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Anja Hennemann

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A cognitive-constructionist approach to Spanish *creo* Ø and *creo yo* ‘[I] think’

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Abstract: The present study approaches the Spanish postposed constructions *creo* Ø and *creo yo* ‘[p], [I] think’ from a cognitive-constructionist perspective. It is argued that both constructions are to be distinguished from one another because *creo* Ø has a subjective function, while in *creo yo*, it is the intersubjective dimension that is particularly prominent. The present investigation takes both a qualitative and a quantitative perspective. With regard to the latter, the problem of quantitative representativity is addressed. The discussion posed the question of how empirical research can feed back into theory, more precisely, into the framework of Cognitive Construction Grammar. The data to be analyzed here are retrieved from the corpora *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* and *Corpus del Español*.

Keywords: Cognitive Construction Grammar, parenthetical verbs, Spanish, corpus analysis, quantitativity/qualitativity

1 Introduction

As differences in form are usually expected to reflect differences in function (Goldberg 1995: 67), this study hypothesizes a semantic-functional difference between the parenthetical use of postposed *creo* Ø ‘[p], [I] think’ and *creo yo* ‘[p], I think.’ Against the background of this hypothesis, the present study is concerned with the use of the Spanish cognitive verb *creer* ‘believe/think’ in the first person singular, located in the right periphery of an utterance. Uses of that verb with the subject pronoun *yo* (‘I’) are compared to uses without the pronoun. The following examples from the *Corpus del Español* illustrate the two constructions:¹

¹ I do not distinguish between the different varieties of Spanish. In this paper, “Spanish” refers to the peninsular variety as well as to varieties from Latin America.

*Corresponding author: Anja Hennemann, Institute for Romance Languages, University of Potsdam, Am Neuen Palais 10, 14469 Potsdam, Germany, E-mail: henneman@uni-potsdam.de

- (1) [...] *en mil novecientos nueve, me mandaron ya a estudiar a Buenos Aires y la familia siguió viviendo en Bahía Blanca hasta el año ... eh ... dieciséis, **creo***. (Habla Culta: Buenos Aires: M13 A)
 '[...] in 1909, they sent me to study in Buenos Aires and the family kept on living in Bahía Blanca till ... uhm ... 1916, [**I**] **think**.'
- (2) *¿A usted le interesa la música de hoy? – Los compositores de nuestro tiempo no hacen mucho por el piano, **creo yo***. (Entrevista, José Luis Rubio)
 'Are you interested in today's music? – The composers of our time don't do much for the piano, **I think**.'
- (3) *Entonces, posiblemente, el que ha hecho teatro ... siempre es forzado ... empezar a hacer cine; **creo yo**, no sé. Tal vez ésa es una de las razones también [...]* (Habla Culta: Caracas: M19)
 'Then, possibly, he who has made theatre ... is always forced ... to start out making movies; **I think**, I don't know. Perhaps this is also one reason [...]

Example (1) contains [*p*], *creo* Ø, while examples (2) and (3) contain [*p*], *creo yo*. In all three examples, the cognitive verb is used parenthetically,² in which case the use of the subject pronoun is not obligatory. In analyzing data from the corpora *Corpus del Español* and *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual (CREA)*, this study investigates the semantic-functional difference between the two variants. The present study takes a constructionist approach and will thereby contribute to the growing number of constructional studies in Romance linguistics (De Knop et al. 2013; Boas et al. 2014a). As will be shown, the analysis of everyday language use in Spanish vis-à-vis the criteria of frequency (Goldberg 2006: 5) and entrenchment (Goldberg 2006: 93) makes it evident that postposed *creo* Ø and *creo yo* should be treated as constructions. Furthermore, it will be shown that *creo* Ø and *creo yo* represent two separate pairings of form and function and should therefore be distinguished from each other. It will be argued that *creo* Ø has a subjective function, while *creo yo* should be interpreted as having an intersubjective function.

Besides investigating the differences in meaning and function of the two constructions, which constitutes the main aim of the paper, this study also has a methodological aim. In keeping with the objectives of this Special Issue, its aim

² I avoid using the “classical” expression *parenthetic verbs* because it describes the use of the verb only from a syntactic viewpoint. The term, however, is – also according to Schneider (2007: 5) – not rejected by Kovacci (1986 [1979]) or Maldonado González (1999: 3572–3573), who investigate verbs that are used parenthetically in Spanish.

is to show how empirical research can feed back into theory, even if the available data pool is small and quantitatively nonrepresentative. It will be shown that qualitative research has an important place in theory building when data for linguistic analysis are hard to come by and therefore infrequent. In other words, the present study represents a case in favor of qualitative analyses, which can be seen as a first step toward future research when more data will be available.

2 Object of study: The parenthetical usage of verbs and the notion of (inter)subjectivity

2.1 Verbs used parenthetically

The parenthetical usage of verbs has been studied, above all, in English and French (see Jespersen 1937; Urmson 1952; Hooper 1975; Blanche-Benveniste 1989; Thompson and Mulac 1991; Aijmer 1997; Féron 2005; Vandelanotte 2006; Blanche-Benveniste and Willems 2007; Fischer 2007; Kärkkäinen 2007; Brinton 2008; Dehé and Wichmann 2010; Fetzer and Johansson 2010; Willems and Blanche-Benveniste 2014). They have also been studied in Spanish (Kovacci 1986 [1979]; Davidson 1996; Maldonado González 1999; De Saeger 2007, 2009; Vázquez Rosas 2006; Schneider 2007). Aijón Oliva and Serrano (2010) and Posio (2014) focus on the difference between verb usage with and without subject pronouns (see also De Saeger 2007: 275 and De Cock 2014: 30–33 on the presence of the Spanish subject pronoun).

