

On the Use of Marked Syntax in Four Short Stories Written by Hispanic American Writers: A Functional Perspective

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Abstract

We are going to analyse the main syntactical processes of thematization and postponement in English in four short stories written by four different Hispanic American writers who wrote around the seventies: Rudolfo Anaya's *The Force of Luck*, Denise Chávez's *Evening in Paris*, Alberto Álvaro Ríos' *My Father and the Snow* and Ana Castillo's *My Mother's Mexico*.

The main purpose of this article is to show that presenting certain important facts in the short stories using several marked syntactical structures in English (extraposition, existential sentences, pseudo-cleft sentences, passive, cleft sentences) is not at random because those structures have specific communicative implications as we will see with the analysis of the corpus of examples.

We will also prove that these Chicano writers create a social reality throughout the recurrent use of these processes or express deep feelings since the use of the anomalous syntactical processes under analysis points out a contrast with the normal SVO order of the English sentence.

Key Words

Systemic Functional Grammar, marked syntactical processes, discourse analysis, context, Chicano literature.

1. Introduction

Chicano writers provide their ideological vision and their search for identity through language. They think that the writer has an important role in society and highlight the richness of a multicultural society and a multicultural culture as a way of showing their world view.

There is a rich production of Chicano short stories and there is also a great number of male and female writers. That is the reason why we have decided to study the main syntactical processes of thematization and postponement in English in four short stories written by four different Hispanic American writers who wrote around the seventies: Rudolfo Anaya's *The*

Force of Luck, Denise Chávez's *Evening in Paris*, Alberto Álvaro Ríos' *My Father and the Snow* and Ana Castillo's *My Mother's Mexico*.¹

We will concentrate on certain anomalous syntactical structures in order to try to answer the following question: why do these four Chicano writers write the way they do, what is their communicative purpose? We agree with Bhatia (1993: 16) in the following statement: "Since each genre, in certain important respects, structures the narrow world of experience or reality in a particular way, the implication is that the same experience or reality will require a different way of structuring, if one were to operate in a different genre".

This article is within the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar because it studies language in relation to society and analyses the main reasons for choosing between some linguistic forms or others, which is always determined for the function that those linguistic forms have in society. As Rudolfo Anaya declares in his interview with Martínez (1998: 118):

[...] the Chicano literature that we have been writing over the past twenty years begins to talk about the fundamental world view of the people, of the group. That is tremendously important. Again, you reflect on those values of that world view; without that reflection you, we are apt to be consumed by that which is not you, us, more easily. Part of the authentic values that we describe as beautiful, as valuable, also take place in art and in the constant experimentation that we call art or literature.

Rudolfo Anaya's *The Force of Luck* is part of the oral tradition of the Hispanic people who lived in the American Southwest, in what is now New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona. These folktales try to reinforce the traditions and values of the culture that preserves them. Anaya has recognition as an interpreter of the lives of Hispanics in the U.S. Southwest through his novels, short stories, and plays. He uses the New Mexican culture as background in his writings.

Denise Chávez is a famous Chicana novelist, short story writer, playwright, actress and teacher. She is inspired by the distinctive culture of the southwestern Borderlands where she was born and pays attention to the beliefs and customs of Mexican American living along the border.

¹ After each example we find the year of the edition we have used and the page of the short story in which we find the example.

Alberto Álvaro Ríos presents moving portraits of his dying father, a man from Tapachula, Mexico, and his English mother in the short story *My Father and the Snow*. In general we can say that his writing carries a lot of emotional impact, he gets inside the skin of his characters to narrate the stories.

Ana Castillo is interested in the struggles of women in oppressed cultures. She has a great interest in race and gender, in the issues that affect Latina women and in a better understanding of the American and Mexican societies. In *My Mother's Mexico*, she presents the slums of Mexico City, the slums that her mother experienced.

