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El español coloquial: Actas del I Simposio sobre Análisis del Discurso Oral by Luis Cortés Rodríguez

Review by: Adriana Bolívar

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LUIS CORTÉS RODRÍGUEZ (ed.), *El español coloquial: Actas del I Simposio sobre Análisis del Discurso Oral*. Almería, Spain: Universidad de Almería, 1995. Pp. 223.

Reviewed by ADRIANA BOLÍVAR  
*Linguistics, Universidad Central de Venezuela*  
Caracas 1041-A, Venezuela  
abolivar@reacciun.ve

This book is a collection of eight papers presented at the First Symposium on the Analysis of Oral Discourse, held at the University of Almería in 1994. The papers are preceded by a short presentation by the editor (7–8), in which he establishes that the aim of the publication is to encourage the study of colloquial Spanish in spite of the theoretical and methodological difficulties involved. What is common to most of the papers is the assumption that colloquial discourse must be taken as a sub-category of oral discourse. Also, they all refer to the Spanish spoken in Spain.

The papers are organized in a sequence that goes from the more theoretical to the more empirical ones. The expectations created for the reader in the introduction are fulfilled in great part because the papers discuss relevant theoretical issues and display analyses of real colloquial Spanish, with plenty of examples that make the reading interesting and enjoyable. The book closes with a bibliography for all the papers (211–22), which gives evidence of updated and rigorous research work.

The first paper, by José Jesús de Bustos Tovar, “De la oralidad a la escritura” (11–28), focuses on the difficulties involved in defining the term COLLOQUIAL – particularly when it is seen in light of existing definitions that rely on the opposition between oral and written language, or as synonymous with family language or spontaneous language. Instead, this author takes orality and writing as two modes of constructing discourse, within which other sub-categories are found; and he proposes colloquial or conversational as a discursive sub-category within the wider context of orality. He then goes on to describe the essential features of orality, and points to the permanent tension between the oral and the written. He ends up discussing the possibility of a grammar of dialogs.

Antonio Narbona Jiménez, “Español coloquial y variación lingüística” (31–42), deals with the need to overcome limitations imposed by current views of

linguistic description; he stresses the need to go beyond the sentence as a unit of analysis. He also rejects the oral/written dichotomy, and suggests that defining colloquial as related to concepts such as proximity, immediacy, or spontaneity is not enough either. Narbona Jiménez is emphatic in claiming that colloquial does not mean simple language, since it is not just a matter of dealing with grammatical features out of context. He insists that, in order to discover the specificity of colloquial language, we must break with the linear and sequential perspective that dominates in sentence grammar, and must adopt a global discourse view (41). Although this position is not exactly new in discourse analysis, it is convincing and attractive to motivate those who are starting the study of conversational analysis in Spanish.

Lluís Payrató, "Transcripción del discurso oral" (45–70), approaches the problem of what transcription system to choose; although this is apparently a practical problem, it involves important theoretical decisions. After briefly reviewing some approaches from ethnomethodology, interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, psycholinguistics, linguistics, and corpus linguistics, Payrató illustrates the existing heterogeneity with examples of transcriptions from Chafe et al. 1991 and from Thibault & Vincent 1990. Contrasting the ideal with the real, he argues in favor of a type of transcription that is not neutral but interpretive, not global but selective, not omnifunctional but pertinent. Payrató sees the perfect system as utopian; taking the best from Dubois 1991, Ehlich 1993, Edwards 1993, and O'Connell & Kowal 1994, he offers a practical and integral guide to transcribers, which is fully explained in the appendix of the paper.

José Polo, "Lo oral y lo escrito: Lengua hablada, lengua escrita, escritura de la lengua y dicción de la lengua" (73–99), shows an effort to collect relevant information, but is probably the least stimulating of the theoretical papers. As the author himself says, it is "a provisional presentation," a set of ideas presented in a synthetic and diagrammatic form, rather like a collection of notes for further development.

