

# Pragmatic and Textual Functions of *o sea*: Evidence from Mexican Spanish

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Research in discourse pragmatics has turned its attention to the analysis of elements that connect segments of discourse and that contribute to discourse coherence. These elements have been called discourse markers (Fraser 1999, Levinson 1983, Martín Zorraquino & Montolío 1998, Portolés 1998, Schiffrin 1987, Zwicky 1985), discourse particles (Schourup 1985), discourse connectives (Blakemore 2002), pragmatic markers (Fraser 1990), discourse operators (Redeker 1991), or sentence connectives (Halliday & Hasan 1978), among other terms. In the studies mentioned, these elements connect portions of discourse and establish coherence relations between an interpretation of the segment they introduce and the prior segment. In general, these elements are often included under the umbrella term of ‘discourse markers’ and are defined as a pragmatic class which may entail a procedural, not conceptual, meaning, and their “specific interpretation is ‘negotiated’ by the context” (Fraser 1999: 950).

In recent years a variety of discourse markers has been examined in Spanish (Briz 2001a, Martín Zorraquino & Montolío 1998, Portolés 1998, Travis 2005, *inter alia*) and the discourse marker *o sea* has received considerable attention. Although there has been some research conducted on the discourse functions of *o sea*, often the language variety of analysis is Peninsular Spanish, and most analyses focus on the semantic relation, that is, two propositions connected by *o sea* at the sentence or discourse level (Casado Velarde 1991, Cortés Rodríguez 1991, Fuentes Rodríguez 1993, Romera 2001, Schwenter 1996, *inter alia*). Other grammarians have observed that *o sea* is empty semantically and functions as an expletive (Seco 1998) and should only be used to introduce a segment of discourse with an explanatory function (Gómez Torrego 1989). Further, other discourse analysts have been unable to identify certain discourse functions of *o sea* and, as a result, classify this marker as an expletive (Cortés Rodríguez 1991). Overall, the speaker’s communicative intention is often not accounted for in previous analyses because sufficient contextual information surrounding *o sea* at the discourse level is not considered. The current study contributes to existing literature on discourse pragmatics and re-examines different functions of *o sea* at the pragmatic and textual levels of discourse using data from Mexican Spanish. In particular, one of the functions of *o sea* that has been analyzed in previous literature as “expletive” will be re-examined in the present study from a pragmatic and textual perspective.

## 1. Previous research

Perhaps the most comprehensive approach to discourse markers is Schiffrin’s (1987) discourse model of coherence. Using conversations from unstructured interviews, Schiffrin examined markers such as *well, now, oh, and, then, you know* and defines them as “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk” (1987:31). She observed that these markers operate on five planes of discourse: 1. exchange structure refers to the turn-taking mechanisms and how speakers alternate sequential roles in a conversational exchange; 2. action structure refers to the sequence of speech acts

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across discourse, that is, “what action is intended, what action is intended to follow, and what action actually does follow” (1987:25); 3. ideational structure refers to propositional relations or ideas connected by the markers and includes cohesive relations, topic relations, and functional relations; 4. participation framework refers to the various ways in which speakers and hearers can relate to one another and involves relations between the speakers’ turns and speakers’ relations to each other; and, 5. information state refers to the speaker’s and hearer’s ongoing organization and management of knowledge and meta-knowledge, that is, what the speaker and hearer know about information and what the speaker and hearer know about their respective knowledge. Overall, in Schiffrin’s model, discourse markers establish two types of coherence: semantic and pragmatic. While the ideational plane establishes a semantic relation between two similar propositions linked by a marker, the other four planes of discourse establish a pragmatic relation with respect to the speaker and hearer in their negotiation of meaning (exchange and action structures), the speakers’ relations to what they said or meant (participation framework), or the speakers’ and hearers’ knowledge and meta-knowledge to one another (information state).

Following the theoretical framework of coherence relations (Hobbs 1983, Sanders et al. 1992), Redeker (1991) re-examined Schiffrin’s model of discourse coherence and proposed a simplified model of discourse coherence consisting of three components: ideational structure, rhetorical structure, and sequential structure. Roughly, Redeker’s three components correspond to Schiffrin’s ideational, action, and exchange structures. However, for Redeker, a model of discourse coherence involves coherence relations at the semantic (locutionary level), pragmatic (illocutionary level), and sequential (textual transitions) levels. The notion of coherence relations was further elaborated by Sanders et al. (1992) who proposed two types of relations: semantic and pragmatic relations that are similar to Redeker’s semantic and rhetorical components. Next, Redeker’s sequential component refers to the transitions that occur between discourse segments. Since the goal of the sequential component is to express relations which may lead to transitions in discourse, the current study adopts Halliday and Hasan’s (1978) notion of textual function to express textual coherence. Thus, following Redeker (1990, 1991), Sanders et al. (1992), and Halliday and Hasan (1978), the model of coherence relations adopted in the current study consists of three types of relations: semantic, pragmatic, and textual, and these are defined below.

