

Mirá: From Verb to Discourse Particle in Rioplatense Spanish

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1. Introduction

In this work, I will deal with an empirical treatment of a specific discourse particle. My theoretical position is that the development that gives rise to these particles, discursivization, is part of a more complex process of change, which includes four movements: grammaticalization, degrammaticalization, codification, and discursivization. Given space constraints, I will not address this issue here, which is specified in Ocampo (2006a and 2006b). I will only describe the facts and hypothesize a diachronic evolution with the general support of three topics, presented in Section 3.

The lexical form *mirá* is a verb and as such appears in conversations, for example in (1):

(1) 1a43¹

A: Esto es de Francia. **Mirá** lo que tiene. Es para vos.

Translation

A: This comes from France. **Look** what it has. It's for you.

In this passage, speaker A shows to L a box that contains a special variety of candy. Here, *mirá* means 'to look' and is syntactically integrated into the sentence: it constitutes the verb of the main clause and has a direct object formed by the subordinate clause *lo que tiene* 'what it has'.

On the other hand, discourse studies (Martín Zorroaquino & Portolés Lázaro 1999) record the use of this form as a discourse particle. An exemplification of this is shown in (2). The discourse topic of this extract from my data is Japanese noodles.

(2) 1a21

A: Salsa de soya y una gotita de aceite, son perfectos.

M: [pe:ro, qué bien.

A: [así que, este, son los high p=

L: =**mirá**, cuando le demos a las chicas, ¿sabés qué vamos a hacer? [...] sacamos un poco de un paquete:te, lo guardamos acá, sacamos un poco del otro paquete:te [...] Y a las chicas le damos a cada una (0.2) en su: paqueti:to.

* I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers and the editors. They took a good deal of effort to point out inaccuracies in the text and made very valuable observations. Of course, final responsibility is mine.

¹ The numbers and letters after each example indicate its location in the corpus. The conventions used in the transcription are as follows. A single bracket '[' between two utterances indicates that they overlap. The sign '=' marks partial overlapping between the end of a turn and the beginning of another. Utterances appear between parentheses when I am not sure of the accuracy of the transcription. Three periods between parentheses '(...)' mean that it was impossible to ascertain what the speaker said. A hiatus of any kind in the speech flow is marked by '-'. A pause is indicated by parentheses '()'. A number between parentheses '(1.4)' shows the length of the pause (in seconds and tenths of seconds). Words or utterances underlined mark that this portion is perceived as salient (strong primary stress, or high pitch, or uttered with a louder voice, etc.). Lengthening is indicated by ':' after a vowel or a consonant. Three periods between parenthesis '[...]' indicate that a portion of the conversation is omitted. The construction relevant for the analysis is shown in **bold characters**.

Translation

A: Soy sauce and a drop of oil, they are perfect.

M: [that's great

A: [so, they are the high p=

L: =look, when we give this to the girls, do you know what we can do? [...] we take a bit from a parcel, we put it here, we take a bit from the other parcel [...] And the girls, we give each one (0.2) her portion.

Here, the form *mirá*, while retaining the original meaning 'to look', also conveys the message 'pay attention': it asks the hearer to pay attention to what the speaker is going to say. In addition, *mirá* is utilized by L to self-select as next speaker, as shown by the partial overlapping (indicated by '=' between the beginning of her turn and the end of the previous speaker's turn.

This work is based on a corpus of twenty hours of informal conversations with Rioplatense speakers born and raised in La Plata, Argentina. The corpus was collected by the researcher on two trips during 1986 and 1987. The criterion for selecting the speakers, (besides being born and raised in La Plata) was to be part of a social network: friends or relatives of the researcher. Speakers were not aware that they were being recorded; however, their authorization to use the data for linguistic purposes was asked afterwards. Names were changed to protect anonymity. The corpus was transcribed utilizing conversation analysis notation. From this corpus, I utilized four hours. The total of number of speakers that participate in this subset is 12. Their ages range from six to 76 years old. The distribution is as follows: four speakers in their seventies, two in their fifties, two in their forties, two in their thirties, and two speakers eight and six years old. These two children, although they were present during one of the conversations and participated occasionally, did not produce any example of *mirá*. Due to the small number of speakers for each age group, I did not perform any statistical analysis to establish if there was any difference in the use of *mirá* between generations. This is a very interesting issue but lies outside the scope of this paper. Besides my own corpus of Rioplatense data, I also performed a concordance with the *Corpus del Español* (Davies 2002).

The plan of this exposition is as follows. In section 2, I will refer to previous work on this discursive particle. In section 3, I will discuss three issues. In section 4, I will present my goals and the hypothesis. I will analyze the data in section 5, and section 6 will convey the conclusions.

