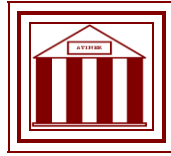


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**Ellipsis a Sign of Natural Like Dialogs in
Niños Y Borrachos by Sandra Cisneros**

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Associate Professor
University of Guadalajara
Mexico**

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**Ellipsis a Sign of Natural Like Dialogs in Niños Y Borrachos
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Abstract

Writers all over the world tend to make their best effort when it comes to writing dialogs for their characters, in such a task, some of them reach more natural like dialogs than others. Linguistically speaking, Osterreich (1996) studied these sorts of dialogs and came out with a two axes scheme: the means and the conception of the communicative event. In this sense, Cisneros, a chican@ author who writes mainly in English, but uses Spanish code-switching in order to show how her characters belong to the Mexican-American or Latino communities in the US, creates her dialogs in a way that has implications for readers and for writers. Indeed, the author mentions that in her work she inserts dialogs she heard in real life. *Niños y Borrachos* is a vignette within Cisneros' novel *Caramelo or puro cuento* (2002) that will be analyzed in terms of the ellipses used by her characters, applying a functional syntax model. In regards to that, Morley (2000) speaks of ellipsis as a textual function where the speaker or writer omits an element that can be recovered later by the hearer or the reader. The presence or restriction of ellipsis is proved through coordination, agreement, subordination and structures of infinitives. Within the different uses of contextual and syntactic ellipses that Cisneros' characters make, we conclude that she has reached a more natural like approach to dialog writing. Indeed, orality is present all through her work making it more vivid and reaching pragmatic closeness to the readers as if we were listening to her.

Keywords: Functional grammar, ellipses, natural like orality, chican@ literature.

Introduction

Niños y Borrachos is the thirteenth vignette from *Caramelo or puro cuento* written by Sandra Cisneros, a chican@ writer. In this paper, this vignette is analyzed based on the elliptic structures encountered. Likewise, the textual and pragmatic behavior of such ellipses are registered and described with the purpose of considering the natural like speaking of the characters. In order to do so, we first define what ellipsis is for different authors. As well, we delimit ellipsis in terms of the two languages that the author uses: English and Spanish. Then, the dialogs used by the author are located using Osterreichers' (1996) scheme. At the same time, some biographical features from the author are mentioned as to support the analysis. We continue with the methodology and analysis to, finally, reach our conclusions in regards to ellipses, modality and Literature.

Theoretical Framework

Ellipsis

Traditional Spanish Grammars such as Sánchez de las Brozas, (1587: 440-441) used to define ellipsis as the use of syntactic units that would lack a phonetic realization. From a radical and positivistic view, it was believed that if there was not any phonetic realization, then it was not necessary to take into account something that “completed” an idea because it could “disturb” the construction, as a consequence the receiver may interpret something very different from what was said or written. On the other hand, from the rationalists' scope, ellipsis is a mechanism that allows the regulation of the language's syntactic patterns. Indeed, it is a source that belongs to the empty categories that ease the task of obtaining general rules. As a result of both points of view, there is a theoretical argument in where ellipsis is centered in the minimal grammatical requirements that a sequence must accomplish, as well as to what extent the level of elided linguistic material in a sequence can be considered grammatical. If the criteria for a correct formation and the logical acceptability for a sequence is generous, then the majority of real texts that are produced and received are prototypically elliptical.

On the other hand, (Morley, 2000) considers ellipsis as a textual function in which the speaker or the writer omits an element that can be recovered later by the listener or the reader from what was previously said in the discourse. As an illustration, notice the element in italics which is related to the empty element marked as (*e*) in (1), (2), (3) and (4).

- (1) I'm not *available*. Are you (*e*)?
- (2) Will you be in the *cellar*? No, (*e*) in the loft.
- (3) I can't *understand his reluctance*. Neither can I (*e*).
- (4) *Have you got the tickets*? No, (*e*) not yet.

Contextual and Syntactic Ellipses

Hernanz and Brucart (1987:110), mention that some restrictions were needed in order to work with empty categories, in this case, ellipsis. Otherwise, the free insertion of entities without phonetic realizations would generate infinite non grammatical sequences. In order to do so, it was necessary to distinguish among two types of ellipses: contextual ellipsis as in (5) and syntactic or grammatical ellipsis as in (6).

