Article

Discourse markers and coherence relations: Comparison across markers, languages and modalities

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Abstract

We examine how one particular coherence relation, Concession, is marked across languages and modalities, through an extensive analysis of the Concession relation, examining the types of discourse markers used to signal it. The analysis is contrastive from three different angles: markers, languages and modalities. We compare different markers within the same language (but, although, however, etc.), and two languages (English and Spanish). We aim to provide a contrastive methodology that can be applied to any language, given that it has as a starting point the abstract notion of coherence relations, which we believe are similar across languages. Finally, we compare two modalities: spoken and written language. In the analysis, we find that the contexts in which concessive relations are used are similar across languages, but that there are clear differences in the two modalities or genres. In the spoken genre, the most common function of concession is to correct misunderstandings and contrast situations. In the written genre, on the other hand, concession is most often used to qualify opinions.

1. Introduction

A great deal of the study of discourse markers has been linked to their role as markers of coherence relations. By coherence relations we mean relations in discourse that join clauses or sentences with rhetorical purposes (cause, con-

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dition, elaboration, justification or evidence), as defined in Rhetorical Structure Theory (Mann and Thompson, 1988), and in similar or related theories (e.g., Sperber and Wilson, 1995; Asher and Lascarides, 2003).

At the same time, recent research has shown the fruitful perspective that contrastive studies can bring to the study of discourse markers and their use in signaling coherence relations (Knott and Sanders, 1998; Altenberg, 2002; Degand and Pander Maat, 2003; Taboada, 2004a; Fabricius-Hansen, 2005; Degand, 2009, among others). These contrastive studies add to a large existing body of research that has focused primarily on English, some of it with a historical perspective (Brinton, 1996). Much ground remains to be covered in contrastive studies of discourse markers, from both a discourse point of view and from the point of view of translation studies, into how discourse markers are translated, added or omitted across languages, and what their role is in the interpretation of coherence relations.

In this study we focus on the Concession relation, and examine the types of discourse markers used to signal it. The analysis is contrastive from three different angles: markers, languages, and modalities. The analysis involves different markers, within the same language and across languages (English and Spanish), and across two modalities: spoken and written language. We aim at providing a contrastive methodology that can be applied to any language, given that it has as a starting point the abstract notion of coherence relations, which we believe are similar across languages.

We analyze two contrastive corpora, one written and one spoken. The written corpus is a collection of 200 texts (100 per language) that evaluate movies and books, taken from web portals that collect and distribute different types of products: Ciao.es for Spanish, and Epinions.com for English, part of the SFU Review Corpus (Taboada, 2008). The spoken corpus, also contrastive, contains 10 telephone conversations (five in each language), from each one of which five minutes have been transcribed (Wheatley, 1996; Kingsbury *et al.*, 1997).

The methodology we follow consists of identifying all the markers that indicate a Concession relation, extracting them from the corpora, and calculating frequencies and other characteristics, such as placement of the marker (e.g., at the beginning or end of the clause). We define Concession as a relation that joins two clauses or units in a potential or apparent contradiction (see Section 3). Finally, we compare the usage of each marker in the two languages and modalities.

2. Coherence relations

One of the fundamental issues in the study of discourse is the phenomenon of coherence. In discourse studies, coherence is described as the way in which a discourse 'hangs together', with pieces relating to other pieces. Mann and

Thompson (1988) defined it as the absence of non-sequiturs, i.e., a coherent text is one where all the parts form a whole: 'for every part of a coherent text, there is some function, some plausible reason for its presence, evident to readers, and furthermore, there is no sense that some parts are somehow missing' (Mann and Taboada, 2010). Renkema (2004: 103) indicates that coherence refers to 'the connections which can be made by the reader or listener based on knowledge outside the discourse.' Those connections are often captured in the form of coherence relations.

The relations that we are concerned with here are referred to as coherence relations, discourse relations, or rhetorical relations. They are paratactic (coordinate) or hypotactic (subordinate) relations that hold across two or more text spans. When building a text or any instance of discourse, just as when building a sentence, speakers choose among a set of alternatives that relate two portions of the text. The two parts of the text that have been thus linked can then enter, as a unit, into another relation, making the process recursive throughout the text. Coherence relations have been proposed as an explanation for the construction of coherence in discourse. It is not clear how much speakers and hearers are aware of their presence, but it is uncontroversial that hearers and readers process text incrementally, adding new information to a representation of the ongoing discourse (e.g., van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983).

There are many classifications and a variety of labels for coherence relations. To better define these relation, we will be making use of Rhetorical Structure Theory, a theory of text organization (Mann and Thompson, 1988). In Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST), texts are understood as coherent wholes, made up of parts that stand in rhetorical relations to each other. The parts are typically clauses or sentences, and the relations are those that capture the perceived coherence of most texts. Examples of relations are: Concession, Condition, Cause, Result, Elaboration, Antithesis, Summary and Background. Units are called spans, and they may be atomic (one clause or one sentence), or composed of other spans.

Another fundamental aspect of RST is the relative status of spans. In most relations, one part of the relation, that is, one span, is considered to be the main part, and the other one is secondary. These are called nucleus and satellite, respectively, and are analogous to main and subordinate clauses in a hypotactic syntactic relation. Some relations are paratactic, consisting of two or more nuclei, just like coordinated clauses. Example (1) shows a typical Concessive relation from our corpus, with the nucleus and satellite marked in square brackets.