### *1.1 Semantic relation*

A relation is semantic if the relation between the discourse units is semantically related because of their propositional content, that is, if the speaker refers to the locutionary meaning of the discourse units. Most importantly, the semantic relation established between the discourse units “entails the speaker’s commitment to the existence of that relation in the world the discourse describes” (Redeker 1990:369).

### *1.2 Pragmatic relation*

A relation is pragmatic if the relation between the discourse units refers to the illocutionary meaning of one or both discourse units (Sanders et al. 1992). This pragmatic relation “is not between the states of affairs described in the two units, but rather between the utterances themselves or (...) between the beliefs and intentions motivating them” (Redeker 1990:369). In this type of relation, the speaker’s communicative intention and the hearer’s recognition of that intention helps to determine the pragmatic relation established between the two discourse units. The portion of discourse following the discourse marker is often the center of attention for the hearer and that information may be unknown to the hearer.

### *1.3 Textual relation*

A relation is textual if one of the coherence relations represents sequential transitions in discourse and creates text, that is, “it is the function that language has of creating text, of relating itself to the

context – to the situation and the preceding text” (Halliday & Hasan 1978:48). According to Redeker (1991), textual relations may indicate transitions to the next topic or point (paratactic relation) and transitions leading into or out of a commentary, digression or disagreement (hypotactic). In addition, a textual relation may express transitions by means of offering the floor to the interlocutor and contributes to the construction of discourse.

Following Redeker (1991), Romera (2001) and Chafe (1980), in the present study *o sea* is examined as a discourse functional unit (DFU), that is, a marker of discourse that “is uttered with the primary function of bringing to the listener’s attention a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the immediate discourse context (Redeker 1991:1168). In this definition the “upcoming utterance” is understood in terms of an idea unit or a sequence of idea units (Chafe 1980:13-4): an idea unit is syntactically and intonationally bounded by a clause unit. This DFU may also be followed by long sequences of idea units, that is, a set of idea units that may be integrated as a coherent whole (Chafe 1980:23-32) connected with the immediate discourse context preceding *o sea*.

## 2. Functions of *o sea* in conversation

The lexicalized form ‘*o sea*’ consists of a conjunction ‘o’ and third person singular verb form ‘ser’ (‘to be’) in the present subjunctive ‘sea’. Given its disjunctive nature, *o sea* literally means ‘or be it,’ but it often displays a variety of discourse functions. Due to its multi-functional nature, *o sea* has been examined as a connective (Galán Rodríguez 1998, Schwenter 1996), a pragmatic connector (Fuentes Rodríguez 1993), a meta-discursive connector (Briz 2001b), a discourse marker (Martín Zorraquino & Montolío 1998; Portolés 1998), an epistemic parenthetical (Schwenter 1996), an operator (Casado Velarde 1991), or an expletive (Cortés Rodríguez 1991, Gómez Torrego 1989, Seco 1998).

The DFU *o sea* shares the following characteristics of discourse markers mentioned in Sankoff et al. (1997) (#1-3), Schiffrin (1987) (#4-6), and Stubbs (1983) (#7): 1. is a free construction syntactically in that it relates to discourse rather than to syntax or semantics at the sentence level; 2) is phonologically reduced and displays a range of prosodic contours (e.g., *o sa*, *sa*, *o sea*:); 3) is “articulated as part of smoothly flowing speech production” (Sankoff et al. 1997:197); 4) is commonly used in utterance-initial position; 5) is used to bracket the discourse either cataphorically or anaphorically (Schiffrin 1987:37), 6) is able “to operate at both local and global levels of discourse” (Schiffrin 1987:328); and, 7) aids the speaker in holding the floor (Stubbs 1983:68).

In general, *o sea* has been analyzed as a marker that establishes a semantic relation between two propositions, that is, segment 1 and segment 2 share a semantic relationship of equal propositional content. Further, *o sea* has often been examined as a reformulator, that is, the discourse segment following *o sea* reformulates the portion of discourse contained in the preceding discourse segment. Reformulation “es un tipo de operación enunciativa que supone el nuevo movimiento enunciativo cuando el precedente no se adecua a la situación” (Fuentes Rodríguez 1993:174). However, while *o sea* is used to introduce explanations, the literature is mixed as to whether it establishes a semantic or a pragmatic relation (Cortés Rodríguez 1991, Romera 2001), and little attention has been given to the notion of intentionality on the part of the speaker (Galán Rodríguez 1998). The textual function of *o sea* is limited in the literature and often insufficient discourse context is provided in the examples containing *o sea* (Romera 2001). Most importantly, as previously mentioned, most research in the literature on *o sea* has been conducted in Peninsular Spanish (Briz 2001a, 2001b, Casado Velarde 1991, Cortés Rodríguez 1991, Fuentes Rodríguez 1993, Martín Zorraquino & Montolío 1998, Portolés 1998, Romera 2001, Schwenter 1996, *inter alia*), and little research has been done in other varieties of Spanish (Travis 2005, Colombian Spanish). Finally, some researchers have observed that the discourse segment following the marker *o sea* only serves to amplify the meaning preceding the marker, but segment 2 does not often introduce anything new: “sin que denotativamente aporte nada nuevo” (Hernández Alonso 1995:217).

