

## 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*

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

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

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

23 We analyze two contrastive corpora, one written and one spoken. The writ-  
 24 ten corpus is a collection of 200 texts (100 per language) that evaluate movies  
 25 and books, taken from web portals that collect and distribute different types of  
 26 products: Ciao.es for Spanish, and Epinions.com for English, part of the SFU  
 27 Review Corpus (Taboada, 2008). The spoken corpus, also contrastive, contains  
 28 10 telephone conversations (five in each language), from each one of which five  
 29 minutes have been transcribed (Wheatley, 1996; Kingsbury *et al.*, 1997).

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

## 37 2. Coherence relations

38 One of the fundamental issues in the study of discourse is the phenomenon  
 39 of coherence. In discourse studies, coherence is described as the way in which  
 40 a discourse ‘hangs together’, with pieces relating to other pieces. Mann and  
 41  
 42

ompton (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.' These connections are often captured in the form of coherence relations.

1 Relations hold at all levels in a text from the clause up.<sup>1</sup> Typically, the clause is  
2 considered the minimal unit of analysis.

3 Space precludes a more extensive discussion of the theory itself. More  
4 detail can be found in the original paper on RST (Mann and Thompson,  
5 1988), a recent overview (Taboada and Mann, 2006a, 2006b), or the RST  
6 web site (Mann and Taboada, 2010).

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

### 12 13 3. Concessive, adversative and contrast relations

14 The term ‘concession’ generally refers to a special kind of adverbial subordi-  
15 nate clause, illustrated in (2), which: (a) is introduced by conjunctions some-  
16 what aprioristically considered as concessive; (b) can be pre- or post-posed to  
17 the main clause or verb; and (c) cannot be replaced by a semantically equiva-  
18 lent adverb.

- 19  
20 (2) a. Although the ending was a happy one, it was also a little sad. [M, no3]  
21  
22 b. La banda sonora es excelente, aunque se repite. [P, no\_2\_20]  
23 e soundtrack is excellent, although repetitive.

24 These characteristics have been identified in numerous studies of con-  
25 ccessives in English (Quirk *et al.*, 1985; Rudolph, 1996: 4–6; Biber *et al.*, 1999;  
26 Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson, 2000; Crevels, 2000b; Huddleston and Pullum,  
27 2002) and Spanish (Gili Gaya, 1955, § 239, § 249; Gutiérrez Ordóñez, 1977–  
28 1978; Álvarez Martínez, 1987; Narbona Jiménez, 1990; Kovacci, 1992: 29; Alar-  
29 cos Llorach, 1994: 441–442; Hernández Alonso, 1995; Di Tullio, 1997: 337;  
30 López García, 1999; Carbonell Olivares, 2005; Real Academia Española, 2009,  
31 ch. 54). However, on closer inspection, the picture becomes rather more com-  
32 plex, as there still has not been a general consensus on the exact number, nature  
33 and realization of these relations.

34 In what follows it will be shown that concessive relations show a wide vari-  
35 ety of realizations in English and Spanish ranging from subordinating ((*al*)  
36 *though*, *aunque*) and coordinating (*but*, *pero*) conjunctions to adverbial items  
37 (*nevertheless*, *nonetheless*, *all the same*, *sin embargo*, *después de todo*, *pese a*  
38 *todo*), phrasal (prepositional) expressions (*in spite of*, *a pesar de*), parenthet-  
39 ical elements, mainly impersonal clauses or adverbial items (*it’s true*, *true*  
40 *enough*, *si bien es cierto*, *ciertamente*), or even combinations with the previous  
41 and/or other markers (*even though it is true that ...*, *si bien es cierto que*).  
42



1 implicit assumption that ‘if John is Socialist, then he is not trustworthy’ evoked  
 2 in the first clause.<sup>2</sup> The third type, corrective, is obtained from the lexical dis-  
 3 tinction between such connectors as *pero* and *sino* in Spanish or *but* and *instead*  
 4 or *rather* in English, of which only the latter (*sino*, *instead* and *rather*) are exclu-  
 5 sively used for corrective purposes (Anscombe and Ducrot, 1977, 1983).

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

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

15 In summary, and following Izutsu (2008), we propose that the family of  
 16 opposition relations that includes concessive, contrast and corrective indicate  
 17 a conflict or clash between the two (or more) parts of the relation. In particu-  
 18 lar, what is mutually exclusive in concessives is found between the proposi-  
 19 tional content of one clause and an assumption evoked in the other segment  
 20 (‘If John is a socialist, (then normally) he cannot be trusted.’)

21 Our work is grounded in Rhetorical Structure Theory, where the Conces-  
 22 sion relation is defined as follows, with the fields (constraints and effect) sug-  
 23 gested for an RST definition (Mann and Taboada, 2010):

24 (3) Concession

25 C : a : he c e : the writer<sup>3</sup> has positive regard for the nucleus.

26 C : a : he a e e : the writer is not claiming that S does not hold;  
 27 the writer acknowledges a potential or apparent incompatibility between  
 28 nucleus and satellite; recognizing the compatibility between nucleus and satel-  
 29 lite increases the reader’s positive regard for the nucleus.