Generally, verbs used parenthetically are understood as complement-taking predicates (CTPs), but this is a contested position.³ In a paper on parenthetical verbs in conversational English, Thompson (2002) argues against this view. For predicates such as *forget*, *guess*, *(be) possible*, or *think*, she rejects an analysis in terms of complementation because the structures usually analyzed as complements first are not objects of CTPs and second are not subordinate to CTPs (Thompson 2002: 136). Hence, these CTPs and their subjects should be analyzed “in terms of epistemic/evidential/evaluative formulaic fragments expressing

³ In line with Thompson (2002), I reject the notion of complement-taking predicate because the notion of “epistemic/evidential/evaluative formulaic fragment” (Thompson 2002: 125), or rather, “subjective/intersubjective fragment” seems more appropriate to describe the verb *creer* used parenthetically. I thank one of the reviewers for having asked me for my position regarding the notion of CTP.

speaker stance toward the content of a clause” (2002: 125), which Thompson summarizes under the heading of “stance expression”. She shows that the vast majority of CTPs, which may precede, interrupt, or follow their associated utterances, are “performing stance work, that is, providing epistemic, evidential, or evaluative framing for the utterances they go with” (Thompson 2002: 141). In summary, the central point of Thompson’s line of argumentation is that the structure consisting of a CTP and a following clause is not appropriately analyzed in terms of “main clause” plus “complement clause”.

Similarly, Mithun (2009) argues that the new and main information the speaker wants to convey is not the act of believing but rather the information expressed by the so-called complement. The analysis of such utterances under the heading of complementation seems to be misleading, since the new and main information does not *complement* the matrix clause but rather represents an independent communicative act (see Mithun 2009: 63; see also Hennemann 2013a: 134–145).

Willems and Blanche-Benveniste (2014: 113) adopt a constructional approach to parenthetically used verbs, in which they criticize analyses that rely solely on pragmatics. In their study of *je crois* ‘I believe’, *je pense* ‘I think’, and *je trouve* ‘I find’, they argue for a description of these verbs as constructions in the sense of Construction Grammar (CxG) (see also Hennemann 2013b on *pienso que* ‘I think that’ and *pienso de que* ‘I think of that’).

In Spanish, as already mentioned, the constructions under investigation may be accompanied by an explicitly mentioned subject pronoun, or they may come without it. Aijón Oliva and Serrano (2010: 7) point out that the variation between examples with or without the subject pronoun can be explained in terms of discourse-pragmatic factors. Posio (2014: 5) shows that especially “mental or cognitive verbs such as the verb *creer* ‘think’ are associated with a significantly higher rate of expressed subject pronouns than other verbs”. And when *creer* is compared to other verbs of cognitive attitude,⁴ it is obvious that with *creer*, “the expression of the subject pronoun *yo* is very frequent” (Posio 2014: 16). Aijón Oliva and Serrano (2010: 7) further state the following:

Expression of the first-person subject is correlated with more argumentative and contentious scenarios, which can be explained by the fact that this variant helps focus on the perceptual presence of the speaker and anchor discourse in his/her personal sphere. The contrary obtains for omission, most often appearing in hypothetical contexts and introducing propositions considered to be of a more general scope.

⁴ The notion “verb of cognitive attitude” is adopted from Cappelli (2007) and is also used in Hennemann (2012, 2013a).

Aijón Oliva and Serrano's examples, which are retrieved from different contexts, reveal that the uses of *creo* and *yo creo* are associated with different discourse functions. They show that the explicit formulation of the subject is especially frequent in radio programs or debates, where the expression of opinion and evaluation is of high importance. Hence, most instances of the construction are found in dialogues (Aijón Oliva and Serrano 2010: 27). These findings are summarized by Posio (2014: 13) as follows:

When the subject pronoun is present, *creo* is typically used to signal that the speaker is taking responsibility for an utterance, signalling confident epistemic stance. In contexts where *creo* rather serves a mitigating function, expressing cautious epistemic stance, the subject pronoun is omitted.

Subject expression is considered especially dominant in both sentence-initial and medial position (Posio 2014: 12); *creo* \emptyset is related to “the speaker's reservation or uncertainty about the veracity of the utterance” (Posio 2014: 14), and thus also to politeness strategies. *Yo creo*, by contrast, is said to occur “in contexts where the speaker is willing to take responsibility of the utterance and does not rely on an external source of information” (Posio 2014: 14). For the postverbal position of the subject pronoun – for *creo yo* – Posio (2014: 15) explains that “the postverbal placement of the pronoun can be interpreted as contrastive, as it typically marks the modified utterance as representing the speaker's point of view but not necessarily being shared by others.” Hence, *yo* fulfills a contrastive function; besides expressing the speaker's perspective, the use of postverbal *yo* also expresses the following implicit message of the speaker: “This is definitely my view. You, as the addressee/interlocutor may have another opinion. I am prepared to debate my epistemic evaluation/opinion.” This view leads to the hypothesis that sentence-final *creo yo* represents an invitation for the interlocutors to comment on the speaker's utterance. Hence, because of the use of *yo*, the domain of intersubjectivity is more present so that the examples where *yo* is to be found can be described in terms of “(higher) intersubjectivity”. In line with this proposal, Davidson (1996: 547) argues that the interpretation of verbs of cognitive attitude (used parenthetically) in terms of subjectivity is only applicable to those uses *without* subject pronoun. By implication, *yo* must have another function. According to De Saeger (2007: 275), the function of sentence-final *creo* \emptyset is mitigating valuations or indicating doubt, while *creo yo* is only used to mitigate valuations. However, it is crucial to add that in the use of postposed *creo yo*, the intersubjective dimension is present, while it is absent in *creo* \emptyset .

