Discourse markers and informal Spanish on social network sites

Marcadores discursivos y español coloquial en las redes sociales

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Abstract:

This paper presents the results of a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the incidence and the functions of Spanish discourse markers in Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The aims of this study are to identify the main uses of these particles on social network sites and outline the possible connection between the use of these markers and the informal oral register of Spanish in tweets and comments on these platforms. The analysis of a corpus of messages confirms that the most frequently used are the counter-argumentative connectors like *pero* (but), the additives *además (what's more), encina* (moreover) and *incluso* (even*), the commentator *pues* (well / so), and the interactional *claro* (of course*), *hombre* (man), *bueno* (well), *vamos* (come on) and *¿eh?* (eh?) Such markers are mainly employed in order to provide valid arguments and negotiate interaction within spaces where conflict predominates.

Keywords:

Social network sites; discourse markers; informal register; argumentation; interaction.

Resumen:

En este artículo se presentan los resultados de un análisis cuantitativo y cualitativo de la presencia y funciones de los marcadores discursivos del español en Facebook, Twitter y YouTube. Los objetivos de esta investigación son identificar los principales usos de estas partículas en las redes sociales y determinar en qué medida relacionan el discurso en estas plataformas con la modalidad oral coloquial de la lengua. El análisis de un corpus de tuits y comentarios confirma que los más utilizados por los usuarios son los conectores contraargumentativo pero *y aditivos* además, encima *e* incluso, *el comentador* pues *y los conversacionales* claro, hombre, bueno *y* vamos *con función interactiva reactiva. Estos marcadores suelen emplearse para argumentar la propia opinión y negociar la interacción en espacios en los que predomina la polémica.*

Palabras clave:

Redes sociales virtuales; marcadores discursivos; registro coloquial; argumentación; interacción.

1. Introduction

Interest in digital discourse in Spanish has increased in recent years as shown by studies carried out from various linguistic, sociolinguistic, discursive and pragmatic viewpoints (Mancera Rueda & Pano Alamán, 2013; Estrada Arráez & de Benito Moreno, 2016; Giammatteo et al., 2017; Robles Ávila & Moreno Ortiz, 2019). The majority of recent studies focus on interactions on virtual social networks, assuming that the technological and socio-situational context of the exchange and the conditions of production and reception of the messages largely determine the linguistic register used by the participants when they interact on these platforms. From this viewpoint, it can be affirmed that the majority of messages published daily on Facebook or Twitter are to be found on the pole of communicative immediacy (Koch y Oesterreicher 2007 [1990]), and thus said messages present numerous manifestations of linguistic elements which are prototypical of the informal oral register in Spanish (Briz Gómez, 2014), such as brevity (Cantamutto & Vela Delfa, 2020) or the abundance of neologisms and dialectic expressions (Mancera Rueda & Pano Alamán, 2013).

Although several of the studies referred to mention the presence of discourse markers, their analysis has been limited to a small number of studies of Spanish and Argentine political discourse on Twitter (Loredo & Picone, 2012; Pano Alamán & Mancera Rueda, 2014; Padilla Herrada, 2016). The objective of this article is to contribute to filling this void by means of a quantitative-qualitive, linguistic-pragmatic analysis of the discourse markers utilized most frequently on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The study also seeks to reflect on the possible relationship between the use of certain markers and the informal register which is, to a certain degree, imposed in discourse on social networks, a discourse generally characterised by controversy in the expression of opinions.

2. Theorical framework: discourse markers and digital discourse in Spanish

In one of the first studies of the presence of markers in digital discourse in Spanish, Gómez Torrego (2001) points out that in the electronic mail analysed, "anaphoric connectors" such as such as *en efecto (really), claro que sí (of course (it is)), bueno, bien (well), de acuerdo (alright) and por fin (finally) are frequent, as they allow the speakers to handle interaction and negotiation in that medium.* López Quero (2007)*, in his analysis of the functions of pues, pero* and *bueno* in chat channels, underlines the polyfunctional character of markers. For example, the first of these usually initiates the reply to a question taking on a role as an intensifier though it may also have a role of continuity when expressing agreement or disagreement with the speaker; the counter-argumentative connector *pero* is normally preceded by *sí,*(yes) when expressing sincerity, or followed by *si* (if) (*pero si*) with a modal value of surprise or opposition; as for *bueno*, this has a meta-discursive role of conclusion, which also allows for attenuation of any possible disagreement with the interlocutor. The same author, in another study focused on the use of *venga* (come on) in fora of debate and chats, affirms that this conversational marker figures in digital discourse to mark a volitional deontic register as well as to express meta-discourse and the focus of the alterity (López Quero, 2010: 192).

In a study dedicated to the utilisation of markers in specialised fora of debate, Landone (2009) indicates that, in some cases, they are information structurers which give coherence and cohesion to the discourse, while in others they serve as conversational markers which facilitate the development of dialogic interaction. These values allow the author to highlight

the fact that discourse in these fora is situated between the oral and written conceptional varieties of the language. In fact, in a successive analysis dealing with courtesy and the use of markers in a debate forum dedicated to the Spanish language, we can see that in these texts there is a simultaneous use of prototypical markers of both the informal oral variety, dialogic, and of the written variety, monologic. Nonetheless, markers of the first category, such as, for example, *hombre, bueno* or *mira* (look), present greater frequency and variety, as well as greater versatility, in that they allow for modulation of the illocutionary force in assertive acts, structure the conversation and negotiate disagreement (Landone, 2012: 1816).

A similar reflection is made by Sal Paz (2007), with the observation that, in comments in the digital press, users often turn to linking words like *entonces* (then / so) or *pero* with the intention of replying to previous comments and expressing agreement or disagreement with their interlocutor. In this context, they not only have functions of giving structure and cohesion to the discourse, but they also acquire modal values. Furthermore, as these are essentially argumentative texts, we can observe a greater frequency of connectors expressing an oppositional (*pero*), consecutive (*entonces*), additive (*incluso*) and explicative (*o sea* (that is), *es decir* (that is to say)) value (Pano Alamán, 2015). This type of particle combines with markers such as *bueno* and *hombre*, with a reactive interactive function, frequently present in replies to other comments in the same space.

