Grammar, Prosody, and Turn Expansion in Second Language Conversations

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1. Introduction

The role of grammar in conversation has been investigated in studies of native speaker (NS) discourse that examine the syntactic, prosodic, and pragmatic resources necessary for the organization of turns and the negotiation of social practices (Couper-Kuhlen & Ford, 2004; Golato, 2005; Lerner, 2004; Ochs, Schegloff, & Thompson, 1996; Schegloff, 2007; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006). These studies demonstrate, among other things, how various resources are utilized by NSs of different languages to negotiate speech acts in interaction (e.g., requests and compliments) including conversational practices such as delay, collaborative turn sequences, and the construction/expansion of turns in conversation. While various conversational practices have been examined in learner-NS conversations (Cf. Gardner & Wagner, 2005; Kasper, 2006), little systematic attention has been given to how learners in a foreign language (FL) context employ their grammatical resources in a second language to organize and expand their turns when talking with a NS of the target language. Similarly, although the role of prosody has been examined in NS conversations (Couper-Kuhlen & Ford, 2004; Ford & Thompson, 1996), there has been little research on prosodic cues such as intonation and syllable lengthening as projections of the next Turn-Constructional Unit in-progress in second language conversation. The objective of the current study, therefore, is to examine how learners of Spanish as a FL utilize grammatical resources, including increment initiators (e.g., *y* 'and', *pero* 'but'), epistemic expressions (e.g., *no sé* 'I don't know', *creo* 'I believe', *pienso* 'I think'), and prosodic cues (intonation, duration) to organize and expand their turns during the discussion of sensitive topics in face-to-face-conversations with a NS of the target language.

2. Previous Research

Turns-at-talk are comprised of turn-constructional units (TCUs) that are utilized to express a wide range of actions such as agreeing or disagreeing or offering an opinion. TCUs are defined according to three organizational resources: syntax, prosody, and pragmatics. Syntax provides projectable TCUs within a turn or across turns: a TCU may encompass "sentential, clausal, phrasal, and lexical constructions. Instances of the unit-types so usable allow a projection of the unit-type under way, and what, roughly, it will take for an instance of that unit-type to be completed" (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974, p. 702 & footnote 12). Prosody represents the intonational packaging of a TCU: a TCU is "grounded in the phonetic realization of the talk" (Schegloff, 2007, pp. 3-4). And pragmatics encompasses the realization of actions during the negotiation of talk in a particular context including the speaker's intention and possibly the recognition of that action by the interlocutor: a TCU "constitutes a recognizable action in context" (Shegloff, 2007, p. 4). It should be noted that a TCU may not necessarily satisfy these three criteria at once, that is, a TCU may be syntactically and prosodically complete, but pragmatically incomplete (see Ford & Thompson, 1996). Projection of the TCU is what allows turn-units to be expanded and organized sequentially across a sequence to achieve a specific purpose in communication. Overall, as noted by Schegloff, a speaker starting to talk has the right and obligation to produce at least one TCU which may comprise one or more actions.

When a speaker nears possible completion of the first TCU in a turn, transition to a next speaker can become relevant at transition-relevance places (TRP). A TRP represents *possible* completions (e.g., where the current speaker should exit) or places where the speaker signals a transition to a next speaker immediately after the necessary completion of the TCU-in-progress (Sacks et al. 1974; Schegloff, 2007). According to Ford & Thompson (1996), TCUs may approach necessary syntactic, prosodic, and pragmatic completion points. Syntactic completion points roughly correspond to Sacks

et al.'s (1974) syntactic criterion of a TCU which may follow a word, a phrase, a clause, or a multi-clausal unit. A TCU may reach intonational completion if it is characterized by an intonational unit including tempo, lengthening of final syllables, or noticeable pauses between intonation units. Finally, pragmatic completion points comprise conversational actions which are interpreted in specific sequential contexts (Ford & Thompson, 1996, p. 150). The results of the English conversational data of these authors showed that syntactic/grammatical completion points are more frequent (*n* = 798) than intonation (*n* = 433) and pragmatic (*n* = 422) completion points, but intonation and pragmatic completion points select from among the syntactic completions to form 'Complex Transition Relevance Places' (CTRPs) (Ford & Thompson, 1996, p. 154). In general, syntactic completion is not the only predictor of speaker change, but rather intonation and pragmatic completion may provide the opportunity for projecting the ends of turns.

Turns can be expanded through various grammatical resources. According to Lerner (2004), before a current speaker approaches possible completion of a TCU-in-progress (and before transition to the next speaker is made relevant), current speakers can expand their turns by adding increment initiators in different positions of the turn. Increment initiators encompass a wide variety of syntactic devices (e.g., 'and', 'or', 'but', 'because', 'for', 'only') which are employed to expand the turn in order to elaborate, clarify, or expand the TCU-in-progress. Lerner identified four types of TCU increment initiators in NS English conversation: i) self-initiated and self-completed; ii) self-initiated but other completed; iii) other-initiated and other-completed; and, iv) other-initiated but self-completed. For the present study, the two relevant types of increment initiators include: i) self-initiated and self-completed (example [1]) and ii) other-initiated but self-completed (example [2]) (examples taken from Lerner, 2004):

(1)   TCU-increment: Self-initiated and self-completed (Lerner 2004, p. 157)
    (a)   Phyllis: <u>Mi</u>ke siz there wz a big fight down there last night.
            Curt: oh really?
                              (0.4)
    →   Phyllis: **With <u>K</u>eegan en, what. Paul de Wa::<u>ld</u>?
    (b)   Stan: Well, the last day is May fifth. **fer** the Ju:ne uh fourth primary

(2)   TCU increment: Other-initiated but self-completed (Lerner 2004, p. 162)
            Jack: I just returned
    →   Kathy: **from**
            Jack: Finland

While the four types of increment initiators examined in Lerner (2004) are common practices in NS discourse in both English (Lerner, 2004) and Spanish conversations to various degrees (Félix-Brasdefer's natural corpus, 2006a),[1] Lerner's main focus is on stand-alone increment initiators (example 2 above) which serve to bring forth an increment from the original speaker. Further, it should be noted that some increment initiators may occur as part of the host TCU in order to elaborate the same action (example 1-b), whereas others are used as a distinct TCU to express a different action(s) (example 1-a). Unlike Lerner's study which focused on increments like those in example 2 (other-initiated but self-completed), in the current study, we limit our analysis to an examination of self-initiated and self-completed increment initiators such as the example in 1-a.

