

Reseñas/Reviews

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Stenström, Anna-Brita. 2014. *Teenage Talk: From General Characteristics to the Use of Pragmatic Markers in a Contrastive Perspective*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 978-1-137-43037-3, 139 pp. Price: 60 €

Recent decades have witnessed a growing number of studies on youth language (Romaine 1984, Eckert 1988, Stenström, Andersen & Hasund 2002, Rodríguez 2002, Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou 2003, Tagliamonte 2005, Stenström & Jørgensen 2009, to mention just a few). These tend to focus on the verbal expression of teenagers (13 to 19 years) in their everyday activities and, more particularly, on their interactions with members of their own peer group, since when they address adults young speakers tend to accommodate to the standard.

Despite extensive research, most studies on youth language have concentrated on specific lexical and grammatical features in particular languages, mainly English. Very little work has been conducted from a contrastive perspective and even less with the purpose of identifying linguistic features that can be regarded as common to various languages. Studies by Androutsopoulos (1998), Zimmerman (2009) and by the author of this book, Anna-Brita Stenström, are exceptions to this general tendency.

The book considered here thus makes an important contribution in this area, filling an important gap in the literature on youth language, since it deals with how some very recent pragmatic markers are used by English and Spanish teenagers. Although it is rather short, 139 pages, it is full of information and data that will undoubtedly be the basis for further research in the field.

The volume is organised into 10 chapters. The first of these is of an introductory nature and is intended to present the study in terms of its main objectives, including a brief description of the two corpora used, COLAm (*Corpus oral de lenguaje adolescente de Madrid*) and COLT (*Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language*), the definition of ‘pragmatic marker’ adopted, plus a general outline of the whole work. Chapters 2 and 3 then provide a general background to the book. Chapter 2 is concerned with the general characteristics of teenage language, and presents a list of the most common pragmatic markers in teen talk. As already mentioned, teenagers are well-known for being the agents of lan-

Ignacio M. Palacios Martínez: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela – Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana, Avda. Alfonso Castela, s/n, Santiago de Compostela 15782, Spain, E-Mail: ignacio.palacios@usc.es

guage change, with their changes often adopted later on by adults. The expression of teens is also influenced by the emergence of new means of communication such as mobile phones and the internet, the role played by music, and the significance of street and visual arts. All this contributes to the construction of teen identity, which is so important at both the individual and group levels. The analysis of the corpora data here also indicates that teenagers favour a number of specific topics of conversation: romance, body care, fashion, music, race and personal relations, hobbies and pastimes, drugs, smoking, school. Teenagers are also well-known for being open to other social groups, particularly to their peers from other immigrant communities. As Stenström (2014, p. 11) claims, “ethnicity has a strong impact on teenage language”, a factor which explains why these subjects are quite receptive to words and expressions from other languages.

Chapter 3 moves on to consider the extent to which youth language can be regarded as synonymous with bad language, as some scholars (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990) seem to maintain, in line with the opinion of many adults. Thus, it is widely believed that teen conversations consist of sloppy and informal speech, with no aim of communicating information, are full of taboo and slang words, together with a high presence of pragmatic markers with no apparent function in the discourse. However, Stenström (2014, p. 23) challenges this idea when she claims that “the characterization of teen talk as ‘bad language’ is not fair”; in her view, all these features “help to create an intimate atmosphere” and without them the conversation would not flow naturally.

Chapter 4 is organised into four sections, beginning with an introductory note. The second part is concerned with the evolution of the pragmatic markers from simple lexical items to grammaticalised units that will then go through pragmaticalisation processes. Spanish *¿qué tal?* and English *anyway* are used as illustrations of this phenomenon. In addition, two tables provide the origin of the main pragmatic markers identified in the Spanish and English data, a total of 18 and 13, respectively. In the third section, the author explains the search procedure followed for her study. Examples of each of these pragmatic markers were analysed manually on the basis of the data retrieved using the concordance corpus tool. Once identified, they were considered according to their context. As expected, access to the sound was essential for their correct interpretation. These data were then carefully filtered again, because in some cases pragmatic markers served purposes other than their expected, typical function. Thus, for example, in the case of Spanish *no* over 15,000 cases were ignored, and something similar applied to English *cos*, with more than 1,200 tokens rejected. This was not the case with forms such as Spanish *eh*, *o sea*, *en plan* and *pues nada* and *yeah*, *eh* and *BE like* in English, in that these perform only

pragmatic functions. Chapter 4 concludes with a brief explanation of how these pragmatic markers are multifunctional in nature and that their function may vary according to the position in the exchange; for instance, Spanish *anda* and the English corresponding *come on* can both have directive or reactive functions, while *sabes* in Spanish and *you know* in English can only be described in terms of being reactive.