2. Previous work

Martín Zorroaquino and Portolés Lázaro (1999)'s chapter provides an encompassing definition and typology of discourse particles. They categorize *mirá* as an alterity focalizer². They state that its discursive use is the result of a process of grammaticalization, which starts from the second person singular imperative form. They express that *mirá* shares formal properties with other discourse particles: (i) they don't admit complementation, (ii) they appear with the subject only sporadically or with a vocative coreferential with the subject, and (iii) they don't admit negation. Martín Zorroaquino and Portolés Lázaro (1999) add that *mirá* admits number variation and that it varies according to levels of formality. Semantically, this particle shows a process of desemantization by which it loses its original meaning 'to direct the sight towards an object' and becomes a signal that attempts to attract the hearer's attention to the speaker's realm. They also convey that postposed, this discourse particle acquires a self-reflexive tone: *no se ha salvado nadie del accidente, mira* 'nobody got out alive from this accident, look.' (p. 4181). Uttered before a question, it mitigates the speaker's inquisitive attitude. They add that *mira* conveys various stylistic effects, such as cordiality, annoyance, or introduction of an opinion contrary to the one held by the interlocutor.

A related topic is that attempts at a typology of these particles have resulted in a multiplicity of categories. Manoliu (2004) divides them in three classes: pragmatic markers, discursive markers, and

² In Spanish *enfocadores de la alteridad*.

conversational markers. Fischer and Drescher (1996) classify them in four groups: interjections, secondary interjections, discourse markers, and modal particles. Blakemore (1992, 2002) proposes a tripartite classification according to the achievement of three cognitive effects by the discourse particle: (a) allowing the derivation of contextual implications, (b) strengthening an existing assumption, and (c) leading to the contradiction and elimination of an existing assumption. For their part, Martín Zorroaquino and Portolés Lázaro (1999) present a five-class classification of Spanish discourse particles: information structurers, connectors, reformulators, argumentative operators, and conversational markers³. Each class is further subdivided in subclasses. These two authors include the form *mirá* in the category *conversational markers*. The particles contained in this category have two functions related to conversation: an informative function oriented towards the message, and an interactive function oriented towards the interlocutor. Martín Zorroaquino and Portolés Lázaro (1999 p.4180) include the form *mirá* within the subcategory of *alterity focalizers* (as previously stated) whose members point towards the listener. On the one hand, the behavior of *mirá* in my data supports its inclusion in this category and subcategory, on the other, given the multiplicity of categories presented by other studies, I think that more empirical research is needed.

3. Clarifications

Here I will discuss three issues. The first one is what constitutes a discourse particle. The second one concerns morphological variation. The third issue deals with the need to differentiate between the notions of *meaning* and *message*.

In general, there is no total agreement of what constitutes a discourse particle (Blakemore, 2003; Martín Zorroaquino & Portolés Lázaro, 1999). Levinson (1983) briefly mentions them in his chapter on deixis “in discourse deixis, there are many words and phrases [...] that indicate the relationship between utterances and the prior discourse. [...] It is general conceded that these words have at least a component that resists truth-conditional treatment” (pp. 87-88).

My own characterization of discourse particles is based on the definitions of various authors:

- (3) The term *discourse particle* refers to the functionally based heterogeneous group of linguistic forms, which do not have a syntactic function within the sentence, and act on segments of discourse to guide inferences, and/or to indicate how these segments are to be understood in the particular context where they appear, and/or to regulate the turn-taking mechanism. (Based on Blakemore (2002), Leech, Deuchar & Hoogenraad (1962), Fischer & Drescher (1996), Martín Zorroaquino and Portolés Lázaro (1999), and Travis (2006).)

If we apply (3) to example (2), we see that the form *mirá* does not have a syntactic function within any sentence, and is utilized by speaker L to indicate that what she is going to say is important. In addition, it is utilized by the speaker to secure her turn.

I utilize the term *discourse particles* to refer to this class, while other authors refer to it by the term *discourse markers*. Fischer and Drescher (1996) utilize the expression *discourse particles* as a cover term that includes *interjections*, *secondary interjections*, *discourse markers*, and *modal particles*. The last two classes are relevant to my analysis. Fischer and Drescher (1996) consider that the second class, modal particles, “express speaker attitude towards the conveyed proposition” (p. 856).⁴ Discourse markers, on the other hand “segment utterances and contribute to the turn-taking system” (p. 856).⁵ I agree with Fischer and Drescher on the utilization of the phrase *discourse particles* as a cover term. In my analysis I will not attempt to go into further distinctions. In its evolution, the lexical form *mirá* passes through the stage of modal particle and ends as a discourse marker. Since in the data the boundaries of these two categories are fuzzy, and even in the stage of regulator of the turn-taking

³ The original categories are in Spanish: *estructuradores de la informacion, conectores, reformuladores, operadores argumentativos, marcadores conversacionales*, respectively.

⁴ Fischer and Drescher (1996) state that they are taking this definition from Quirk et al. (1972).