2.1. Epistemic modality and turn expansion

Elements of epistemic modality represent another set of grammatical resources necessary to expand the speaker's turn by initiating, continuing, or ending the TCU-in-progress. Markers of epistemic modality or epistemic disclaimers (Schegloff, 1996) reflect the speaker's attitude and

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[1] In this study, Félix-Brasdefer (2006a) analyzed the discourse functions of the marker 'o sea' in colloquial conversations taken from Mexican Spanish using Romera's (2001) concept of Discourse Functional Units (DFUs) as the main unit of analysis.

indicate his/her security or insecurity with respect to the truth of the proposition expressed (Coates, 1987; Nuyts, 2001; Wierzbicka, 2006). It has been observed that using verbs with epistemic meaning (e.g., 'I believe...', 'I think') is equivalent to a mitigated assertion that is converted into a subjective utterance (Benveniste, 1971). Depending on their distribution in the speaker's turn (beginning, medial, final), expressions of epistemic modality may expand the speaker's turn by projecting additional information in upcoming TCUs or indicate possible completion points. Although expressions of epistemic modality have been examined in L2 speaker discourse, these expressions are not often examined at the discourse level (with the exception of Bardovi-Harlig & Salsbury, 2004). The objective of most studies has been to examine the inventory and frequency of expressions of epistemic modality without an analysis of their interactional practices using either oral or written experimental data (Faerch and Kasper, 1989; Trosborg, 1995).

Some studies of NS discourse have acknowledged the importance of prosodic cues such as pitch, loudness, and time in turn construction as well as in expressing speaker meaning in conversations (Ford & Thompson, 1996; Lerner, 2004; Schegloff, 1998; House, 2006; Wilson & Wharton, 2006). However, regarding the role of prosody in second language conversation, little attention has been given to the prosodic resources used with both increment initiators and epistemic expressions in talk-in-interaction.

Despite the fact that increment initiators are frequent means of expanding the speaker's turn in NS discourse, the distribution and the degree to which these interactional resources are used in second language conversation need to be empirically investigated. Finally, although expressions of epistemic modality have been examined in NS conversations in English (Coates, 1987; Nuyts, 2001; Tsui, 1991; Wierzbicka, 2006) and Spanish (Briz, 2001), much remains unknown about the sequential distribution of these expressions that are used to construct the speaker's turn and to negotiate an opinion in second language conversations. It is important to note that in this study we do not make any claims with regard to language acquisition; rather, our primary goal is to examine how second language learners *use* these grammatical resources (increment initiators, elements of epistemic modality, and prosodic cues) to expand their turns and to accomplish conversational practices.

The objective of the current study is to examine the preference for increment initiators and expressions of epistemic modality utilized by learners of Spanish to expand their turns during the negotiation of a controversial topic with a native speaker of Spanish. Then, adopting a Conversation Analytic (CA) perspective, the increment initiators and expressions of epistemic modality will be analyzed in terms of their sequential distribution in learner-NS exchanges. Finally, to analyze the role of prosody in second language conversations, we will examine the learner's pragmatic intent by an analysis of prosodic markers, such as final rising intonation and lengthening of the syllable.

3. Methodology
3.1. Participants

The present study examined eleven dyadic natural conversations which took place between eleven second language learners of Spanish (L1= American English) and seven NSs of Spanish. The learners who participated in this study (7 females, 4 males) were all enrolled in different sections of an intermediate Spanish composition course at Indiana University. For the learners who participated in this study, proficiency was determined by year of study (Thomas, 1994). Two of the learners had abroad experience: one male studied for one semester in Cuernavaca, Mexico (Tom) and one female engaged in volunteer work for two months in Costa Rica (Erin) (see Tables 1 & 2). The other nine learners had not been abroad in a Spanish-speaking country. Though NS interaction was not the primary focus of analysis, an effort was made to control for the variety of Spanish. All NSs were from a Latin American country (4 Colombians, 1 Chilean, 1 Mexican, 1 Uruguayan) and were graduate students at Indiana university. In order to comply with the *Institutional Review Board* (IRB) for the protection of Human Subjects, all participants agreed to be part of the current study and gave their consent before data collection occurred.

3.2. Data

The present analysis was selected from a corpus consisting of approximately four hours of natural conversations obtained through 11 natural interactions which took place at a campus café. Each dyad conversed for 20-25 minutes in Spanish on a given prompt regarding a controversial topic (euthanasia) which had been presented and discussed in the learners' class two weeks prior to data collection. Thus, when these dyads took place, the learners were already familiar with the topic. From each conversation, the middle 15 minutes of talk were extracted and transcribed for analysis (165 minutes). All conversations were audio recorded with a digital recorder and subsequently transcribed using the conversation-analytic conventions outlined in Jefferson (2004) (see Appendix).

3.3. Analysis

Both researchers coded the conversational data independently by identifying TCUs in the learners' turns, then indicating what units of analysis mentioned above were used to either initiate the TCU or to close the TCU. The TCU-increment initiators analyzed in the current study were *y, pero,* and *porque,* and the elements of epistemic modality which prefaced a TCU-in-progress included *creo que, pienso que, no sé*, as well as the prosodic cue of rising intonation (↑) marking prosodic completion. Syllable duration was also analyzed as a prosodic cue used to complement turn expansion along with increment initiators. Acoustic analyses were performed using *Praat* version 5.0.44 (Boersma y Weenink, 2008), and pitch settings were adjusted to measure the pitch movements in Hz according to whether the NNS was male or female.