(1) [S] Kiss the Girls was OK, [N] but there were too many unbelievable points about it that made it a bad story all together. [W, Books, no24]

Relations hold at all levels in a text from the clause up.[1] Typically, the clause is considered the minimal unit of analysis.

Space precludes a more extensive discussion of the theory itself. More detail can be found in the original paper on RST (Mann and Thompson, 1988), a recent overview (Taboada and Mann, 2006a, 2006b), or the RST web site (Mann and Taboada, 2010).

The main focus of this paper is the Concession relation, a relation that we have observed is very frequent in the review genre, one of the genres in this study (Trnavac and Taboada, 2010). We also include related relations, such as adversative and contrast relations. The next section outlines the family of concessive relations in Spanish and English.

3. Concessive, adversative and contrast relations

The term 'concession' generally refers to a special kind of adverbial subordinate clause, illustrated in (2), which: (a) is introduced by conjunctions somewhat aprioristically considered as concessive; (b) can be pre- or post-posed to the main clause or verb; and (c) cannot be replaced by a semantically equivalent adverb.

(2)   a.   Although the ending was a happy one, it was also a little sad. [M, no3]

b.   La banda sonora es excelente, aunque se repite. [P, no_2_20]
The soundtrack is excellent, although repetitive.

These characteristics have been identified in numerous studies of concessives in English (Quirk *et al.*, 1985; Rudolph, 1996: 4–6; Biber *et al.*, 1999; Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson, 2000; Crevels, 2000b; Huddleston and Pullum, 2002) and Spanish (Gili Gaya, 1955, § 239, § 249; Gutiérrez Ordóñez, 1977–1978; Álvarez Martínez, 1987; Narbona Jiménez, 1990; Kovacci, 1992: 29; Alarcos Llorach, 1994: 441–442; Hernández Alonso, 1995; Di Tullio, 1997: 337; López García, 1999; Carbonell Olivares, 2005; Real Academia Española, 2009, ch. 54). However, on closer inspection, the picture becomes rather more complex, as there still has not been a general consensus on the exact number, nature and realization of these relations.

In what follows it will be shown that concessive relations show a wide variety of realizations in English and Spanish ranging from subordinating ((*al*)*though*, *aunque*) and coordinating (*but*, *pero*) conjunctions to adverbial items (*nevertheless*, *nonetheless*, *all the same*, *sin embargo, después de todo, pese a todo*), phrasal (prepositional) expressions (*in spite of, a pesar de*), parenthetical elements, mainly impersonal clauses or adverbial items (*(it's) true, true enough, si bien es cierto, ciertamente*), or even combinations with the previous and/or other markers (*even though it is true that …, si bien es cierto que*).

We shall also see that, although it is common for concessives to be adverbial adjuncts at the matrix clause level of syntactic analysis, it is also quite common for both concessives and their conjoined segments to be expressed in two juxtaposed matrix clauses. In addition, concession can be expressed by certain lexico-syntactic realizations other than discourse markers such as special uses of tenses or impersonal constructions. It can also be left implicit in the discourse with no overt marking, a possibility that transcends the scope of this paper.

From a semantic point of view, confusion emerges because such terms as 'contrastive', 'adversative', 'concessive' and 'corrective' have been used interchangeably in the Spanish and English literature when, in our view, these labels represent distinct notions (Rivarola, 1976; Abraham, 1979; Traugott, 1986, 1995; Spooren, 1989; Lavacchi and Nicolás, 1994; Moya Corral, 1996; Fuentes Rodríguez, 1998; Flamenco García, 1999; Crevels, 2000a, 2000b). In this study *concessive relations* fall within the triadic category of *relations of opposition* together with *contrast relations* ('adversative') and *corrective relations* (Lakoff, 1971; Foolen, 1991; Izutsu, 2008), as opposed to *alternative* or *otherwise* relations, the meaning of which emphasize a sense of alternativeness rather than opposition (Mann and Thompson, 1988). Both opposition and alternative relations belong to the ideational structure of the discourse (together with those expressing time, space, condition, etc.), and in the Spanish tradition they are mostly regarded as *causativity relations* (cause-effect or condition-consequence), within which concessives would express inefficient cause, conditionals hypothetical cause, final clauses intentional cause and reason clauses efficient cause (Gutiérrez Ordóñez, 1997: 76 and ff.). Therefore, excluded from this study are those discourse markers that belong to the interpersonal and/or textual dimension of discourse (e.g. *well, so, then, I mean, you know* and their Spanish equivalents (*bueno, entonces, quiero decir, ya sabes*). This distinction concerns the 'source of coherence' and has received different labels in the literature such as *ideational* vs. *pragmatic* discourse markers (Redeker, 1990), *subject-matter* vs. *presentational relations* (Mann and Thompson, 1988), *external* vs. *internal* uses of conjunctions and relations (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Martin, 1992), or *semantic* vs. *pragmatic* connectives (van Dijk, 1977; Briz, 1994).