⁵ Fischer and Drescher (1996) state that they are taking this definition from Ehlich (1986).

mechanism, *mirá* still retains much of its previous functions, including its original verbal meaning, I prefer to keep the general label *discourse particle*.

Martín Zorroaquino and Portolés Lázaro (1999) mention morphological invariability as one of the defining features of discourse particles. In previous works (Ocampo 2006a and 2006b), I have adopted this point of view. However, Martín Zorroaquino and Portolés Lázaro (1999 p.4180) also indicate, as stated in the previous section, that *mirá* admits variation. In my Rioplatense data there is verb agreement: besides *mirá* '(you singular informal) look', the forms *mire* '(you singular formal) look' and *miren* '(you plural) look' also appear as discourse particles. This is exemplified in (4) and (5):

(4) 6b21

C: Hay muchos que están desesperados por la edad. Es que - que creen que se le (acabó) la juventud se acabó la: la vida. [...] yo hasta que: - hasta que pueda, vivo. [riéndose] Después no sé.

[...]

F: e he he (0.4) no:, dejate de embroma:r, eso de que (0.6) mientras uno se pueda mover

C:

[**mire** che pero
¿por qué uno solamente a la - a la - a los - veinte años, a los treinta, va a ser un tipo capaz, si - si yo a - si yo a:ctualmente me siento, intelectualmente, en mis plenos medios?

Translation

C: There are many who are desperate because they are old. They believe that the end of youth means the end of life [...] I plan to live until I can. [laughing] After that, I don't know

[...]

F: um ha ha (0.4) no:, no kidding, you know, provided that you are able-bodied

C:

[**look**, man but, why people
believe that only if you are - if you are twenty, thirty years old you are able-bodied if - if I - if now, intellectually I feel with all my energy?

Here we see that instead of informal *mirá*, speaker C utilizes formal *mire* to introduce his own point of view about aging. This point of view stands in opposition to the opinion attributed to other people, and previously mentioned by C. During the whole conversation speakers C and F, who are colleagues in a teaching institution, address each other formally because of the age difference between them. There are seven contexts in the data where the relationship between speakers requires the utilization of formal *mire*. In all cases this is the form that appears, and not informal *mirá*.

In example (5) speaker N utilizes the second person plural form *miren*. The discourse topic is the children of speakers P and S.

(5) 2b3

S: éstos anoche no se porta:ron ma:l.

P: no:, éstos se portaron bá:rbaro. [...] lo que pasa que la abuela es una histé:rica.

N: no:, no: no. (pero **miren**) es que estaban los cuatro juntos, cuando empezaron a jugar (...)

A:

[no,
cuando pasamos las diapositivas se portaron muy bien, eh (...)

P:

[¿sabés qué pasa? que ella - ella es
fanática de los chicos - que están con ella.

N: no:

P: entonces, es decir, los reta a éstos (0.4) los reta a éstos

Translation

S: These ones didn't misbehave last night.

P: No:, they were very well-behaved. [...] what happens is that their grandmother is very impatient.

N: no:, no:, no:.. (but **look**) what happened is that the four were together and they started to play (...)

[
A: no, when we showed the slides ther behaved very well, eh (...)

P: [do you know what happens? That she -
she is biased towards the kids - who are with her.

N: no:

P: so, you know, she scolds these ones (0.4) she scolds these ones.

In (5) speaker P accuses speaker N, who is his mother, of favoritism towards the children of P's sister (who was absent during the conversation). He states that when her four grandchildren misbehave, N scolds only P's children. Speaker N rejects this accusation and attempts to get her point across, by signaling to both P and his wife S that what she is going to say is important. For this purpose, she utilizes the second person plural form *miren*.

It is very likely that the feature of morphological invariability –the absence of agreement– was noticed in the analysis of adjectives that became discourse particles. It is true that adjectives lose their gender and number affixes and become invariable when they are used as discourse particles (Ocampo 2006a, 2006b). In the case of verbs, however, the data from *mirá* seems to indicate that the need to address the interlocutors, in terms of number and formality, prevents losing some verbal inflections. Notice, however, that the trend towards invariability is still present. For example, the first person plural imperative form *miremos* 'let's look' does not appear in the data with a discursive use, although its presence could potentially fill communicative needs. Moreover, (5) is the only case in the data where the second plural form appears. In the rest of the contexts that require second person plural *miren*, second person singular *mirá* is used instead: 10 out of 11 contexts, that is 90.9% of the time. This can be seen in (21) below, where speakers F and M address the audience with *mirá* instead of *miren*. My hypothesis is that this loss of syntagmatic variability is a feature that discoursivization shares with grammaticalization (Ocampo 2006a, b). In addition, this feature is a change in process, which is well advanced in the case of *mirá* versus *miren*, but minimal or nonexistent in the case of the second singular formal *mire*.