Regarding their use on social networks, analysis has generally been focused on Twitter. Loredo & Picone (2012), for example, investigate, in a corpus of tweets, the values of supposition, concession and especially irony of the marker *ponele (let's put it)*, frequent in Argentinian Spanish. Pano Alamán & Mancera Rueda (2014) analyse the presence and functions of the interactive markers *¿en serio?* (really?), *por supuesto* (naturally), *bien, claro, ¿no?* (isn't it?), *hombre* or *mira* in a corpus of tweets in which citizens react in a generally critical way to the tweets of Spanish parliamentarians. These elements appear in different positions in the messages to appeal to the political interlocutor and to express agreement or disagreement with what has been said. In a similar study of markers in political and journalistic discourse in a microblog, Padilla Herrada (2016) underlines the relation between the interactive markers employed by politicians, journalists and citizens and frequent linguistic devices in prototypical informal conversation. Markers such as *¿verdad?* (right?), *¿eh?* and *¿no?* manifest the degree of cooperation or conflict between the interlocutors, with varying degrees of attenuation or intensification. Finally, analysis of the pragmatic-discursive marker *ahora* (now) with *verbum dicendi* in a general corpus of tweets, carried out by López Quero (2019), shows that this temporal deixis may be included, together with *ahora bien*, amongst the counter-argumentative markers used in Twitter.

As argued above, the networks tend to display an interactive dynamic characterised by polemic and the expression of opinions on a given subject. The interaction is largely facilitated by technical mechanisms which encourage the users to react to certain content and which are found in Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, the spaces which are the focus of this study, with similar forms and functions. Facebook, for example, is based on the connection of profiles, between persons or groups, where "posts" appear daily that the user or users can share with their contacts. There may be images, videos, links, events, etc. which are reflected on the timeline of the user's *biography* or *wall* and which others may comment on by clicking *Like*, among other options, or through text, generally short, addressed to that same user. Such texts may be subject to a response, which permits interaction from many to one, or from many to many. Twitter is a *microblogging* platform which allows the user to publish messages of no more than 280 characters on their own profile or personal or institutional

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account. Twitter's interface, which in recent years has evolved to become somewhat similar to that of Facebook, presents a central chronological column, where the user posts his/her tweets, occasionally creating a "thread "which brings together sequentially various messages on a common theme, and where the user can read the tweets posted by those profiles which he/she chooses to follow. Moreover, thanks to several tags visible below each message, the user can "respond" to another tweet thereby opening an exchange with other users, share (retweet) other users' messages with his/her own *followers* and indicate if he/she *liked* a message.

Finally, YouTube presents some unique characteristics, as it is a video sharing network accessible from any device without the need to follow certain profiles or to enter into contact with other users, in many cases, on request. Videos can be shared, valued positively or negatively by use of a thumb image which may be up or down, and commented on –after accessing a YouTube account– in a space where registered users' messages may accumulate in just a few minutes. These comments, which the system normally orders chronologically, starting with the most recent, may receive responses, meaning this platform may also permit a sort of conversation. Such dynamics allow us to affirm that the networks are spaces where the expression of opinions, discussion and persuasion are predominant, and this explains the interest in extending analysis of discourse markers to diverse platforms, from a perspective which takes into account their use as a function of the degree of colloquiality or informality in the messages.

2.1. Markers and conceptional variation of written language and spoken language

The studies mentioned above were focused on the discursive and pragmatic functions of some markers in specific digital settings. However, this study is an attempt to offer a systematic study of the functions of those markers present in different social networks, bearing in mind the written/spoken conceptional variation of language. To this end, the standpoint of López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga (2010) is taken into consideration, specifically on the use of markers in relation to written/spoken language variation. These authors observe the existence of a specialization among discourse markers regarding their appearance in oral or written discourse and point to the fact that numerous authors have taken up this idea (2010: 329). Having reviewed the studies of discourse markers in Spanish (Fuentes Rodríguez, 1987, 1993; Pons Bordería, 1998; Portolés Lázaro, 1998, 2010; Montolío Durán, 2001; Loureda Lamas & Acín Villa, 2010; Aschenberg & Loureda Lamas, 2011, among others), in which the relation between these particles and said variation is discussed, López Serena and Borreguero Zuloaga suggest that the analysis of their functions should consider written/spoken opposition as medial opposition –phonic as opposed to graphic execution– and as a gradual differentiation between the different ways in which discourse can be conceived and elaborated, that is, in relation to "the underlying *conception* of an enunciation and the *mode* of its verbalization" (López Serena y Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 338, authors' italics). Thus, following Koch & Oesterreicher (1990 [2007]: 30), it is preferable to establish a differentiation not between written language and spoken language, but regarding communicative immediacy and distance.

Based on this difference, they set out, in second place, the interactional, meta-discursive and cognitive macro-functions[1]. They would include in the first category the prototypical markers of communicative immediacy, which indicate a cooperative or conflictive reaction to what has been said by the interlocutor. They indicate the interlocutors' conversational movements, and therefore, in their analysis, it is necessary to consider who uses the marker, the speaker or the listener. Within this macro-function the discursive strategies which manifest the interlocutor's reaction are found, whether they be collaborative and corroborate what was said by the speaker, or reactive, as a manifestation of disagreement or as a request for clarification (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 354-357). On the other hand, the meta-discursive function is related to the discourse's process of linguistic expression, wherein it is possible to identify the cohesive mechanisms which provide it with order and structure in order to facilitate its processing, as well as those which allow for the linguistic formulation of the textual content, revealing the relationship between the speaker and his/her own discourse in the phase of planning and development. This macro-function may be seen both in terms of communicative immediacy and distance in discourse whether conceptionally spoken or written, although some subfunctions such as the structuring of information, are commonly found "in written texts through a larger number of tagging elements" (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 350). The final macro-function, the cognitive, is related to the connectors, markers that are normally, although not exclusively, used in conceptionally written discourses (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 373). The functions included within this macro-function, are, amongst others, that of indicating logical-argumentative relationships established between the propositional contents of the phrasal and inter-phrasal elements of the text –the logical-argumentative function–; between content which transmits the discourse and the knowledge shared or presupposed by the participants in the communication, and which allow for inferences – the inferential function–; or between the textual content and the speaker's attitude – the modal function – (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 351-352).

