dus 2007). For instance, *Salvame* is a day-time talk show that displays greater levels of confrontation and impoliteness among both celebrities and panellists, verging on verbal violence (cf. Fuentes Rodríguez and Alcaide Lara 2008).

Yet an alternative interpretation to what we describe here as the presenters' pursuit of harmony may be simply interpreted as political correctness and a survival strategy for the programme and the Channel amidst more stringent regulation and control of radio and television broadcasting in Ecuador, under President Correa's government. In this respect, it would be of interest to examine earlier broadcastings of VCT as well as a wider range of programmes from Ecuadorian television to tease out perhaps socio-cultural from socio-political factors at play in the production of programmes like VCT. It would also be of interest to focus more closely on (im)politeness phenomena and how these phenomena contributes to articulating the programme as confrontational. As it is, again, there is some incongruence for example between the overall politeness of the presenters and most of the interviewees and the tabloid contents of the programme. Finally, it would be interesting to examine the extent to which the VCT version developed for the Andean region resembles the coastal version or whether it is enacted differently by the Andean presenters. Some people commenting on the Andean version in a newspaper blog indicate that they find this newer version dull!¹⁷

Appendix: Transcription conventions employed

- : indicates vowel lengthening
(.) marks a minimal pause measured impressionistically

¹⁶ See, for example, 'El programa Vamos con todo se convierte en un 'ring de pelea', 2 April 2009.

¹⁷ See, for instance, postings by readers in reaction to the news item referred to in footnote 16 above (<http://www.hoy.com.ec/noticias-ecuador/el-programa-vamos-con-todo-se-convierte-en-un-ring-de-pelea-341307.html>) (accessed 10 March 2011).

?	marks rising intonation
[]	marks overlapping speech
()	marks inaudible talk
...	marks preceding or subsequent talk
CAPITALS	mark increased volume

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