The third issue that I would like to clarify is the difference between the notions of *meaning* and *message* (Diver, 1995; Contini-Morava, 1995; Huffman, 2001):

- (6) The **meaning** is codified in the linguistic sign
The **message** is the inference that the hearer makes taking into consideration the meaning of the linguistic form, the context, and her knowledge of the world.

In cases where it is not possible to differentiate between meaning and message, I utilize the cover term *sense* instead.

4. Goals and hypothesis

In my analysis of the data I will attempt two main tasks:

- (7) a. Establish the meaning, message, and discursive uses of the form *mirá*.
b. Ascertain the process that gave birth to the discursive use of *mirá*.

The verb *mirar* 'to look' comes from the deponent Latin verb *mīrāri*, which has a passive form and a reflexive meaning:

- (8) *mīror*, *mīrāris*, *mīrāri*, *mīrātus* sum: 'to marvel'

hōmīn-is nēglīgēntīa -m mīrāri
 man GENITIVE carelessness ACCUSATIVE marvel her/himself
to be astonished by the carelessness of this man
 (Blánquez Fraile, Agustín, 1961)

The Spanish meaning registered in dictionaries (9) constitutes an innovation from that Latin meaning. Lloyd (1987) explicitly includes *mirar* among the class of dynamic *-ar* verbs and states that “the commonest dynamic verbs of the *-ar* class often represent innovations from their point of view of their Latin meanings.” (p. 290).

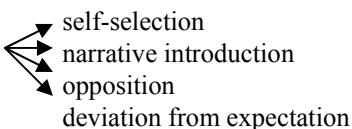
(9) (Real Academia Española. 2001. *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*. 22^a Edición)

Mirar:

1. tr. Dirigir la vista a un objeto. ‘To direct the sight toward an object.’⁶
2. tr. Observar las acciones de alguien. ‘To observe someone’s actions.’
3. tr. Revisar, registrar. ‘To revise, to register.’
4. tr. Tener en cuenta, atender. ‘To take into consideration.’
5. tr. Pensar, juzgar. ‘To think, to judge.’
6. tr. Inquirir, buscar algo, informarse de ello. ‘To ask, to look for something, to request information about something.’
7. intr. Dicho de una cosa, especialmente de un edificio: estar situado, puesto o colocado enfrente de otro. ‘Said about an object, specially a building: to be situated in front of another one.’
8. intr. Concernir, pertenecer, tocar. ‘To concern, to belong to.’
9. intr. Cuidar, atender, proteger, amparar o defender a alguien o algo. ‘To take care of, to protect, or to defend someone or something.’ *Mira mucho por sus amigos*. ‘S/he takes care of her/his friends’
10. intr. Tener un objetivo o un fin al ejecutar algo. ‘To have a goal when doing something.’ *Solo mira a su provecho*. ‘S/he only considers her/his advantage’.
11. prnl. Tener algo en gran estima, complacerse en ello. ‘To hold something in great esteem, to enjoy it.’ *Se mira en su pintura*. ‘S/he derives great pleasure in her/his painting’.
12. prnl. Tener mucho amor y complacerse en las gracias o en las acciones de alguien. ‘To feel great love for and to enjoy the amusing actions of someone.’ *Siempre se mira en sus hijos*. ‘S/he always enjoys the actions of her/his children’.
13. prnl. Considerar un asunto y meditar antes de tomar una resolución. ‘To consider and ponder an issue before taking a decision.’

Taking into consideration the array of senses listed in (9), we see that in contemporary use, *mirar* has extended further its sense, probably from the meaning listed first: ‘to direct the sight toward an object’. Based on this observation, my hypothesis is that the development towards discourse particle stems from this sense⁷, and has followed the path indicated in (10):

(10) ‘direct the sight toward an object’ > ‘consider’ > ‘pay attention’



- self-selection
- narrative introduction
- opposition
- deviation from expectation

My proposition is that from the order or suggestion to look at something, the listener infers the message ‘consider’ something, and from this, s/he may infer ‘pay attention’. I hypothesize that it is from the message ‘pay attention’ that the discursive use originates: this message is further exploited to convey the discursive uses shown above. Interestingly, in a dictionary based on the *Diccionario* of the

⁶ All translations are mine.

⁷ Notice that Martín Zorroaquin and Portolés Lázaro (1999) were the first to postulate this.

Real Academia Española, published in Paris in 1896, the sense ‘pay attention’ is included as part of the meaning of *mirar*:

- (11) **mirar**: fijar la vista en algún objeto, aplicando juntamente la atención. ‘To concentrate the sight on an object, applying jointly the attention.’
(*Novísimo Diccionario de la Lengua Castellana*. París: Librería de Garnier Hermanos, 1896.)

5. Analysis of the data

As previously stated, I performed a concordance (Davies 2002) with the standard form *mira* (*tú*) and the *voseo* form *mirá* (*vos*), to account for dialectal and/or sociolectal variation. Notice that it was *voseo* and not the standard *tú* form that was adopted by the Rioplatense variety. Since the purpose of the concordance was to verify the strength of the hypothesis. I only looked for the time of occurrences of the senses listed in (10) and the first appearances of discursive uses. I did not perform any statistical analysis at this point.

