

**Driving force or expectation?  
On the role of knowledge congruence, corrections & discourse particles**

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Knowing what corrections people make during a dialogic exchange can reveal what type of discourse expectations are necessary for the development of a conversation. In addition to conveying the speaker's attitude towards a proposition, corrective utterances prove that speakers (a) keep a record of the epistemic state of all interlocutors, and (b) calculate how the information states of the interlocutors will look like in subsequent moves. They show that one of the main expectations of interlocutors is to maintain knowledge congruence –that is, a conflict-free epistemic state. Particles like *si* mark when this expectation is not met.

In this paper, I focus on the meaning and contexts of use of independent *si*-utterances in Spanish, which have been described as refuting or correcting the previous utterance.<sup>1</sup> I propose that *si*-utterances signal that the context update proposed by a salient contextual proposition is rejected by re-asserting a contradicting proposition that was already established in the dialogue (similarly to *re-assertion* and *rejection of a speech act* in Schlöder 2018). The particle itself introduces the reason for the rejection: the contextually salient proposition contradicts a previously established proposition, which is the one *si* introduces. To do so, *si* marks that the proposition it heads is already in the common ground (CG). This shows that maintaining knowledge congruence is not only a *driving force* of conversation (a salient feature in many accounts, e.g. Robert 1996, Farkas & Bruce 2010, a.o.), but it is also an *expectation*.

**Background:** Independent *si*-clauses in Spanish as in (1) pose an interesting question both in terms of their semantic and pragmatic meaning, as well as their syntax (Schwenter 1998, 2000, 2016; Rodríguez Ramalle 2011).<sup>2</sup> In terms of semantic-pragmatic meaning, independent *si*-utterances can be used to react to a vast array of propositions in the previous discourse: they can react to a previous utterance (1), an action (2), and an inference from the context (3):

(1) B: Dónde está tu hermano? / A: *Si acabo de llegar!*  
B: 'Where is your brother?' / A: 'A: [Si] I just arrived!' (Rodríguez Ramalle 2011:215)

(2) [A and B are friends; B hands A a beef burger, but A is vegetarian]:  
A: *Si soy vegetariana!*  
'[Si] I'm a vegetarian!'

(3) [After watching a forecast for rain, A opens the window to a sunny day]:  
*Si hace sol!*  
'[Si] it's sunny!'

Even when independent *si*-utterances react to the previous utterance, it can react to various types of information, such as the propositional content (4), presuppositions (5), unmet felicity conditions (1), and defective implicatures (both conversational (6) and (7) scalar):

(4) B: Ottawa está en Estados Unidos. / A: *Si está en Canadá.*  
B: 'Ottawa is the United States.' / A: '[Si] it is in Canada.'

(5) B: El hermano de Pedro es arquitecto. / A: *Si Pedro es hijo único.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Si* has many functions in Spanish; perhaps most notably it is the interrogative and conditional complementizer (English 'whether' and 'if'). There is evidence, however, for independent *si*-utterances not to be analyzed as elliptical embedded sentences and for their status as root clauses. This evidence is prosodic (Elvira-García, Roseano & Fernández-Planes 2017), syntactic (Hernanz 2015) and semantic-pragmatic (Schwenter 2016).

<sup>2</sup> The syntactic analysis is not addressed in the present paper.

B: 'Pedro's brother is an architect.' / A: '[Si] Pedro is an only child.'

(6) [A & B are talking about their next North American trip and wondering who they could ask for advice.]

B: Voy a preguntarle a Pedro. / A: *Si no ha salido de España!*

B: 'I'll ask Pedro.' / A: '[Si] he has never been out of Spain!' (modified from Schwenter 2000)

(7) B: Creo que te han tintado MAL el pelo. / A: *Si me lo han tintado FATAL.*

B: 'I think they dyed your hair poorly' / A: '[Si] they dyed it HORRIBLY' (Schwenter 2000)

**Analysis:** I propose to give a unified account of the use of independent *si*-utterances as meta-conversational moves with the aim of correcting an epistemic conflict. This epistemic conflict stems from the contradiction between a salient proposition and a proposition in the CG. The conflicting proposition can be introduced by the latest move or inferred from context, which explains why *si*-utterances can react to such different antecedents as presented in examples (1)-(7). This proposal formalizes and unifies previous analyses that focused on either the contrastive (Rodríguez Ramalle 2011) or the obvious-to-the-speaker (Schwenter 2016) nature of these utterances. It also explains why a *si*-utterance can be used in contexts like (7), where A is not disagreeing with B, but it still feels like a correction. In this case, the proposition that is in the CG pertains to conversational rules (in this case, to be as informative as possible), which according to A has been contradicted by B's utterance since they were not optimally informative.

But how is this achieved? An important distinction is to be made between the contribution of the *si*-utterance to the conversation and the contribution of the particle *si* to the utterance. A ***si*-utterance** marks that there is a contradicting proposition in the conversation: the previous move proposes a context update that makes it apparent that there is an epistemic conflict. To avoid this, the **particle *si*** marks that the proposition it introduces is already in the CG –a marked move that is in line with the exceptions to the Principle of Economy proposed by Romero & Han (2004), which states that this type of meta-conversational move is only acceptable for resolving epistemic conflict. We therefore have contrasting propositions (*si*-utterance and the salient proposition) and uncontroversiality, since *si* marks that status of *p* as being already in the CG. Both *contrastiveness* and *uncontroversiality* have been identified as key components in the meaning of other discourse particles like German *doch*, *schon*, and *ja* (Grosz 2010, Egg 2013, Döring 2016). In this paper, I compare *si* to these particles, and identify the parameters that distinguish one from the other (uncontroversiality, contrastiveness, and selection of argument).

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