3. Methodology & corpus

The principal objective of this study is to extend the analysis of markers on social media with consideration of their presence and functions not only on Twitter but also on Facebook and YouTube. In order to identify the most frequent examples in the corpus elaborated for this investigation, the classification proposed by Martín Zorraquino & Portolés Lázaro (1999) has been employed and some of the postulations compiled in the *Diccionario de partículas discursivas del español (Dictionary of discursive particles in Spanish)* (Briz Gómez *et al.*, 2008) as well as in studies dedicated to connectors (Domínguez García, 2007) and interactive markers (Cortés Rodríguez & Camacho Adarve, 2005). Furthermore, with the objective of determining their functions as regards their position in the continuum between communicative immediacy and distance, the analysis of macro-functions proposed by López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga (2010) has been applied.

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1   The macro-functions indicated can be broken down into several functions and subfunctions. However, we cannot set limits between the functions grouped in these three macrofunctions, given that, in a particular context, a marker may perform several functions corresponding to different macro-functions (syntagmatic poly-functionality), while another may participate in the performance of different functions depending on the context in which it appears (paradigmatic polyfunctionality) (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 353).

The corpus is composed of 3000 messages (66915 words) posted on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube[2], information networks which see a high degree of interaction between their users expressing opinions and arguments related to matters of current interest (Mancera Rueda & Pano Alamán, 2013).

The corpus is composed of messages related to the management of the recent COVID-19 crisis in Spain, extracted automatically using the ExportComments tool. It contains three sub corpus each composed of: 1000 responses to two tweets posted on March 10th and April 24th on the profile @MinisterioSanidad; 1000 comments on two posts dated May 19th and June 1st on the Ministry's official Facebook page; and 1000 comments on two videos posted on the YouTube channels of *El Mundo* (01-03-2020) and *El País* (14-03-2020), about two press conferences given by the Spanish government to detail the initial handling of the pandemic[3]. Therefore, it includes the users' responses and comments on these three networks to similar content originating from official sources. Details of the authors have been omitted from the study for reasons of privacy and the messages have been reproduced as they were posted, without leaving out examples of the written subcode inherent to electronic texts.

4. Results

The functions *Wordlist* and *Ngram* of the Sketch Engine program have allowed for the compilation of a list of frequencies for the markers present in the corpus. Table 1 shows those which have a minimum of ten occurrences in the general corpus, organised by social network.

Table 1. Most frequent markers (Total ≥10)

DM	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	TOTAL
Connectors				
pero	88	67	139	294
encima	6	5	8	19
además	3	10	4	17
incluso	3	10	2	15
sobre todo	3	1	6	10
Information Structurer				
pues	25	11	32	68

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2   According to the report: *Digital 2020*, they are the most frequently used platforms in Spain, together with Instagram. This report is available at: https://wearesocial.com/es/blog/2020/02/digital-2020-en-espana

3   *Tweets available at*: https://twitter.com/SaludPublicaEs/status/1234056474743185408; https://twitter.com/SaludPublicaEs/status/1253624622215581696; posts on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/MinSanidad/posts/2535106579922607?comment_id=2535111529922112; https://www.facebook.com/MinSanidad/posts/2564621386971126?comment_id=2564627350303863; videos on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LSRyxNQe6U; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eakx-GWKoDQ

Discourse Operators				
por ejemplo	1	4	6	11
Conversational Markers				
claro	11	2	17	30
hombre	7	-	6	13
bueno	3	1	8	12
vamos	3	2	6	11
¿eh?	1	3	7	11

Source: created by the author

As we can observe, the most frequent markers on the three social networks are the connectors, on one hand, and the conversational markers, on the other, although, the connector *pero*, the structurer *pues* and the epistemic mode marker *claro* are clearly the most frequent. Also utilised are the additive connectors *encima, además, incluso* and *sobre todo*, while the conversational *hombre, bueno, vamos* and *¿eh?*, though they do appear in the three sub corpus, are particularly used in comments on Facebook and YouTube. The specifier *por ejemplo.* figures more sporadically. Reformulators such as *en fin* (recapitulative), *o sea* (explicative) or *la verdad* (argumentative reinforcement), which are common in fora and comments in the press (Landone, 2012; Pano Alamán, 2015) have little more than an anecdotic presence in these social networks, not even reaching ten occurrences.

As regards frequency (# of occurrences) of use by type and network (Fig. 1), we can state that the usage of connectors and conversational markers is greater than that of the structurers, followed at a certain distance by the discourse operators. All four types are employed in comments on YouTube, while connectors are utilised more frequently on Twitter than other types. In the case of Facebook, users also frequently employ connectors, with a lesser presence of conversational markers and of the structurer *pues*.