After the 11 conversations were independently coded, the analysis of the data for each conversation was then verified by both authors. Any discrepancies found in the data were discussed and when a consensus was reached, that portion of the data was included in the analysis. All names of participants were changed in this paper.

4. Results
4.1. Preference for TCU-increment initiators

An analysis of the data revealed that learners used three TCU-increment initiators (*y* 'and'*, pero* 'but', and *porque* 'because') most often when negotiating a sensitive topic with a NS of Spanish. Table 1 provides an overall view of the TCU-increment initiators used among each of the 11 learners.

Of the 275 instances of increment initiators identified in the data, learners employed the increment *y* 'and' most of the time to expand their turns in order to clarify or present additional information across the sequence (53.8%; n = 148 of 275 cases), followed *pero* 'but' which introduced subjective information when expressing disagreement (32.7%; n = 90 of 275 cases), and *porque* 'because' which was utilized less often so as to elaborate, justify, or clarify the learners' opinion during the construction of the turn (13.5%; n = 37 of 275 cases). In general, these increment initiators were mainly self-initiated and self-completed by the learner across the sequence.

Table 1. Distribution of TCU-increment initiators used by the learners in learner-NS interactions
($N = 11$ learners; $n = 275$ cases)

	Increment Initiators			
Learner	*y* 'and'	*pero* 'but'	*porque* 'because'	Total
Mary	13 (59%)	8 (36%)	1 (5%)	22 (8%)
Erin	33 (56%)	10 (17%)	16 (27%)	59 (21.5%)
Sam	19 (68%)	6 (21%)	3 (11%)	28 (10.2%)
Tracy	10 (53%)	9 (47%)	0 (0%)	19 (7%)
Tammy	20 (69%)	8 (28%)	1 (3%)	29 (10.5%)
Nicole	11 (61%)	2 (11%)	5 (28%)	18 (6.5%)
Courtney	7 (39%)	10 (55.5%)	1 (5.5%)	18 (6.5%)
Tom	4 (20%)	11 (55%)	5 (25%)	20 (7.3%)
Rick	13 (59%)	7 (32%)	2 (9%)	22 (8%)
Rob	10 (38%)	14 (54%)	2 (8%)	26 (9.5%)
Kevin	8 (57%)	5 (36%)	1 (7%)	14 (5%)
Total	148 (53.8%)	90 (32.7%)	37 (13.5%)	275

N = number of learners
n = frequency of increment initiators
*TCU = Turn-Constructional Unit

As seen in this table, the preference for these increment initiators varied among the learners. Of the three elements, *y* 'and' and *pero* 'but' were used at least twice by each participant, while 91% (10 of 11) of the learners utilized *porque* 'because' at least once. Of these learners, Erin showed the highest usage of incrementing TCUs (21.5%; $n = 59$ of 275 cases) and Kevin the lowest (5%; $n = 14$ of 275 cases). Variation in these increments was also noted within each learner. For example, Erin incremented her turns mainly by means of *y* 'and' (56%; $n = 33$ of 59 cases) and *porque* 'because' (27%; 16 of 59 cases), while Rob incremented his turns through *y* 'and' (38%; 10 of 26 cases) and *pero* 'but' (54%; 14 of 26 cases). In general, although variability was evident in terms of the frequency of increment initiators used in the learners' TCU increments, each learner employed a combination of these items to expand their turns to varying degrees across the conversation with the NS.

4.2. Preference for TCU-epistemic modality elements

Table 2 shows the results for the elements of epistemic modality used to preface a TCU increment among the learners: *creo* 'I believe', *pienso* 'I think', *no sé* 'I don't know', and a prosodic marker, namely, final rising intonation [↑].

Table 2. Distribution of elements of epistemic modality used to construct a TCU-in-progress among the learners in learner-NS interactions (N = 11 learners; n = 169 cases)

Learner	*(yo) creo* 'I believe'	*(yo) pienso* 'I think'	*no sé* 'I don't know'	Final Rising Intonation [↑]	Total
	Elements of Epistemic Modality				
Mary	4 (19%)	0 (0%)	5 (24%)	12 (57%)	21 (12%)
Erin	19 (63%)	0 (0%)	6 (20%)	5 (17%)	30 (17.8%)
Sam	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (29%)	5 (71%)	7 (4%)
Tracy	4 (40%)	0 (0%)	4 (40%)	2 (20%)	10 (6%)
Tammy	3 (23%)	0 (0%)	2 (15%)	8 (62%)	13 (7.7%)
Nicole	0 (0%)	2 (18%)	7 (64%)	2 (18%)	11 (6.5%)
Courtney	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	8 (80%)	0 (0%)	10 (6%)
Tom	6 (24%)	2 (8%)	4 (16%)	13 (52%)	25 (15%)
Rick	11 (73%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (27%)	15 (9%)
Rob	0 (0%)	6 (60%)	3 (30%)	1 (10%)	10 (6%)
Kevin	1 (6%)	4 (23.5%)	4 (23.5%)	8 (47%)	17 (10%)
Total	49 (29%)	15 (8.9%)	45 (26.6%)	60 (35.5%)	169

N = number of learners

n = frequency of increment initiators

*TCU = Turn-Constructional Unit

Of the 169 instances of epistemic modality elements identified in the data, 73% of the learners (8 of 11 participants) relied on two epistemic verb phases including *creo que* 'I believe' (29%; n = 49 of 169 cases) and, less often, *pienso que* 'I think that' by 45% of the learners (or 5 of 11 participants) (8.9%; n = 15 of 169 cases). Further, the expression of uncertainty *no sé* 'I don't know' (26.6%; 45 of 169 cases) was mostly used by 91% of the learners (or 10 of 11 participants) as a hedge to preface an opinion so as to project more information to come (e.g., *no sé, pero creo que la eutanasia…* 'I don't know, but I think euthanasia…'); of the 45 cases, this expression was utilized less frequently as a stand-alone expression of uncertainty in one single turn (4 of 45 cases). Further, the learners' tentativity or degree of uncertainty was also marked by means of prosodic cues such as final rising intonation [↑] which expresses uncertainty on the part of the learner and elicits the interlocutor's uptake. Final rising intonation was commonly used by 91% of the learners (or 10 of 11 participants) to express uncertainty of word choice or content information about the topic under discussion (euthanasia) (35.5%; 60 of 169 cases). The role of final rising intonation to express pragmatic meaning is further explained below.