These four writers try to present Chicana culture as an expression of their social features, as a resistance to the dominant ideology, as a reinforcement of their identity, etc. We agree with Rebolledo and Rivero (1993: 160) in the following statement:

The psychological space of living between two or more cultures, languages, and histories is part of the mestiza consciousness [...]. It is also part of the consciousness that permeates other works [...]. Crossing borders, bridging borders, or simply recognizing the limits of the borders are an integral aspect of Chicana writing and of Chicana literature.

These writers state a desire to avoid prejudice, to respect the rights of minorities, to be open to other cultures, to get rid of the hostility and xenophobia against Chicano culture.

The main themes of Chicano literature are immigration, racism, the construction of identities (which requires negotiation between the individual, the community and the society), family life, the feeling of being different, etc. With these themes, Chicano writers point out that Chicanos perceive the negative consequences of an extreme attachment to national or regional identities.

The two women writers we have chosen, Denise Chávez and Ana Castillo concentrate on their mothers in the short stories; they rescue their mother's figure and let us know their feelings about their mothers, the difficult situations they went through and how much they deserve. As Rebolledo and Rivero (1993: 27) declare, we think that there is a purpose in this precise treatment of the maternal figure:

[...] the redemption of the mail relationships in the lives of Chicanas, particularly the father-daughter relationship. When they first began to write, Chicanas had been so overwhelmed for such a long time by a dominant, patriarchal society that most of the mail figures, especially the fathers, were either present in their writing as violent characters or were absent from it altogether. Tired of long-standing gender stereotypes, women wrote to demythologise the mail figure, to challenge him, to make fun of him. Their main focus was in rescuing the female maternal figures from oblivion and from silence. Thus the figures of the mother, or, in particular the grandmother, took on singular importance.

2. Cleft sentence

2.1 Formal aspects

This construction is known as cleft sentence since it is the result of the division of a simple sentence in two parts that constitute two different sentences. Normally, it starts with the pronoun *it* (without any meaning), followed by the verb *be*.

Visser (1963-1973:49) presents this structure as follows: "This periphrastic construction is used to bring a part of a syntactical unit into prominence; it is especially employed when contrast has to be expressed: It is father (not mother) who did it".

The emphasized element can be a nominal group:

One said that it was money which made a man prosperous, and the other maintained that it wasn't money, but luck, which made the man.

(Anaya, 2001: 24)

Sometimes we find a pronoun as the highlighted element:

There was a constant stream of faces, but it is those few that I remember, like the lady with the unsteady Infant Jesus of Prague who stayed in my room and cried to herself while I slept on the couch. (Chávez, 2001: 51)

It can also be a prepositional phrase or a noun phrase followed by a prepositional phrase:

It was with great reluctance that it was dispatched into oblivion, which in this case was the irrigation ditch behind the house. (Chávez, 2001: 50)

It was the destiny in Mexico that my mother's little brother Leonel refused to reject because of his hatred for capitalism, which he felt was fully embodied by the United States. (Castillo, 2001: 288)

Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1386-1387) state that the second part of the structure can be introduced by *who, that* and 'zero pronoun', but we can also find *wh-* forms such as *whose, whom* y *which* in a small number of examples. It is impossible to find these last two *wh-* forms preceded by a preposition.

In our corpus we find *which, that, who* or 'zero pronoun' as we can see in the following examples:

He contends that it is luck which elevates a man to high position, and I say it is money. (Anaya, 2001: 24)

It was with great reluctance that it was dispatched into oblivion, which in this case was the irrigation ditch behind the house. (Chávez, 2001: 50)

It was the person of the inappropriate gifts who followed hunchbacked old women on winding metal stairways into greyed, murky expanse of space with no stars. (Chávez, 2001: 52)

When the miller saw the bag he immediately knew that it was the very same bag he had lost to the hawk which fought him for the piece of meat years ago. (Anaya, 2001: 30)

2.2 Functional aspects

Halliday & Matthiessen (2004³:97) propose a double thematic analysis for cleft sentences. The first one represents the local thematic structure of the two sentences that we find in the construction. The second level shows the thematic structure of the whole sentence. The following example illustrates these two analysis:

