

## ***YO VIVO AQUÍ Y SE VIVE MUY TRANQUILO. DISCOURSE VIEWPOINT, PRAGMATIC FUNCTION AND THE PLACEMENT OF SPANISH YO<sup>1</sup>***

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**ABSTRACT.** The formulation and placement of Spanish personal pronouns is a traditional topic of research on syntactic variation that has not yet received a comprehensive explanation. The present study focuses on expressed *yo* 'I' as a communicative choice in a corpus of readers' comments on digital news texts. The first-person pronoun is approached as an element that explicitly anchors discourse in the viewpoint of the speaker, thereby specifying the cognitive domain in which the content is to be interpreted. A distinction is proposed between epistemic contexts, where either a personal stance or behavior is described, and epistemic-evidential ones, aimed at lending support to argumentation based either on personal witnessing or on life experience. Variation between the preverbal and postverbal placement of the pronoun is found to correlate with the different contextual types. Evidential uses exhibit very high frequencies of preverbal *yo*, in line with the self-attributed authority of the speaker. Conversely, the postverbal pronoun, while still entailing the construction of the speaker's viewpoint into discourse, signals the fact that such viewpoint is not the dominant one. This can explain the association of this variant with epistemic contexts where predefined, often hypothetical situations are described. It is concluded that the development of a model based on the construction and interpretation of discourse viewpoint can be very beneficial in advancing knowledge of pronoun variation.

**Keywords.** Spanish; pronouns; subject placement; viewpoint; epistemic modality; evidentiality.

**RESUMEN.** La formulación y la colocación variable de los pronombres personales en español es una cuestión tradicional en la investigación en variación sintáctica, pero que aún no ha recibido una explicación exhaustiva. Este trabajo se centra en el *yo* expreso como elección comunicativa en un corpus de comentarios de lectores a noticias digitales. El pronombre de primera persona se contempla como un elemento que ancla explícitamente el discurso en el punto de vista del hablante, especificando el dominio cognitivo en el que se ha de interpretar el contenido. Se propone una distinción entre contextos epistémicos, en los que se describe una postura o un comportamiento personal, y epistémico-evidenciales, destinados a apoyar una argumentación por medio del testimonio personal o la experiencia vital. La variación entre la colocación preverbal y posverbal del pronombre se correlaciona con estos tipos de contextos. Los usos evidenciales presentan frecuencias muy altas del *yo* preverbal, en consonancia con la autoridad que se autoatribuye el hablante. Por el contrario, el pronombre posverbal, aunque sigue implicando la construcción del punto de vista del hablante, señala que este no es el dominante en el discurso. Esto puede explicar la asociación de esta variante con contextos epistémicos en que se describen situaciones predefinidas, a menudo hipotéticas. Se concluye que el desarrollo de un modelo basado en la construcción y la interpretación del punto de vista del discurso puede ser muy beneficioso para avanzar en la comprensión de la variación asociada a los pronombres.

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**Palabras clave.** Español; pronombres; colocación del sujeto; punto de vista; modalidad epistémica; evidencialidad.

### 1. The meanings of variation in pronouns. The case of *yo*

The formulation and placement of personal pronouns and other referential expressions is a subject of extensive discussion in the study of Spanish grammatical variation. Research has mostly been devoted to syntactic contexts where such expressions are assigned the function of subject (see e.g. Erker & Guy 2012; Manjón-Cabeza Cruz *et al.* 2016; Martín Butragueño 2020; Otheguy 2014; Pérez Córdoba & Camacho 2021; Travis & Torres Cacoullos 2012, as well as the studies in Carvalho *et al.* eds. 2015). However, it has been noted that the discursive and cognitive factors involved in subject pronoun variation are not fundamentally different from those that come into play with object pronouns (Aijón Oliva 2017, 2018; Serrano 2017). A considerable body of research has sought to explain such variation by associating it with a range of (frequently elusive) pragmatic concepts such as contrast, ambiguity, or emphasis (e.g. Davidson 1996; Limerick 2023; Luján 1999; Matos Amaral & Schwenter 2005). Other, more mechanical discourse factors, such as priming, have also been observed to play a part in the formal configuration of subjects, even in languages with a priori categorical subject expression, such as English (Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2014). However, it remains challenging to identify a universal factor that can explain the variability in formulation and placement across all possible contexts. In principle, such a factor should operate at a high level of abstraction and be grounded in general cognitive principles.