Variability in epistemic forms was found among the learners. Once again, Erin utilized these forms with the highest frequency (17.8%; 30 of 169 cases), whereas Sam employed two of these forms infrequently, *no sé* 'I don't know' and final rising intonation (4%; 7 of 169 cases). Moreover, two learners (Erin [63%; 19 of 30 cases] and Rick [73%; 11 of 15 cases]) employed the form of *creo* 'I believe' more frequently than the other learners. The form *pienso* 'I think' was used by five learners with lower frequency, and was the most frequent epistemic form used by Rob (60%; 6 of 10 cases). The final lexical epistemic element, *no sé* 'I don't know', was preferred by Courtney (80%; 8 of 10 cases) and Nicole (64%; 7 of 11 cases) and less by Sam, Tammy, and Rob (3 cases or fewer).

4.3. Sequential distribution of increment initiators and elements of epistemic modality

Both increment initiators and elements of epistemic modality were interactionally used to expand learners' turns across the sequence. While the learner's TCU-in-progress was introduced by an increment initiator or an element of epistemic modality or ended by means of an epistemic modality marker (see example [3] below, lines 221 & 229), the majority occurred during the expansion of the turn across long sequences in which both the learner and the NS co-constructed discourse to arrive at a mutual agreement in conversation. This distribution indicates a preference for self-initiating and self-completing increments in their turns-at-talk among the learners.

To illustrate the sequential distribution of increment initiators and elements of epistemic modality, two sequences extracted from two different conversations were analyzed to uncover the role of grammar in second language conversations.[2] The objective of the following analyses is to highlight the interactional role of these elements across the interaction. We also examine the use of prosody (e.g., intonation and duration) as a resource for the learner in the co-construction of spontaneous discourse with a NS.

The excerpt in (3) highlights the dynamics of increment initiators, epistemic expressions, and prosodic resources, and focuses on the organization and expansion of the learner's turn to reach possible turn completion.

(3) Erin (E) (Learner)
    Gabriela (G) (NS)

210	G:	*porque es una:: – sí - de las situaciones más difíciles - ¿no?*
		'because it's a::: - yes – of the most difficult situations – don't you think?'
211	E:	[*mhum*
		'[mhum'
212	G:	[*probablemente - en la – en la vida* =
		'[probably-in-in life='
213	E: →	= *y también en los Estados Unidos porque no tiene las reglas para eutanasia* =
		'= **and** also in the United States because it doesn't have the rules for euthanasia ='
214	G:	*yeah=*
		'yeah='
215	E: →	=***pero*** *si ah el doctor Kevorkian↑*
		'=**but** yes ah doctor Kevorkian↑'
216	G:	*mhum*
		'mhum'
217	E:	*que* =
		'that ='
218	G:	= *yeah* =
		'= yeah ='
219	E: →	= ***y*** *el::: quiere* =
		'= **and** he::: wants ='
220	G:	= *es que no sé qué paso con él al final=*
		'= it's that I don't know what happened with him after all'
221	E: →	= *yeah [**no sé↓*** =*
		'= yeah [**I don't know↓** ='
222	G:	[*no me acuerdo ((laughter))*
		'[I don't remember ((laughter))'
223	E: →	*sí ((laughter)) ah* ***pero*** *él quiere –quier – ((makes noise with mouth))*
		'yes ((laughter)) ah **but** he wants-wan- ((makes noise with mouth))'
224		*él quiere ah ayuda en matarlo a muchas perso[nas*
		'he wants ah help in killing many pe[ople'
225	G:	[*yeah* =
		'[yeah ='

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[2] These examples, taken from two conversations in learner-NS interactions, were chosen at random from the data to illustrate the interactional nature of TCU-increment initiators and the elements of epistemic modality.

226	E: →	= ***pero:: es su decisión, y ah necesita la decisión con la familia***
		'= **bu::t** it's his decision and ah he needs the decision with the family'
227	→	***pero::: en – realmente - es una – no es un – no es lega::l***
		'**bu:::t** in- really – it's a- it's not a – it's not lega::l'
228	G:	[*yeah*
		'[yeah'
229	E: →	[*solamente es legal en Oregon, **yo creo que**↓ ((soft voice))*
		'[it's only legal in Oregon, **I think so**↓ ((soft voice))'
230	G:	*es legal en Oregon?*
		'it's legal in Oregon?'
231	E:	*sí =*
		'yes ='
232	G:	*= no sabía, ya – porque me acuerdo que Kevorkian - sí tenía la firma ¿no?*
		'= I didn't know, yeah – because I remember that Kevorkian – he had the signature, don't you think?'
233		*de las personas*
		'of the people'

