

## Interview with Juana I. Marín-Arrese



BY HELENA PIRES

Juana I. Marín-Arrese is Professor of English Linguistics in the Department of Filología Inglesa I (English Language and Linguistics) at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Her main research interests involve the fields of evidentiality and modality, with specific interest in cross-linguistic studies on the expression of stance and subjectivity and intersubjectivity in discourse. She has coordinated several research projects on these topics and has published extensively in various journals and collective volumes: *Perspectives on Evidentiality and Modality* (Editorial Complutense, 2004); *English Modality in Perspective. Genre Analysis and Contrastive Studies* (Peter Lang, 2004); *Belgium Journal of English Language and Literatures* 5 (2007); *Modality in English. Theory and Description* (Mouton de Gruyter, 2009); *Studies on English modality. In Honour of Frank R. Palmer* (Peter Lang, 2009); *Critical Discourse Studies in Context and Cognition* (John Benjamins, 2011); *Discourse Studies* 13 (2011). For more information, please go to <http://www.researcherid.com/rid/B-8903-2009>.

Helena Pires is Assistant Professor at the Communication Sciences Department and a member of the Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS), University of Minho, Portugal.

**Helena Pires – The first question I would like to ask you is how has the notion of crisis entered discourses of higher education and research?**

**Juana I. Marín-Arrese –** In the Spanish context, the crisis is very much debated because of the cuts in education. There are cuts in teaching contracts and also in research. That is very much the focus. So, presumably we are supposed to carry on with the Bologna process, not only at zero cost, but having to undergo all these other cuts. At least in the community of Madrid this is the case.

***How do you think this has been used to construct problems and to offer a solution, considering politicians' discourse, in terms of the research institutions, universities and also the European Union? You talked about Bologna and political discourses.***

You know, for example, recently the Minister of Education was saying that there was no problem at all in increasing the number of students per class, and also in increasing the teaching time. We already have a huge amount of students and we have to teach the maximum number of the credits in my department. They are thinking of increasing our teaching several credits, of course that's going to have an impact on research. It's unavoidable, because teachers can't have a heavy teaching load and carry out quality research.

***Do you think there are some contradictions in the Bologna process?***

Absolutely! In the sense that the government seems to assume that we can carry on with the Bologna process, but at the same time having to accept all the increasing students plus increasing the time of direct contact in teaching, which is absolutely contrary to the Bologna process.

***Why aren't teachers and students very happy with this system? I hear many people, teachers, and sometimes also students, questioning this system.***

I think it's because it hasn't been implemented adequately. Because the Bologna process is very expensive if you want to implement it adequately. I mean, for example, by increasing direct contact teaching in seminars and by increasing tutorials. I think specially in Southern European countries we have a different tradition in teaching, kind of having these plenary sessions for hundreds of students.

***A heritage from the past...***

Exactly, and it's a sort of difficult to change. Of course, at least in my university, in my department, somehow because we have had contact with British models of teaching, there was no problem in accepting the Bologna type of model. But there has been a lot of resistance on the part of other departments. They have no tradition of this type of model.

***In the ways of teaching? So you think there is a cultural issue?***

Absolutely!

***And what about economic implications, because maybe also this model implies more money to spend with teaching in order to teach fewer students?***

It's an expensive model.

***And we are living through a crisis. Back to the theme, the economic crisis...***

And it's also a model where you somehow empower the student, making the student responsible for his or her learning process and, again, I think it is all a cultural thing, that some more traditional professors don't want to release that power.

***Do you think that the political discourse concerning education is significantly different from the discourse concerning financial issues and economics?***

On the one hand, officially they say they have to increase the quality in education, but then what they are saying in terms of scholarships is they are going to lower the scholarships, money cuts, but they are going to justify this by saying “well, what we are going to do, we are going to select students more thoroughly, students who are worthy of having the scholarships”. So what they are doing here, they are trying to transform this discourse of economic cuts, which is a pressure in some areas of society, into a kind of revision of the system to make it more efficient and competitive.

***In terms of ideology this selective system is not very respectful of democratic principles. Perhaps it's a contradiction. What do you think?***

I think somehow the idea is to give greater support to private universities. You know, those universities are supposed to educate a select minority. Public universities, because of these successive cuts, are also missing out on fees. They are going to, gradually, lose power in society.

