

Notes

Contributors:

Ricardo Miguel Alfonso

Yolanda Sánchez Mateo

Section editor:

José Antonio Álvarez Amorós

Lars Andersson and Peter Trudgill. *Bad Language*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, 160 pp.

Most people think that bad language comprises slang, swearing, and special linguistic entities such as “sort of” or “ain’t.” This is a book that talks about this kind of linguistic corruption and especially about negative views in relation to grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, accent, language attitudes, register, style, and social and moral restrictions. The study starts with an explanation of the three possible educational policies towards “the things we call bad language” (8): elimination, approval, or stylistic (situational) differentiation. The authors support the last possibility, as they think that the other two are drastic measures. Their last policy, then, deals with the fact that swearing, for instance, appears in many varieties of English.

Bad Language challenges the linguist by asserting things like: “It is possible to swear and use slang while speaking Standard English” (172); “Bad language is worthy of study and discussion” (190); “Bad language is not a threat to civilization” (194). The third asseveration contains both refreshing irony and humour, and it is on a same level with some of the sections in this work, such as the ones in the introduction: “1. We give a damn”; “2. Parents should give a damn”; “3. Teachers should give a damn”; “4. What is so damned good about bad language?,” etc. Therefore, the reader gets two main ideas when reading this book: first of all, bad language is “normal,” and it is used by many people; secondly, bad language has many positive aspects.

There is a chapter devoted to slang with simple and clear ideas, which enlarges upon the main theme. Furthermore, the chapter on swearing is really illuminating. In this chapter the study of bad language reflects unprejudiced treatment, something desirable but unusual in linguistic research. As the authors put it, swearing is usually related to religious

or moral criteria, and the ambiguity that surrounds stigmatized language adds to the problem. In spite of all this, Peter Trudgill and Lars Andersson give us a good summary of the State of the Art of swearing, and in chapter 10 (“Moral”), they make interesting suggestions regarding this subject.

Since the publication of *The Anatomy of Swearing* in 1967 by Ashley Montague, other titles have appeared about bad language, but most of them lack methodology, coherence and good bibliographic research. However, the authors of *Bad Language* worked on the same subject before —Andersson, for example, in *Fult språk*, 1985— and now we have their views in the same volume. In conclusion, *Bad Language* is a good introduction to the subject, it is concise and easy to read, and extremely attractive for the general reader and the undergraduate, as well as for the linguistics scholar interested in this aspect of language. The originality of this text lies in its uninhibited claim that all linguistic forms and varieties are valuable and ought to be respected.

Nigel Rapport. *Talking Violence: An Anthropological Interpretation of Conversation in the City*. Social and Economic Studies No. 34. Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research and Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1987, 211 pp.

This book did not appear in bibliographic databases the same year as its publication by the University of Newfoundland, but it could be found in 1988 in a British database because it was published by a British editor. University editions are not easily found in commercial databases nowadays due to automation problems, but this title deserves a comment, and this is why I have chosen it for a review.

This research was conducted in the Canadian city of St. John, and it deals with citizens’ opinions about violence through a study of their daily talk. It is divided into two parts: a theoretical introduction and a second part full of interesting dialogues. The introduction is general in scope but not extremely exhaustive in its cultural vision of violence. In fact, the author delves deeply into the use of violence in groups, and he comes to the conclusion that it fulfils two different functions: to fight against enemies and to enhance the feeling of belonging to the group. However, the second part of the text is the most interesting one. It contains eleven recorded conversations which —according to the terminology used by the ethnographers of communication— combine a wide array of participants and settings:

1. Saturday night, at a party of academics.
2. Monday evening, at a MUN criminology course.
3. Tuesday afternoon, at a session of the Provincial Court.
4. Wednesday lunchtime, driving downtown, looking for work.
5. Wednesday afternoon, at an introduction to the halfway-house.
6. Wednesday night, fun at Milligan’s Irish pub.
7. Thursday night, a chinwag at the Salon Paris nightclub.
8. Thursday evening, at a visit to Tee Cee’s lounge.
9. Friday morning, Open House at the Detoxification Centre.

10. Friday lunchtime, at the General Hospital, room 414.
11. Friday afternoon, at work in the Occupational Therapy Department.

To achieve a proper and unprejudiced recording of these dialogues —the classical problem in fieldwork studies— Rapport chooses the “participant-observer’s position” working as a volunteer, attending classes and making friends for a few weeks, trying to integrate into the community.

