GRAMMATICAL DESCRIPTION AND CORPUS EVIDENCE: *SUPPOSING, ASSUMING, CONSIDERING*

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The use of large corpora provides abundant evidence of the actual usage of grammatical structures and function words and reveals the language behaviour of native speakers. One of the principles of corpus linguistics is that meaning is contextual: we can only identify the meaning of items by investigating the contexts in which they occur. In this paper I use data from a large corpus of English to describe the usage of three grammar words: *supposing (that), assuming (that), considering (that)*. By analysing the regularities in the context of use of these grammar words I attempt to describe their function in discourse and to reveal what one must know in order to use and understand these words correctly. The results show that *supposing (that), assuming (that)* and *considering (that)* convey different implications concerning the factuality of the clauses where they occur.

1. INTRODUCTION

Corpus analysis is a useful method of distinguishing the meaning of grammatical words which seem to overlap and of investigating the differences in use between them (cf. Kennedy. 1991; Kjellmer, 1989). This paper is a study of the interrelation and discourse function of three grammar words which morphologically are the present participles of mental verbs: *supposing (that), assuming (that)* and *considering (that)*. Their use as grammar words is the result of a process of grammaticalisation. Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1002) use the term "marginal subordinators" to refer to forms such as *supposing (that), assuming (that),* and *considering (that)* and describe them as conjunctions which retain some properties characteristic of verbs. In this paper I will try to answer the following

questions: 1. Which is the grammatical status of these words? 2. Which are the differences and similarities in use between them? 3. Which is their discourse function? I will first review briefly the treatment of these words in some recent grammar books and dictionaries, and then I will use corpus evidence to answer the questions above.

Corpus-based research has revealed that linguistic features are used in association with other linguistic features, and that the meaning of both lexical items and grammatical constructions should be studied by taking account of their association patterns (Biber, 1996: 173). The basic assumptions underlying corpus linguistics is that linguistics should be concerned with the study of meaning, that form and meaning are inseparable, and that meaning should be examined in authentic instances of use (Stubbs, 1993). Or, as Firth puts it (1935: 37), "the complete meaning of a word is always contextual and no study of meaning apart from a complete context can be taken seriously".

This study is based on the Bank of English corpus at COBUILD.[1] When the study was carried out the corpus had a size of 300 million words. It consists of texts from various sources, which represent written and spoken discourse from different varieties of English: conversation, American, Australian and British newspapers, radio broadcast, American and British books, magazines, ephemera. In order to explore the corpus I used the software at COBUILD, which includes a concordancer and statistical programs which order collocates (i.e. items that tend to co-occur with the word selected for analysis, or *keyword*) by significance. The concordancer allowed me to search for all the occurrences of the linking words *supposing (that), assuming (that), considering (that)*. I took a sample of 200 instances of each form to analyse them in printouts with a large context (350 characters).

2. Supposing, assuming, considering

Conditionals have aroused the interest of many scholars, who have engaged in classifying and describing the different kinds of conditionals, often from a truth-value perspective (cf. Bennet, 1995; Comrie, 1986; Edgington, 1995; Jackson, 1990) or in analysing their topic status and function in discourse (Ford and Thompson, 1986; Haiman, 1978; Schiffrin, 1992). Much literature on the meaning and pragmatics of conditionals is concerned with the conjunction *if*, or with items that are unequivocally conditional conjunctions, such as *unless* (cf. Bree, 1985; Dudman, 1984; Haegeman, 1984; James, 1986; Traugott, 1997). There has been little

research on the meaning and use of other conditional connectives (cf. Nordman, 1985; Visconti, 1996).

The items analysed here have been largely neglected in the literature. Quirk et al. (1985: 998) list these items among the complex subordinators ending with optional *that*. Usually *supposing* and *assuming* only occur in lists of conditional conjunctions, but no information is provided as to their use, although it is acknowledged that a comprehensive study of conditionals should account for the use of these conjunctions (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1983: 352). Quirk et al. (1985: 1097) include *assuming (that)* and *supposing (that)* within a group of subordinators that can introduce an indirect condition. An indirect condition is an open[3] condition that is "dependent on an implicit speech act of the utterance" (e.g. "if you don't mind my saying so...", "I met your girlfriend Carolina last night, if Carolina is your girlfriend", "If you are going my way, I need a lift back"). *Considering* is described by Quirk et al. (1985: 707) as a preposition denoting respect. They state that "*considering* is used like 'in view of' (taking into consideration), often 'if one takes into consideration the rather surprising fact that...'". Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) consider it an additive connector which expresses reference (i.e. used to introduce a topic), e.g. "Considering this,...". Chalker (1996: 24-25) describes *considering (that)* as belonging to the same group of linking words as *assuming (that)* and *supposing (that)*: conditional linkers that are participles in form.