Using spontaneous conversational data from Mexican Spanish, in the current study I will examine the frequency, distribution, and discourse functions of the DFU *o sea* as realized in three coherence relations: semantic, pragmatic, and textual.

### 3. Conversational data

The data for the present study were taken from two sources and included spontaneous conversations among native speakers of Mexican Spanish. The first set of data was recorded by the researcher in natural settings, in different contexts among adult males and females, and most subjects had a university-level education from central Mexico. The corpus examined here consists of 10 hours of natural recordings. All conversations were recorded at the research site in three regions of Mexico: Mexico City, Tlaxcala, and Puebla, employing a digital recorder and a microphone of high fidelity. Once the data were recorded, all conversational data were downloaded onto a computer and all segments of the conversation containing *o sea* were transcribed. Conversations in this data set included narrative and argumentative discourse among members of a family. The second set of data is taken from transcribed conversations from *El corpus de Monterrey*. The Monterrey corpus included in the current study consists of seven natural conversations in structured interviews between two participants, a researcher and a native speaker of Monterrey, Mexico (approximately 56,000 words). Four participants were females and three males; of these, four had a university-level education and three had primary-level education. In this data set, conversations consist of narrative discourse and include topics describing personal experiences, family anecdotes, food, work experience, and school-related experiences. In both data sets all tokens of *o sea* were extracted and analyzed in their discourse context.

### 4. Data analysis

All instances of *o sea* were analyzed according to the three types of coherence relations previously described: semantic, pragmatic, and textual.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.1 Semantic relation

A relation is semantic if the discourse units are related because of their locutionary meaning, that is, if the meaning of discourse unit (DU) 2 can be inferred from the propositional meaning introduced in DU1. In this relation, DU2 approximates the meaning of DU1. The semantic relation may consist of a reformulation of at least two types: precision and rectification. In this type of relation, DU2 does not present new information to the hearer, rather, both DUs share referential properties, that is, the relation established is one of referential synonymy. An example of a semantic relation is shown in (1) below:

(1) *En tren / sí / pos es que no hay transporte / o sea no hay camión / par'allá...*

#### 4.2 Pragmatic relation

A relation is pragmatic if two DUs are related because of their illocutionary meaning. The speaker's communicative intention and the hearer's recognition of that intention help to determine the pragmatic relation established between both DUs. In this coherence relation, *o sea* introduces information (DU2) with the following functions: a) explanation, by means of presenting new information to the hearer. Salient explanatory material may also be indicated by means of cataphoric reference; b) conclusion, by means of condensing information contained in previous discourse (DU1); c) an epistemic function which reduces the negative effects of an upcoming rejection (DU2) and produces a polite effect on the hearer; this is the interpersonal function of *o sea*. Example (2) shows

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<sup>1</sup> Given its multi-functional nature in discourse, *o sea* may serve various functions within each coherence relation simultaneously. However, for the purposes of this study, the various instances of *o sea* were counted once for each coherence relation. While a categorical analysis may be considered controversial by some researchers, future research should examine the simultaneous functions of *o sea* in discourse.

two instances of *o sea*, explanation and conclusion, respectively, and example (3) displays an instance of the epistemic function.

- (2) *O sea* – Function: Explanation and conclusion  
*...eso fue lo que Víctor y yo dijimos / o sea está bien / está bien / hay muy buena foto / muy buena / este / adaptaron mucho el guión / al principio hay narraciones interesantes y retrospectivas interesantes / de repente cuando van en el camino / que si hubieran venido diez años antes hubiera sucedido eso / o sea / es bonito ¿no?*
- (3) *O sea* – Function: Epistemic  
 a) *No / se me hace que no / nunca / o sea que no / nunca me ha gustado a mí eso.*  
 b) *bueno / o sea yo creo yo creo por ejemplo también Soto trabaja y yo trabajaba los tres semestres anteriores / obviamente sí es muy pesado pero también te deja otras cosas que / pero el TEC como que no te deja.*

### 4.3 Textual relation

A relation is textual if the speaker employs *o sea* to contribute to the organization and management of discourse. In this function, *o sea* is primarily used (a) as a DFU to restart or re-orient discourse, (b) as an intensifier or continuer in conversation; and, c) as a conversational DFU to offer the floor to the interlocutor. Examples of these functions are shown in (4), (5), and (6):

