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17 Discourse markers in Spanish

Abstract: The chapter offers a systematic overview of the four most relevant approaches in the synchronic research on discourse marking in Spanish along with their respective theoretical frameworks. The instructional model developed by Portolés (Autonoma University of Madrid) focuses on the nature of procedural meaning to explain the lack of synonymy between closely related markers. The Val.Es.Co model developed by Briz and the Val.Es.Co group (University of Valencia) focuses on the discourse marker position in colloquial conversation and proposes a specific system of units based on pragmatic criteria to account for the paradigmatic and syntagmatic polyfunctionality of the particles. The macro syntactic model developed by Fuentes (University of Seville) focuses on the multidimensional dynamic nature of discourse to account for the different types of procedural construction and the high language productivity in creating subjective and intersubjective operators. The experimental analysis carried out by the group directed by Loureda Lamas (Heidelberg University) focuses on the human cognitive processing of procedural particles to test the validity of theoretical hypotheses. The four models coexist, interact, and illuminate each other for an integrated view of discourse and marking. Finally, the sixth and last section aims to contribute with a new case study to the research on discourse markers and dialectal variation by focusing on the functional expansion experienced by the reformulator *mejor dicho* in the Colombian variety of Spanish. The marker has developed conclusive, formulative, and modal values that distance it from the strictly corrective value and European use. The modal values support the hypothesis of a process of change by subjectivization and, specifically, by intensification arising in the conversational interaction as a result of the usual combination of the marker with the intensifying resources of colloquial Spanish such as hyperbolic metaphor, enumeration series and consecutive constructions.

Keywords: Instructional semantic model, Val.Es.Co model, macrosyntactic model, experimental analysis, dialectal variation, change by intensification

1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to synchronic research on discourse marking in Spanish. The chapter is divided into six sections that attempt to present the various dimensions and approaches to the phenomenon. Each section can be understood as an answer to a different research question, and as an account of the different approaches with their respective theoretical frameworks. The models coexist, interact, and illuminate each other for an integrated view of discourse and marking. The sixth and final section introduces a new case study on the functional expansion experienced by the

AU: We have inserted numbering for the head levels. Please check and confirm if the hierarchy of the head levels is fine.



reformulator *mejor dicho* in the Colombian variety of Spanish. The compilation of corpora, especially oral corpora, representative of the whole pan-Hispanic world, has been and continues to be essential for research in this area in Spanish.

2 The notion of discourse marker

In the tradition of Hispanic studies, the definition of discourse markers proposed by Portolés (1998a, 25–26) and by Martín Zorraquino/Portolés (1999, §63.1.2, 4057) fixed the concept and delimited the category: “Discourse markers are invariable linguistic units, they have no function in relation to sentential predication, and have a task that coincides with that of discourse: to guide, according to their different morphosyntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties, the inferences that take place in communication” (Portolés 1998a, 25–26, our translation).

In the light of this definition, discourse markers are units that convey procedural meaning and that guide the interpretation of discourse (Briz 2008; Martín Zorraquino/Portolés 1999, §63.1.2, 4057). They do not constitute a grammatical category because these units belong to different categories (*pero* ‘(but’¹) is a conjunction, *además* ‘(besides’ is an adverb, *¿eh?* is an interjection) (↗4 The grammatical status of discourse markers). They constitute a semantic, pragmatic, and functional category: semantic because all the units convey the same type of meaning; pragmatic, because, thanks to this meaning, they guide inferential interpretation processes operating on conceptual representations (Portolés 2004a, §14; 2016; Briz/Pons Bordería/Portolés 2008; Murillo 2010; Escandell/Leonetti 2004; 2011) (↗3 The semantics and pragmatics of discourse markers); and functional, because they all contribute to discourse functions that are different from the sentence level propositional function.

Consider the following examples:

- (1a) Juan es madrileño. *Por tanto*, es muy guapo.
‘John is from Madrid. *Therefore*, he is very handsome’.
- (1b) Juan es madrileño. *Sin embargo*, es muy guapo.
‘John is from Madrid. *However*, he is very handsome’.
- (1c) Juan es madrileño y, *en cualquier caso*, es muy guapo.
‘John is from Madrid and, *in any case*, he is very handsome’.

¹ We’d like to thank Silvia Murillo (University of Zaragoza) and Iria Bello (University of the Balearic Islands) for their assistance in the translation of the manuscript. The translations of the discourse markers are necessarily approximate. Although this chapter is the result of the joint reflection of the authors, sections 3, 4, 5, and 7 should be attributed to Eugenia Sainz, and the Introduction and sections 2, 6, and 8, to Laura Nadal.

- (1d) Juan es madrileño y, *a lo que iba*, es muy guapo.
 ‘John is from Madrid and, *(more) to the point*, he is very handsome’.
- (1e) Juan es madrileño y, *por lo visto*, es muy guapo.
 ‘John is from Madrid and, *apparently*, he is very handsome’.

All these utterances *say* the same, but do not *communicate* the same (Grice 1989). They say the same because their truth conditions do not change. In all cases, the subject being talked about is a man named Juan, who is from Madrid, and who is very handsome. However, they do not communicate the same, because the discourse markers give different instructions on how to reconstruct the speaker’s intentional meaning or, in cognitive terms, on where to search for optimal relevance. *Por tanto* (‘therefore’) presents the second member as a consequence of what was said in the first; *sin embargo* (‘however’) presents it instead as a conclusion contrary to what would have been expected. The represented facts are identical, but from ex. (1a) we understand (i.e. we conventionally infer) that people/men from Madrid are very handsome; from ex. (1b), that they are not. These implicit meanings are *conventional implicatures* guided by the argumentative connectors *por tanto* and *sin embargo* and, as such, they are not calculable, i.e. it is not necessary to resort to the context or to encyclopedic knowledge about people from Madrid to obtain them. Rather, the hearer must follow the instructions given by the marker. These are detachable, because they disappear (i.e. they detach from the utterance) if the particle disappears; they are non-cancellable, or cancellable only with difficulty, because, once uttered, the attempt to deny them is perceived as a contradiction or incoherence (§4.2); and finally, they are the speaker’s responsibility, as s/he has decided to mark her/his utterance with that particle and to trigger that kind of interpretation (Grice 1989).

The markers *en cualquier caso* (‘in any case’), *a lo que iba* (‘(more) to the point’), and *por lo visto* (‘apparently’) trigger inferential computational operations which are also conventional. As Martín Zorraquino/Portolés (1999, §63.1.4.2, 4072) indicate, “all discourse markers, thanks to their meaning, compel the listener to make inferences in a certain way”. *En cualquier caso* (ex. (1c)) presents the second member as a new point of view that invalidates the relevance of the previous argument; *a lo que iba* (ex. (1d)), as the result of a regression movement to recover the topic that had been abandoned (Taranilla 2008); *por lo visto* (ex. (1e)), as information obtained through an indirect source (usually through third parties); hence, a lower epistemic commitment on the part of the speaker is perceived (see the entry for *por lo visto* in the online *Diccionario de Partículas Discursivas del Español*, DPDE, Briz/Pons Bordería/Portolés 2008).

All the units in the previous examples are peripheral, but procedural meaning is not necessarily associated to peripheral items. In fact, there are also invariable and procedural units that are syntactically integrated into constituents of sentential predication. These are the so-called discursive particles (Briz/Pons Bordería/Portolés 2008; Portolés

2016; Portolés/Sainz/Murillo 2020; Santos Río 2003). For example, focus adverbs such as *incluso* or *hasta* (both with the approximate meaning of ‘even’) in ex. (2):

- (2a) Ana habla coreano.
 ‘Ana speaks Korean’.
- (2b) Ana habla *hasta* coreano.
 ‘Ana speaks *even* Korean’.

In *Ana habla hasta coreano*, *hasta* forms part of the direct complement of the verb *to speak*. It highlights Korean (focus), and, in doing so, evokes the existence of an alternative (the other languages that Ana speaks). Notice that the presence of *hasta* changes the truth conditions of the utterance. In order for ex. (2a) to be true, it is only necessary for Ana to speak Korean. However, in order for ex. (2b) to be true, it is necessary for Ana to speak other languages besides Korean.

