

Theme as point of departure in English and Spanish casual conversation: A contrastive study

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Abstract

This paper uses a trinocular approach – i.e. from below, from above and from roundabout – to describe Theme as point of departure (POD) in English and Spanish casual conversation (thus avoiding the more controversial ‘what-the-clause-is-about’ aspect of Theme). This research is part of a long-term contrastive study which includes the description of POD in academic writing and a crosslinguistic comparison of POD in academic writing and casual conversation. Among the main findings in this paper, the following stand out: a) the identification of a conversational texture characterized by the interplay of textual and interpersonal strands of meaning; and b) different POD arrangements of English and Spanish clauses in casual conversation, motivated by different ways of enacting communicative exchange.

Keywords: casual conversation; Theme; point of departure; Systemic Functional Linguistics; English/Spanish contrasts; trinocular approach

1. Introduction

This paper uses Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) to look at the point of departure of English and Spanish clauses in casual conversation as part of a long-term contrastive study so far applied to academic writing (Arús-Hita, forthcoming). From a functional perspective, point of departure typically corresponds to what is known as ‘Theme’, a term which is not completely avoided in this research but which may refer to a broader category than our actual object of study. In previous publications (Arús-Hita 2017, 2010), I have discussed the evolution of mainstream descriptions of Theme from “the starting point of the message... what the clause is going to be about” (Halliday 1985: 39) to “the point of departure of the message; that which locates and orients the clause within its context” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 89). This shift was arguably motivated by the heated debate which took place in the late 80s and early 90s about the nature of this linguistic category, notably its ‘aboutness’ component (Hudson 1986; Huddleston 1988, 1991; Matthiessen & Martin 1991; Martin & Matthiessen 1992; Martin 1995). Consequently, and following the example of other researchers (e.g. Downing 1991; Davies 1997; Thompson & Thompson 2009), I have opted for an approach to Theme exclusively focused on its most stable feature, i.e. ‘point of departure’ (henceforth POD).¹

¹ *Point de départ* – French for ‘Point of departure’ – was originally used by the French philologist Henri Weil (1844), in opposition to the *énonciation proprement dite* (‘the actual statement’).

Analyzing the POD of clauses in such a spontaneous genre as casual conversation may seem less relevant than in other genres characterized by more careful planning.² Casual conversation, however, does not unfold as haphazardly as one may think. As Eggins and Slade point out in their reference book on this genre, “Despite its sometimes aimless appearance and apparent trivial content, casual conversation is, in fact, a highly structured, functionally motivated, semantic activity” (1997: 6). Although these and other authors show that most of the structural complexity of casual conversation is of interpersonal nature (Eggins and Slade 1997: 16; Matthiessen and Slade 2010: 376; Briz Gómez 2001: 41), it is possible to identify a textual structure, a sort of texture as that of written texts, yet with its own specific characteristics. Examples of this can be found in Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), Matthiessen and Slade (2010) and Halliday and Hasan (1976), with a focus on cohesion, as well as in Ventola (1979) and Slade (1996), with a focus on generic structure.

The thematic structure of casual conversation, on the other hand, has not received much attention, as Theme has overwhelmingly been studied in the context of written genres. There are, of course, some exceptions to this, both in English (e.g. Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, Ch. 3; Matthiessen and Slade 2010; Ping 2005; Taboada and Lavid 2003; Firbas 1992, Ch. 10) and Spanish (e.g. Piatti 2020; Andreau 2020; Granato and Piatti 2010). Despite the existence of these studies, the fact that “conversations are primarily concerned with the interpersonal – the creation and maintenance of social relationships” (Matthiessen and Slade 2010: 376), typically results in the foregrounding of the interpersonal, rather than the textual, structure of casual conversation and other spoken dialogic genres. This paper seeks to contribute to fill that gap.

Although not very abundant, at least in comparison with work on other genres, there are some studies, in addition to those mentioned above, dealing with different aspects of casual conversation in English (e.g. Simon-Vandenberg 2014; Knight 2010; Lucantonio 2007),³ Spanish (e.g. Narbona Jiménez 2015) or both (e.g. Flores Figueroa 2005). None of this research, however, focuses on the contribution of POD to the textual progression of communicative exchange, so I will not delve into a review of the literature on this genre. On the other hand, given the contrastive nature of this paper, some reference should be made to the literature on Theme in English and Spanish. Within SFL, Lavid *et al.* (2010), in their contrastive grammar, highlight the higher flexibility of Spanish in terms of the syntactic elements that are thematized non-markedly, in opposition to the usual thematization of Subjects in English. Gómez González and García Varela (2014) and Arús-Hita *et al.* (2013) illustrate this contrast in

² Casual conversation can be said to be a macro-genre rather than a genre. Eggins and Slade (1997), for instance, identify specific genres within this, such as gossip, story-telling or casual talk at work. Although the use of the term *genre* is in SFL typically associated with the study of its elements of structure and “how people use language to achieve culturally recognized goals” (Eggins and Slade 1997: 24), not the focus of this paper, SFL approaches to genre also stress the importance of looking at discourse-semantic and lexicogrammatical patterns within genres (e.g. Hasan 1985; Martin 1993), something which is done in this paper.

³ To these we would have to add all the work done within the Conversation Analysis framework as well as the early approaches to the study of conversation, as referenced in Eggins and Slade (1997: 6).

the context of news reports, whereas Arús-Hita (forthcoming) does likewise in academic writing. The same focus on the variety of unmarked choices in Spanish is placed by Montemayor-Borsinger (2009) in the arguably most detailed study of Theme in this language to date as well as one of the earliest attempts to avoid the blunt transposition of descriptions of Theme in English to the description of Spanish Theme. As can well be imagined, this issue will be amply explored in this paper.

A different contrastive approach to Theme is the one by Moyano (2016), who does not consider clause-initial position to be necessary for the identification of Theme in Spanish. According to this author, the Theme – or “agreeing participant” (2016: 196) – is realized post-verbally in Spanish VS and *se*-constructions, as illustrated by example (1) (adapted from Moyano 2016: 209).⁴ It can be argued that this approach – expanded in Moyano (2021) – relies on a view of Theme as ‘what the clause is about’, which in turn may point to different thematic waves – e.g. POD and aboutness – interacting in the clause, more in unison in some languages than in others. Future research should look closely into this.

- (1) [Given:] *Se utilizó* [New/Theme (agreeing participant):] *un diseño en bloques completos al azar...* (‘a split-plot randomized block design was used’)

For reasons of space, the review of the literature above has been of a quite general nature – other sources closely related to our research will come up throughout the paper. It does however show that Theme as POD in casual conversation is rather uncharted territory, let alone from a contrastive perspective. This paper thus seeks to add to the existing contrastive literature on Theme in English and Spanish, and to the study of Theme in general, in two ways. Firstly, by narrowing down the approach to Theme as POD, i.e. leaving out any consideration of aboutness; secondly, by focusing on casual conversation. More precisely, my main goal will be to provide a contrastive description of the realizations and functions of POD, as well as its interplay with other clausal elements and PODs from surrounding clauses, in English and Spanish casual conversation. The next section will expound on how this will be done.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 specifies the data and methodology used. Sections 3, 4 and 5 analyse and discuss the data in detail from the point of view of realizations, functions and texture, respectively. Lastly, section 6 presents the final conclusions as well as some pointers for future research.

