

TRANSITIVITY IN SPANISH CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

I investigate transitivity in Spanish conversation by appealing to Hopper and Thompson's transitivity scale (1980), and Thompson and Hopper's study on transitivity in English conversation (2001). My corpus consists of excerpts taken from three different conversations; two of them were randomly chosen from the same conversation in order to determine how transitivity evolves at different moments of the same interaction. I argue that in addition to the analytical levels considered by Thompson and Hopper (2001): the clause and the whole corpus, attention to the conversational excerpt allows for a finer treatment of both transitivity as a composite, and each parameter involved. My results support, in general, Thompson and Hopper's finding for English that conversation is low in transitivity. However, by attending to the excerpt-level results, I demonstrate that some excerpts rank high in transitivity and that excerpts of the same conversation can differ in their ranking for specific features.

KEY WORDS: Spanish, transitivity, conversation, clause, conversational excerpt

RESUMEN

Estudio la transitividad en discurso conversacional en español a partir de la escala propuesta por Hopper y Thompson (1980) y de su estudio sobre transitividad en inglés conversacional (2001). Analizo fragmentos de tres conversaciones, de los cuales dos fueron elegidos al azar de la misma conversación para determinar el comportamiento de la transitividad a lo largo de la misma interacción. Además de la cláusula y el corpus en su conjunto —niveles considerados por Thompson y Hopper (2001)—, demuestro la utilidad del fragmento conversacional para alcanzar un análisis más fino de la transitividad y de cada uno de los parámetros implicados. En general, confirmo los resultados de Thompson y Hopper sobre que el discurso conversacional es bajo en transitividad. Empero, atendiendo al nivel del fragmento conversacional demuestro que algunos fragmentos en su conjunto son altos en transitividad, y que fragmentos de la misma conversación pueden variar con relación a rasgos específicos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: español, transitividad, conversación, cláusula, fragmento conversacional

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INTRODUCTION

Transitivity and argument structure have been a longstanding concern for discourse and grammar studies. Until recently, theories on these issues had been advanced on the basis of constructed clauses and narrative discourse. Linguists have started to think about how argument structure and transitivity are managed in everyday conversation. In this respect, Thompson and Hopper's pioneering study on conversational discourse (2001) offers a new perspective to the study of transitivity and argument structure. For this study, the authors appeal to the scale of transitivity they developed (Hopper & Thompson, 1980) on the basis of grammatical and discursive crosslinguistic evidence. The scale consists of the following parameters, each of them focused on a different facet of the transferring of an action.¹

A. Participants: in order for an action to be transferred, at least two participants are necessary. A clause with either two or three participants ranks high for this feature.

B. Aspect: an activity viewed as completed is transferred more effectively than an action in progress.

C. Kinesis: according to this parameter, clauses involving physical actions are more effectively transmitted than states.

D. Punctuality: clauses high in this feature are those in which there is no transitional phase between the inception and the completion of the event.

E. Volitionality: refers to whether A is presented as acting purposefully (high volitional) or not (low volitional).

F. Mode: this feature contrasts actions which are presented as either having not occurred or having occurred in a non-real world (irrealis), with actions presented as actually occurring (realis). An action in realis mode is seen as more effectively transmitted and therefore high in this feature.

G. Agency: the effective transmission of an action involves a participant high in potency.

¹ The Affirmation parameter introduced in Hopper and Thompson (1980) according to which affirmative actions rank high, in contrast with negative actions, is not considered for the study on conversation, since "this parameter has not been shown to correlate strongly with other measures of transitivity" (2001: 36).

H. Affectedness: the more completely affected the patient is, the higher the degree of transference of the action.

I. Individuation: this feature refers to the degree of distinctness of the patient from the A, and it involves itself the following set of features (as proposed in Timberlake, 1975, 1977, and adopted by Hopper & Thompson, 1980: 253):

HIGH	LOW
proper	common
human, animate	inanimate
concrete	abstract
singular	plural
count	mass
referential, definite	non-referential

Thompson and Hopper find that most clauses in English conversation are either one-participant clauses, or two-participant clauses with low transitivity. They demonstrate that, for most of the parameters of the scale, conversational clauses rate low. However, English conversation proves consistently high for realis mode and agentivity, while volitionality appears as a relatively high parameter, with half of the clauses of the corpus ranking high. Taking this study as a reference, my paper investigates transitivity in conversational discourse in Spanish.² The results support, in general, Thompson and Hopper's findings for English conversation in that most of the clauses that form the corpus are low in transitivity. I also find that Spanish conversation is high in agentivity, realis mode and

² Although transitivity has been addressed to a greater or lesser extent in most Spanish grammars (*Cf.* Bello, 1847; Real Academia Española, 1931; Seco, 1954; Gili Gaya, 1961), works more directly concerned with transitivity are relatively few. In addition to Vázquez-Rozas' (2006, 2007) studies, which are more closely related to my own research line, García-Miguel (1995) focuses on the connections between direct and prepositional complementation in two-participants clauses, and identifies subtle semantic differences between seemingly equivalent clauses, which only differ in the presence or absence of a preposition. He also determines the syntactic contexts in which alternance is allowed, and those in which only one form is possible. Since this author is interested in the possibilities of Spanish as a language, many clauses are constructed or taken from dictionaries, while some others are taken from ARTHUS (Archivo de Textos Hispánicos de la Universidad de Santiago). His results are therefore not comparable to mine, which are based on naturally occurring discourse.