Antonio Briz, "La atenuación en la conversación coloquial: Una categoría pragmática" (103–22), begins the empirical articles, clearly and to the point, with attention to mitigators as semantic and pragmatic modifiers in the context of colloquial conversation – which he defines as a type of discourse that combines the features of conversation with the features that determine its location within the colloquial register. Briz first distinguishes mitigators from intensifiers with respect to their function in the process of communication. Although he sees both as derived from argumentative activity and negotiation for agreement in conversation, he analyzes mitigation as a phenomenon that shows the strategic relation between speaker and hearer, while intensification is a resource that focuses on the speaker only. Then he deals with semantic, pragmatic, and dialogical mitigation. In semantic mitigation, a part or all of the proposition is mitigated; in pragmatic mitigation, it is the illocutionary force of an act; and in dialogical mitigation, it is the disagreement. Briz concludes that, in colloquial Spanish, the lack of mitiga-

tors does not mean lack of politeness, but their absence in formal conversation may be taken as rudeness. However, in colloquial Spanish, too many mitigators can be an indicator of distancing. His findings are interesting both from the linguistic point of view, and for their implications for the study of Spanish in other Spanish-speaking countries.

Gemma Herrero, “Las construcciones eco: Exclamativas en español” (125–45), deals with another type of conversational strategy. She uses the term “tag” to refer not only to question tags, but also to other types of constructions under the general name of tag sequences – defined as constructions that repeat statements in the immediate preceding turn, either partly or completely, in an exact manner or with minor changes. Tag exclamatives are characterized as a fourth type of modality, the expressive (different from declarative, interrogative, or imperative), because of independent phonological, syntactic, and semantic features. Tag exclamatives are classified in two major categories, total and partial, and examples of each are discussed in detail. Herrero concludes that, although these constructions seem to go against the principle of politeness, this is not really the case: they occur in clearly defined informal situations where there is a high degree of trust among the speakers. In formal situations, these constructions would be totally dispreferred, and would even threaten the continuity of the conversation. The implications of this study for understanding cultural differences in the Hispanic world are very important.

José Portolés, “Del discurso a la gramática: La sistematización de los marcadores discursivos” (149–71), calls our attention to the differences between doing different types of grammatical analysis, where it is relatively easy to find theories to guide our research, and dealing with discourse markers, where theory is scarce. His paper can be read as a short review of the literature to be taken into account when analyzing discourse markers, with good examples that serve as inspiration for further work.

The last paper, by Ana María Vígara Tauste, “Comodidad y recurrencia en la organización del discurso coloquial” (175–208), puts still more emphasis on the need to give more attention to colloquial Spanish and to essential communicative strategies in everyday interaction. Although this paper is included with the empirical ones, it is particularly relevant from the theoretical point of view because the author uses this study to illustrate her position with respect to the definition of “colloquial,” more along the line of the Freiburg School than as defined by some other authors. What is most important in the paper is that spontaneous repetition or reiteration is seen from a pragmatic perspective as a mechanism of discourse organization and discourse progression.

This book will be motivating for linguists dealing with the Spanish language in Spain and Latin America. Although one is aware that many of the issues presented have been studied in other languages, especially in English, it is very satisfying to see that studies on colloquial Spanish have started, and are developing in a rigorous form from a pragmatic perspective.

## REVIEWS

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CARMEN SILVA-CORVALÁN (ed.), *Spanish in four continents: Studies in language contact and bilingualism*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1995. Pp. xi, 304. Hb \$49.95.

Reviewed by MARGARITA HIDALGO  
Spanish, San Diego State University  
San Diego, CA 92182  
mhidalgo@mail.sdsu.edu

This volume is divided in four parts. Part I introduces the reader to the issues of Spanish language contact and mixture; Part II deals with Spanish in the Americas; Part III is devoted to Spanish in contact with Basque; and Part IV offers two articles on Spanish in Africa and Asia. The title of the book, which contains 19 articles, is not at all modest; nor is Silva-Corvalán's statement that "More than half of the nearly four hundred million people who speak Spanish around the world do so in situations of intensive and extensive contact with other languages" (3). This provocative assertion prompts the reader to seek the patterns of language contact and bilingualism prevailing in the heterogeneous areas.

In the first article in Part I, Silva-Corvalán discusses processes and phenomena characteristic of bilingualism – such as simplification, overgeneralization, transfer, code-switching, analysis, and grammatical convergence. These processes or phenomena are equated with strategies aimed at lightening the cognitive load of remembering and using different linguistic systems. The issue seems to be whether the sociolinguistics history of the speakers or the structure of their language is the primary determinant of the linguistic outcome of language contact. Silva-Corvalán modifies the stance taken elsewhere in this volume by Sarah G. Thomason – which emphasizes the sociolinguistic history of the speakers – and proposes instead that the structure of the language(s) involved governs the introduction and diffusion of innovative elements in the linguistic systems, whereas the sociolinguistic history of the speakers is the primary determinant of the language direction and the linguistic outcome of language contact (9).

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