Dictionaries do not always provide separate entries for these words, sometimes including them in the same entry as the corresponding verb. The COBUILD dictionary lists *considering* and *assuming* in separate entries, but *supposing* is included in the entry for *suppose*. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (henceforth OALDCE) lists *considering* and *supposing* in separate entries, but does not deal with the meaning of *assuming*, not even in the entry for *assume*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* only lists *considering* in a separate entry from that of the verb, describing it as "an absolute use of the present participle".

If we compare the definitions provided in these dictionaries we can make the following observations: they do not agree on whether *assuming* and *supposing* are different grammatical categories from the verb; they do not agree on the grammatical status of these words when they are considered as different from the verb (e.g. while in the COBUILD dictionary *considering* is classified as a conjunction, a preposition, or a sentence adverb, in the OALDCE it is classified as a conjunction or a preposition); some of the verbs from which these grammar words derive are used to

define the other words, which makes it more difficult to see the difference between them, as the definitions below show:

— *Supposing*. Suppose and supposing are used when you are *considering* a possible situation or course of action and trying to decide what results or effects it would have (conj. coord) (COBUILD)
— *Supposing* (conjunction). If we *assume* the fact or the possibility that. Suppose. Used in the imperative (To make a suggestion). *Consider* a proposal (OALDCE)

Although there are similarities between these words (i.e. the three of them contain a conditional element), there are also clear differences. This is evident if we consider the factuality of the clause they introduce. Kjellmer (1989: 257) makes a distinction between *factual, non-factual* and *counterfactual clauses*, which is very useful for our discussion. He defines a *factual clause* as that which "states what the speaker perceives as a fact", a *non-factual clause* as that which "contains an open condition and refers to an imagined situation which is not claimed to represent a fact", and a *counterfactual clause* as that which "contains a hypothetical condition which does not conform to the speaker's conception of the real state of affairs". It should be pointed out that the factuality dimension is a cline. As Thompson and Longacre (1985) noted, it includes more than three points: true (factual), possibly true (non-factual) and not true (counterfactual). There may be further gradation, including low likelihood clauses (i.e. events that are considered quite unlikely but not impossible), and high likelihood clauses (i.e. events that are considered quite likely but are not presented as facts).

Considering (that), assuming (that) and *supposing (that)* can be described in terms of their place in a cline of factuality.

(1) Considering he entered this year's tournament as one of the favourites, the tall Englishman's golf was nothing short of hellish.
(2) Assuming that he does cut taxes for individuals, Mr. Clark has the choice of reducing taxes on income or taxes on spending.
(3) Supposing I decide to re-marry (about as likely as a transplant). I can't quite picture my bride-to-be.

Example (1) entails that "he entered this year's tournament as one of the favourites". The clause introduced by *considering* is presented by the speaker as a fact. It is, therefore, a factual clause. In (2) the speaker does not commit himself/herself to the truth of the proposition

introduced by *assuming*. This proposition presents a possible situation. not a fact. This is, thus, a non-factual clause. However, the use of *assuming* suggests that there are expectations that the situation is or can be a fact. In (2) the speaker does not know whether Mr. Clark is going to cut taxes for individuals, but he/she has reasons to believe so (e.g. he has promised to do it). That is, the speaker has high epistemic expectations concerning the eventual truth of the proposition. We could consider, therefore, that rather than non-factual, this is a semi-factual clause. Finally, the clause introduced by *supposing* in (3) presents an event that is quite unlikely but not impossible. It is quite evident that the subject "I" does not intend to remarry. The low-likelihood meaning conveyed by *supposing* is reinforced by "about as likely as a transplant".

The fact that these conjunctions can be placed in a cline of factuality is associated with the non-discreteness of the categories used for the classification of adverbial clauses (König, 1986). Harris (1986: 71) remarks that there is "a semantic spectrum ranging from causal clauses, in which the causal link between subordinate and main clause is asserted, via conditional sentences, in which the causal link is hypothesised and proposed as a basis on which to continue the verbal interaction, to concessive clauses". This spectrum accounts for the shifts of meaning of the connectives used with these values.