2.2 The notion of (inter)subjectivity

To contextualize the present study, a few words on subjectivity and intersubjectivity are necessary. Lyons (1982: 102) defines subjectivity as “the way in which natural languages, in their structure and their normal manner of operation, provide for the locutionary agent’s expression of himself and of his own attitudes and beliefs.” Defining the dimension of subjectivity, Nuyts (2001a) differentiates on the one hand between subjectivity and objectivity, and on the other hand between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, thus establishing a second dichotomy and refining Lyons’ contrast of subjectivity and objectivity:

- (i) [...] in (my reassessment of – JN) Lyons’ view, the dimension [of subjectivity – added by AH] concerns the quality of the speaker’s evidence for an epistemic evaluation: does (s)he have good, mathematically or formally reliable evidence (i. e., objectivity), or does (s)he have poor or vague, intuitive evidence (i. e., subjectivity).
- (ii) Alternatively, the dimension can be defined [...] as follows: one pole involves the speaker’s indication that (s)he alone knows (or has access to) the evidence and draws conclusions from it; the other pole involves his/her indication that the evidence is known to (or accessible by) a larger group of people who share the same conclusion based on it. In the former case the speaker assumes strictly personal responsibility for the epistemic qualification, in the latter case (s)he assumes a shared responsibility among those who have access to the evidence and accept the conclusions from it (including him/herself). An important (but maybe not a necessary) element in how this distinction actually works may then be whether the interaction partner belongs to those sharing the evidence and the conclusions, or not. (Nuyts 2001a: 393–394)

Nuyts (2001b) analyzes the functional and structural characteristics of modal sentence adverbs, modal adjectives, modal auxiliaries, and verbs of cognitive attitude in a comparative way concerning their expression of epistemic modality. In this analysis, he “reframe[s] the positions in the literature regarding the old sub/objectivity distinction in terms of the alternative analysis of (inter)subjectivity” (Nuyts 2001b: 64). In Traugott’s sense, intersubjectivity is – roughly speaking – represented in meanings that mark “attention to the addressee’s self-image” (2010: 29), i. e., meanings involving “a communicative relationship between speaker and hearer” (Cuyckens et al. 2010: 13). Traugott (2010: 37), who mentions certain uses of hedges such as *sort of*, *well*, and *perhaps* as serving intersubjective functions, applies her understanding of intersubjectivity to

situations of speaker exchange. For Cornillie (2010), who is concerned with discourse functions of Spanish epistemic adverbs and adverbial phrases, the notion of intersubjectivity – even though not mentioned explicitly – is of prime importance as he shows “that *a lo mejor* and *igual* invite the co-participant to approve or reject the hypotheses put forward. They are involved in *on-line planning* to ensure a reaction/reply from the co-participant (via turn-taking)” (Cornillie 2010: 313). To sum up, Cornillie shows that speakers use certain linguistic devices to involve the addressee’s self, which is one feature that constitutes intersubjectivity. Traugott and Dasher also address the interactional setting, and thus the addressee’s perspective. They focus on “coded expression [s] of SP/W [speaker’s/writer’s – explanation of the acronym added by AH] attention to the image or ‘self’ of A/R [addressee/reader–explanation of the acronym added by AH]” (2002: 22). Nuyts (2001a, 2001b) also relates the concept of intersubjectivity to the notion of common ground, mentioning that certain linguistic devices are used when the interlocutors assume that knowledge is shared between the speaker and the hearer (see Nuyts 2001b: 37).⁵ De Cock (2014: 12) considers subjectivity and intersubjectivity as “gradient phenomena”. According to her, “the clearest signs” of both categories are

those where the attitudes and beliefs of the coparticipants are clearly staged, e.g. for subjectivity, the performative nature of communication and cognition verbs [...] or, for intersubjectivity, the use of forms of address and politeness phenomena [...]. (De Cock 2014: 12)

The notions of subjectivity – the expression of the speaker’s evidence for an epistemic evaluation⁶ – and intersubjectivity – the expression of the speaker’s awareness of the addressee’s “self”⁷ – in interactional settings are of high importance for the present study since *creo* \emptyset is considered a construction expressing subjectivity, while the construction *creo* *yo* should be described more in terms of intersubjectivity. This will be shown on the basis of contextual information: *creo* *yo* usually appears in more intersubjective contexts where the interlocutor is invited to approve or reject the speaker’s opinion.

⁵ For the notion of (inter)subjectivity, see also Hennemann (2013a: 77–87).

⁶ Here, the fact that evidence may also be based on the speaker’s intuition (only) is included.

⁷ The speaker’s expression of his/her awareness of the interlocutor’s “self” can mostly be interpreted as a politeness strategy.

3 The framework of Cognitive Construction Grammar

As this analysis adopts a cognitive-constructionist approach to the functional-semantic differences between the constructions *creo* \emptyset and *creo yo*, the following section will briefly outline the framework of CxG. Above all, the studies by Goldberg (1995, 2006) are associated with Cognitive CxG (Boas 2013: 233). Constructions are described as form–meaning pairings (Goldberg 2006: 5) and are to be found at all linguistic levels. The term construction includes linguistic units with a concrete meaning, such as content words, as well as patterns with abstract meanings such as ditransitive, resultative, or passive constructions (Goldberg 2006: 5; Boas 2013: 235), i. e., constructions which are fully schematic and whose slots are to be filled if used. Linguistic structures are not only constructions if the meaning (of a part of them) is not compositional (cf. Goldberg 1995 or Fillmore 2013 on the Berkeley CxG framework). However, even fully compositional structures are constructions if they are used with “sufficient frequency” (Goldberg 2006: 5).

Between content words and fully schematic constructions, there are constructions that are partly schematic such as the *let alone* construction (Fillmore et al. 1988) or the *What’s X doing Y* construction (Kay and Fillmore 1999). In Berkeley CxG, partly schematic constructions were the only constructions recognized to exist. Representing this view, Fillmore (2013) explains that a phrase such as *She loves me* cannot be considered a construction. Valency structures of this kind are not viewed as constructions in Berkeley CxG because “[...] everything we know about such a sentence, including the case forms of the two pronouns, can be explained by what we know about valence, two patterns for valent realization, grammatical function and the case form of personal pronouns etc.” (Fillmore 2013: 126). The cognitive-constructionist approach, however, assumes “that the network of constructions captures our grammatical knowledge of language *in toto*, i. e., it’s constructions all the way down” (Goldberg 2006: 18). In addition, De Knop and Mollica (2013: 12) explain that every construction, from morpheme to sentence, is considered a potentially independent, symbolic unit with its own formal and functional constraints.