Chapter 5 is essentially theoretical in nature, with previous descriptions of the Spanish and English pragmatic markers discussed in the book coming under survey. In the case of Spanish this includes a review of the literature on 15 pragmatic markers, from *mira* and *oye* to *¡qué va!* and *pues nada*. The English account is much shorter, dealing with only 7 such markers: *anyway*, *cos*, *well*, *okay*, *come on*, *like* and *you know*. Although these descriptions are rather short, the author does a very good job at summarising the main information concerning each of these markers. This is followed by a brief report of earlier contrastive studies on the use of pragmatic markers not only in English and Spanish but in other languages, such as Catalan, Norwegian, Dutch and German.

Chapter 6 is central to the book. Stenström discusses how these pragmatic markers are actually used by teenagers from Madrid and then draws a comparison with British teen talk. For this purpose she follows the Hallidayan division into the interactional, interpersonal and textual levels of conversation. Within the interactional level she considers these markers as opening, continuing and ending devices. Thus, *¡qué tal?* is used mainly to open a conversation, and thus is a greeting rather than a simple question. Comparisons are made with five English expressions in the English corpus: *how are you?*, *what's up?*, *how's it going?*, *how're you doing?* and *what's up?* The general picture seems to be that these English expressions have not reached a similar degree of pragmaticalisation as Spanish *¡qué tal?* The function of *mira* and *oye*, which generally occur in turn-initial position and which are much more common than their English equivalents (*look* and *listen*), is that of getting the listener's attention. In contrast to these we find *sabes* and *vale*, almost twice as common as the English counterparts (*you know* and *okay*), which serve to trigger a response. *Pues nada* is classified as a marker typically suggesting the end of a conversation, as is also the case with *vale*, *vamos*, *vaya* and *venga*. Comparisons are drawn here with English *anyway*, *okay* and *well*.

At the interpersonal level, special attention is paid to the use of vocatives by Spanish and English teenagers and to the way these young subjects address one another. In Spanish this includes non-taboo vocatives such as *tío/a*, *tronco/a* and *chaval/a* and taboo vocatives like *hijo/a de puta*, *gilipollas*, *cabrón/a*, while in English we find *man*, *woman*, *boy*, *girl* and *baby* versus *bastard*, *bitch* and *dick*. Once again differences are attested between the Spanish and the Eng-

lish data, because while the Spanish teenagers use non-taboo vocatives at a rate of 9.3 per 1,000 words, in the case of English this figure is reduced to only 1.1. Moreover, the data also indicate that teenagers in general prefer non-taboo over taboo vocatives, and what is even more surprising, these vocatives are not used as insults or terms of abuse but to create a feeling of intimacy between speaker and interlocutors that favours the flow of the conversation. The position in the sentence and the function they serve are also of importance here because while in English final position is dominant for both taboo and non-taboo vocatives, in Spanish we find more variety: non-taboo vocatives generally occur in final position but the taboo vocatives *hijo de puta* and *gilipollas* may even constitute a separate turn. The Spanish marker *en plan* is also studied at this interactional level. It is analysed as a typical hedging marker corresponding to English *like*. It is also notable for its multifunctionality, because apart from functioning as a hedge it may be used as a quotative to introduce direct speech. In fact, it is a very typical quotative marker in Spanish teen language and this leads us to the textual level, that is, the level concerned with the organisation and structure of the message. In this respect *pues* is used as a pragmatic marker signalling continuity and should not be regarded as a simple clausal conjunction introducing a subclause. Of particular interest is *o sea*, which in the corpus serves different purposes: planning and hedging, reflecting the speaker's commitment to what is being said, and with a minimising effect, this latter being equivalent to *I think* or to a tag question. Under the function of what the author calls 'stalling', that is, when the speaker cannot immediately find the right words and wants to gain time, we find *en plan* once more. In such a context this pragmatic marker is generally followed by a pause or is even repeated. Finally, as part of the intensifying function, Stenström includes *sí* and *no* in combination with *pues* and *que*; *anda*, *vamos*, *vaya* and *venga* are also classified under this label. Very little attention is paid in this chapter to the English markers, with the main emphasis clearly on young speakers of Spanish.