Fig. 1. Frequency of markers by typology and social network
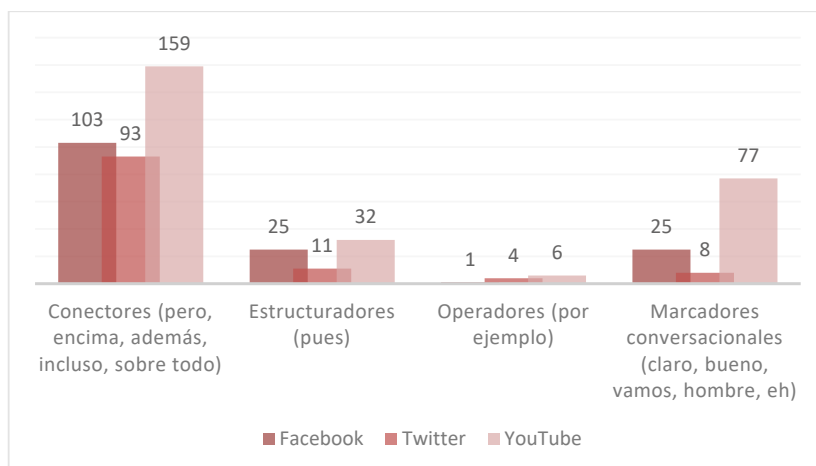
Source: created by the author

4.1. Analysis & discussion

4.1.1. Pero (but)

We can see from the data obtained that *pero* is the most frequent marker on the three networks. The usage of this common connector includes several nuances (Domínguez García, 2007: 98). It acts on these platforms as an argumentative connector when the speaker employs it to cancel out the conclusions of the previous utterance, by means of the enouncement it introduces:

(1) Face coverings yes, face coverings no, gloves yes, gloves no, air-born drops, now surfaces aren't a problem, honestly, I don't have this gentleman's brain, *but* (*pero)* nor would I want to cos it's a case of Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee. Could they just tell us a tiny bit of the truth????? If not for themselves, then for the healthcare workers [...] (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

(2) Mr Prime Minister, I can understand that it's difficult to handle a pandemic, *but really* (*pero en serio)* is there no other way? Children of 6 to 12, where are they supposed to be if parents like me have to go to work so that other parents can go to work? (Twitter, 28-04-2020).

(3) That's right. Spain should have acted energetically from the first case, back on January 31, nobody would have understood such measures, *but* (*pero)* a good epidemiologist would have known that when you find one case, there are 50 or 100 more and could have explained that to the country and its leaders. [...] (YouTube, 01-03-2020).

As we can see, one of the most frequent argumentative values is the restrictive. In such cases, the first enunciation is admitted into the speaker's statement, this is done by recurring to, for example, the first person singular ("I understand", "I don't have") or to "efectivamente" ("indeed"), to confirm a previous opinion, and to then cancel out the possible inferences deriving from that enunciation (Domínguez García, 2007: 99). In these examples, *pero* has an anti-orientational, logical-argumentative function which manifests in messages more typical of the written conceptional variety of discourse (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 360 & 378). To this end, it figures in syntactically more elaborate utterances addressed to the auditorium or to the collective of followers and not to one specific interlocutor, and comes after a comma or an aside.

Within this anti-orientational, argumentative function, it also takes on a value of weak opposition when, though still expressing counter-argumentative opposition, the speaker introduces an explanation. The enunciation which introduces *pero* cancels out a conclusion of the previous utterance and justifies said cancellation (Domínguez García, 2007: 103):

(4) And travel? From when? Personally, I'm Spanish and confined here, *but (pero)* I spend long periods of time in another country for work and I'd need to know more or less when air space is reopening. Gracias (Twitter, 29-04-2020).

(5) I agree, though we shouldn't forget that health is not an independent variable! If the economy goes pear-shaped and there's a recession (and there will be), that too will end up having consequences on people's health in the medium-to-long term. It's not that simple. People are setting health against the economy as if they were 2 independent things, *but (pero)* they're not, we have to be careful (YouTube, 14-03-2020).

In these messages, *pero* indicates that the second segment is that of greater informative weight and that which determines the argumentative orientation of the enunciation (Fuentes Rodríguez, 1998: 37). Thus, in these cases it presents a "meta-discursive value of control over the act of speaking" (Domínguez García, 2007: 106). It particularly appears in monologic comments which place in doubt what the tweet or Facebook post by the Ministry, or the video of the institutional press conference on YouTube, has said.

However, we note that it is also utilised in replies addressed to other users on the same social network, so as to add a refutative value to the connector's restrictive one, associated with dialogic contexts (Domínguez García, 2007: 101). Opposition is established between what different speakers say (Portolés Lázaro, 1995: 259-263), so as to allow its inclusion among the markers with an interactive reactive function, with which the speaker opposes the previous intervention, sometimes to place doubt on the exactitude of the interlocutor's statement (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 361), as in (6), which responds to a tweet from the ministry, or to attenuate a criticism made of another participant:

(6) *But (Pero)* let's see… if Sanitat says at 15:00 that there are 63 cases, how the hell can there be 50 cases in the Province of Valencia at 18:00? What numbers are you working with? Do you take us all for fools, or what? It seems we can't even add up now, as if sums weren't easy… (Twitter, 10-03-2020).

(7) A: HOW hilarious, well I DISAGREE, I have a 94-year-old family member with an ulcer, and her nurse isn't coming to treat her because the protocol says it's not an urgency. WHAT on Earth is happening?! As there's a PANDEMIC they're leaving disable PEOPLE to die!!!!!. […]

> B: healthcare workers always obey orders, don't come down on them when the fault lies with those at the top, my friend. Doctors and nurses would be the first to want to attend to everyone and to help them. *But* (*Pero*) though it's cruel your family problem only affects your relative, while this affects us all and its spread increases the deaths I know it's not fair, it's just 1 explanation. *But* (*Pero*) I say again they don't give the orders (YouTube, 14-03-2020).

In these comments, *pero* marks the opposition between two segments that lead to opposing conclusions, but which are related. Some of the comments in which *pero* is used combine with other particles. These are structures such as *pero bueno*, which normally attenuate what is going to be said in the counter-argument (8), and *pero claro* in (9), which leaves to one side what has been said, which is accepted to a certain degree before the speaker moves on to another matter which he/she considers to be of greater argumentative weight in order to affirm his/her position. In this case it has a meta-discursive value, as a marker of transition to another discursive aspect. (Domínguez García, 2007: 107):

(8) A: Do you really need to be told? Do you imagine that people who've made their own face coverings have done it because the government told them to?

