

QUESTIONS ON THE NORMAL-PATHOLOGICAL POLARITY IN LANGUAGE

Maria Francisca Lier-De Vitto*

RESUMO: As questões abordadas neste trabalho dizem respeito ao estatuto dos erros na fala, em particular aqueles que remetem à polaridade normal vs. patológico. Desenvolve-se o argumento de que tal oposição não foi adequadamente discutida, como problema lingüístico, em termos teóricos. Migra-se diretamente do reconhecimento de que a "fala patológica" existe (de sua diferença em relação ao que se assume como "fala normal") para tentativas de descrição disso que é intuitivamente apreendido. Em outras palavras, o movimento é aquele que vai do "julgamento de fato" para o "julgamento de valor". Deixa-se, assim, de dar o passo necessário da explicação. Questões relacionadas à heterogeneidade dos erros são levantadas e discutidas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Fala patológica; erros na fala; dicotomia normal vs. patológico; heterogeneidade dos erros.

The topics I will approach in this article are related to speech errors, specifically those that have to do with the normal-pathological polarity. The so-called pathological errors can be conceived of as a symptom of a particular nature insofar as it shows up in language itself. I will present some thoughts on these

* Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo - PUC/SP.

matters by raising and discussing questions, which I hope will contribute to bring out the conceptual opacity underlying the normal-pathological opposition. I understand that such an opposition has not been duly addressed as a linguistic problem.

Indeed, research connected to that issue has been done by linguists and speech pathologists. The problem is that the polarity at stake here is not faced on theoretical grounds. Although explicitly or implicitly mentioned, it has not been made a problematic proposition, i. e., the normal-pathological polarity goes straight from "factual judgement" to "moral judgement". The "acknowledged fact" is, thus, estimated as "normal" or "pathological". In other words, it seems to me that the necessary step towards explanation is still missing. As I see it, this is reflected in the imaginary division between disciplines: there are researchers who are concerned with an alleged "normal" aspect of language (the linguists) and those who deal with a "pathological" one (speech pathologists/therapists).

It is worth stressing the word "imaginary" in the above statement to signal the pre-theoretical approach to the normal-pathological dichotomy. Moreover, one should have in mind that neither the category "normal" nor the "pathological" is pertinent to the scientific program of Linguistics. I would like to underline again that the polarity normal-pathological is not actually discussed as such for it is handled in a naïve way.

The reason for this state of affairs could be that speech pathologists, in the attempt to spot and circumscribe the pathological error in speech, resort to Linguistics in a way that can be deemed "utilitarian" since they make use of its descriptive apparatuses not taking into account the theoretical bases they derive from. This is the very reason why speech pathologists' evaluations result in a "negative taxonomy". Nevertheless, this type of evaluation cannot either spot or circumscribe pathological errors because the descriptive apparatuses of Linguistics were not devised to tackle

speech, let alone speech-deviant productions. What I mean is that speech errors are the residue of that which the descriptive linguistics tools encompass. Being that the case, one could state that speech pathologists attribute to Linguistics a knowledge about empirical facts which are not part of its scope and must, therefore, be ignored. That is why I have labeled the speech pathologists' relationship with Linguistics an "unfortunate association" (Lier-De Vitto, 1995).

In "Sobre o normal e o patológico na linguagem: quem decide?", Fonseca & Rubino (in press) state that "a speaker of a given language identifies signs of a specific quality in the speech of another speaker, signs which are taken as pathological". The following discussion will not involve an inquiry into the nature of the speaker's judgement that allows for drawing the line between what is "normal" and "pathological" as far as language is concerned. I will go in a different direction. That is to say, my interest lies in examining speech pathologists' attempts at grasping the above mentioned effect on native speakers. I will start out calling the attention to the fact that, when the normal-pathological polarity is referred to, manifest speech productions are necessarily taken into account. That is why true ethical commitment to pathological deviant productions ought to be sustained in order that they can be rendered a problematic proposition. I insist on emphasizing that, although language is at issue, Linguistics has nothing to say about speech errors. Why is that so?

One should recall that the very condition for the structuring of Linguistics as a scientific domain relies on the ideal that language be represented by formal devices, i. e. "that language be represented by/as a calculus" (J-C. Milner, 1978). That is to say, the very ideal that directs and sustains the science of language hinders the inclusions of speech errors in its empirical realm. But, I maintain, "what is left out still exists and exhibits a truth that, although not

dealt with within the strict contours of linguistics" (Lier-De Vitto, 1999), still calls for an explanation.