- (5) Who is in the bathroom?
-Mom (*e*).
- (6) a. Luis llegó tarde.
b. (*e*) llegó tarde.

Contextual Ellipses

According to Beaugrande and Dressler (1999:116-117), ellipsis is present when there are textual processing tasks requiring to complete a perceptible *discontinuity* on the textual surface. In that sense, ellipsis may be anaphoric, that is, the complete structure appears before the elliptic one. Nevertheless, the recovery of the elided entity may be complex if the distance between the elided and the complete entity is far away from one another. In that case, we are before a cataphoric elision.

In terms of economy, null ellipsis increases the investment of time and energy in the text processing task. On the contrary, the major use of ellipsis neutralizes any time or energy saving since it increases the search for meanings. As a consequence, the protocols for solving syntactic or semantic problems may be much more problematic.

According to Brucart (1999:2795-2796) contextual ellipses happen via lexical and semantic units. The use of this resource permits the correct interpretation of the utterance since the information can be recovered through the unit that contains the information that the elided structure lacks and where the context and situation is there for the participants involved in the communicative event. (7) is an example of contextual ellipsis where the auxiliary **would** allows the recovery of information that the previous *would* has.

- (7) Every boy, in Bill's class hopes Mary *would* ask him out, but a boy in John's class knows that she actually **would**. (ask him out).

Syntactic or Grammatical Ellipses

In general, coordination; agreement; structures of infinitive and subordination in Spanish will give us the clue to restrict (or not) the presence of grammatical ellipsis. For example, coordination is a syntactic proof that evidences the nature of elliptic fragments and sentences since as a general rule it is possible to coordinate two or more sentences to form a more expanded one, but only if the result has semantic coherence as in (8a); however, the union of a sentence with a fragment leads to a non grammatical result as in (8b).

- (8) a. Luis read *Retahílas* and his brother *Rayuela*.
 b. *Luis read *Retahílas* and his brother.

Agreement is considered a syntactic argument in favor of these empty categories that occur among some constituents of the sentence. To illustrate this, in Spanish, adjectives with a predicative or attributive complement show identity with the noun by using features of gender and number. See (9c) and (9d).

- (9) a. La actriz asistió sola a la fiesta.
 b. La actriz estaba muy cansada por la complejidad del rodaje.
 c. *e* asistió sola a la fiesta.
 d. *e* estaba muy cansada por la complejidad del rodaje.

In Spanish, the possibility that a reflexive pronoun appears in sentences with an elliptic noun confirms, therefore, the presence of an empty entity in that position. In (10b) the relationship is indirectly established through the same empty category that, without lexical content, requires a lexical or discursive antecedent.

- (10) a. El sospechoso se lesionó voluntariamente.
 b. *e* se lesionó voluntariamente.

In general, Hernanz and Brucart (1987:67) mention that inside the syntactic ellipsis, there are nominal and verbal ellipses that depend on the typology of languages. On the other hand, Halliday and Hassan (1976:142-167) speaks about verbal and nominal ellipses, but in relation to English. Anyway, the recoverability principle, according to Hernanz and Brucart (1987:111) indicates that an empty unit is recoverable if its content can be interpreted in terms of the information that is found in the same sentence, but the principle is valid only for some languages.

- (11) a. Tú te equivocas.
 b. *e* te equivocas.

Some other times, recoverability of the empty category is guaranteed by the existence of an antecedent inside the same sentence. Thus, the appearance of the empty categories in such grammatical representations is determined by two different conditions: 1) such units must occupy mandatory syntactic positions due to the structural principles derived from the X bar theory or due to the requirements imposed by the thematic structures of the predicates and 2) the recoverability condition only allows the syntactic elision in the cases where the fundamental features from the empty category could be obtained from the principle of the sentence.

- (12) a. El campeón derrotó a su contrincante.
 b. El campeón lo derrotó *e*.
 c. *El campeón derrotó *e*.

In contrast, we cannot suppose that (12b) includes an empty category in the noun complement since nouns do not demand the presence of their complements. Note (12c) that is non grammatical because the verb is the one that demands an argument.