Constructions are “conventionalized pairings of form and function” (Goldberg 2006: 3). Any construction represents a conventionalized form–meaning pair “unabhängig davon, wie schematisch oder konkret die jeweilige Form- oder Bedeutungsseite sein mag” (‘no matter how schematic or concrete its respective form or meaning may be’; Fischer 2006: 2). Hilpert (2013: 5) even speaks about constructions as being “mentally represented along a continuum

of schematicity”. De Smet and Cuyckens (2007) explain that a construction is an “automated routinized chunk of language that is stored and activated by the language user as a whole, rather than ‘creatively’ assembled on the spot” (De Smet and Cuyckens 2007: 188; see also Hennemann 2013b: 166). These routinized chunks of language can also be considered “building blocks of grammar” (see Hilpert 2013: 4–5). In consideration of all of the above ideas, the present paper adopts the following definition of “construction” with regard to postposed *creo* Ø and *creo yo*:

Any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist. In addition, patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency. (Goldberg 2006: 5)

Formally, the constructions under survey consist of the verb of cognitive attitude *creer* in first person singular with the personal pronoun *yo* or with Ø-pronoun. These forms themselves – *creo* Ø and *creo yo* – are not schematic. However, the structure ([p] + *creo*Ø/*creo yo*) can be considered a partly schematic construction because [p] as a slot has to be filled. The meaning of *creo* Ø and *creo yo* is clearly compositional⁸ and there is *no* aspect of its form which is not strictly predictable from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist, i. e., other verbs of cognitive attitude. However, with respect to the constructions under survey, there is some aspect of their function which is not strictly predictable from its component parts: the function of expressing the subjective and intersubjective dimension. Furthermore, both postposed *creo* Ø and *creo yo* are highly entrenched in everyday speech.

4 Data, methodology, and goal of the study

For this study, the *Corpus del Español* and the *CREA* were searched for *creo* Ø and *creo yo*, i. e., for utterances of the verb used in the right periphery of [p], with or without a subject pronoun. The semantic-functional difference between the parenthetical use of verbs with the explicitly mentioned subject and the parenthetical use of verbs with no explicitly mentioned subject has, as shown above, rarely been investigated so far – especially not with a focus on its use in

⁸ They are “compositional” in the sense that the constructions *creo* Ø and *creo yo* express the addition of their component parts’ meaning.

sentence-final position. Thus, the study is concerned with the quantitative and qualitative analysis of examples taken from the *Corpus del Español* and the *CREA* focusing on the opposition between examples marked by the presence of *yo* and examples marked by the absence of *yo*. The study is guided by the hypothesis that the presence of *yo* not only emphasizes the speaker's expression of opinion and thus subjectivity but also intersubjectivity so that the examples where *yo* is to be found can be described in terms of (higher) intersubjectivity.

Instances of sentence-final *creo* \emptyset and sentence-final *creo yo* were searched for in the oral part of the *Corpus del Español*. To use the language of the corpus, {, *creo*.} was searched for, as the punctuation has to be separated. The oral part of the corpus contains a total number of 50 examples for [p], *creo* \emptyset . The following examples illustrate these usages:

- (4) [...] *es el del pantalón rayado, **creo**. Bueno. Todos elegantísimos, elegantísimos; la fiesta más increíble, eso sí.* (Habla Culta: Bogotá: M42)
 '[...] they are the striped trousers, **I think**. Well. All [of them] very elegant, very elegant, the most unbelievable party, this [is] for sure.'
- (5) [...] *Tenía - - - dos muchachos - - - Ernesto y Aldo - - - y eran - - - cuatro chicas, **creo**. Y bueno, la madre de esos muchachos era una señora muy muy buena.* (Habla Culta: Buenos Aires: M13 A)
 'S/he had - - - two sons - - - Ernesto and Aldo - - - and they were - - - four girls, **I think**. And well, the mother of these two sons was a very, very good woman.'

Additionally, {, *creo yo*} was also searched for. The oral part of the *Corpus del Español* contains a total number of 72 hits for [p], *creo yo*.

- (6) *¿A usted le interesa la música de hoy? – Los compositores de nuestro tiempo no hacen mucho por el piano, **creo yo**.* (Entrevista, José Luis Rubio)
 'Are you interested in today's music? – The composers of our time do not do much for the piano, **I think**.'

It is important to note that “almost sentence-final” positions were also counted, as in the following example, in which the construction under survey is only followed by a question requiring back-channel behavior:

- (7) *Hombre, el problema es que tan pron/en esta época nunca ha hecho buen tiempo, **creo yo, ¿no?** Bueno, no. [...]* (España Oral: CCON031B)

‘Man, the problem is that so ear[ly] the weather has never been fine in this season, **I think, right?** Well, not. [...]’

A few examples for [p], *creo* Ø had to be excluded from the analysis. These include examples in which the construction does not show up at the very end of the utterance or in “almost sentence-final position”, or in which it is used as a hesitator (8–10) followed by three dots or as a hesitator that is accompanied by another filler such as *eh* ‘uhm’ (11):

- (8) *Sí, señor ... ella ... f ... se divorció cuando Guzmán Blanco hizo el decreto, **creo** ... se ... fue la ... la primera mujer [...]* (Habla Culta: Caracas: M10)
 ‘Yes, mister ... she ... [?] ... was divorced when Guzmán Blanco made the decree, **[I] think** ... She ... was the ... first wife [...]’
- (9) *[...] ya vivíamos en San José, **creo** ... este ... mm ... y ... después en Bello Monte [...]* (Habla Culta: Caracas: M36)
 ‘[...] we already lived in San José, **[I] think** ... this ... uhm ... and ... then in Bello Monte [...]’
- (10) *Inf.b. – No tengo idea, **creo** ... creo que tiene como dos metros de largo.* (Habla Culta: Santiago: M46)
 ‘Inf.b. – I have no idea, **[I] think** ... think that it’s like two metres long.’
- (11) *[...] Victoria estuvo - - - alrededor de tres meses, **creo** ... **eh** ... María Esther estuvo dos meses ... **eh** ...* (Habla Culta: Buenos Aires: M17 A)
 ‘[...] Victoria was - - - like three months old, **[I] think** ... **uhm** ... María Esther was two months old ... uhm...’

All in all, there are 11 examples of *creo* Ø that had to be excluded from the analysis because they did not represent the target construction. Considering the construction *creo yo*, 51 out of 72 examples had to be excluded because the construction did not show up in sentence-final position or in “almost sentence-final” position. Given this criterion, examples that were excluded are, for instance, the following ones:

- (12) – *Una actitud, **creo yo**, abierta del partido, para no cancelar ninguna posibilidad estratégica [...]* (Entrevista PAN, Bravo Mena, 7 de Mayo de 1999)
 ‘– A behavior, **I think**, open to the game, for not missing any strategic possibility [...]’

