

# Textual Functionality of One-Member Sentences in Colloquial Style

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**Abstract:** Traditional grammar has conceived the study of one-member sentences extracted from texts in different functional styles. The authors have focused on the formal aspect, on the syntax of these structures. It is from the 60s of the twentieth century that linguistic studies take a turn. The grammatical structure is examined according to the meaning it transmits, the contexts in which it is emitted and the communicative intention that is pursued, that is, the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions are taken into account. A communicative approach to language teaching is followed, aimed at studying the language in use. The theoretical-methodological foundation of this discursive analysis is the textual linguistics and the cognitive, communicative and sociocultural approach. The objective of this article is to propose activities for the teaching-learning of one-member sentences and the analysis of the functionality provided by this grammatical content in a dramatic text with a colloquial style. From the systematization of educational theory and practice, analytical-synthetic, inductive-deductive methods, observation and document analysis were used, which allowed the design of topic I of Spanish Grammar I, as part of the preparation of this subject for the second year of Spanish-Literature major. The textual functionality of the one-member sentences in colloquial style provided a better understanding of the text and a better approach to the speech acts between the interlocutors.

**Keywords:** Teaching, Learning, Single Sentences, Colloquial Style

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## 1. Introduction

In Cuba, language teaching is characterized by a cognitive, communicative and sociocultural approach. Language, more than a system of signs, is an instrument of human cognition and communication.

Between 1960 and 1970, one of the most relevant theories in the field of communication and in the study of language emerged: textual linguistics. This theory came to reinforce the pragmatic character of communication. Note that pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that deals with how context influences the interpretation of meaning. The context is understood as a situation, since it can include any extralinguistic aspect: communicative situation, knowledge shared by the speakers, and interpersonal relationships [13]. Marina Parra [14], points out the need to frame language teaching in a linguistics centered on meaning and text.

As a contribution of the previous theory, in the last

decades of the last century, the communicative approach to language teaching came to light. "This centers the interest in a communicative functional perspective on the basis of the orientation towards the teaching of the textual structures essential for the acquisition and development of the communication skills of the students [13]".

To face discourse analysis, special attention must be paid to textual linguistics, which deals with text and context, and takes into account the comprehensive study of language from three levels: semantic, linguistic and pragmatic. The latter is given by the communicative function, the intention and the situation in which the communication occurs. In correspondence with the abovementioned, another approach that must be considered for the analysis of the text (or discourse) is the cognitive, communicative and sociocultural one, which defends the relationship between cognition, discourse and society, and is aimed at the study of language in use, in different contexts and with an interdisciplinary

character.

So, it is necessary to go back to the definition of text. In this work, the one provided by Roméu is assumed: "[...] coherent communicative statement, carrier of a meaning; that fulfills a communicative function [...] in a specific context; that it is produced with a specific communicative intention and purpose; that makes it possible to fulfill certain communicative tasks, for which the user employs different procedures and chooses the most appropriate linguistic means [21]".

By referring to these linguistic functions of communication, Roméu brings the reader closer, in some way, to the textual typology: colloquial, literary, journalistic, publicist, official, scientific texts, among others. It is noteworthy that linguistic functions are not exclusive to one type of text, several of these functions may converge in it. For example in literary text, colloquial style can be expressed.

In the speech acts that the individual produces, he can use different structures of the language, in which the grammatical sentences are one-member ones. They are often used in different types of text and generic forms. The colloquial text constitutes one of the supports for the use of these structures, although the colloquial style can be integrated into literary texts, as long as there is an intention to talk to the public and exchange ideas, as occurs in the dramatic work.

In the consulted literature, it is evident that the grammatical one - member sentences have been treated from the traditional grammar to the discursive one. Among the authors are: Roca Pons [18], Gili and Gaya [9], Porro [16], [17], Cueva [3], who have offered the essential theoretical foundations to address this grammatical content. They have focused on the formal aspect, on the syntax of these structures, some have called it phrases that from the semantic point of view can constitute a unit of communication at a certain moment.