At this point, it is worth asking what empirical data in Linguistics are. We could start out by mentioning that Linguistics became a Galilean science in this century; that is, Linguistics submitted to the principles that govern modern science. La langue and internal language were elected as its object. Such a general/universal theoretical endeavor lead to (1) the definition of its object, which is the functioning of language (universal language properties), (2) attempts at literalization and (3) circumscription of its empirical domain, which is not speech (as I will be discussing below). This being the case, the science of language has become distant from speech as such and from its heterogeneous/assistematic occurrences. Thus, speech is the residue.

If the "assistematic nature of speech" (Saussure, 1916) or the "chaotic" nature of the input (as Chomsky puts it) cannot be dealt within Linguistics, let alone deviant speech productions. It should be pointed out that errors occur in actual speech, i. e., manifest productions. But do all errors fall under the label "incorrect"? If they do, how should their obvious glaring heterogeneity, which shows up in effective manifestations, be dealt with? Taking what has been said into consideration, one can understand why taking errors into account "should be enough to give rise to critical approaches and to the building up of alternative analyses and of theoretical proposals" (C. Lemos, 1982). Indeed, the unpredictable assortment of deviant productions seems to bring about specific difficulties.

The heterogeneity of deviant productions requires considering the speaker as a subject not identifiable either to the stable unified epistemic subject or to the standardized individual of the species (Chomsky's 'species specific').

The point is that heterogeneity reveals the presence of a speaker in speech. Note that I mentioned a speaker. I understand

that such a mark of uniqueness inscribes itself in language, thus rendering speech extraordinarily heterogeneous. As to deviant pathological productions, one could state that they give visibility, in quite a dramatic way, to "that mark of uniqueness" which expresses itself in a speaker's tragic isolation. Indeed, when pathological productions are at stake, a speaker's erratic production exhibits a fundamental and radical qualitative difference, which sets the subject speaker apart from all other speakers of a given language.

On theoretical grounds, one could state that pathological productions seem to violate both of the above-mentioned conceptions related to the matter of subjectivity, i. e., pathological productions do show that someone failed to reach stable unified knowledge about language and/or that he cannot be taken as a speaker representative of the species. If that is agreed upon, instead of being conceived of as one in a series of equals – one which comprises, at a time, both individual and universal instances – the speaker should be approached as a subject who does not sustain the language calculus of Linguistics.

In the area of Language Acquisition and Speech Pathology, researchers cannot avoid facing actual speech productions. The very reason for that refers to the fact that such occurrences are deviant and, therefore, unpredictable; that is, they cannot be taken as either examples or counter-examples of any grammatical rule. The point is that deviant productions do not belong or cannot be included in the empirical realm of Linguistics. That explains why most studies in language acquisition fall into serious theoretical problems: they do fail to acknowledge the distance between grammar as a formal object and children's actual speech (C. Lemos, 1998; Lier-De Vitto, 1998).

Rubino's article, *On the symptomatic approach to children's errors in language acquisition studies* (in press), examines the way children's speech has been approached by researchers and

concludes that such approaches should be labeled "symptomatic", meaning that "theoretical consequences have not always been assumed". Rubino takes the nativist studies as a conspicuous example of such a "symptom" in which "the need to face change, i. e., to account for the "interim grammars" (those between So e Ss) seems to have lead researchers to children's speech productions". That being the case, their investigation includes data which are, by all means, discarded from Chomsky's theoretical framework. One should keep in mind that Chomsky clearly and explicitly endeavors to build a strong logically formalized theory which is strictly apart from usage.

The nativist researchers' move towards children's manifest speech productions seems to constitute an unavoidable theoretical problem. True commitment to Chomsky's scientific program implies that the status of example of empirical data be retained. The difficulty (and a hard one) the nativist researchers ought to face refers to the fact that most of the children's manifest productions do not fall under the category "predictable" because they are neither "positive" nor "invented" examples. By the way, children's erratic speech productions are of a kind that cannot be invented at all. Such productions are definitely unexpected – unpredictable.

It is now worth mentioning that empirical sciences must justify, by means of verification, their sets of hypotheses or empirical propositions. That implies a relation with a concrete/empirical realm; with "data which can be found in time and space" or "not found in time and space" (Milner, 1989: 50). The fulfillment of such a requirement is not a simple task, as one might believe. Besides discussing the relation between heterogeneous spheres, the symbolic and the empirical, it brings about the problematic conceptual status of "concrete". In Linguistics, the word "concrete" does not retain the Aristotelian meaning of "individual", "particular" and "experienced through one's senses". Differently, it seems to be closer to the Hegelian meaning of "concrete" as "what can occur" since,

according to Hegel, rational considerations are admittedly concrete. Note that, in the first case, data refers and is restricted to that which is actually observed/attested (not observed/not attested) in usage. In the second case data should be accomplishable, not necessarily observed/attested. The latter notion enlightens Milner's statement that, in Linguistics, "data are examples".