Table 1 shows the number of occurrences of *considering, assuming* and *supposing* when they are grammar words:

	in a clause or group in initial position	in a clause or group in final position	Total
Considering	349	1.142	1.491
Assuming	797	466	1.263
Supposing	228	152	382

Table 1.
Occurrences of considering, assuming and supposing

3. CONJUNCTIONS, PREPOSITIONS, OR ADVERBS

In order to discuss the category to which these items belong we should make reference to the concept of grammaticalisation. Traugott and Heine (1991: 1198) define grammaticalisation as the process or the set of linguistic changes whereby "lexical items in the course of time acquire a

new status as grammatical, morpho-syntactic forms, and in the process come to code relations that either were not coded before or were coded differently". The process of grammaticalisation reflects the fact that the boundaries between categories are not discrete and that a lexical item in certain uses cañ become a grammatical item (Hopper and Traugott, 1993). According to Lehman (1991: 493), this process implies a loss of substance, both semantic and phonological substance, and a loosening of the selection restrictions. *Assuming, considering* and *supposing* derive from the absolute use of the present participle of the corresponding verbs, but now they function as linking words that connect parts of a discourse. To see to what extent *supposing, considering* and *assuming* have undergone a process of grammaticalisation we can compare the examples below:

(4) (a) ...the cloud remains that consumers may fail to adopt the product, *considering* it to be revolutionary.

(b) His rise has actually been meteoric, *considering* that he is now 38 and didn't even start 'getting serious' till his mid-twenties.

(5) (a) Miller was asked to test for the role of Esmeralda, but almost didn't go, *assuming* that every actress in Hollywood would be up for it.

(b) This will allow the budget deficit to come down to the Maastricht limit (3 per cent of GDP), *assuming* that real GDP growth is around 2.5-3 per cent per annum in the next two years.

(6) (a) ...whereupon all the other customers fled in disorder, *supposing* this wild man of the woods to be alive with vermin.

(b) "The middle and lower classes don't want to buy Danish cheese," said one local observer. Yet even *supposing* shortages do worsen, the same source doubted if there would be much of a backlash.

While in (4a), (5a) and (6a) *considering, assuming* and *supposing* are present participles whose subject occurs explicitly in the main clause ("consumers", "Miller", "all the other customers"), in (4b), (5b) and (6b) *considering, assuming* and *supposing* are conjunctions, which, therefore, need not be in concord with the subject of the main clause.

The original verbal use can, however, influence the syntactic environment of the linking word, as can be seen in example (7).

(7) The resurrection and ascension, supposing them to have taken place, admitted of public and ocular demonstration.

The change from lexical to grammatical status occurs only in a specific context: where the verbs are complemented by *that*-clauses. Although *assume* can be used in the following co-texts: "to assume that something is true", "to assume power, responsibility or control", "to assume a particular quality or appearance", "to assume a particular expression or way of behaving" (COBUILD), in the grammaticalisation process *assuming* has only selected the first meaning. *Assume, consider* and *suppose* are mental verbs which in the pattern "Verb+ *that*- clause" imply that the subject is engaged in an act of "visualising" a situation. The derivation of conjunctive use from verbal use is made possible by the semantics and pragmatics of the verbs. Let's take, for instance, *suppose*. Wierzbicka (1987: 263) points out that this verb has the component "I don't know if it is true". This is the reason why the sentences with *suppose* conjure up an imaginary or hypothetical state of affairs. As Wierzbicka (1987: 263) puts it, "In inviting someone to suppose something, we are not inviting them to commit themselves to a thought, however tentatively. On the other hand, the idea that X may be true seems compatible with the purely hypothetical use of *suppose*."

Supposing (that) only occurs in the corpus as a conjunction. It is followed by a finite complement clause:

(8) Supposing you out-sprint the mob on your heels. The boss will give you your job back.

Although very rarely, it also occurs in the corpus followed by a non-finite complement clause, which reflects its verbal origin (e.g. 7).

Assuming (that) can be a conjunction (e.g. 9) and a preposition (e.g. 10):

(9) Assuming the strike goes ahead, the government cannot count on public support if it decides to take on the unions.

(10) Iran can probably survive into 1992, assuming a good harvest next year.

When *assuming* functions as a preposition it is followed by an indefinite noun group (e.g. 10).

Considering can be a conjunction (e.g. 11), a preposition (e.g. 12) or an adverb (e.g. 13), although there are very few examples of adverbial *considering* in the corpus.