- (4) *O sea* – Function: Re-start  
*Roberto Benigni / decían que él... / o sea no sé si te acuerdas al final cuando saca lo del tanque / que el niño quería un tanque / y al final sale un tanque de Estados Unidos que es el que defiende / el final es muy Holliwodesko...*
- (5) *O sea* – Function: Intensifier / continuer in conversation  
 a) *sí, pero eso es trabajo o sea de becaria / y lo que pasa es que para obtener horario preferencial trabaja creo que 15 días o algo así / allá en la dirección de carreras..*  
 b) *...yo le digo a mi esposo que pónganos / un estanquillo / y ya... / ahí hacer algo / porque así empezaron / mis tíos / o sea los del restaurán...*
- (6) *O sea* – Function: Offer the floor  
 Blanca: *...pero entonces ahorita tienes un poco de insomnio ¿por qué? o sea =*  
 Tere: *no, simplemente me despierto, pero vuelvo a dormir en media hora...*

## 5. Results and discussion

Figure 1 shows the overall distribution of the Discourse Functional Unit (DFU) *o sea* identified in the conversational data as realized in three coherence relations: semantic, pragmatic, and textual.

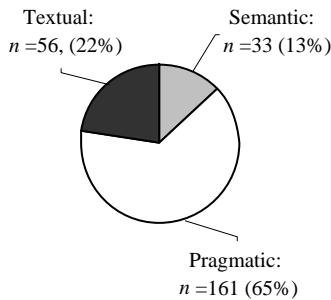


Figure 1: Semantic, pragmatic, and textual functions of *o sea* in Mexican Spanish. Includes 250 instances of *o sea*.

As shown in Figure 1, 250 instances *o sea* were identified in the natural conversational data examined. Of these, 65% ( $n = 161$ ) of the uses of *o sea* were employed to establish a pragmatic relation between two discourse segments; these were followed by the textual relation which accounted for 22% ( $n = 56$ ) of the data. Finally, the least frequent use of *o sea* was to establish a semantic relation between two discourse units at the sentence level, accounting for 13% ( $n = 33$ ) of the corpus.

Examples of each of these uses are found below. The numbers in parentheses after each example indicate the order of occurrence of all instances of *o sea* in both data sets. Examples 1-115 and 243-250 come from the first data set collected by the researcher and examples 116-242 come from *El habla de Monterrey* corpus. The information in each example is separated by means of slashes (/) indicating intonational units.

### 5.1 Semantic relation

The semantic relation expressed by *o sea* can be observed in the following examples.

- (7) *Sí / y éste es un / almartigón / o sea / un bozalío que lleva* (#129)
- (8) *En tren / sí / pos es que no hay transporte / o sea no hay camión / par'allá...* (#148)
- (9) *Y aquí / y aquí qué / qué turnos tienes / o sea a qué horas entras?* (#121)
- (10) *... pero en alguna borrachera / a éste le metieron en la cabeza el New Yorker / el New Yorker es un carro ahorita que habla / traí una cinta ahí grabada / y que quién sabe qué / dont forget your keys / este... / o sea / no... / no / olvidaste / no olvide su llave / este / su llave está mal puesta...* (#236)

The semantic relation established by *o sea* was often observed between two discourse units which shared similar referential properties. In (7) the semantic relation established is between two single nominal units *almartigón* 'halter' (for horses) and *bozalío* 'halter'; in (8) the relation established is between two negative clauses *no hay transporte* 'there is no transportation' and *no hay camión* 'there is no bus'; in (9) the relation expressed is between two direct questions *qué turnos tienes?* 'what shifts do you have?' and *a qué horas entras?* 'what time do you start?'; and finally, in (10) the semantic relation established is that of a direct translation of the previous discourse unit, 'don't forget your keys' *no olvide su llave*. It should be noted that while both discourse units share certain semantic properties, the discourse unit following *o sea* is the unit that functions as the unit to which the hearer's attention is directed. In these cases, the discourse unit following *o sea* is used to clarify, rectify,

reformulate, or translate the previous discourse unit. Overall, in the data examined, the semantic relation established by *o sea* occurred with the lowest frequency and often linked two syntactic categories such as two nouns or a noun and an adjective, or two clauses. The semantic relation expressed by *o sea* in the examples above is similar to Schiffrin's (1987) and Halliday and Hasan's (1978) ideational function of discourse coherence, that is, *o sea* is often used as a link between two propositions or ideas which share similar referential properties, and thus, contributes to the cohesiveness of discourse.

## 5.2 Pragmatic relation

The use of *o sea* to establish a pragmatic relation accounted for the majority of the data examined (65% [ $n = 161$ ]). A pragmatic relation was established by means of three types of coherence relations: explanation, conclusion, and epistemic or polite. Figure 2 shows the frequency and distribution of *o sea* used to establish a pragmatic relation in these categories.

