

MACROSYNTAX OF PERSUASIVE DISCOURSE: CONSTRUCTIONS AND OPERATORS (MACPER)

INTRODUCTION

The research project “Macrosyntax of persuasive discourse: constructions and operators (MACPER)” (P18-FR-2619), a PAIDI Frontera project funded by the Autonomous Government of Andalusia, was carried out from 01/01/2020- 31/01/2023. It was co-led by Dr Fuentes Rodríguez (University of Seville) and Dr Brenes Peña (University of Cordoba), and included the participation of researchers from the University of Seville (Dr González Sanz, Dr Padilla Herrada, Dr Moreno Benítez, Mr José García Pérez and Mrs Isamary Aldama Pando), the University of Cordoba (Dr Pérez Béjar, Dr Perea Siller) and the University of Lorraine, France (Dr Meléndez Quero).

The **main objective** of this project was to describe the macrosyntax of argumentation, identifying and analysing the different elements drawn on by the speaker in order to be able to express persuasion. In this regard, it supposes progress in relation to some of the main topics of current pragmalinguistic research, as well as a logical continuation of the research path of the participants in the project.

To this end, we have used pragmatic linguistics, a **methodology** that we have been developing since 2000, with the publication of *Pragmatic Linguistics and Discourse Analysis*, (Fuentes Rodríguez, Arco Libros, 2000. 3rd edition 2017). In this approach we study how communications in a specific context (statements and texts) transmit the intention of the speaker and how they wish the hearer to receive it. Persuasion, therefore, and its linguistic specification in the argumentation text, have their natural space in this method.

OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED

1. We have determined the **macrosyntactic structure of persuasive discourse**. We take into account the elements that function at this level, above all operators as a specific category (*at least, until, just...*), syntactic constructions in the process of fixation (*if you say so, I'm telling you, all things considered...*), peripheral complements (setting complements, mitigators and intensifiers...), and free structures (adjectives, syntagma, sentences). Some of these terms, in their function as modifiers within the sentence, can change the orientation or degree of force of an argument (*réalisants* and *dérealisants* modifiers). They have all been inventoried, described in terms of their macrosyntactic behaviour (distribution, combinatorics, use of pauses, intonation, predetermined combinations...) and argumentation function.

2. Operators:

2.1. We have limited the **paradigms of argumentation operators** (cfr. Fuentes Rodríguez ed. 2022). We have organised their functions, originating structures and degree of fixation, and classified them according to the argumentation operation they express.

2.2. Those that mark **argumentation force** have been classified and organised on a **scale**:

- a. Force intensifiers
- b. Force mitigators

- c. Position on scale: argumentation framework
- d. Scale limit
- e. Sufficiency/insufficiency
- f. Scale saturation

2.3. We have taken into consideration **their distribution and intonational character**, and the **discursive functions** they carry out. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that intonation and prosody are not just relevant in oral, but also in written terms. Orthographic signs (exclamations, interrogations, commas...) are necessary for understanding the real meaning of text, and specific discursive units cannot be understood unless associated with a specific melody. In fact, despite numerous spelling mistakes and lack of punctuation, many texts originating from digital sources (such as social media) are perfectly comprehensible and unambiguous thanks to the fact that speakers are able to associate grammatical structure with a type of specific oral intonation.

2.4. In this regard we have considered their **multidimensional nature**, given that the starting argumentation value is combined with other enunciative, modal and informative aspects. In turn, other operators in these planes also act as argumentation operators in some contexts.