***What about the researchers' freedom and creativity? How is this goal of freedom being affected?***

I think more and more when you get research funding programmes, you get a lot of the money being reserved for specific lines of research, and so either you try to get into one particular area of interest or else you will have a hard time getting funding. There are still general programmes in the humanities, but the standards are being raised since last year, so you have to have a higher level in your evaluation in order to get some funding, and of course the more restrictive the funding, the less space there is for more personal creativity or specific issues, which may not have clear applications in the short term, you know in terms of society, but their applications are more indirect.

***Yes, we can testify to that in Portugal.***

The actual format of the application that you have to fill in restricts your research. So very clearly you have to focus on empirical research.

***Maybe freedom and creativity concerning a research strategy are difficult because of those parameters. In Spain is there the expression “Excellence” as it exists in Portugal?***

In international publications.

***Publications in journals with impact, for example.***

But there is a paradox there. You get colleagues trying to publish their work in some journal in Romania because that's international versus a journal in Spain, which could be a far higher quality journal, but it's Spanish. It's preferable to publish your paper in Romania than in Spain, which is absurd. I think the important thing is to assess the quality of the journal, and what I find is that in the humanities area they are kind of applying the criteria that are valid in the sciences. But in humanities it is completely different. What is better, to

publish a paper in some journal with a lot of other papers, or other topics, or to be able to publish your paper in a specialized collective volume? And it may be more difficult to be able to publish in a particular volume, a selected volume, but that doesn't count, you know.

***What counts is the quantity?***

The important thing is journals, which is ridiculous, because some of the important stuff, at least in the Anglo-Saxon world, is actually published in collective volumes.

***And there's the question of language because, for example in Portugal, many researchers have good relationships with French researchers, for example with the Sorbonne. Some of our researchers and professors were students at the Sorbonne, and they have a good command of French. But it happens that the English language is quite oppressive in terms of publications.***

Right, right, if you want to publish you have to do it in English, that's a fact. And another thing as well: it's not just the language, it is all the system of knowledge. I mean, you find, for example, Lakoff saying things about metaphor that have already been said in Europe, but they don't read the Europeans.

***A different way of functioning, another system of thought.***

Yeah, and as we say in Spanish, they are really discovering the Mediterranean again in some cases, that is, for example, coming up with a theory of metaphor without relating it to all the previous theories. And so it's very much a dictatorship of knowledge, or controlling knowledge.

***Thinking, for example, about Spain and Portugal, maybe it is a prejudice of mine, but I think the Portuguese are making an effort to speak and write in English, but I have not experienced that in Spain. Spanish researchers have more difficulty to talk in English.***

Absolutely! In Spain there is a clear ideological split between for example people in English departments and others. Obviously we make the effort, but people working in Spanish linguistics just don't want to make that effort. So there is clearly resistance, but it's a very... how should I put it? It's often very irrational, it's not systematic in terms of critical resistance, I think it is more of a reaction against some kind of thing, and certainly it creates a lot of difficulties.

***Just to conclude: in order to publish in English, we often have to pay reviewers or translators. And how can you do it without money? It could be a waste because of the language. We have a good paper, but not in a good enough English...***

Absolutely! And it is a very simple thing, it is really having the academic skills in the language. We have the same problem in Spain. At my university, one thing that I suggested, that they should set up some sort of department to help researchers with their English, but not just simply in terms of translating the paper. There is a service that they have at the university where they have translators, but you have to pay for them. So I thought this should be a sort of community service offered to researchers, also in terms of developing

their academic skills in English, giving them lessons, if you want, in things like presentations, how to make their presentations more effective, and also writing skills. But they just didn't listen to me.

***Don't you think that at the same time we are forcing the importance of English and the importance of one language, and one kind of journals?***

Ok, we somehow create an international language, so as long as we still develop this kind of language, we can communicate even in China. I think that is a positive thing!

***A wider group of people.***

But as long as this language is not controlled by, shall we say, the "natives", as long as we make it a more international English kind of thing.

***Do you think there is any space to new politics in education in this time of crisis?***

It's difficult. Colleagues are basically concerned with the fact of they had cuts in salaries, cuts in jobs and that is the mainstream discourse. But there is nothing in terms of what options we have, what the system is going to do about this. I think people are very concerned with their own problems.

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