volitionality, as Thompson and Hopper showed. However, I demonstrate that conversational excerpts can also be high in number of participants, kinesis and affectedness. For the number-of-participants parameter I find that 25%, that is, one of the four excerpts I analyze for this study, is high, while for kinesis and affectedness 25% of my corpus, that is, one out of four excerpts, ranks high. By analyzing the behavior of the clauses within the frame of the respective excerpt, I demonstrate that conversational excerpts can be high in transitivity. Specifically, one of the excerpts ranks high in six out of the ten parameters that make up the scale: affectedness, volitionality, and kinesis in addition to agency, realis, and individuation. Thus, although my analysis confirms the finding that conversation tends to be low in transitivity, it also shows that some conversational excerpts rank high. This is especially true if we consider each excerpt as a unit of analysis, rather than each clause isolated from the broader context in which it occurs.³

The present paper adds to previous usage-based research on transitivity in Spanish carried out by Vázquez-Rozas (2006). By appealing to Thompson and Hopper's transitivity scale, Vázquez-Rozas studies a specific kind of verbs called 'psych verbs,' in which the experiencer is expressed through the indirect object, and the stimulus through the subject. She finds that clauses containing this class of verbs are low in transitivity, since they are usually stative, atelic, have no agentive subject, and their object is affected psychologically rather than physically.⁴

The same author (García-Miguel & Vázquez-Rozas, 2009) analyzes the frequency of transitive constructions in Spanish on the bases of ARTHUS (Archivo de Textos Hispánicos de la Universidad de Santiago)—a computerized corpus which consists of texts of a variety of styles (narrative, essay, theatre, spoken language, journalistic documents) and Spanish dialects—and finds that the most frequent verb-object clauses in this corpus are low-transitive with a generic meaning, which is consistent with Thompson and Hopper's results for English conversational data.

³ As mentioned below, a total of 563 clauses taken from four five-minute excerpts were analyzed. The conversational excerpts I analyze for the present study, were initially recorded as part of my dissertation research (see Oropeza, 2006).

⁴ Another study that treats psych verbs in Spanish is developed by González (1997). The focus is on the alternation of case-marking accusative-dative that frequently takes place in clitics. He also looks at those contexts in which only the accusative form is possible, as well as the role of dialectal variation. This study shows that alternance occurs when the object is either as high as or higher than the subject on the animacy hierarchy.

My analysis differs from García-Miguel and Vázquez-Rozas (2009) in three respects. First, the kind of discourse I explore is limited to casual conversation, while ARTHUS includes both written and elicited spoken data. My data comes only from Mexican Spanish dialects, while ARTHUS has a broader dialect-coverage, since it includes data from Peninsular as well as Latino-American Spanish. Finally, my study does not deal with a specific kind of verbs. The only crucial distinction that I make throughout the analysis is between a) clauses involving one-participant, and b) clauses involving two-participant verbs, the latter of which are further analyzed for Thompson and Hopper's transitivity parameters.⁵

CORPUS

The corpus for this study consists of 563 clauses, taken from four five-minute excerpts, which in turn come from three different conversations (Diversity 1, Diversity 2, Teasing and Electricity). Two of them were randomly selected from the same conversational interaction as a methodological decision that would allow me to broaden the scope of my findings. That is, not only can we assess the behavior of clauses produced by different speakers in a different situational setting, but also the behavior of transitivity at different moments of the same interaction. Each conversational excerpt involves the participation of four to five conversationalists, either friends or family members, two of them—myself included—participated in all of the conversations. The subject matter varies greatly. For each example provided throughout the text, the specific context in which the interaction occurs is described.

METHODOLOGY

Considerations concerning the clause

In order to determine what counted as a clause, and which clauses should be considered for this study, I made the following decisions:

⁵ This does not mean to suggest that one-participant clauses cannot, under certain circumstances, rank higher in transitivity than two-participant clauses if we attend to other components of the scale, as Hopper and Thompson point out (1980).

1) Only complete clauses were included, except when in a truncated clause the element missing is expected to be, on the basis of syntactic evidence, a modifier, so that the head of the NP is not affected, as in *el Jorge tenía el apodo de...* ‘Jorge had the nickname...’. Here, the speaker is about to specify what Jorge’s nickname is, but he stops because another speaker takes the floor. However the head noun, that is, *el apodo*, is indeed provided.

2) Clauses involving elliptical verb were excluded, except when the verb missing is the auxiliary of a two-verb predicate.

3) Repetition is a pervasive phenomenon in conversation. Most repetitions in the corpus involve isolated NPs or words, rather than whole clauses, so they were not eligible for this study in any case. The repetitions that involve whole clauses in my corpus are so few that their inclusion does not affect the analysis in a significant way. Although my initial thoughts were that I should exclude at least exact repetitions, I realized how hard it is to find exact repetitions. Usually what has been called “repetition” involves partial changes in features ranging from intonation and voice quality to lexical and semantic features to word order. So, the decision was finally made to consider part of the corpus those clauses that involve repetition. Thus, the following two clauses were included. Speakers are discussing whether tips should be given to the boys who deliver pizza. They agree that if you asked them directly, they would say ‘yes’ for sure. So, the first speaker says: *Pues quie- quién te dice que no* ‘nobody would say no’, while the second responds: *quién dice que no. En su sano juicio, quién te dice que no* ‘nobody would say no. In his/her right mind, nobody would tell you no’.

4) Co-constructions reveal the collaborative character of conversational interaction. Although several instances of co-construction were found, only a couple of them resulted in whole clauses. For instance, in my conversational corpus, the clause *hay que seguir un procedimiento para que reconozca la tarjeta* results from the collaboration of two speakers.⁶

⁶ Standard orthography is used: the clauses or fragments in Spanish are provided in italics. In those cases in which it is necessary to show the turn structure in order to clearly illustrate the phenomenon at issue, the following transcription conventions are used (Du Bois’, *et al.*, 1993): each numbered line in Spanish is an Intonation Unit. Speaker labels are provided in capitals before his/her turn. The following conventions are also used:

{ }	name of the excerpt	...	pause
=	length	--	truncated IU
-	truncated word	[]	overlap

Example 1

{DIVERSITY 1}

1 PACO: *Hay que seguir un-*
 have.3SG that follow.INF INDEF.MASC.SG

‘It is necessary to follow a-’

2 RIGO: *un procedimiento.*
 INDEF.MASC.SG procedure

‘a procedure.’