Contrary to traditional assumptions that formal variants are semantically equivalent, or that they become functionally neutralized in context, it has been posited that there are fundamental differences in the way referents are cognitively construed by way of variable formal choices (Aijón Oliva & Serrano 2010, 2013; Serrano 2013, 2017). Formal expression correlates with comparably lower cognitive accessibility and higher informativeness. It is also necessary to consider the distribution of syntactic functions in the clause, most notably those of subject and dative and accusative—or primary and secondary—objects (e.g. Company 2001, García-Miguel 2015). In languages like Spanish, the subject, which is characterized by its coindexicality with the verbal ending, typically corresponds to the most prominent participant in the event being described (García 2009: 50-51; Serrano 2017: 134). This correlates with specific semantic preferences—the function is typically assigned to animate and definite participants assuming the semantic roles of agent or experiencer. At the level of discourse, the subject is often placed at the beginning of the clause or is not formally realized, being recoverable from other referential elements in the context. Consequently, variation in the formal configuration of the subject is associated with variation in the notional status accorded to its referent. This concerns both its inherent salience and its accessibility across a stretch of discourse (Aijón Oliva & Serrano 2010; 2013: 32-36; Ariel 2008: 49-53).

The case of the singular first person is a significant one. This grammatical paradigm constitutes the primary formal means to construe ‘the speaker’ as an element of communicative interaction (Aijón Oliva 2019: 119-120). The speaker can be considered inherently salient, its existence being presupposed, as is that of the addressee or audience. In functional models, referents are best understood as mental representations construed by linguistic means, and not as real-world objects (Fontaine *et al.* 2023: 28, 31). However, specific choices regarding the coding of the speaker in discourse are indicators of how and to what extent such discourse is conceptually connected with the individual responsible for its production, i.e. the extradiscursive reference of ‘the speaker’.

Research on morphosyntactic variation as the construction of meaning has shown that the presence of first-person forms, particularly overt subject and object pronouns, in a stretch of discourse contributes to its anchoring in the stylistic pole of subjectivity (Rodríguez García 2021: 189-192; Serrano 2013: 291-293). This is due to the higher informativeness accorded to overt referents, in contrast to the salience associated with omitted ones that remain accessible across discourse, thanks to deictic-anaphoric elements such as verbal morphemes.

Conversely, grammatical choices such as the plural first-person or the singular second-person pronoun will signal the adoption of less subjective and more intersubjective viewpoints (Serrano 2017: 144-145), while third-person pronouns are primarily associated with the realm of objectivity. The theoretical framework developed in studies of viewpoint in grammar and discourse (Dancygier 2017; Verhagen 2016) provides a useful basis for the analysis of grammatical choices associated with the construction of participants (Serrano 2022: 9-10), starting with the allocation of syntactic functions and the ways these are formally configured.

The goal of the present study is to analyze the motivations and repercussions of the first-person subject pronoun *yo* ‘I’ as a communicative choice, with the aim of contributing to a general explanatory model of pronoun variation in Spanish. The observation will focus on written communication within a digital environment, namely that of news items published in electronic newspapers, and more specifically on the comments to those items submitted by the readership. Contrary to most extant literature on subject pronoun variation, this study will not address the contextual conditions for the formulation of the pronoun as against its omission. The focus is on overt *yo* as a meaningful choice, trying to unveil how its communicative repercussions can be best described. A general distinction will be proposed between *epistemic* and *evidential* contexts where the pronoun is used. These will respectively be subdivided into two more specific functions that appear to form a continuum in real usage. The proposal will then serve as a basis for the analysis of the preverbal vs. postverbal placement of the pronoun in the clause, as well as more generally within the textual sequence where it appears, these aspects having traditionally offered stronger resistance to theorization than the expression vs. omission of subjects (Aijón Oliva 2017: 179; Aijón Oliva & Serrano 2013: 119-121). The contextual categories distinguished will be correlated with the different options for placement, in order to elucidate the relationships between clause configuration, pragmatic meaning, and the notional construction of the speaker.

Section 2 of this paper delineates the features of the corpus utilized and the analytical approach to be deployed on the textual materials. Sections 3 and 4 develop the qualitative phase of the analysis, wherein the epistemic and evidential contexts associated with *yo* are discussed and illustrated in the corpus. In Section 5, the quantitative patterns of preverbal and postverbal subject placement are addressed in relation to the functions previously examined. Finally, Section 6 summarizes the conclusions of the study and details some questions for further exploration.