B: well yeah. In fact I work in a health clinic and the doctors told us that surgical masks did nothing to prevent contagion, as the particles went straight through the cloth. Now any old piece of cloth does the job…so there's something here that doesn't add up. *But well* (*Pero Bueno*) I suppose we all feel a little calmer when we see the guy next to us with his mouth covered though it's only with a scrap of cloth (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

(9) You disgust me. If you'd acted sooner none of this would have happened. *But of course* (*Pero claro*) demos were more important than health. Come on man, come on. What the hell are you doing… (YouTube, 14-03-2020).

4.1.2. Encima, además, incluso & sobre todo (what's more, moreover, even & especially)

Among the group of connectors identified in the corpus, the additives *encima, además, incluso* and *sobre todo* stand out. Taking the first two, one should remember that using *encima* "a personal valuation is granted to the second argument: a modal value is added that is lacking in *además*" (Domínguez García, 2007: 66). In these comments, *encima* and *además* order the segments of the discourse on a rising scale, in such a way that the segment they introduce is argumentatively stronger. Messages in which these two appear are addressed to the auditorium and, due to their frequency, the use of asides and of other markers in coordinate and subordinate sentence structures, are close to the conceptional variety of written language in the messages on the three networks, as in the following examples:

(11) Don't lie. Surgical masks cost 0.40 and now 0.98.. "govt bargain price", you have to use at least one a day and you can still catch it, no one knows who's asymptomatic. An FFP2 costs 6 but lasts a month and *what's more* (*además*) they prevent contagion. ARE WE ALL DAFT??? (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

(12) You have no idea of what you've approved, and *moreover* (*encima*) based on half-truths and lies. You should be ashamed of yourselves (Twitter, 28-04-2020).

(13) And to think there are still some who defend this rotten system. How Little critical sense they must have …. And as *moreover* (*encima*) our politicians don't really decide anything, as all the decisions are taken in Germany,….[…] The truth is that the Euro has been ruinous for Europe, but how few voices say that !!! (YouTube, 01-03-2020).

Regarding *incluso*, this marker links, both semantically and pragmatically, two segments of a discourse, to this end it has a meta-discursive structural function with information with a focusing function. In this sense it adds a final argument as if it were the most relevant (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 365-366). In fact, this is an adverb of focus (Portolés, 2010: 295), whose function is to give focus to certain parts of the enunciation. As seen in (14), the focus is placed on the second member, where the speaker highlights the confiscation of face coverings coming from abroad:

> (14) First no, now yes. After they stopped face coverings and *even* (*incluso*) confiscated ones from abroad (I was affected by that) they "demand" their use now the mask business is under their control? How they play with people's health,! How irresponsible! (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

The marker has here a cognitive macro-function in relating two co-orientated arguments on a rising scale as regards their argumentative force (García Negroni, 2000). In the following cases, as well as maintaining the same discursive orientation, it increases the force of the argument it introduces (Portolés Lázaro, 1998: 95), given that:

> (15) You'd have been kicked out the door of a private company by now. But as it's the government, paid for by everyone (*Even* (*Incluso*) those of us who didn't vote for them) NO WORRIES!!! No-one has to resign here! (YouTube, 01-03-2020).

> (16) A: loads of uneducated idiots are heading for the fiestas in Valencia and the numbers are going to go through the roof, either you cancel them, or the minimum contention is going to be worthless
>   B: and when will they cancel classes in Catalonia?
>   C: In Asturias there are *even* (*incluso*) schools without kids all year long (Twitter, 10-03-2020).

In fact, an emphatic sense for *incluso* has been discussed, which "may be related to a nuance relative to a lack of expectation […] in as much as a sentence containing *incluso* is, basically, a sentence which is not expected to come to pass (as it expresses an event we think unlikely), and that which we do not expect has greater value, should it actually happen, than that which we had foreseen" (Cuartero Sánchez, 2002: 144).

Although with lesser frequency, particularly in Twitter, we should mention the particle *sobre todo* among the connectors, with an argumentative function of additive co-orientation, which serves to introduce "an argument of greater importance, and without establishing a graded scale" (Domínguez García, 2007: 72), by virtue of which it cannot be compared to the previous markers:

> (17) so, let's see, face masks are now obligatory, cos we're passing through phases and there're more people together and the best for prevention is a mask, without one we'd be keeping our distance all the time and that might not work, *especially* (*sobre todo)* in shops. (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

In other cases, we can highlight the presuppositional nuances deriving from the particles employed by users and which allow for the inference of the existence of alternatives to that proposed in the focalised constituent or to place this on a hypothetical scale of probability. For example, *incluso*, as well as highlighting the focus, places it in relation to alternatives that may appear either explicitly or implicitly, that is, are presupposed in this context. (Portolés, 2010: 297). Such functions are particularly evident on the social networks, which tend to follow a principle of linguistic economy (Mancera Rueda y Pano Alamán, 2013: 41).

4.1.3. *Pues (well / so)*

The commentator *pues* is the second commonest marker in the general corpus. It generally has a double argumentative and illocutionary value in these messages (Briz Gómez, 1993: 173), which is manifest in the reactive interventions, and therefore it is possible to place it among the markers with an interactional macro-function, the functions of which are "to point out the interlocutors' "conversational movements" and "to manifest a certain attitude to the information received" (Borreguero Zuloaga & López Serena, 2010: 178). In the messages analysed it expresses total (18) or partial (19) disagreement with that said by the speaker previously. In the first case, the speaker openly opposes the content of the ministerial tweet, denying its veracity, in the second, B limits or reduces the relevance of what his interlocutor has said concerning the capacity of the government to find solutions (note also the use of "I believe" as a strategy to attenuate the disagreement):

> (18) So few, really, *well* (*pues)* I don't believe they're at all honest (Twitter, 10-03-2020).