(11) Considering he entered this year's tournament as one of the favourites, the tall Englishman's golf was nothing short of hellish.

(12) It was not a bad day, considering the volatility of the market in recent times.

(13) All successful footballers have those problems when they retire. My health's in good shape, considering.

When *considering* is a preposition it is followed by specific sets of nouns: grammatical metaphors[4] (e.g. 12) or carrier nouns[5] (Ivanic, 1991), always preceded by a definite determiner (usually the article *the*) (e.g. "the number of reports", "the size of the boat", "the present economic situation", "the success of the recent promotion", "the disparity in skill and stature"). What is interesting is that both carrier nouns and grammatical metaphors preceded by a definite determiner entail the existence of something, that is, they have a similar status to that of factual clauses. The definite article triggers off an existential presupposition. "Considering the disparity in skill and stature" is similar to "considering how disparate in skill and stature they are" or to "considering that they are so disparate in skill and stature". Or in the clause: "I think the number of errors is quite acceptable considering the number of transactions", "considering the number of transactions" is similar to "considering that the number of transactions is quite high".

4. Meaning in discourse

I will discuss separately each of these words, to describe their meaning in discourse. For that purpose I will examine whether they usually introduce initial adverbial clauses or final adverbial clauses and analyse the linguistic elements which point to their status in the factual/non-factual cline.

Corpus-based research has revealed that certain items show a tendency to collocate in the company of other words, forming collocations, and that words also tend to occur in specific syntactic environments (Sinclair, 1991; Baker *et al.*, 1993). The items that collocate with a word and the syntactic environments where it typically occurs provide information about the meaning and discourse function of the word.

4.1. Supposing

According to Chalker (1996: 26) the whole sentence where *supposing (that)* occurs "is concerned with considering the consequences of imaginary or hypothetical situations". Thus, the *supposing* clause introduces

hypothetical events and states. Frequently, *supposing* conveys low likelihood and counterfactuality, and co-occurs with "backshifted" verb forms (Quirk et al. 1985: 1092), used in conditional clauses to express unlikely or impossible states or events: present tense is used to refer to future time, past tense is used to refer to future or present time and past perfect is used to refer to past time, as in the following examples:

(14) Supposing he gave up. Do you think you might give up then?
(15) He only had an expedition to Copenhagen, but supposing he had gone there every week for a year, it might have had some effect, who knows? I'm very glad he didn't.

Low likelihood and counterfactuality are conveyed both by the linking word and by the verbal form. While in (14) the verbal forms imply futurity, in (15) they imply an impossible action.

However, the verbal forms in the clauses where *supposing* occurs are not always backshifted, as the examples below show:

(16) The full official ration for the A tickets, supposing it was available at the market, which it never was, would average around six hundred calories a day.
(17) Supposing that he *does find* out his wife was executed here? I do not see how he could - but just supposing that *did happen?*

Rather than expressing time the verbal forms used in *supposing* clauses express the degree of the speaker's commitment to the fulfilment of the action. In example (17) "does find" and "did find" have the same temporal reference. But, after stating "I do not see how he could" the speaker considers it appropriate to use a form which indicates a lower degree of confidence.

The meaning of low likelihood that *supposing (that)* clauses usually convey is also reflected in other verbal forms, such as the subjunctive or past tense modal verbs, both in the clause introduced by *supposing* and in the main clause.

(18) What I want to know is why gnomes are fooling around here, just supposing there *might* possibly be any gnomes.

Low likelihood is sometimes stressed with the particles *just* (the t-score[6] of the association between *just* and *supposing* is 2.587543) or *even* (the t-score of the association between *even* and *supposing* is 2.753421).

Just supposing and *even supposing* could be considered complex conjunctions similar to *even if*, which has a non-factual meaning (Kjellmer, 1989). Frequently, this combination is preceded by *but*, which emphasises the non-factual status of the sentence.

(19) It's too late and not really necessary for me to try and acquire it – even supposing I could.
(20) The nurses will call the force in as soon as they see him. But just supposing he manages to slip past without anyone noticing, you're to ring your call bell the moment he comes in here.

Sometimes, the speaker stresses the low likelihood of the event by using expressions that make it clear that the clause presents a hypothetical situation which is not a fact.

(21) Supposing I decide to re-marry (*almost as likely as a transplant*)...
(22) I don't know your Bishop but I very much doubt whether we would have enough in common to understand each other. Even supposing that I wished to help you, *which I don't.*
(23) Supposing, *by a great leap of faith*, that the policy-makers do at last begin to get their act together...

