

The translation of discourse markers in epistolary fiction

(La traducción de los marcadores del discurso en la ficción epistolar)

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Resumen: Los marcadores discursivos (adverbios, conectores, reformuladores, etc.) son expresiones de la lengua natural que los hablantes emplean con la intención de guiar el proceso de interpretación y comprensión por parte de los oyentes. Por este motivo, el estudio de los mismos tiende a enfatizar su papel fundamental en el proceso de interpretación de las relaciones de coherencia que hay en los textos (Sanders et al. 1992).

En conversación, la coherencia no es solamente una propiedad inherente al texto, sino que es, además, el resultado de un proceso dinámico entre los hablantes (Lenk 1998). Por su parte, en los discursos monologados diafónicos, tales como las cartas, se ha de tomar en consideración la presencia implícita de un interlocutor ficticio o real para poder interpretar dichas relaciones de coherencia.

El objeto de este trabajo es comparar la versión original en español del cuento "Estío" de Isaac Montero y su traducción al inglés, siguiendo una clasificación de las relaciones de coherencia que da cuenta de las similitudes y diferencias entre ambas versiones.

Palabras clave: Marcadores discursivos. Ficción epistolar. Expresiones metadiscursivas. Marcadores conversacionales. "Estío" / "Summer" de Isaac Montero.

Abstract: Discourse markers (e.g. adverbs, connectors, comment clauses) are natural language expressions used by the speakers in their intention to guide the hearers' process of interpretation and understanding. Research on discourse markers tends to focus on their key role in the process of interpretation of coherence relations within texts, as there seems to be a strong correspondence between the linguistic devices chosen by the speakers and the set of coherence relations in the texts (Sanders et al. 1992).

In conversation, coherence is not just a text-inherent property, but the result of a dynamic process between the interactants (Lenk 1998). In diaphonic monological types of discourse, such as letters, the implied presence of a fictitious or real partner must be taken into consideration in order to interpret the coherence relations.

The aim of this paper is to compare two versions of a short story, in Spanish and in English, following a fully developed theory of coherence relations, providing an account of the similarities and differences between them.

Key words: Discourse markers. Epistolary fiction. Metadiscursive expresiones. Interactional markers. "Estío" / "Summer" by Isaac Montero.

INTRODUCCIÓN

The analysis of discourse markers is part of a more general study of discourse coherence. A basic assumption in discourse analysis is that discourse consists of units which form a coherent structure, or, in other words, that sentences are not isolate. Hence, discourse coherence may be defined as "how speakers and hearers jointly integrate forms, meanings, and actions to make overall sense out of what is said" (Schiffrin, 1987: 49). Sometimes these relationships between units are not explicitly indicated, as in:

(1) 'Sorry to be late. My flight was delayed.'

where we can easily infer a causal relationship between both sentences (I am late because my flight was delayed.). But when explicitly indicated, coherence relations are 'helped' by language expressions that contribute to our interpretation of discourse. These expressions are called "discourse markers" and they have been defined as

natural language expressions whose primary function is to facilitate the process of interpreting the coherence relation(s) between a particular unit of discourse and other surrounding units and/or aspects of the communicative situation. (Risselada & Spooren, 1998: 132)

Different word classes are normally included in an account of discourse markers: connective particles (oh, well...), conjunctions (and, but, or, so, because...), time deictics (now, then...) or lexicalized clauses (y'know, I mean...). These expressions or 'markers' guide our interpretation on two levels of utterance coherence: 'semantic' and 'pragmatic':

(2) They elected her *because* she was the best one. (semantic)

(3) It must be very late, *because* there are no people in the street.
(pragmatic)

These examples of causal relationships differ in that the second segment in (2), i.e., the subordinate clause, actually provides a reason for the fact expressed by the first segment, whereas the second segment in (3)

is not a direct cause but is added to support the acceptability of the first judgement¹.