In short, and as can be seen from the previous examples, discourse markers can perform different functions. They can indicate the argumentative value of what is said (argumentation); the organization of the information (informative structuring and focalization); the formulation process itself (reformulation); the speaker’s attitude towards what is said or towards their own speech (modalization); the attitude, relation, and positioning with regard to the interlocutor (~~modalization~~, interpersonal function), and, finally, the dynamics of turns and the maintenance of contact (phatic and interactional function) (Portolés 1998a; Briz 1998; Casado 1993; Martín Zorraquino/Portolés 1999; Pons Bordería 2006; Loureda Lamas/Acín 2010; López Serena/Borreguero 2010). Very often, they perform more than one function at the same time because they can operate simultaneously at different levels of discourse.

3 Discourse markers and language meaning: The instructional model

The aim of procedural semantics is to describe as precisely as possible the meaning of the various discourse markers and to explain in a scientific way the lack of perfect synonymy between close but not perfectly equivalent units of the same language or of different languages. Depending on the type of meaning encoded, discourse markers specialize in one function or another. For this type of research in Spanish, the decompositional meaning model proposed by Portolés (1998a; 1998b; 2004b) and Martín Zorraquino/Portolés (1999) has been fundamental. The model makes use of the notion of instructional semantics from Argumentation Theory (Ducrot 1980; 1984; Anscombe/Ducrot 1994). Instructional, or procedural (cf. Blakemore 1987) meaning is understood as a falsifiable hypothesis made by the researcher on the basis of discourse data, and it consists in a set of instructions that combine with

each other. At the cognitive level, the mind processes a single instruction (cause-consequence, counterargumentation, informative ordering, focalization, etc.), but language encodes a complex meaning; that is the reason why there are so many different markers for the same function and why they have an idiomatic character: there are no perfectly synonymous units either within a language or between different languages (Murillo 2010).

In fact, the possibility of decomposing meaning introduces a fundamental epistemological advantage. The lack of equivalence between two close but not synonymous particles can be justified on the assumption that they share certain instructions but differ in others; such an assumption can be demonstrated empirically and explained scientifically by resorting to the method of commutation. At least five types of instructions are considered: argumentative, formulative, informative, polyphonic, and modal. These instructions are theoretically grounded in the notions and tools developed in Argumentation theory (Anscombe/Ducrot 1994), reformulation theory (Gülich/Kotschi 1983; Roulet 1987; Rossari 1994), theories on information structure and focalization (van Kuppevelt 1995a; 1995b; Rooth 1992; 1996), the Polyphonic Theory of Enunciation (Ducrot 1986; Anscombe 2008; Nølke 2006) and the long tradition of studies on modality and subjectivity in language (Benveniste 1977; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1980; García Negroni/Tordesillas 2001). The explanatory strength of this approach lies precisely in its integrative nature. The model is open: it can be extended with further instructions if the discourse data support them (Murillo 2010).

The decompositional model developed by Portolés allows us to account for the semantic differences between similar particles and to justify the lack of perfect interchangeability. The resulting explanations would not have been possible if they had departed from the assumption of a compact linguistic meaning in a single instruction. Let us see two examples of analysis.

3.1 Two additive connectives: *además* / *es más*

The online *Diccionario de la Lengua Española (DLE)* indicates that *además* ('besides, moreover, in addition') is used "to introduce information that is added to the information already presented" (our translation). However, it is not possible to add any kind of information. If we consider the following contrast: the utterance in ex. (3a) is adequate; on the other hand, the statement in ex. (3b) is pragmatically difficult to understand.


- (3a) María es muy estudiosa y, *además*, hace muy bien todos los ejercicios.
'María studies a lot and, *besides*, she does all the exercises very well'.
- (3b) #María es muy estudiosa y, *además*, hace muy mal todos los ejercicios.
'#María studies a lot and, *besides*, she does all the exercises very badly'.

As we can see, this is not a matter of adding information; it is rather a matter of adding arguments of a certain type: co-oriented arguments, that is, arguments that support the same conclusion. *Además* presents the discourse segment in which it appears as an argument oriented towards the same conclusion as the previous one and gives the instruction to add them on an additive scale [n+1]. The addition of the arguments (*Maria studies a lot + Maria does all the exercises very well*) has more force than the first argument alone for a single conclusion, which may be expressed or implied; for example, +> Maria is doing very well at school or +> Maria will have no problems passing the maths exam.

Además is similar to *es más* ('what is more') in so far as both connect co-oriented arguments. But they are not synonyms, because *es más* encodes an instruction of greater strength for the second segment, i.e., it "presents the discourse segment in which it appears as a stronger argument than another preceding argument for the same expressed or implicit conclusion": (see the entry for *es más* in the DPDE). This second instruction of strength is added to the additive scale, as in ex. (4a), and differentiates *es más* from *además* (4b), which only signals the sum of the co-oriented arguments:

- (4a) Laura estudia español en la universidad; *es más*, se ha sacado el DELE C1.
'Laura is studying Spanish at university; *what's more*, she has passed the DELE C1'.
- (4b) Laura estudia español en la universidad; *además*, se ha sacado el DELE C1.
'Laura is studying Spanish at university; *besides*, she has passed the DELE C1'.

This indication of strength also accounts for the frequency of the connector in substitutive scales: the second, stronger argument replaces the first, weaker argument to arrive at an explicit or implicit conclusion:

- (5a) Los datos del paro son malos, *es más*, muy malos.
'Unemployment data are bad, *even* very bad'.
- (5b) Los datos del paro son malos y, #*además*, muy malos. 
'Unemployment data are bad and, #*besides*, very bad'.

The stronger argument (*very bad*) replaces the weaker one (*bad*) to reach the implicit conclusion +> 'The national economy is in recession'. In this statement, *es más* could be replaced by a scalar adverb such as *incluso* ('even'), but not by *además*.

3.2 Two recapitulative reformulators: *en suma* / *en resumidas cuentas*

The discourse markers *en suma* (approx. 'in short') and *en resumidas cuentas* (approx. 'in summary') are recapitulative reformulators (Martín Zorraquino/Portolés 1999, §63.4.5.2 and 63.4.5.3). Both present the segment they introduce as a conclusion or

recapitulation of what was said in the previous segment or in a previous series. But they are not synonyms, as the following contrast reveals:

- (6a) Paco es amable, galante, muy educado, *en suma*, / *en resumidas cuentas*, un caballero de los que ya no existen.
 ‘Paco is kind, attentive, very polite, *in short*, a gentleman of the kind that no longer exists’.
- (6b) Paco es amable, galante, muy educado, (pero) #*en suma*, / *en resumidas cuentas*, un estafador.
 ‘Paco is kind, attentive, very polite, *in short*, a swindler’.

En resumidas cuentas is adequate in both utterances. *En suma* is adequate only in the first one. We can observe that the argumentative orientation of the connected segments changes. Being a gentleman is a conclusion that follows from being kind, gallant, and very polite. In contrast, being a hustler is an antioriented conclusion. In fact, only in this second case is the use of *pero* possible. *En resumidas cuentas* is correct in both cases because it is indifferent to the argumentative orientation of the segments. *En suma* imposes coorientation (see the corresponding entries in the DPDE).

In short, the instructions that are encoded in a marker impose restrictions on interpretation which are exclusively linguistic. This approach allows us to perceive how pragmatics is inscribed in language, revealing the semantic footprint of the multidimensionality of discourse.