At the same time, studies were developed that increasingly revealed the need to use these language structures in different speech acts. Authors such as: Dubsky, J. [7], Van Dijk [23], Parra, M. [14], Matos, E. and Hernández, V. [13], Ferrer, J. [8], Roméu, A. [20], [21], Toledo [22], López [11], Abello [1], Armas [2], Pérez [15], Dorta and Leiba [6], Dorta, Arocha and Escalona [4], Rodríguez and Dorta [12], Dorta, M., Rodríguez, Y. and Souto, M. [5], among others, have provided the theoretical foundations in the light of textual linguistics and the cognitive, communicative and sociocultural approach, of which Discursive grammar has incorporated the principles and semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions for the study of grammatical content, according to the context and communicative intention. Different didactic proposals of language structures have been provided where their functionality is appreciated in pursuit of communication, but those referring to the use of one-member sentences in colloquial style throughout the dramatic work are still insufficient.

Related to the topic, the following problem is presented:

The syntactic dimension predominates in the study of one-member sentences, without taking advantage of the

potentialities offered by colloquial style texts to discover the functionality of these structures in communication.

This article pursues the following objective: To propose activities for the study of one-member sentences and the analysis of the functionality provided by this grammatical content in a dramatic colloquial style text.

## 2. Development

### 2.1. Communication in Colloquial Language

In daily communication, a simple vocabulary is almost always used, a plain language, without elaborate or pompous terms; furthermore, it does not always conform to the grammatical norms established for the correct use of the language, although this does not mean that there is freedom to distort the mother tongue, which must be preserved as it is a national heritage. Generally, speakers make use of certain "instruments" offered by the language so that everyday communication is fast, direct and precise.

This daily communication is understood as conversation, in which the interaction and exchange of information between the interlocutors is established. In the conversation, a spontaneous and informal way of speaking is evident. This type of communication is also called colloquy and it happens regardless of social position, profession or trade, or cultural or academic level.

It has already been said that spontaneous and informal conversation predominates in the colloquium. It is necessary to refer to the formal and stylistic aspects that characterize the colloquial text:

Oral: a more relaxed and permissive language, with repetitions and redundancies, constant use of ellipsis and unfinished sentences. The intonation, which is usually varied (interrogative, exclamatory, declarative) and truncated (ellipsis). The use of short sentences is frequent. Eventually, onomatopoeic words are heard.

Spontaneity and imprecision: lexical improprieties and pronunciation, inconsistencies, improvisation, deviation from the topic, unfinished ideas, and syntactic disorder often appear.

Expressiveness: in the colloquy there is a predominance of the expressive function, many times the words or sentences have a high emotional charge. Diminutives, augmentatives, and pejorative terms are used. Interjections, popular and humorous phrases abound, all due to the familiar context, in which the colloquy generally takes place.

Contact with the sender: colloquial language is characterized by the support of extra textual codes and the use of a phraseology that properly formulates the phatic and appellative functions of language (by which contact with the receiver is established, maintained and stimulated) in which abound:

1. Idioms, set phrases, sayings.
2. Greetings, appeals, vocatives (sometimes affectionate insults).
3. Congratulations.

4. Euphemistic expressions.
5. Use of fillers.

One of the distinctive features of the colloquial text is the lexicon or vocabulary, which can correspond to the various spheres of life, in relation to the topic and communicative context in which communication is established (conversation or colloquy).

The characteristics of the colloquial style previously expressed can be manifested not only in formal and informal registers, but also in literary prose in which the characteristics of the speech of the characters depend on how the author has conceived them, but with a direct language, tinged with cultured terms, the use of an exquisite, organized syntax; which reveals certain characteristics of the speakers (cultural level, social stratum, communication skills [1]). It is typical of the colloquial style to use different unified structures in communication in which the speakers through nominal and verbal phrases, vocatives, and interjections can express different states of mind, emotions, sadness, joy, surprises, make alert calls, suggestions, among other possibilities offered by this content, depending on the communicative intention.

As it is known, the short story and the novel are literary texts; but regardless of their style, in these forms of the epic genre, a language typical of the recreated environment is frequently used: rural or urban, of the country, popular or cultured norm; that is why the characteristics of the colloquium are perceptible.