The *supposing* clause may have three different positions in relation to the main clause. It may occur in initial position (e.g. 24) and in final position (e.g. 25), although final position is very rare. Additionally, it may also stand on its own (e.g. 26), in which case it is usually, although not necessarily, dependent on a previous or following clause.

(24) Supposing this approach works, what sort of scale are we talking about before this may be useful?
(25) The gamekeeper would never take a deskjob, supposing he could find one.
(26) Maybe I am penny-pinching about my children's future life. Supposing he's right and I do die tomorrow? Maybe I should take out an extra policy.

Since different positions have different discourse meaning, this factor has to be taken into account when describing the use of *supposing* in discourse. When the *supposing* clause occurs in end position, it completes the meaning of the previous clause (Winter, 1982), suggesting quite an improbable possibility. For that reason, the verbal group in the *supposing*

clause includes frequently the modal *could.* and the verbal group in the main clause tends to include *would.*

(27) Killing him *would* be even more dangerous. Just supposing anyone *could* do that (which I rather doubt).

The function of the *supposing* clause is to comment on the low likelihood of the action presented in the previous main clause.

The occurrence of the *supposing* clause in initial position is much more frequent. Winter (1982: 90) states that adverbial clauses in front position usually "refer backward to the topic of the immediately preceding clause(s)". Frequently, the *supposing* clause introduces a fragment which clarifies or complements what has already been said, by proposing a hypothetical situation. With this function, *supposing* collocates with nouns of discourse reference which include the feature non-factual in their meaning, such as *possibility, example, question, issue.* They are labelling nouns (cf. Francis, 1994), whose meaning has to be specified in the subsequent stretch of text.

(28) For me this raises an intriguing *possibility*: supposing such a priest has married and become an Anglican priest but now wishes to return to the Roman Catholic Church...

(29) Another *question* often asked is: supposing there are such things as spirits, discarnate entities, how come they are so wise and all-knowing, when they may have...

(30) Let me give you an *example*. Supposing you come here with your hernia and you say...

The *supposing* clause can precede a question, in order to introduce a hypothetical situation, not likely to happen, and to ask about the consequences of the fact if it comes to be true.

(31) But supposing a chap in a wheelchair for that matter wins, mm. the Thee As Marathon. Is he the champion?

(32) Supposing your clients don't pay up on time, then where will you be?

The clause where *supposing* occurs may also be an interrogative clause itself. In this case there is always an implicit question about the effects.

(33) —You could have asked someone where I was.
     —Oh, yeah? And supposing they'd said you were taking Wendy?

In example (33) the question: "What would have happened?" is implicit after "And supposing they'd say you were taking Wendy?". The purpose of the clause is always to make the hearer think about the consequences. Since *supposing* introduces a hypothetical situation it usually incorporates a modality meaning of possibility.

(34) Supposing she couldn't stand the thought of mating with Renato and changed her mind at the last moment?
(35) I'm nervous. We've been set up. Supposing we've been recognized? Supposing Edwin gets to know? Supposing we're spied on?

The meaning in example (34) is "She may not have been able to stand the thought of mating with Renato and may have changed her mind at the last moment". The epistemic meaning conveyed by *supposing* explains that it can be used to express a criticism or a reproach, when the hearer is requested to think about the negative consequences of his/her actions. In the following example the *supposing* clause has the same meaning as "you might have fallen and broken a hip".

(36) Don't be a bloody fool. Supposing you *fell* and broke a hip?

Given that *supposing* involves thinking about the consequences, it is sometimes used with a verb in present tense to make a suggestion.

(37) "I don't suppose we could get your old banger going, Joe?" Bob Gath put it. "Supposing we give it a jump start". Joe nodded. "It is worth a try".

In the example above *supposing* is used to indicate that if they give the banger a jump start they may get it going.

4.2. Assuming

The clauses introduced by *assuming* show a correlation of tense and time that reveals their semifactual status (i.e. the writer does not commit himself/ herself to the truth of the proposition and does not take it as a fact, but presents it as very likely to be true). Thus, there are not backshifted verbal forms.

(38) The show's debut is set for fall 1990, assuming enough TV stations sign up.

(39) Assuming you didn't draw undue attention to yourself by turning up with jeans tucked in a pair of shocks, you were home and dry.