4 Discourse markers and polyfunctionality: The Val.Es.Co model

As stated above, discourse markers specialize in one function or another depending on the type of meaning they encode and on their main instruction. But, in addition, they are typically polyfunctional units that interact with the context: they can perform several functions simultaneously (*paradigmatic polyfunctionality*) and also different functions depending on the discursive and cognitive context in which they are found (*syntagmatic polyfunctionality*) (Martín Zorraquino/Portolés 1999, §63.1.5, 4077–4078; López Serena/Borreguero 2010, 442–443; Bazzanella 2008, 934–935). In this respect, the research on colloquial conversation in Spanish carried out by the Val.Es.Co group, directed by Antonio Briz (1998), which continues the tradition of Hispanic studies on colloquial syntax (Narbona 1989), has been fundamental. Among other things, the group has proposed a model of segmentation of conversation (Briz/Hidalgo 2010; Briz/Pons Bordería 2010), created a representative corpus and a transcription system available online (Briz/Grupo Val.Es.Co. 2002), and demonstrated the existence of linguistic constants which have an impact on the polyfunctionality of particles, such as the

rhetorical strategies of attenuation and intensification (Briz 1995; 1998; 2017; Albelda 2007; Albelda/Briz 2020; Albelda/Estellés 2021), the prosodic realization of markers (Hidalgo 2010) (↗5 Discourse markers and phonetics/prosody) or the position it occupies with respect to the segment in which it appears (Briz 2003; Briz/Pons Bordería 2010; Cortés/Camacho Adarve 2005).

Saying that a given marker is placed in the initial, intermediate or final position of a discourse segment is not enough to account for the polyfunctionality; hence the need to develop a specific system of units based on pragmatic criteria. Taking as a basis the Geneva School model (Roulet/Burger/Grobet 2001), Val.Es.Co distinguishes five units: *dialog*, *exchange*, *intervention*, *act*, and *subact*, that are relevant to account for the polyfunctionality of particles (↗6 Discourse markers and discourse/conversational units). By way of example, we can consider the particle *¿eh?*

From a grammatical point of view, *¿eh?* is a proper interjection, that is, it does not have as its base a word or phrase of denotative content. From a prosodic point of view, it is tonic and presents its own melodic contour delimited by an ascending interrogative toneme. From the functional point of view, *¿eh?* fulfills three functions that are associated with three positions and two units: *act* and *subact* (Briz/Pons Bordería 2010; Montañez 2007; see DPDE).

1. The act is a unit which has its own illocutionary force. It is identifiable thanks to the demarcating function of intonation; and it is isolable, i.e. it could constitute an utterance by itself. *¿Eh?* can be an act and constitute by itself a reactive intervention (ex. (7a)) or it can be the first act of the intervention (ex. (7b)). The act is represented with #.

(7a) A1: #_iAy qué ilusión me hace comer!#
 B1: #¿Eh?#
 A1: ‘#Oh, I’m so excited to eat!#’
 B1: ‘#Eh?#’

(7b) A4: #Prueba este pastelito#
 C3: #¿Eh? # #¿y yo qué?#
 A4: ‘#Try this cake#’
 C3: ‘#Eh? # #and what about me?#’

In this case, *¿eh?* is associated with a clarifying question function. It is a question requesting clarification or repetition of what has just been said by the interlocutor because there is something that has not been understood or heard well. Accompanied by specific suprasegmental features (emphasis, intensity), it can ask for rectification and express surprise or recrimination, as in ex. (7b) (see the entry for *¿eh?*³ in the DPDE).

2. The subact is the minimum identifiable informative unit, delimited intonationally, but not isolable. There are *substantive subacts*, i.e. with propositional content, and *adjacent subacts*, which introduce subsidiary (modal, textual, or interpersonal)

information. *¿Eh?* can be an interpersonal adjacent subact, prototypically located in final position of act and intervention (ex. (8a)) or in final position of an act only (ex. (8b)). The subact is represented with {}.

- (8a) C2: #{A ese paso no adelgazarás} {¿eh?}#
 C2: '#{At this rate you won't lose weight} {eh?}#
- (8b) B2: #{Es que no hay nada como una tarta de nata y chocolate} {¿eh?} # #qué injusta la vida#
 B2: '#{There's nothing like a cream and chocolate cake} {eh?} # #how unfair life is#

In this case, *¿eh?* assumes two values. When used in act and intervention final position (ex. (8a)), the marker appeals to the listener to confirm, ratify or accept what has been said. Sometimes it requests, either explicitly or implicitly, a change of attitude, as in C2, where it assumes a polite attenuation value. This is the so-called *appellative ¿eh?* On the other hand, when it appears in final position of an act (8b), *¿eh?* functions as a self-affirmative reinforcement: it contributes to reinforcing the illocutionary force, but it does not demand any response, at most a reaction of the type *sí, sí, ya, mm* as a sign of reception and cooperation. This is the so-called *phatic ¿eh?* (see Martín Zorraquino/Portolés 1999, §63.6.4; *¿eh?*¹ and *¿eh?*² in the DPDE).

3. And, finally, *¿eh?* can appear (less frequently) in middle position within an act:

- (9) B3: #A todo esto, ¿qué tal ayer //¿eeh? con Enrique?#
 B3: '#By the way, how did it go yesterday //eh? with Enrique?#

In this case, *¿eh?* acquires a formulative value and acts as a lexicalized or verbalized pause that gives the speaker time to think about the continuation of their utterance (Briz/Pons Bordería 2010, 340–341). As can be seen, the identification of the position of the particle and of the unit in which it appears allows us to better account for the phenomenon of polyfunctionality.

5 Discourse operators in process: The macrosyntactic model

Consider the following examples taken from Fuentes (2017) and Fuentes et al. (2022):

- (10) El *dichoso* aparato no quiere funcionar.
 'The *damn* device does not work'.

- (11) Young se radicó en Miami y debió empezar de nuevo, en una ciudad que le quedaba totalmente a trasmano para su trabajo, y *lo que es peor*, lejos de sus amigos y parientes.

‘Young moved to Miami and had to start all over again, in a city that was totally out of reach for his work, and *what is worse*, far from his friends and relatives’.

From a grammatical point of view, *dichoso* (approx. ‘damned’) is a qualifying adjective and *lo que es peor* (‘what is worse’), a subordinate relative clause. But these labels do not explain their function in sentences. In ex. (10) *dichoso* is not used to denote a quality of a device, and *lo que es peor* lacks truth-conditional impact because, as a peripheral complement, it is not at the service of representation. To account for these units, it is necessary to put them in relation to the speaker who enunciates and constructs her or his discourse. *Dichoso* becomes the index of a modal dimension, which shows the attitude or mood of the speaker towards the state of things described. In (11), *lo que es peor* is a semi-free construction that introduces a subjective evaluative comment referring to the segment that follows. Preceding the phrase, it advances the speaker’s evaluation and presents the argument it introduces as a higher scalar value than the previous one. If the move to Miami is an argument for the conclusion ‘discontent’, the absence of friends and relatives is a stronger argument for the same conclusion. As a semifixed pattern, it imposes a comparative attributive predicate, but admits variation (*lo que es más importante*, *lo que es más grave*, *lo que es peor / mejor*, etc.).

The macrosyntactic model developed by Catalina Fuentes (2013; 2017) is a methodological proposal to account for the syntax of discourse (macrosyntax), both written and oral, from a pragmalinguistic perspective. Similar to the Val.Es.Co approach for colloquial conversation in Spanish and in line with the research of Santos Río (2003), the macrosyntactic model takes enunciation as its point of reference and assumes the existence of categories, units, functions, and relations that emerge as a result of the enunciative anchoring. Following Adam (1990) and Roulet (1997), the methodological premise of the model is that the multidimensional and polyfunctional nature of discourse affects the functioning of the system itself. Following Van Dijk (2003), three levels of analysis are differentiated: microsyntactic, macrosyntactic, and superstructure, in close interrelation, with four planes or domains that overlap and interact with each other: enunciative, modal, argumentative, and informative.

In the macrosyntactic model, the difference between connector and operator (Portolés 1998a, 142; Fuentes 2003; 2009) is fundamental. Both connectors and operators constitute open paradigms, but language seems to be much more productive in the creation of the latter, related to subjectivity and intersubjectivity. To account for the process, Goldberg’s (1995) notion of construction is assumed as an instrument of analysis and as a procedural unit of discourse. In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of the macrosyntactic model is that it places its focus on the intermediate stages of the process of change in order to capture the dynamism embedded in synchrony itself. The

notion of construction makes it possible to notice and account for how certain syntactic structures, many of them simple or subordinate clauses located on the periphery of the utterance and associated with a certain modal, informative, argumentative, and prosodic configuration, gradually lose their compositional meaning and become procedural patterns (Fuentes/Padilla/Pérez Béjar 2022).