In the concordance, the meaning of ‘direct the sight toward an object’ appears distinctively with this sense for the first time in a text from the 14th Century:

- (12) Si quieres ver el omne en todo su valor, /**mira** bien los sepulcros que están en derredor, /ado los cuerpos yazen con aquel grant fedor: /verás imagen muerta fría e sin color.

Translation

If you wish to see man in all his value, /**look** carefully at the tombs around here, /where corpses lay with this huge stench: /you will see a dead, cold, and colorless image
(Pedro López de Ayala (1332-1407) *Libro Rimado de Palacio*. 14th Century.)

There is a previous occurrence of *mira* in a text of the 13th Century where it is not possible to differentiate between the senses ‘direct the sight toward an object’ and ‘pay attention’:

- (13) Mas el obispo de Puy quando oyó el alborozo & el mal traymiento de los cristianos llamó a grandes bozes Santa María & dixo mas assi: dios **mira** & torna sobre tu pueblo & abre los tus ojos

Translation

But the Bishop of Puy, upon hearing the commotion and the christian’s ill-treatment, called loudly Saint Mary and said the following: God, **look** and defend your people and open your eyes
(Anonymous. *Gran Conquista de Ultramar*. 13th Century.)

Moreover, examples present in the concordance suggest that there is a continuum between the messages ‘pay attention’ and ‘consider’, since sometimes it is not possible to separate them. The messages ‘pay attention/consider’ appear together in a text from the 13th Century:

- (14) Y ella respondió: -Cierto, en vano hablas. Mejor es que hagas aquí penitencia que en el infierno. **Mira** lo que dize el sabio: que al pobre sobervio e al rico mentiroso e al viejo loco aborrece Dios.

Translation

And she answered “This is true, you speak in vain. You would better do penance here than in hell. **Look** at what the wise man says: the poor vain and the rich liar and the old fool are detested by God.”
(Anónimo. *Los siete sabios de Roma*. 13th Century.)

In this text both interpretations are possible. In a passage from the end of 15th Century, the message of ‘pay attention’ is more discernible:

- 15) Capítulo xxiii. del pensamiento de la muerte. // Muy presto sera contigo este negocio: por esso **mira** como obras: hoi es el hombre e manyana ya no parece e luego que fuere quitado de los ojos: luego passa del pensamiento.

Translation

Chapter 23rd about the consideration of death. Time passes very fast: thus **look** at your actions: today man is, and tomorrow is no more, and once he is out of sight he is out of mind. (Pseudo-Jean Gerson. *Imitación de Cristo*. Zaragoza circa 1490)

This passage reflects on the brevity of human life. Consequently, the author urges the reader to pay attention to his acts in this world. The second person singular imperative form of *mirar*, accomplishes here a *focalizing function*. It tells the reader to concentrate her attention in the segment that follows. I base this notion of discourse focalizing function on the syntactic characterization of focus as *center of attention* (Bolinger 1954, Lambrecht 1994, Ocampo 2003). Notice, however, that the notion of focus is syntactic in the sense that it operates within the limits of the sentence. From the notion of focus I have taken the concept of *center of attention* and applied it to a portion of discourse. It is in this sense that this function of *focalizing* should be understood. Discursive use of *mirá* stems from this focalizing function that accompanies the message ‘pay attention’.

In the concordance, the first discursive use appears with the dialectal form *mirá* in a play from Lope de Rueda, dated in the 16th Century:

- (16) TORUVIO. -Eso es la verdad, mujer, que no puede dejar de ser lindo.

ÁGUEDA. -**Mirá**, marido, ¿sabéis qué he pensado? Que yo cogeré el aceituna y vos la acarrearéis con el asnillo y Mencigüela la venderá

Translation

TORUVIO. -It is true, woman, this can only be nice.

ÁGUEDA. -**Look**, husband, do you know what I have thought? I will gather the olives and you will transport them with the donkey and Mencigüela will sell them

(Lope de Rueda (1505-1565). *Pasos completos*. 1535)

In this passage, the character Águeda proposes a course of action to her husband. The form *mirá* has a discourse focalizing function: it tells Toruvio to pay attention to what she is going to say. Notice that *mirá* is not syntactically dependent on the sentence that follows. Águeda utilizes the second person plural form to speak to her husband: *vos*. This form of address was becoming socially marked at the time: notice that the author puts it in the mouth of a villager. This *voseo* was later adopted in the Río de La Plata region as the unmarked informal manner of address.