3 PACO: *Un procedimiento para que reconozca la tarjeta.*
 INDEF.MASC.SG procedure for that recognize.3SG.PRES DEF.FEM.SG card

‘a procedure so that it recognizes the card’

Seguir un procedimiento is an infinitival clause, so it was counted as a one-participant clause. On the other hand, the complement clause *para que reconozca la tarjeta* was analyzed and counted as a two-participant clause, since it involves a subject (third person singular as suffixed on verb *reconocer*), and an object (*la tarjeta*).

5) In those cases in which a repair involving a verb took place, only one occurrence of the verb was considered. While the speakers in *Teasing* are addressing the situation of a particular Mexican indigenous people whose members migrate to the US and need an ID card to cross the border, the verb *tener* is repaired from *traían* ‘brought’ to *traen* ‘bring’ in line 4 below.

The gloss and translation into English are provided in the second and third line respectively. For the English translation I use normal punctuation.

The glossing conventions employed are as follows:

1	First person	INF	Infinitive
2	Second person	MASC	Masculine
3	Third person	NEG	Negation
AFF	Affirmation	PL	Plural
DAT	Dative	POSS	Possessive
DEF	Definite article	PRES	Present tense
FEM	Feminine	PSREF	Pseudoreflexive
INDEF	Indefinite article	PST	Past tense
+	Morphological boundary		

Example 2

{TEASING}

- 1 BRUNO: *Está como los... el grupo este,*
 be.3SG.PRES like DEF.MASC.PL DEF.MASC.SG group this-one
 ‘It is the same case as that group,’
- 2 *que migra cada...cada invierno,*
 which migrate.3SG.PRES each each Winter
 ‘which migrates each... each winter,’
- 3 *este...por Chihuahua*
 ‘well... through Chihuahua.’
- 4 *Traían... traen su credencial.*
 bring.3PL.COPR bring.3PL.PRES POSS.3PL ID-card.
 ‘They brought... bring their ID cards.’

In this case, only one occurrence of the verb was coded for the transitivity parameters.

6) Those clauses, frequent in my data, in which either a phatic device or a discourse marker interrupts the continuity of the clause were included in the analysis.

7) Also clauses completed by the same speaker in different turns, as the one shown in lines 3 and 5 below, were considered. In this conversational fragment, speakers are discussing the differences they find between the attention the customer receives from the waiters in American and Mexican restaurants. From different turns of the same speaker, we obtain the clause *en México te atienden muy bien precisamente pa-- para ganarse la propina*, which was counted and coded for the transitivity parameters. A second speaker contributes a turn that interrupts the clause projected by the first one, as illustrated by the incomplete intonation unit symbol (--).

Example 3

{DIVERSITY 1}

- 1 AUREO: *Bueno pero en Mé--*
 Well but in Me-
 ‘Well, but in Me-’
- 2 *en México te atienden muy bien,*
 in Mexico DAT.2SG serve.3PL.PRES very well
 ‘in Mexico they serve you very well,’

- 3 *precisamente para ga- --*
 precisely to ear-
 ‘precisely to ear-’
- 4 RIGO: *Pero en México sí hay un poquito más de --*
 but in Mexico AFF there:is INDEF.MASC.SG little.DIM more of
 ‘But in Mexico there is a little more of --’
5. AUREO: *para ganarse la propina.*
 to earn.INF+DAT.3SG DEF.FEM.SG tip
 ‘to earn the tip.’

8) Overlapped clauses were also counted as clauses. While speaking about the bad condition of a Mexican river (El Sedeño), a partial overlap takes place, as can be seen in lines 2 and 3. The resulting overlapped clauses counted as one each.

Example 4

{TEASING}

- 1 BRUNO: *No pues El Sedeño también ya,*
 NEG well DEF.MASC.SG Sedeño also already
 ‘Well Sedeño is also,’
- 2 [*se está convirtiendo en un caño.*]
 PSREF be.3SG become.GERUND in INDEF.MASC.SG waste-pipe
 ‘It is becoming a waste-pipe’
- 3 ALDO: [*El Sedeño ya peló.*]
 DEF.MASC.SG Sedeño already be:lost.PST.3SG
 ‘Sedeño is already lost.’

9) Complement clauses were coded in addition to the whole clause of which they are part. However, infinitival complement clauses, which are around 8% of the corpus, were excluded despite the fact that they can take object, because they are not syntactically marked for subject. This decision has to do with the pervasiveness of subject as a syntactic category in Spanish. Thus, for example, Spanish predicates agree with subject in number and person, while they are not sensitive to the corresponding object features.

10) Discourse markers and fixed expressions consisting of a verb were left out, specifically *o sea*, ‘I mean’, *ádale*, *digo*, *sale*, *mira*, *oye*, *vaya*, *como sea*, and *olvídate* (pseudoreflexive), which indexes surprise. Most of them tend to occur by themselves both from an intonational and a syntactic perspective.

11) Throughout the analysis I paid attention to V-O compounds, understood as combinations of verb plus lexical noun a) which are highly lexicalized, and/or b) whose object is not referential, and/or c) whose verb is low in content (Thompson & Hopper, 33). I didn't exclude them from the analysis, because the degree of lexicalization varies in each case, making it difficult to set a clear boundary between V-O compounds and verbs that simply take object. In all cases, however, the V-O compounds I include in the analysis are less fixed than any of the forms just mentioned in 10. The frequency of these compounds in my corpus is really low. They can involve two or three participants depending on the specific discourse context. Thus, for example, *darse color* literally "give oneself color", which is a pseudoreflexive (or middle-voice marker, for other scholars), has always only two participants (subject/object) semantically, in spite of the fact that three participants are syntactically represented in the clause.