Excerpt (3) begins with a NS turn-at-talk consisting of two TCUs (lines 210 and 212) punctuated by an overlapped learner minimal vocalization ('umm') in line 211. Then, in line 213 the learner begins her turn by self-selection with the increment initiator *y* 'and', followed by the turn-initial TCU which provides factual information regarding the legality of euthanasia in the US. After an agreement token ('yeah') by the NS in line 214, the learner further expands her turn by adding another TCU with the increment initiator *pero* 'but' (line 215) in order to preface giving a subjective opinion. After drawing attention to the topic of her opinion through rising intonation ('Kevorkian↑'), the NS provides a minimal response in line 216 followed by another turn expansion in line 219. Here, the learner augments her turn with a TCU introduced by *y* 'and'. Negotiation of meaning takes place when the NS presents an evaluation of the topic in line 220. In turn, the learner offers a marker of epistemic modality to express uncertainty (*no sé* 'I don't know') in line 221. The epistemic phrase here plays a dual role: first, it serves as a response to the NS's assertion in line 220 and second, it functions to project and redirect the continuation of her turn. In line 223, the learner produces an aligning agreement marker ('sí') along with laughter, possibly motivated by the NS's laughter (line 222). Then, the learner actually utilizes another increment initiator (*pero*::: 'bu:::t') in the same line to introduce a TCU in which she offers subjective information (line 226). In line 227, Erin yet again expands her turn by means of *pero*::: 'bu:::t' followed by an opinion. In both lines (226 and 227), the increment initiator (*pero*::: 'bu:::t') exhibits final syllable lengthening which indicates that another TCU is forthcoming. In line 228, the NS orients to the subjective information previously offered, and then the learner concludes her turn with a final TCU (line 229). In this last TCU-increment, Erin mitigates her opinion previously given by employing the epistemic verb phrase *yo creo que* 'I think so' together with descending final intonation to end the turn (↓). Taken together, these resources indicate that a transition relevant place (TRP) has been reached. In line 230, the NS prefaces her own turn-initiation by seeking clarification (*es legal en Oregon?* 'is it legal in Oregon?'). After the learner confirms the information (line 231), the NS confirms turn transition by beginning her turn in lines 232-233.

In general, the above excerpt highlights how the learner uses elements of epistemic modality and increment initiators to expand her turn across the sequence. Prosodic cues combine with both epistemic markers and increment initiators to support actions such as relating factual information (i.e. *y* 'and'), offering a subjective opinion (i.e. *pero* 'but'), and mitigating previous talk and closing a turn (i.e. *yo creo que*↓ 'I think so↓'). The interaction here demonstrates how FL learners employ grammatical and pragmatic resources to expand and conclude turns while exchanging opinions with a NS.

The segment in (4) below, taken from a different conversation, shows the dynamics of various grammatical resources that are interactionally used by the learner (Kevin) to organize and expand his turns when expressing his opinion with the NS (José). This segment shows the interaction of grammar and social action; in particular, the dynamics of increment initiators and epistemic disclaimers that serve to co-construct discourse between the learner and the NS.

(4) Kevin (K) (Learner)
  José (J) (NS)

92   K: →   *er, er es como, ah, la situación de Terri Schiavo↑*
             'er, er it's like, ah Terri Schiavo's situation↑'

93   J: *sí*
             'yes'

94   K: *ah, no qui, no, ah (2.0) no quería - vivir porque (2.0)*
             'ah no wan, no, ah (2.0) she didn't want – to live because (2.0)'

95   *ella no puede, or, no ah podía hacer nada=*
             'she can't, or, no ah she couldn't do anything ='

96   J: = *mhm*
             '= mhm'

97   K: *um, **pienso** que ella no ah- no podía pensar – even ((soft)), so::, pues, um,*
             'um, **I think** that she no ah – she couldn't think – even ((soft)), so::, well, um,'

98   ***pero::* si yo ah era en - la situación de Ramón Sampedro =*
             '**bu::t** if I ah was in – Ramon Sampedro's situation ='

99   J: = *mhm*
             '= mhm'

100 K: *ahhh (2.0)*
             'ahhh (2.0)'

101   ***no sé,** no es una vida muy ((breathes in)) (2.0) um divertido ¿no?*
             '**I don't know**, it's not a very ((breathes in)) (2.0) fun life, is it?'

102   *((laughter))*
             ((laughter))

103 J: *mhm*
             'mhm'

104 K: ***pero::* (2.8) no - **creo que::** suicida↑, suicide↓*
             '**bu::t** (2.8) no – **I think** tha::t suicide↑ suicide↓'

105 J: *mhum*
             'mhum'

106 K: *es ahh, ((makes noise with tongue)) es mal↑ (0.42) **I [guess↓***
             'it's ahh ((makes noise with tongue)) it's bad↑ (0.42) **I [guess↓**'

107 J: [*mhm*
                                       '[mhm'

108 K: → *estoy ca- católico↑*
             'I'm Ca-Catholic↑'

109 J: *ah – ok*
             'ah – ok'

110 K: *um (0.4) pues, en uh, en el caso de Ramón Sampedro, **pienso que::::,***
             'um (0.4) well, in, uh, in Ramon Sampedro's case, **I think** tha:::t,'

111   *puedo, er um - I would, u::::m – su::friré↑ I would suffer =*
             'I can, er, um – I would, u:::m – I will suffer↑ I would suffer ='

112   J: = *uh-huh*
             = 'uh-huh'

113 K: *um **porque**, (3.0) um, todavía es -es una vida ¿no? y puede a::*
             'um **because** (3.0) um, it's still – it's a life, isn't it? and it can a::'

114   *afe, er um (3.0), um ((exhales)), ah influir↑,*
             'afe, er um (3.0), um ((exhales)), ah influence↑,'

115 J: [*uh-huh*]
             '[uh-huh]'

116 K: [***maybe**] otras personas,*
             '[**maybe**] other people'

117 J: *mhm*
              'mhm'

118 K: ***y**, ah mejorar las vidas de:: - esos - persona, esas personas, so::: (2.0),*
             '**and** ah improve the lives of:: - those – person, those people, so::: (2.0),'

119   *u:::m, puede todavía um - hacer um cosas buenas [en su vida] - **pienso↓***
             'u:::m, he can still um – do um good things [in his life] – **I think↓**'

| 120 | J: | [*está bien* |
| | | '[it's fine' |

121   *sí, sí es entendible - respetable la ...*
       'yes, yes it's understandable, respectable the ...'