## 2. Corpus and methodology

The inquiry is based on a corpus of comments to local news items published in three digital newspapers from the Peninsular city of Salamanca during the year 2021.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> The newspapers in question are *La Gaceta de Salamanca* ([www.lagacetadesalamanca.es](http://www.lagacetadesalamanca.es)), *Salamanca 24 Horas* ([www.salamanca24horas.com](http://www.salamanca24horas.com)), and *Salamanca RTV al Día* (<https://salamancartvaldia.es>). The majority of the comments were obtained from *Salamanca 24 Horas*. Reader participation was less frequent in the other journals, presumably due to the requirement of prior registration on their platforms. All excerpts will be reproduced in their original spelling.

comments amount to a total of 51,651 words, exceeding the 49,345 words of the news texts to which they correspond, which suggests a high level of engagement on the part of the readership, particularly when the topics dealt with are controversial. As for overt *yo*, a total 124 tokens were obtained, which will form the basis for the qualitative and quantitative analyses.<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that the pronoun is virtually absent from news texts, with only occasional occurrences in literal quotations. This in itself points to divergent tendencies in the construction of viewpoint in informative versus argumentative media discourse (see also González de Requena Farré 2020: 200-202).

First, the detailed observation of the contexts in which *yo* appears makes it possible to distinguish a range of pragmatic functions that will be classified into epistemic (Section 3) and evidential ones (Section 4), the latter being viewed as a particular development of the former. The first-person pronoun is observable in comments dealing with different topics and where different kinds of participants are addressed, but the communicative intentions seem to be notably recurrent across the examples. Quantitative analysis (Section 5) focuses on a more structural facet of variation, namely the placement of the subject pronoun, which in any case should be connected with the contexts discussed previously. The positional variation of subjects has usually been approached as the choice between preverbal vs. postverbal placement within the specific clause (e.g., Delbecq 2005; Gundel & Fretheim 2009; Serrano 2013). From a discursive-cognitive approach, it has been possible to specify that postverbal subjects entail lesser salience and higher informativeness of their referents (Serrano 2013: 293-296), which in turn is projected on a variety of possible interpretations according to the context.

However, in order to gain further insight into the relationships between subject position and the construction of viewpoint in discourse, all tokens of *yo* in the corpus were classified according to their placement at three different levels, from more general to more specific:

- a) Within the whole comment: initial vs. non-initial position.
- b) Within the utterance: initial vs. non-initial position.
- c) Within the clause: preverbal vs. postverbal position.

The consideration of not just whether *yo* is preverbal in the specific clause, but also whether it is the initial word in the utterance and in the whole comment, is motivated by the preliminary observation that many comments in the corpus do start with the first-person pronoun. As will be shown, this is in turn connected with the interactional orientation of comment threads in digital environments (Fuentes Rodríguez & Brenes Peña 2021: 267). The utterance is defined here as any textual sequence demarcated with periods or paragraph marks, or where such elements could be expected to appear according to conventional writing norms, even if commenters often alter standard punctuation or dispense with it altogether. Of course, there is partial implication among the three levels considered: a pronoun placed at the beginning of a comment will at the same time be utterance-initial as well as clause-initial, i.e. occupying the preverbal position within the clause. Conversely, a pronoun formulated after the verb cannot be comment- or utterance-initial. However, the consideration of other possible combinations—preverbal pronouns that do not appear at the beginning of the comment and/or the utterance—may prove useful to better understand the mechanisms underlying the placement of *yo* in the sequences under analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> Several tokens of the pronoun used as the heading of a comment were disregarded. In such cases, it is not integrated in a clause or a textual stretch, but is merely used as a title of the sequence – just as proper names, nicknames and many other elements can be.

### 3. *Yo* and epistemic modality

The relationship between epistemic modality and evidentiality is a complex one (Sanromán Vilas 2020) and has been described in different ways (Nuyts 2017: 60-61). Here it will be proposed that the overt pronoun *yo* is a priori an *epistemic* resource in the sense that it is employed to explicitly construct ‘the speaker’ into discourse, thus signaling the cognitive domain where the content is to be interpreted. In most cases, *yo* appears when exposing some personal stance or behavior that, through the pronoun, is explicitly ascribed to a first-person viewpoint. However, in some contexts—the ones to be characterized as *evidential*—the clause with the overt pronoun is further aimed at lending support to a different informative or argumentative segment. Evidentiality is usually understood as the linguistic indication of “the source of information on which a speaker bases an assertion, and, more broadly, the reliability of the speaker’s knowledge” (Clift 2006: 570). In the contexts under analysis, this generally translates into the assertion that the speaker has seen or done something that endows him/her with authority on the topic under discussion.