1. VARIATION ACROSS DISCOURSE TYPES

When we come to define the functions of discourse markers, we must also take into consideration that they may function on different levels of discourse where coherence can be obtained. Caroline Kroon (1998) defines discourse markers in terms of their functions in the following levels of discourse²: the 'representational', the 'presentational' and the 'interactional'. As can be seen, these coincide with M.A.K. Halliday's distinction of the three metafunctions of language, namely, the 'ideational', the 'textual' and the 'interpersonal', respectively (see Halliday 1985/1994).

Broadly speaking, they are a) particles that function on the ideational level signal the semantic relations between the states of affairs in the represented world (usually subordinating linking conjunctions); b) particles that function on the textual level account for the internal organization of the text (they usually relate different units within a monological stretch of text, for instance, marking its thematic structure); and c) particles that function on the interpersonal level mark the relationship between discourse acts within an interactional exchange (for instance, if I tell a friend "Let's have a take-away!" and she answers "But I don't like Chinese food!", this "but" does not only convey an adversative meaning but, in conversational terms, it implies a challenging move since she is reacting against my proposal)³.

One may argue that this distinction appears to be oversimplified as the correspondence between presentational particles and monological discourse and that between interactional particles and dialogical discourse is far from being a clear-cut one. Sometimes, "a number of conversational features can be found within the essentially monological environment of a move, without all the formal characteristics of a dialogical discourse being present" (Kroon, 1998: 212).

This is the case with letters, for example, where there are no turns as in conversation, but where initiating, responding or follow-up moves (Tsui's

¹ According to H. Pander Maat, the distinction between 'semantic' and 'pragmatic' relations lies in the fact that "semantic relations refer to the real world relation between the two situations described in the successive utterances, while pragmatic relations are concerned with relations between successive illocutions" (1998: 179).

² Her distinction is based on Halliday's (1976, 1985) and Schiffrin's (1987).

³ On this account there are very interesting contributions in the edition by Morton Ann Gernsbacher & Talmy Givón (1995) *Coherence in Spontaneous Text*. More particularly, those by Anne H. Anderson "Negotiating coherence in dialogue" (pp. 1-40), Jennifer Coates "The negotiation of coherence in face-to-face interaction" (pp. 41-59), Talmy Givón "Coherence in text vs. Coherence in mind" (pp. 59-116) and Charles Goodwin "The negotiation of coherence within conversation" (pp. 117-138).

terminology 1994) may be distinguished. A letter is a monological type of discourse but, in that essentially monological contribution of the speaker/writer we may perceive the actual occurrence of "voices" of real or fictitious partners. In other words, a conversational exchange is suggested between the writer/addresser and the implied receiver/addressee. Some linguists, following Bakhtin, have used the term "diaphony"⁴ or "polyphony" to describe this phenomenon.

The present study endeavours to account for the main types of relationships signalled by discourse markers in a piece of "diaphonic" monological discourse, more concretely, in a piece of narrative discourse, "Estío" (1993) by Isaac Montero, a short story in the form of a letter. And, further beyond this goal, I have aimed to establish a comparison between the types of coherence relations and the discourse markers assigned to them in the original version in Spanish and their counterparts in the English version, "Summer".

2. VARIATION ACROSS WRITTEN AND SPOKEN GENRES: THE CASE OF THE SHORT STORY "ESTÍO"

"Estío" is short story full of irony in the form of a letter from a woman to another woman, a friend of hers, about events involving the past of them both. In it, Isaac Montero, a master of narrative realism and prizewinner of the *Premio de la Crítica* (1999) and two *Premios Sésamo*, recounts how a mature woman's love affair is found out by her daughters, resulting in a family argument.

The text exhibits many of the linguistic features that are characteristic of both written and spoken genres: as a written kind of genre it is a one-sided personal view, but as a personal letter, it is a type of interpersonal interaction, with apparent marks of the interlocutor.

It is, therefore, a text where personal involvement is prominent and the commitment of the writer to both the propositional information and to a more affective personal stand is always present. As a consequence, this entails the occurrence not only of purely 'connective' devices functioning on a textual level, but also of 'situating' devices that establish an extratextual coherence relationship, that is, with some element of extratextual reality (the communicative situation, the interlocutors' interactional goals and intentions, etc.).