Focusing on ideational or subject-matter relations of opposition, the contrastive-concessive dichotomy endorsed here derives from Lakoff's (1971) study of *but*, distinguishing between 'the semantic opposition *but*' and 'the denial of expectation or concessive *but*' (for an application of this dichotomy to Spanish, see Rivarola (1976)). In the former, two clauses are directly opposed to each other (*Mary is tall, but Peter is short*), whereas the latter denies a presupposed expectation (or assumption) evoked from the semantic content of one clause. In *John is Socialist, but you can trust him* the *but*-concessive clause denies the

implicit assumption that 'if John is Socialist, then he is not trustworthy' evoked in the first clause.[2] The third type, corrective, is obtained from the lexical distinction between such connectors as *pero* and *sino* in Spanish or *but* and *instead* or *rather* in English, of which only the latter (*sino, instead* and *rather)* are exclusively used for corrective purposes (Anscombre and Ducrot, 1977, 1983).

Besides lexical differences, these three types of relations of opposition also show syntactic differences that support their consideration as distinct semantic categories. As pointed out by Lakoff (1971), contrast differs from concessive and corrective under three syntactic operations: reversing two connected segments, paraphrasing with *and*, and omitting a connective.

Salkie and Oates (1999), in their study of *but* and *although*, distinguish between two meanings for *but*: contrast and denial of expectation. Contrast and concession are also distinguished by Quirk *et al.* in their classification of adverbial subordinate clauses (Quirk *et al.*, 1985).

In summary, and following Izutsu (2008), we propose that the family of opposition relations that includes concessive, contrast and corrective indicate a conflict or clash between the two (or more) parts of the relation. In particular, what is mutually exclusive in concessives is found between the propositional content of one clause and an assumption evoked in the other segment ('If John is a socialist, (then normally) he cannot be trusted.')

Our work is grounded in Rhetorical Structure Theory, where the Concession relation is defined as follows, with the fields (constraints and effect) suggested for an RST definition (Mann and Taboada, 2010):

(3)   Concession
    Constraints on the nucleus: The writer[3] has positive regard for the nucleus.
    Constraints on the satellite: The writer is not claiming that S does not hold;
    the writer acknowledges a potential or apparent incompatibility between
    nucleus and satellite; recognizing the compatibility between nucleus and satel-
    lite increases the reader's positive regard for the nucleus.
    Effect: The reader's positive regard for the nucleus is increased.

Note that, in this case, 'positive regard' does not mean that the writer agrees with a potential (positive) evaluation expressed in the nucleus; it implies that the writer believes that the nucleus is more likely or more the case than the potentially conflicting situation presented in the satellite.

4. Markers of concession in English and Spanish

In this paper, we deal mostly with discourse markers as signals of concessive relations. We use the term 'discourse marker' in a loose sense, to refer to any conjunction, adverb, adverbial phrase or other type of phrase that frequently links two or more units of discourse.

We extracted relations automatically, using discourse markers that indicate concessivity in each language. This has the advantage that the extraction can be done automatically. The disadvantage is that some relations that are 'implicit', or signaled by means other than a discourse marker (Taboada, 2009), will be missed. Markers were drawn from a number of sources, and from our own corpus analysis (Rivarola, 1976; Quirk *et al.*, 1985; Narbona Jiménez, 1990; Moya Corral, 1996; Knott, 1996; Rudolph, 1996; Marcu, 1997; Fuentes Rodríguez, 1998; Flamenco García, 1999; Crevels, 2000a; Montolío Durán, 2001; Carbonell Olivares, 2005; Taboada, 2006). In some cases, the automatic extraction returned cases of these markers that indicated something other than a concessive. Those cases were excluded from the study.

4.1. English markers

The following are general categories of English markers that indicate a concessive relation, classified according to part of speech.

(4) **Conjunctions and conjuncts:** albeit, although, but, but even so, come what may, despite (everything), despite the fact that, even if, even though, even when, even while, howbeit, much as, though, when, whereas, whether, while
a.   It's the same message as 'It's a Wonderful Life', **albeit** delivered with a lot more f-words and flying liquor bottles. [W, M, yes23][4]
b.   … felt a little funny he felt a little funny in the chest **but** that could be a reaction because of the heat [S, en_4315]

(5) **Sentence adverbials**: above all, after all, and even then, anyway, at any cost, even, even yet, for all that, for one thing, however, in any case, in spite of all things, in spite of everything, nevertheless, no matter what, nonetheless, of course, only, over all, rather, regardless, still, too, withal, yet
a.   Kelly Preston has little to do and not much time to do it in. Baldwin, **however**, is a convincing bad guy. [W, M, yes15]

(6) **Gerunds introducing subordinate clauses or noun phrases:** admitting, allowing that, even supposing, gra`nting (all this), supposing, without considering
a.   Miranda the patient was a more plausible impression, **considering** Halle Berry has a natural confused look on her face which enhances this role. [W, M, no23]

(7) **Prepositional phrases with certain prepositions:** against, aside from, distinct from, even after, even before, even as, even with, in contempt of, in defiance of, in spite of, in the face of, notwithstanding, regardless of, without regard to
a.   **Regardless** of whether they like him or not, Luke is forced to keep many secrets the workers have told him or made evident to him. [W, B, no6]

4.2. Spanish markers

Below are summarized the Spanish markers of concession that are analyzed in this study. This list is not exhaustive but it does contain the most common markers.