As can be seen from the beginning of this sequence (line 92), the learner guides the organization of turns through various increments that function to elaborate, clarify, or show mitigated disagreement with the interlocutor, whereas the NS's contributions to the co-constructed discourse are realized through brief agreement responses or backchannels (e.g., *sí* 'yes', okay, umhm) which are used to signal continuation of the conversation. The sequence features two attempts on the part of the learner to mark possible completion (lines 101 and 106). The learner begins by announcing the topic of the discussion (line 92, *la situación de Terri Schiavo↑* 'Terry Schiavo's situation↑') and his first initiated turn is expanded three times. The first instance of turn expansion presents objective information about Terri Shiavo's situation with two two-second pauses (line 94) and lexical repair (line 95). In response to the NS's brief uptake (line 96, 'mhm'), the learner increments his previous turn using an epistemic verb phrase to introduce his opinion about Terri Shiavo's situation (line 97, um, *pienso que*…'I think...') and uses an elongated increment initiator that presents contra factual information (line 98, *pero::: si yo era en – la situación de Ramón Sampedro* 'bu:::t if I were in – Sampedro's situation'). Following the NS's brief response (line 99, 'm-hm') and a two-second pause (line 100), the learner further increments his turn using an epistemic disclaimer (line 101, *no sé* 'I don't know') that signals that there is more information to come, and brings this turn to possible completion with a final tag question (*¿no?* 'don't you think?') and laughter (line 102) which mark syntactic, prosodic, and pragmatic completion (Ford & Thompson, 1996).

As a result of the NS's minimal response (line 103), the learner redirects the conversation by means of an elongated increment initiator and a 2.8-second pause which serves to present the speaker's point of view with an epistemic verb phrase marking uncertainty of lexical information with final rising intonation (line 104, 'pero::: (2.8) *no creo que::: suicida↑, suicide↓*' 'bu:::t (2.8) I don't think tha:::t suicide↑ suicide↓'). After the NS's brief acknowledgement (line 105, 'mhm'), the next increment brings the learner's turn to possible completion with a parenthetical expression ('I guess↓') that signals syntactic, prosodic (low final intonation), and pragmatic completion (line 106) which is followed by the NS's brief uptake (line 107, 'mhm'). (The transmission of prosodic information in both increments [lines 104, 106] is explained below).

The last sequence of the excerpt (lines 108-121) brings the interaction to completion. The increment in line 108 is a continuation of the learner's previous TCU (line 106) which adds support to the learner's point of view uttered with final rising intonation to express uncertainty of the word *católico* 'Catholic' (line 108, *estoy Católico↑* 'I am Catholic↑'); this is followed by the NSs' acknowledgment of the information (line 109,'ah - ok'). Each of the last four increments is followed by a brief acknowledgement on the part of the NS. This sequence is prefaced by pauses, and includes lexical code-switches (line 110-111), an increment initiator *porque* 'because' that offers additional information along with additional pauses, a tag question (*¿no?* 'don't you think?'), lexical repair, and final rising intonation to express uncertainty (lines 113-114). The learner's turn is further expanded by the increment initiator uttered in English 'maybe' (line 116) and is overlapped with the NS's uptake (line 115), followed by a final turn expansion prefaced by the increment initiator 'y' along with pauses and lexical repairs (line 118). The learner reaches turn completion by means of the final epistemic verb phrase (*pienso↓* 'I think↓'), separated by a brief pause, and is realized with low final intonation that marks syntactic, prosodic, and pragmatic completion (line 119). This sequence is followed by the NS's overlapped turn (lines 120-121) expressing an assessment of the learner's opinion.

4.4. The role of prosody in second language conversations

Prosodic resources were frequently employed by the learners to convey various pragmatic meanings to the interlocutor. Figures 1 and 2 show the intonational contours of two increments in example (4) (lines 104, 106) separated by the NS's minimal response (line 105). Figure 1 shows the prosodic contour of the first increment which introduces the learner's opinion.

Figure 1. Kevin: **(**1 second) *pero::* (2.8 second) *no - creo que:: suicida*::↑ suicide↓ ' (1 second) bu::t (2.8) no – I think tha:::t suicide↑ (3rd singular present indicative Spanish verb ending) suicide↓ (line 104 [example 4]).
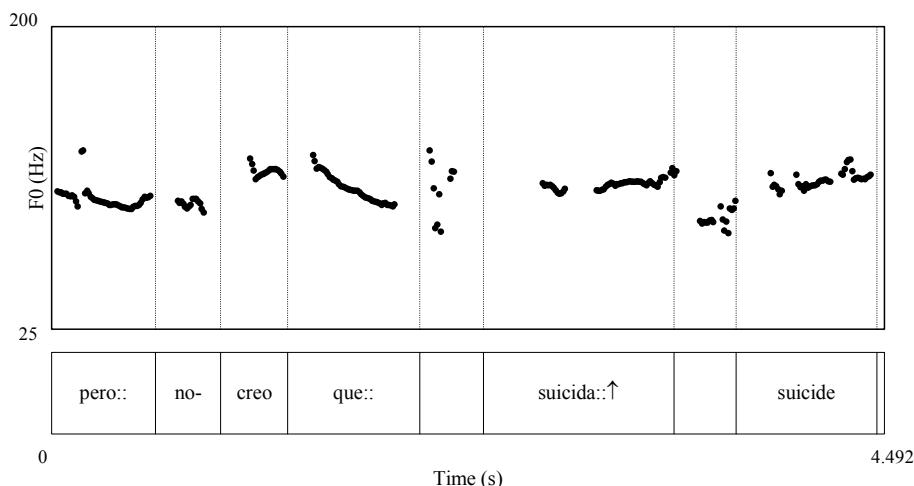
Two types of prosodic resources were commonly employed by the learner to expand his turns: pitch and duration. The example in Figure 1 shows various instances of tentativeness in the expression of the learner's opinion. The TCU is prefaced by a one-second pause, followed by an elongated increment initiator *pero*::: 'bu:::t' of 0.84 seconds and a 2.8 second pause. This pause is followed by an instance of lexical repair that is produced softly and a brief pause (no -), followed by the learner's opinion which is introduced with an epistemic verb phrase (*creo que*::: 'I believe') lasting 1.22 seconds to further delay the response. This elongated epistemic verb phrase is followed by another brief pause of 0.29 seconds, and an instance of code-switching: the first word (line 104, 'suicida↑') expresses the learner's uncertainty in Spanish and is realized with final rising intonation (115 Hz) lasting 0.88 seconds, followed by the English translation ('suicide↓') which is shorter (0.50 seconds) and lower in pitch (110 Hz) than the previous Spanish word ('suicida↑'). These prosodic cues, high pitch and lengthening of the final syllable, were interactionally employed as a means of indirectly asking the NS for confirmation of the learner's word choice and to smooth conversational interaction.