Thus, we may propose the following features typical of 'diaphonic monological discourse', and, more specifically, of the short story under scrutiny, that contribute to the overall text coherence:

⁴ This was developed especially by the Paris-Geneva School of Linguistics (like G. Genette among others) and is now incorporated by different discourse analysts.

- a) first, subordination or grammatical complexity typically associated with speech.⁵
- b) second, a profuse use of personal reference and address that is normally associated with informal, unplanned types of discourse (1st and 2nd person pronouns and verb forms):
- (4) “En fin, recuerda que tú y yo dimos la campanada...” (l.220)⁶
“And remember how you and I were the talk of the town...”
- c) thirdly, the use of the present tense in passages where the past would have been otherwise employed:
- (5) “ya le había sacudido y cuando el pobre muchacho se dobla en dos...” (l. 125)
“she had already thumped him and when the poor boy crumples in a heap”
- d) fourthly, the use of rhetorical and non-rhetorical questions and of directives that emphasize the implicit present of the interlocutor; also extraclausal interactional elements such as interjections or vocatives:
- (6) “¿Sabes lo que te digo, mona? Anda y que te onduen” (l. 406-407)
“You know what, honey? Go and get your hair curled”
- e) finally, the use of metadiscursive expressions such as subjective and evaluative ones, metadirectives and performatives, attitudinal and comment disjuncts, etc.:
- (7) “¿Cómo decírtelo?...” (l.34) / “How can I put it?...”

Once the main systemic features have been listed, I will centre my attention on the conjunctive relations prevailing in the text and the main conclusions that can be drawn from the comparison between the Spanish version and the English translation.

3. CONJUNCTIVE RELATIONS IN “ESTÍO” / “SUMMER”

This survey focuses on additive, adversative, causal (reason, result, purpose) and temporal relationships, as they seem to prevail in the text in this precise order.

⁵ See D. Biber (1988) *Variations across Speech and Writing*.

⁶ All references of line correspond to the 1993 edition.

3.1. Additive relations

Additive conjunctive relations are prominent in the text under scrutiny, which is not surprising due to the 'expository' type of this stretch of discourse. Furthermore, the fact that it is 'monological' involves that we readers are presented with the speaker's continuum of ideas. Additive relations do not only imply the coordination of these ideas, but they entail the pragmatic effect of "speaker's continuation":

(8) I. 86: ¿no te hace sonreír que Caty y la Isabelona sorprendieran a mamá en pleno efluvio amoroso dentro de un cuatro plazas? ¿Ni que ocurriera a las puertas del hogar? ¿Ni que ... ? ¿Ni que ...? ¿Ni que...? ¿Tampoco que... Eduardo, macho hasta los tuétanos, pagara con un empleo...? ¿Ni que creyeran que era hijo del esposo y por tanto hermano? ¿Ni que... ?

*Doesn't it make you smile that Caty and Isabelona should have caught their mummy in the middle of an amorous effluvium in a car? **And that** it should have taken place at her front door? **And that** ... ? **And that**...? **And that**...? **Don't** you **also** find it amusing that Eduardo, a macho through and through, should have paid him [with] a job? **And that** [they] believed that [he] was the husband's son and therefore a brother? **And that** ... ?*

What surprises us is the fact that these logical relations require more elaboration and profuse explanation in the English version than in the Spanish. The reason may lie in the fact that English is not the source text but the target one, and that the complexity of the story and its cultural implications need further assessment:

(9) I.2: Respondo a tu carta sobre Catalina, si es que merece el nombre de carta un decreto-ley de cinco líneas.

*I'm writing in reply to your letter concerning Catalina -**that is**, if you can call that five-line adict a letter.*

(10) I.31: Y mira: puesta a verter tus mismas ponzoñas, añado que me callé esa noche lo que pensaba de [ti].

***And as a matter of fact**, to give you a taste of your own poisonous medicine, let me add that I did not mention a word that night about what I thought of (you).*

(11) l.393: Que el parado cobre como si hubiera cumplido no tiene gracia. Que la infiel saque un billete de avión [a su amor]...