The first discourse use of the socially unmarked form *mira* appears in the concordance in the 18th Century in the work *Fray Gerundio de Campazas*, by José Francisco de Isla, dated 1742:

- (17) Su padrino el licenciado Quijano, que era el menos romancista de todos los circunstantes, le dijo:

-**Mira**, hombre, que⁸ puellas no significa «muchachos», sino «muchachas».

Translation

His godfather Bachelor Quijano, who was the less latinist of all the interlocutors, said him: **look** man, puellas doesn't mean boys but girls.

(José Francisco de Isla. (1703-1781). *Fray Gerundio de Campazas*. 1742)

Notice that the examples in the concordance only show that the discursive use appears later than the verbal use and therefore does not contradict the hypothesis stated in the previous paragraphs. It does not confirm, however, the first steps of the hypothesis as schematized in (10), since the first attested use of *mira* with the unambiguous meaning of ‘direct your sight toward an object’ is from the 14th Century, and the senses ‘direct the sight toward an object/pay attention’ and ‘pay attention/consider’ are first attested in the 13th Century.

⁸ This is not a subordinator but an exclamation mark.

In the Rioplatense data it is possible to see cases of *mirá* that constitute a transition between the verbal and the discourse use. The verbal use is exemplified in (1) where the form *mirá* is the nucleus of the verbal predicate, i.e. it functions within the sentence. The discourse use is shown in (2) where *mirá* is an independent form outside of the sentence⁹, and conveys the message ‘pay attention’. Example (18) constitutes an intermediate case:

(18) 2a27

P: ¿no tomás más? Hay - hay más, ¿eh?

F: [**mirá**, ella se lo tomó todo.

Translation

P: don't you want more? There - there is more, hum

F: [**look**, she emptied her glass

Here the form *mirá* can be considered an independent clause, with which speaker F is asking the other participants to direct their sight to a speaker. However, notice that at the same time F utilizes *mirá* to self-select, and this request to look is also a request to pay attention. It is from uses like this that the discourse particle develops.

The next step in the evolution is the utilization of this form to ask the reader to concentrate her/his attention in the discourse that follows, as in (19):

(19) 619

F: claro, usted puede saber hablar y todo pero () **mire**, después de tantos años () me di cuenta de que verdad lo que hay que saber [...] es la teoría. Usted puede saber veinte lenguas pero si no se conoce bien () la teoría, ahí es donde se ve.

Translation

F: ok, you might know how to speak and everything but () **look**, after so many years () I realized that what you should really know [...] is the theory. You might speak twenty languages but if theory is not acquired, there is where you see [the shortcomings]

This discourse focalizing function of *mirá* is furthermore exploited to convey the four discourse functions listed in (10): self-selection, narrative introduction, opposition, and deviation from expectation. I would claim that the form *mirá* still retains its original meaning of ‘direct the sight toward an object’. This meaning allows for the message ‘pay attention’ which accomplishes the discourse focalizing function. A further development is that this discourse focalizing function is conversationally exploited to carry out the other four discourse functions. In the remainder of the exposition I will refer to these functions as they appear in the Rioplatense data.

The discourse focalizing function of *mirá* is exploited by speakers to self-select during a conversation, as exemplified in (20). The discourse topic is the obnoxious behavior of a person in a museum:

(20) 15a22

Q: el tipo es lo que se: proponía. () Armar el escándalo. Por qué motivo? no sé. () Pero creo=

M: =para ver la reacción de la gente

Q: y sin embargo u - este no:, precisame:nte debe () buscando todo lo que:: - dijo: - este era - busca:ndo la reacción de la gente, para que se armara bochinche. ¿Por qué? no sé

M: ah porque parece que el tipo era: (autorida:d)

Q: [**mirá** fue algo: este:: positivo que: evidentemente algo está cambiando [...] en el país. [...] la gente no: le dio: [...] ni: bolilla.

⁹ Notice that it is also possible to consider *mirá* as forming an independent sentence by itself.

Translation

Q: this is what the guy wanted, to provoke a disturbance. Why? I don't know. But I think=

M: =to see the reaction of the public

Q: and yet - um no:, precisely must have been looking for what she said - um looking for the reaction of the public, to provoke a tumult. Why? I don't know

M: mh because this guy was someone in (a position of power.)

Q: [**look**, this was something um positive that shows that something is changing [...] in the country [...] the public didn't [...] pay the slightest attention.

Here Q utilizes the message of 'pay attention' to self-select as next speaker. Notice that his utterance overlaps with the turn of his wife, M, and that he utilizes his turn to introduce a new discourse topic.

The discourse particle *mirá* is also utilized to introduce oral narratives, as in (21):

(21) 15a13

M: como - (...) en la época de la plata dulce que todo el mundo viajaba a Europa sin saber ni ni () ni qué miraba ni ni que: - a qué país iba?

[risas]

M: este: - y que ya no sabían e: que: si habían ido a un museo si la Tour Eiffel está en: en París o:: dó:nde, confundían las cosas, tenían unos matetes (...) masacota:dos

(1.4)

F: **mirá** - tengo una anec

Q: (...)