This process has taken place, for example, with conditional sentences such as *si tú lo dices* ('if you say so') or *si no te importa* ('if you don't mind'). The structures are fixed and their conditional value is weakened to give way to a specific procedural meaning that is not compositionally predictable (Goldberg 1995, 4): in the first case, it is a modal-plane instruction of the type 'I don't think, so I disagree' in a reactive intervention: *–Elena está muy enamorada. –Si tú lo dices*; in the second case, the construction introduces an attenuation value in directive speech acts: "Es que quería pedirte un favor, *si no te importa*" (Fuentes 2019, 12). The same could be said about many other constructions, some of them already collected by Santos Río (2003) in his dictionary of particles (Fuentes 2019; 2020). In the light of the theory, procedural constructions are discourse operators in process; transition units between a free structure and a fixed construction.

A good example is the discursive operator *aunque sea* ('although' + subjunctive 'be', approx. 'even if it is') (Fuentes 2019), originating in a proper concessive subordinate clause in subjunctive. In the current synchrony, all the phases of the process coexist: free concessive structure (phase 1), construction (phase 2) and discursive operator (phase 3). In this last phase, *aunque sea* has been recategorized as an adverb and has become part of the paradigm of focal adverbs that exclude an alternative, such as *al menos*, with which it is sometimes commutable. See the following contrast:

- (12a) Averigua un poquito sobre etología animal, o mira *Nat Geo* *aunque sea* una revista no especializada.
 'Find out a little bit about animal ethology, or watch *Nat Geo*, even if it's a non-specialized magazine'.
- (12b) Averigua un poquito sobre etología animal, o mira *Nat Geo* *aunque sea*. (Fuentes 2019, 14)
 'Find out a little bit about animal ethology, or watch *Nat Geo*, at least'.
- (12c) Averigua un poquito sobre etología animal, o mira *Nat Geo*, *aunque sea* parcialmente.
 'Find out a little bit about animal ethology, or watch *Nat Geo*, at least partially'.

In ex. (12a) *mira Nat Geo aunque sea una revista no especializada* is a concessive structure: *mira Nat Geo* is the main clause or apodosis; *aunque sea una revista no especializada* is the subordinate clause or protasis. *Aunque* can be substituted by *a pesar de que* or *pese a que*: *mira Nat Geo pese a que es una revista no especializada*. Both clauses are in a conventional relationship of contrast or opposition. *Aunque* presents the protasis as an inefficient or inoperative cause that does not cause the effect that would have been

expected in the apodosis. From an argumentative point of view, the relationship is one of anti-orientation and the effect counter-expectational. An argument as *revista no especializada* orients towards ‘non-reading’; *mira Nat Geo* directly introduces the opposite conclusion. The interpretation is guided by the syntactic configuration itself and the existence of a shared implicit assumption as a warrant: ‘scientific knowledge requires the reading of specialized texts’. From an informational point of view, the main clause and the subordinate clause comment on different topics, they function as answers to different questions: what to do? What is Nat Geo?

In ex. (12b) the situation is very different. In *mira Nat Geo aunque sea*, there is only one sentence, not two. *Aunque sea* is a locution, it has become fixed as a unit and does not allow internal changes (reanalysis and lexicalization); the verb has dispensed with its arguments and has remained fixed in the third person singular of the present subjunctive (**Aunque es*, **aunque sean*, **aunque fuesen*); it is part of the periphery, admits mobility (*mira Nat Geo aunque sea*; *aunque sea, mira Nat Geo*; *mira, aunque sea, Nat Geo*), has been reinterpreted procedurally as sufficient minimum, and it can be substituted by the exclusive focus adverbial *al menos*, which evokes and denies a preferable alternative that is not verified: *mira Nat Geo aunque sea / al menos* (Portolés 2016). In this case, the alternative appears explicit in the immediately preceding discourse: *Averigua un poquito sobre etología animal*.

The examples point to the two extremes of a process of change that goes from syntax to discourse, from free syntax to fixed operator. But it is necessary to assume, as constructional change theorists argue (Traugott/Trousdale 2013) and as Fuentes (2019) herself argues, an intermediate or transitional phase in which the new sign begins to be “constructed”; a pragma-syntactic scheme that begins to be recognized by speakers as a procedural pattern.

If we compare ex. (12a) and (12c), they are similar, but there are important differences between them. In fact, ex. (12c) is a pragma-syntactic transition scheme. We are still dealing with a two-member concessive scheme, but with a particular multi-dimensional configuration. The discourse planes interact in a different way than that described for ex. (12a). First, from an argumentative point of view, *aunque sea parcialmente* maintains the same argumentative orientation as *mira Nat Geo*, but it weakens its force because it is placed low on the scale. *Aunque sea parcialmente* is interpreted as minimal but sufficient condition (a satisfactory minimum; a sufficient minimum). There is a transition from the interpretation of inefficient or inoperative cause to operative cause; from insufficient argument to sufficient argument (for the notion of sufficiency, see Portolés 1998c).

Secondly, from an informational point of view, the concessive structure introduces a focal reading: *aunque* introduces and highlights the predicate that contains the lower scalar value (focus) and evokes the excluded alternative that was the desirable upper value: *totalmente*_{presupposed alternative} / *parcialmente*_{focus, lower value}. The substitution of *aunque* by a *pesar de* is no longer possible; however, it is possible to insert the adverb *solo*

(‘only’) (*aunque solo sea parcialmente, aunque sea solo parcialmente*) and to substitute *aunque sea* as a whole (reanalysis) by *al menos* (*aunque sea parcialmente > al menos parcialmente*); *solo* and *al menos* are two focal adverbs of exclusion.

As we can see, the concessive scheme itself provides the appropriate structural framework for a different configuration of the discourse planes and makes possible a transition or construction phase in which the new discourse operator begins to be “created” and a new segmentation of the sequence begins to be interpreted, which is not *aunque* + sentence, but rather *aunque sea* + complement. The concessive scheme itself thus lays the groundwork for the leap from sentence to discourse and allows the beginning of a process of grammaticalization by subjectivization (Traugott 1995) that will encode, through a scalar focus, the speaker’s subjective attitude to the information by presenting it as a sufficient minimum. As we said above, all the phases of the process coexist: free concessive structure (phase 1), construction (phase 2) and discursive operator (phase 3).

6 Discourse markers and cognition: Experimental analysis

One of the endeavors of Experimental Pragmatics has been to test the validity of theoretical hypotheses through scientific techniques and methods (Loureda Lamas et al. 2019; 2020; Noveck 2018) (↗14 Discourse markers and psycholinguistic processing). To this end, the Discourse Particles and Cognition (DPKog) group at Heidelberg University has carried out numerous eye tracking reading experiments to study these units in Spanish (cf. Nadal 2019; Narváez 2019; Recio 2020; Cruz 2020; Torres 2020; Loureda Lamas et al. 2021a). Eye tracking makes it possible to record the reading times in milliseconds invested in the different parts of an utterance, that is, to measure the processing effort required by words or groups of words (Loureda Lamas et al. 2020). Below are the results of three specific experimental tests carried out for the counter argumentative connective *sin embargo* (‘however’).