(8)   **Concessive conjunctions/conjuncts**: a pesar de (que), a pesar de todo, a pesar de + Inf., así, aunque, cuando, no obstante, (Conditional / Future +) pero, pese a (que), si bien, sin embargo, (tan) siquiera.

a. **A pesar de que** para mi Almudena Grandes es una escritora genial (yo me he leído toodos sus libros aunque este no lo he podido terminar) este libro me ha parecido un coñazo, el argumento no me iba para nada y me parecía lento y monótono. [W, L, no_1_16]

Although to me Almudena Grandes is a great author (I've read aaall of her books although I couldn't finish this one) this book was a pain, I didn't like the plot at all and I found it slow and monotonous.

b. Algo que me ha gustado de la película es que aparecen todos los personajes, o casi todos, **aunque** sólo sea en una imagen global de todos los habitantes del pueblo. [W, P, yes_4_2]

One thing that I liked in the movie is that all the characters are there, or almost all, **although** it's only in a global image of all the town's inhabitants.

c. algunas escenas de la película son sencillamente magistrales, como la transformación del Hombre de Arena. **No obstante**, lo espectacular de algunas escenas (especialmente las de acción) en ocasiones resulta excesivo. [W, P, no_1_9]

some scenes from the movie are simply masterful, like the transformation of the Sandman. **However**, what is spectacular in some scenes (especially action ones) in some others becomes excessive.

d. Realmente Prometía con Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas **pero** luego intentó vivir de rentas y en este mundillo: renovarse o morir. [W, B, no_1_11]

[She] really showed promise with Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas [Love, curiosity, Prozac and doubts] **but** then [she] tried to live off of her success and in this world: either do something new or die.

e. En un principio, tengo que reconocer que tenía mis reservas, pues **si bien** es cierto que últimamente el cine español está abordando el género de terror con bastantes buenos resultados, esa no es siempre, ni de lejos, una característica aplicable a todas las películas del género que se ruedan en nuestro país. [W, P, yes_4_6]

First of all, I have to acknowledge that I had my reservations, since **although** it's true that as of late Spanish cinema is venturing into horror with pretty good results, that is not at all a characteristic that can be applied to all the movies in that genre that are shot in our country.

(9)   *por* + AdjP / AdvP + *que*-relative clause: e.g., *por más que*, *por mucho que*

a. Otra razón radica en que intenta explicar al lector todo lo que ocurre **por más que** diré que esto no hacía falta alguna. [W, L, no_2_17]

Another reason is that [the author] tries to explain everything to the reader **although** I'd say that this was not necessary at all.

b. Tampoco se debería manejar de forma absurda: sólo encaja perfectamente en el relato cuando se sabe utilizar. Si no, un 'intento de' contamina el resto de las páginas, **por muy bien escritas que** estén. [W, L, no_2_17]

It shouldn't be treated in an absurd way either: it only fits perfectly in the narration when one knows how to use it. Otherwise, an 'attempt to' corrupts the rest of the pages, **no matter how well written they are**.

(10)   *para* + **NP / InfP /** *que*-**relative clause**

a. Es una niña muy inteligente **para la edad que tiene**, responsable y concienciada con el medio ambiente. [W, P, yes_4_2]

She's a very intelligent girl for her age, responsible and engaged with the environment.

(11)   *con* + **NP / InfP /** *que*-**relative clause or** *con lo* + **AdjP / AdvP +** *que*-**relative clause**

a. Por otro lado, tb destaco como positivo, la interpretación del actor que dá vida al joven Lecter, lo cierto es que, no era nada fácil, y menos **con el antecedente de lo bien que bordó Hopkins al personaje**. [W, L, no_2_25]

On the other hand, I also point out as positive, the performance by the actor who plays the young Lecter, the truth is that, it wasn't easy at all, and least of all **with how well Hopkins played the character**.

(12)   **Gerund**

a. **Siendo** tan fácil de recolectar en el campo o de cultivar en nuestro huerto, es una lástima que no se incluya como una verdura más de una manera habitual en la dieta diaria saludable.

Being so easy to pick in the countryside or to grow in a garden, it is a shame that it isn't included as a vegetable on a regular basis in a daily healthy diet.

(13)   **Gerund / Participle / AdjP +** *y todo*

a. Guille como excelente padre que es, el viernes, **enfermo y todo**, se arrastró hasta el colegio para ir a buscarlo.

Guille, being the excellent father that he is, on Friday, **sick and all**, dragged himself to the school to pick him up.

(14)   **Repetition** of two (identical or different) verbal expressions, in the same or different tenses, in which the second verb may be: *sea cual sea, (lo) quieras o no,*

a. Hecho que, la verdad, no da muy buena espina porque suena un poco a desesperación y a colarte el libro lo **quieras o no** para luego poder ir diciendo que si es un best seller que si tal y cual [W, L no_1_8]

A fact that, truth be told, doesn't bode well because it sounds of desperation and of trying to sell the book **whether you want it or not** so that then [they] can say that it's a best seller and such.

