

Pilar Ron Vaz

Not to mention “por no decir”: A contrastive study of a complementary alternation discourse constructions in English and Spanish

Keywords: complementary alternation; not to say/por no decir; corpus analysis

English has several complementary alternation discourse constructions where two elements X and Y are presented in contrast within an entailment scale, with Y representing a stronger element in the scale, and considered to be more (or less) likely to occur: X if not Y, X, let alone Y, X never mind Y, among others (Fillmore et al 1988; Ranger 2007, Penner 2018; Erviti 2015; Sawada 2003; Capelle et al 2015; Ron Vaz 2021, 2022).

This paper focuses on one such construction “X not to mention/say Y” and contrasts it with the Spanish construction “X por no decir/mencionar Y”. These constructions may present the Y element as an additional element to be interpreted (and highlighted), as in (1)-(2), or the two elements are presented in contrast with one being considered more or less likely to occur than the other, as in (3)-(4):

- (1) One of the best and memorable experiences is seeing the underwater beauty of this island. Through this you would be able to know the different kinds of creatures under the sea. This adventure is very perfect for this place since the water is clear and blue not to mention the unique and beautiful creatures under the water.
- (2) La publicidad es bastante aburrida, por no decir que cada vez dura más y más.
- (3) But beyond the shiny exterior, my impressions found a city whose social fabric is a bit unsustainable, not to mention inadequate to hold together the dreams and aspirations of the size of this city's
- (4) Miles de hogares están sin electricidad porque las compañías les han cortado el suministro, otras miles, por no decir millones, hacen malabares para pagar el dichoso recibo de la luz más cara del mundo ...

A corpus analysis contrasting American English data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies 2008) and European Spanish data from the Corpus del Español (Davies 2016) has been conducted focusing on two distinct goals: (a) a characterization of the relationship(s) between the X and Y elements; and (b) the analysis of the discursive function(s) of these constructions. The results shows that these two factors are interrelated and that the nature of the relationship and whether an actual entailment scale is presented affects the interpretation and use of the construction.

References

Capelle, Bert, Dugas, Edwige and, Tobin Vera (2015): An afterthought on let alone. In: Journal of Pragmatics 80: 70-85

- Davies, Mark (2008-): The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA): One billion words, 1990-2019. Available online at <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/> (last access: 8 February 2023).
- Davies, Mark (2016-): Corpus del Español: Web/Dialects. Available online at <http://www.corpusdelespanol.org/web-dial/> (last access: 8 February 2023).
- Erviti, Aneider Iza (2015): Complementary alternation discourse constructions in English: A preliminary study. In: International Journal of English Studies 15: 71-96.
- Fillmore, C., P. Kay, P. & O'Connor, C. (1988): Regularity and idiomaticity in grammatical constructions: The case of let alone. In: Language 64: 501-538.
- Pennec, Blandine (2018) Discourse Readjustment(s) in Contemporary English. London: Wiley.
- Ranger, Graham (2007) All this, if not more. Paper presented at the 47th Congrès de la Société des Anglistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur. https://www.academia.edu/10481316/All_this_if_not_more (last access: 12 April 2020).
- Ron Vaz, Pilar (2021): Most if not All: On the Ambiguity of "X if not Y" Constructions. Paper presented at the 44th International AEDEAN Conference, University of Cantabria, November 24th-26th, 2021.
- Ron Vaz, Pilar (2022): Register Variation in the Use of the "X if not Y" Construction: An Analysis of Blogs, Magazines, and Academic Language. Paper presented at the 13th International Corpus Linguistic Conference, University of Bergamo (Italy), May 26th-28th, 2022.
- Sawada, Osamu (2003): Rethinking the let alone construction: what are its construction specific characteristics? In: Journal of the Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics 7: 135-151.

Contact information

Pilar Ron Vaz

University of Huelva

ronvaz@dfing.uhu.es