[...] *it is luck which elevates a man to high position, [...]* (Anaya, 2001: 24)

- | | | | | |
|----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| a) | Theme | Rheme | Theme | Rheme |
| b) | | Theme | Rheme | |

The cleft sentence allows the speaker or writer state something in a categorical way, generally in contrast with something already said as can be seen in the contrast expressed in several examples:

Once two friends got into a heated argument. One said that it was money which made a man prosperous, and the other maintained that it wasn't money, but luck, which made the man. [...] He contends that it is luck which elevates a man to high position, and I say it is money. (Anaya, 2001: 24)

In fact, the one who insisted that it was money and not luck which made a man prosper took out another two hundred dollars and gave it to the miller.
(Anaya, 2001: 25)

"Either way," he continued, "I still believe that it is money and not luck which makes a man prosper." (Anaya, 2001: 27)

In this last example, there is a contrast between the few faces the author remembered and those she did not remember:

There was a constant stream of faces, but it is those few that I remember, like the lady with the unsteady Infant Jesus of Prague who stayed in my room and cried to herself while I slept on the couch. (Chávez, 2001: 51)

But the main use of this structure is to express emphasis. Grzegorek (1984: 70) declares this statement regarding this important use of cleft sentences:

Generally cleft constructions are used whenever the speaker wants to give special prominence to the new, most prominent information. He may also choose to put heavy stress on the information focus in its regular position. Clefts, however, are preferred, especially in written English where stress cannot be marked.

Ríos highlights that his father was getting very sick with this syntactical structure:

*My father has finally lost his sight, and much else.
But it has been the loss of his sight that he cannot reconcile.* (Ríos, 2001: 150)

In the next two examples, this is evident with the premodification of the noun phrase which emphasizes even more the highlighted element and specifies that it was that bag where money was. We have to point out that in the following example, instead of the pronoun it introducing the structure, we find the demonstrative pronoun *this*:

When the miller saw the bag he immediately knew that it was the very same bag he had lost to the hawk which fought him for the piece of meat years ago. "You won't believe me, friends, but this is the very same bag in which I put the first two hundred dollars you gave me," he told them. (Anaya, 2001: 30)

The next examples emphasize the way of doing something and a precise place, the 'piloncillo':

It was with great reluctance that it was dispatched into oblivion, which in this case was the irrigation ditch behind the house. (Chávez, 2001: 50)

In those days of Sugar, it was the piloncillo that I gravitated toward, secretly chipping away rich amber edges and devouring them with delight.

(Chávez, 2001: 51)

The next two examples, one after the other, are representative since they express Chávez's feelings:

Much later, when I was older and found myself in Paris, it was the lost little girl who understood so much about its reality. It was the person of the inappropriate gifts who followed hunchbacked old women on winding metal stairways into greyed, murky expanse of space with no stars. (Chávez, 2001: 52)

With the following example we can see that it is a fact that cultures and languages mutually invade one another. In this sense, it should be stated that there is a segregationist ideology of white supremacy and that the border produces national identity:

It was the destiny in Mexico that my mother's little brother Leonel refused to reject because of his hatred for capitalism, which he felt was fully embodied by the United States. (Castillo, 2001: 288)

The following examples one after the other are really expressive and give solemnity to the narration. A certain moment - *that night*- and what saved the narrator are emphasized since those are the highlighted elements of the structure:

It was that night that my tía and I, riding a city bus, jumped off suddenly in a plaza where trios and duos of musicians gathered for hire, and brought a late-night serenade to Mami and family at our hotel. That was when my tía Flora and I bonded as big-time dreamers, and it was that night, after the serenade and after Dad (who came on this trip) had brought out a bottle of mescal and we had all shared a drink with the musicians, that Mami told me some of the stories I tell you now. [...] But it was the perseverance of Rachel the Rock and the irrepressible sensuality of Flora that thick-stemmed calla lily that save me, too.