Figure 2 shows the second TCU increment which is realized after the NS's uptake by means of a minimal response (line 104, 'mhm') that brings the turn to possible completion.

Figure 2. Kevin: *es ahh* ((noise)) *es mal*↑ I guess↓ 'It's ah ((noise)) it's bad↑ I guess↓' (line 106 [example 4])
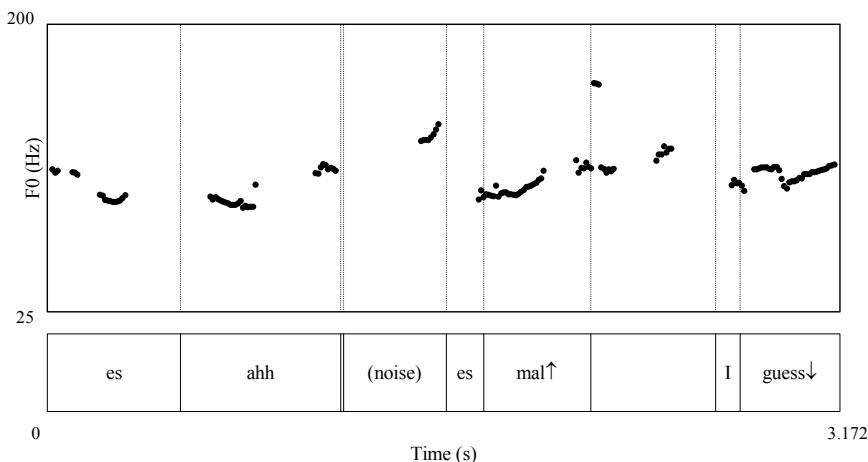
As seen in Figure 2, after the NS's uptake (line 105, 'mhm'), the second increment serves to complete the learner's previous turn and to convey his point, namely, "suicide is bad": this increment is prefaced by the verb *es* 'is' which lasts 1.28 seconds followed by a 1.41-second pause and rising intonation in the adjectival predicate (*mal*↑) (110 Hz). This TCU-increment is brought to possible completion after a brief pause which separates it from a parenthetical expression in English (0.62 seconds) (- 'I guess↓'). This parenthetical verb phrase in turn-final position mitigates the entire turn, and brings the TCU-increment to syntactic, pragmatic, and prosodic completion (low final intonation) (*es*::: *mal*↑ - I guess↓ 'It's bad↑ - I guess↓') (100.5 Hz).

Overall, in both sequences presented in this section, TCU-increment initiators and epistemic phrases combine with intonation in shaping the learners' turns. Depending on distributional placement and intonational contours within turns, epistemic phrases can be interactionally used to communicate pragmatic meaning (i.e. mitigation, uncertainty) or for conversational achievements such as turn initiation or turn closure. Prosodic features such as lengthening and pitch movement were crucial cues in co-constructing sequences in learner-NS interactions.

5. Discussion

The current study was designed to address the important issue of the role of grammar in social interaction and how learners in a FL context use grammatical resources, specifically increment initiators and elements of epistemic modality, in order to expand and organize their turns during the discussion of a sensitive topic with a NS of the target language. Also, the role of prosody, namely, final rising intonation and lengthening of the syllable, was analyzed as an important resource to convey pragmatic information. In the current study, these elements often co-occurred throughout the interaction and were dynamically utilized to expand the learner's turn across the sequence. The use of these grammatical resources in face-to-face conversations shows the learner's ability to maintain the flow of conversation, to negotiate his/her intentions with a NS, and to be a co-participant in conversation. Overall, a sequential analysis of the grammatical resources that FL learners employ in conversations with NSs is necessary in order to understand how actions implemented through turns and sequences are co-constructed in social interaction (Ochs, Schegloff, & Thompson, 1996; Schegloff, 1995).

5.1. Increment initiators and elements of epistemic modality

The first objective of the study was to examine the distribution of and preference for increment initiators and elements of epistemic modality. It was found that the TCU-increments, *y*, *pero*, and *porque,* were often employed by the learners in this study to clarify, rectify, add information, and to express disagreement from the beginning of the turn, and they further served to expand the learner's turn in order to reach possible completion. The results from Lerner (2004) show that the equivalent forms 'and, 'but,' and 'because' were also employed frequently in L1 English conversations in order to achieve turn expansion. Further, the results of this study showed that the preference for these increments varied among the learners, as some learners showed a stronger preference for one increment initiator over another. Of the 11 learners who participated in the present study, two utilized a higher frequency of these grammatical resources (Erin [Tables 1 & 2] and Tom [Table 2]) and this may be due to the fact that these learners were the only ones who had lived abroad (Erin, 2 months [Costa Rica] and Tom, 1 semester [Mexico]). Although the goal of the current study was not to examine the effect of study abroad, research shows that previous exposure to the target language in the host environment may influence the learners' interactional ability (DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Lafford, 2004).