2. Data and Methodology

The data compiled and analysed for each language and genre is detailed in Table 1. The sample handled had to be kept relatively small because of the painstaking manual scrutiny required by the identification and analysis of PODs. It is however large enough to allow quantification. The results presented here are therefore rather tentative; the

⁴ See section 3, below, for an explanation of impersonal/passive *se*-constructions.

analysis should be expanded in future research to include more texts so as to confirm these results. Although some quantitative data will be presented at the time of discussing POD realisations, the analysis will for the most part be qualitative.

	English	Spanish
Casual conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excerpts from <i>BNC</i> (Davies, 2004-) • 2,333 words • 279 clause complexes (plus non-clausal expressions)* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excerpts from <i>Corpus de conversación coloquial</i> (Val.Es.Co. 1994/1996) and CORLEC (Laboratorio de Lingüística Informática 1992) • 2,239 words • 164 clause complexes (plus non-clausal expressions)

* “Independent, free-standing syntactic or formulaic expressions” proper to spoken discourse (Tucker 2005: 679).

Table 1. Data used in this study

Following the procedure in Arús-Hita (forthcoming) for the description of PODs in academic writing, and to facilitate the cross-generic analysis to be carried out in future research, a trinocular approach is used – see Mwinlaaru & Xuan (2016: 10) for the relevance of this approach in language descriptions. We will thus be looking at POD *realizations*, i.e. the view from below, *functions*, i.e. the view from above, and *interplay* with other discursive elements, including surrounding PODs, to build texture, i.e. the view from roundabout. The trinocular analysis, as described by Halliday (1996), favours the view from above and is usually undertaken in the order: from above → from below → from roundabout. In this paper I have found it more practical to start with the view from below so as to first present the quantitative analysis of POD realizations and then move to a higher order, arguably more complex, qualitative analysis of functions and interrelations.

For the sake of focus, the analysis is circumscribed to the first element of ‘nuclear transitivity’, whether participant or Process (i.e. verb) – see Matthiessen (1995) for the distinction between ‘nuclear transitivity’ and ‘circumstantial transitivity’. However, as we move upwards and sideways in our description, other elements, notably interpersonal and circumstantial, will be incorporated into the discussion.

Table 2 illustrates the contexts considered for the identification and analysis of POD, which include the first participant or Process in both primary, i.e. main, and secondary, i.e. dependent, clauses in a clause complex as well as in simple clauses. Because the grammatical environment sometimes determines the choice of POD, relative clauses are also taken into account, in spite of their more limited contribution to logogenetic

development, as they clearly illustrate this point in contrast with choices made at clause complex level, which are more dependent on the wider semantic environment.⁵

Simple clause: <i>It's got the biggest garden in the area.</i>
Clause complex $\alpha \rightarrow \beta$: [α :] <i>I don't think</i> [β :] <i>they'll be free of that until...until the summer.</i>
Clause complex $\beta \rightarrow \alpha$: [β :] <i>When Gareth lived with us before he got married</i> [α :] <i>he turned the bath on and walked away and left it.</i>
Clause complex 1 \rightarrow 2: [1:] <i>Well I know,</i> [2:] <i>but he didn't have top dog meat since he's been here.</i>
Relative clauses $\alpha \rightarrow \beta$: <i>There was</i> [α :] <i>one</i> [β :] <i>that I had to throw away</i>

Table 2. PODs considered in the research (α and β indicate hypotactic relations; 1 and 2, paratactic)

As done in Arús-Hita (forthcoming), the different POD realizations have been tallied for each language (see Table 4, in the next section) through manual tagging, their frequencies being compared and discussed based on examples from the texts. The findings made in the initial view from below will serve as the basis for the subsequent discussion of the functions and interactions of PODs.

A last methodological observation is that, despite dealing with spoken language, the study does not include intonation, as a contrastive account of the role of this feature in casual conversation would deserve a paper of its own.⁶

3. The view from below: Realizations of the point of departure in casual conversation

The scrutiny of transcripts from casual conversation results in the identification of eight different types of ideational PODs, as shown in table 3. All illustrative examples in Table 3 are from Davies (2004-) and CORLEC (---).⁷

Realization	Example
(Non-pronominal) Nominal Group	and er <i>the company</i> have told him his got to
Pronoun	<i>I</i> went to turn the fire on ...
Verbal Group	... and then <i>displays</i> related target language words on the phone's wallpaper
Non-finite (clause)	look at them <i>dancing</i> to Mozart these two
Wh-	...the bloody people <i>who</i> goes in and out there
Existential <i>there/hay</i>	... and <i>there's</i> no gas.

⁵ See Halliday (1988: 43) for the importance of considering both the grammatical and the semantic environments when studying the Subject. This can arguably be extended to other functional categories, including POD.

⁶ The existing contrastive studies on intonation in English and Spanish do not look at the role of this feature in discourse. They are for the most part studies concerned with the teaching of intonation in the context of foreign language teaching (see, e.g. Valenzuela Farías 2013; Chela-Flores and Chela-Flores 2013).

⁷ English examples use italics to signal POD; Spanish examples follow the opposite convention.

Se (Spanish)	<i>¿Y se puede ... prevenir ... la pancreatitis, o no hay nada que hacer? ('And can one prevent pancreatitis, or nothing can be done?')</i>
Clitics (Spanish)	<i>Oye, por cierto, te he traído esto ('ey, by the way, I brought you this' [lit. you have brought-I this'])</i>

Table 3. Nuclear PODs in English and Spanish casual conversation

To start with, table 4 provides a quantitative crosslinguistic contrast of the realizations of the different nuclear POD types in this genre. PODs in secondary clauses –whether in hypotactically related clauses in a clause complex or in relative clauses – are tallied separately from PODs in the rest of clauses to try to account for the higher dependence of the former on narrow semantic or grammatical contexts, as explained above. This is expressed in Table 4 as ‘ α , 1, 2’ – for primary clauses as well as free-standing clause simplexes – on the one hand and ‘ β ’ – for secondary clauses – on the other, following SFL conventions. Results are shown in percentages expressing the frequency of each POD realization with respect to the total instances of all realizations. Thus, for instance, verbal groups in primary (i.e. α , 1, 2) clauses in the Spanish corpus represent 53.8% among the eight categories in the table, all of which total 100%, and so forth.