- (13) [...] – se ha hecho propietario de la EMT un tal señor Rodríguez – por culpa, **creo yo**, de todos – no sólo del – equipo de gobierno del ayuntamiento de Madrid [...] (España Oral: APOL023A)
 ‘[...] a certain mister Rodríguez has become owner of the EMT – because of the fault, **I think**, by all [of them] – not only of – the government of Madrid [...]’

The corpus *CREA* was used as a benchmark against which the results for *[p]*, *creo yo* found in the *Corpus del Español* could be compared.⁹ The *CREA* was only used to search for {*creo yo*} to check the intersubjectivity hypothesis. In other words, I checked whether *creo yo* was only – or at least predominantly – found with an intersubjective function and in interactive contexts. The corpus contains 227 examples in 160 different documents. Thirty-eight out of 227 results showed up in (nearly) sentence-final position. Hence, for *[p]*, *creo yo*, a total amount 59 results were considered. Finally, the distribution of results in Table 1 represents the basis for the present study:

Table 1: Data of the study.

Total	<i>[p]</i> , <i>creo</i> ∅	<i>[p]</i> , <i>creo yo</i>
	50	72
Excluded	11	51
Considered	39	21 + 38

The *Corpus del Español* comprises a total amount of 100 million words from Old Spanish to the late 1990s and the *CREA* more than 200 million words (see also Davies 2009: 140). The oral part of the *Corpus del Español* only comprises data from the twentieth century. However, the constructions under survey occur infrequently in the corpora. The data to be analyzed here occurred naturally; they were recorded or occurred in TV debates, interviews, and radio talks, for instance. The constructions to be analyzed here are interesting insofar as their form and function are only predictable at first sight, i. e., the constructions are only apparently transparent. The subjectivity–intersubjectivity opposition

⁹ In the *CREA*, the different Spanish varieties were also not distinguished. The only restriction was the search in the oral part of the corpus.

represents an aspect of the constructions' function which is not predictable from the meaning/function of its component parts.

There are three reasons why the present study has a quantitative and a qualitative part: First, to say it with Gries' (2006: 5) words, I intend to "operationalize [a] subjective qualitative phenomen[on] on the basis of quantification"; second, I would like to address the problem of frequency in a certain (closed) corpus; third, the exact meaning or function of the constructions *creo* \emptyset and *creo yo* is not detectable without a subtle qualitative analysis.

4.1 Qualitative analysis of the constructions *creo* \emptyset and *creo yo*

The following examples from the *Corpus del Español* show that 38 out of 39 examples of sentence-final *creo* \emptyset are used without a question requiring back-channel behavior, questions or comments. *Creo* \emptyset is only added to mitigate the propositional content [p]. De Saeger (2007: 275) explains that the "adición de *creo* o *pienso* al final del enunciado no aporta ninguna información nueva. Sirve sobre todo para destacar la subjetividad de la proposición" ('addition of *creo* or *pienso* at the end of the utterance does not contribute any new information. It serves above all to highlight the subjectivity of the proposition'). However, my analysis suggests that final *creo* (or *pienso*) indeed represents new information.¹⁰ The content of the proposition is, up to the point where the verb of cognitive attitude is added, represented as a fact. Hence, the added construction (*creo* \emptyset or *creo yo*) is of high importance, as the speaker wishes to show that he/she does not want to be fully responsible for the content of the proposition. Sperber and Wilson (1995: 181) also explain: "A speaker who communicates that she believes that *P* does not automatically communicate that *P*", and Urmson (1952: 484) argues that "the whole point of some parenthetical verbs is to modify or to weaken the claim to truth which could be implied by a simple assertion *p*." Hence, the propositional content is tinged with subjectivity:

- (14) [...] *él quería que nosotros tuviéramos su educación, creo.* (HC: Lima: M4)
 '[...] he would have liked that we got his education, [I] think.'

¹⁰ "New information" is meant in the sense of "additional information", since the assertions "p" and "p, I think" are to be differentiated from each other (see also Sperber and Wilson 1995: 181). However, De Saeger is right insofar as the added verb of cognitive attitude does not add new information to the propositional content. I thank one of the reviewers for having asked me to clarify the meaning of "new information".

- (15) *Y ellos habían fundado el Ateneo de la Juventud unos dos años antes, creo.* (HC: La Paz: M28)
‘And they had founded the club of youth like two years earlier, [I] think.’
- (16) *Entonces ... este ... sesionan los viernes, de ocho a diez, creo.* (HC: México: M27)
‘Then ... this ... [they] hold a meeting on Fridays from 8 to 10, [I] think.’
- (17) *[...] el cuarto piso – digamos – ¿verdad? Oficinas, creo.* (HC: San José (CR): M11)
‘[...] the fourth floor – let’s say – right? Offices, [I] think.’
- (18) *[...] donde se graduaban maestros, creo.* (HC: San José (CR): M25)
‘[...] where teachers graduated, [I] think.’

The propositional content in each of the examples in (14)–(18) does not represent a fact but the subjective perspective of the speaker’s mental state. Willems and Blanche-Benveniste (2014: 135) also explain that “[the] weak verb construction typically appears as a second thought” and that “[in] spoken language weak verbs are for the speaker often the locus of particular attention and metalinguistic reflection”. Through the use of *creo* Ø, the speaker indicates that the transmitted information may also be wrong, as in the following examples:

- (19) *¿Eh? La abuela viene esta noche, creo.* (España Oral: ACON023A)
‘Pardon? Grandma arrives this night, [I] think.’
- (20) *Nos dirigimos a una iglesia fantástica llamada “Santo Domingo”. Románica, creo.* (España Oral: AENT027A)
‘We see a fantastic church called “Santo Domingo”. Romanesque, [I] think.’
- (21) *¿[...] cuántos años tiene ese primo? Pues diez, creo.* (España Oral: CEDU029A)
‘[...] how old is that cousin? Well, ten, [I] think.’
- (22) *[...] Está desde la diez kilos, creo.* (España Oral: ETEC002A)
‘[...] It’s from 10 kilograms onwards, [I] think.’