> (19) A: they're distracting us with this "facemasks yes or no" business, and while people keep on about that, everything else is forgotten, it's bread and circuses for the plebs
> B: *well* (*pues)* I believe the government is distracted looking for solutions for everyone, in three months they've taken more steps and found more solutions than in many whole legislatures. [...] it's others who are looking for distractions, the government doesn't create them (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

It also transmits a collaborative response when the speaker wishes to manifest his/her agreement with the opinion of another user, as in (20). However, this value is manifest in few reactive messages on Facebook and YouTube. Therefore, its function in this context is normally that of transmitting disagreement:

> (20) A: A little respect for this man, he's a top expert, that's why he's where he is (and I can tell you, he has no interest in politics). [...]
> B: *well* (*pues)* maybe that's true... I'm not talking for any political motive (YouTube, 01-03-2020).

As we can see, when placed at the beginning of reactive comments, it acts as a connector and as a prototypical commentor of the informal oral variety of the language, as well as introducing a new comment (Portolés Lázaro, 1998; Porroche Ballesteros, 1996).

Apart from this, the marker, within the cognitive macro-function which indicates the logical-argumentative relationships established between the propositional contents of the text and, in the following messages, between the textual context and the speaker's attitude (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 375-376), presents meta-discursive and co-orientated argumentative functions, the latter being both causal (21) and consecutive (22), values that are excluded from the *Diccionario de partículas discursivas* (Briz Gómez et al., 2008). On this occasion they are closer to the written conceptional variety. As we can see, these are longer messages in which other markers and hypotactical sentence structures are employed:

> (21) I've been very patient with this government *well* (*pues),* I know that the position they're in is far from easy, with Casado getting in the way all the time, but don't let us down, we voted for you we don't want the right, but we need a sincere left, [...] (Twitter, 04-06-2020).

(22) I heard everyone say this was just like a flu... the flu kills 6 thousand people a year ... I don't need to be told... I can see and act for myself... but there are donkeys who believe everything that's said to them... and as they said it wasn't coming here and that anyway, it's no more than a flu, *well* (*pues)* caution to the wind... [...] (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

4.1.4. *Claro (of course)*

Another frequent marker in the corpus is *claro,* an epistemic modal conversational marker which, especially on Facebook and YouTube, expresses evidence and can be interpreted as a reinforcement of an assertion, see (24) where the author of the message adopts capital letters to intensify the enunciation and impose his/her opinion on the other participants:

(23) They're accelerating everything very quickly and *of course* (*claro)* now no-one's dying, they're lying through their teeth and we'll all end up paying with fresh outbreaks, bravo and bravo again for their handling of this [...] (Facebook, 01-06-2020).

(24) SEÑOR SIMÓN SAID WHAT???..NO WORRIES HAHAHA, WE'RE AT 2097 CASES AND COUNTING..YOU DARE TO COMPARE US TO CHINA AND KOREA?..ARE YOU FUMIGATING THE STREETS AND CITIES LIKE IN CHINA & KOREA?... [...] ..NOOO ALL YOU CARE ABOUT IS EASTER IN SEVILLE, MARCH 8TH, FOOTBALL, ETC INSTEAD OF POSTPONING IT, *OF COURSE* (*CLARO)* AS FUNCTIONARIES YOU GET PAID 100% OF YOUR SALARY AND US WORKERS GET 70...[...] (YouTube, 01-03-2020).

In other cases it allows the speaker to evaluate the evidence of the member of the discourse that it introduces in relation to the data found in the discourse, in context, or that is presupposed in the mind of the speaker or in those of the participants in that interaction (Martín Zorraquino & Portolés Lázaro, 1999: 4150). In (24), for example, *claro* introduces a statement that alludes to public sector workers receiving 100% of their salaries, addressing them in the second person plural to support his/her argument, that is, that the civil servants in the Ministry of Health are not worried about the pandemic.

Claro can trigger procedures of cooperation between interlocutors, indicating possible areas of agreement between them. Note how, in this exchange, B utilises *claro* to confirm what A has said and, at the same time, to reinforce the argument that A had introduced, concerning the sincerity and credibility of the government:

(25) A: As if we were kids, you could have been sincere from the beginning about it being obligatory but that there weren't enough, and fine. One has to be consequent, this way you lose all credibility
B: *Of course* (*Claro)* they didn't tell us the truth because they knew there weren't any on the market, they lied to us. They play with us like puppets. [...] (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

However, when placed at the beginning of this type of comment, it is more common as a transmitter of disagreement, when admitting a concession to successively introduce a restriction (Landone, 2012: 1812). In other cases, as we see in (27), it even expresses a critical attitude with ironic intention, by which the speaker invites the listener to infer the opposite to what is explicitly stated:

(26) *Of course* (*Claro)*, they don't even bother to update them. They've just changed the time. They're laughing at us (Twitter, 28-04-2020).

(27) A: And? What's the video supposed to demonstrate? That the situation has changed? That they've adapted their measures to the conditions?

B: *Of course* (*Claro)*, the situation changes because it does, not due to incompetence (YouTube, 01-03-2020).

It can also figure, in the formula *claro que sí*, as an independent enunciation in brief messages situated on the oral conceptual pole of the language. In the following message it also serves to intensify the irony, although this usage is less frequent in the corpus:

(28) The Minister's a philosopher! *Of course he is (Claro que si)* (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

4.1.5. Bueno, vamos y eh (well, come on & eh)

Other conversational markers used on the three social networks are *hombre* (not on Twitter), *bueno*, *vamos* and *eh* (a single appearance on Facebook). In the messages analysed, *hombre* performs as an interjective in reactive interactive comments, where it is used with the intention of attenuating an "expression of disconformity with what the listener has said [...]" (Martín Zorraquino & Portolés Lázaro, 1999: 4173-4174) and to support a positive image of the speaker. It usually figures in these messages at the beginning of the sentence, although it appears occasionally at the close, normally in comments that may be considered in the oral conceptional variety of the language, as seen in these two cases of non-standard punctuation or the use of prototypical turns of informal Spanish in these contexts such as the lengthening of the vowels and the graphic reproduction of laughter:

(29) A: [...] As for tobacco, sadly there are loads of smokers in this country. Abstinence syndrome is really hard.(I don't smoke),but I understand those who do.