		NG (non- pronom- inal)	Subject Pronou n	clitics	Se	VG	Non- finite verb	Wh-/ /Qu	Exist- ial There/ /Hay
Spanish	α , 1, 2	9.7%	17.2%	14.8%	0.1%	53.8%	0.0%	1.5%	3.1%
	β	6.8%	4.1%	14.8%	0.0%	50.1%	4.5%	16.3%	3.4%
English	α , 1, 2	3.4%	79.6%	0.0%	N.A.	9.4%	1.9%	4.9%	0.8%
	β	7.8%	68.6%	0.0%	N.A.	0.0%	7.8%	15.7%	0.0%

Table 4. Detailed comparison of nuclear PODs in English and Spanish casual conversation

A bird’s-eye look at Table 4 reveals that POD realizations are more varied and evenly distributed in Spanish than in English. Thus, whereas almost 80% primary and 70% secondary English clauses in the corpus analyzed have a Subject pronoun as POD, the most frequent POD realization in Spanish, Verbal Group, is just above 50% in both primary and secondary Spanish clauses, Subject pronouns and clitics combining in primary clauses for over 30%. This points to the higher flexibility of Spanish SPCA structure,⁸ which comes into its own in casual conversation, where, according to Briz Gómez (2001: 77-79), the psychological and pragmatic ordering of clausal elements is more important than the syntactic one. Although Briz Gómez does not work within the systemic-functional framework, it is worth remembering that, in SFL, Theme is equated to psychological Subject, i.e. “what the speaker had in his mind to start with, when embarking on the production of the clause” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 80). Examples (1, 2) illustrate the prevalence of the psychological over the syntactic in casual conversation. Notice that the impromptu embarkment on the production of the clause – using Halliday and Matthiessen’s words above – may be the main reason for

⁸ SPCA structure – also SFPCA – refers to Subject, (Finite), Predicator, Complement and Adjunct (see Fawcett 2000), i.e. what the mainstream SFL literature considers interpersonal structure. For the reasons to prefer referring to it as SPCA rather than interpersonal, see Arús-Hita (2021).

the repetitions and reformulations which are characteristic of this genre (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 463; Briz Gómez 2001: 71), as in (3, 4).

(1) Funny were sort of company isn't it?

(2) *es - verle la cara cuando en Almería, cuando - ¡ Y yo muerta de risa! Y él...*
 ('it is - seeing his face when in Almería, when – And me laughing to death!
 And him...')

(3) I have to get, I have to get people's conversations.

(4) *Y hoy... Y es además... Hay una cosa muy curiosa, y es que además hoy...*
 ('And today... And it is also... There is a very curious thing, and it is that
 also today...')

In English, where interpersonal constraints dictate the Subject ^ Finite sequence to open declaratives, placing the Subject first – often the personal pronoun *I*, as “much of our talk consists of messages concerned with ourselves” (Halliday and Matthiessen: 2014: 97) – comes out naturally, and thus the grammatical Subject, i.e. Subject, and the psychological Subject, i.e. Theme, tend to conflate as clausal POD. In Spanish, conversely, where the sequencing of Subject and Finite – i.e. Mood – does not play a role in communication exchange (see Gil and García 2010; Quiroz 2018; Arús-Hita 2021), the psychological Subject often conflates with other elements of SPCA structure – notably the Predicator, realized by a verbal group in which the inflectional ending plays the same referential role as the pronominal Subject in English. Table 5 illustrates this crosslinguistic contrast.

<p>[S pronoun] I know [NG] some of these security men are worse than the bloody people [Wh-] who goes in and out there you know. [S pronoun] They knows the layout don't they? Course [S pronoun] they do. [NG] That's it. [S pronoun] It's easier [S pronoun] It's stupid [S pronoun] I could do it if [S pronoun] I had the face and [S pronoun] I had the guts [S pronoun] I could do it.</p>
<p>[NG] <i>las demás chicas del grupo siempre que [VG] han empezado a salir con alguien me lo contaban para que [S pronoun] yo diera el visto bueno, y así [VG] digo [non-finite] a ver [VG] tráelo aquí que [clitic] lo vea [VG] digo [VG] vale [VG] Nos vamos al monumento. [VG] Es Diana [VG] creo que [VG] es Diana caza - sólo que, sólo que - ¡ Ay Dios Mío! Es que [VG] es una cosa familiar [VG] mira, porque [S pronoun] yo con mi hermana pues [clitic] nos aguantamos todo</i> ('The rest of girls in the group whenever they started dating someone they would tell me so I gave my consent, so I say let's see bring it here so I see it and say ok We are leaving for the monument. It's Diana I think it's Diana Hunt – just that, just that – Oh my God! Just that it's a family thing look, because I with my sister we tolerate everything.')</p>

Table 5. Different POD realizations in English and Spanish casual conversation

There are, of course, functional reasons motivating the different POD choices in Table 5. That clauses in casual conversation often start in the unplanned manner mentioned above does not mean that POD is a mere instrument to gain or maintain the floor (already a function in itself). When looked at in its context, each POD can be seen to contribute to the unfolding of the clause which it starts while integrating it into the general unfolding of the conversation. These functional issues are discussed in the

views from above and from roundabout, below, the present section being focused on POD realizations.

Continuing with the discussion of results from Table 4, we have just seen that the most noteworthy crosslinguistic contrast concerns Subject pronouns and verbal groups. English (79.6% in primary, 68.6% in secondary) has a much higher proportion of POD Subject pronouns than Spanish (17.2% in primary, 4.1% in secondary). The results for English are in line with those obtained in other studies on dialogic genres. Ping (2005) registers 62.9% pronouns as Theme in English spontaneous conversation, while Taboada and Lavid (2003) register 4.13% cases of Process, i.e. verbal group, as Theme in English scheduling interactions (comparable to the 9.4% and 0.0% for primary and secondary clauses, respectively, in table 4, above). Future studies will hopefully corroborate the tendencies identified for Spanish, too.

When looking at POD in secondary clauses, we can observe that, contrary to the functional motivations of realizations in primary clauses, the internal grammatical constraints of the clause complex often determine how to start the secondary clause. That explains, for instance, the 0.0% of (finite) verbal groups as POD in English [β :] clauses, where subordination does not allow dropping the Subject, in contrast with Spanish [β :] clauses (5) and English [2:] clauses, i.e. the second clause in a paratactically-related clause complex (6). The grammatical context of the secondary clause is also accountable for the use of specific POD realizations in secondary clauses, such as non-finite verbal groups (7, 8). These PODs are non-surprisingly more frequent in secondary (4.5% in Spanish; 7.8% in English) than in primary clauses in both languages (0.0% in Spanish; 1.9% in English). The reason for English 1.9% in primary clauses obeys to the fact that commands in this language are realized non-finitely, whereas the verb in Spanish commands is finite (compare [9] and [10], where Spanish *mira* has the inflectional ending *-a*). Also very much conditioned by the grammatical context are *wh-/qu-* PODs in relative clauses (11, 12) and indirect questions (13, 14), those in primary clauses belonging to direct questions (15, 16).

(5) *esta claro dice que compraron* ('it's clear he says [they] bought..')

(6) I said give us the keys and *said* I'll take the bloody car

(7) Because he likes *to see* what's going on

(8) *pongo la television a ver lo que ha tocao* ('I switch on the TV to see what [number] has come out')

(9) *look* at them dancing to Mozart these two you funny boys

(10) *Mira, mira Javier* ('Look, look Javier')

(11) I know some of these security men are worse than the bloody people *who* goes in and out there you know

(12) *sí un chico que su hermana vive aquí* ('yes a kid whose sister lives here')

(13) I wonder *what's* in old DOS?

(14) *No sé qué me pasa* ('I don't know what's wrong with me')

(15) *How* about your tooth, did you get erm

(16) ¿ *!qué vas a decir!?* ('what can you say?')