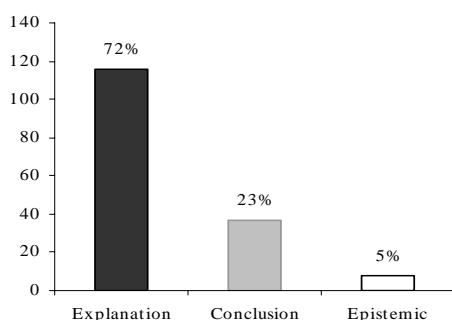


Figure 2: Pragmatic functions of *o sea*: explanation, conclusion, epistemic (65%;  $n = 161$ )

### 5.2.1 Explanation

As can be seen in Figure 2, *o sea* was most frequently used to introduce salient explanatory material which was unknown to the hearer. Examples (11-15) show the various kinds of explanatory material introduced by *o sea* which served to clarify, reformulate, and introduce new information.

- (11) *No / mira / Victor ahorita ya come de todo / o sea todo lo que podamos nosotros comer allá él va a comer / de hecho le gustan las gorditas / claro que no con salsa / o sea / le pongo no sé frijolitos o alguna / o así solito / le gusta también / este / la tortillita o con arrozito o con lo que haya / excepto algo picante / ¿verdad? (# 6, #7)*
- (12) *...porque siempre me dediqué a mi abuelita / o sea / mi abuelita la que... / andaba buscando / este / siempre me dediqué a ella / porqu'ella siempre estuvo enferma / y este y... / yo me levantaba / desde la noche arreglaba mi uniforme / m'iba' la escuela / le dejaba... / el té o leche / y las pastillas / y m'iba' la escuela / llegaba / atendía la casa / yo / ten- / yo recuerdo que / pues / tenía seis años / y yo como Dios / me diera licencia yo le lavaba / (# 219)*
- (13) *...y qué crees que se requiere para poder lograr estos objetivos que tienes en mente? / o sea a lo que me refiero es / tú crees que debe se debe apoyar más a las universidades para que existan este tipo de apoyos y que los estudiantes una vez terminando su carrera tengan lo que se le conoce como un departamento de colocación para los estudiantes / existe en tu universidad o...? (#99)*

(14) I: 1 *Unos dicen que / es por / el gobierno / otros dicen que no / que / que va subiendo la*  
 2 *cosa / que porque / el dólar ha subido mucho y / tod'eso / pero yo / casi no / pa mí no*  
 3 */ no hay culpables / digo porque / pa mi ver / s'está escasiando todo / tiene qu'ir / lo*  
 4 *poco que hay / tiene que i'lo aumentando / y / pos tiene uno que compra'lo*  
 5 *porque / hace falta.*

E: 6 *o sea que tú crees que... / por ejemplo / sí / sí hay / tanto campo / desolado ¿verdá? /*  
 7 *hay mucho campo sin trabajar / pues / es lógico / es lógico que lo poco que hay / que*  
 8 *haya ¿verdá? / suba de / suba de precio ¿no? (#145)*

I: 9 *Pues / n- / que no / no todo ¿verdá?*

(15) .. *yo nomás vengo aquí con la realidad / no quiero chingaderas (...) / yo te dije a ti en una*  
*oportunidad, si te apegas tú y como albacea / estoy yo contigo / si no te apegas (...) pues vamos*  
*contigo / yo quiero que seas explícito desde ese punto / para empezar no vamos a detallar por*  
*qué nota / vamos a empezar contigo, contigo [señalando a la persona] / o sea / ¿qué es lo que*  
*no nos gustó? / ¿qué es en lo que sí estamos bien? / ¿qué es en lo no estamos bien? / ¿sí? /*  
*porque se están viendo otras cosas tan profundas tan tontas que yo no les veo mucho interés....*  
 / (#63)

In example (11) the discourse units following *o sea* are used to clarify the previous information, namely, information that conditions the hearer's comprehension. More specifically, the pragmatic relation established by *o sea* is used to avoid an implicature on the part of the hearer: the discourse unit *ya come de todo* 'he eats everything' is followed by *o sea* which introduces a clarification of what *todo* means (information presented for the first time) and *le gustan las gorditas, claro que no con salsa* 'he likes *gorditas*, of course, not with *salsa*' is followed by *o sea* to introduce a clarification that instead of *salsa*, one of the main ingredients of a *gordita*, something else will be used instead. It should also be observed that the information following *o sea* shows narrow scope and restricts the speaker's intentional message. Similarly, in example (12) *o sea* is used to introduce new explanatory material unknown to the hearer, that is, detailed information regarding the discourse unit preceding *o sea*, *mi abuelita* 'my grandma.'

In (13) the pragmatic relation of explanation is established by means of reformulation of the previous information (segment 1). This reformulation, however, is not a direct paraphrase of the previous discourse unit with similar semantic information, but rather, the information following *o sea* is used to explain what the speaker means by the question more clearly. Most importantly, *o sea* is used as a link to present information which rectifies the speaker's communicative intention and contributes to the hearer's comprehension of the intended message.

In example (14) a reformulation is provided by the hearer in the next turn with respect to the speaker's point of view. In response to the speaker's comment (lines 1-5), the interlocutor opens his turn with *o sea (que)* in order to reformulate the speaker's previous information and to confirm comprehension (6-8). This reformulation, however, does not represent the speaker's true communicative intention, as shown in the speaker's response in the next turn (line 9), but rather, reflects the hearer's own interpretation (lines 6-8). When *o sea* introduces a reformulation, often this reformulation contains salient communicative information which may condition the hearer's communicative intention.