(15)   **Impersonal clausal**: (si) bien es cierto, lo cierto es que, la verdad es que, está claro que

a. **Bien es cierto que** es cortito, pero tambien es cortito todo lo demas: los personajes, la trama, el desenlace, etc… [W, L, no_2_21]

It is true that it is short, but everything else is short too: the characters, the plot, the ending, etc…

(16)   **Adverbs and adverbial expressions**: *ciertamente, efectivamente*

a.   Hace un tiempo, me llamaron la atención unos libros, que, **ciertamente**, no es que tengan una presentación que entre por los ojos, pero fué precisamente eso lo que me hizo fijarme en ellos.

Some time ago, I was struck by some books, which, **certainly**, do not have the most attractive presentation, but it was precisely that which led me to pay attention to them.

(17)   **Combination of markers** (cf. Luscher's (1994) distinction between compositional and additional sequences): *aún así, aún con eso/esto, aún cuando, aún +* Gerund, *así y todo, pero no obstante, y sin embargo.*

a.   **Aún con** esto no voy a dudar de la capacidad de la Iglesia seguire confiando en el, y espero que la proxima vez que lo veamos en pantalla me sorprenda como otras muchas veces. [W, P, no_2_12]

Even despite that, I don't doubt the capacity of de la Iglesia I will continue to trust him, and I hope that the next time we see him on the screen I will be surprised, like I have been in the past.

5. Corpus study: Corpus and methodology

In this section, we discuss the configuration of our corpus and the parameters studied. In our corpus study we are concerned with connections between clauses rather than smaller constituents, and contrast the behavior of concessives in English and Spanish along the following parameters:

i.   **Distribution of concessives across written and spoken texts.** Our assumption is that differences in mode result in differences in the frequency and type of concessive markers. Writing requires a careful evaluation and an effective marking of the intended connections among segments in order to preserve the right logico-pragmatic interpretation of the text, which will be reflected in the choice of concessive connectors (Montolío Durán, 2001). In oral texts, on the other hand, the interactive nature of concession becomes more evident.

ii.   **Realization of the concessive relation** in terms of (a) **concessive marker** and (b) position of concessives with regard to the conjoined element: **post-posed** or **pre-posed concessives**. We will argue that these realizational differences also encode semantico-pragmatic differences. In English some scholars claim that pre-posed and post-posed (*al*)*though*-clauses are variants of the same underlying

structure, analyzing the former construction as being derived from the latter by the so-called 'adverb-preposing' (Ross, 1986; König, 1988; Winter and Rimon, 1994; Lagerwerf, 1998). We believe, however, that different placements in initial or thematic and final or rhematic position may involve different sources for the assumptions evoked, from the propositional content of the main clause (in post-posed *although* clauses) or from the concessive clause (in pre-posed *although* clauses). In addition, these positional tendencies can also be explained in relation to other factors such as the encoding of information as Given or New, or the implementation of different strategies of perspectivization in the discourse.

The written corpus is part of the Simon Fraser University Corpus,[5] which, in its latest version, consists of 1,600 reviews of movies, books, music, hotels and consumer products (cars, telephones, cookware, computers), 800 reviews for each language. For this study, we selected a portion of the movie and book review sections, because they tend to be the longest texts, and contain the most elaborate arguments. There are 50 reviews in each of the movie and book parts of the corpus for each language, with 25 having been labeled by the author as positive, and 25 as negative towards the movie or book being reviewed (a label of 'recommended' or 'not recommended').

The spoken corpus is part of the large CallHome set of corpora in different languages distributed by the Linguistic Data Consortium.[6] The CallHome corpus was an effort by the Linguistic Data Consortium to collect spontaneous telephone conversations. Participants were given 30 minutes of long-distance calling time, to call relatives or friends, provided they agreed to being recorded. There are CallHome-style recordings for a variety of languages. Each of the Spanish and English versions of the corpus contain 120 conversations, about 30 minutes long, but with only five minutes of transcription (Wheatley, 1996; Kingsbury *et al.*, 1997). For this particular study, we chose the transcripts of five conversations in (American) English and five in Spanish. There is no detailed information on place of origin for the Spanish speakers, but we were able to identify a variety of dialects. In this sense, the English corpus is more homogeneous, since most callers were speakers of American English. Table 1 shows the number of texts or conversations per language, and the total number of words and sentences. Sentence count is approximate. For the written texts, we counted end-of-sentence punctuation. For the spoken conversations, the count corresponds to the number of turns in the transcripts. Most turns contain only one sentence, although often complex or compound.

Table 1: Corpus statistics

	Written		Spoken	
	English	**Spanish**	**English**	**Spanish**
Texts/conversations	100	100	5	5
Sentences	3,869	5,768	1,708	1,322
Words	62,090	90,338	11,457	8,694

Using the discourse markers presented in Section 4, we extracted sentences and their context from the corpus. We examined the sentences extracted, and discarded those where the presumed marker was not, in fact, a connective indicating concession. That left us with the following number of examples for English: 326 relations in the written part of the corpus, and 101 in the spoken part. For Spanish, the counts are 628 for the written, and 24 for the spoken parts, respectively.

For each marker, we then examined its frequency of realization and context of usage. We outline the main results of this study in the next section.

6. Results

We will first discuss some basic statistics about the number of relations and the presence of markers. Then we compare the spoken and written parts of the corpus, and the two languages.