It should be pointed out that the dependence of POD selection on grammatical constraints in secondary clauses is not genre-specific. It can be expected to apply to genres across the board, both written and spoken, in any given language, different genres – and different languages – favouring some realizations over others (see Arús-Hita [forthcoming] for a demonstration of the same phenomenon in academic writing). In casual conversation, however, secondary clauses do not abound as much as in other genres; they are sometimes abandoned due to overlap, among other possible reasons (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 460). Consequently, the contribution of secondary clauses in general – and their PODs in particular – to overall textual development will be less relevant than in other genres, sometimes even negligible. This can be appreciated in casual conversation chunks such as (17), consisting only of primary clauses and non-clausal expressions, something which would be hard to expect from monologic, notably written, texts.

(17) Rebecca? Maybe. Jessica? Maybe. Sarah wacko-jacko! Sarah wacko? Oh definitely! Oh A yes! four inch? Tony. No! Paul No! Andy? No. Me? No! Paul? No.? No. No. No! Can't read that one! Danny. ? No. She must be joking! Paul and Bryant ? Erm, Bryant maybe. No. I didn't put Paul ! Couldn't have been him

Two final observations about the results in Table 4 concern Spanish *se* and clitics. The former is surprisingly low in frequency, considering that impersonal/passive *se*-constructions are rather frequent in Spanish, the impersonal participant *se* often realizing POD in other genres (see Arús-Hita, forthcoming). This construction is equivalent to the English agentless passive and has the particularity that it is passive in meaning but active in form (Alarcos Llorach 1987: 219). Example (18) represents one of the few realizations of *se* as POD in the corpus analyzed. Future research should look closely into the reasons for the scant use of this construction in casual conversation, yet a tentative claim may be made that, casual conversation often being, as said above, about the speakers themselves, there is no need for a stylistic resource which places the focus on the process rather than on the agents. Such is the case with *se*-constructions in Spanish as well as passive constructions in English, both of them harder to find in casual conversation than in more formal genres.

(18) *¿Y se puede cui ... <vacilación> prevenir la... la pancreatitis, o no hay nada que hacer?* ('And one can take care.. <hesitation> prevent... pancreatitis, or there is nothing that can be done?')

Clitic PODs, on the other hand, are proper to conversational exchange in Spanish, where they play an important role in textual development, as will be seen in section 5. In that section we will also discuss the interpersonal motivations behind the choice of clitics as POD, which ultimately reflect the interactional nature of conversations and their dependence on interpersonal considerations, as pointed out by Matthiessen and Slade (2010: 376). Examples (19-21) illustrate different clitics serving as POD in the Spanish corpus analyzed, their English translations reflecting the sharp contrast between both languages in these cases.

(19) *no le sale nada* ([in a gambling context] ‘he is not getting anything’; lit. ‘not him coming out anything’)

(20) *te he traído esto* (‘I have brought you this’; lit. ‘you have-I brought this’)

(21) *Y lo dijimos siempre* (‘and we always said it’; lit ‘and it said-we always’)

4. The view from above: Functions of the point of departure in casual conversation

After focusing on the realizations of POD in casual conversation, we now turn to its functions as well as internal and external interplays, i.e. the views from above and roundabout, respectively. These different perspectives are not isolated from one another; we will sometimes allude to interrelations between different clausal elements in the view from above and refer to both discursive functions and realizations in the view from roundabout. We will not be looking at the experiential function of POD participants (Actor, Sensor, Goal, etc.) as this is beyond our focus, that kind of analysis being more productive when looking at generic structure, as is done, in the context of news reports, by Gómez González and García Varela (2014) and Lavid *et al.* (2012).

Conversational excerpts (22) and (23) will serve to illustrate the subsequent discussion of the functions of Theme in Spanish and English casual conversation. The Themes from these two fragments are shown in Table 6, below.

(22)

- *y y cuando llego a casa todos los días pongo la television a ver lo que ha tocao* (‘and when I get home every day I switch on the TV to see what (number) has come out’)
- *sí* (‘yes’)
- *oyE/.te pues creer que ya van dos sábados que de los números que salen ni uno no tengo NI UNO* (‘listen. Can you believe that it’s two Saturdays in a row that among the numbers that come out I don’t have any[?]’)
- *ni [uno]* (‘not one’)
- *[ah]*
- *en mis cinco números no tengo NI UN NUMERO de los que salen* (‘in my five numbers I don’t have a single one of those that come out’)

- *yo me río d'eso digo/ yo me espero a ver si me salen claro como tol mundo* ('I laugh at that, say/ I wait to see if mine come out of course like everybody')
- *hombre normal claro* ('naturally')
- *digo los míos el seis* ('I mean mine (number) six')
- *te lo envuelvo un poquito?* ('shall I wrap it a little?')
- *bien* ('fine')
- *no tengo ningún seis el cuatro ¡che! si no tengo ningún cuatro* ('I don't have any six four listen! I don't have any four')
- *¡che! pero ¿qué es? Yy* (listen! But what is it?')

(23) *it's much smaller is it? _ Oh yeah it's smaller, but it's a nice er _ Is this the biggest one in the section? _ Er, well it's bi--, I don't know. _ It must be pretty near it. Don't know. Don't really care! _ It's got the biggest garden in the area. _ I don't know, I don't really care! Not really. _ You can see that about five garden size. _ Well it's not really relevant. _ Well it's a property! He said it was a big one didn't they? Mm. _ Cos it's probably double the size of this one. _ Er it's, _ It's got ta be well it's ri--, what do you reckon, four thousand square feet? _ No, no! Oh I can't work it out. I really can't afford _ It must be pretty close. So you don't need all this,* (Davis, 2004)

The main crosslinguistic contrast seen in the view from below, i.e. high frequency of POD Subject pronouns in English vs. POD Predicators in Spanish,⁹ points to different ways of fulfilling the same textual function: signalling that the identity of the POD participant is recoverable, either from the cotext or from the situational context. This, in functional terms, is known as realizing 'presuming reference', which contrasts with 'presenting reference', used to signal that the participant's identity is not recoverable from the context or cotext (Martin 1992: 102). This contrast can be observed in (22) and (23), above, and is more clearly illustrated in Table 6.

Nuclear PODs in Spanish (22), by turns	Nuclear PODs in English (23), by turns
<i>llego, pongo, a ver, lo que</i>	<i>it</i>
<i>te pues creer,* van, de los números que salen ni uno</i>	<i>it</i>
<i>no tengo</i>	<i>it</i>
<i>yo, yo</i>	<i>is this</i>
<i>digo</i>	<i>it, I</i>
<i>te</i>	<i>it</i>
<i>no tengo, no tengo</i>	<i>don't know, don't really care</i>
<i>qué</i>	<i>it</i>
	<i>I, I</i>
	<i>you</i>
	<i>it</i>

⁹ Since the focus in the view from above is on functions rather than realizations, we will from now on favour the term 'Predicator' over 'verb' and 'verbal group'.

	<i>it, he, it</i>
	<i>it</i>
	<i>it, it, what</i>
	<i>I, I</i>
	<i>it, you</i>

* The reason why the whole of *te pues creer* (and not just *te*) is POD is that this is the verb *creerse* (an emphatic version of *creer* ['believe']). *Te* is therefore part of the Process and not a participant. This contrast with *te* in *te lo envuelvo*, which is Beneficiary in a material clause.