(Castillo, 2001: 291)

3. Reversed-pseudo cleft

3.1 Formal aspects

We find a reversed pseudo-cleft when the nominal relative clause is at the end of the complex sentence as subject complement and the emphasis is on the subject. Regarding the analysis of reversed-pseudo-clefts, it is evident that it is a sentence with the structure SVC with a nominal relative clause as subject complement.

Halliday & Matthiessen (2004³: 70) refer to this structure as "marked thematic equative".

The first part of the structure can start with the demonstrative pronoun *this* or *that* and in the second part we can find *why*, *how*, *what*, *where*, *when*. In our corpus, the second part of the structure is introduced by:

- Why: *"That is why poor men remain honest," the man who had given him the money said. "Because they don't have money they can't get into trouble. But I find your stories hard to believe. I think you gambled and lost the money. That's why you're telling us these wild stories."* (Anaya, 2001: 26)

The first *that* has cataphorical reference and the second anaphoric.

- How: *That is how the miller proved to his friends that he was truly an honest man.* (Anaya, 2001: 31)

The previous example has cataphoric reference and the next ones have anaphoric reference.

And he told them how he had sold the diamond.
"And that's how I acquired this business and many other things I want to show you," he said. (Anaya, 2001: 30)

The three men carefully unravelled the cloth and found the other one hundred and ninety dollars which the miller had told them he had lost. That is how the miller proved to his friends that he was truly an honest man. (Anaya, 2001: 31)

- What: *This is what brought the Guanajuatan couple to the United States.* (Castillo, 2001: 286)

The outside him, the structure, the public him, that's what he gave me, and that's what much of my literary work has been about. (Ríos, 2001: 147)

That Paris of lights and magic exists, I have seen it, inside the haunting starless nights. And this is what I felt when I sat in the deep, embracing darkness of that special tree, the longest of all time. (Chávez, 2001: 53)

There are no examples in the four stories introduced by *where* and *when*.

3.2 Functional aspects

According to the analysis of the structure in terms of theme and rheme, the theme is the demonstrative, the verb *to be* is considered transition and the nominal relative clause is the rheme as we can see in the following example:

[...] *that* 's *what it's doing to his heart.* (Ríos, 2001: 150)
theme transition rheme

The next example points out Alberto Álvaro Ríos' feeling since he remembers the time when his father was not sick:

I take as measure against these recent days the fine drama and big lives of my parents together-that's where my father is still big. (Ríos, 2001: 148)

The following example highlights the fact that Ríos' father's health is getting worst; with this structure the author emphasizes new information:

It's an act of translation, the cardiologist said, like this: If you can understand what the diabetes has done to his eyes, that's what it's doing to his heart.
(Ríos, 2001: 150)

With the next example, the author points out the importance of moving to the United States for her family. This example fulfils the principles of end-focus and end-weight since the most important part of the information and the longest unit of the sentence appears at the end of the structure:

My grandfather, my father has often told me, worked on the railroads as a signalman. This is what brought the Guanajuatan couple to the United States. [...] My mother was a little servant (and that is why she now keeps a neat home).

My tía Flora was sent to the kitchen of and Arab family. And although her house now is always crowded crazy chaos, she became the best Mexican cook on both sides of the border. (That is why it's a Tenochtitlan feast at tía Flora's table in her humble casita [...]) (Castillo, 2001: 286)

In the historical moment in which these short stories are placed, there was a clear dominance of the Anglo and that implied that Spanish was not a respected language at all, as Arteaga (1997: 71) states:

English carries with it the status of authorization by the hegemony. It is the language of Anglo America and of linguistic Anglo-Americans, whether or not they be ethnic Anglos. Further, it is the language of the greatest military and economic power in the world. Spanish is the language of Latin Americans, south of the border and north. Across the border, Spanish is a Third World language; here it is the language of the poor.