As far as methodology is concerned, this academic work is a good example of interdisciplinary research, which is highly valued now in Linguistics. Nevertheless, there seems to be a terminological divergence which may lead to a theoretical mix-up. First of all, it is significant to note that the keywords given by the Canadian Cataloguing Rules for this book are “conversation,” “social interaction” and “violence,” although the author states that he uses conversation as linguistic material but the really important theoretical point —he says— is that it combines both an ethnographic and a sociolinguistic approach. On the other hand, the title draws attention to the anthropological interpretation. In spite of all this, information is always welcome and looking at a concept from different perspectives is necessarily enriching.

Thus, after reading this publication, a reasonable doubt remains as to whether the author wanted the linguistic items to be highlighted so much; but it is in this last sense that *Talking Violence* appeals to us, because “the social context of violence contains gesture both physical and verbal” (192), an asseveration which is backed by Austin’s theory of “language as a mode of action.” To end with, this work is easy to read, not theory-laden, and primarily attractive for its conversation material, which may be useful as a tool for linguistic analysis in general.

José Carlos Rovira Soler. *Para leer a Pablo Neruda*. Madrid: Palas Atenea, 1991 • Javier del Prado. *Para leer a Proust*. Madrid: Palas Atenea, 1990 • Luis Blanco Vila. *Para leer a Camilo José Cela*. Madrid: Palas Atenea, 1991 • Cándido Pérez Gállego. *Para leer a Henrik Ibsen*. Madrid: Palas Atenea, 1990.

Palas Atenea nos presenta una colección de marcado carácter didáctico en la que se pretende ofrecer una serie de estudios introductorios a la vida y obra de las figuras literarias más sobresalientes de nuestro siglo. Desde un perspectiva histórico-biográfica —más acusada en los estudios sobre Neruda y Cela— los cuatro volúmenes que presentamos hoy aquí tratan de guiar al lector no especializado a lo largo de las obras de Pablo Neruda, Marcel Proust, Camilo José Cela y Henrik Ibsen.

En general el conjunto de las cuatro obras destaca por cubrir una notable cantidad de objetivos: entre ellas, estudiar al completo la obra de los literatos propuestos, analizar la influencia de sus experiencias vitales sobre sus respectivas obras e incorporar en los estudios el aparato crítico que sobre éstos se ha escrito. Con todo ello en mente, Palas Atenea va construyendo esta serie de monografías que sin duda ayudarán al estudiante de filología a adentrarse en la producción artística de estos cuatro autores. Todos ellos tratan de establecer las líneas maestras de los autores analizados, tanto en lo referente a los

distintos momentos histórico-literarios en los que se desarrollaron como a los tópicos temáticos y particularidades formales que conforman sus respectivas obras.

En el volumen de Cándido Pérez Gállego sobre Ibsen (1990), se analizan a un tiempo la construcción de los personajes principales en cada una de sus obras, las relaciones que entre ellos se establecen, la significación de éstos dentro de las mismas y, en un plano más general, las influencias de unas obras sobre otras. El resultado de todo lo anterior es un estudio crítico de corte marcadamente psicológico que, por lo general, tiende a ramificar sus líneas argumentativas hasta el infinito.

Mayor constancia crítico-literaria mantiene el estudio de José Carlos Rovira Soler sobre Neruda (1991), que presta una especial atención a la obra del poeta chileno desde la perspectiva de su experiencia vital. Es éste el estudio que mayor espacio dedica a comentar la abundante crítica sobre Neruda, ofreciendo a lo largo de toda la obra una interesante fusión entre el estudio biográfico-literario y la recapitulación del aparato crítico.

Como ya decíamos al principio, también el estudio de Luis Blanco Vila sobre Cela (1991) mantiene un punto de vista eminentemente bio-bibliográfico en su aproximación a la obra de nuestro más reciente Premio Nobel, dándonos buena cuenta de sus tribulaciones como escritor e introduciéndonos en la obra menos conocida de éste (y su relación con sus novelas más celebradas).

Por último, el volumen de Javier del Prado sobre Proust (1990) presenta una perspectiva integradora de distintas clases de aproximación crítica. Su autor nos ofrece un estudio riguroso y ordenado de la obra del novelista francés —con especial interés en *En busca del tiempo perdido*— en el que se estructuran cuidadosamente todo tipo de consideraciones sobre la construcción formal de la obra: la figura del narrador, el lenguaje figurado (los polos metafórico y metonímico) y las relaciones de intertextualidad, entre otras.