Finally, in example (15) *o sea* introduces a sensitive topic unknown to the hearer by means of a series of questions which threaten the hearer's negative face. The researcher was present during this conversation when the information in (15) was presented to the interlocutor for the first time, and upon hearing the unexpected information following *o sea*, the hearer reacted quite angrily.

According to Schiffrin (1987), the pragmatic functions of *o sea* described above can be explained on at least three different planes of talk: first, *o sea* functions in the information state because the information following *o sea* "involves the organization and management of knowledge and meta-knowledge" (1987:28), that is, new informative material that guides the hearer's comprehension of the speaker's communicative intention; second, *o sea* functions in the exchange structure because it is part

of the mechanics of turn-taking, with *o sea* being used to initiate a conversational turn, marking discourse segment transitions; third, *o sea* also functions in the participant framework because the information following *o sea* signals a shift in the speaker's attitude or orientation toward discourse which is being negotiated by the participants.

### 5.2.2 Conclusion

The second pragmatic relation established by *o sea* which was observed in the data was by means of conclusion or condensation of the information preceding the DFU. As shown in Figure 2, the pragmatic relation of conclusion accounted for 23% ( $n = 37$ ) of the pragmatic use. An example of this use of *o sea* is shown in (16):

- (16) ...*ándale / así es que por eso no lo pusieron a Juan / lo pusieron a él / pero en contacto con Pedro / porque tampoco es de fiar eh? / tampoco es de fiar porque Luis me dijo que Juan estuvo como dos o tres años y le falló / pero sabes / ¿por qué crees que no presenta ningún papel? / una / otra / dice que se le desapareció de allí / le quiere echar la culpa a Silvia / o sea / hay que ser conscientes / Silvia tiene lo suyo y Juan lo suyo / porque no es tonto (...), pero pos en fin... (#17)*

In the example in (16) the information preceding *o sea* is presented as a fact and the information following *o sea* functions as a justification and further support of that information. The coherence relation of condensation represents the deontic dimension (Galán Rodríguez 1998) which relates to implied intentions between the interlocutors.

### 5.2.3 Epistemic function of *o sea*

Finally, as seen in Figure 2, the epistemic function of *o sea* accounted for 5% ( $n = 8$ ) of the pragmatic use. Examples (17) – (19) show instances of this function:

- (17) *no / se me hace que no / nunca / o sea que no / nunca me ha gustado a mí eso / de inmiscuirme'n en esas cosas no / porque / que al cabo no... / no gana uno nada / pues en / en mí / no / esas cosas no van conmigo / .. (#192)*
- (18) *Bueno / o sea yo creo yo creo por ejemplo también Soto trabaja y yo trabajaba los tres semestres anteriores / obviamente sí es muy pesado pero también te deja otras cosas que / pero el TEC como que no te deja... (#84)*
- (19) Juan: 1 ...*para eso el abogado que está acá que nos asesore =*  
 Manuel: 2 = *no / pero es que es una cosa / o sea / yo pienso que tienes que hablar con él (hermano) para que renuncie ahorita a la compra del terreno (#67)*

In the epistemic function of *o sea*, the speaker does not commit him/herself to the content of the proposition (Nuyts 2001) and uses the DFU to mitigate the illocutionary force of the upcoming utterance. In the examples above, *o sea* is preceded (17) or followed (18-19) by mental state predicates with first person singular subjects (*yo creo*, *yo pienso*) or mental verbs which take third personal grammatical subjects but whose first person subject is reflected in the indirect pronoun *me* 'to me' as in *se me hace* 'it seems to me.' For instance, in (17) *o sea que*<sup>2</sup> is used as an internal mitigator

<sup>2</sup> As correctly observed by one reviewer, the complementizer *que* in *o sea que* in (17) is different from the use of *que* in *o sea que* in (14, line #6). That is, *que* in (17) functions as a complementizer following an elliptical verb and is merely a repetition of the complementizer: *no / se me hace que no / nunca o sea [se me hace] que no* 'no / it seems to me that it's not / never *o sea* [it seems to me] that it's not.' On the other hand, *que* in (14) is part of *o sea que* (cf. Schwenter 1996 for additional information on *o sea* and *o sea que*).

intended to reduce the negative effects of a disagreement. It should be noted that this disagreement is further mitigated by a mental verb predicate preceding a negation *se me hace que no* ‘it seems to me that it’s not.’ In examples (18) and (19), *o sea* is used before two mental predicates to soften a disagreement. According to Schwenter (1996), *o sea* functions as an epistemic connective when it co-occurs with mental state predicates and with first person singular subjects, preceding or following *o sea*. This observation was supported by the findings of the current study. Overall, when *o sea* functions as an epistemic DFU, it produces a mitigating effect and protects the speaker’s positive face (Brown & Levinson 1987).