Castillo uses a reversed pseudo-cleft sentence to share with the reader how she learned English. In this way, the author points out that Spanish was very important for the Hispanic population in the United States although the fact of living in America implied that Hispanic had to immerse in the American culture and the English language:

I had made friends with the little girl next door. At that time we climbed trees and fed the chickens and took sides with each other against her older brother. That's how and why I learned to write Spanish-I wanted to write to Rosita.
(Castillo, 2001: 288)

This example emphasizes an important moment in Ríos' father's life:

In the United States, nieve comes down from the sky, really. That's when he would show the postcard. (Ríos, 2001: 151)

In the following example, the fact that the reversed pseudo-cleft is between two cleft sentences points out the importance of that moment for the narration:

It was that night [...] That was when my tía Flora and I bonded as big-time dreamers, and it was that night [...] (Castillo, 2001: 291)

4. Left dislocation

Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1310) refer to this syntactical structure as 'anticipated identification', where a noun phrase is positioned initially and a reinforcing pronoun stands 'proxy' for it in the relevant position in the sentence".

Geluykens (1992: 18) precises that this structure "consists of a sentence with a pro-form, preceded by a noun phrase which has the same reference as the following pronoun. E.g: Steve, he likes beans".

This structure is normally associated with oral discourse.

Left dislocation can be divided in different parts. Following Geluykens (1992: 18-19) we will refer as "referent" to the nominal phrase that precedes the sentence and the sentence will be called "proposition". The pronominal element in the proposition is called "gap". In the interaction process, the referent, the pause and the proposition can be considered as three stages of the process.

We find just one example of this structure in our corpus and it is used to give importance to the referent in the conscience of the hearer or reader:

It is a long and slow worm, this thing of dying in the way that he is.
(Ríos, 2001: 147)

The theme is what we find before the comma, and the rheme what we find after it.

5. Passive

5.1 Formal aspects

Passive can be used in two different ways: passive has no agent complement as a thematization process; in this way the result of an action or the person affected by the action is emphasized. As a postposition process, passive emphasizes the agent when this is present. As a postposition process, it can also emphasize the predicate if there is no agent complement.

In some examples of the short stories under analysis we find a *by* agent:

On the way home he was attacked by a hawk that had smelled the meat which the miller carried. (Anaya, 2001: 25)

That afternoon when he arrived home from work he was greeted by his wife. (Anaya, 2001: 26)

He was painted by someone named Sallman, who perhaps saw him in a vision or a dream. (Chávez, 2001: 49)

In other examples there is no agent as we can observe in the following ones:

When the day's work was done, the miller decided the first thing he would do would be to buy food for his family. (Anaya, 2001: 25)

So the miller was consoled and the next day he went to work as usual.
(Anaya, 2001: 26)

The dishes were token, and each plate was embossed with streams of invisible words, known only to my Mother. (Chávez, 2001: 52)

I was reminded of an event several years ago. (Ríos, 2001: 152)

My tía Flora was sent to the kitchen of an Arab family. (Castillo, 2001: 286)

5.2 Functional aspects

In relation to the analysis of the structure in terms of theme and rheme, the theme is the part of the structure before the passive verb and the rheme is the rest of the sentence.

Halliday (1970: 161) declares the following statement in which we can see that the use of the passive voice is justified:

[...] theme, actor and modal subject are identical unless there is a good reason for them not to be. Where they are not, the tendency in Modern English is to associate theme and modal subject; and this is the main reason for using the passive. The passive has precisely the function of dissociating the actor from this complex, so that it can either be put in focal position at the end, or more frequently, omitted, as in (29):

(29i) *This gazebo was built by Sir Christopher Wren.*

(29ii) *This gazebo is being restored.*

Most of the examples of passive sentences are used to emphasize certain facts. In this way, the reader pays attention to certain climatic moments:

On the way home he was attacked by a hawk that had smelled the meat which the miller carried. (Anaya, 2001: 25)

When Maria de los Angeles died (not surprisingly, she was not saved by the rudimentary medical treatment she received at dispensaries), her children-two sons, two daughters- were sent out to work to earn their own keep.