Table 6. Different nuclear PODs in Spanish and English casual conversation

As shown in Table 6, most nuclear Themes in primary and secondary clauses in Spanish (22) are Predicators; the only exceptions are *de los números que salen ni uno*,¹⁰ two instances of the 1st person singular pronoun (*yo me río...yo me espero*), where the speaker highlights her/his particular experience (something like '*I personally*' in English), one clitic POD, i.e. *te* (see about clitics, below) and the interrogative pronoun *qué* in the last turn. Subjectless realizations in Spanish compare with those in which the Subject is realized as a postverbal nominal group, e.g. *dos sábados* in *ya van dos sábados*. In this case, the Predicator ^ Subject sequencing indicates that the POD Predicator is not pointing to a preceding or external identity but to the postverbal Subject *dos sábados*, which in turn signals presenting reference, thus bringing a new identity into the conversation.

English (23), conversely, reflects the alluded pervasiveness of personal pronouns in this language to signal presuming reference in the POD. The only exceptions are one instance of the demonstrative *this* and the two subjectless *Don't know. Don't really care!*, where, even if English does not have the grammatical help of the verbal ending, the situational context allows the correct identification of the referent. Subjectless clauses in English have been studied, among others, by Ozaki (2010). This author identifies a number of criteria associated with these clauses. From a syntactic point of view, they tend to refer to the present, although the past is also possible, and are limited to main clauses. In addition, first and second person pronouns are more frequently omitted than third person pronouns. From a semantic point of view, these clauses tend to include verbs used on an everyday basis (e.g. *know, care*, above). Finally, from a pragmatic perspective, these clauses have a lubricating function: they are used to help the hearer get involved in the conversation (Ozaki 2010: 39-44). These functions would add to the above-alluded discursive one, i.e. signalling context-dependent presuming reference.

In the view from below, we observed a drastic absence (0.0%) of pronominal POD realizations in Spanish β clauses. This does not mean that this kind of POD is impossible in casual conversation. The scrutiny of a larger corpus will certainly provide

¹⁰ This is a noun group with heavy internal dislocation, the Qualifier (*de los números que salen* ['of the numbers that come out']) serving as a kind of marked Theme for the clause. This practically turns the Qualifier into an independent locative Adjunct (something like 'Among the numbers that come out'), which would make the Head *ni uno* the actual nuclear Theme in a complex 'circumstantial Theme + nuclear Theme' POD.

some cases, but the lack of instances in the corpus analyzed does point to a clear tendency to express contrast or emphasis – the main functions of pronominal Subjects in Spanish – in primary, rather than in secondary clauses. Additionally, the grammatical constraints of the secondary clause often call for specific arrangements, such as non-finite Predicator PODs, which indicate semantic continuity with respect to the POD of the primary clause. Such is the case with English (24) and Spanish (25), where the infinitives *to see* and *ver* imply the previous *he* and 1st person singular, expressed through the verbal inflection in *pon-go*, respectively. Also determined by grammatical constraints are *wh-/qu-* elements in relative clauses and projected indirect questions. In the former, the relative pronoun signals presuming reference – *who* in (26) and *que* in (27) point back to *people* and *chico*, respectively. On the other hand, the opposition presenting/presuming is not applicable to interrogative pronouns such as *what* in (28) and *qué* in (29), as pointed out by Martin (1992: 105).

(24) Because he likes *to see* what's going on

(25) *pongo la television a ver lo que ha tocao* ('I switch on the TV to see what [number] has come out')

(26) I know some of these security men are worse than the bloody people *who* goes in and out there you know

(27) *sí un chico que su hermana vive aquí* ('yes a kid whose sister lives here')

(28) I wonder what's in old DOS?

(29) *No sé qué me pasa* ('I don't know what's wrong with me')

Before moving on to the view from roundabout, let us say something about clitics, given their importance in Spanish casual conversation. As said in section 3, the presence of POD clitics in Spanish can be explained by the fact that conversations are primarily concerned with the interpersonal and, in Spanish, clitics play an active role in communicative exchange, as part of the Negotiator function. From a textual point of view, they represent an important resource for signalling presuming reference in Complement ^ Predicator clauses such as (30), which incidentally has not one but two clitic Complements – each one of them realizing a different nuclear participant, thus only the clause-initial Beneficiary *te* counting as POD.

(30) *te lo envuelvo un poquito?* ('shall I wrap it a little for you?' [lit. 'you it I wrap a little?'])

As we will see in the following section, the possibility in Spanish of building semantic continuity through clitic Complements contrasts sharply with the English chaining of clauses with Subject pronouns. Authors such as Taboada (2004) and Montemayor-Borsinger (2009) extend the Theme to the verb following clause-initial clitics. In that view, the whole of *te lo envuelvo* would be the Theme in (30). While acknowledging that the unstressed nature of clitics may point to their syntactic dependence on the

verbal group in which they appear, an argument will be made in section 5 for treating clitic and verb as a single unit from an interpersonal perspective but not from a textual one (see also footnote 13, above for a distinction between verb-dependent and verb-independent clitics).

5. The view from roundabout

5.1 Threads of meaning in casual conversation

After the views from below and from above, we now look at POD from roundabout, i.e. at the interplay of POD elements in the clause and beyond. An important goal of this section will be to find out whether it is possible to identify some sort of texture, something typically associated with written text. A classic study of texture within SFL is Thomson and Thompson's (2009) analysis of sports reports, where they distinguish two different threads of meaning, one realized through Subject, the other through Theme. When these coincide, they are hard to tell apart, but when they do not, typically in clauses starting with a circumstantial, the authors convincingly argue that each of these two elements makes different contributions to texture: circumstantial Themes signal transitions, Subjects indicate topic continuation (Thompson and Thompson 2009: 64). This is illustrated by example (31), taken from one of the extracts analyzed by these authors (2009: 60), where the marked Theme *At 1-1* takes us to a phase of the reported football match, whereas the Subject *this fierce encounter* provides the continuation of the 'match' topic.

(31) At 1-1, this fierce encounter soon began to settle down, with both sides enjoying more time on the ball in midfield.

Thompson and Thompson's view imply that, when there is a marked circumstantial Theme, the participant following this, typically the Subject in English, is not considered part of the Theme. The same authors, however, acknowledge that Theme boundary is an issue far from settled and arguments can be made in favour of the inclusion of post-circumstantial participants into the Theme. In Arús-Hita (forthcoming) I take the latter stance, as important crosslinguistic contrasts can be identified by always considering the first nuclear participant in the analysis, something which also concerns the present paper, where the focus is on nuclear Themes. It is worth remembering at this point that Theme, the same as Rheme, represents a gradient scale, as suggested by Firbas (1966: 270; see also "thematic prominence" in Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 89); it makes therefore sense that different types of analysis may opt for one or the other approach, depending on the nature of the study.