### 5.3 Textual functions of *o sea*

The textual function of *o sea* expresses a coherence relation that creates text across discourse. Figure 3 below shows the three types of textual relations observed in the data: restart, continuer, and offering the floor in conversation. This use accounted for 22% ( $n = 56$ ) of the data.

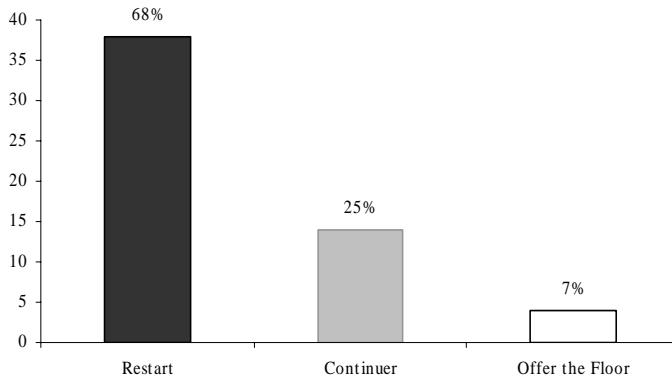


Figure 3: Textual functions of *o sea*: restart, continuer, offer the floor in conversation (22%,  $n = 56$ )

#### 5.3.1 Restart: Marker of discourse segment transition

As seen in Figure 3, the predominant textual relation observed in the data was when *o sea* was employed as a restart in discourse. Examples of this textual function are shown below:

(20) *Roberto Benigni / decían que él... / o sea no sé si te acuerdas al final cuando saca lo del tanque / que el niño quería un tanque / y al final sale un tanque de Estados Unidos que es el que defiende / el final es muy Holliwoodesko (#31)*

(21) *No / pos había niños que... / o sea por ejemplo / yo tenía grupos de niños de... (#182)*

In the examples above, *o sea* establishes a textual relation of coherence when the speaker introduces a portion of discourse which he/she does not complete because he/she feels the need to redirect the speech in a different direction. In these examples *o sea* signals a transition between a false start and a new one and by doing so creates new text in discourse. A different alternative for examining this function of *o sea* is as a pop or push marker in true-start constructions similar to ‘well’ in English conversation (Östman 1981, Polanyi 1978), that is, *o sea* is used to suddenly restart a discourse unit as a result of a previous unfinished discourse unit. This textual function of *o sea* can be seen as an example of discourse segmentation and functions in the exchange structure domain (Schiffrin 1987) because “the speaker wants to continue with a particular segment or considers it closed and wants to move on, (...) by simply using the marker for segmentation inside her own turn” (Redeker 1991:1163). Further, *o sea* also functions in the participation framework of discourse (Schiffrin 1987) because it signals a shift in the speaker’s attitude or a discourse segment transition to

a new direction in discourse. Similar instances of *o sea* marking a textual relation by means of restart were also identified in Peninsular Spanish (Romera 2001).

### 5.3.2 *Continuer: Marker of conversation management*

As shown in Figure 3, *o sea* functioned as a continuer of conversation management in 25% ( $n = 14$ ) of the textual data. Unlike the former functions, where the discourse unit following *o sea* is related to the previous portion of discourse, when *o sea* is used as a continuer, its main function is to keep the flow of conversation going between the participants. Examples (22)-(24) show instances of *o sea* as a continuer of conversation:

(22) ... *sí / pero eso es trabajo / o sea de becaria / y lo que pasa es que....* (#86)

(23) ...*me molesta esto / que si tú tomas una decisión / o sea sostenla /, pero...* (#13)

(24) Victor: 1 *ahí sigues*

Vero: 2 *sí / o sea sí* = (#109)

Victor: 3 *=sigues haciendo tu luchita?*

In the examples above, *o sea* does not connect two portions of discourse, but rather, it is used to manage conversation or intensify one aspect of the speaker's communicative intention. In example (22) *o sea* is inserted between a noun (*trabajo* 'job') and a prepositional phrase and emphasizes the speaker's communicative intention, *de becaria* 'scholarship student.' In (23) *o sea* is inserted to preface an imperative clause. In both cases, *o sea* is used inside the turn to intensify the speaker's communicative intention or to highlight one aspect of the speaker's message, the upcoming discourse unit. Finally, in (24) *o sea* is used in a different turn (line 2) to keep the conversation going. Notice that *o sea* is inserted between two emphatic affirmative responses in order to keep the negotiation between the participants open. In general, in these examples, *o sea* maintains the flow of conversation and highlights the upcoming information.<sup>3</sup>

In Cortés Rodríguez (1991), similar instances of *o sea* were classified as expletives, that is, elements which are semantically empty and are used as hesitation particles in conversation (1991:62). Other grammarians have also classified similar functions of *o sea* as expletives, that is, linguistic forms which should be avoided in conversation (Gómez Torrego 1989, Seco 1998). In the current study, and in accordance with the observations of Schwenter (1996), these instances of *o sea* are not considered to be expletives, but rather, DFUs which behave as 'evincives', that is, elements in discourse that mark speakers' ongoing thought processes, as they plan and organize the upcoming linguistic output (Schourup 1985:18).