I would like to call attention to the particular nature of examples: they illustrate empirical propositions which are built a priori. In other words, empirical propositions settle what data are relevant data, i. e., they establish, a priori, that "datum x should be found in time and space" and that "datum x' should not be found in time and space". In this sense, they acquire a specific normative character. The opposition "should/should not" in the above proposition makes justification in Linguistics an experiment in Galilean terms in that the verification procedure changes from an inductive to a deductive maneuver. In other words, the a priori nature of empirical propositions render empirical data predictable since the true-false polarity is inherent to them, i. e., empirical propositions foresee how data must be and how they must not be. What counts here is that empirical data are always examples, whether they are positive examples (quoted from printed matter or effectively uttered by speakers) or made up example (invented by linguists).

However, I would like to emphasize that whether examples are positive or invented does not make any difference since the positive ones are disconnected from their textual/contextual environment to relate to the empirical propositions they must refer to. In other words, they relate to the rule, not to the text/context in which they actually occurred. To conclude: examples as data are type data since they, in fact, stand as equivalent to empirical propositions. With reference to that, Vorcaro, A. (2000) stated that: "linguists' empirical data cannot be conceived of as occurrences: linguists' empirical data derive from an [...] attribution judgement". I would like to add that such an operation (attribution judgement)

elects (selects) its relevant data and that it also desubstantializes occurrences. Consequently, they end up reduced to examples, i. e., to the invariant properties they must correspond to and exemplify.

I would also like to highlight that the above mentioned theoretical-methodological operation has to do with the fact that linguists' grammatical activity comprises a bipolar scientific justification procedure: data are assessed as possible/impossible ("correct/incorrect"; "acceptable/unacceptable".) Moreover, note that "possible/impossible examples" and empirical propositions establish a symmetric relation: examples/counter-examples are two sides of a coin, i. e., of an empirical proposition. Thus, we can logically conclude that as empirical data, examples and/or counter-examples are both predictable. The question that should be re-introduced at this point is: are all types of errors encompassed by the correct/incorrect dichotomy? The answer is no: manifest deviant-speech productions, as those labeled pathological, cannot be conceived of as either examples or counter-examples of empirical propositions. Once again, they are not relevant empirical data in Linguistics; they are, in fact, irrelevant data.

Deviant productions are definitely alien to the typical grammatical justification procedure, which has to do with the attribution judgement: "speech errors are errors of speech that count as occurrences", i. e, their textual/contextual environment and the subject speaker must not be ignored. According to De Lemos, it is solely in rendering "subjectivity" a problematic proposition that "speech" can be made a problematic proposition as well. Note that, contrary to examples, speech errors are singular productions: singularity rather than generality must be retained. As data, they must not be desubstantialized. That is precisely why they are unpredictable, unique in occurrence.

In a previous study (Lier-De Vitto & Arantes, 1998), we argued that errors are heterogeneous, which means that we refused (and refuse) to admit that both children's errors and the so called

pathological errors could be captured by the attribution judgement comprised in the grammatical enterprise. As far as children's speech is concerned, some language acquisition researchers render "structuring" errors which occur in language acquisition process (Bowermann, 1982; Carvalho, 1995; Figueira, 1995; Lemos, 1982, 1992; Lier-De Vitto, 1998).

Speech errors (children's or adults') can also be labeled "pathological" – true scandals which isolate a speaker from all the other speakers of a given language. Clearly, at least one distinction ought to be made when we consider errors: that between those which are intuitively recognized as "structuring" and those rendered "pathological" (Lier-De Vitto & Arantes, 1998). This need indicates that there is heterogeneity within the domain of errors. There are tolerable/interpretable errors (acceptable, passable, recognizable and corrected, witty etc.) and intolerable/pathological errors (unacceptable, unpassable... not witty at all).

In the area of Language Acquisition, the fundamental theoretical problem is: how does an infant become a speaker? The very circumscription of its basic proposition involves considering what it includes and what it excludes, i. e., it includes the ideal that an infant will speak and excludes – as a theoretical problem – the possibility that she/he may not speak. Note that the latter possibility makes room for the emergence of another field of studies, that of Speech Pathology.