On the other hand, from the semantics point of view, the elliptic entities represent the necessary material for the correct interpretation of the sentences in arguments as in predicates:

- (13) a. Luis quiere que Sara asista a la fiesta
b. Luis quiere que *e* asista a la fiesta.
- (14) a. Durante el invierno, Luis ha escrito un artículo y María Luisa *e* el primer capítulo de su tesis doctoral.

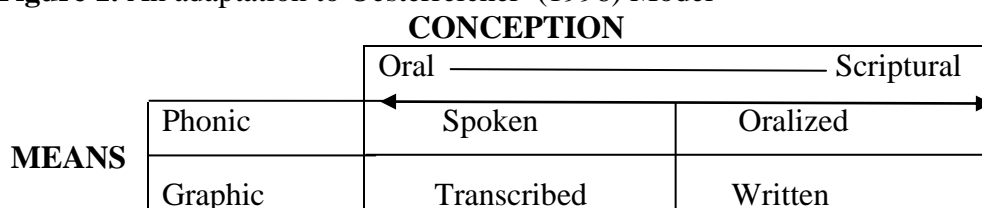
In short, the condition for all the information to be present in the semantic interpretation of such sentences is that their syntactic representation includes the presence of empty units.

Summarizing, the margins of variation between languages in regards to elliptic constructions can be attributed to the syntactic and morphological differences such as the existence of a system of verbal agreement that is rich enough to guarantee the recoverability of the elided material or the availability of a system with modal verbs with syntactic autonomy.

Oesterreicher's Scheme

Oesterreicher (1996) speaks about the functional uses of language using two perspectives: a) the means (spoken vs. written, or phonic vs. graphic), and b) the conception (orality vs. scripturality). This last one is a two pole continuum: the communicative immediacy and distance that lead to four systems of discourse: 1) Spoken language, e.g. informal dialogs; 2) written language, for example, laws, codes, scientific texts; 3) oralized language, i.e. a lecture or workshop and 4) transcribed language as in a spontaneous personal letter (Figure 1).

Figure 1. An adaptation to Oesterreicher (1996) Model



Concerning literature, the writing of it requires the communicative immediacy and distance to separate the narrations from the characters' dialogs. In order to represent spoken language in literature, writers use different techniques: changing spelling, syntactic or lexical choices, among others. In chican@ literature, authors may use code-switching to represent their community's identity. Summarizing, *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* uses

the first and the fourth systems of discourse much more than the other two, probably because of the facts shown in the next section.

About Sandra Cisneros

Sandra Cisneros is a chican@ author born in Chicago in 1954. Her mother had Mexican roots, but was born and raised in the U.S. Thus, she spoke more English than Spanish. On the other hand, Sandra's father was born and raised in Mexico City, but migrated to the U.S. in his early twenties. These facts marked her linguistic identity as a bilingual/bicultural person and writer since her production is English-Spanish code-switched in different degrees. It is worth mentioning that a big influence in her cultural and literary identity is the fact that she had seven brothers where she was the only girl "a condition that [left] her marginalized as a consequence of her gender" (Madsen 2000:105-106). In relation to her academic identity, Cisneros got her B.A. in the University of Loyola, Chicago (1976). Two years later, she got her M.A. degree in Creative Writing at the University of Iowa. It was during this period that she acquired her sense of ethnic 'otherness', as a result, she gave voice to those who did not have it in her childhood neighborhood according to Madsen (2000:106). Her work includes book poems: *Bad Boys* (1980), *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* (1987), short stories: *Women Hollering Creek* (1991) and *Hair Pelitos* (1994), as well as 3 novels: *The House on Mango Street* (1988), *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* (2002) and the last one *Have You Seen Marie?* (2012).

Mullen (1996:6) mentions that Cisneros' work, as the one from many other chican@ authors, is a literature that does not belong to the U.S. writers traditional canon since it represents a sort of social commitment with the Latin community in that country. The researcher adds that Cisneros is conscious of the dominant canon, but deliberately, deviates from it. In relation to her writing style, Madsen informs that:

The narrative techniques of her fiction demonstrate daring technical innovations, especially in her bold experimentation with literary voice and her development of a hybrid form that weaves poetry into prose to create a dense and evocative linguistic texture of symbolism and imagery that is both technically and aesthetically accomplished. (Madsen, 2000:105)

Concerning the analyzed vignette, we locate it in Cisneros's novel *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*. In fact, Cisneros mentions in Sastre (2003) that she recorded her mother's conversations where she would tell her stories about the Mexican Revolution and how her ancestors migrated from Guanajuato to the U.S. to work in the railroad construction. Besides, in Elías (2010:29), Cisneros says that she would remember complete dialogs from real people in her childhood to make her characters speak by inserting such oral fragments in her writing. Undoubtedly, all these facts make her writing oral.