30 E : ec : the reader’s positive regard for the nucleus is increased.

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

36  
 37 **4. Markers of concession in English and Spanish**

38 In this paper, we deal mostly with discourse markers as signals of concessive  
 39 relations. We use the term ‘discourse marker’ in a loose sense, to refer to any  
 40 conjunction, adverb, adverbial phrase or other type of phrase that frequently  
 41 links two or more units of discourse.  
 42

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; Montolio 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. These 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) **Conjunctive adverbs**: 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’, **as** delivered with a lot more f-words and **buying** liquor bottles. [W, M, yes23]<sup>4</sup>
  - b. ... felt a little funny he felt a little funny in the chest **because** that could be a reaction because of the heat [S, en\_4315]
- (5) **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**: admitting, allowing that, even supposing, granting (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) **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. **Regarding**

## 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) **C** *ce* *ec* *c* / *c* *c* : 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** *e a de e* para mi Almudena Grandes es una escritora genial (yo me he leído todos 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]  
**A** *h gh* to me Almudena Grandes is a great author (I've read all 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, **a** *e* 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, **a** *h gh* 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. **N** *b a e*, 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. **H** *e e*, what is spectacular in some scenes (especially action ones) in some others becomes excessive.
- d. Realmente Prometía con Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas **e** 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] **b** 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 **b** e 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 **a** *h gh* 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* + **Ad P** / **Ad P** + *que-* **e a** *e c a* : e.g., *por más que*, *por mucho que*
- a. Otra razón radica en que intenta explicar al lector todo lo que ocurre **a** *e* 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 **a** *h gh* 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, ~~de~~ ~~be~~ ~~e~~ ~~c~~ ~~a~~ ~~de~~ 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, ~~de~~ ~~be~~ ~~e~~ ~~c~~ ~~a~~ ~~de~~ ~~de~~ ~~he~~ ~~de~~.

(10) *para* + NP / I fP / *que-* e a e c a e

a. Es una niña muy inteligente ~~de~~ ~~a~~ ~~a~~ ~~edad~~ ~~de~~ ~~e~~ ~~e~~, 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 / I fP / *que-* e a e c a e *con lo* + Ad P / Ad P + *que-* e a e c a e

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 ~~c~~ ~~e~~ ~~a~~ ~~e~~-~~cede~~ ~~e~~ ~~de~~ ~~b~~ ~~e~~ ~~e~~ ~~b~~ ~~d~~ ~~H~~ ~~e~~ ~~a~~ ~~e~~ ~~a~~ ~~e~~. [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

~~h~~ ~~h~~ ~~e~~ ~~H~~ ~~e~~ ~~a~~ ~~d~~ ~~he~~ ~~cha~~ ~~ac~~ ~~e~~.

(12) *Ge* *d*

a.

I... e ha it is short, but everything else is short too: the characters, the plot, the ending, etc...

- (16) **Ad e b a d a d e b a e . e . . .** : *ciertamente, efectivamente*
  - a. Hace un tiempo, me llamaron la atención unos libros, que, **c e a e e**, no es que tengan una presentación que entre por los ojos, pero fué precisamente eso lo que me hizo **jarme** en ellos.  
Some time ago, I was struck by some books, which, **ce a e** do not have the most attractive presentation, but it was precisely that which led me to pay attention to them.
  
- (17) **C b a f a e** (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. **A c** esto no voy a dudar de la capacidad de la Iglesia seguire con **ando** en el, y espero que la proxima vez que lo veamos en pantalla me sorprenda como otras muchas veces. [W, P, no\_2\_12]  
**E e de e** 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 con guration 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:

- . **D . b . . . f c c e . e a c . . . e a d . . . e e . . .** . 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)

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,<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.

(b) al(m.)]TJt/T1\_0 1 Tft0.01 Tc t0.03 17.207162 0 Td.731997222 F6(4)dis partyalae-sy  
o (r)-c1(l)-3(a)IE12(n)8(y)-g-di T,(a)8y)-7(1 )348(7(h)4(6(ws2021 Tw T11I min)1m5

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. at le 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 rst discuss some basic statistics about the number of relations and the presence of markers. en 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



### 6.1. Comparison between genres

These 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 good passages (and 19(u)7(y p)-9(es)3)19(t i)12(t2 p)-5(a)-8(e)-5(e)

- 1 A: I thought she was going away for vacation this week  
 2 B: she's away now  
 3 A: oh she's away now  
 4 B: but she's coming back tonight [S, en\_4315]
- 5 (23) B: felt a little funny  
 6 he felt a little funny in the chest  
 7 but that could be a reaction because of the heat [S, en\_4315]
- 8 (24) B: Estoy lleno de granos por todos lados, pero ahí ya, ya me siento bien, como  
 9 puedes oír, más o menos. [S, sp\_0291]  
 10  
 11 I'm covered in spots all over, but it's okay, I already feel better, as you can hear,  
 12 more or less.

13  
 14 Concessives fulfil topic-management strategies in the spoken data, as in  
 15 (25), where the clause that contains *sin embargo* changes topics from one child  
 16 that has been discussed to another child, Mónica.

- 17 (25) B: y sigue igual, así bien despierta, igual a como era mamá  
 18 A: ahá  
 19 B: sólo que más despierta  
 20 y Mónica sin embargo ha crecido un montón. [S, sp\_0753]  
 21  
 22 And she's the same, like really lively, just like Mom was (A: uh-huh) only more  
 23 lively, and Monica, on the other hand, has grown a lot.

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

- 30 (26) B: because it is a regular fulltime job  
 31 even though it might not be the great the great school [S, en\_4808]  
 32

## 33 6.2. Order of spans

34 Certain coherence or rhetorical relations are argued to have a canonical order,  
 35 in terms of the position of the main and subordinate units. In RST, the canonical  
 36 order does not tie to the syntactic status of the spans (whether they are  
 37 independent main clauses or not), but to the tactic relations, that is, to the  
 38 order of nucleus and satellite in a hypotactic relation. Nucleus and satellites  
 39 tend to correspond to main and subordinate units respectively, at the lower  
 40 level of analysis (within the clause). The distinction, however, applies to relations  
 41 across clauses. In a concessive relation, the nucleus is the unit for which  
 42







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

## 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.



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