6.1 The value of marking: Marked / unmarked utterances

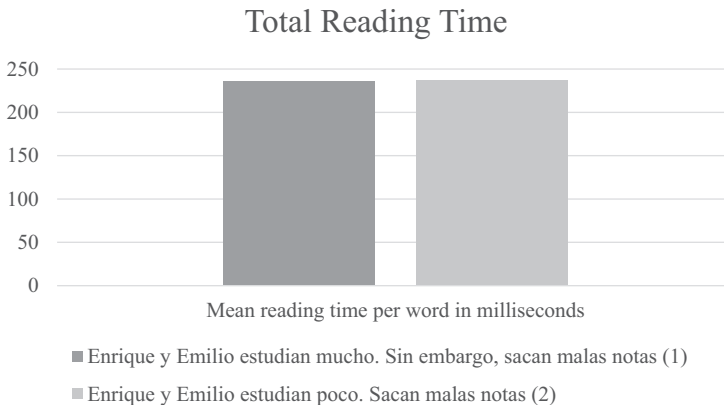
If we consider the following contrast:

- (13a) Enrique y Emilio estudian *poco*. *Los dos sacan malas notas.*
 ‘Enrique and Emilio study little. They both get bad grades’.
- (13b) Enrique y Emilio estudian *mucho*. *Sin embargo, sacan malas notas.*
 ‘Enrique and Emilio study little. *However*, they get bad grades’.

In ex. (13a), a cause-effect relationship between the two segments is inferred *asyndetically*: Enrique and Emilio study little, [consequently], both get bad grades. In ex. (13b), however, the connective conventionally points to a counterargumentative relationship. It warns the reader that what follows contradicts what might have been inferred from the first segment, for example, “they do well academically” (Blakemore 1989; Portolés 1993; 1995; 1998a; see the corresponding entry in the *DPDE*). The cause/consequence relationship is an expected interpretation and is easily obtained in juxtaposed structures such as ex. (12a). If this expectation is not met, the inclusion of a counterargumentative connective is expected (Zunino 2017; Nadal 2019, 178).

Based on these theoretical assumptions, we may hypothesize that the presence of the connective *sin embargo*, which forces inference cancellation, will entail more processing costs than the simpler, causal, *asyndetic* relationship. The results of the reading experiment refute our hypothesis. See the reading times obtained for ex. (12a) and (12b) in [Graph 1](#):

AU: The cross references to figures, tables and equations are highlighted for the author/ editor to check and confirm its correct placement. These highlights will be removed in the next stage. Please make changes if necessary.



Graph 1: Adapted from Nadal 2019.

The data indicates that the presence of the marker does not incur extra processing costs even when compared to discursive relationships considered easier and more automated. Although counterarguing might require additional effort, the presence of the connective eases the potential difficulty by acting as a guide that conventionally imposes constraints on context: it flags the counter orientation and constrains context, giving the reader a unique inferential path, allowing them to construct the alleged statement more directly and unequivocally (Nadal 2019, 159). The particle facilitates “the integration of the discursive segments it affects” (Loureda Lamas et al. 2021b, 620).

6.2 The weight of error

Procedural meaning imposes itself on the conceptual meaning guiding its interpretation (Escandell/Leonetti 2011). This has been verified experimentally by comparing the reading times of neutral utterances, in which the processing instruction harmonizes with the context, as in (14a), with utterances in which there is a conflict between the instruction given by the particle and the utterance in which it is inserted (14b) (cf. Loureda Lamas et al. 2021b).

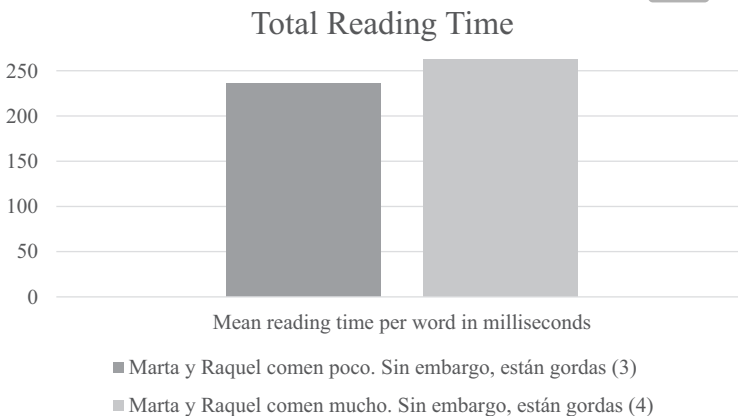
(14a) Marta y Raquel comen *poco*. *Sin embargo*, están gordas.

‘Marta and Raquel eat little. *However*, they are fat’.

(14b) #Marta y Raquel comen *mucho*. *Sin embargo*, están gordas.

‘Marta and Raquel eat a lot. *However*, they are fat’.

The degree of pragmatic acceptability between the two utterances can be altered by altering the argumentative operators *poco* (Eng. ‘little’) y *mucho* (Eng. ‘much’) (Anscombre/Ducrot 1994) that follow opposite direction. The counter-argument connective, *sin embargo* (Eng. ‘however’) (ex. (14a)), warns of the cancellation of a conclusion that would have been expected from the first member and that results from the application of a commonly shared assumption that is not verified: “people who eat little do not generally get fat”. The conflict that occurs in an utterance like ex. (14b) between the connective and the conceptual meaning forces the derivation of the implicature “People who eat a lot do not usually get fat”, which is contrary to our encyclopedic knowledge and therefore difficult to accept. This implicature contradicts the assumptions that are part of the speaker’s knowledge of the world and such a contradiction is accompanied by additional processing costs during reading. The pragmatic implausibility in (14b) implies an increase of 11.30% in total reading time per word (Nadal 2019, 135).



Graph 2: Adapted from Nadal 2019.

AU: Please mention Graph 2 in the text.

6.3 The effect of position

Finally, it has been possible to verify what happens when comparing the reading of three identical utterances in which only the position of the connective varies within the discursive segment that hosts it (Nadal 2019, 176):

- (15a) Juan y Ana comen mucho dulce. *Sin embargo*, están sanos.
'Juan and Ana eat a lot of sweets. *However*, they are healthy'.
- (15b) Juan y Ana comen mucho dulce. Están, *sin embargo*, sanos.
'Juan and Ana eat a lot of sweets. They are, *however*, healthy'.
- (15c) Juan y Ana comen mucho dulce. Están sanos, *sin embargo*.
'Juan and Ana eat a lot of sweets. They are healthy, *however*'.

Sin embargo ('however') is an adverbial phrase endowed with positional mobility. In principle, it can appear in initial, intermediate, and final positions, even if the most frequent and least stylistically marked position is the initial one. The experiment carried out by Nadal (2019), is therefore based on the hypothesis that abandoning the initial position will lead to higher processing costs. And indeed, the hypothesis is confirmed: the change in position translated into an increase in reading times in the second discourse segment. The initial position of the marker generates a stable reading pattern: it acts as the axis for the understanding of the statement, gathers the highest processing costs, but, in exchange, regulates the times allocated to the areas of the connected discursive members, which are low and balanced. This reading pattern is altered when the procedural instruction is "dislocated" from its usual position. When this happens, the default schema is disrupted, and the second segment is especially affected by the position change. In middle and final positions, the reader does not have the connective as a reference point and the processing costs are shifted towards areas composed of conceptual elements. In other words, a marked position implies higher processing costs, although the procedural guide is still sufficient for the reader to activate the expected inferential routes (Nadal et al. 2016; Nadal/Narváez 2021). The case of *sin embargo* (Eng. 'however') is just one example of the verifications that can be carried out experimentally with particles.

7 Colombian *mejor dicho*: Grammaticalization by intensification

Within the scope of the Val.Es.Co group's research on spontaneous orality, Briz (1995; 1998) very early called attention to the existence of pragmatic categories whose presence is a linguistic constant in colloquial conversation in Spanish, such as the forms associated with the strategic functions of connection, attenuation, and intensification (Albelda 2007; Briz 2017).

In this section we aim to contribute to research on dialectal variation and discursive marking and intensification by drawing attention to the functional expansion experienced by the rectification reformulator, *mejor dicho* (Eng. ‘that is’) in Colombian Spanish. This marker has a much higher frequency of use than its European homonym because, without losing its original corrective value, it has developed conclusive, formulative, and modal functional values that distance it from the standard use (Portolés 1998a; Martín Zorraquino/Portolés 1999, § 63.4.3; Garcés 2006; 2008, §4.2; see the corresponding entry in the DPDE). In addition, contrary to what is expected in a rectifying reformulator (Garcés 2008, 80), it is very frequently documented in the function of a discursive operator because of the frequent non-explicitation of one or both initially connected segments (Portolés 1998a, § 6.4; Martín Zorraquino/Portolés 1999, §63.1.4.2, §63.4.1) with a meaning of intensification that even favors its use as an interjection for the expressive function.