Methodology

In order to analyze the ellipses here, we first observed the characteristics of the text using Osterreichers' (1996) scheme. Then, we identified all the ellipses in the text by marking in italics those syntactic ellipses and in bold the contextual ones. Segments of the text were numbered by lines. After that, next to the elided structure, in parenthesis, there will be an interpretation of the recovered material. Previous to the segments, we have the corresponding analysis.

Analysis

In a 117 lines text, there were 88 ellipses. 59% of them were syntactical while 41.9% represented contextual ellipses.

In lines 1, 3, 4 and 5 we found syntactic ellipses where the copula 'to be' has an attributive function. Indeed, it is a descriptive paragraph where the author decided, perhaps because of style, to leave out the copula 'to be'. In addition, the elision of the copula helps the economy of the text since it can be recovered easily. In line 2, the verb *insists* normally demands an argument, but it is not in an immediate position; however, it can be recovered through the before given information so that the reader can interpret (that I go to the living room). In the text, the semantics of this last verb, as well as the conjunction *but*, allow the author to use ellipsis and the reader to recover the coordinated structure as it can be observed in the segment below.

1. The living *room* (is) crowded with *people* drinking highballs before dinner. I don't like 2. going into the living room, but Father *insists* (that I go into the living room). The *men* 3. (are) under a tent of cigarette smoke, their amber *drinks* (are) clinking in their hands, 4. their *breath* (is) a sweet stinky when they talk into your face. How can I tell Father they 5. frighten me? (Cisneros, 2002:51)

As observed in lines 7 and 8 (*voice*, *fingernails* and *eyes*) need the copula 'to be' with attributive function. Moreover, in line 8, we found the possessive *girl's* that recovers information from *fingernails* that is previously mentioned. With regards to line 9, we found a different ellipsis between *and* and *surprises* since the information is recovered via the conjunction which is part of its coordinated. We also have an ellipsis between *like* and *the movies*. In this case, *like* as a comparative helps us to recover the action before. Finally, in line 11, *start* recovers the subject of its coordinated because of the conjunction.

6. Father's *compadre* Señor Coochi is playing his guitar. The sound of Señor Coochi's 7.*voice* (is) trembling like tears, like water falling clear and cold. Señor Coochi's 8.*fingernails* (are) long like a *girl's* (nails), and his *eyes* (are) a green green that jumps out 9.*and* (the green of the

eyes) *surprises* you when he closes and then opens them as he sings. 10. It's funny to have someone singing to you *like* (they sing) in the movies. When he starts 11. singing to me, I can't help myself and (I) *start* laughing. 12. Then the guitar music suddenly stops. (Cisneros, 2002:51)

Regarding lines 13 and 14, we can say that it is the same question that Mr. Coochi asks Celaya. According to Hernanz and Brucart (1987), we have a cataphoric contextual ellipsis since the missing information in 13 is recovered in 14.

13 -And **you?** (what are you?)

When Señor Coochi talks, the whole room becomes quiet as if everything he says is pearls and diamonds.

14 -And you, **what are you?** (Cisneros, 2002:51)

The following is the longest segment where we find contextual and syntactic ellipses. We first concentrate on the contextual ellipses, afterwards on the syntactic ones.

In the first place, in lines 18, 24, 26, 28, 30 and 33 Celaya denies the offers Mr. Juchi makes through contextual ellipsis which information is recovered with the question Mr. Juchi asks Celaya in 16. Would you like to come with me and be my little girl? Meanwhile, line 37 is the affirmative version that recovers information from exactly the same question meaning that she finally accepts the offer.

In relation to syntactic ellipses, in 15 we encountered an unmarked tag question which reference is in the previous structure before the comma, thus, *it* recovers information that we know is related to *so you are a little girl, aren't you?* in 16, *one* works as an object. Because of that, it is not considered an empty category as opposed to another *one* that we will encounter later on.