3. Constructions

3.1.A fundamental point, inseparable from the previous one, is the consideration of **constructions as descriptive tools**, above all in the evolutive field, in the **genesis of new units**. We have explained cases of constructions that stop acting as simple complements of the statement and take on operator-like functions, although it cannot yet be said that they possess all of the characteristics associated with these elements. For example, structures such as *I'm telling you* and *let me see* can be responses to a comment, reinforcements, intensifiers or to suspend the statement, and are related to others such as *you'll see*, *told you*, *do you see?*, *see?* The series is rather large: *tell me about it*, *I tell you*, *as I say*, *you know what?* *you know*, *you should know*, *you're telling me*, *if you want*, *if you don't mind*, *if you only knew*, *what's there to see anyway*, *but also if...*, *if possible...*

The study of these structures sheds light on the evolution of discourse operators, the evolutive dynamics of elements with procedural content, which allows us to achieve another of the project's objectives: Establishing the continuum between peripheral elements and discourse operators.

3.2. In line with that set out, we are creating a **repertoire on these constructions** and their instructions for use (procedural content), available online, to allow for modification and the incorporation of new structures, and to make it accessible to researchers and users.

4. The study of the procedural functions and contents included in argumentation and their interaction with other planes has allowed us to draw theoretical conclusions on how the **macrosyntax of Spanish works**.

5. Our objective in the project was to analyse the employment of these resources from the **gender perspective**. In present day society, the historical, political and social changes that took place over the last century has favoured the incorporation of women into different working environments that, up to this moment, had been traditionally occupied by men, to the extent that the expected linguistic behaviour was, precisely, that which was prototypically masculine. We refer, for example, to the worlds of business, politics, the media and institutions. In all of

them there has been a predominance of the employment of strategies of imposition and strict assertion on the part of executives or individuals in positions of leadership, strategies classified as being typically male, compared to courtesy, indirectness and empathy, more associated with female discourse (Tannen 1990). Our analysis of the macrosyntax of persuasive discourse from the gender perspective has permitted us to verify whether women resort to argumentation strategies of imposition, adopting a communicative style similar to that traditionally used by men in these situations; or whether, in contrast, they opt for argumentation strategies where features considered feminine (the use of attenuating operators, fundamentally) are used strategically creating a collaborative face, and showing empathy with the recipient so that, in the last instance, they achieve their communicative goals.

6. The objective as regards **application and transfer** has also been specified in the sphere of teaching non-natives and translation. To this end we have collaborated with the PRACOMUL project, designing video tutorials on the use of connectors and discourse operators, which have been presented in international courses and seminars, and are active on the platform of the Erasmus+ project.

RESULTS

The scientific production of this project has been extremely broad and specified in journals of impact and in prestigious publishers. The following collective collaborations can be consulted:

- Fuentes Rodríguez, C.; Brenes Peña, E. y Pérez Béjar, V. (coord. y ed.) (2021): *Sintaxis discursiva: construcciones y operadores discursivos en español*. Bern: Peter Lang
- Fuentes Rodríguez, C.; Padilla Herrada, M. S. y Pérez Béjar, V. (coords.) (2022): *El dinamismo del sistema lingüístico: Operadores y construcciones del español*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla.
- Fuentes Rodríguez, C. y Brenes Peña, E. (coords., 2023): *La enseñanza-aprendizaje de conectores y operadores discursivos en ELE*. Madrid: Arco Libros.
- Alcaide Lara, E. Pérez Béjar, V. y M. S. Padilla Herrada (eds.) (e. p.): *Aplicaciones de la(s) teoría(s) de la argumentación*. Sevilla: Editorial Universidad de Sevilla.
- Fuentes Rodríguez, C. (ed.2022), *Operadores argumentativos*. Madrid: Arco Libros.
- Fuentes Rodríguez, C. (coord.), (2021) *Argumentación y discursos*. Madrid: Arco Libros
- Brenes Peña, E, C. Fuentes Rodríguez y C. Prestigiacomo (eds., 2022): *Estrategias comunicativas, proyección de imagen y género*. Editorial de la Universidad de Palermo.
- Fuentes Rodríguez, C. y E. Brenes Peña (eds., 2023, e.p.), *El discurso de la mujer en el ámbito profesional y social*. Sevilla: Editorial Universidad de Sevilla.