Considering the data, it seems that the unit underwent a process of grammaticalization by subjectivization (Traugott 1995; Company 2004) and, specifically, by intensification (Briz 1998; Albelda 2007), arising in the dialogic space of communicative immediacy. Proof of this is the frequent combination with intensification resources in spontaneous colloquial orality such as the enumerative series, repetition, hyperbole, hyperbolic metaphor, prosodic enhancement, exclamation, or consecutive and suspended constructions (Briz 1998; 2017; Albelda 2007; Cortés 2008).

Our research is based on the data provided by *CORDE* (*Corpus Diacrónico del Español*), *CREA* (*Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual*), *CORPES* (*Corpus del Español del Siglo XXI*), *PRESEEA* (*Proyecto para el estudio sociolingüístico del Español de España y de América*), and *AMERESCO* (*América y España Español Coloquial*). From a diachronic point of view, even if the corpora consulted record the new functions only from the end of the 20th century, it is plausible to assume a previous undocumented process (López Serena 2007) from the beginning of the century or even before. It would be worth digging deeper in this regard. Nor can we exclude that the phenomenon may also affect other varieties of Spanish. The present study will be only a first approximation to the phenomenon. The new values coexist with the old ones according to Hopper’s 1991 principle of persistence. We focused our attention on the new ones: conclusive, modal, and formulative. As a conclusive marker, *mejor dicho* is placed at the beginning of the reformulating act; as a modal operator, it moves to the closing position of the act or turn; finally, as a formulation marker, it appears inside the act.

7.1 Conclusive-recapitulative reformulation value

The following example could also be found in the European variety. *Mejor dicho* reinterprets, summarizes, and makes explicit the implicit conclusion towards which the co-oriented arguments of the first member are oriented. From an informational point

of view, it maintains the topic and therefore enables the recovery of a focus and an alternative. It is placed at the beginning of the conclusive reformulating act.

- (16) Cuando comencé a buscar seriamente a Reina, visité a Orlando varias veces en su oficina. Allá llegaba todo el que tuviera un problema: los desplazados, los necesitados, los enfermos, los desempleados, los enredados y hasta los aburridos. *Mejor dicho*, llegaban todos. (CORPES: Jorge Franco (2001): *Paraíso Travel*. Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana)

‘When I started looking seriously for Reina, I visited Orlando several times in his office. Everyone who had a problem came there: the displaced, the needy, the sick, the unemployed, the busy, and even the bored. *Rather*, they all came’.

However, certain uses of the Colombian *mejor dicho* are strange in European Spanish. See the following example. *En definitiva* (Eng. ‘in short’), *en una palabra* (Eng. ‘in a word’), *o sea* (Eng. ‘it is’), or *vamos* (Eng. ‘I mean’) would be more natural:

- (17) “Lo que pasa es que Robin era insistente. Me dijo que él no quería esperar más, que yo era una persona muy trabajadora, organizada, que él quería estar conmigo peroviviendo juntos, compartiendo todo. *Mejor dicho*, me convenció.” (CORPES: López, Andrés/Ferrand, Juan Camilo (2001), *Las muñecas de los narcos*, Madrid, Aguilar)

‘What happens is that Robin was insistent. He told me that he didn’t want to wait any longer, that I was a very hard-working, organized person, that he wanted to be with me but living together, sharing everything. *Rather*, he convinced me’.

On the other hand, and in contrast to European Spanish, the Colombian *mejor dicho* extends the conclusive value to planned texts of communicative distance (Koch/Oesterreicher 1985). In (18), the marker introduces the conclusion that closes the comment on forms of loneliness in children and adolescents. It can be replaced by *en suma* (Eng. ‘in sum’), *en una palabra* (Eng. ‘in a word’), *en definitiva* (Eng. ‘in short’), or *en conclusión* (Eng. ‘in conclusion’).

- (18) Un niño o un joven se siente solo cuando [. . .]:
- En la primera infancia (hasta los seis años), no establece o mantiene vínculos gratificantes con la madre, el padre y los hermanos o cuando estos vínculos son conflictivos, distantes o inseguros.
 - En la segunda infancia (entre los seis y los diez años), cuando el niño fracasa al iniciar o mantener vínculos con sus compañeros y profesores o con los demás adultos del escenario escolar. También cuando estos vínculos son conflictivos, distantes, evasivos o inseguros.

- En la primera adolescencia (de los once a los dieciocho años), cuando el joven fracasa al establecer o mantener vínculos con grupos o amigos, o cuando no crea relaciones íntimas con personas del sexo opuesto. Igual cuando dichas relaciones son conflictivas o distantes.

Mejor dicho, las posibilidades de soledad son muchas y varían con la edad.

(CORPES: Zubiría Samper, Miguel (2007): *Cómo prevenir la soledad, la depresión y el suicidio en niños y jóvenes. Un manual para que sus hijos vivan mejor*, Bogotá: Aguilar).

‘A child or young person feels lonely when [. . .]:

- In early childhood (up to six years), they do not establish or maintain rewarding bonds with the mother, father, and siblings or when these bonds are conflictive, distant, or insecure.
- In their second childhood (between the ages of six and ten), when the child fails to initiate or maintain ties with their classmates and teachers or with other adults in the school setting. Also, when these links are conflictive, distant, evasive, or insecure.
- In their early adolescence (from eleven to eighteen years old), when the youngster fails to establish or maintain ties with groups or friends, or when they do not create intimate relationships with people of the opposite sex. The same when said relationships are conflictive or distant.

Rather, the possibilities of loneliness are many and vary with age’.

7.2 Modal values of intensification

Intensification is a scalar and modal-evaluative phenomenon linked to the subjectivity of the speaker. It affects the illocutionary force of the utterance, reinforcing assertiveness and favoring expressive values, with strategic repercussions in the social dimension of communication for the negotiation of the agreement, interpersonal relationship, or image (Briz 1998; Albelda 2007). As intensification is a scalar phenomenon, it is not surprising that discourse particles that summon scales can be used for purposes and in contexts of intensification. These are modally marked contexts that are characteristic of spontaneous conversational orality: the speaker presents him/herself as highly committed to the truth of what has been said and as personally affected or impacted by a situation that exceeds what is normal or expected.

To understand the intensifying use of *mejor dicho* in Colombian Spanish, the difference between substitutive scales and culminating additive scales may be useful (Portolés 2007; 2009; 2010). In fact, the use of *mejor dicho* for intensification purposes is possible throughout the Pan-Hispanic area when the reformulator is combined with a lexical or pragmatic substitutive scale, but in the Colombian variety it is also possible with the additive scale, which is a sign of a greater extension and frequency of the intensifying strategy.

In ex. (19), *mejor dicho* is combined with a substitutive scale that levels out the insufficient strength of the first formulation (Garcés 2008, 106). This is a pan-Hispanic usage. The scale is lexically based: *bien buenas* ('very good') / *geniales* ('great').

- (19) Bueno, amigazo, le cuento que tengo las mejores noticias. Prepárese porque la verdad es que son bien buenas. *Mejor dicho*: geniales. (CORPES: Gamboa, Santiago (2009): Necrópolis. Bogotá: Norma)
 'Well, friend, I have the best news. Prepare yourself because the truth is that they are very good, *or rather*, great'.

Due to its own lexical meaning, and even though it is already intensified with respect to the neutral form *buenas*, *bien buenas* ('very good') is in a lower position with respect to *genial* ('great'), which occupies the highest position on a gradual scale of excellence. Because it is stronger, the second argument replaces the first, which also works, from the informational point of view, as an alternative to the focus of the second.

