

## QUESTIONS ON THE NORMAL-PATHOLOGICAL POLARITY IN LANGUAGE

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**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

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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