It is possible that the grandmother arrives this night or another one (19); it is possible that the church is from another epoch (20); the cousin could also be younger or older (21); or the entity denoted by *it* possibly weighs 11 or 12 kilograms (22). In every single case, the speaker marks the propositional content

subjectively by the postposed construction *creo* \emptyset . The construction's "specific pragmatic role is to allow the speaker to put some distance between him/herself and the simple statement, often considered otherwise too strong" (Willems and Blanche-Benveniste 2014: 135).

The *Corpus del Español* contains only one example in which *creo* \emptyset is used in connection with a question requiring back-channel behavior and in which it can be regarded as being used in sentence-final position:

- (23) *Enc. – Un pintor que está esperando su día, ¿no?, creo ... Inf. – Sí. Bueno, este señor ha muerto hace un año [...]* (Habla Culta: Sevilla: M10)
 'Enc. – A painter who is waiting for his day, **right?**, **[I] think** ... Inf. – Yes. Well, this man has died a year ago [...]'

In studying the use of sentence-final *creo yo*, it is obvious that far more examples (18 of 59; approx. 30% of the examples) are accompanied by a question requiring back-channel behavior on behalf of the interlocutor (see 27–30).¹¹ In examples (24)–(26), sentence-final *creo yo* is used, and the interlocutor starts to represent his contradictory opinion (24) or asks another question (25–26):

- (24) *Inf.b. – Este año va a pasar lo mismo, creo yo. Inf.a. – No, tal vez ... mira [...]* (Habla Culta: Bogotá: M34)
 'Inf.b. – This year the same is going to happen, **I think**. Inf.a. – No, perhaps ... look [...]'
- (25) *Eso influyó mucho, creo yo. Enc. – Bien eh ... ¿usted se siente satisfecho con esta profesión?* (Habla Culta: Santiago: M18)
 'This influenced a lot, **I think**. Enc. – Well uhm ... are you happy with this profession?'
- (26) *Inf.a – Es sólo para llamar la atención, no más, creo yo. Enc. – Pero usted ¿lo ve negativamente eso o...[?]* (Habla Culta: Santiago: M20)
 'Inf.a – It is only to gain attention, nothing more, **I think**. Enc. – But do you see this negatively or... [?]'

¹¹ Most examples containing *creo yo* in which the interlocutor asks another question etc. come from sociolinguistic interviews, which are also found in the *ALFAL* corpus (a corpus of interviews compiled by the Asociación de Lingüística y Filología de América Latina). Thus, also genre factors are to be taken into account in the analysis of the constructions. I thank a reviewer for this comment. As De Cock (2014: 32) also explains, "[i]nteractional data typically contain many more deictic (subject) pronouns."

I assume that the pronunciation of *yo* invites the interlocutor to represent his perspective regarding a particular information or to ask another question more than postposed *creo* \emptyset does. Hence, *creo yo* is considered a construction expressing intersubjectivity. The following examples may corroborate this assumption, as *creo yo* is accompanied by an explicit question asking for the interlocutor's opinion (27–28), by a particle (29), or by a discourse marker (30):

- (27) [...] *la distancia de la vivienda a los centros de trabajo, todas estas cosas, ¿no?, se podrían tratar, creo yo, ¿qué te parece, X?* Inf.a. – Claro, sí. (Habla Culta: Bogotá: M22)
 '[...] the distance from the flats to the business premises, all these things, right?, one could do [something], **I think, what do you think, X?** Inf.a. – Clearly, for sure.'
- (28) Inf. B. - - ... *en gran parte, creo yo, ¿no?* Inf. A. - - ... *y a veces ... agarran una pieza literaria interesante que [...]* (Habla Culta: Caracas: M26)
 'Inf. B. - - ... mainly, **I think, right?** Inf. A. - - ... and sometimes ... [they] pick an interesting literary piece that [...]'
- (29) – Sí. – *pero – tiene usted que pensar, creo yo Sí.* (España Oral: PPOL007C)
 '– Yes – but – you should think about it, **I think, yes.**'
- (30) Inf.a. – *Sin nominación política determinada, creo yo, pues.* Inf.b. – *¿En la ... la ideología, dice usted?* (Habla Culta: Santiago: M48)
 'Inf.a. – Without a certain political nomination, **I think, well.** Inf.b. – In the ideology, do you mean?'

In example (31), the speaker does not only invite back-channel behavior by asking *¿no?* but also adds an explanation starting with *por* 'for (because)', which supports his opinion:

- (31) [...] *no es com..., no es el ... el Bonnie and Clyde auténtico, creo yo, ¿no? por los convencionalismos de la sociedad española [...]* (Habla Culta: Madrid: M4)
 '[...] it is not lik[e]..., it is not the ... the authentic Bonnie and Clyde, **I think, right?** Because of the conventionalism of the Spanish society [...]'

Example (32) shows that the speaker is unsure with regard to [p] because he adds *no sé* 'I don't know' to the construction. He also adds the question *¿ah?*, without waiting for the interlocutor's opinion. De Cock (2014) argues that

subjectivity and intersubjectivity are closely linked and actually overlap in expressions like *no sé*. In example (33), the speaker introduces an utterance with *yo creo que* ‘I think that’ and finishes it with *creo yo*:

- (32) *Y parece que es esto (no tanto el tema mismo, **creo yo, no sé ¿ah?** el gusto de las personas [...])* (Habla Culta: Santiago: M12)
 ‘And it seems as it is this (not so much the topic itself, **I think, I don’t know, huh?** The peoples’ liking [...])’
- (33) *[...] **yo creo que** también está en la ... en ... en todas las capas sociales ... y ... e ... está en todos los países, **creo yo**. Aquí hay una crisis [...]* (Habla Culta: Caracas: M10)
 ‘[...] **I also think that** it is in the ... in ... in every social class ... and ... i ... is in every country, **I think**. The crisis is here [...].’