However, one must not lose sight of the fact that it is a literary text, and we must take into account what Érida Grass Gallo states in this regard: "As it is a literary dialogue, its speech acts are mimetic or ritual in the view of some scholars, because these dialogues of elocution force that characterizes the speech acts and makes up common oral discourse, that is, it should not be forgotten that in literature language acts occur in special circumstances, and do not have an intrinsic linguistic reality. A literary work leads the receiver (reader) to imagine the speakers, certain communicative situations and a series of facts. What the writer produces is not a speech act, but the representation of a speech act [10]".

The same happens with representative works of the dramatic genre, which are structured from the predominance of dialogue, taking into consideration that they are made in this way to be represented on stage. Examples of this genre are *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare; *Tartufo*, by Moliere; *Dollhouse*, typical Scandinavian realistic theater play, written by Henrik Ibsen; or *Bernarda Alba's House*, by Federico García Lorca.

The dramatic genre is not only written text, but also a scenic practice, which makes it a double articulation between literary phenomenon and spectacular phenomenon, between written text and representative text.

The communication process of the dramatic work does not end in reading but extends to representation. Representation is a constitutive characteristic of the dramatic text, which conditions the mode of its reception; that is why the dramatic text is a highly complex dialogical process between the

author and the audience.

In most theatrical works, the author suggests to the director and the actors as well, how to arrange the stage, and in the parliaments, annotations are indicated about gestures, movements so that the work is more credible or induce other reflections.

In this work, sides are taken with the theatrical dialogue to allow a varied use of different morphosyntactic structures that communicate a certain message, according to the intention of the speaker in a specific situation; that is why it is considered as the main function, the communicative one.

## 2.2. *The One - Member Sentence in Theatrical Dialogues*

It has been preferred to illustrate the use of one-member sentences based on communication through the colloquial style that is manifested in the dialogues between the characters in a dramatic work.

Within those structures that can be used in the theatrical dialogue are the one-member sentences, understood as: Intentional units with complete meaning, marked by an intonational figure, whose structure does not respond to the subject-predicate relationship. They are compact expressions, which are sometimes related to the expressive and appellative functions of language, or they are answers to questions, greetings, farewells, etc. [22].

One of the linguists familiar with the subject expresses: "A grammar of the text provides a better basis for the study of discourse and conversation in the social interactional and institutional context and for the study of types of discourse and the use of language in different cultures [23]."

The use of each grammatical structure depends on the use that the speaker needs to make in speech acts, depending on his communicative intention. One-member grammatical sentences are used in poetic texts and in colloquial style texts, due to their great emotional charge.

Linguistic literature contains varieties of one-member grammatical sentences, such as: Noun phrases: Happy day!; Adjectival phrases: Small in stature!; Adverbial phrases: Far from here; exclamatory groups: What a relief! What a pity!; Vocative: Companion, what can I do? (The vocative is companion, the other grammatical sentence is a two – member one (what can I do).

On the other hand, there are the verbal or impersonal one-member sentences, constituted by a verb phrase in which verbs that lack a subject appear: You have to wait for the pipe; atmospheric or meteorological verbs: It rains heavily; It thunders at sunset; verbs to have, to do, and to be: It was cold, it's hot, it's late, it's dark. They are also used in farewells: Goodbye, friend. See you soon; in expressive phrases of courtesy: Please, a tea; thanks, thank you very much. The authoress [22] exemplifies these structures in colloquial style texts and refers that there is an abundance of noun phrases, impersonal sentences, especially when it is intended to hide some information, as well as the presence of vocatives and interjections in the dialogues.

The use of these structures of language in theatrical dialogue is once again close to the conversation that takes

place between members of society at a certain historical time. It is a reflection of the reality of the moment, of their customs, idiosyncrasies, social problems, etc. Spectators see the historical moment reflected through the language of the actors together with the use of gestural media.

As can be seen, the elements indicated as typical of the conversation are associated with the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic from the discursive point of view, aspects of transcendent importance when analyzing this type of text, regardless of whether it is a conversation more or less formal.