The concept of texture has been applied to casual conversation, notably by Slade (1996), who uses this term to refer to the characteristics of casual conversation as a genre and, from the point of view of the lexicogrammar, focuses on the interpersonal considerations that characterize conversational structure. This rather unconventional

interpretation of texture was not maintained by the author in later publications on casual conversation; no allusion to texture is made in Eggins and Slade (1997) or Matthiessen and Slade (2010). This is therefore a good opportunity to find out whether a more textual-oriented, rather than interpersonal-oriented, texture can also be identified for casual conversation and test whether the sort of analysis proposed by Thompson and Thompson (2009), previously used in my study on POD in academic writing, can be adapted to this genre.

‘Texture’ is in fact a rather elusive category. Linlong and Haiyang observe that “notwithstanding the fact that many discourse analysts touch on this concept, it seems that no scholar has ever paid heed to the theoretical positioning of texture” (2016: 13). Definitions such as Halliday and Hasan’s “the property of being a text” (1976: 2) or Thompson’s “the quality of being recognizably a text rather than a collection of unconnected words or clauses” (2014: 215) are not particularly clarifying. What seems to be clear from the treatment that texture is given in different sources is that it is brought about by a combination of registerial and generic coherence and, notably, cohesive resources (see, for instance, Eggins 2004: 24). Because in this paper we are dealing with POD, we will focus here on the contribution of this part of the clause to the creation of texture.

Excerpts (32) and (33), below, illustrate the main characteristics of casual conversation in terms of the contribution of PODs to the construal of texture in each language. Obviously, larger amounts of dialogue would be needed to obtain a more complete picture, yet these samples will arguably suffice to grasp the essentials of texture in this genre as well as its language-specific (English vs. Spanish) traits.

(32) Yeah. Mm mm. Oh! Right. Er, I need a copy of Xtree Er I want to have a look at the Erm, my is I'm always carrying it. Here it is. I'm always sorting out people's computers for them. Ah? I said I always carry Xtree, I'm always sorting out people's computers for them. I see! A chair would help wouldn't it? Yes, why not have one? Er would you prefer the chair or the stool? Have what you like. It doesn't matter one can have one. Ah, interesting! Aha! I wonder what's in old DOS? Read me now! View. Oh I understand! That's fine, you can delete that. Aha! That's fine. Now then er I wan na get back onto your computer.

(33)

- *sí un chico que su herma na vive aqui el no vive aqui* (‘yes a kid whose sister lives here he doesn’t live here’)
- *no en- la hermana vive él no* (‘no in-the sister lives he doesn’t’)
- *pero es que la cosa fue la- de la siguiente manera compraron el viernes los números los tiraron a la mesa el despacho y el lunes cuando fueron hasta que no fueron a trabajar no se enteraron de nada* (‘but the thing was as follows- they bought the numbers on Friday, threw them on the office desk

and on Monday when they went until they went to work they didn't realize anything')

- *se encontraron con que les había salido el gordo y el cuponazo* ('they found out that they had won the big lottery prize and the coupon lottery')

English (32) shows the typical alternance of declaratives and interrogatives, as well as exclamatives and imperatives, of casual conversation (see Eggins and Slade 1997: 75), which determines the nature of the POD; that Spanish (33) does not have any interrogatives is to be put down simply to chance – (22), in the previous section, did include some. Practically all declaratives in (32) have a pronominal Subject as POD, more precisely the first-person singular *I*, reflecting that, as said in section 3, “much of our talk consists of messages concerned with ourselves” (Halliday and Matthiessen: 2014: 97). From a textual point of view, this indicates a continuity of the speaker as the orientation for what is to follow in each clause – including turns by different speakers, e.g. in the pair A: *I'm always sorting out people's computers for them.* B: *I see!* The Spanish excerpt (33), on the other hand, does not show this pervasiveness of pronominal PODs. While the necessity in the first exchanges of identifying the third-person referent – another favourite in casual conversation, after *I*, *you* and *we* (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 97) – accounts for the realization of explicit pronominal and non-pronominal POD Subjects (*un chico, la hermana, él*), once the referent is clear, the succession of PODs other than Subject starts, either in the form of Predicators (*compraron, fueron, no se enteraron, se encontraron*) or clitic Complements (*los [tiraron], les [había salido]*).

An interesting cross-linguistic contrast reflected by (32) and (33) is that, whereas topic continuation, an important feature in the construal of texture, is largely brought about in English by means of personal pronouns, Spanish alternates between these and, mostly, Predicators, as seen in previous sections. An additional feature of Spanish is that this continuity can also be indicated by means of Complements, realized as clitic PODs, as in the two cases indicated above, i.e. *los [tiraron], les [había salido]*. This points to an important contrast in the way the interpersonal and the textual metafunctions interplay in each language. The different configurations in, for instance, Spanish *los tiraron* and English *they threw them* obey primarily to interpersonal reasons; English uses the Mood arrangement Subject[^]Finite to make declaratives, whereas Spanish, where Mood does not play a role (see Arús-Hita 2020; Quiroz 2018; García and Gil 2011), realizes unmarked declaratives by means of (clitic Complement).Predicator. From an interpersonal perspective, these two elements – or just the Predicator when there is no preceding clitic – constitute the Negotiator, a key function in communicative exchange in Spanish (Quiroz 2008). From a textual perspective, the POD is just the clitic, as this is ideationally independent, i.e. it has participant status (Goal, Beneficiary...). Thus, whereas both *los tiraron* and *they threw them* include two elements each contributing to texture, interpersonal requirements dictate the angle from which such texture is construed.

There are some aspects in the construal of texture where English and Spanish show similarities. In both (32) and (33), we can see that the staging role of circumstances identified by Thompson and Thompson (2009), as discussed above, is not so relevant in casual conversation. The here and now, i.e. the situational context, can be said to provide the framing that circumstances bring to other genres (see Davies 1997: 57), whereas the turn-taking which characterizes conversation guarantees proper staging. However, when the conversation moves away from the here and now to a different temporal or spatial setting, circumstantial PODs are brought into the picture. Such is the case with *Last time I attempted it I drove into the gates* in (32) and *el lunes cuando fueron hasta que no fueron a traba jar no se enteraron de nada* in (33).

An important part of the texture of casual conversation is built by means of conversational interaction and the turns thereof. This explains that, as pointed out above, the literature on casual conversation tends to focus on the registerial and structural characteristics of this genre. Among those characteristics, the text chunks seen so far reflect, both for English and Spanish, the short nature of exchanges and clauses within these (Narbona Jiménez 2015) and the tendency to leave clauses unfinished, “either because they [speakers] run out of time or because they are interrupted” (Eggins and Slade 1997: 106). One consequence of this is that sometimes “the secondary clause is abandoned” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 460), which often results in a succession of juxtaposed primary clauses (as [17] in section 3), to the detriment of hypotaxis (Narbona Jiménez 2015: 173-176). Although these characteristics involve the end of the clause rather than its POD, the latter is also affected in the sense that interlocutors often need to make quick decisions about when and how to gain, or keep, the floor, and, of course, the POD plays an important role there (see Briz Gómez [2001: 44] for casual conversation as a game in which we play to win).