At this point, it is important to note that back-channeling does not always have to be given verbally. Unfortunately, the present study can only deal with transcribed oral texts. If, however, the back-channel token is nonverbal in nature, it is not surprising that the speaker keeps on talking, not waiting for a verbally expressed agreement or question. Examples (31)–(33) support the intersubjectivity hypothesis with regard to *creo yo*. The construction is accompanied by an explicit question asking for the interlocutor’s opinion (examples 31 and 32) or by an additional expression (*yo creo que* in example 33) to explicitly mark [p] as the speaker’s opinion, which is considered to have an intersubjective function because in stressing one’s own opinion the speaker is aware of the interlocutor’s self (just as is the case with *no sé* in example 32). The statement in (33) could equally well have been introduced by *creo que* ‘[I] think that’, but instead the subject pronoun is used.

As already mentioned, the *CREA* corpus was used to double check the results for [p], *creo yo* found in the *Corpus del Español*. The *CREA* contains a total amount of 227 examples for {*creo yo*}, out of which only 38 showed up in (almost) sentence-final position. In considering the results from the *CREA*, one difficulty becomes apparent: the interviews, dialogues, debates, etc. do not contain markers that signal the change of speaker. Conversations are transcribed as continuous texts without any indications that mark turn changes. Nevertheless, the speaker changes are (in most cases) clearly deducible from the context.¹²

¹² As already mentioned, some data from the *CREA* corpus are also contained in the *CORLEC* corpus (*Corpus Oral de Referencia de la Lengua Española Contemporánea*) or *ALFAL* corpus. In these original versions of the data, turn changes have predominantly been transcribed adequately. In cases of doubt, consulting these original sources leads to clarification.

Example (34) represents a conversation between two speakers who are trying to estimate the time. Here, the utterances are not only intersubjectively tinged by *creo yo* but also by sentence-final *yo creo* because both speakers are speculating about the time of day and one of the speakers is relying on the church bells:

- (34) *Sí, deben ser las dos y cuarto, **creo yo**. Un cuarto para las dos, yo creo. No No, deben ser las dos, si están sonando las campanas es porque son las dos.* (CSMV, texto MDD1MB)

‘Yes, it must be a quarter past two, **I think**. A quarter to two, I think. No no, it must be two o’clock; if the church bells are ringing it is because it is two o’clock.’

The following four examples come from interviews or conversations. After the use of *creo yo*, the interlocutor is asking another question so that postposed *creo yo* may clearly be considered a construction with the function of signaling a change in turn (or a chance for the interlocutor to take the floor), thus having an intersubjective function:

- (35) *[...] y si el entrenador cree en ello conveniente ponerme con Goicoechea, pues tendrá sus motivos, **creo yo**. ¿Vas a jugar con [...]?* (Madrid, 14/01/91, RNE, Radio 5)

‘[...] and if the coach believes that it is convenient to put me with Goicoechea, well, he must have his reasons, **I think**. Are you going to play with [...]?’

- (36) *Pues, creo que eso es para gente insegura, **creo yo**. ¿Por qué dices que es para gente insegura?* (Grupo G 7, Magisterio)

‘Well, I think that this is for insecure people, **I think**. Why do you say that this is for insecure people?’

- (37) *[...] te ayuda a tu formación como persona, **creo yo**. ¿Habéis salido alguno fuera, a algún país extranjero o lo que sea?* (Grupo G 1, Filología Hispánica)

‘[...] it helps you for your formation as a person, **I think**. Did some of you leave, to a foreign country or something like that?’

- (38) *[...] pero en el momento uno cree que es una rochela de uno casarse, **creo yo**. ¿Cómo es eso?* (CSHC-87 Entrevista 90)

‘[...] but in the moment one thinks that it is a hullabaloo to marry, **I think**. How come?’

It seems as if the pronunciation of *yo* invites the interlocutor to ask another question, which is an element of intersubjectivity. In taking into account the addressee's (probable) need to ask a question, the speaker expresses his awareness of the interlocutor's self. The next four examples also indicate that *creo yo* invites the interlocutor to react because the use of this construction is accompanied by a question requiring back-channel behavior:¹³

- (39) *Bueno, eso es por etapas, **creo yo, ¿no?** A veces tú estás en una etapa así medio bueno, en mi opinión, ¿no?* (CSHC-87 Entrevista 1)
 'Well, this is step by step, **I think, right?** Sometimes you are at one stage like half good – in my opinion, right?'
- (40) *Dice: hombre para eso están las cucharas, **¿no?, creo yo.** Por Dios. Qué gracioso. Qué gracioso es, por Dios.* (Ay Lola, Lolita, Lola, 30 March 1995, TVE 2)
 'S/he says: man, we have knives for that, **right?, I think.** Jesus! How funny. How funny is that, oh my God.'
- (41) *[...] no hay necesidad que se le imponga, **creo yo.** Y es un poco difícil porque no buscan periodistas que sean muy entendidos en la materia, **¿verdad?** [...]* (Entrevista 25, Carla Cabalero)
 '[...] it is not necessary to impose [this] on him/her, **I think.** And it is a little bit difficult because they do not search for journalists who are experts on this, **right?** [...]'
- (42) *Hay un cierto margen de respeto que se debe mantener en toda familia, **creo yo.** De controlar, o sea, de dar libertad, **¿verdad?** [...]* (Entrevista 25, Carla Cabalero)
 'There is a certain room of respect that should be maintained in every family, **I think.** Of control or to give freedom, **right?** [...]'

Examples (43) and (44) also corroborate the hypothesis regarding intersubjectivity, because besides showing up in a context where a question requiring back-channel behavior is found, another marker indicating the speaker's opinion or reasoning is used. The explanation starting with *Porque* 'because' explicates the speaker's line of thought:

¹³ On Spanish tag questions see, for instance, de los Ángeles Gómez González (2014).

- (43) *Por eso hay un gran misterio en este problema de la pecadora, **creo yo. Porque** en realidad es una forma como muy provocadora, muy provocativa de amor ¿no?* (Pueblo de Dios, Madrid, 3 February 1991, TVE 1)
 ‘That is why there is a big mystery in this problem of sinfulness, **I think. Because** actually it is a form like very provocative, very provocative of love, **right?**’
- (44) *[...] y la educación es mala en Venezuela, es el problema más grande, **creo yo. Porque** está muy mal [...]* (CSMV, texto MDA5FA)
 ‘[...] and the education in Venezuela is bad, this is the biggest problem, **I think. Because** it is very badly [...]