There are some examples below of the textual functionality of single sentences and their analysis, in dialogues of the play: A colonial house, by Nicolás Dorr.

These activities were designed as part of the preparation of the subject Spanish Grammar I, for the Spanish-Literature major, second year.

Read carefully the following micro text, belonging to the second act, and second scene of the play: A colonial house, by Nicolás Dorr.

Amado: (amused) Is there a party in this house?

Jazmín: My love! (Runs to him, hugs him and kisses him).

Amparo: The gentleman arrived.

Jazmín: But you also look very happy. What happened?

Amparo: Oh, yeah... look how her eyes shine. (...) And why that joy? Did they increase your salary?

Amado: No, something better.

Jazmín: Did you win the emulation at the polyclinic?

Amado: No, something personal.

Jazmín: Did they give you any distinctions?

Amado: Cold... cold...

Amparo: Ha! You are the new director of the polyclinic!

Amado: (laughs) No, not so much.

Jazmín: Oh, Amado, spit it out!

Amado: Well, are you given up?

Jazmín: Yes.

Amparo: You won. Today I am not focused.

Amado: Well, listen to me: they gave us the apartment! They gave it to us, Jazmín! We can move in today! Here is the paper! (He brandishes it in the air)

Jazmín: Oh my dear, what a joy! (Kiss it) (...)

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- What play is referred to? What do you know about it and its author?
- What genre does it belong to?
- What historical context does the work reflect?
- What is the elocution form?
- What functional style is used? Why do you know it?
- What ideas are expressed?
- Determine examples of verb and noun grammatical sentences. What meaning do these sentences bring to the text?
- According to the meaning, what has been the communicative intention?
- What other one-member structures are used? What are their meanings? What is the communicative intention?
- Do you think they contribute to the understanding of the text? Support your answer.

k) Select examples of one-member sentences in which the joy and surprise of one of the characters is expressed. What effect did it have on you?

l) Think about being asked to write an act about a dramatic work whose problem is the one posed by Nicolás Dorr. Create your own characters. After writing the text, check if you needed to use one-member sentences. Express the communicative intention you had.

m) Select a text that encourages the study of one-member sentences. Create activities in which this grammatical structure is used based on understanding.

Nicolás Dorr was a Cuban playwright and novelist. His appearance on the Cuban scene is one of extraordinary surprise, and he immediately premiered *El Palacio de los Cartones* and *La Esquina de los Alcijales*, all in one act.

He has written more than twenty plays, all published and the vast majority premiered. His works have been presented in different countries: Spain, France, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Nicaragua, Panama, Colombia, and the United States, among others.

He has also published essays and articles on dramaturgy, both theatrical and cinematographic, in the magazines *Cine Cubano*, *Bohemia*, *Cuba en el Ballet*, *Gaceta de Cuba*, *Casa*, among others.

This fragment belongs to the aforementioned Cuban play: A colonial house, which was awarded at the Second Havana Theater Festival. The jury considered that it expressed very well the problems of youth, particularly that of housing. The action takes place in Pinar del Río, around 1981.

Specifically, the selected fragment expresses the arrival of Amado to the house, in a very happy way, after receiving the news of the apartment he was given. His wife Jazmín and Amparo, the lady who welcomed them into her home, tried to guess what was wrong with him and were unsuccessful.

From the first intervention of the dialogue: (Funny) Is there a party in this house? Amado inquires about the celebration in the house, and he uses an impersonal interrogative one-member sentence. The presence of the verb *have* (there is) in the third person singular ratifies the type of sentence due to its structure (one-member) and the communicative intention of the author.

In the second speech: My love! (He runs to him, embraces him and kisses him) his wife Jazmín, receives him effusively, as a sign of her affection, of the joy she feels when she sees him, and she uses a one-member sentence with an exclamation mark, loaded with emotionality and expressive function that characterizes the colloquial style.

In Amparo's intervention: Oh, yes... look how her eyes shine. (...) And why that joy? This woman also captures the joy with which Amado arrives, through the interjection (*Ay*), and the adverb of affirmation (*yes*), which constitutes one-member sentences. The coincidence of ideas is evident. Jazmín has also penetrated his psychology and the expressiveness of his eyes; they recognize that something good is happening to the young man.