The fractured nature of casual conversation often comes along with repetitions, not only of part of the clause – e.g. three almost consecutive instances of *I’m always...* in (32), above, and two of *no tengo ningún* in (22), in section 4 – but also of whole clauses, e.g. *I’m always sorting out people’s computers for them*, again in (32). The combination of unfinished clauses and repetitions – which are lexical and not to be confused with recursion, i.e. the repetition of stages (see Ventola 1979: 281-283) – arguably results in a more ‘frayed’ texture for casual conversation than for other genres, notably written ones, in which writers, not having to cope with the fast pace and spontaneity of casual conversation, have more time to weave their text.¹¹ This may also explain the frequent use in casual conversation of linkers with a pragmatic rather than syntactic role (Briz Gómez 2001: 76), such as *Cos* in (34) and *pero* in (35), taken from (23) and (33), respectively.

¹¹ The use of terms like “fractured” or “frayed” does not imply that casual conversation is imperfect. Much on the contrary, as Halliday and Matthiessen state, “...not only is natural spoken language every whit as highly organized as writing ... but, more significantly, it is in the most un-selfmonitored spontaneous speech that people explore and expand their meaning potential (2014: 34).

(34) *Cos it's probably double the size of this one*

(35) *pero es que la cosa fue la- de la siguiente manera...*

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 603) draw our attention to this use of conjunction markers to indicate continuity rather than conjunction proper. Continuity markers are not limited to linkers; they are often realized by elements such as *Oh!*, *Ah!*, *Well* – with several instances of them in (23) and (32), above – or any other that may contribute to create such continuity. Such is the case with *Yes/Sí*, when not used to answer a question, e.g. both *yeah* and *yes* in (36) and *sí* in (37), the latter also including the continuity marker *pues* in the first turn.

(36) Hm, yeah. and er the company have told him his got to a. Cut back. Cut back. There goes the cafetiere. Hm, hm, yes.

(37) - *pues así cualquiera - sí claro* (- ‘lucky her’ [lit. ‘so this way, anyone’ – ‘yes, of course’])

A case could be made for continuity markers to play as important a role in casual conversation as circumstantial PODs in written genres. Whereas the asynchrony of written genres calls for the explicit staging and framing of discourse, the synchronous, spontaneous tug-of-war of casual conversation can be said to require special emphasis on the signalling of continuity to keep the conversation flowing in the right direction.¹² The combination of continuity markers and nuclear Themes as POD creates two different threads of texture, the former related to communicative exchange, and therefore primarily interpersonal, the latter, of textual nature, signalling the semantic continuity or discontinuity of participants in the POD. To differentiate it from the kind of texture found in written texts, we may call this ‘conversational texture’, a term mostly used in literary studies yet not completely alien to linguistics (see, for instance, Hoffmann [2012: 205] in the context of weblogs). The presence of interpersonal aspects in the construal of dialogic texture in casual conversation PODs reflects that, as claimed by Matthiessen and Slade, “conversations are primarily concerned with the interpersonal – the creation and maintenance of social relationships (2010: 376)”.

5.2 Thematic progression in casual conversation

Interpersonal considerations also spring up when looking at thematic progression in casual conversation, something to be expected given the dependence of thematic choices on Mood – for English – or Negotiator – for Spanish – requirements seen above. The same as with texture, research on thematic progression is usually applied to written discourse. It is however possible to speak of thematic progression in spoken genres, as shown, among others, by Taboada and Lavid (2003) for scheduling interactions and Ping (2005) for spontaneous conversation. Both studies are applied to English and identify a whole array of thematic development patterns ranging from the

¹² For Halliday, written language encodes phenomena as things that exist, whereas spoken language encodes them as things that happen “in a continuous onward flow” (1989: 97).

basic linear, constant and derived to more complex patterns such as boxed, gapped or holistic (Taboada and Lavid 2003:154-157; Ping 2005: 710-714).

The multifaceted approach of this paper to POD in casual conversation will keep us from delving into a detailed analysis of thematic progression, something which deserves a paper of its own. In this section we will simply make some observations based on the conversational fragments so far discussed and in light of the interpersonal and textual interplay already identified in the POD. English (32), above, with its very short moves and turns, provides a clear bird's-eye view of some defining characteristics of thematic progression in casual conversation. Perhaps the most notable of these is the gapped progression which is brought about by the succession of those moves and turns. Gapped progression is that "where there is intervening material between the Theme and its link to the previous discourse" (Taboada 2004: 89, after Dubois 1987). Let us consider the extract from (32) in Figure 1.

A: Er, I need a copy of Xtree
B: Er
A: I want to have a look at the
B: Erm, my is
A: I'm always carrying it.
B: Here it is.
A: I'm always sorting out people's computers for them.
B: Ah?
A: I said I always carry Xtree, I'm always sorting out people's computers for them.
B: I see!

Figure 1. Gapped constant thematic progression created by turn-taking in casual conversation

As we can see, all A turns have *I* as POD, accompanied by the hesitation interjection *Er* in the first turn. This creates a gapped constant thematic progression, with B turns as a succession of minor gaps, i.e. undeveloped intrusions (Ping 2005: 719). Speaker A thus appears as the one in control of the flow of the conversational exchange, all fully developed turns starting with a reference to herself, including the two moves in the last A turn.¹³ Speaker B, conversely, mostly provides hesitation markers (*Er, Erm, Ah?*), accompanied by a failed attempt at a meaningful intervention, i.e. *my is*, where not even the POD is successfully deployed, and two more meaningful yet totally procedural turns such as *Here it is* and *I see!*, the latter representing the only time when this speaker manages to include a reference to himself in the conversation.

The rapid turn-taking brought about by short turns, as we have just seen, is a characteristic of casual conversation which has been pointed out in the literature (Eggs and Slade 1997: 49). Although the same kind of fast-paced exchanges can also be found in Spanish – see some of the turns in (22), section 4 – future contrastive genre-based research may shed light on whether some languages are more prone to the rapid exchange of incomplete turns than others. Spanish (33), above, is less fractured than the

¹³ Information about speaker genders obtained from the *BNC* corpus documentation.

English sequence just discussed and yet some instances of gapped progression can be identified, notably in the opening exchanges, where references to a young man and his sister alternate across moves and turns, as shown in Figure 2, below. Precisely the need to establish a contrast between brother and sister motivates the expression of the Subject in this first exchange (*un chico, su hermana, él, la hermana, él*). After that, it is clear that the interlocutors are referring to both siblings, which results in the constant – with one minor gap, i.e. *los* referring to *los números* – progression shown in Figure 3 and the disappearance of Subjects. In line with what the previous discussion of texture revealed, thematic progression is now brought about by means of Predicators and clitic Complements, in contrast with the pervasiveness of personal pronouns as articulators of progression in English casual conversation.

- *sí un chico que su herma na vive aquí él no vive aquí*
 - *no en- la hermana vive él no*

Figure 2. Gapped thematic progression realized by Subjects in Spanish

- *compraron el viernes los numeros los tiraron a la mesa el despacho y el lunes cuando fueron hasta que no fueron a traba jar no se enteraron de nada*
 - *se enconTRArón con que les había salido el gordo y el cuponazo*

Figure 3. Thematic progression through Predicators and clitic Complements in Spanish

The use of clitic PODs in Spanish has consequences for thematic progression, too. This is reflected in Figure 3, where the clitic *los* refers to the rhematic *los números*, from the previous clause, thus enacting linear progression where English would typically resort to constant progression (*they bought...they threw them*). This shows that thematic progression is not necessarily as planned a resource in casual conversation as it is in written genres; rather, it often comes as a by-product of the arrangement of elements in conversational exchange. Interpersonal motivations thus once again prove to be the driving force in the unfolding of casual conversation, the different configurations of English Mood structure and Spanish Negotiator being accountable for crosslinguistic contrasts in thematic progression.