With respect to the elements of epistemic modality, it was found that the learners in this study preferred the forms *creo que* 'I believe that', *pienso que* 'I think that', *no sé* 'I don't know', as well as the prosodic cues of rising intonation and lengthening of the syllable in order to express pragmatic meaning and project more information to come during the course of the interaction. The preference for '*creo que*' among the learners coincides with Spanish NS data that show that '*creo que*' represents the

unmarked form for expressing an opinion (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008a).[3] Similar to the findings of Ford & Thompson (1996), the convergence of pragmatic, syntactic, and intonational completeness at points of Complex Transition Relevant Places (CTRP) played a crucial role in learner – NS interactions here. The learners in this study employed a variety of grammatical resources while exchanging opinions with a NS in order to reach syntactic, pragmatic, and prosodic completion by means of final rising intonation to elicit the interlocutor's uptake. The current study, however, found that grammar is used not only to conclude turns, but also to expand them through projecting more talk or by eliciting NS input. The notion of projection (Schegloff, 1996, 2007) is crucial in conversation analysis as it allows the speaker to project the idea that there is more information to come by expanding and organizing his/her turns in face-to-face interactions. Similar to the distribution of increment initiators, the preference for elements of epistemic modality varied among the learners and this may be due to individual factors such as exposure to the host environment (two learners [Erin and Tom, Tables 1 & 2]) which provides the learner with rich interactional input (Dufon & Churchill, 2006).

With respect to the sequential analysis focusing on increment initiators and elements of epistemic modality across the interaction, the present study revealed that learners of Spanish employed these grammatical resources to initiate and expand their turns. Much like the findings in Lerner (2004), which focused on other-initiated and self-completed increments, the present study confirms increment initiators were a key resource for turn expansion in order to negotiate their intentions with a NS. Unlike Lerner's (2004) analysis, the current study examined the distribution of the increment initiators in longer sequences of discourse which allow the learner to expand and project his/her turns over multiple TCU-increments across the interaction. The current analysis found that, among these second language learners, the type of increment initiator employed was most often self-initiated and self-completed across long sequences during the discussion of a sensitive topic. In addition, learners used elements of epistemic modality as a turn-construction device to attenuate the negative effects of a disagreement. As noted in excerpt 4 (line 101), an epistemic disclaimer such as *no sé* 'I don't know' can be used to initiate a turn by projecting future talk, and can be employed as well as a stand-alone expression of uncertainty in one turn (example 3, line 221).

Finally, prosodic resources were also employed by the learners to expand their turns, such as final rising intonation and duration of the syllable. According to previous research (House, 2006; Wilson & Wharton, 2006), prosodic cues such as intonation and duration of syllable convey pragmatic meaning (mitigation, tentativity, uncertainty) and function in the co-construction of discourse. Thus, although the role of prosody has been researched in L1 discourse (Couper-Kuhlen & Ford, 2004), the current study also showed that in a second language, prosodic information plays a crucial role as grammatical and pragmatic resources in the co-construction of discourse between the learner and the NS.

5.2. Limitations and pedagogical implications

The primary aim of this study was to examine the distribution of and the preference for TCU-increment initiators and elements of epistemic modality in learner-NS interactions (male-female; male-male; female-female). However, no attempt was made to examine the effect of gender or the role of individual factors (e.g., motivation, language aptitude, or conversational ability) that may have influenced the preference for these TCU-increments in each interaction. With regard to prosody, we focused on the effect of final rising intonation and duration to express pragmatic intent (i.e., tentativity, projection of more to come) during the discussion of a controversial topic. Other prosodic features not analyzed in the current study, and that may influence the interpretation of pragmatic meaning in learner-NS interactions, include speech rate, vowel quality, and stress. Also, non-verbal cues such as gesture and the role of laughter, and other grammatical resources such as the sequential and prosodic realization of parentheticals, appear to merit further investigation.

Finally, the findings of the current study can inform second language pedagogy. For example, given the limited inventory of increment initiators and elements of epistemic modality identified in the learners' TCUs-in-progress in this study, it is recommended that SL and FL teachers teach other forms and other sequential contexts in which these TCU-increment initiators are used in NS conversations

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[3] Wierzbicka (2006) provides an insightful analysis of the various functions of 'I think', the most frequent and prominent verbal epistemic phrase in modern English.

such as other-initiated and other-completed and other-initiated but self-completed (See examples 1 and 2 as well as information before and after the examples). In particular, knowledge of other elements of epistemic modality would improve the learners' discourse ability and their ability to interact with NSs of the target language. Finally, following the pedagogical recommendations of Félix-Brasdefer (2006b, 2008b), it is recommended that FL teachers raise learners' awareness of the inventory, form, and sequential distribution of TCU-increments by analyzing these forms sequentially in NS interactions in the classroom. To improve learners' comprehension skills in regard to these forms, it is suggested that the teacher play a few sequences followed by an analysis of the turn-taking mechanisms and the sequential distribution of these forms in groups. This sequential analysis of NS conversations would be followed by oral practice through learner-learner conversations in the classroom and discussion of these TCU increments in the classroom. In general, by raising learners' awareness of these forms at the discourse level, followed by communicative practice, their interactional ability will improve.

6. Conclusion

The results of the current study contribute to our understanding of the role of grammar and social interaction in a FL context; in particular, the findings highlight the interactive role that increment initiators, elements of epistemic modality, and prosodic cues (i.e. intonation and duration) play during the construction of turn expansion in second language conversations. The present study also sheds light on the issue of individual variation among learners in the preference for and distribution of grammatical resources during the negotiation of meaning in social interaction. Overall, we hope that future studies further analyze the role of grammar and social interaction in a FL context by an examination of other conversational mechanisms (e.g., delay, turn-taking, laughter, silence), the prominence of prosody in social interaction, and the notion of epistemic modality as a discourse strategy in second language conversations.

Appendix

Transcription conventions (Adapted from Jefferson 2004)

=	Equal signs indicate no break up or gap.
[/]	A left bracket indicates the point of overlap onset; right bracket indicates end of overlap
( )	Parentheses indicate the time in seconds.
-	A dash marks a short untimed pause within an utterance.
↑↓	The up and down arrows mark sharp rises or falls in pitch.
:	A colon marks a lengthened syllable or sound (more colons prolong the syllable/sound).
word	Underlining is used to indicate some form of stress or emphasis (i.e. loudness or pitch).
.	A period marks fall in tone.
,	A comma marks continuing intonation.
?	A question mark signals rising intonation.
(( ))	Double parentheses are used to mark the transcriber's descriptions of events.

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