In ex. (20), on the other hand, the scale is additive:

- (20) ¡Es que la que le hizo el anterior Comisionao de Paz Camilo Gómez!... Imagínate que le entregó el puesto y no le dio ningún teléfono, ningún nombre, nada: *mejor dicho*, se le llevó la clientela. (CORPES: Gallego, Carlos Mario (2007), *La era Uribe contada por las dos lengüilargas de Colombia*, Buenos Aires, Aguilar)
 'The former Peace Commissioner Camilo Gómez really messed things up with him!... Can you imagine that he handed over the position and didn't give him any phone number, no name, nothing: *rather*, he took away his clientele'.

The scale is pragmatically based. From our knowledge of the world, we know that stealing someone's clientele is more serious than denying data that could help someone; this is a stronger argument for the conclusion 'ethically unacceptable behavior' and a more informative piece in that it is least expected. Now, the speaker does not rectify to replace but to add. The higher value is not the second, but the result of the sum of all: 'do not give any phone number + no name + nothing + STEAL CUSTOMERS'. It is a culminating additive scale. *Mejor dicho* is switchable by *incluso* or *hasta* (Eng. 'even'): *no le dio ningún teléfono, ningún nombre, nada: incluso, se le llevó la clientela*.

As Portolés (2007, 146, own translation) explains, "in the culminating additive scales two syncretic orderings coincide: the additive one itself (n +1) and the one that places the last addend as more informative than the rest". Repetition is here used as an intensifying strategy (Briz 1998; Albelda 2007, 72; Camacho Adarve 2009): the denial is repeated three times: *no, ningún, nada* (Eng. 'no, not, nothing'). The culminating additive scale and repetition are strategic resources that contribute to the assertive and expressive reinforcement of the speech act: the speaker presents him/herself as highly committed to the truth of what has been said and strongly affected by the events described in order to fully convince the interlocutor. This culminating additive use, which is uncommon in

European Spanish, is normal, on the other hand, in the Colombian variety, which points, as suggested, to a greater extension and frequency of the intensification strategy with the particle.

In fact, the use of hyperbole and hyperbolic metaphor is very frequent (Briz 1998, 123). Empathy is sought through humor. In this scheme, the member introduced by *mejor dicho* has argumentative weight and acts as an intensifier of the assertiveness and expressiveness of the speech act, but it does not really provide any new information; it is, rather, a gloss or paraphrase that explains in a graphic, concrete, and hyperbolic way how the first segment should be interpreted. It could be paraphrased with a metadiscursive operator like *para que me entiendas* or *para que usted me entienda* (Eng. ‘so that you understand me’). The capitalization in ex. (22) serves as a graphic device of intensification. From a social point of view, it also has a strong impact (valuing or threatening) on one’s own public image (ex. (22)) (Briz 2017):

(21) E.: [. . .] ¿cómo le parece el Metro?

I.: [. . .] en horas pico y tres vagones eso es un gentío *mejor dicho* eso es <alargamiento/> s / hacete de cuenta u<alargamiento/> no metido en una caja de fósforos / (PRESEEA: MEDE_H13_002)

‘E.: [. . .] how do you like the Metro?’

I.: [. . .] at peak hours and three carriages that’s a crowd, *rather*, think about it, to ride a matchbox’.

(22) Todo el día el desfile de taxis tomándose el tinto de los clientes, ocupando parqueadero, usando el baño, y no gastaban NADA. Bueno, sí, gastaban el café, el azúcar, las servilletas y el papel higiénico, pero de dinero, nada. *Mejor dicho*, gastaba más Supermán en buses, o Tarzán en corbatas, jajajajaja. (CORPES: Albeiro, Piter (2019), *El sueño del millón de dólares*, Bogotá, Grijalbo).

‘All day the parade of taxis drinking the customers’ red wine, taking parking spaces, using the bathroom, and spending NOTHING. Well, yes, they spent coffee, sugar, napkins, and toilet paper, but no money, nothing. *Or rather*, Superman spent more on buses, or Tarzan on ties, hahahahaha’.

The first argument is a high value on the scale of force (a crowd, nothing). *Mejor dicho* reinforces the assertiveness and expressiveness of the statement paraphrasing the first segment through a hyperbolic conceptual metaphor that presents the referents (the subway, the taxi drivers) as extreme cases that exceed all expectations of normal. Intensification through humor and hyperbole is used to convince and amuse the interlocutor.

It is plausible to suppose that the recurrent use of *mejor dicho* in intensive communication, which orders two values on a scale that are high in themselves, has favored the internalization of a procedural pattern by the speakers and its evolution towards modal discourse operator. By dint of repetition, speakers would have incorporated the scalar procedural pattern of intensification as part of the procedural meaning of the

particle to the point of making it possible to not make the arguments explicit without thereby jeopardizing the scalar evaluative-intensive interpretation. On the other hand, the evolution would confirm the connection – modalization sequence, as indicated by Pons Bordería (2014) for *o sea* (Eng. ‘that is’).

In fact, *mejor dicho* can introduce a complement of intensification in the same way as *pero* (Eng. ‘but’) could do (García Negroni 1995; Portolés 1998a, 94–95; 99–100; Albelda 2007, 66–67). The alternative is a lower value but, in any case, high, which is not made explicit: [p], *mejor dicho q*.

(23) E: ¿cómo cree que sería dentro de unos años Pereira / doña O?

I: no pues inmenso mu <palabra_cortada/> muy grande porque construyen mucho<alargamiento/> [. . .] las construcciones acá en Pereira están *mejor dicho* / elevadísimas. (PRESEEA: PERE_M32_050)

‘E: What do you think Pereira would be like in a few years, Ms O?’

I: no, well, huge, very big because they build a lot. The buildings here in Pereira are *rather* very high’.

Mejor dicho focuses directly on a superlative lexical unit: the adjective *elevadísimas* (Eng. ‘extremely high’) and forces to recover an implicit alternative that contains an equally high value that is rejected as insufficient: *Las construcciones aquí en Pereira están elevadas*_(unmentioned alternative) *mejor dicho*, *elevadísimas*_(focus). In fact, it would not be appropriate to focus on the lowest value: #*Las construcciones aquí en Pereira están mejor dicho elevadas*. *Mejor dicho* is switchable by *pero* (Eng. ‘but’): *Las construcciones aquí en Pereira están pero elevadísimas*.

The co-occurrence with *pero* (Eng. ‘but’) can also be attested. As in the previous case, the alternative is presupposed: [p] *pero mejor dicho q*:

(24) entonces uno ve otras ciudades / entonces uno de esas ciudades aprende aunque sea a punta de ojo / y uno le pregunta a los mexicanos cuando uno se montaba en ese Metro / eso suena *pero mejor dicho* horrible. (PRESEEA: MEDE_H23_001)

‘then one sees other cities, then one learns from those cities even through the eyes and one asks the Mexicans when one got on that Metro that sounds *rather* horrible’.

It can close an enumerative series (Briz 1998, 120; Albelda 2007, 74; Cortés 2008):

(25) A mi mamá se le explotó el hígado, se le fracturaron tres costillas, se le quebró el omoplato, quedó ciega por un ojo, *mejor dicho*. (CORPES: López, Andrés/Ferrand, Juan Camilo (2010), *Las muñecas de los narcos*, Madrid, Aguilar)

‘My mother’s liver exploded, three ribs were fractured, her shoulder blade was broken, she was blind in one eye, *rather*’.

- (26) Hoy me encontré con una persona bastante negativa. Y empezó a hablar mal de todas las cosas por las que se sentía incómodo. Empezó a hablar mal de la universidad, empezó a hablar mal del programa, empezó a hablar mal de los estudiantes, *no mejor dicho*. (authentic oral sample)
 ‘Today I met a rather negative person. And he started talking bad about all the things he felt uncomfortable about. He began to speak ill of the university, he began to speak ill of the program, he began to speak ill of the students, *not rather*’.

It can also close intensive consecutive or quasi-consecutive constructions (Briz 1998, 119–121), as other structures in European Spanish could do (*para qué te voy a contar; que para qué; que no veas*, etc.). In fact, the European Spanish intensive quasi-consecutive constructions with suspension of the second member are found in Colombian Spanish with *mejor dicho*: *Se armó una. . . > Se armó una que mejor dicho*.