(Castillo, 2001: 286)

In the following example, Chávez's feelings and emotions are pointed out; the passive voice emphasizes the different agents that made the author feel wonderstruck:

I am wonderstruck by the colors behind the glass, by the image in the mirror, by the smell of this midnight time. (Chávez, 2001: 48)

In this example, the author highlights a bad situation, which was common for many Chicanos at the time:

But for now, they are relegated to a temporary space on the rug, to be covered by the falling needles of our dying tree. (Chávez, 2001: 50)

We didn't have to worry about crowding the bathroom, because the toilets were already shared by the entire vecindad. (Castillo, 2001: 289)

The two previous examples illustrate the following statement of Johnson and Michaelson (1997: 1-2): "The idea of "border" or "borderlands" has also been expanded to include nearly every psychic or geographic space about which one can thematize problems of boundary or limit".

Nash (1980: 140) presents passive as a characteristic of formal discourse: "A further stylistic property of the passive is that it noticeably cools the manner of address – i.e. it is an index of the formal tone". We agree with Nash since the passive sentences add solemnity to the narration in this example:

I knew what the crying was about, and I have been haunted by it ever since.

(Ríos, 2001: 152)

With the next example, Castillo wants to emphasize that Chicanos were members of a discriminated social group. They could feel racism and were taken advantage easily as we can see in the example that follows:

One year later my mother was either raped or, at least, clearly taken advantage of by the owner of the restaurant on the U.S. side of the border where she found work as waitress. (Castillo, 2001: 287)

6. Extraposition

6.1 Formal aspects

When we place a long subject at the end of the superordinate clause and we replace it by the pronoun *it* in subject initial position, we find an example of extraposition. Huddleston (1984: 451) offers the following definition: "Extraposition shifts a unit to the end of the clause (except that certain peripheral adjuncts may still follow it) and inserts *it* into the vacated position".

We normally find the verb *be*, but there are examples in which other verbs are found. Extraposition is compulsory with verbs such as *appear, seem, chance, happen, remain* and the passive of *hope, intend*, etc. (Huddleston, 1984: 452), as we can see in these examples:

Three months after he had lost the money to the hawk, it happened that the two wealthy men returned to the village. (Anaya, 2001: 25)

And so it seemed to me this Christmas that at last I have found the perfect gift for her. (Chávez, 2001: 52)

In the previous examples it can be seen that the second part of the structure is a *that* clause but it can also be a *to* infinitive clause, as we can observe in the example that follows:

It is better to give that to receive. (Chávez, 2001: 53)

6.2 Functional aspects

As regards the analysis of the structure in terms of theme and rheme, the theme is the pronoun *it* and the rheme is the rest of the structure.

According to Erdmann (1990: 138-139), the main difference between extraposition and the correspondent sentence without extraposition is that this last one situates the speaker in discourse, in the situation or in her/his knowledge on a fact. In contrast, extraposition does not make reference to the text, to the context or to the knowledge of certain facts or people. Extraposition is then a much more neutral construction than its correspondent without extraposition.

Extraposition can be used to emphasize certain facts by presenting them at the end of the structure. The following example emphasizes the poverty that surrounded many Chicanos:

"It is our lot to be poor until God wills it otherwise." (Anaya, 2001: 26)

Sometimes the author declares a statement in a strong way by placing the most important part of the information at the end of this syntactical structure:

It is better to give than to receive. (Chávez, 2001: 53)

But what a serious sounding debris of words. It's just that there's nothing else to say or to use. (Ríos, 2001: 147)

By using extrapositions the author is postponing the heavy subject to the end of the clause, that is, we are postponing an important part of the message as a way of giving prominence to it:

Those nights it was my custom to sit in the darkness of the living room near the tree and watch the lights. (Chávez, 2001: 52)

And so it seemed to me this Christmas that at last I have found the perfect gift for her. (Chávez, 2001: 52)

Later it seemed to me that perhaps Mother thought the Evening in Paris had been given to her by one of her students. (Chávez, 2001: 52)

7. Pseudo-cleft sentence

7.1 Formal aspects

In Systemic Functional Grammar, Halliday & Matthiessen (2004³: 69) refer to this structure as "thematic equative" since theme and rheme appear as an equation. In Halliday & Matthiessen's words (2004³: 69): "This kind of clause is known as a Thematic Equative, because it sets up the Theme + Rheme structure in the form of an equation, where 'Theme = Rheme'." In the example *What the duke gave to my aunt was the teapot* we find a nominalization as theme since a group of elements is functioning as a nominal group in the sentence. Apart from the theme's nominalization, we find the verb *be* and other element in the rheme.