F: no no sí () Tengo una una anécdota de los - los argentinos en el exterior () sabés que - tábamos en Miami [oral narrative follows] entonces ésta claro la dejó la como no entendía lo que le decía () ma sí a la qué ta:nto y se fue

[risas]

M: **mirá** - aye:r había un tipo. (Que yo no sé cómo ubicar al) tipo (pero) que era milico

F: [lo que pasa es que era así que no era exagerado - así te digo

Q: [propio propio de argentinos

M: exactamente porque es una falta de respeto - total y de y de desconocimiento de las cosas. () Ayer había un tipo que me parece que era milico () viste que vos o o el tapado te lo tenés que: p que pone:r o lo tenés que dejar en el guardarrupas. Bueno había un tipo que no: - no lo quiso dejar en el guardarrupas pero tampoco se lo quería poner. [oral narrative follows]

Translation

M: like - (...) in the times of the sweet money when everybody traveled to Europe without knowing what what () what they were looking or in in - in which country they were?

[laughter]

M: hum - and they didn't know if hum if they had visited a museum, if the Eiffel Tower was in in Paris or where, they confused things, they had a mess in their heads (...) very thick

(1.4)

F: **look** - I have a st

Q: (...)

F: no no, yes () I have a story about - about argentinians in foreign countries () you know - we were in Miami [oral narrative follows] so this one, of course since she didn't understand what the flight attendant was telling her, she left saying what the heck is that

[laughter]

M: **look** - yesterday there was a guy. (I don't know how to figure out this) guy (but) he was a

F: [let me tell you that I was not

M: cop¹⁰ for sure.

[

F: exaggerating - it happened like I said

[

Q: typical typical of argentinians

M: exactly because this is a total lack of respect, and reveals ignorance. () Yesterday there was a guy I think was a cop () the coat, you know, you must either wear it or leave it at the cloakroom. Well, there was this guy that didn't - didn't want to leave it at the cloakroom but didn't want to wear it, either. [oral narrative follows]

In this passage, the discourse focalizing function of *mirá* is utilized by speakers F and M to introduce two oral narratives.

In some cases, the discourse particle is utilized to introduce a statement that is in opposition with the previous situation. This function was already noticed by Martín Zorroaquino and Portolés Lázaro (1999); (22) exemplifies this:

(22) 2a16

P: hay más carne:

A: pero me - me parece que es mucho, eh

[...]

F: mh (más o menos) yo comí: (0.4) cuatro pedazos de carne.

[...]

P: ¿pero no - no querés?

F: no no, más no. Taba muy rico. No, más no. Tá muy rica pero

[

A:

mirá, casi comería una rodaja.

Translation

P: there is more meat

A: but I - I think this is too much, hum

[...]

F: mhm (more or less) I ate (0.4) four pieces of meat.

[...]

P: but don't - don't you want?

F: no no, no more meat for me. It was delicious. No, no more. It is delicious but

[

A:

look, I think I would

like a slice.

Speaker F states that he does not want another slice of meat. In opposition with him, speaker A changes her mind and states that she wants another slice. The discourse focalizing function of *mirá* is exploited here to introduce an opposing statement.

The form *mirá* also conveys the pragmatic function of *deviation from expectation* (Ocampo 1995). In some contexts *mirá* may appear followed by the pronoun *vos* 'you singular informal', as in (23):

(23) 1b24

L: un día no hace mucho - no hace mucho habló por teléfono, [...] dice, era lo último que yo me esperaba. (0.6) ¿Para qué habló por teléfono, a ver? (0.5) ¿si no estaba quién? [...] bueno, no me acuerdo. El asunto que habló, dice, habló Fito acá, (0.2) para preguntar si no estaba p (0.5)

¹⁰ The slang term *milico* has the core meaning 'soldier'. However, in some contexts it is extended to encompass any member of the Armed Forces, sometimes with the connotation of 'authoritarian person'. During the 1976-1983 military dictatorship this lexical item could be utilized to denote any one who could wear an uniform of what people considered repressive forces: Army, Navy, Air Force, or Police. My translation is an attempt to capture the negative and authoritarian connotations transmitted by speaker M.

no sé quién, dónde b o a lo mejor hablaría en la farmacia, el teléfono de la calle ocho, andaba mal.

[
M: no andaba, porque él estaba llamando y no atendía.

L: [porque él estaba llamando, todo el día llamando y nadie atendía. (0.5) Y entonces le habló - a Gabriela, **mirá vos**, le habló a Gabriela para ver, dice Gabriela, mirá lo último que me imaginaba. (0.4) Porque Gabriela le le dijo a Lalo. (0.4) Que no se atreva a meterse en en mi casa, no, a meterse en mi casa, porque acá no:

M: Gabriela nunca lo pudo ver. (1) Nunca lo pudo ver.