Table 2: Markers in the English corpus

Marker	**Written**	**Spoken**
but	216	96
although	27	0
while	20	0
however	17	0
yet	10	0
even though	8	1
despite (the fact that)	6	0
though	6	4
even if	5	0
regardless	4	0
still	3	0
when	3	0
no matter	1	0
Total	326	101

Table 3: Markers in the Spanish corpus

Marker	Written	Spoken
pero	348	22
aunque	137	0
(y) sin embargo	45	1
aun así/ aún con/ aún + Ger	15	0
a pesar de (que) / a pesar de + Inf	17	0
Impersonal clausal	12	1
a pesar + Inf	9	0
Gerund	6	0
por mucho/más/muy x que	8	0
(pero) no obstante	7	0
si bien	7	0
cuando	5	0
para/con NP + que /Inf	4	0
a pesar de todo	3	0
pese a (que)	2	0
tan siquiera	1	0
Repetition	1	0
ciertamente, efectivamente	1	0
Total	628	24

The first observation from the tables is the lack of diversity in the spoken versions of the corpora, with *but* and its equivalent *pero* accounting for the majority of the types of concessive markers. Although the spoken corpus is much smaller in size, it is clear that the markers used are more restricted in type. To better compare written and spoken frequencies, we normalized the frequency of markers to presence per thousand words (Table 4). We can see then that spoken English has a slightly higher frequency of markers, but that, overall, written English and Spanish, and spoken English are comparable. The outlier is spoken Spanish, with a very low frequency of markers. We cannot draw good conclusions about this, since the spoken Spanish part of the corpus is the smallest, but it does seem to indicate that the type of interaction in the casual Spanish conversations does not require extensive use of concessive relations.

Table 4: Frequency of markers per thousand words

Written		Spoken	
English	Spanish	English	Spanish
5.25	6.95	8.82	2.76

6.1. Comparison between genres

The relations are used differently in the two different genres. In the written genre, they most often serve to qualify an opinion or dismiss potential objections to the author's opinion. In (18), the author expresses an opinion (a children's movie can appeal to adults), but acknowledges that there may be different viewpoints, in a sort of claim-response pattern (Hoey, 2001). The concession serves as a dismissal of those viewpoints, by including them in the author's statement. A different example is presented in (19), where the negative opinion (that some passages are tedious and long) is qualified by the acknowledgment that some passages are good. In this case, the result of the concession seems to be a balanced opinion, and one that is much more credible, because it is not polarized.

(18)   Despite what some people think, a kids movie can be good and appeal to
adults, such as Toy Story or Space Jam. [W, M. no20]

(19)   Reconozco que tiene 'pasajes' muy guapos, pero también hay otros (la mayoría) muy pesados y otros que ni siquiera resultan creíbles. [W, P no1_15]

I acknowledge that it has very good 'passages', but also that there are others
(most) [that are] very tedious and others that are not even credible.

In the spoken corpus, on the other hand, concessive relations are most often used to indicate a contrast between two situations, such as (20) and (21).[7]

(20) B: it's hot I mean Tiberius is very hot too but it's dry
and this is humid
I don't know what's worse [S, en_4315]

(21) A: Estamos gordos, no más, pero aparte de eso, estamos bien. [S, sp_0082]
We are fat, that's all, but apart from that, we are well.

Another function of concessives in speech is the correction of potential misinterpretations, such as in (22). This example is interesting because the concessive relation is built collaboratively across speakers' turns. Speaker A starts the main clause (*oh she's away now*), and speaker B adds the satellite or subordinate clause, which helps to clarify a potential misunderstanding. In (23) and (24), there seems to be an anticipation that the hearer will be worried upon hearing news of somebody 'feeling a little funny' in (23), or having spots all over in (24). This possible misunderstanding is then corrected with a concessive clause.

(22) B: Susan's away this week so I might I'm going to my sister's tomorrow she needs
a babysitter on Thursday
A: yeah
B: so I'm going tomorrow but I I feel like I'm (( ))

A: I thought she was going away for vacation this week
B: she's away now
A: oh she's away now
B: but she's coming back tonight [S, en_4315]

(23) B: felt a little funny
          he felt a little funny in the chest
          but that could be a reaction because of the heat [S, en_4315]

(24) B: Estoy lleno de granos por todos lados, pero ahí ya, ya me siento bien, como
          puedes oír, más o menos. [S, sp_0291]

          I'm covered in spots all over, but it's okay, I already feel better, as you can hear,
          more or less.

Concessives fulfill topic-management strategies in the spoken data, as in
(25), where the clause that contains *sin embargo* changes topics from one child
that has been discussed to another child, Mónica.

(25) B: y sigue igual, así bien despierta, igual a como era mamá
      A: ahá
      B: sólo que más despierta
          y Mónica sin embargo ha crecido un montón. [S, sp_0753]

          And she's the same, like really lively, just like Mom was (A: uh-huh) only more
          lively, and Monica, on the other hand, has grown a lot.

Finally, concessives in the spoken data may also have similar functions to
those in the review texts, such as acknowledgment of a different viewpoint.
In (26), the speaker discusses her husband's job opportunities as a teacher,
and states that one of them would be good because the job is full-time. She
acknowledges, however, that there may be a perception that the job is not
desirable because the school is not the best.