And the fact that the fired employee collects his payment [when his job has already been done] is not at all amusing. **And that** the unfaithful woman should buy [her lover] a plane ticket...

In (9) and (11), there are no explicit markers of the additive relationship between the clauses in the original version, whereas the translation offers an appositional, expository marker in the first case (*that is*), and the prototypical additive *and* in the last one. Example (10) shows how the Spanish additive conjunctive "y" has been tinged with the contrastive sense of *as a matter of fact* implying an 'avowal', a contrasting relation, too⁷.

The context will always help us distinguish and interpret the more particular shades of meaning borne by the markers. For instance, in:

(12) l.3 7: ¿O es que se te borró de la memoria que detrás de Eduardo andábamos las dos antes de que Catalina se lo llevara al huerto?

Or have you completely forgotten that both of us were after Eduardo long before Catalina tumbled.

(13) l.64: ...lo que cuenta es esta pérdida irremediable, o esta irremediable transformación de los sentimientos.

...what really counts is this irrevocable loss, **or** this irrevocable transformation of the feelings.

(14) l.219: (Eduardo sería dueño de la herrería. Y Catalina, modista.) *En fin*, recuerda que tú y yo fuimos la excepción que confirma la regla.

(Eduardo would have become the owner of the ironmongery. **And** Catalina, dressmaker.) **And** remember how you and I became the exception that confirms the rule.

The first 'o/or' does not involve a provision of choice here, as Halliday & Hasan (1976: 242) or Schiffrin argue (1987: 190), but rather, it merely provides an addition of information: "Don't forget that..."; in the same way, the second 'o/or' does not actually provide another option or alternative either, but rather it implies a clarification or the speaker's self-repair.

In (14), "*en fin*" has not a conclusive or resumptive sense, in that context it conveys an additive meaning ("what is more...") aptly captured by

⁷ See Halliday & Hasan (1976:242-243).

the translator; probably, the use of “moreover” or “furthermore” would have best captured the spirit of the original.

3.2. *Adversative relations*

There are frequent instances of units marked as contrasting with the previous ones in the discourse:

(15) l.154: me reí con las lágrimas de cocodrilo de Katy. *Pero* cuando la Isabelona mencionó sus horas de confusión el nudo del llanto apretó mi pecho.

*I have laughed till I wept crocodile tears like Katy's. **But** when Isabelona mentioned her hours of confusion I felt the tears welling up inside me.*

Although, on some occasions, the adversative sense is accompanied by other meanings, as in:

(16) l.232: (...eran unos paletos de mucha consideración (LONG EXPLANATION). *Pues bien*: hoy Eduardo llama "la fábrica" a su taller de instalaciones eléctricas...

*(...they were a couple of out and out yokels...). **And yet** nowadays Eduardo calls his electrical machine shop "the factory"...*

where the translation provides the adversative, but not the resumptive meaning. However, the importance of such relationships in the story actually lie in the fact that they do not matter so much at the level of structural coordination, as at the interactional level. They imply the initiation of challenging moves in the exchange, that is, they involve reactions to presuppositions or assertions supposedly stated before by the other interlocutor, though we should not forget that we are dealing with a monological text, not with a dialogue:

(17) l.25: Explicaciones, las que quieras, *pero*, en lo tocante a mi participación: lentejas, querida mía.

*For explanations, you only have to ask, **but** as far as my involvement is concerned: baloney, my dear.*

(18) l.51: ...el hecho de advertirlo no es grato, *pero* tampoco obliga a hacer aspavientos.

*...**although** it certainly must be unpleasant to have this pointed out to you, it doesn't mean you have to kick up a fuss.*

(19) l.444: ...comprendo sus cuitas. *Pero* comprende tú también que la que suscribe estaba en Madrid haciendo un concurso oposición.

*...I understand their anxiety. **But** you too must understand that the undersigned was in Madrid to sit for a government examination.*

The addresser in the story is reacting in contrastive, emphatic terms against the supposed attitude of her addressee towards her words in a kind of predictive, self-defensive attitude. In (18), the translator has chosen to make explicit the concessive subordinating conjunction instead of the coordinating 'but'.

