

Review

A review of “*Cosas que pasan cuando conversamos*”

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If we were to carry out a poll to determine the most common activities that human beings do daily, we would likely obtain the following answers: eating, sleeping, working, watching television, browsing through social media, shopping, using public transportation, to name a few. If one of the respondents were Estrella Montolio, Ph.D. in Hispanic Philology from the University of Barcelona and Professor of Spanish Language at the same university, she would answer that our most common activity is talking. Yes, talking. Estrella Montolio's response would be brief. However, the reflections and precise analyses that support her answer can be found in several articles in the written media,

and recorded in the space “*Todo es Lenguaje*” [Everything is language] broadcast on *Radio Nacional de España*. At the beginning of 2020, her reflections and analyses about conversations were compiled in a 227-page work published by Planeta Editorial, S.A., titled *Cosas que pasan cuando conversamos* [Things that happen when we converse].

With a writing style that is fluid yet precise, and that includes excerpts from conversations to illustrate the topics addressed, *Cosas que pasan cuando conversamos* is aimed primarily at a general audience. However, it may be equally attractive to readers who specialize in the field of communication and language. The titles that the author gives to each chapter are particularly suggestive. As an example we have the titles of chapters two and seven: *We all know conversational delinquents* and *We are poets of the everyday: metaphors in daily life*, respectively. Below I will comment in detail on the goodness of both chapters, which caught my attention from the beginning. However, before commenting I would like to highlight the prologue of the book. In this section, titled *In Praise of Conversation*, the author takes an interesting journey into the deep relationship between conversation and well-being. The tour she takes us on is lucid and clearly shows the backbone of the chapters: "the quality of our life depends on the quality of our dialogues and conversations," declares the author. The invitation to visit the chapters is unavoidable because the praise is deserved.

As mentioned, chapters two and seven caught my attention from the moment I read the index of this book. The first of those chapters, *We all know conversational delinquents*, addresses one of the axes sustaining the development of pragmatic theory, from its beginning to current times: the cooperative principle, proposed in 1967 by English philosopher Herbert Paul Grice. Estrella Montolio centers her attention on speakers who infringe the tacit agreement of cooperation, meant to achieve the goals of interaction. These people, using the author's words, “suffer from a great verbal incontinence, lie shamelessly, they rant or speak in

a confusing manner”, that is to say, they violate the conversational maxims proposed by Grice: the maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relation, and maxim of manner. While the dialogues included in this chapter clearly illustrate the lack of compliance of the speaker with some of these maxims, the author does not discuss the reasons that may motivate a speaker to infringe them. It is my opinion that this omission might lead the reader to believe that conversational maxims should be respected without exception, and that violating them makes the speaker worthy of being convicted of a communicative felony. Such a situation would fill the penitentiary of speakers, among whom you and I would probably be found. The reason: to have infringed, for example, the maxim of quality due to the use of figurative speech elements, or not complying with one maxim in order to respect another more important one. Hence, many speakers that appear to be conversational delinquents may simply seek to achieve their communicative purposes, by resorting to a broad range of linguistic resources and generating different degrees of cooperation when necessary.

The chapter titled *We are poets of the everyday: metaphors in daily life* explores a topic that only in recent decades has been given a space in the field of human communication and language, in particular in guidelines for cognitive linguistics: the theory of conceptual metaphor, developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980. The author begins this chapter by exposing the main ideas supporting the theory: a. human thought is essentially metaphorical, b. the metaphor is a mechanism that allows the conceptualization of diverse worldly phenomena, c. the metaphor allows building new concepts, leaning on those previously acquired, d. the metaphor is a resource of thought that is manifested linguistically, e. metaphors are a part of everyday language. She goes on to explain the functioning of a group of conceptual metaphors, among which we find “an argument is a war”, “love is magic”, and “health adversities are a container”. Compositions such as “I attacked the weak points of their argumentation”, “I love being on their side”, and “they have been unwell, but they have pulled through”, allow to illustrate the presence of conceptual metaphors in diverse communicative situations of everyday life. These examples support the

affirmation that metaphors are units that transcend the borders of literature and position themselves as protagonists in our communicative acts. Ultimately, they are a part of human heritage. There is no doubt that this chapter will wake up the reader’s curiosity to identify their own use of metaphorical structures, as well as those that abound in the surrounding linguistic landscape. The readers will surely devour this chapter.

Each one of the chapters that the author presents in *Cosas que pasan cuando conversamos* is a fundamental piece in the complex fabric of social and individual components that bring to life conversations that liven sharing a meal, make the wait easier at the supermarket line, inflame an argument, and bring down the spirit when delivering bad news. Thus, this work reminds us of the importance of an activity we carry out since our early years without too much effort or difficulty. This book will wake up the public’s curiosity to know more about conversations, after seeing this reflected on the examples that Estrella Montolío presents. After reading, our answer to the poll mentioned at the beginning of this review may be different: conversing is an act we carry out equally or more frequently than watching television or going shopping. With regards to the specialist public, I would like to recommend this work to Speech and Language Therapy students who are beginning their professional training. The recommendation is due to the fact that conversation is one of the propellers for language development, and it constitutes a wide window of observation for the use of linguistic resources with a communicative purpose. In consequence, the contents of this book and how they are addressed can be a source of inspiration to use conversation as a primary source for the observation of language in action.

The publishing of books of general interest about phenomena that characterize our species is always good news. After having enjoyed this work in its entirety, I allow myself to affirm that *Cosas que pasan cuando conversamos* is certainly a recommendable book.