

### 03. Commonplaces in Clinical Linguistics

#### 03.06. The written standard as reference: orality and writing.

The bibliography on language pathologies almost always uses written language as a reference model, both in the areas of assessment and language rehabilitation; this demonstrates a "preconception of the written nature of syntax" (Hernández Sacristán 2006a: 33)<sup>1</sup> that moves the patient away from natural, conversational oral linguistic usage.

The differences between orality and writing are important in accounting for the informant's real speech, and should be taken into account when describing certain language samples as impaired or as following typical speaker patterns. Conversational syntax is different to written syntax, to the extent that it is always subject to (Narbona 1985: 191)<sup>2</sup> semantic and informative functions; thus in spoken use, the sentence model of writing is conditioned by the circumstances of the utterance: verb persons, deictics, temporality, and even interrogative, imperative (intimation) and affirmative syntax are a direct result of a speech act into which any utterance is inserted. In their speech, speakers leave traces of the absence of planning that characterises it, but this does not mean they make ungrammatical<sup>3</sup>, incorrect, wrong or even unacceptable utterances. This position is in line with the definition put forward by S. Gutiérrez (1989:25)<sup>4</sup>, for example, for whom the utterance is

*"any construction that is configured as an autonomous message, irrespective of its internal organisation (it can be a VERB PHRASE or SENTENCE, or a NOUN, ADJECTIVAL or ADVERBIAL PHRASE). Although it also means, contrasts with and distinguishes itself from other utterances, this unit possesses an exclusive function that marks it out: the COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION".*

When analysing and assessing the language of speakers whose diagnosis involves verbal impairment, we should abandon the syntactical model of sentence (written) and focus on the syntax of utterance (oral).

Rejecting the sentence model led to researchers' attempts to find a smaller unit that could really be applicable to data from spoken discourse (including non-conversational): a unit was needed that could operate in the framework of unplanned language. Thus, we find units such as informative units, tonal groups, phonemic clauses<sup>5</sup> or the breath-group. What they all have in common is the possibility of their appearance in the turn and in the sentence, a feature that enables the difference in level between the two units to be overcome.

<sup>1</sup> Carlos Hernández (2006): *Inhibición y lenguaje (Language and inhibition)*, Madrid: Biblioteca nueva.

<sup>2</sup> Antonio Narbona (1985): "Problemas de sintaxis coloquial andaluza"(Syntax problems in colloquial Andalusian), in *Sintaxis española: nuevos y viejos enfoques*, Barcelona: Ariel, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Labov (1972:258): "La agramaticalidad del habla cotidiana resulta ser un mito sin base en los datos reales" (The agrammaticality of everyday speech is a baseless myth when looking at actual data). In: *Modelos sociolingüísticos*, Madrid: Cátedra, 1983. Translation by José Miguel Marinas Herreras.

<sup>4</sup> Salvador Gutiérrez (1989): *Introducción a la semántica funcional (Introduction to functional semantics)*, Madrid: Síntesis.

<sup>5</sup> Navarro Tomás (1948:41) describes "melodic units": One phrase of a certain length can be divided into a greater or lesser number of units, depending on the particular intention with which its sense is activated in each case. The increase in units is prompted by highlighting and valuing the semantic elements in the phrase. Logical and emotional circumstances influence this decision. As a particular idiomatic element, the feeling of the predominant measure or beat in each languages rhythmic structure also has an influence.

Everyday conversation thus includes various syntactic formats:

1. Sentences:
  - a. complete
  - b. fragmentary: explained by ellipsis and references to context, but not agrammatical.
2. Non-sentences:
  - a. anacoluthons: the agrammaticality of the speech act and the break-up of the syntactic structure are caused by the speaker's own design. The cases of reticence and suspension are also included here.
  - b. interruptions: another speaker, by interrupting and speaking, brings the current speech to an abrupt end.