B: yeah *man (hombre)* it'll really matter to them if you go cold turkey when you can't smoke hahahaha [...] (YouTube, 14-03-2020).

(30) Because two months ago you were saying that facemasks were good for nothing, sort yourselves out *maaaaan (hombreeeee)* (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

The marker *bueno*, which appears on all three platforms, though with just a single appearance on Twitter, is normally used, in line with the principal classifications, in both dialogic and monologic statements (Fuentes Rodríguez, 1993: 217-218). This feature is also seen performing several functions on the platforms considered. For example, it can act as a linguistic formulator of discursive illation. In this sense, it presents the member of the discourse in which it figures as a continuation of what has been said previously. However, as can be seen in these examples, the enunciation introduced by *bueno* substitutes or adds nuance to an element of the previous discourse, providing new information that the speaker considers more relevant or more appropriate:

(31) Face coverings aren't necessary No, but yes in closed spaces *Well* (*Bueno)* now in open spaces too *Well* (*Bueno)* if you're in the countryside you don't need one *Well* (*Bueno)* wear one when you leave the house...It's not that important there'll only be a few isolated cases in Spain [...] (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

(32) They're waiting for more pensioners to die, that's why they're not doing anything, *Well* (*Bueno)* there is something, they lie like dogs (YouTube, 01-03-2020).

In the corpus, it also performs a meta-discursive function when, for example, it orientates the end of the enunciation, or indicates conclusion of the same, as in the following message which also displays elements of oral speech reproduced in digital text:

> (33) How true !!! Something they haven't said from the beginning. Knowing that it should be compulsory. But as they hadn't made even a MINIMAL prevision of material. They were the ones who left Spain mask free. To be able to supply the hospitals. OUR HEROES !!!! They were sold out keeping all the pharmacies' distribution channels for themselves. NOW *Well* (*Bueno)* better late than never !!! (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

It also attenuates disagreement in reactive comments (Portolés Lázaro, 1998: 108). As we can see in (34), C addresses B in this exchange between three participants in the debate to cast doubt on his/her words, by means of implicit and mitigated criticism, using the initial particle, of the US President and his ability to deal with the crisis, in comparison with what the Spanish government is doing:

> (34) A: With the greatest respect… it seems to me, that saying hairdressers can stay open is just laughing at healthcare workers and others who are stuck in our homes waiting for all this to finish .. […] this is ... it's laughable…shameful
>
> B: Honestly.....how ridiculous... they'd never say that in the USA.....
>
> C: *Well* (*Bueno)* your president is hardly Albert Einstrein, is he? (YouTube, 14-03-2020).

Amongst the interactive markers we find *vamos*, whose function is usually that of drawing the attention of the interlocutor to something (Cortés Rodríguez & Camacho Adarve, 2005: 17). In the messages analysed, it is placed at the beginning of the enunciation, normally in interventions addressed to the group of participants in the interaction. The analysis shows that in these messages it presents the member of the discourse in which it appears as a clarification or nuance of what has just been said, as in this comment:

> (35) When things were at their bleakest…they were inadvisable and now that there's light at the end of the tunnel…they're highly advisable. *Come on* (*Vamos),*… obligatory. What a bit of stock in the warehouse can do!!!! (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

Other times *vamos* is employed to introduce a summary or a conclusion of what has been generally said in a tweet, post or institutional video, as a premise to the actual comment:

> (36) *Come on* (*Vamos),* coronavirus is here to stay and now we'll have to live with the flu and covid-19 together every winter, as if flu wasn't bad enough, well great, if anyone catches the two at the same time, good luck, cos viruses don't wait in line. (YouTube, 01-03-2020).

> (37) *Come on* (*Vamos)* just the same as yesterday, nothing has changed, so why the press conference? (YouTube, 14-03-2020).

The following Facebook exchange acquires an attenuating function which permits the speaker to avoid responsibility for what is said and any possible disagreement Note in this example, in the comment by C, the combination of the particle with *digo* with an anaphoric function which attenuates the affirmation, together with the suspension marks, and with *macho*, that in this case could be considered a variation of *hombre* focusing on the disagreement:

> (38) A: How many times are you going to change your minds, aren't you ashamed of yourselves, RESIGN
>
> B: suggest a solution instead of just criticising!

C: however much Teresa makes proposals, the one being paid to do a job, is the one who has to do it!!! *Come on, I mean….man* (*Vamos digo… macho)* letting just anyone have an opinion… (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

Finally, it appears on a couple of occasions as an independent enunciation in brief responses, acquiring a value of initiation:

(39) A: Spanish Brothers and Sisters, stay home and take precautions. I am from Italy, Emilia Romagna, we have good hospitals but this virus is like a tsunami [...].

B: *Come on* (*Vamos)* forza!!!! (YouTube, 14-03-2020).

Despite its scarcity in the general corpus, we should also mention the meta-discursive conversational marker *¿eh?*, whose function in the messages analysed seems to be that of an appellative signal. For example, in the messages below, it appeals to the listener, strongly requesting (Briz Gómez *et al.*, 2008) confirmation or acceptance of what the speaker says (40), or of what has been asked of him (41):

(40) man, no need to exaggerate … the three-month "face coverings are unnecessary" campaign wasn't invented by the public … and now that it's over, we believe it … and all change!! The good guys aren't that good … and the bad guys aren't that bad, *eh?* (*¿eh?)* (Facebook, 19-05-2020).

(41) Seriously, enough copy and paste, it's really boring ,… continue on another page…. if you want *eh?* (*¿eh?)*… wow… (YouTube, 01-03-2020).

Moreover, in (41), the speaker seeks the conformity of the addressee with what has previously been said ("The good guys aren't that good … and the bad guys aren't that bad"). In short, he/she intends to submit the proposal for the consideration of those who are making comments in that space.