In 19, there is attribution and the elided copula is recovered because of the descriptive character of this line. Whereas 21 and 22 recover their predicate because of their coordination through conjunctions *and* and *but*. Lines 27 and 29 recover their predicate through the question that Mr. Juchi asks Celaya in 25. In relation to 35, it is a subordinate sentence that recovers information from the independent clause that the author decided to visually separate with a period, probably to make emphasis in the fact that Mr. Juchi wants to persuade Celaya to go to his house and if she does it, she will receive all sorts of presents. Finally, in line 42, *isn't that so* has the ability to recover all the information of *children and drunks that always tell the truth*.

15. -Ah, a little girl, *is it?* (you are a little girl, aren't you) Well, what luck. It just so happens 16. I'm looking for a little girl. I need one, in fact. Would you like to come home with me 17. and be my little girl?

18. -**Nooooo!** (I don't want to go with you and I don't want to be your little girl!).

19. Again (there is) *a huge laugh* I don't understand.

20. -But I've got to have a little girl of my own. What if I told you I have a garden with a 21. swing and (I have) *a very nice little dog*. And you wouldn't have to do a thing 22. but (you have to) *play all day*. What do you say to that? Now will you come and be my 23. *niña*?

24. -**No, never!** (I don't want to go with you and I don't want to be your *niña*!)

25. -But what if I gave you a room full of dolls...

26. -**No!** (I don't want to go with you and I don't want to be your *niña*!)

27. -*And* (if I gave you) *wonderful toys*...

28. -**Nope!** (I don't want to go with you and I don't want to be your *niña*!)

29. -*And* (if I gave you) *a windup monkey that does somersaults*...

30. -**Oh, no!** (I don't want to go with you and I don't want to be your *niña*!)

31. -**And!** How do you like this? A blue bicycle. And your own little guitar.

32 And a box of chocolates.

33. -I already told you. **No and no and no.** (I don't want to go with you and I don't want to be your *niña*!)

34. -But how about if I give you your very own room. I'll buy you a bed fit for a 35. princess. (I'll buy you a bed) *With a canopy with lace curtains white-white like the veils* 36. *for Holy Communion*. Now, will you come with me?

37. -**Well...O-kay.** (I'll go with you)

38. The room roars into a laughter that terrifies me.

39. -Women! That's how they all are. You just need to find their price, Coochi says, 40. strumming his guitar 41. -Just like the saying goes, Aunt Light- Skin adds, winking, -children and drunks 42. always tell the truth. **Isn't that so** (that children and drunks always tell the truth), Juchi? (Cisneros, 2002:51-52)

In the following segment, we have two cases of ellipses. In 43, we have a fixed expression that always collocates with *house* or *home*. Because of its semantic nature, we consider it a contextual ellipsis. In 46, Celaya describes her bed and the elided structure is the relative pronoun and the copula 'to be'.

43. At the **Grandmother's** (house), I sleep on the rollaway cot in Mother and Father's room 44. when I'm not sleeping in their bed. And back home in Chicago, my bed is the orange 45. Naugahyde La-Z-Boy in the living room. I've never had a room of my own. Every night 46. the blankets and pillows are brought out from my closet and my *bed* (that is) made. (Cisneros, 2002:52)

Another example of contextual ellipsis is 49 where *do* is an auxiliary. Thus, we have elision of SSVV because this auxiliary is able to recover SSVV information from the question in 48.

48. -And who loves you, my heaven?

49. -**You do.** (You love me)

Even though this segment is also descriptive and as a consequence we find verbal ellipsis where we recover the copula through the subjects and their attributes as in 53, 55 and 56. We also find 54 where the recovered copula is plural since the subject is pluralized; that is, we recover information because of agreement in all the cases, but with more emphasis in 54.

53. The smell of fresh plaster and *paint* (is) mixed with the smell of the Grandmother's *mancha manteles mole*. 54. The *grown-ups* (are) seated at the big blond table, and the table 55. (is) covered with a lace tablecloth, and 56. *the lace tablecloth* (is) covered with clear plastic, 56. even tonight on Father's birthday.