As to the area of Language Acquisition, though criticizable, it might be possible to understand why children's speech is normally approached by means of descriptive grammatical apparatuses. If one keeps in mind that the ideal of the Language Acquisition field implies that what the speaker says equals the grammar of a language, then the application of grammar to children's actual productions makes sense as it would check what categories and/or rules the child has already acquired and what still has to be acquired. Therefore, grammar is the benchmark that selects what is relevant

(speech productions that match a grammatical rule) from a corpus under analysis. Note that in such an application process, children's productions are made examples and the singularity comprised in the expression "children's speech" is lost since what she/he actually says is nothing but another empirical source for Linguistics justification procedure.

Speech pathologists face children who have failed: their speech errors exhibit qualitative marks which hinder the interpretation that they are "structuring". These children do speak, but what they say is not recognized as "in process of development". Neither are they seen as potential language speakers. The "ideal" of Language Acquisition is, therefore, suspended. Surprisingly enough, speech pathologists also submit children's pathological speech to descriptive grammatical apparatuses ignoring, I repeat, that grammar will never be able to spot and circumscribe the singularity of such occurrences. Thus, speech pathology researchers may, at most, attest that pathological speech "does not follow the rules". However, would it be plausible to state that someone's deviant production "does not follow the rules?". If so, in precisely what sense? Might someone's speech be taken as "ungrammatical?". If so, according to what grammar tradition? Such questions, important as they seem to be, have not been raised, as far as I know.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning what Rubino (in press) pointed out: "no evidence of actual [grammatical] violation is admitted by nativist language researchers [...] nativists do raise an issue which should be seriously addressed by researchers affiliated to other theoretical perspectives: the theoretical assumption that children's deviant productions are grammatically restricted" (*my italics*). Having this in mind, it is important to insist on the question raised above: what does "not follow the rules" mean?

Up to this point, I hope to have been able to show that grammatical rules should not be taken as "references" to speech

occurrences, let alone to deviant productions. They were not devised, I reiterate, to apprehend the logic of singular occurrences. When that is not acknowledged, the special opacity of deviant productions is erased and the so-called pathological speech cannot be rendered a problematic proposition. In addition, it sounds misleading to label errors "deviant". If, on the one hand, "deviant" does give the idea of "pathological", on the other hand, it should be recalled that "deviant" is not comprised in the dichotomy possible/impossible in Linguistics. "Deviant" goes beyond such a polarity. Speech pathologists, nevertheless, do not seem to have recognized such a theoretical-methodological restriction. That being the case, "deviant", which qualifies "pathological", refers to an alleged linguistic norm/rule.

In addition, since grammar is mistakenly applied to deviant pathological productions, the concept of "linguistic norm" is subverted to acquire the meaning of "normal". One can see that the normal-pathological polarity is established on equivocal theoretical grounds: the ideal sustained in Linguistics is subverted into an ideal of normality. Similarly, the assumption of a "normal developmental pattern" is inexact. "Normality" is not a category which belongs to the field of Language Acquisition either; and no "pattern" has ever been established (C. Lemos, 1998). The problem is that, as Andrade (1994) put it, the theoretical controversy present in the area of Language Acquisition is not taken into account by speech pathologists.

Arantes (in press) underscores the difficulty of rendering a diagnosis explicit. She examines the works of Curtiss, S. et al. (1992) and Bishop, D. (1992) to illustrate her statement. Arantes also analyses Bates et alli (1997). These researchers touch upon the normal-pathological opposition when dealing with "individual differences". Such differences are so striking that some children are conceived of as "late talkers". As to the normal-pathological polarity, they endeavor to distinguish between children that, although "late", do come to talk, and those who are "late" and do

not come to talk. This latter group will fall under the nosological category "Language Acquisition Delay". Interestingly enough, they arrive at the conclusion that 50% of the children rendered "late" are within an acceptable pace of development whereas the other 50% fall short of an acceptable pace. Their speech productions present "language troubles" concerning grammatical morphology, which are attributed to a significant delay in language developmental process.

I am specifically interested in Arantes' comment on Bates' work. She states that *"La différence entre les deux serait alors tout simplement d'ordre temporel ... la distinction entre le normal et le pathologique est effectuée pour servir de référence au rythme dans le développement. Cependant, les auteurs ne fixent pas les limites de ce continuum et ne disent ni à quel moment un enfant passe du 'groupe des late talkers' au 'groupe pathologique', ni quels sont les critères qui peuvent être utilisés pour procéder à cette delimitation"*. Arantes concludes that "il n'y a qu'un pas entre l'intuition et l'affirmation de la polarité normal/pathologique". In other words, neither the use of sophisticated descriptive tools and/or terminology nor the implementation of scientifically-devised instruments (battery of tests, statistic and comparative approaches) seem to add to a native speaker's intuitive recognition of the polarity at stake in this paper.