Thus far, I have made explicit the clause-level considerations relevant to make up the corpus. As a result of the application of steps 1-7, a corpus consistent of 563 clauses was obtained, out of which only the two- or more- participant clauses, that is, 223, were counted for the remaining parameters of the transitivity scale.

Methodological considerations concerning the number of participants

Determining the number of participants involved in a clause is crucial to this analysis, because the transitivity features rely for methodological reasons on this distinction.⁷ In addition to the overall criteria mentioned above, more specific decisions were made, which have to do with the number-of-participants parameter.

⁷ It is important to mention that Hopper and Thompson (1980) found a correlation between participant and argument. Thus, while in p. 252 they employ exclusively the term *participant*, in p. 284 they appeal to the notion of argument. A possible explanation for this alternance is that they analyze transitivity from different, complementary, perspectives. Thus, for example, once they have introduced the transitivity parameters, they discuss, in a further section, the correlations between transitivity features and morphosyntax crosslinguistically, to finally reflect on their pragmatic facets. The use of the term *argument* or *NP argument* takes place relatively late in the article, when the connections between transitivity and discourse (especially narrative discourse) are established. At this point, they associate the number of arguments to the grounding phenomena, so that backgrounding is associated with one NP argument, and foregrounding with more than one argument. Thus, we can conclude that the alternance between both terms (or notions) vary according to the broader context in which they are discussed.

1) The clauses containing complement clauses were counted as a one-participant clause, while the complement clause itself was internally examined and coded as either involving one or more participants.

2) Arguments double-marked for discourse-management reasons, associated with either “topicalization” and word order, or the prevention of ambiguity when third person referents are tracked, counted as only one argument. For example, in the clause, *entonces le dije a Chenchó* ‘so, I told Chenchó’ the referent of both the full NP and the pronominal form is the same, so there is only one participant involved.

3) Clauses in which a pseudoreflexive verb works as predicate were considered one-participant clauses. My justification for this is that, although subject and object are syntactically involved, from a semantic perspective the action named by the verb is not transmitted to the object. Thus, for example the clause *el mesero se ofendió* (lit. ‘the waiter offended himself’) means that he felt offended by the small amount of money he is receiving from the customer.

4) Clauses containing the verb *decir* ‘say/tell’ as a framing device for reported speech, were treated as follows. The clauses involving indirect reported speech were treated the same as other complement clauses. For direct reported speech the quotation didn’t count as object (as proposed in Munro, 1982),⁸ that is, the framing clause was seen as either one-participant or two-participant, depending on whether it involved only subject, or subject and indirect object, but never as a

⁸ Munro’s article explores crosslinguistically the morphosyntactic treatment of the verb *decir*, and finds that “the verb or the sentence may be morphologically marked as intransitive, or the ‘say’ construction may pattern with other intransitive constructions” (1982: 302). Although she does not present evidence from Spanish, and there is not a particular analysis for such language from this perspective —as far as I know—, Munro’s work is reliable and empirically supported. In order to support her position, I would like to refer to some characteristics that make evident the especial behavior of the verb *decir* in Spanish. One of them has to do with the speaker’s change in point of view in the quotation, with respect to the framing clause, so that pronominal forms and deictics (among other elements) differ. In addition, in long quotations the framing clause tends to appear more than once in order to reinforce the quotative nature of the utterance. On the other hand, in embedded interactions —which imply turn exchanges between the quoted speakers—, the framing clause can be omitted, once the identities of the quoted speakers can be inferred for discourse and pragmatic reasons. The role of the verb *decir* deserves, by far, a deeper treatment that I can provide here; but as the most frequent verb that frames quotation, exhibits a highly specific behavior. This property is shared by some other (less frequent) framing verbs such *afirmar* ‘ascertain’, *preguntar* ‘question’, *insistir* ‘insist’, and *pensar* ‘think’ in the case of reported thinking.

three-participant clause. However, the clauses occurring in direct quotation were coded, like any other clause, as either one —or more participant clauses, or left out from the corpus, if they incurred any of the exclusion-criteria mentioned above. In those cases in which either a full NP or a pronominal form acted as indirect objects within the reported-speech framing clause, the latter was taken to involve two participants (subjects and indirect object).

Most instances of reported speech in my data are direct. Interestingly, only one clause was found in the corpus in which *decir* doesn't frame reported speech, and only one instance in which a verb different from *decir*, that is, *preguntar*, frames direct reported speech.

5) The role of copulative and existential verbs in transitivity is an issue that deserves more attention than I can give it in this paper. It must be discussed whether or not the transitivity features are applicable to them, especially the number of participants in those copulative clauses that involve two NPs, one acting as subject and the other one as predicate nominal. However, in an effort to make my analysis more comparable to Thompson and Hopper's paper, I counted those clauses involving copulative and existential verbs, that is, *ser* 'to be' (existential), *estar* 'to be' (stative) and *haber* 'there to be', as one-participant, except when *estar* and *haber* act as auxiliaries in progressives and imperfective, respectively, in which case the main verb was coded for the transitivity features.⁹ The inclusion of copular and existential verbs as one-participant predicates in this study for the reasons mentioned above is strongly influential to the analysis due to their frequency in Spanish conversation, frequency that has to do with the different functions they accomplish. The verb *ser*, the most frequent verb in my whole corpus, was found to occur mostly in predicate nominal clauses, such as *medicinas sería un buen termómetro*, through which the speaker expresses his opinion that the price of medicines in the Mexican cities located in the border area, would be a good indicator of the impact of the events of September 11th on the Mexican economy. *Ser* also occurs in predicate adjective clauses, such as *Enrique es bien*

⁹ The existential verb *haber* "there is/are" has a special syntactic behavior in Spanish, so that it is not clear whether the NP that occurs after the verb works as subject or object. Some studies (Bentivoglio, 1986; Sánchez, 2003) suggest that this NP accomplishes the function of subject, thus involving only one participant. However, in my view, there is syntactic evidence that this NP acts as object. The fact that this verb is always conjugated in third person singular regardless of the number of the full NP makes evident that syntactically two participants (subject and object) are involved.

cuidadoso ‘Enrique is very careful’; followed by an oblique, as in *muchas de las tiendas son de autoservicio* ‘many of the shops are of the self-service kind’.