4.1.6. Por ejemplo (for example)

Finally, the even more limited use of the discursive operator *por ejemplo*, which features a minimum of ten times in the general corpus, of which 6 are in comments on YouTube. This particle is presented by a participant as an example or case, in conceptionally distant enunciations or that are more associated with the written conceptional variety. As we can see in the next, longer comment, addressed to a generic interlocutor, that is, to the audience imagined on this video channel, the marker is placed in an intermediate position to support, by means of an illustrative example, the argument relative to the difficulty of keeping a 1-metre distance between people in daily life:

(42) all activities in meeting places are supposed to be prohibited, [...] I suppose that from now on they'll limit the distance between people to 1 metre,,, *for example* (*por ejemplo)* in a lift, instead of 4 people, only 2 will be allowed, staying a metre apart, just as on the metro, bus and planes, a minimum of a metre and in taxis, instead of 3 or 4 passengers, there'll only be one in the back, if there are 2 it's a source of propagation, either you do it right or you do it wrong (YouTube, 14-03-2020).

5. Conclusions

The analysis performed shows that connectors and conversational or interactive markers predominate on the social networks Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and that they are generally utilised to modulate the illocutionary force of the enunciation and to manifest agreement or disagreement with what was said in other messages. These are prototypical markers of communicative immediacy which perform the functions of both interactive, such as indicating the reaction – manifestation of agreement or disagreement – relative to the affirmations of an interlocutor (López Serena y Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 354-357) and cognitive macro-functions, such as expressing the argumentative relationship between enunciations. In the messages analysed, *pues* presents a double argumentative and illocutionary value (Briz Gómez, 1993: 173), which is manifest in reactive interventions to indicate disagreement with what was previously said. *Pero*, the most frequently used logical-argumentative connector in the corpus, by virtue of the varied functions it acquires, is mainly related to cognitive and meta-discursive macro-functions. The first of these includes the logical-argumentative function that *pero* performs similarly on the three platforms, in order to cancel out –logical-argumentative and anti-orientated function – the conclusions of the previous statement through the enunciation it introduces and which often contains an explanation. Within this function it acquires a restrictive value in messages which can be considered within the written conceptional variety of discourse (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 360). This is the case for statements which are syntactically more elaborate, addressed to the group of users, to the audience imagined on the network, and not to a specific interlocutor as a response. In this sense it also performs a meta-discursive macro-function, related to the process of linguistic expression in the discourse, as a mechanism of cohesion, and where it transmits meta-discursive values of control of the act of speaking (Domínguez García, 2007). Other frequently used connectors with these two macro-functions on the three networks are *pues*, when transmitting co-oriented arguments with a consecutive value in messages corresponding to the written conceptional variety: and *incluso, además* and *encima*, which express co-orientated arguments of addition on a rising scale or focus or even intensify the illocutionary value of determined constituents of the enunciation.

The analysis has shown that *pero* also tends to appear frequently in responses addressed to other users, particularly on Facebook and YouTube, thus adding a refutative value to the restrictive value of the connector, which usually manifests in dialogic contexts and in texts corresponding to the pole of communicative immediacy or to the conceptionally spoken. Said opposition is established between what different enunciations say, placing it amongst the markers with a reactive interactive macro-function, through which the speaker opposes the previous intervention to place the exactitude of the statement in doubt (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga, 2010: 361) or to attenuate a criticism of what another participant has said. This fact is hardly surprising if we consider that these are brief argumentative texts posted on spaces that promote polylogical polemic interaction, in particular on YouTube (Bou-Franch y Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014).

Other frequent markers with an interactive macro-function are *claro*, which is particularly common on Facebook and YouTube and in messages closer to the informal oral, or conceptionally spoken, variety, to express evidence and reinforce an assertion, often in combination with *pero*. Less frequent are *hombre, bueno, vamos* and *¿eh?*, with a modal function, utilised as attenuators of the illocutionary force of assertions, normally in responses to tweets and in replies to

other comments on the other two platforms. In general, they assume a function of a more pragmatic nature, such that they acquire different meanings depending on the context in which they appear, occasionally associating themselves with other particles (*pero bueno*). Concerning this aspect, it is worth noting that this type of particles very often invite a presupposition of the content implicitly transmitted by the message, on being used in brief messages that express a reaction to contents posted on a certain profile or channel or to other messages, promptly and from mobile devices, where linguistic economy is predominant.

The texts analysed, particularly the tweets, present quite a limited picture as regards the presence and functions of these particles on the networks. We can observe a tendency to favour a restricted group of particles (*pero, pues, claro*), which perform interactive, cognitive and discursive macro-functions, depending on the type of message –reaction to a certain content or response to another user's message – and the communicative intention of the speaker. These allow for the expression of criticism of the institutional spokesperson, indicate agreement or disagreement with that interlocutor or with another participant in the same debate, to finetune or modify what has been said and to intensify or attenuate a statement by the speaker him/herself or by the interlocutor. These three markers acquire different values depending on the type of "response" (Twitter) or "comment" (Facebook and YouTube) that they appear in, being more or less cooperative or reactive. In this sense, the study partially corroborates the results of previous studies into the utilisation of markers in chats, fora of debate and comments in the digital press (López Quero, 2007; Landone, 2012; Pano Alamán, 2015).

The conversational connectors and markers identified tend to appear in comments on Facebook and, especially, YouTube. In Twitter, on the other hand, the use of connectors is preponderant. This fact seems to indicate a difference between this and the other social networks as regards the use of markers, perhaps due to the diverse conception and elaboration of the message, which cannot be greater than 280 characters, and to the type of interaction within "threads", where it can be more difficult to see the message which originated the thread and distinguish between the responses to that first post. The interfaces of YouTube and Facebook allow one to activate a visualization of the comments, where it is possible to immediately identify the initial message and any responses it has received. In this sense, the user perceives, arguably more evidently, that he/she is participating in a space in which an exchange between users predominates. This hypothesis and other aspects explored in this article invite us to continue reflecting on the influence of technical and socio-situational factors on interactions on social networks on the use or non-use of certain markers in Spanish, be they conceptionally oral or written. To this end it is necessary to expand the corpus of study and work out each of the functions these particles perform in digital environments where the expression of opinions predominates.

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