- (27) Garzón dice que de ahí no pasó. Y da una disculpa que *mejor dicho*. (CREA: El Tiempo, 01/12/1991: Teléfono rosa, Prensa, Bogotá)
 ‘Garzón says that it didn’t go further than that. And he gives an apology that *rather*’.
- (28) El negro [. . .] comenzaba a bailar currulao con unos cambios de ritmo y con un movimiento de caderas que *mejor dicho*. Era un portento para eso. (CORPES: Jaramillo Agudelo, Darío, et al. (2011), *El fútbol se lee*, Bogotá, Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá. Secretaría de Cultura, Recreación y Deporte)
 ‘The black [. . .] began to dance currulao with a few changes of rhythm and with a movement of the hips that *rather*. He was a wonder for that’.
- (29) ¡Dios mio, nos toca ver unas cosas en el trabajo que *mejor dicho*! (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1197628380440379>)
 ‘My God, we need to see things at the workplace that *rather*!’

The intensification with *mejor dicho* has a strong impact on the expressiveness of the statement with diverse expressive values such as the humor that we saw above, but also disapproval, emotion, empathy. . . In ex. (30) we interpret very strong disapproval: the maximum imaginable of moral decadence and corruption.

- (30) Bienvenidos a Somorra y Gomorra de siglo XXI, ojalá Dios los coja confesados porque *mejor dicho*. . . (Davies, Marc (2016), *Web/Dialects*, Colombia)
 ‘Welcome to Somorra y Gomorra of 21st century, I hope God finds them confessed, because *rather*. . .’

The emotional implication can be very high, as in the following example in the closing position of a turn. *Mejor dicho* is equivalent to an interjection that expresses the emotion

of the speaker like *Dios mío* ('my God'). This leap to the emotive function was noticed by Serna/Hernández (2016, 89), who classify it together with the forms *ave María* ('my Goodness') (*eeh ave María, eavemaría, vemaría, hombre, pa que vea* ('well, look at this').

(31) E: ¿y a usted cómo le ha ido con la crianza de su niño?

I: con la crianza de <vacilación/> de mi hijo / <silencio/> me ha ido muy bien [. . .] cuando mi esposa estuvo embarazada / <silencio/> <vacilación/> hasta lloraba porque pues / la verdad<alargamiento/> de<alargamiento/> <vacilación/> ese emoción de ser papá y / y<alargamiento/> de verlo / cuando era pequeño y ahora / que creció / <silencio/> uff / *mejor dicho*. (PRESEEA: CALI_H11_003)

'E: And how has it been with your child's upbringing?

I: Raising my son has gone very well [. . .] when my wife was pregnant, she even cried because well, the truth is that emotion of being a father and seeing him when he was little and now that he has grown up. Uff, *rather*'.

In dialogic interaction, *mejor dicho* can constitute by itself an act manifesting empathy with the interlocutor. The speaker intensifies what the interlocutor has said and elevates it to the maximum to express their total agreement, understanding, and empathy: what happened is more than traumatizing; the day was beyond horrible.

(32) E: pero una pesadilla

I: sí <alargamiento/> fue muy / traumatizante

E: no / *no mejor dicho* / y quién sabe<alargamiento/> / puede que les haya mentido al decirle que la finca estaba rodeada<alargamiento/> / pues para meterles terror puede que simplemente haya sido cuatro personas. (PRESEEA: PERE_M12_013)

'E: but a nightmare

I: Yes, it was very traumatizing.

E: no, not *rather* and who knows. They may have lied when they told them that the farm was surrounded, well, to terrorize them it may have simply been four people'.

(33) A. Ayer tuve un día horrible, estudiantes, consejo, curso de lengua, devolver libros en la biblioteca, no encontraba el móvil. . .

B. Nooo, *mejor dicho*. (authentic oral sample)

'A. Yesterday I had a horrible day, students, council, language course, returning books to the library, I couldn't find my mobile. . .

B. Nooo, *rather*'.

7.3 Formulative values

We may suppose that the possibility of operating without an alternative has facilitated *mejor dicho*'s acquisition of a formulative function, as has happened with *o sea* ('that

is'). In fact, Colombian Spanish *mejor dicho* also assumes metadiscursive formulation values characteristic of unplanned immediate communication (López Serena/Borreguero 2010, 441, 453, 457). Within the act, it supports the speaker in the elaboration of their speech as *o sea* (Eng. 'that is') could do. The presence of expletive editing marks such as *eh* or suspension, which can be considered traces of an alternative that is no longer made explicit, should also be noted.

- (34) ¿Cómo así, tres? Somos cuatro. . . mejor dicho, cinco, con Ana Pávlova. Ella es la que nos. . . *eh!*. . . *mejor dicho* la que trabaja para nosotros, pero es como de la familia. (CREA: Grupo Teatro La Candelaria 1977, *Los días que estremecieron al mundo*, Colombia)

'How so, three? We are four. . . rather, five, with Ana Pávlova. She's the one who. . . uh!. . . *or rather* the one who works for us, but she's like family'.

- (35) Trimegisto estaba azorado. No sabía qué hacer ni decir.

– Mira, Alonso: yo. . . yo. . . no quise. . . *mejor dicho*. . . censurarte de ninguna manera. Lo que pasa es que. . .

– No pasa nada, primo querido. (CORPES: Iriarte, Alfredo (2001): *Espárragos para dos leones*. Barcelona: Ediciones del Bronce)

'Trimegisto was stunned. He didn't know what to do or say.

Look, Alonso: I. . . I. . . did not want. . . *rather*. . . to censor you in any way. What happens is that. . .

It's okay, dear cousin'.

In other cases, it signals a change in planning that serves to better guide the topic:

- (36) – Nunca dije que le comprara un ataúd barato – cortó él, casi perdiendo la paciencia –. *Mejor dicho*, Ariel, ¿cuánto en total? (CORPES: González, Tomás (2006), *Los caballitos del diablo*, Barcelona, Belacqua)

'I never said I was buying you a cheap coffin, he cut in, almost losing patience. *Rather*, Ariel, how much is it in total?'

8 Conclusions

In this chapter we have presented the main approaches in synchronic research on discursive marking in Spanish. On the one hand, the instructional semantic approach accounts for linguistically encoded procedural meaning (Portolés 1998a, 1998b, 2004b, 2010; Martín Zorraquino/Portolés 1999). Then, the Val.Es.Co. model considers the structure of colloquial conversation and the polyfunctionality of particles (Briz 1998; Briz/Pons Bordería 2010). The macrosyntactic approach (Fuentes 2013; 2017) addresses

the pragmatic dimension of syntax and the intrinsic dynamism in synchrony. Finally, the experimental approach (Loureda Lamas et al. 2021a; 2021b) aims at empirically verifying the hypotheses raised from theoretical research. Additionally, the intense research carried out in the lexicographical field has resulted in three large dictionaries of reference, namely Santos Río (2003), Briz/Pons Bordería/Portolés (2008), Fuentes (2009). All these models nourish each other for an integrated view of discourse and marking.

In the last section a first approximation is proposed of the Colombian marker *mejor dicho*. We believe a functional expansion like the one described is interesting for different reasons. First, it confirms the importance of the pragmatic strategy of intensification – a “linguistic frequency or constant” of colloquial Spanish (Briz 2017, 39, own translation) – not only to explain the spontaneous speech of a given synchrony, but also to account for processes of grammaticalization by subjectivization that have developed in conversational interaction in Spanish and to understand the emergence of polysemy or new functional values. Secondly, the development of modal values from reformulative connectives would come to support the hypothesis of Pons Bordería (1998; 2014) regarding the reformulator *o sea* and would provide further evidence that it may be a regular evolutionary pattern. Future research should delve deeper to understand how *o sea* is positioned with respect to *mejor dicho*. Finally, in light of the data consulted, it seems we are facing a phenomenon in Colombian Spanish that has developed in spontaneous orality in the 20th century, the first occurrences of the intensification operator in CREA dating from the end of the century. That said, we cannot rule out a prior, undocumented process that may have begun much earlier in some form of orality that has not been preserved. The same applies to other varieties that have not been studied in detail yet.

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