In Amado's interventions: No, something better and No, something personal, the negative answer to two questions is

expressed. It is enough with the use of the negative adverb *no*, followed by another nominal expression in each of the cases, to express that they were wrong and that for him it had a higher personal relevance that perhaps at that time they did not even imagine. (Both structures are single sentences). The presence of the indefinite pronoun (something) ratifies the uncertainty. However, it conveys an indication of what it could be, by using the adjectives (best and personal).

The wife believes that they gave him some distinction, for which he responds: *Cold... cold...* Through this repetitive compact unit the character conveys the idea of how far he is from what really constitutes his joy. The ellipsis indicates the economy of the means of expression typical of colloquial language.

The character Amparo expresses: *Ha! You are the new director of the polyclinic!* The beginning of this idea begins with a one-member sentence, through the interjection (*Ha!*) to express that she had guessed, that she had discovered it, which is not the case. It was almost taken for granted.

In the following parliament Amado responds: *no, not so much.* He uses two juxtaposed one-member sentences with the intention of reiterating that he does not believe that he has reached such a high step as occupying that responsibility.

Jasmine, his wife, intervenes: *Oh, Amado, spit it out!* This interjection that begins the idea conveys that she is already somewhat tired and desperate to know, that is why she asks for it using the vocative (*Amado*). Both structures are one-member sentences.

Finally Amado uses a discursive marker (*Good*) and then a question to close the question (*Are you giving up?*), to which the wife answers (*Yes*), through a one-member sentence. He expresses his agreement with them saying the answer which is that they were given an apartment.

With the intervention of Amparo (*You won. Today I am not focused*) it is evident that she is giving up, but again Amado intervenes and through the discursive marker (*well*), as a support to continue the previous conversation, followed by an imperative sentence, draws attention to the women who listen to it (typical of the colloquial style) and continues with several affirmative grammatical statements with an exclamatory tone, specifically addressing *Jazmín*, a noun in function of vocative, which constitutes a one-member sentence, used with the purpose of expressing his wife all the euphoria and joy he felt for having received the apartment that they had been waiting for so long, his intention was to share it with her.

This micro text concludes with *Jazmín's* reaction: *Oh, my dear, what a joy!*, she approaches her husband and kisses him full of surprise, happiness, affection, loving and flattering words expressing the joy that she was experiencing at that moment. All this idea is expressed by three juxtaposed and exclamatory one-member grammatical sentences, which summarize the positive impact caused on this character and at the same time transmit the message of hope and optimism to the youth.

As it can be seen in the previous text, in the dramatic work

the use of one-member sentences, typical of the colloquial style, is frequent. For better understanding, it is necessary to look for the functionality of these structures in the text, taking into account the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions.

### 3. Conclusions

Textual linguistics and the cognitive, communicative and sociocultural approach constitute theoretical-methodological foundations for the study of discursive grammar. Both approaches have as object of study the text in the different functional styles and are directed to the language in use, with an interdisciplinary character. Grammatical structures are analyzed taking into account the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions, that is, the meaning they have in the text, the context in which they are found and the communicative intention with which they are used; the cognitive, communicative and sociocultural approach defends the relationship between cognition, discourse and society.

The grammar of the text provides a better basis for the study of speech and conversation in the social context. The use of each grammatical structure depends on the use that the speaker needs to express in the speech acts, depending on his communicative intention. Dramatic texts and colloquial style, due to their great emotional charge, are favorable to using one-member sentences of different types. Particularly in the theatrical dialogue, the historical moment is reflected through the language of the actors with the diversity of compact units to transmit different messages, together with the use of gestural media.

The activities designed and the analysis of the textual functionality of the one-member sentences in a sample of a text in colloquial style, allowed the design of topic I of Spanish Grammar I, as part of the subject preparation, for the Spanish-Literature major. It also provided a better understanding of the text and a closer look at the speech acts that occur between the interlocutors.

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