Position and polyfunctionality of discourse markers: The case of Spanish markers derived from motion verbs

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Abstract

This paper presents a quantitative and qualitative study of the relationship between discourse positions and pragmatic functions of the Spanish discourse markers derived from motion verbs, namely *anda*, *vamos*, *vaya* and *venga*. These discourse markers are highly polyfunctional and concurrently have a high degree of positional freedom. The results show, first, that the position of a discourse marker and the discourse unit in which the marker is inserted restrict or activate its pragmatic functions. More particularly, discourse markers with an expressive, conative or discourse structuring function present a more increased pragmatic scope than those with a textual function operating at a more profound level of the discourse. Second, the degree of distributional freedom is related to the potential semantic-pragmatic autonomy of the discourse markers, rather than to the degree of functional diversity. In other words, discourse markers that do not necessarily depend on other discourse units (within the same turn) to convey their communicative intentions show a higher degree of positional freedom.
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1. Introduction

Research on discourse markers (DMs) has primarily focused on their meaning (in synchronic studies) or on the development of linguistic items involving full lexical forms and their discourse marker's uses (from a diachronic perspective).[1] It is only very recently that there has been a growing interest in the formal behavior of DMs. Studies on the prosody of DMs (Dehé and Wichmann, 2010; Hidalgo Navarro, 2010; Cabedo Nebot, 2013), their possible combinations (Pons Bordería, 2008; Cuenca and Marín, 2009; Dostie, 2013; Fraser, 2013) or positions (Cuenca and Torres Vilatarsana, 2008; Aijmer, 2013; Beeching and Detges, 2014; Estellés Arguedas and Pons Bordería, 2014) often examine these formal aspects in relation to their functional behavior.

Previous studies on specific DMs postulate the existence of an association between discourse positions and pragmatic functions (Montañez Mesas, 2007; Briz and Pons Bordería, 2010; Ghezzi and Molienlli, 2014). However, considerable

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[1] The discussion about the definition and the terminology of these linguistic phenomena lies beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, the term *discourse marker* will be used as a working term. In the present paper the term is used in a broad sense including interpersonal, modal and discourse-structuring functions (Martín Zorraquino and Portolés, 1999; Loureda Llamas and Acín Villa, 2010) as opposed to more narrow definitions that consider discourse markers as a type of pragmatic marker establishing coherence in the discourse (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1990; Norrick, 2009). For further reading about this topic, see, among others, Schiffrin (1987), Fraser (1999), Traugott and Dasher (2002), Traugott (2007), Brinton (2010), Aijmer (2013) and Cuenca (2013).

differences haven been identified in the degree of modification of the pragmatic value triggered by a change of position, in that some DMs (such as *oye, eh?*, etc.) seem to be more sensitive to a change of discourse position than others (such as *pero, sin embargo*, etc.) (Briz and Pons Bordería, 2010). Moreover, the established differences should not be considered categorical in the sense that there is no one-to-one relationship between discourse positions and pragmatic functions (Ghezzi and Molienlli, 2014), but it is preferable to describe the relation between both parameters in terms of tendencies.

The studies of the association between functions and positions of discourse markers realized by Montañez Mesas (2007), Briz and Pons Bordería (2010) and Estellés Arguedas and Pons Bordería (2014) prove that the pragmatic functions of the discourse markers are not only associated with the position within the turn (Aijmer, 2013; Ghezzi and Molienlli, 2014) or the Tune Unit (Romero-Trillo, 2015), but also with the level at which the discourse marker operates. Therefore, in this study a model of discourse segmentation will be applied that distinguishes various discourse levels and thus enables an analysis at both the micro- and macro-level of discourse (section 3.2).

This paper aims to contribute to the discussion on the relationship between discourse positions and pragmatic functions. Two research questions are proposed: (1) to what extent does the position of a DM restrict or activate its communicative functions (Briz and Pons Bordería, 2010, 328)? With respect to this research question two main tendencies have been proposed. First, the functions are related to the level at which the DMs operate rather than to their position, in that DMs with modal values should be studied at the level of the intervention, while markers with a connective value operate at a more internal discourse level (namely the Act cf. *infra*) (Briz and Pons Bordería, 2010). Second, an asymmetry has been postulated between the left and right periphery of discourse units with the former being related to more subjective values and the latter being inclined to contain more intersubjective values (Beeching and Detges, 2014).[2] (2) Does greater functional diversity entails greater formal diversification (Briz and Pons Bordería, 2010, 336)? In other words, the relation between the degree of polysemy of a form and the degree of positional freedom is examined. Both research questions and the related tendencies are explored by analyzing four Spanish discourse markers derived from the verbs of motion *andar (to walk), ir (to go)* and *venir (to come)*, namely *anda, vamos, vaya* and *venga*.[3] These four markers pertain to a microsystem since they are related on the basis of their lexical sources: they derive from the same semantic verb class (verbs of motion) and from verb forms in irrealis moods (the imperative or subjunctive). They are suitable to verify the hypotheses proposed in the present study since they are (a) very frequent in spoken European Spanish which enables quantitative and statistical verifications of the proposed hypotheses and (b) they are described in the literature as presenting various pragmatic functions according to their discourse context (Santos Río, 2003; Romero Aguilera, 2006; Castillo Lluch, 2008; Fuentes Rodríguez, 2009).[4] All the functions of one marker are diachronically related which is reflected in its synchronic values (e.g. the ambiguity of a function is a reflection of the diachronic transition from one function to another). The relationship between these values can be accounted for by a polysemous approach, since it is very hard to distinguish one basic meaning (*Gesamtbedeuting*) for each marker (Mosegaard Hansen, 1998, 2008; Hummel, 2012).

The outline of this paper is as follows. In the next section, the corpus and methodology are described. After that, the results of the corpus study are processed quantitatively and interpreted qualitatively in order to examine the relationship between the functions and the positions of the DMs. The paper concludes with the most important results of the research and suggests some challenges for future research.

2. Corpus and methodology

2.1. The corpus

The corpus under analysis consists of a sample of 2587 examples of the four motion DMs *anda, vamos, vaya* and *venga*. The cases represent various registers of spoken Peninsular Spanish and were retrieved from various corpora (*CREA Subcorpus Oral del Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* (Real Academia Española), *Corpus de conversación coloquial* (Briz and Grupo Val.Es.Co, 2002), *MC-NLCH Macrocorpus de la norma lingüística culta de las*

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[2] Subjectification is the process whereby meanings increasingly encode the speaker's subjective stance on the linguistic or extralinguistic situation, whilst intersubjectification refers to a process whereby meanings increasingly encode the awareness of the presence of the interlocutor and the social relations (Traugott, 2011). As a consequence, the conative function has to be considered an intersubjective value, and the expressive function is subjective and, in accordance with Degand (2014, 161–162), the metadiscursive uses of discourse structuring are subjective while the metadiscursive uses of reformulation are intersubjective since the former are speaker-oriented and the latter hearer-oriented.

[3] *Anda* is derived from the second person singular of the imperative form of *andar*. *Vamos* and *vaya* correspond, respectively, to the subjunctive form of the first person plural and the third person singular of the verb *ir*. *Venga* is derived from the verb *venir* in third person singular of the subjunctive mood.

[4] For an elaborate discussion of the role of the lexical sources (the verb forms) of these DMs in the development of their pragmatic functions (and hence polysemy), we refer to Tanghe (2013, 2015a).