In highlighting one’s own opinion by using, for instance, the subject pronoun, as in example (43), the domain of intersubjectivity becomes automatically present. The speaker is aware of the addressee’s self, as contextually provided information confirms:

- (45) *[...] y ese conocimiento e es, precisamente, la la razón de del amor, **creo yo. Para mí** el el amor es, pues, es algo que ocurre cada día, ¿no?* (Documental “Parejas”, 15 February 1991, TVE 2)
 ‘[...] and this knowledge i is, precisely, the the reason of love, **I think. For me** the the love is, well, is something that happens every day, **right?**’

In example (45), besides *creo yo* and besides *¿no?*, an explicit subjective marker—*para mí* ‘for me’—is used. The speaker makes it clear that the expressed opinion is definitely his view; he takes into account that the interlocutor might have another opinion, and he signals that he is prepared to debate his viewpoint. In other words, the speaker does not only mitigate [p] by using *creo* ∅.

4.2 Summary

Aijón Oliva and Serrano argue that the expression of the subject pronoun in *yo creo* helps to anchor the speaker in the discourse, wherever this is important. This is why this structure is to be found more often in argumentative discourse such as radio programs, interviews, or TV debates. In these contexts, the expression of opinion or valuation of a certain state of affairs is important to the speakers. *Creo*, by contrast, is said to rather appear in hypothetical contexts. Hence, *yo creo* is associated with the speaker’s responsibility for [p], and *creo* with the speaker’s wish to express reservations with

regard to [p]. The postverbal placement, i. e., *creo yo*, is said to typically mark “the modified utterance as representing the speaker’s point of view but not necessarily being shared by others” (Posio 2014: 15). This is, in my view, even more the case if the speaker ends his utterance with the construction *creo yo*. And this, in turn, leads to the assumption that it represents an invitation for the interlocutors to comment upon the speaker’s utterance. Consequently, *creo* alone is a construction to indicate that [p] represents the speaker’s mental state and *creo yo* fulfills a further function besides this. This study has shown that *creo* and *creo yo* in utterances having the structure [p], *creo* \emptyset and [p], *creo yo* fulfill different functions. While *creo* without subject pronoun is considered a construction expressing subjectivity, *creo yo* is regarded as representing the domain of intersubjectivity, inviting the interlocutor to comment upon [p] or to ask a question about [p]. This is also supported by the short questions or particles that are means of requiring back-channel behavior, questions or comments. However, future studies could investigate the use of [p], *creo* \emptyset and [p], *creo yo*, for instance in conversations in internet forums or other online platforms. Future studies should also focus on the analysis of real dialogic discourse data and video material (TV debates or talk shows, for instance) and find out whether *creo yo* goes hand in hand with special gestures or eye contact with the interlocutor (asking for the addressee’s reaction) as well as investigating nonverbal back-channel behavior on behalf of the interlocutor.

Boas and González-García (2014b: 5) point out that generally, “much research over the last decade has demonstrated that the concept of grammatical construction is an effective tool for conducting diachronic research”, and state with regard to Romance languages in particular that “Romance languages qualify as the perfect test bed for construction grammarians interested in historical facts” (Boas et al. 2014b: 2). Hence, the development of postposed *creo* \emptyset and *creo yo* as well as the development of *creo yo* as a construction representing the intersubjective dimension could also be topics for future studies adopting a constructionist approach. Admittedly, the quantitative analysis in the present form does not go beyond the summary of frequencies in corpus data of the two constructions *creo* \emptyset and *creo yo*. One could also consider presenting a distributional quantitative analysis of identifiable usage/meaning chunks in the construction – especially *creo yo* – that could be observed from the corpus data. This, in turn, could lead to observations which may be helpful for future diachronic analyses.¹⁴

14 I thank the reviewers for this idea.

Future research could also be concerned with constructional change (see Hilpert 2013), more precisely, with the criterion of relative frequency with regard to postposed *creo* \emptyset and *creo yo*. The question could be how often postposed *creo* \emptyset occurs in comparison to postposed *creo yo* in a closed corpus of oral data.¹⁵ Even though it could be expected that postposed *creo* \emptyset never surpasses postposed *creo yo* – as *creo yo* fulfills a particular function that is not covered by *creo* \emptyset – oral speech is usually accompanied by the tendency of shortening. The *Corpus del Español* already displayed more instances of the verb of cognitive attitude (used parenthetically) without subject pronoun (see Table 1). A comparison with the parenthetical use of other verbs of cognitive attitude such as *pensar* ‘to think’ or *opinar* ‘to mean’ might also be fruitful.

5 Concluding remarks on the integration of theory and empirical research

What remains to be said about the integration of theory and empirical research? And how can empirical research feed back into theory, especially if the amount of data available in a certain corpus and thus analyzed are not regarded quantitatively representative? In the context of the present study, two observations should be made. First, *creo* \emptyset and *creo yo* can clearly be considered constructions because in line with the definitions proposed in Goldberg (1995) and (2006), there is some aspect of their meaning and function that is not predictable from the component parts. Differences with regard to subjectivity and intersubjectivity suggest that the constructions should be distinguished from one another. Second, the analysis of concrete observations found in everyday speech demonstrated that both *creo* \emptyset and *creo yo* are well entrenched. Admittedly though, postposed *creo* \emptyset and *creo yo* occur relatively infrequently in two big and widely used corpora for Spanish, the *Corpus del Español* and the *CREA*.¹⁶

In conclusion, on the one hand, the present study is a plea for recognizing research as profoundly empirical, even if the amount of naturally occurring data dealt with is relatively small. On the other hand, it represents a case of a carefully conducted qualitative analysis as a first step toward a potential quantitative analysis that could be based on a more sizeable data set.

¹⁵ In doing so, one could either use existing corpora for Spanish or gather oral data.

¹⁶ Because of their meanings/functions, the two constructions are restricted to very special communicative settings. In these settings, they occur frequently.

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