The complexity and overwhelming volume of data presented in chapter 6 contrasts with the intended systematisation in chapter 7, whereby the author tries to summarise the different functions of the pragmatic markers on the three levels of conversation. Once again, the close connection between position and function is underlined. The focus here is not only on the Spanish markers, as in the previous chapter, but also on the English ones, allowing us to draw a full contrast between the systems of the pragmatic markers studied in the two languages. Several tables are provided giving information on the function of each of the markers studied.

Chapter 8 introduces a sociolinguistic perspective to the analysis and although rather brief, it provides interesting information on the use of these

pragmatic markers, considering a number of sociolinguistic variables: age, gender and social background. Thus, girls from Madrid use pragmatic markers most frequently. Two items, *en plan* and *pues nada*, are not used at all by the 15 to 16 years old. As to social class, girls from a high social class are the most dominant users among the 14 to 15 year-olds, and the middle class girls among the 15 to 16 year olds, while for boys the opposite is true. In COLT the boys dominate, using *eh* and *BE like* more often than the girls. In terms of age, the 14 to 16 year-olds are the most frequent users of these pragmatic markers, and with regard to social class, the boys and girls with a high class background use the markers almost as often as their middle class counterparts.

The English and Spanish corpora differ in terms of the dates, with COLT compiled in 1993 and COLAm in 2004. In chapter 9 Stenström wisely overcomes this deficiency by supplementing her analysis with some new tendencies identified in two recently collected corpora, the *Linguistic Innovators Corpus* (LIC) from 2005 and the *Multicultural English Corpus* (MEC) from 2008. Information on these two corpora and the main findings can be found in Cheshire, Fox, Kerswill & Torgersen (2008), and Torgersen, Gabrielatos, Hoffmann & Fox (2011).

Chapter 10 serves as a conclusion to the work. Stenström refers to what she considers some of the most striking findings of her analysis. English *okay* can be used in the same way as five of the Spanish pragmatic markers, with functions on all three levels of conversation, and *eh* also stands out due to its multifunctionality, with a clear predominance in the Spanish data. Spanish teenagers seem to use a higher number of pragmatic markers than their English counterparts and these help to create a particularly intimate kind of contact with each other during conversation. Broadly speaking, the girls were the most frequent users of the markers studied in the Spanish corpus with the 14 to 15 year-olds from a middle class background dominating. This contrasts with data from COLT, where the boys with a high class background were the most dominant.

As already noted, this book makes a very significant contribution to the study of youth language in general and, more particularly, to the analysis of pragmatic markers in the expression of Spanish and English youths. The intended goals are perhaps a little too ambitious, given the length of the book, and as a result the analysis of some of these pragmatic markers is less detailed than might have been the case. The notion of pragmatic marker adopted is also perhaps too broad, including not only backchannels and traditional discourse markers but also quotatives and intensifiers. Another minor criticism is that, whereas those working in the area of teen language will be familiar with the corpora used, a more complete description of them might have been useful for a wider readership. It is also true that the method for data collection in these corpora has conditioned the study of the sociolinguistic variables, and that

chapter 8, devoted to these issues, could have been longer and included far more detail. Finally, although the author has tried to maintain a balance in the analysis between the Spanish and the English data, the emphasis has been placed mainly on the former.

These minor shortcomings by no means undermine the great value of the work as a whole, and its publication should be warmly welcomed. It will without doubt serve as the precursor of, and indeed the basis for, many future studies. Let me congratulate the author and the publisher heartily for having taken on such a complex and challenging project.

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