However, occasionally past tense is used in the corpus to express present time, in which case the clause expresses a hypothetical (contrary to fact or quite unlikely) situation. In these cases *assuming* has a similar meaning to *supposing*.

(40) (a) Assuming you were a major drug dealer, would you use your phone?

(b) Assuming you lived in a Barrio like El Dorado, would you want to escape?

Whether past tense refers to past or to present time is indicated by the context and by the relation between the verbal forms in the main clause.

(41) Assuming that people actually used the service, it would be cheaper to run than a supermarket built on a prime retail site.

(42) Assuming that Franco was aware of the implications of what he was reading out, he seemed to be announcing his support for Arrese's draft of the "constitutional" framework.

In example (41) past tense refers to present or future time, since the proposition refers to a hypothetical or imaginative situation. In example (42) past tense refers to past time.

Assuming is usually associated with the expression of inference. Quirk et al. (1985: 1092) point out that *assuming (that)* is used in "open conditions, which the speaker assumes were, are, or will be fulfilled, and from which a proposition is deduced" and Chalker (1996: 25) considers that *assuming (that)* implies a meaning of the kind "if we assume that one thing is true, then a second thing must also be true". However, the meaning is rather "in order to accept that something is true, first a previous condition has to be fulfilled". The *assuming* clause presents a condition which is necessary for the truth of the main clause, and which, owing to its semifactual status, is presented as very likely to be fulfilled. The speaker is not really interested in presenting a conditional or consequence relation but in the information provided in the main clause. The *assuming* clause is only used to inform of the condition to be fulfilled so that the proposition in the main clause can be true.

(43) The new Parliament will be prevented from using its tax powers
      until at least 2002, assuming labour has a majority.
(44) It is advisable to have an ΓΥHF card, otherwise you will have to pay
      an extra 25 kr, assuming you are admitted to the hostel.

We can compare (43) with (43'):

(43') The new Parliament will be prevented from using its tax powers
       until at least 2002 if labour has a majority.

In (43) the speaker is not interested in the relation between the
clauses, but in stating that "the new Parliament will be prevented from
using its tax powers until at least 2002". The speaker takes it for granted
that "labour will have a majority" but allows for the possibility of this not
happening. In (43') the speaker is interested in the consequences of the
conditional clause.

The taken-for-granted status of the *assuming* clause is reflected in
the fact that it mostly occurs in front position (see Table 1), and includes
predicates that indicate "no change" or "expected event". The t-score of
the association between *assuming* and *no* is (3.627441):

(45) (a) Assuming *nothing* untoward *happens...*
      (b) Assuming *no further* bad surprises...
(46) (a) Assuming rates *remain constant...*
      (b) Assuming *unchanged* interest rates..
      (c) Assuming that he *stays...*
      (d) Assuming investments performances *were the same...*
(47) (a) Assuming a ban on the Ukrainian champions *is confirmed...*
      (b) Assuming congress *carries out the agreement...*

Winter (1982: 91) states that "the main contextual feature that
distinguishes adverbial clauses in front position is their very strong
tendency to refer backward to the topic of the immediately preceding
clause(s)". The adverbial clauses in front position present the information
as known or taken for granted. The subsequent main clause presents
new information in the context of what has been said in the dependent
clause. *Assuming* clauses are pragmatically presupposed, both in
front and final position. *Assuming* introduces the taken-for-granted
circumstances, which are considered to be known by the receivers. If
these circumstances do not hold then the proposition in the main clause
is not true.

(48) Taxis are easy to find, assuming it is not raining.

The *assuming* clause can also precede a question, introducing what should be taken for granted in order to answer it. In the context of a question the *assuming* clause may have a semifactual status, as in example (49):

(49) (a) Assuming you are ready to take the plunge into parenthood, which of the following reasons tops your list?
    (b) Assuming that gravity exerts a downward force of 10N/kg, on both of them, what is the total weight of Paul and his bike?

Or it may have a counterfactual status, with backshifted verb forms. In this case it is very similar to a clause introduced by *supposing* (see example 40).

4.3. CONSIDERING

The clauses introduced by *considering* show the relation between tenses and time typical of factual statements, and backshifted forms never occur.

(50) Considering how gloomy the Americans are at the moment it is mildly surprise that they did not vote for more change.

The use of *considering* as a sentence adverb reflects clearly the factual status that this function word implies. In the following examples *considering* presupposes that the factual proposition is already known by the receiver.

(51) (a) Not something to chase him all over the damn county for. Considering.
    (b) I can think of nothing more to say than "how beautiful she looks, considering".