Huddleston (1984: 462) defines this structure in the following way: "The pseudo-cleft is a special case of the identifying *be* construction - the case where the identified role is associated with a fused relative construction".

The definition of reversed-pseudo cleft offered by Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1387) is the following: "It is essentially an SVC sentence with a nominal relative clause as subject or complement".

7.2 Functional aspects

According to the analysis of the structure in terms of theme and rheme, the theme is the part of the structure we find before the verb *be* and the rheme is the rest of the sentence.

In these structures one sentence is identified with another. The identifier is normally more prominent and it is there that we find the focus of the information, as the following example shows:

What is simply remarkable for me

is the way of understanding - of understanding her, of course, but of understanding him too.

(Ríos, 2001: 148)

Theme
Identified

Rheme
Identified

Traditionally we find known information in the first part of the pseudo-cleft sentence; on the other hand, the focus is placed after the verb *be*.

The examples of pseudo cleft sentences we have in the short stories are used to highlight certain facts as it is going to be explained in the following paragraphs:

The first example emphasizes the way in which the author's mother came and the second points out the importance of understanding his parents for the author:

What matters is that she came by herself across the ocean halfway around the world to be his wife, even though in her life up to then she had never been more than two train stops away from home. (Ríos, 2001: 148)

What is simply remarkable for me is the way of understanding-of understanding her, of course, but of understanding him too. (Ríos, 2001: 148)

It is important to precise that the author places the most important part of the information at the end of this structure, following the principles of end-focus and end-weight.

The next two examples are used to underline the illness of Ríos' father:

The nurse there had taken my father's blood pressure, but the doctor wanted my mother to take it. What he really wanted was for her to feel it, something he knew she'd understand, so that he wouldn't have to tell her something like 220 over 120, which was so much nothing. (Ríos, 2001: 149)

The diabetes has made him blind. I see that. What happens to the heart is more difficult to articulate, but not hard to understand. I see that too. (Ríos, 2001: 150)

8. Existential sentences

8.1 Formal aspects

From the semantic point of view, an existential sentence is that which describes the existence of something or let us know that something happened, in Kimball's words (1973: 265):

The proper characterization seems to be that the existential there can appear with a sentence if it expresses coming into being of some object, where this coming

into being can include coming into the perceptual field of the speaker, i.e., coming into being for the speaker.

Breivik (1983: 5-6) reserves the term existential sentence to design "all and only clauses containing existential/locative be or an intransitive verb which has included in it the meaning 'be in existence' or 'come into existence'".

The structure of the sentence is: *There* + verb + nominal group.

Normally, we find the noun preceded by an adjective, the indeterminate article or expressions of quantity such as *a few*, *a great deal of*, etc.

Sometimes the noun phrase can be followed by an adjunct:

They noticed that there was a cloth bag at the bottom of the nest.
(Anaya, 2001: 30)

The noun phrase can also be followed by a relative clause. In this example, the relative clause precises the men's role in Chicano society, which is quite different to the women's role. As we said in the introduction of this article, Ana Castillo was very much interested in gender, which can be seen with this statement:

The husbands of these two sisters did not come along on this pilgrimage, because there are men who, despite having families, are not family men.
(Castillo, 2001: 288)

8.2 Functional aspects

With regard to the analysis of the structure in terms of theme and rheme, the theme is *there* and the rheme is the rest of the structure. New information is in the rheme, i.e., in the notional subject.

Existential sentences are a resource to introduce new topics in a conversation. These topics include people, objects, etc., and the hearer receives information on them. This use is very clear when we find existential sentences at the beginning of commentaries, verses, etc.