3.3. Causal relations

Almost every single instance of causal relationships in the story refers to the fact that the people described by Piti (the writer of the letter) are "a couple of yokels". This is the reason raised by her to justify all the dilemmas that happen to them (*because...→ consequently..., so ..., therefore..., for this reason...*):

(20) l.209: *Y es que*, querida mía, tu hermana y tu cuñado son un par de paletos de mucha consideración.

***Because the thing is**, my dear, your sister and your brother-in-law are a couple of out and out yokels.*

(21) l.270: *En consecuencia*, sus comportamientos se han atenido a una mezcla de saber antiguo, un poco rural, y a la zafiedad, un tantico vertiginosa, de los nuevos ricos.

***Consequently**, their behaviour has remained a mixture of old-fashioned, unrefined country wisdom, and the somewhat impetuous uncouthness of the nouveaux riches.*

(22) l.298: ...Eduardo estaba mosca. *Así que*, ni corto ni perezoso, contrató un detective. Conocía, *por tanto*, las platónicas idas y venidas de tu hermana.

*... Eduardo was suspicious. **So** he rapidly made it his business to hire a detective He was **therefore** well aware of your sister's platonic comings and goings.*

(23) l.351: *Por ello*, la aparición de la primera secretaria de tu cuñado volvió a ponerle el toque rural a este enredo con motos Yamaha.

For this reason, ... *the appearance of your brother-in-law's first secretary added yet another rural touch to this soap opera with Yamaha motorcycles.*

3.4. Temporal relations

This may refer either to 'discourse time' or to 'reference time'. According to Schiffrin, 'discourse time' refers to the "order in which a speaker presents utterances in a discourse" (1987: 229), that is, within the organisation of discourse as a text:

(24) l.64: *En suma*, lo que cuenta es esta pérdida irreparable...

In short, *what really counts is this irreparable loss...*

On the other hand, 'reference time' has to do with the "relationship between a proposition and the time of speaking" (Schiffrin, 1987: 228):

(25) l.134: *En ese instante*, el delineante le grita que está loca y ella, sin embargo, lo besa y se retira.

At this moment, *the draughtsman screams that she is crazy, but she kisses him all the same and then withdraws.*

Some other times the marker may signal the speaker's progression of ideas. For instance, in the next example the speaker concludes with a shift of orientation:

(26) l.380: *Ahora va a resultar que* lo único relevante es el fin de semana que su segura servidora pasó con él...

Now *it seems you 're trying to tell me that the only important thing is the weekend that your humble servant spent with him...*

4. OTHER INTERACTIONAL MARKERS

As commented above, and due to its epistolary nature, "Estío"/"Summer" exhibits many linguistic features which are characteristic of both written and spoken modes of discourse. For this reason, the fact that the 1st person narrator is addressing a 2nd person receiver is reflected in a great amount of interactional markers and meta-discursive expressions.

'Well', which is mainly used to mark responses in spoken exchanges, is the most recurrent marker at an interactional level in the story. Its

occurrence places the text much closer to the boundary between spoken and written genres. Although it does not have any inherent semantic meaning, in “Summer” it either gives the speaker time to think or marks a kind of self-response or self-correction, sometimes making explicit relations in the translated text which are simply implied in the original (as in (28)):

(27) l.190: ¿Sabes lo que más me divierte? Pues, ¿cómo decírtelo?

*Do you know what most amuses me about all of this? **Well**, how can I explain it?*

(28) l.353: ...los trayectos de la familia confluyeron en el apartamento del pajarillo, un verdadero nido y no de amor.

*... the family's trajectories all converged in the love nest (**well**, let's just call it a nest and leave it at that).*

4.1. Meta-discursive expressions

The narrator of “Estío”, Piti, is a ‘self-conscious narrator’ and, as such, makes use of recurrent evaluative and procedural expressions of a meta-discursive⁸ nature, which the translator has faithfully reproduced or, even, expanded (see (30)):

(29) l.7: No voy a decirte, pues, nada distinto...
I'm not going to add anything...