Another function accomplished by the verb *ser* is to introduce a complement clause. The sequence made up of *ser* conjugated in third person singular, plus the complementizer *que* is to be understood as a construction that expresses cause, reason, as if implicitly preceded by *la razón* or *el hecho*, as when Abel, trying to explain why some people who live in a Mexican neighborhood are gray-haired, attributes it to the fact that the fuzz released by a textile factory located in the nearby area, says: *es que como era textil, toda la pelucita blanca de las telas volaba* ‘the fact is that since it was a textile one (referring to a factory) all the little white fuzz of the fabrics floated’.

The verb *estar* (stative) takes predicate adjectives, as well as locative and time predicates involving both adverbs and obliques. The verb *estar* occurs in predicate-adjective clause, as can be seen in *en el Costco están más baratas* ‘in the Costco they are cheaper (referring to pizzas)’. It also occurs followed by an oblique, as in *Marina y yo estábamos también con la duda* ‘Marina and I were also with the doubt’ in the context of whether they should or should not give a tip to a shop employee. An instance of a temporal oblique following verb *estar* is, referring to the time required to get to Cachuma from Goleta, *estará como a una hora* ‘it is around one hour (away)’. A locative clause involving *estar* is *ahí están los guantes* ‘the gloves are there’.

The verb *haber* only takes either numerals working as pronouns, as in the clause *pasando el caño hay dos* ‘crossing the waste-pipe there are two’, referring to two complexes located close to a small dam.

Once the criteria mentioned above were applied, a total of 563 clauses was obtained, which constitute the corpus for this study. Only those clauses involving two or three participants were counted for the transitivity parameters. Further considerations dealing with the remaining parameters will be discussed later on as part of the analysis.

RESULTS

Number of participants

By appealing to usage-based studies, Thompson and Hopper (2001) and Tao (2003) demonstrate that argument structure in conversation is not fixed, but flex-

ible. So, a specific verb may involve either two participants or just one-participant. What might be imagined to be a two- or three-participant verb considering idealized data —such as the English verb *remember*—, turns out to be more frequently used in conversation as a one-participant verb. This is true for many of the verbs found in my conversational excerpts. Indeed the most frequent verbs in my corpus after the verb *ser*, that is, *decir* and *dar* are flexible in the number of participants they occur with. For example, *decir*, which appears in 11% of the clauses, takes either one or two participants. In the following examples *decir* appears framing direct reported speech and taking two participants and one participant, respectively. In the first one, Rigo quotes a conversation he held with a waiter in a restaurant. Rigo feels bothered because the amount of the tip was included in the bill: *Y yo sí le dije en mi medio inglés; le digo: “Yo no estoy de acuerdo. Es una cuestión voluntaria”* ‘And I did tell him in my broken English: “I don’t agree. It is a voluntary matter”’. In the second instance, in which the speaker got an electric charge when he was connecting some cables and he thus decided to stop restoring the service, the recipient of the quoted words is not explicitly mentioned: *Dije: “ya así que se quede”* ‘I said: “It is better to leave it like that.”’

Likewise, when *decir* frames indirect reported speech it takes either one or two participants, respectively. For example, one of the speakers is, at a certain point in the interaction, complaining that he was not warned that in order to restore the electricity service, the cable should not reach the sides of the box. The accusative pronominal form *me* ‘me’ acts as indirect object: *Nunca me dijo que había que entrar este... sin que pegara el cable alrededor* ‘He never told me that (the cable) must get into... well, without it touching the sides’.

In the clause *Y otros dicen que van a esperar hasta diciembre* ‘And others say that they are going to wait until December’, there is no syntactic indirect object, but only subject (*otros*), in such a way that only one participant is involved.

Decir appears more frequently as a one-participant verb, and the most frequent type of reported speech that it frames is direct reported speech. Interestingly, Thompson and Hopper’s findings for English do not show that “say” and “tell” are especially noticeable when compared to other verbs in their corpus.

The verb *dar* shows a similar behavior with regard to flexibility in the number of participants it actually takes. Unlike *decir*,¹⁰ this verb takes one, two or three argu-

¹⁰ Recall that quotations do not count as object for this study.

ments as shown, respectively, in the following examples. In the first one, the words of a waiter in a restaurant are being quoted in the context of an interaction with a customer. *Si no quiere dar, no dé* ‘If you don’t want to give, don’t give’. Here, the clause *no dé* ‘don’t give’, involves only subject. In the next example, which is a continuation of the previous one, the conditional clause *si lo doy o no* ‘if I give it or not’ contains both subject implicit in the verb inflection, and object, expressed by the pronominal form *lo*. In the following turn (my third example), the speaker wonders whether the boys who help pack the items for the customers in the supermarkets obtain a tip from the customers, and describes his own experience: *Yo no he visto que nadie les dé propina* ‘I haven’t seen anybody give them a tip’. The three arguments involved are: *nadie* ‘nobody’ as subject, *les* as a pronominal form that stands for the boys and works as indirect object, and *propina* ‘tip’ acts as the lexical object.

Unlike *decir*, clauses including *dar* are more frequently high in number of participants. That is, the argument combinations subject/object and subject/object/indirect object are more frequent than only subject. In other words, most verbs that occur in my conversational excerpts are flexible in the number of participants they actually take.