(26) B: because it is a regular fulltime job
          even though it might not be the great the great school [S, en_4808]

6.2. Order of spans

Certain coherence or rhetorical relations are argued to have a canonical order,
in terms of the position of the main and subordinate units. In RST, the canon-
ical order does not tie to the syntactic status of the spans (whether they are
independent main clauses or not), but to the tactic relations, that is, to the
order of nucleus and satellite in a hypotactic relation. Nucleus and satellites
tend to correspond to main and subordinate units respectively, at the lower
level of analysis (within the clause). The distinction, however, applies to rela-
tions across clauses. In a concessive relation, the nucleus is the unit for which

the reader has positive regard, and the satellite is the unit that presents a poten-
tially conflicting situation (cf. definition in Section 3).

In some concessive relations, then, the nucleus-satellite distinction coin-
cides with main-subordinate clause. This is the case in most *although* relations,
as in Example (27).

(27)   [N] At the end of the film, kids were calling the Cat 'cool', [S] although Thing
        One and Thing Two seemed to get more praise than the Cat himself did. [W,
        M, yes15]

In other cases, and with other markers, the nucleus-satellite distinction
from RST still applies, although the relation does not hold across clauses, but
across sentences, as in (28), where the satellite is made up of two sentences
('although the idea is not new, because it is a different version of another film').

(28)   [S] The idea of the film is not new either. It was like a different version of the
        Sixth Sense, but in a more perverse way. [N] However, I forgive that because it
        seemed to work out at the end. [W, M, yes17]

With such distinction in mind, we annotated each example from our corpus
to determine whether the nucleus-first or satellite-first order was the most fre-
quent. According to Mann and Thompson (1988: 256), in Concessive rela-
tions, the most frequent order is satellite first.

Before we discuss the results of the annotation, we would like to point out
that the annotation was not as straightforward as could be assumed. In the
informal writing style of the reviews in particular, sentence boundaries are
not always easy to determine. Punctuation is used irregularly, and run-on
sentences are frequent, many of them involving concessive relations. A par-
ticularly difficult example is presented in (29), where arguments are strung
together, with frequent use of suspension points and brackets as linking
devices. The most interesting cases in this example are the two uses of the con-
junction *pero* ('but'). In both cases, it is unclear whether a real concessive or
adversative relation is intended, and what the satellite of that relation would
be.

(29)   Un 7… porque aunque me fue algo más indiferente que las otras, me man-
        tuvo entretenida y a pesar de ser YA la tercera parte… ¡En tensión! [Como nos
        gusta pasarlo mal, ¿verdad?… Ainss…] Pero sinceramente, tampoco encuentro
        demasiadas diferencias de las otras… solamente una [-en su final-] que lógica-
        mente no puedo contaros porque si no os destriparía esta a veces desagradable
        película [y nunca mejor dicho]… Pero quiero decir que a mi parecer es tal vez
        el final más bestia de las tres partes…

        A 7… because although it left me more indifferent than the other ones, it kept
        me entertained and despite the fact that it was ALREADY the third part…

In suspense! [How we enjoy suffering, right? Ouch…] But honestly, I didn't find many differences with the other ones… only one [-in the ending-] that of course I cannot tell you about because otherwise I would spoil this sometimes unpleasant movie [literally]… But I want to say that in my opinion is perhaps the most horrendous ending of the three parts…

We now turn to a discussion of the general results of presentation order (Table 5). For both languages, and across both genres, the table shows clearly that the canonical order proposed by Mann and Thompson (1988) holds: The majority of relations have satellite first. In some cases, we see a relation inserted in the middle. That happens when the satellite interrupts the clause that forms the nucleus. This seems to be more frequent in Spanish, of which we present an example in (30). Neither language shows any middle relations in the spoken genre, presumably because of the higher processing load that they involve.

(30)   Flaubert escribe con un estilo exquisito que, a pesar de que no lo hace inmune a las traducciones, sí facilita su excelente consideración fuera del original francés.

Flaubert writes in an exquisite style that, despite the fact that it does not make him immune to translation, does enable its excellent reputation outside of the original French.

Table 5: Order of presentation

	Written		Spoken	
	English	**Spanish**	**English**	**Spanish**
Nucleus first	31 (9.51%)	108 (17.20%)	1 (0.99%)	1 (4.17%)
Satellite first	294 (90.18%)	504 (80.25%)	100 (99.01%)	23 (95.83%)
Satellite middle	1 (0.31%)	16 (2.55%)	–	–

With respect to markers, most markers seem to have a preferred canonical order, with a typical satellite-first or nucleus-first order. Some markers are more evenly distributed across both (or all three) positions. For instance, in English *although* and *even if* occur in similar proportions in nucleus-first or satellite-first position. The markers *even though* and *when* appear most frequently in examples with the nucleus first. Markers with satellite-first ordering are: *but, despite, however* and *while*. The only example of a marker positioned in the middle in English is *although*.

In Spanish, *a pesar de (que)* seems to occur in all three positions, and *por mucho/muy/más (que)* both with nucleus-first and satellite-first. Other markers are more frequent with the nucleus-first ordering, *aunque* being the most

salient. Most other markers tend to have a satellite-first distribution (*a pesar de (todo), aún (así), cuando, pero, sin embargo*).