(30) l.13: Hay un punto, sin embargo, sobre el que no admito discusión y que pongo por delante... Me refiero, como habrás adivinado, a mi papel en el embrollo de tu hermana.

There is one question about which I will brook no argument and I want to make this clear from the start... I am referring, as you might have guessed, **to the role I played in the mess your sister got herself into.**

(31) l.34: ¿Cómo decírtelo?
How can I put it?

(32) l.187: Pero, vaya, sigamos por donde íbamos...
But anyway, back to where we were...

⁸ See P. Gillaerts & F. Van de Velde (2010).

(33) l.198: *No sé si lo ves. Me refiero a la falsa tonalidad cosmopolita que impregnó el asunto...*

I don't know if you understand. I am referring to the fake cosmopolitan airs that impregnated the affair...

(34) l. 277: *Ahí van un par de ejemplos: ...*

Here are a couple of examples: ...

The frequent use of attitudinal and comment disjuncts also contributes to the spoken nature of the story:

(34) l.86: *¿De verdad, no te hace sonreír que Caty y la Isabelona sorprendieran a mamá...?*

Doesn't it really make you smile that Caty and Isabelona should have caught their mummy...?

(35) l.148: *De verdad. He tenido chufas para Catalina, pero ...*

Honestly. I have gone into stitches over Catalina, but ..

As Piti presents her ideas and develops the letter, she employs 'subjective evaluation verbs', most of them mental verbs of cognition:

(36) l.168: *Creo que los perseguidos sin razón, los oprimidos y los desesperados conocen esa sed.*

I believe that the unjustly persecuted, the oppressed and the desperate know all about that thirst.

(37) l.173: *Sé desde luego que las mujeres que descubrieron la pasión entre los barrotes de un matrimonio a la fuerza tuvieron que sufrir...*

I can certainly see that those women who used to discover passion while shut away behind the bars of an enforced marriage must have suffered...

First person performatives are also recurrently used by the narrator throughout the story:

(38) l.21: *Repito lo que te dije aquella noche: soy ajena al problema de Catalina.*

Let me repeat what I told you that night: I had nothing to do with Catalina's problem.

(39) l.118: *A mí, te lo confieso, sólo un momento del embrollo del que no pude reírme: ...*

As far as I am concerned, I must admit there's only one episode of the farce where I find nothing to laugh at: ...

(40) l.164: ... y *te juro que* su sorda queja me traía el eco de todos los que, sabiendo justo su deseo, lo ven prohibido.
 ... and **I swear that** her silent lament brought to my ears the echo of all those who manage to pinpoint the object of their desire, only to discover that it is forbidden.

(41) l.247: ... todo ello, *insisto*, no ha acabado de quitarles el pelo de la dehesa.
I insist; none of this has done away with their provincialism.

Typically spoken hearer-oriented directives also bestow certain liveliness upon the story:

(42) l.220: En fin, *recuerda que* tú y yo dimos la campanada...
 And **remember how** you and I were the talk of the town...

(43) l.423: No te has perdido nada, *créeme*.
 You haven't missed a thing, **believe me**.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis of discourse coherence in “Estío / Summer” reveals that the distributional pattern of the discourse features runs parallel to what was originally expected. The text exhibits a great deal of linguistic features that are recognised as characteristic of both written and spoken genres.

Firstly, additive conjunctive relations prevail in this 'expository' text and they imply the pragmatic effect of 'speaker's continuation' in the exposition of her ideas. Secondly, adversative relations also convey an 'interactional' quality, since they frequently involve the initiation of challenging moves in the implied exchange. Thirdly, the discourse marker '*well*' places the text quite close to a 'dialogical' stretch of discourse, as it is mainly used at an interactional level.

Moreover, what may surprise us is that such coherence relations are more frequently indicated in an explicit way in the English version. I would argue then that the reason for this seems to reside in the fact that English is not the source language but the target, and that the cultural, contextual implications and the inherent complexity of the story “Estío” should require further assessment.

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