As mentioned above, pseudoreflexive verbs did not count as two-participant verbs for this study, because in spite of the fact that they syntactically take two participants (subject and object), semantically the action does not actually transfer to the entity referred to by the pronoun working as object—which coincides with the entity referred to by the subject—. Around 4% of the corpus have pseudoreflexive verbs as predicate. True reflexives are really scarce. The most frequent pseudoreflexive verbs are *acordarse*, *convertirse*, and *parecerse*.

As we can see, my corpus as a whole is low in this parameter, as Thompson and Hopper found for English. Three out of the four excerpts are low in number of participants, that is, involve only one participant. However, my results differ from Thompson and Hopper’s in that one of the excerpts, ‘Electricity’, amounting to 25% of the corpus, rates high in number of participants (51%). It is important to mention, however, that the percentages for high and low do not differ much in both studies. That is, while Thompson and Hopper obtained 43% of clauses high in number of participants, and 57% of clauses low in that parameter, I obtained 51% and 49%, respectively. In spite of the fact that the proportion is not very different, in a two-value scale any amount over 50% means high. It is in this sense that some Spanish conversational excerpts can be said to rank high in number of participants.

Kinesis

For this parameter, which reflects whether or not the clause involves physical action, most clauses in the corpus rated low. In addition to the fact that for most excerpts in the corpus, clauses in which action takes place are few, they name mostly processes or sets of activities, which only partially involve physical action. In other words, only part of the process or some of the actions of the set can be seen as involving physical action. Let us examine some examples. In the first one, the speaker is talking about the U.S. immigration authorities' requirement that Mexican passport holders exchange their visas for laser visas as we see in a previous example. Yet these verbs also imply other steps that are not necessarily to be seen as physical activity, such as looking at the visas and checking the information on them.

In the second case, verbs that would be expected to name a physical action are used metaphorically, thereby losing kinesis. This is evident if we compare the use of the verb *meter* 'to put into' in two examples. The first one refers to how to restore electricity: *Aquí nada más le desatornillas aquí y metes el cable este* 'you only need to unscrew here, and put this cable inside'. Here, the introduction of the cable into a box in order to restore the electricity service is an action. Yet I found cases in which we could hardly say that physical activity is involved. The talk centers on a news broadcaster, who established an inexistent connection between the change-of-visas affair and the events of September 11th: *Pero el que dio la noticia, no dio completa la noticia, ¿no? sino la mete en el cuadro del- en el contexto de los atentados, y bueno, pues tiene otra lectura ¿no?* 'but he who gave the news, didn't give the complete story, right?, but he rather places it into the picture of the- in the context of the attacks; and well, it has a different reading, right?'.

Unlike the previous example, *meter* 'to put into' is presented here as a mental, interpretive process, in which the news is framed by the broadcaster in the wrong way. So, the discourse context was carefully explored in order to determine whether action was involved or not. While the first was included as high in kinesis, the clause in the second example was classified as low in kinesis. Verbs that name verbal communication, such as *preguntar*, *contestar*, and especially *decir* involve a certain degree of physical activity and are relevant to this parameter due to their frequency (specially the latter). So, I kept these verbs separate

throughout the analysis to determine whether their inclusion would affect the result and to what extent. The difference between low and high kinesis clauses was so large in three of the excerpts, that even if I coded those verbs as high in kinesis, the result would be low for most clauses. On the other hand, for “Electricity” kinesis would remain high for more than 50% of the clauses even if those instances of *decir* that involve two participants were coded as low in kinesis. So, finally, the tendencies were so neat that the treatment of those verbs didn’t affect the result for this parameter. Since a decision needed to be made in any case, I coded those verbs as low in kinesis.

Punctuality

A high percentage of the clauses of each excerpt were low in punctuality, since they involve a transition, a process. Each clause was considered carefully in order to determine how the speaker is presenting the events being talked about, since even the use of a verb which prototypically involves punctuality was found to implicate some steps before completion. Thus, in the following example, which refers to the installation of an Ethernet card, the verb *abrir* “to open” involves an accurate handling of the machine (a computer), and some steps before the computer is completely open to install the card: *La abres* (referring to the computer) *y metes una tarjetita; la prendes y la máquina sola pone* ‘you open it and put a little card inside; you turn it on and the machine puts (gives instructions) by itself’. Consequently, this occurrence of the verb *abrir* was coded and counted as low in punctuality. On the contrary, the clauses below were coded as punctual, because there is not transition in the event. The speaker was restoring electricity by connecting some cables to a box, and he suddenly received a shock that made him toss the tool he was using: *y me da un pinche flamazo, entre azul y amarillo, y me botó las pinzas* ‘and it throws me a damn blaze between blue and yellow, and threw the pliers away from me’. The verbs *dar* ‘give’ and *botar* ‘throw’ are used to name actions which occur immediately, without transition. Most clauses in the corpus are not as neat as this one, but in general they are rather to be seen, in their respective discourse context, as referring to an event “in progress”. Considering my whole corpus for the present study, though “Electricity” ranks as high as 45%, none of the excerpts exceeds 50%, thus resulting in a corpus low in punctuality.

Agency and volitionality

Volitionality and agency are two transitivity parameters which were found to consistently rate high by Thompson and Hopper. As they note, people typically talk about people and what they do, or what happens to them. Consequently they are mostly agentive, that is, they transfer effectively an action or carry out an event in a potent way. In the example just mentioned, the electric charge appears as agentive (though non-human), that is, high in potency, but also as lacking volition. Contrarily, in the case of the Ethernet card installation, subject is both potent and volitional in the action to open the computer and put the card inside it. In the following case, however, the subject, that is, the members of an ethnic group that migrates to the U.S. and back to Mexico each year is not high in potency, although they carry, volitionally, their ID cards: *está como los... el grupo este que migra cada invierno por Chihuahua. Traían... traen su credencial* 'It is also the case of the... the group that migrates each winter crossing (lit. through) Chihuahua. They brought... bring their ID card'.