Considering introduces an indirect reason clause, that is, a clause which provides a reason that "is not related to the situation in the matrix clause, but is a motivation of the implicit speech act of the utterance, e.g. *Percy is in Washington, for he phoned me from there*" (Quirk et al., 1985: 1104). *Considering* expresses an internal (i.e. knowledge-based) cause-effect relationship (see Martin, 1992). It presents the knowledge on

which the speaker's assertion is based, serving the rhetorical organisation
of the text.

The main clause can be a question or a declarative clause. When it
is followed by a question, the *considering* clause is used to introduce
and remind the hearer of a fact that should be taken into account to
answer the question and to make sure that this fact is shared knowledge.

(52) Considering it is illegal in this country to call yourself a doctor
      without having a doctorate of some kind, exactly what is Dr. Alex
      Paterson a doctor of?
(53) Considering that sales have increased dramatically in the last three
      years and that the production cost of each disc has fallen to the
      floor, why do CDs still cost much?

The speaker in (52) and (53) is asking the hearer to provide an
explanation after having weighed up the previous arguments.

With declarative clauses, the *considering* clause always introduces
the reason for the evaluation presented in the main clause, an evaluation
that may be contrary to expectation. In example (50) the evaluation of
the fact that "(Americans) did not vote for more change" as "mildly
surprise" relies on the fact that "(Americans) are gloomy at the moment".
This is very clearly shown in the collocates of *considering*. The main
clause tends to contain evaluative terms, usually positive (e.g. *good, not
bad, reassuring, disappointing*) and terms belonging to the semantic
field of "surprise" (e.g. *surprisingly, amazing, miracle, surprise, astonish*).
The evaluative items are often modified by adverbs of high degree with
an attitudinal meaning (e.g. *extraordinarily, remarkably*).

(54) It is generally accepted he was a gifted scholar. *An impressive
      achievement*, considering that he was the self-educated son of a
      stonemason.
(55) The female tournament attracted 1,200 customers for the week. *Not
      bad*, considering that roubles are so tight.
(56) "When she wants something she gets it. She shouts, she doesn't
      cry." *No surprise*, considering that dad is Yasser Arafat, the chairman
      of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.
(57) Considering that the ANC's armed struggle has been going on for
      nearly thirty years, there has been *extraordinarily* little carnage.

Usually the *considering* clause introduces adverse circumstances,
which would lead to the expectation of adverse results. That is why *not*

bad (e.g. 55) precedes very frequently the *considering* clause. However, the expectation is not always that there should be bad results. *Considering* is normally used to justify an unexpected evaluation. This is reflected not only in the collocations of *considering* in the main clause, but also in its own clause. *But* is used frequently preceding *considering*.

(58) I've since read a book explaining how to tend a ceiling and realise I did it the wrong way. But considering I've never tried anything like this before, I suppose it worked reasonably well.

It also collocates with expressions which indicate high degree, such as *how+ adjective* or *how much*.

(59) A pair of trousers would cost 150 pounds. Considering how comfortable a well-fitting pair of trousers can be, this is actually very good value for money.

As we have said *considering* introduces the internal reason for the speaker's belief or evaluation. Thus, the main clause usually includes items that reveal the speaker's involvement and his/her degree of commitment to the proposition, such as hedges (e.g. *I think*) or epistemic modals.

(60) Also, the article stated that the travellers don't have a spokesman. Considering that they are being debated in parliament (...) *I think* it is in their best interest to get one.

In (60) the dependent clause acts as an argument that supports the writer's opinion that "it is in the best interest of the travellers to get a spokesman".

The *considering* clause may occur in initial position (e.g. 57) or final position (e.g. 54-56). As has been said, *considering* introduces a factual clause and occurs in the context of factual structures (e.g. that-clauses, definite noun phrases). Thus, when the clause occurs in initial position, it introduces the known context within which the following evaluation should be interpreted.

When the *considering* clause occurs in final position, the preceding main clause always includes an evaluation.

(61) Sunderland have begun well in their pursuit of that aim, considering the quality of their early opposition - Wolves (won), Leicester (lost), Norwich and Vale (both drawn).

Most often what precedes the *considering* clause in final position is a noun or adjective phrase, resulting from the omission of the subject and the copula in a clause with the syntactic structure: "subject+ copula+ complement of_the subject (evaluating element)" (e.g. 54-56).