This structure is mainly used to point out that something exists, to let the reader know about the existence of certain things. Existential sentences also help writers to describe certain facts as we can see with these examples:

They noticed that there was a cloth bag at the bottom of the nest.
(Anaya, 2001: 30)

There was a chicken in the oven, our Christmas "turkey". (Chávez, 2001: 50)

There was a familiarity of shelves and counters where one perched along blue linoleum expanses and stared into the blocked universe of Emilia's cutting board.
(Chávez, 2001: 51)

There was a constant stream of faces, [...] (Chávez, 2001: 51)

I asked sheepishly, "Aren't you going to open your gift?" for as far as I was concerned, there was only one. (Chávez, 2001: 52)

There were too many children to sleep in the house, [...] (Castillo, 2001: 288)

But I don't remember their names or how many there were then. There were nearly ten-but not ten yet-because that was the total number my uncle and his woman would eventually have. Still, it felt like ten. So now there were four adults and at least thirteen children, age fourteen and under, staying in one room.
(Castillo, 2001: 289)

The structure can also be negative to let us know that something does not exist:

They run to a clear place where there is no fire, but, in doing so, light it up because their fun is burning. (Ríos, 2001: 148)

The United States was Atlantis, and there was no Atlantis; and therefore, having been born there, I could not exist. (Castillo, 2001: 291)

The next example shows the bad conditions in which many Chicano families lived:

There were no lights and no plumbing. (Castillo, 2001: 289)

Grzegorek (1984: 83) points out as one of the uses of existential sentences their facility to introduce a new topic at the beginning of a text:

He was born near the end of the 1920s in southern Mexico, on the border of Guatemala, where there's a great deal of trouble right now, and where perhaps there has always been trouble. (Ríos, 2001: 147)

Sometimes this structure presents the fact that is being narrated in a mysterious way that makes it imprecise:

There is a voice at the edge of this world. (Chávez, 2001: 50)

Most likely there was someone around to help us then: a maid from Mexico, a friend like Ninfa, who told us stories about the overly curious mouse who fell into the stew and was later eaten for his impudence. (Chávez, 2001: 50)

9. Conclusions

After having analysed several anomalous syntactical structures in four short stories written by Rudolfo Anaya, Denise Chávez, Alberto Álvaro Ríos and Ana Castillo, we can state that the literary text is an authentic text because in it we find the real language in context.

We have chosen Systemic Functional Grammar as a theoretical framework for this article because one of our main interests is to study the use of language in context. The analysis of the examples following the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar has helped us to understand the relationships between language and culture and language and situation.

After the analysis of the corpus of examples, we can state that the answer to the question we presented in the introduction- why do these four Chicano writers write the way they do, what is their communicative purpose?- is clear: there is a specific communicative purpose in the use of the marked syntactical structures we have analysed. These writers create a social reality through the use of certain marked syntactical processes (cleft sentence, reversed pseudo-cleft, left dislocation, passive, extraposition, pseudo-cleft sentence, and existential sentences); they want to point out the social situation and the culture of Chicanos, which are characterized by being considered inferior to the American situation and culture; marked syntax helps them to highlight these facts since those structures have specific communicative implications as we have already seen in the analysis.

Rudolfo Anaya, Denise Chávez, Alberto Álvaro Ríos and Ana Castillo want to reflect a different vision of themselves and of society, they want to present a heterogeneous world enriched by different identities. These writers challenge stereotypical notions of nationality, identity, language, etc.

The marked syntactical structures we have analysed are not used at random, they help these Hispanic writers to reflect the social context, for example, the recurrent use of extrapositions, especially in *Evening in Paris*, highlights certain facts presenting new information at the end of the structure, accomplishing the principles of end-focus and end-weight in this way. The recurrent use of reversed pseudo-cleft sentences, especially in *The Force of Luck*, helps the author to recapitulate since it is an appropriate structure to make reference to something that has been previously said.

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