In 58 we recover an infinitive (To use the blender!) from 57 in a contextual ellipsis. In line 61, the case of line 42 is repeated: *Isn't that so* has the ability of recovering information in a contextual way.

57. -But, Mamá, why didn't you use the new blender I brought you last summer? Did it break already?

58. -(To use)The blender! Forget it! Not even if God willed it! It never tastes the same. 59. The ingredients have to be ground by hand, or it never comes out tasting authentic. 60. These modern kitchen gadgets, really! What do you men know? Why, our own father's 61.never even entered in my kitchen. Isn't that so (our own father's never entered in my kitchen), Narciso?

62 is an ellipsis where the predicate is empty; however, it is recovered through a cataphoric process in 63. Indeed, one of the textual functions of the cataphor is the surprise element that, in this case, is well accomplished in 63.

62. -**My dress!** (is ruined) Antonieta Araceli is howling.-Somebody spilled *mole* on my 63.chair! My dress is ruined.

These lines contain cases of contextual ellipses that recover information anaphorically. 65 recovers information in the same line and it has an emphatic function of the same question. In 67 and 68, we have two characters negotiating information that is recovered from question 66. Finally, 69 is an emphatic affirmation from -Sure is a mystery.

65. Well, how did it happen? **Pretty strange, huh?** (it happened) Rafa continues. -Ito, tell me the truth. 66. Did you see *mole* on that chair when you sat down?

67. -**No, I didn't.** (I didn't see mole)

68. -**Me neither,** (see mole) says Rafa.-Sure is a mystery.

69. -**Sure it's** (a mystery), Ito says.

All the ellipses found in this segment are contextual. 96a is an affirmative answer to 95 from which it recovers information. 96b recovers its attributed noun from 95 and 98 is a negative answer that recovers information from the question in 97.

95. -Grandfather, is it true you lost them in a terrible battle?

96. -**Oh, yes!** (I lost my three ribs) **Terrible, terrible.** (battle)

97. -But don't you miss your three ribs?

98- **Well. Not very.** (I don't miss my three ribs very much)

Line 117 is a contextual ellipsis meaning that Mr. Juchi will not come back the next night to pick Celaya up as negotiated in the middle of this vignette.

116. But he doesn't come for me.

117. **Not the next night. Nor the next. Nor the next next next.**

Conclusions

Contextual ellipses were used to give an affirmative response to a request or offer as in 37, 69, 81, 83, 96 and 99 or to decline the offer as in 18, 24, 26, 28, 30, 33, 67, 68, 98 and 104. All the information could be recovered because of the corresponding questions no matter if English or Spanish was used.

Another frequent ellipsis that happens in English and Spanish was the one that appeared in descriptive paragraphs where the copula 'to be' was omitted, but recovered through agreement or coordinates. Indeed we recognize these paragraphs as a style that saves the space and the corresponding spelling of the copula 'to be'. As a consequence, there was a reduction of coordination; that is, sentences that must be interpreted as examples of SSVV with an only empty category that represents the empty verb of one of its members (Brucart, 1987:123).

Moreover, there was a SV elision with affirmative or negative polarity particles that, according to Brucart (1987:143) have the ability of presenting an adverbial form related to the predicate's polarity from the utterance before, as the only mark of the elided predicate. Examples of these particles are *neither*, *either*, *too* that reaffirm the polarity of the previous sentence. *Yes/no* are particles that modify the polarity of the sentence as it could be noticed in 68 that constituted the clearest example of this.

In addition, English tag questions recover affirmative or negative information through what was said in the previous part of the utterance and by focusing on the auxiliary.

In general, *Niños y Borrachos* served the purpose of illustrating both, contextual and syntactic ellipses present in the dialogs of *Caramelo* or *Puros Cuento* written by Cisneros who displayed a great degree of orality through natural like dialogs with her strategies and unconscious use of ellipsis.

Depending on the writers' style, their purpose and the language they are using to write their dialogues, they may take into account oral corpus that has been collected in order to make their dialogs read more natural. Besides, they may consider using ellipses in a more conscious way to make their characters speak in a more realistic form.

Finally, some limitations of the study are that we could have omitted or over generalized some of the examples analyzed. One more limitation is the fact that even though Hernanz and Brucart (1987), Halliday and Hasan (1976) are old sources, they are still being used in this study.

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