This example shows that although agency and volitionality tend to cooccur, they can differ sometimes. In my corpus, both parameters exhibit a similar frequency. That is, all of the excerpts have clearly over 50% of its clauses ranking high for both volitionality and agency. Thus, these parameters prove consistently high in Spanish conversation.

Affectedness

Affectedness can be seen as a cover parameter that embraces at least two different features, both of them considered by Hopper and Thompson (1980). One of them is how completely a patient is affected, while the other one has to do with the intensity of the action on the object. In the latter case, what is relevant is whether or not the object is radically affected or physically changed in some way (moved or altered). When each of them is considered separately the results differ, because they indeed respond to different perspectives, though both of them are relevant to measuring transitivity. Thus, for example, the clause containing the verb *ver* "to see" below, would be high in affectedness because the subject is looking at the whole entity that is named by object. In this example, the speaker is referring to a friend who is very careful in handling high tension cables. *Jorge es bien cuidadoso,*

encinta las puntas. Tú lo has visto, ¿no? ‘Jorge is very careful. He covers the ends with tape. You have seen him, right?’. The clause *tú lo has visto* includes an O: the pronominal form *lo*—which stands for Jorge—, as being seen in his totality, and then being fully encompassed by the action named by the verb.

By appealing to the second criterion, on the other hand, the same clause would rate low, since the object is not being physically modified in any sense. Considering this circumstance, I decided to apply the second criterion, that is, the degree of physical change carried out on the object, regardless of whether the whole entity referred to by the object suffers the change or not. That is, a clause ranks high for affectedness if the object is altered in some way, such as in the clause: *si la quieres conectar* (referring to electricity) *nada más le destornillas aquí y metes el cable* ‘if you want to connect it, just unscrew here and put the cable inside’.

In this example, what is going to be unscrewed is just part of a bigger area, not the whole surface. The use of the indirect object pronoun *le* instead of the available object pronouns *la* or *lo* supports this interpretation, for it gives the idea of partiality. In some clauses both features coincide. Thus, in the previous example, the ends of the cable are totally covered with tape. The use of the definite (feminine plural) article *las*, in the NP *las puntas* helps to morphologically and syntactically convey totality.

By appealing to this criterion, I found that for two of the excerpts: “Diversity 2” and “Electricity”, most of the clauses are rather high in affectedness, while for the rest of the corpus the clauses are low in this feature. In this respect, my data differ from Thompson and Hopper’s (2001) results for their English corpus, which contained 84% of low-in-affectedness clauses. Recall that “Electricity” involves manipulation of tools and cables in order to restore electricity, which is highly influential on the result for this paper.

Individuation

Individuation is a parameter that involves a set of different though interconnected features in such a way that the result of the analysis depends on what features are given priority over the rest. Although I only use two values, high and low, to code my data, individuation is better seen as a scalar parameter, which includes proper nouns employed for humans, but also for places (cities, countries, rivers, neighborhoods) and international companies, as well as non-human entities which, in

their respective contexts, are more clearly individuated than some human beings. So, the decision for this study was to examine each clause in its context in order to determine whether the object was being individuated or not, and whether a different choice would have been available to the speaker, regardless of the features “humaness” or “animacy”. Proper nouns were all ranked high, as well as NPs with definite articles provided that they were not used as generalizing or classifying devices. I examined above two clauses that were coded as high in individuation in spite of the fact that they refer to non-human entities. In a previous excerpt, the subject matter is whether or not to give a tip in U.S. stores. The same excerpt later contains a clause in which Domino’s, a pizza worldwide company, appears as highly individuated *Yo hasta al Domino’s no le doy dinero* (referring to all Domino’s employees who deliver pizzas) ‘I don’t even give money to Domino’s.’ Another of the speakers in the same interaction provides his own opinion by saying *si alguien se quiere ganar propina, procura atenderte bien* ‘if somebody wants to earn a tip, s/he tries to serve you well’. In this case, *alguien* ‘somebody’ in the conditional clause, refers to a human entity that is not being individuated. Likewise, the suffixed pronominal form *-te* in *atenderte* accomplishes a generalizing function (anybody), rather than an individuating one (you as interlocutor).

Another piece of evidence that non-animated entities are highly individuated is the clause *él arregló tu máquina* ‘he fixed your machine’ in which the NP *tu máquina* is clearly individuated by the possessive pronoun *tu* ‘your’ that comes immediately before the NP.

Given that, as has been shown above, individuation is a feature that needs to be determined in relation to the discourse context, regardless of whether it characterizes animated or unanimated entities, the decision for each clause as to whether it was high or low in individuation was made on the basis of the specific context of occurrence. By appealing to this criterion I found that the corpus is consistently high for this parameter, that is, all four excerpts contain either 50% or more clauses high in individuation. Thus, this feature, along with volitionality and agency, is high for the whole corpus. This finding is not far from the results found by Thompson and Hopper for this feature, since they obtained nearly 50% of highly individuated clauses. Their account for this is that conversational discourse frequently involves pronouns working as object. In my data, although pronominal forms acting as O are frequent, I also found a relatively high number

of proper nouns naming human as well as non-human referents, and NPs that are individuated either by possessives, prepositions and definite articles.