Translation

L: one day, not so long ago - not so ong ago he called, [...] she said, that was the least thing I would expect (0.6) Why did he called? do you know? (0.5) was he looking for whom? [...] ok, I don't remember. The fact is that he called, she said, Fito called here (0.2) to ask for someone (0.5) I don't know whom, where w or may be he was calling from the pharmacy, the telephone at eighth street was out of order

M: [was out of order, because he kept calling and nobody answered

L: [because he had been calling all day and nobody answered. (0.5) So he spoke to - Gabriela, **look at that**, he spoke to her to see, Gabriela said, look, this is the least thing I would expect. (0.4) Because Gabriela told told Lalo. (0.4) He'd better not dare invade my home, you see, invade my home, because here he is not

M: Gabriela couldn't stand him. (1) She couldn't stand him.

The previous discourse topic of speakers M and L is *Fito*, an ill-behaved distant young relative who is no longer in talking terms neither with them nor with their sister *Gabriela*. Therefore, the telephone call to *Gabriela* from *Fito* is qualified by L as a very unusual act. In various instances in the corpus, the combination *mirá vos* is utilized to convey contrary to expectation. In other contexts the form *mirá* by itself may also convey this function, as exemplified in (24):

(24) 1b19

M: el otro muchacho Abel, lo volvió a tomar otra vez (0.2) en la herrería donde trabaja. El primo Abel. [...] y le rompió una má:quina. [...] la máquina esa de: de fundir el hie:rrro, no sé cuál

F: [¿ah sí?

M: es. Sí. Se cortó un de:do. Se cortó varios de:dos. Se=

L: =e el dedo se lo cortó en una carpintería.

M: ah ¿no fue allí? ¿en lo de: Abel?

L: [no:, el dedo se lo cortó en una (carpintería).

A: [ah, pero todo de - ¿to:do un dedo?

M: **mirá**. p Sí., perdió dedos, sí.

Translation

M: the other boy, Abel, hired him again (0.2) in his blacksmith shop. His cousin Abel [...] and he wrecked a machine. [...] the machine that melts iron, I wouldn't know which one. Yes. He

F: [really?

M: severed his finger. He severed various fingers.=

L: =hum his finger he severed it in a carpenter shop

M: ah, it wasn't there? At Abel's?

L: [no:, his finger he severed it at a (carpenter shop)

A: [ah, but a compl - a complete finger?

M: **look at that**. Yes, he lost fingers, yes.

The discourse topic of this passage is the same ill-behaved character, *Fito*. Speaker M believes that he had cut his fingers in the blacksmith shop. When speaker L corrects her, stating that the fingers were lost in a carpenter shop, M qualifies this information as deviation from expectation. Notice that in her turn, M first reacts to L's statement, expressing deviation from expectation, and then she answers the previous question of speaker A about the fingers.

6. Conclusions

Table 1 shows the tokens and percentages of discourse and non-discourse uses of *mirá*:

| Uses of <i>mirá</i> | tokens | percent |
|----------------------------|--------|---------|
| Verbal use | 15 | 23.44 |
| Pay attention | 13 | 20.31 |
| Self-selection | 4 | 6.25 |
| Narrative introduction | 7 | 7.81 |
| Opposition | 11 | 17.19 |
| Deviation from expectation | 14 | 21.88 |
| Unclear | 2 | 3.12 |
| Total | 64 | 100 |

Table 1
Discourse and non-discourse uses of *mirá*

We can see that 47/64, that is 73.44% of the time, *mirá* in the data is utilized with a discourse use. Considering that the first attested discourse use is from 1535, the process schematized in (10) is advanced.¹¹ As stated in section 2, Martín Zorroaquino and Portolés Lázaro (1999) postulate that *mirá* has undergone a process of desemantization. Table 1 shows that the functions in which *mirá* is marginally conveying meaning, and mainly functions as a regulator of the conversation –narrative introduction and self-selection– have the lowest percentages of appearance 7/64, 7.81% and 4/64, 6.25% respectively.

The findings of the analysis confirm and extend the discoveries of Martín Zorroaquino and Portolés Lázaro (1999). I have postulated a process of evolution. The data shows that the extension of *mirá* from verb to discourse particle is a continuous one. For example, as shown in (13) it is not possible to differentiate between the senses 'direct the sight towards an object' and 'pay attention'. Also, (18) is a case where *mirá* retains its original meaning while requesting the listeners to pay attention and being used by the speaker to self-select. The utilization of conversational data has allowed me to discover new discourse uses of *mirá*, which arise as an exploitation of the sense 'pay attention'.

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¹¹ I am not claiming that the process started in the 16th Century. Menéndez Pidal (1950) comments that a feature in the language may remain invisible for many centuries because it was not documented. Given its oral nature, *mirá* could have developed a discourse use a long time before it was registered in writing. Notice that its first appearance is in a play which imitates oral language.

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