To put this in a clearer way, example (1) is a fabricated sentence illustrating both an evidential context (*yo presencié* ‘I witnessed’) and an epistemic one (*yo apoyo* ‘I support’). In real discourse, the pronoun could of course have been omitted in either or both clauses. However, as previously expounded, the mechanisms underlying variable formulation will not be specifically discussed in the present study.

- (1) *Yo presencié los hechos y yo apoyo la versión de los agentes de policía.*  
 ‘I witnessed the events and I support the version given by the police officers.’

Following this general distinction, evidential uses of *yo* will appear within utterances or clauses aimed at substantiating expository or argumentative discourse developed in other—more often subsequent—ones. This means that the evidential function is realized at the level of discourse, usually being discernible through the wider context. For this reason, evidential uses of *yo* could more accurately be termed *epistemic-evidential*. In (1), the characterization of *I witnessed* as an evidential resource—and not, for example, as the mere recounting of an experience—is mainly derived from the interpretation that the clause aims at establishing the commenter’s authority regarding the topic discussed. In turn, the first-person pronoun apparently constitutes a formal resource to emphasize such authority.

In all contexts, the pronoun is an indicator that the content should be interpreted from the viewpoint of that participant and need not be extrapolated to others. In other words, it demarcates a conceptual domain where that content applies. From an isomorphic perspective, this function can be considered inherent to the pronoun in all its manifestations; in fact, observation suggests that the uses we will characterize as evidential (Section 4) are a more specific pragmatic category derived from this general one. Also, this use of the term *epistemic* is a broader one than was handled in Aijón Oliva & Serrano (2010: 15-16), where a distinction was made between *epistemic* and *argumentative* uses of the verbal form *creo* ‘I think’, depending on whether it was the intention of the speaker to expose a mere hypothesis or rather a personal stance or belief. It was shown that argumentative contexts promote the formulation of the pronoun, based on the higher informativeness associated with this variant, as against those where the intention is to expose a mere hypothesis.

From the perspective adopted here, the use of the first person with cognition and communication verbs is itself epistemic, insofar as it always indicates that the content

of discourse is approached from the viewpoint of the speaker. The intention can of course be more hypothetical or rather more contentious, but this is connected with contextual features including the variable formulation of the pronoun itself—as the aforementioned study indeed revealed. In turn, the placement of the pronoun in discourse can add further nuances to how the content is to be interpreted.

Two major kinds of contexts for epistemic *yo* will be distinguished, namely those where the speaker reports a stance regarding a certain topic or fact (§3.1) and those dealing with specific deeds the speaker attributes to him/herself, sometimes by proposing a hypothetical situation and stating what he/she would do (§3.2). In spite of the distinguishing features of these uses, which include the semantics of verbal roots, verbal tense and aspect, and other contextual elements, their pragmatic motivations can be considered analogous.

### 3.1. Personal stance

The adoption of a certain stance is closely associated with epistemic modality, linguistic elements being resources for the indexing of such a stance (Cook 2012: 296; Kiesling 2013: 452). It is common for news items commenters to elaborate their opinion regarding controversial matters related to the events under discussion. In such cases, the first-person subject pronoun underscores the fact that the content is associated with the personal domain of the speaker. The verbs used are generally cognition ones, such as *creer* ‘to think, believe’ (example 2), or perception ones, like *ver* ‘to see’ (3), the latter excerpt alluding to the presence of a photograph alongside the news piece, which enables readers to form independent judgments.

- (2) *Yo creo que la policía y los jueces hacen su trabajo, lo que ocurre que las leyes las hacen los gobernantes y ahí empieza el fallo, el primer fallo. Detienen a uno 10, 20, 30 veces y sigue en libertad... y a continuar delinquiendo.* < suc-S24H-300521-com >  
 ‘I think that the police and judges do their job; the problem is that laws are made by rulers, and that’s where the failure begins. Someone can be arrested 10, 20, 30 times and still they will be left free... and continue committing crimes.’
- (3) *Yo veo bien parada la furgoneta antes del paso de peatones, a ese idiota multa gorda por gilipollas* < suc-S24H-160421-com >  
 ‘I see the van correctly stationed before the pedestrian crossing. That idiot must get a big fine for being such a jerk.’