Moreover, we have held a number of seminars and an international congress:

- Congreso Internacional "Construcciones y Operadores Discursivos" (CICOD). Universidad de Sevilla, 2020.
- Jornadas internacionales "Sintaxis del discurso". Sevilla, 2021.
- Organización de sección monográfica ("Macrosintaxis del español actual") en el XIV Congreso Internacional de Lingüística General. Universidad de Sevilla, 2021.
- V Seminario de macrosintaxis: construcciones en proceso de fijación. Sevilla, 2020.
- Seminario formativo "Nuevos retos de la Lingüística: macrosintaxis del español actual" 12-16 abril de 2021. (Programa de doctorado interuniversitario en Lenguas y Culturas, Universidad de Córdoba)

- Workshop “El docente de ELE en el siglo XXI: retos formativos y experiencias didácticas”. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Universidad de Córdoba. 19 de marzo de 2021
- Jornadas internacionales “Estrategias comunicativas, proyección de imagen y género”, Palermo, 20-21 de abril de 2022.
- Congreso Internacional de Macrosintaxis y Pragmática del discurso persuasivo, Sevilla, 19-21 de octubre de 2022.
- Seminario: Teoría y práctica de la macrosintaxis, Sevilla (online), 9-11 de noviembre de 2022.
- Seminario formativo “Pragmalingüística de la argumentación en español”. 16-20 de mayo de 2022. (Programa de doctorado interuniversitario en Lenguas y Culturas, Universidad de Córdoba).
- Escuela de verano, competencia pragmática y e-learning. 27 junio – 1 julio 2022 (Proyecto PRACOMUL (Pragmatic Competence from A Multilingual Perspective) Universidad de Ljubljana).

IMPACT

This project has been extremely novel in terms of its scope of study and we foresee a potentially high scientific-technical and social impact. From the scientific perspective, it has allowed us to identify the macrosyntax specific to persuasive texts, and to discover operators, markers and constructions that thrive in modern Spanish. It is a study on the creative dynamism in this sphere: we have verified what syntactic structures are more productive and used in the argumentation plane. We verified their employment in digital discourse, in the current technological conversation and in texts of a markedly argumentative nature, such as political discourse and advertising.

Significant progress has thus been made in the study of discourse, in the definition and theoretical definition of discourse markers and in the design of a series of recommendations on the most effective strategies and resources for persuading the recipient. From the social perspective, as well as the didactic applications, we believe that the importance of the results we have obtained transcends the academic sphere, being of great interest to professionals from the world of communication (journalists, politicians, disseminators). This has a direct social and economic impact, as it permits communicators, professional or otherwise, improve in their speaking activity and in the knowledge and practice of argumentation. This implies an increase in knowledge.

To summarise, we consider that this project serves as a reference and starting premise for discourse studies. Why is it innovative? Because of its linguistic-pragmatic methodology and its description of a field of study, macrosyntax, which implies a methodological innovation, given it exceeds traditional studies. We apply it to the description of elements employed in all mediums: oral, written, digital, the media and professional. In turn, persuasion implies the putting into practice of, situational and ideological determinations, to name a few, which has allowed us to apply it to the study of political language, of populism, of the institutional or media discourse in times of pandemic and to describe the communication strategies that professionals from the world of journalism, TV, theatre and film configure to define their identity.

Furthermore, the **international projection** of this project is evident. We can describe this in various ways. Apart from the international congresses in which we have participated, we have established collaboration with researchers from other Universities including Vrije



Brussels, Ljubljana, Palermo, Naples, Porto, U.do Minho, Bolonia, Graz, Doshisha University, Kyoto, Taiwan and a number of universities in Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Argentina and California, not to mention other national institutions.

This has enabled us to set up the PERDICOM international convention (“Persuasive Discourse in Public Communication”), which boasts the participation of the universities of Palermo, Porto, do Minho, Cordoba and Seville. Included in the Erasmus+ Pracomul project are the universities of Seville, Vrije Brussels, Ljubljana and Palermo.