Before bringing this section to an end, it is worth pointing out a characteristic of casual conversation – extendable to other spoken genres and in contrast with written ones – which can be observed in the examples discussed and was mentioned in passing in 5.1: the use of the same pronominal realization, i.e. *I/yo* and *you/tú* for different referents. For instance, the last two turns in figure 1 have *I* as POD, first referring to speaker A and then to speaker B. Such is of course the essence of first- and second-person reference, yet, obvious as this may seem, it is still worth bringing it up because it explains that a dialogic exchange with a succession of turns with the same POD, e.g. *I/yo* (or the equivalent 1st person singular verbal ending in Spanish), does not represent a case of contiguous constant but of gapped constant progression.¹⁴ From the point of view of written genres, on which thematic progression patterns are usually modelled,

¹⁴ That is, gapped progression is not a progression type in itself. It rather turns whichever type of progression, in this case constant, into gapped, rather than contiguous (see Taboada and Lavid 2003: 9).

this might arguably be seen as an oddity. What is in any case clear is that the analysis of thematic progression in casual conversation provides further evidence that textual issues concerning the POD in this genre are very much determined by interpersonal considerations. In this case, we have seen that the actual turn-taking proper to dialogic exchange conditions the thematic progression patterns which are formed in the conversational flow.

6. Conclusion and Pointers to the Future

This paper set out to explore the different realizations, functions and interplays of clausal POD in English and Spanish casual conversation. This has revealed some clear crosslinguistic contrasts as well as similarities which, pending the exploration of POD in other languages, may point to generalizable characteristics of this genre (see Matthiessen 2004 about generalizations in typological descriptions).

Among the traits which are common to both languages, we have identified the following: In terms of POD realizations, these are sometimes determined by their grammatical context rather than by actual conversational choices made by speakers. Such is the case with the POD of some secondary clauses and, notably, PODs in relative clauses and indirect questions. Speaking of secondary clauses, both English and Spanish seem to share the tendency to leave them unrealized due to the pressures of the fast-paced conversational flow. From a more functional perspective, we have seen that PODs contribute to creating conversational texture, which is characterized by the interweaving of interpersonal and textual threads of meaning working together to push the conversation forward in a cohesive way. The spontaneity of casual conversation is reflected in the disruptions and repetitions of PODs, which contributes to making conversational texture more frayed than the texture of other genres. All in all, textual issues concerning the POD in this genre have shown to be much determined by interpersonal considerations, something which is also reflected in how dialogic exchange conditions thematic progression patterns. An example of this is the characteristic gapped constant progression created by turn-taking, often through the use of *I* or *you* for different referents (i.e. the interlocutors).

In terms of crosslinguistic contrasts, Spanish POD realizations have proved to be more varied and evenly distributed than English ones, mostly because of the higher flexibility of Spanish SPCA structure, which results from its non-reliance on the sequencing of Subject and Finite for the enactment of communicative exchange. Whereas English Subject and Theme tend to conflate as clausal POD, Spanish Theme often conflates with other elements of SPCA structure – notably the Predicator, realized by a verbal group whose inflectional ending has the same referential role as the pronominal Subject in English, i.e. signalling presuming reference. Sometimes, however, the fast, impromptu nature of casual conversation, helped by the situational context, allows English speakers to be less heedful of the requirements of Mood structure, i.e. Subject and Finite, and thus not express the Subject. This has textual consequences, the POD in

a declarative clause ‘exceptionally’ being the Predicator rather than the usual pronominal Subject (*Don't know, Don't really care*), i.e. in the manner of Spanish.

Another important point of crosslinguistic contrast concerns the presence in Spanish of clitic PODs, which are proper to conversational exchange as part of the Negotiator function and bring about a specific orientation of the clause from a Complement POD while English typically orients the clause from a Subject POD. This has consequences both for thematic progression, Spanish using linear where English will have constant, and the construal of texture, to which different elements of SPCA structure contribute in Spanish in contrast with the pivotal role of Subject in English. As seen, these two different ways of orienting the clause are ultimately motivated by interpersonal concerns, which prevail in casual conversation, clitics and Predicators in Spanish playing an active role in communicative exchange, which is enacted in English by the interplay of Subject and Finite within the Mood element. It could thus be said that different crosslinguistic interpersonal configurations bring about different interpersonal-textual couplings, i.e. “the way in which meanings combine” (Martin 2010: 19).

The findings in this paper arguably provide a rather complete view of POD in casual conversation. Although some of the traits identified are likely to be extendable to the realizations, functions and interplays of POD in other genres, cross-generic studies are needed before any claims can be made about which characteristics of POD are general and which genre-specific, as well as language-specific. As already mentioned, one such study has already been made on POD in English and Spanish academic writing (Arús-Hita, forthcoming). The next step in this long-term project will be to establish a crosslinguistic comparison between POD in these two genres so that our understanding of Theme as point of departure may gain a more comprehensive dimension.

In addition to the upcoming research announced above, the discussion in the preceding pages opens a number of avenues for future research. Firstly, results should be validated with the extension of the study to include other variants of each language. The neat crosslinguistic contrasts resulting from the comparison of standard British English and European Spanish may not be so clear-cut if the sample becomes more varietyally complex. For instance, speakers of other Englishes may be more prone to disposing of the Subject in declaratives or the Finite in interrogatives, whereas other Spanish variants may use more POD Subjects than European Spanish, all of which would bring both languages closer together.

Some other specific areas deserving future research have been identified at different points in the paper: how interpersonal and textual constraints affect the choice of experiential participants as POD in casual conversation (see Arús-Hita 2004 for a related crosslinguistic study in fiction); whether the tendency to drop secondary clauses, or leave them unfinished, is a generalizable feature of casual conversation or cross-linguistic differences can be identified; how the relatively scant use of *se*-constructions in Spanish and passive constructions in English in casual conversation compares to their use in more formal genres; the status of clause-initial clitics as full-fledged POD, as

defended in this paper, vs. the view of clitics as Predicator-dependent; and, perhaps most importantly for a comprehensive understanding of Theme, whether different thematic waves may be identified in the clause, one of which would be Theme as point of departure, interacting differently in different languages and accounting for some of the disagreements on Theme-related issues in the literature.

Despite all these open questions, the research presented in this paper has arguably provided enough evidence that POD plays an important role in casual conversation. This confirms Eggins and Slade's (1997: 6) claim that casual conversation is highly structured and functionally motivated, something which, as we have seen, can be traced down to the lexicogrammar of moves and turns. Although clearly determined by interpersonal motivations, POD in casual conversation is also textually relevant, providing the necessary resources to push the conversation forward. This juggling of the textual and the interpersonal defines the essence of conversational texture as well as of its main driving force: Theme as point of departure.

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