### 5.3.3 *Offer the floor in conversation*

As seen in Figure 3, a textual relation with the speaker offering the floor to the interlocutor was established when *o sea* occurred in utterance final position. These examples accounted for 7% ( $n = 4$ ) of the textual function of *o sea*. The following examples illustrate this function.

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<sup>3</sup> One reviewer mentioned that examples (22-24) were characteristic of instances of repair rather than 'conversational continuants.' According to conversation analysis (CA), repairs are strategic devices whose main function is that of remedial exchange and are often used to correct oneself or the interlocutor (Goffman 1967, Sacks 1995 [1992]). Repairs address the 'repairable' or address a 'trouble source' (Schegloff et al. 1977). According to these notions of repair, the examples above do not seem to be instances of self-correction or self-repair nor instances of remedial exchange, but rather, *o sea* appears to function as a conversational marker to lubricate the ongoing interaction.

## (25) Two women talking about sleep habits

Blanca: 1 *pero entonces ahorita tienes un poco de insomnio / ¿por qué? / o sea:* (#27)Tere: 2 *no / simplemente me despierto / pero vuelvo a dormir en media hora.*

## (26) Interviewer and Interviewee.

Interviewer: 1 *y sí / y sí / sí... / ¿sí la llevas bien? / o sea:* (#142)Interviewee: 2 *aquí en esta chamba que / to' el tiempo la he llevao bien... /*

In both examples, *o sea* occurs at the end of the speaker's utterance, following a direct question. Intonationally, *o sea* is bracketed separately from the previous discourse unit and is pronounced with an elongated and soft vowel. It is important to note that the speaker's end of turn (line 1 in both examples) was not interrupted by the interlocutor, but rather, *o sea* is used politely to invite the hearer to hold the next turn. Unlike Cortés Rodríguez (1991) who was unable to classify similar functions of *o sea* in his analysis because they were incomplete or fragmented utterances (1991:63), in the current study these instances of *o sea* are examined in light of Schiffrin's (1987) function of exchange structure because *o sea* is used to politely offer the floor to the interlocutor and to contribute to the negotiation process across various turns.

## 6. Concluding remarks

Using conversational data, the current study examined *o sea* as a discourse functional unit (DFU) and identified three types of coherence relations in Mexican conversational data: semantic, pragmatic, and textual. The main objective of the current study was to examine different uses of *o sea* in conversational Spanish and to re-examine 'expletive' uses from a pragmatic or textual perspective. Also, all instances of *o sea* were considered in the broader discourse context in which this marker occurred in spontaneous conversation. The findings of this study are consistent with previous investigations which analyzed the distribution and function of discourse markers under the coherence relations model (Hobbs 1983, Redeker 1990, 1991, Romera 2001, Sanders et al. 1992). Distributionally, *o sea* occurred in three utterance positions: initial, medial, and final. While in the semantic relation both propositions preceding and following *o sea* share similar referential properties, the pragmatic function of *o sea* introduces new explanatory material to the hearer, reduces the negative effects of a disagreement politely, and condenses the speaker's communicative intentional message. In particular, the pragmatic function of explanation should be understood in terms of degree of intentionality of the speaker's communicative intention (Galán Rodríguez 1998), that is, it introduces information which is new to the hearer. Similarly, when *o sea* is used to present a reformulation, it should be seen as a reorientation of the message in order to make the speaker's communicative intention clearer to the interlocutor (Fuentes Rodríguez 1993). Regarding the textual function, *o sea* is used as a conversational strategy to manage and organize discourse, and to contribute to the negotiation process in communication.

The following caveats for the current study as well as venues for future research are in order. It should be noted that the results of this study cannot be generalized to all speakers of Mexican Spanish, but rather these results are representative of four Mexican regions: Mexico City, Puebla, Tlaxcala, and Monterrey. It should be noted that the pragmatic relation of 'offer the floor' only consisted of four tokens and thus, these results should be considered preliminary. Further, future research should analyze in detail the syntactic distribution of *o sea* and *o sea que*, as well as the elements this marker conjoins: noun phrases or clauses (cf. Schwenter 1996 for the distinction between *o sea* and *o sea que*). Similarly, while discourse markers may be sensitive to intonational patterns, the current study did not look at the relationship between intonation and the distribution of *o sea*, and this issue is left open for future research. Also, due to the uneven number of male and female participants in this study, future research should look at whether semantic, pragmatic, and textual functions of *o sea* are conditioned by the gender of the speaker. Finally, since *o sea* represents a multi-functional conversational marker in oral discourse among native speakers, future research should investigate whether these same functions of *o sea* are also present in the speech of non-native speakers of Spanish at different proficiency levels.

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