5. Concluding remarks

Linguists engaged in corpus-based research have pointed out that the description of grammar words has been traditionally based on intuition and on scarce data rather than on reliable empirical evidence (Kjellmer, 1989; Kennedy, 1991). This paper illustrates a corpus-based approach to the description of grammar. We are in a position now to answer the questions at the beginning of the paper: 1. Which is the grammatical status of these words? 2. Which are the differences and similarities in use between them? 3. Which is their discourse function?

Supposing (that), assuming (that) and *considering (that)* are grammar words that have acquired this grammatical status as the result of a process of grammaticalisation, which accounts for the fact that they maintain some verbal features and occur in structures typical of verbal groups. *Supposing (that)* has been described as a conjunction, *assuming (that)* as a conjunction and a preposition and *considering (that)* as a conjunction, a preposition, and an adverb. A key question in elucidating the category of these items is: Which language units follow them (i.e. clauses, groups)? *Supposing (that)* is followed by clauses, and *assuming (that)* and *considering (that)* are followed by clauses or nominal groups. But there are restrictions regarding the nominal groups that these words precede. We have seen that *assuming* is followed by indefinite noun groups (e.g. "assuming a good harvest") and that *considering* is followed by carrier nouns or grammatical metaphors within a definite noun group. In all these cases the nominal group does not refer to an object, but to a proposition, which is typically realised by a clause (e.g. "assuming a good harvest" is equivalent to "assuming that there is a good harvest" and "considering the volatility of the market in recent time" in example (12) is equivalent to "considering that the market is very volatile in recent times"). Similarly, when *considering* is an adverb, making sense of the utterance requires accessing to non-explicit knowledge. Thus, these three words, which derive from the verbs *suppose, assume* and *consider* in the pattern "verb+ complementiser *that*", introduce propositions.

The difference in meaning between these items can be accounted for in terms of factuality. We have seen that the clauses that these words

introduce could be placed in a scale of factuality, which explains that *considering* clauses are used to express cause and *supposing* clauses can be used to introduce hypothetical conditions. If we accept that there is a semantic spectrum ranging from causal clauses to concessive clauses, we can account for the overlaps and differences between these linking words and for their shifts in meaning. *Considering* is a causal linking word, while *assuming* and *supposing* are conditional. The difference concerning factuality between the clauses where these items occur is reflected in other differences in grammatical selections, such as the use of tenses or the selection of definite or indefinite noun groups.

Discourse function has also been examined with reference to the concept of factuality. The *supposing* clause expresses a counterfactual/ hypothetical situation, which accounts for its use in the context of different pragmatic functions: to ask about consequences, to express complaints, etc. The *assuming* clause presents a condition which is necessary for the truth of the main clause, and which is presented as taken for granted knowledge. Finally, the *considering* clause introduces the internal reason for the evaluation presented in the main clause.

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NOTES

1. I am grateful to Collins COBUILD for their permission to use this corpus, from which all the examples in this paper have been taken.

2. The distinction between *factual, non-factual and counterfactual* clauses is present in most descriptions of conditional relationships (see Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1983; Thompson and Longacre, 1985; Givón, 1990).

3. Quirk et al. (1985: 1091) distinguish between open conditions, which are neutral and "leave unresolved the question of the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the condition, and hence also the truth of the proposition expressed in the matrix clause", and hypothetical conditions, which express "the speaker's belief that the condition will not be fulfilled (...), is not fulfilled (...) or was not fulfilled".

4. The term "grammatical metaphor" is used to refer to a realisation of semantic meaning which is not the most basic or *congruent* one. The congruent or basic realisation of a *process* is a verb, that of an attribute is an adjective. Thus, in example (12) the congruent realisation would be "...considering that the market is very volatile in recent times". For an extensive discussion and exemplification of *grammatical metaphor* see Martin (1992: 406-17).

5. *Carrier nouns* (Ivanic, 1991) are countable abstract nouns (e.g. purpose(s), feature(s)) which, in addition to their constant meaning, have a variable specific meaning which they acquire when they are used in context (Ivanic, 1991). So, for instance, in "Considering the present economic situation", "situation" has a specific meaning in context, which the speaker assumes the hearer knows.

6. T-score is a statistical measure which indicates the degree of "confidence with which we can claim that there is an association" between two items (Clear, 1993: 281). Although it is difficult to determine in absolute terms whether a t-score value is significant, it can be said that there is a significant association between two items when the t-score of the association is superior to 2 (Barnbrook, 1996).

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