An interesting follow-up to this work would be to examine the thematic development of the texts, and determine whether the order satellite-nucleus obeys contextual constraints, relating to how the information progresses (see also Spooren, 1989 on thematic continuation after *but* clauses), or to cognitive constraints. Noordman (2001) observed that in *although* clauses the preferred order is subordinate clause first, and proposed this was because of a correlation between cognitive and linguistic structures. He interpreted concessive relations as a type of causal relations, and as such, the most congruent order, from a cognitive point of view, is cause first, and then consequence.

6.3. Multiple markers

In some cases, more than one marker is present for the same relation. In our quantitative study, we have counted them as two markers. The most frequent instance of such cases is in Spanish, where a combination of *pero* and *es cierto/ lo cierto es que/ciertamente* is present, as in (31). In other cases, it is *a pesar (de) (que)* plus *pero*, as in Example (32).

(31)   Es cierto que en los capítulos de la serie de vez en cuando también aparecen personajes famosos y cosas así, pero en el filme se juntan muchos detalles de este tipo que hacen que sea una película muy ingeniosa. [W, M, yes_4_2]

It is true that in the chapters of the series there are every now and then famous characters and such, but in the movie many details of that type are put together, which makes it a very ingenious movie.

(32)   A pesar estar destinada a un público claramente infantil, lo cierto es que con Ratatouille pasa lo que pasa con muchas otras películas de animación… [W, P, yes_5_7]

Despite (the fact that) it is clearly geared towards a children's audience, the truth is that with Ratatouille you get what you get with many animation movies…

The combination of *pero* and *aunque* to signal the same relation is common in some languages, such as Farsi (Wilson and Wilson, 2001), but ungrammatical in Spanish, as in Example (33)

(33)   Aunque todas sus amigas y familia la dijeran que era lo mejor que la había podido pasar, pero ella seguía dando vueltas a la cabeza si Iain aun amaba a su ex. [W, B, yes_5_15]

Although all her friends and family told her that it was the best thing that could have ever happened to her, but she was still considering whether Iain still loved his ex.

7. Discussion and conclusions

We have presented a study of concessive relations in two languages (English and Spanish) and two modalities (spoken and written). First of all, we present a methodology for studying coherence relations starting with the abstract notion of coherence relations, which makes the methodology applicable to any language. We extracted relations based on markers used to signal them, which likely underestimates the number of relations, but which makes the automatic process much easier. An extension of this work would involve analyzing each text carefully, looking for other instances of relations that are not explicitly signaled, or that are signaled by means other than discourse markers.

We focused on the concessive relation, because we believe that it plays an important role in what we could call vernacular argumentation, especially in the case of informal online reviews. Concession fulfills the role of the classical thesis-antithesis structure, and helps writers and speakers express opinions, while mitigating their strength, or acknowledging potential alternative viewpoints.

We found that differences in usage are more pronounced across genres than across languages. In the spoken genre, the most common function of concession is to correct misunderstandings and contrast situations. In the written genre, on the other hand, concession is used to qualify opinions. This type of distribution is very similar across languages, showing that genre guides and constrains the types of coherence relations used, and that those constraints are constant across similar genres in different languages.

With regard to the variety of markers, it is striking that speech used only a handful of markers, most notably *but* and *pero,* whereas the written version of the corpus showed more type diversity.

We also quantified the ordering of spans, and confirmed the claim in Rhetorical Structure Theory that the most frequent order in concessive relations is satellite-nucleus.

Future work will involve a larger corpus, in particular for speech. We would also like to explore the relationship of coherence relations in general, and concession in particular, to the staging structure of the genre. Our intuition is that, at least in the review genre, concessions tend to occur towards the middle and end stages of the genre, that is, the most heavily argumentative stages. Finally, we will explore the semantic and pragmatic implications of a non-canonical order, that is, when the nucleus precedes the satellite.

Notes

1.   In RST, and in our work, minimal units (spans) are simple sentences or clauses, main and subordinate. Typically, though, complement clauses do not constitute a segment on their own. Thus, we do not segment subject and object clauses, reported speech and the like, but do consider adverbial clauses as minimal units of discourse.

2.   This distinction between simple contrast and concession involving an assumption has been variously termed in the literature, such as 'contrast' and 'violated expectation' (Kehler, 2002), 'contrast' and 'denial' (Blakemore, 1987, 1989), and in Spanish 'contraste' vs. 'objeción inoperante', 'obstáculo ineficaz', 'condición insuficiente' or 'relación de preferencia' (Kovacci, 1992; Moya Corral, 1996; Flamenco García, 1999; López García, 1999).

3.   RST was mainly developed with written texts in mind. We have shown that it can be extended to spoken language (Taboada, 2004b). When we use the terms 'writer' and 'reader', 'speaker' and 'hearer' are also possible.

4.   All the examples from our corpus are reproduced verbatim, including typos and grammatical errors for the written corpus and hesitations or repetitions in the spoken. The examples are marked with their source: W (written), S (spoken); M (movies), B (books), P (películas), L (libros); and with file identifying information. In addition, the review corpus examples contain information about whether the review was overall positive ('yes') or negative ('no'). When the example has no source specified, then it is invented.

5.   Available from http://www.sfu.ca/~mtaboada/research/SFU_Review_Corpus.html

6.   http://www.ldc.upenn.edu

7.   The spoken data is broken down by intonation units. Each line represents an independent intonation unit (Wheatley, 1996; Kingsbury et al., 1997).

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