In fact, Andrade, L. (in press) has shown that the widely applied NSST (Northwestern Syntax Screening Test), devised by Laura Lee to evaluate children's speech, may lead to catastrophic results since "correct answers", as far as grammatical structure is concerned, can be scored "incorrect" if a child's response does not match the specific grammatical item being tested at the moment. Andrade quotes Lee (1969, 108-9): "if the examiner said 'The girl will drink' and the child replied 'The girl is going to drink', this reply would be judged a failure on the test item 'future tense' marked by 'will' even though it is a semantically appropriate response to the picture".

Andrade adds that: "It is surprising that the child did not make any mistake but her 'correct' production was scored as 'incorrect'. Even more surprising is that a child can be referred to clinical intervention after a testing procedure such as that".

From what Arantes and Andrade pointed out, one can conclude that the normal-pathological dichotomy, which is intuitively grasped by native speakers, is not captured by descriptive apparatuses and/or technical procedures usually mobilized for that purpose. Research investigations mingle grammatical based descriptive apparatuses with statistic/quantitative procedures. The problem (or obstacle) is that grammar can neither describe speech occurrences nor is it legitimate that it be incorporated to test batteries in order to assess the normal-pathological polarity.

I hope to have shown that a fruitful relation with Linguistics, although imperative, must be cautious and critical. In an attentive examination, one can envisage what is comprised in its scope: its conceptual realm does not include value judgements, such as "normal" and "pathological". The attribution judgement leads to the opposition possible/impossible, which is, by no means, equivalent to the aimed normal-pathological opposition. If that is not taken into account, one misses that goal because value judgements label but do not lead to consistent approaches.

As I said in the beginning of this paper, I understand that pathological speech is a symptom of a particular nature. I state now that true commitment to such a special difference that shows up in language must play a decisive role in the dialogue with Linguistics and Language Acquisition. One should keep in mind that deviant pathological speech productions are not contemplated in those fields of language studies. Thus, to go from the level of recognition that "speech pathology exists" to an explanatory level seems to require a theorization effort which involves asking, for example, where to draw the line at using traditional or official grammatical descriptive apparatuses pertinently.

It is worth recalling that, in empirical sciences, empirical instances are deductively derived from a set of logical-conceptual propositions: theory selects its empirical domain. But, such a legitimate scientific selective procedure "makes exclusions" and what is excluded still exists. That is precisely the case of speech occurrences like errors. That is why Speech Pathology and other areas like Language Acquisition operate in a territory where "linguistic possible" and "speech possible" do not coincide.

From what has been said above, should speech researchers ignore Linguistics? Once more the answer is "no". M.T. Lemos (1994) raised that question when she analyzed language acquisition researchers' commitment to children's speech productions as well as their approach to Linguistics. I agree that Linguistics should be sustained as "otherness". I would like to add that, as I see it, the same is true as far as Speech Pathology is concerned. The restriction posed for this dialogue should also be taken into consideration by speech pathologists: that language acquisition not be complementary to Linguistics. That is, one must assume that the knowledge construed by Linguistics is "faulty", as M.T. Lemos states. In other words, one ought to sustain the tension due to non-coincidence. Otherwise, one submits to the sovereignty of a discourse, that of Linguistics. Thus, children's speech (or pathological speech) must be recognized in its special difference.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the building up of a consistent field concerning language pathology involves admitting that it belongs to the domain of language studies. The circumscription of its specificity requires, as I have intended to show, a critical dialogue with Linguistics – the science of language. Speech Pathology should be placed within the interface between the universalizing ideal of Linguistics and the singularity of pathological speech occurrences (Andrade, L., in press) (Vorcara, in press). I understand that the tension just mentioned should be seriously considered by those who deal with and reflect about pathological

speech – that could be a steady path from value judgement to consistent explanations.

ABSTRACT: *The topics approached in this article concern the status of speech errors, specifically those implied in the normal-pathological polarity. It is argued that such an opposition has not been duly addressed, on theoretical grounds, as a linguistic problem, i. e.; the normal-pathological dichotomy goes from the recognition that “pathological speech” (as opposed to “normal speech”) exists to descriptive attempts at apprehending such an intuitively recognizable distinction. In other words, researchers seem to go straight from factual judgement to value judgement, thus missing the necessary step towards explanation. Questions related to the heterogeneity of errors are raised and discussed.*

KEYWORDS: *Pathological speech; speech errors; normal-pathological polarity; heterogeneity in speech.*

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