Aspect

This parameter deals with the telic or atelic character of the clause. That is, whether it is presented as completed or in progress. Unlike the number-of-participants and kinesis parameters, in which at least one excerpt rated high, for this parameter all four excerpts were low. The criteria employed were as follows. In Spanish, a language rich in moods and verb tenses, telicity is a highly grammaticized feature. Telic actions are conveyed by the *pretérito* ‘preterit’ (different and more specific than English past tense), while other tenses convey the sense of a non-telic action. So, all instances of verb conjugated in preterit, except negative clauses, were coded as telic, while verbs conjugated in any other tense were coded as atelic. The same is valid for the clauses in *copretérito*, which in other languages is treated as imperfective aspect. The example *Jorge tenía el apodo de...* ‘Jorge had the nickname...’, as well as many others in my corpus, contains clauses in *copretérito*. In the case of *Yo no he visto que nadie les dé propina* ‘I haven’t seen anybody give them a tip’, the verb *dar* ‘give’ occurs in present subjunctive. Since the action named by the verb is not presented as completed, this clause was coded as atelic. The clause *ahí están los guantes. Agárralos* ‘the gloves are there. Take them’ contains a verb in imperative, *agárralos*, and was consequently treated as atelic, given that the action has not only not been accomplished, but might not even have been initiated.¹¹

The most frequent tenses found, arranged according to frequency, were present, preterit, present subjunctive—which occurs in many complement clauses—, *copretérito*, proximate future, and imperative.¹²

¹¹ However, from a lexical point of view, this verb can be seen as telic in the sense that it involves a necessary endpoint. In this regard, as Hopper and Thompson (1980) point out, it is necessary to make a distinction between aspect, understood as involving telicity/perfectivity and lexical aspect. The latter “comprises those manners of viewing an action which are predictable from the lexical meaning of the verb” (p. 271), that is, “the inherent type of action of the verb” (p. 271). The authors argue that, although these two kinds of aspect tend to correlate to a high degree, they are to be seen as separate phenomena.

¹² Verbs in ‘proximate future’ (*ir a* ‘going to’), as in *van a cambiar todas las visas* ‘they are going to change all visas’, though irrealis in mode, were not considered, because they trigger infinitival clauses. As mentioned from the onset, infinitival clauses were excluded at all.

Interestingly, it was found that many tenses were not actually used in the conversational excerpts I studied. A case in point is future, which was only used in association with copulative verb *estar* to express uncertainty, doubt, approximation, as in the example above (*estará como a una hora, vid. p. 86*), in which the speaker is estimating the time it takes to get from Goleta to Cachuma Lake. My corpus is clearly low in telicity, which corroborates Thompson and Hopper's finding for English.

Mode

The coding criteria I followed for the present paper were to count as irrealis those clauses involving the conditional particle *si* 'if', as in the clause *si no quiere dar* 'if you don't want to give'; and those whose verb is conjugated in present subjunctive, as *dé* in example *no he visto que nadie les dé* 'I haven't seen that somebody gives them (referring to tips)'. Future (expressing uncertainty, as mentioned in the section above), was also counted as irrealis. Any other clause was counted as realis.

Proximate future (*ir a* 'going to'), on the other hand also occur sometimes in one-participant clauses, but are not relevant here. The number of realis clauses is strikingly high in my corpus, thereby strongly supporting Thompson and Hopper's finding that conversation is high in realis clauses.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has investigated transitivity in Spanish conversational discourse by appealing to Hopper and Thompson's scale of transitivity. As a first step, some methodological decisions were made in order to determine a) what should count as a clause and therefore be part of the corpus, b) what should count as two or more participants, thus being eligible for the application of the remaining parameters of the scale, and c) specificities regarding the application of each parameter. After making the relevant decisions in these respects, the results for each excerpt were kept separate, so that some correlations among them could be established. All excerpts, regardless of whether they belonged to the same conversation or not, were consistently high in agency, volitionality, individuation, and realis, but consistently low in punctuality and telicity (aspect). For affectedness,

I found that two out of the four excerpts ranked high (around 50% of the corpus) in this feature. The result differs if we count each clause independently or we count each of them as part of a larger conversational unit which I have called “excerpt”. While the first choice would result in a corpus slightly under 50% high in affectedness, the second gives us 50% of the corpus high in this feature. This shows the crucial role of methodological decisions in the study of transitivity. In this respect, I have suggested throughout the analysis an intermediate discourse analytic level between the clause and the whole corpus, so that relevant correlations can be more easily identified. With regard to kinesis, although the corpus as a whole tends to be low, one of the excerpts consists of 59% of clauses high in kinesis. The same is valid for the number-of-participants parameter, where three out of the total number of excerpts are low, while one is high.

Interestingly, for the feature “affectedness,” the two excerpts taken from the same conversation (“Diversity 1” and “Diversity 2”), show a different behavior. In other words, whereas the former is high in affectedness, the later is low. This supports the claim that different fragments of the same conversation, in which the same speakers and the same setting are involved, actually differ for this feature. This situation opens the possibility that excerpts of the same conversation differ also for other transitivity parameters, specially kinesis and number of participants, for which excerpts from different conversations ranked high.

It was also found that conversational excerpts can be high in transitivity when the latter is conceived, as I am doing from the onset, as a composite. My analysis shows that one of the conversational excerpts, “Electricity”, ranks high for participants, kinesis and affectedness, in addition to agency, volitionality, and mode. A factor that contributes to this outcome is that, as mentioned above, some parameters, precisely agency, volitionality, realis mode, and individuation are consistently high for both English and Spanish conversation, so that a high rate in either of the remaining parameters would give as a result an excerpt 50% or more high in transitivity.

Some factors such as the extensive use of reported speech involving two participants in the framing clause (subject and indirect object) affects significantly the number of participants in two of the excerpts. A combination of a high use of direct reported speech framed by the verb *decir* when it involves two participants, plus a relatively low occurrence of copulative verbs, is a factor that contributes to the high-in-number-of-participants character of “Electricity”.

On the other hand, verbs conveying the speaker's stance, easily identifiable and strikingly frequent in English conversation, are not specially numerous in Spanish with respect to other verbs. Although verbs such as *decir* 'to say/tell', *creer* 'to think', and *saber* 'to know' are used to convey stance, this use is not especially frequent in the excerpts analyzed. What is more, most of the few instances I found were indeed left out of the analysis due to their role as discourse markers or highly lexicalized expressions.

Further studies in these and other languages will contribute to deepen our understanding of these phenomena, as we seek to clarify the relationship between grammar and discourse.

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