Example (2) is an instance of the construction *yo creo* ‘I think’, largely pragmaticalized as a resource for the introduction of personal arguments, even if the variant with an omitted subject (*creo*) and that with the subject pronoun after the verb (*creo yo*) are also frequent in discourse and entail partially different meanings (Aijón Oliva & Serrano 2010; Hennemann 2016). *Yo creo* most often appears at the initial position of comments (see further Section 5) and recalls the use of utterance-initial *yo* as a turn-taking device in dialogic discourse (Aijón Oliva 2019: 132-133; Orozco 2023: 742). This suggests the intuition that threads of comments are instances of co-constructed discourse with a certain degree of interaction.

Other cognition verbs that are not as clearly fixed with the preverbal pronoun also tend to appear at different positions within comments, as illustrated by the following examples with *entender* ‘to understand’ and *preguntarse* ‘to wonder’. Both are headed by the adversative particle *pero* ‘but’, thus are presented as somehow countering what has been said just before, respectively that the reaction of the person in question is not praiseworthy and that it is not the intention of the writer to criticize the police.

- (4) Que la reacción no están bien, pues no, pero *yo* le entiendo al hombre! < suc-S24H-160421-com >  
 ‘His reaction is not right? Well it’s not, but still *I* understand the fellow!’
- (5) No es crítica empezando por hay pero *yo* me pregunto como se pueden presentar ocho coches patrullas segun se ve en la foto quedó media ciudad dejada por una pelea < suc-S24H-180421-com >  
 ‘This isn’t a criticism to begin with, but *I* wonder how it is that up to eight patrol cars showed up, as can be seen in the photo. Half the city was left unattended for a mere fight.’

Therefore, among the most recurrent contexts for the occurrence of *yo* in comments are those in which personal views are discussed, as a basic facet of argumentative discourse. While the pronoun may suggest the lack of generalizability of the content by highlighting the association of the content with the viewpoint of the speaker—and thus promoting subjectivity in a discursive-cognitive sense—it can simultaneously enhance the assertiveness of the speech act or at least suggest commitment on the part of the speaker, as has been noted in pragmatic studies of pronoun formulation (Davidson 1996; Stewart 2003).

### 3.2. Personal behavior (in real or hypothetical situations)

These uses are often analogous to stance ones in the sense that deeds and habits are presented as personal positions and implicitly regarded as worthy of imitation by others. In example (6), the writer states what he/she does not do, i.e. going into a supermarket that has people begging at the entrance. In other cases, the utterance may not intend to suggest a behavioral pattern, but it will still report a personal situation. In (7), amidst a discussion about the right of homeowners to retain—and use—copies of the keys of the properties they lease to tenants, a participant states that he/she does not have such copies and inquires about the legality of their possession. Note the transition from the first-person viewpoint to that of impersonal *se* with a quasi-generic referential reading (Fábregas 2021: 118), which will also be observed below in some examples characterized as evidential.

- (6) *Yo* ya no entro a un súper con un “pidepelas” de esos perenne en la puerta. < suc-S24H-150421-com >  
 ‘*I* no longer go into supermarkets with those “change-beggars” perennially installed at the entrance.’
- (7) *Yo* no tengo llaves de mi piso alquilado. ¿Se pueden tener? < suc-S24H-150421-com ><sup>4</sup>  
 ‘*I* have no keys of my rented apartment. Can one have them?’

However, the majority of cases within this epistemic subset are hypothetical, discussing what the writer would do if placed within a given situation related to that in the news piece. In (8), which is a comment on the same text as (7), the writer suggests that tenants should change door locks when moving into a rented home. The pronoun is

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<sup>4</sup> As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, this and other examples of preverbal *yo* seem easy to interpret as contrastive, e.g. ‘*I*, unlike others, have no keys...’. As already noted, *contrast* is itself an elusive pragmatic notion. Our proposal here is to view it as one possible contextual projection of the meaning that can be considered inherent to all instances of overt *yo*, and most clearly to comment-initial ones, i.e. the indication that the content is to be interpreted from the speaker’s viewpoint—and thus, implicitly, that it is not to be interpreted from the viewpoints of others.

extracted from a relative clause and topicalized (*yo es lo que haría* ‘me, that’s what [I]’d do’ as opposed to *es lo que yo haría* ‘that’s what I would do’). The hedging marker *vamos* ‘well, I mean; lit. [we] go’ is another conversational feature that underlines the function of the pronoun, i.e. signaling the fact that it is a personal viewpoint that is under development. Subsequently, there is another instance of preverbal *yo* (*yo estoy pagando un alquiler* ‘I’m paying the rent’) that, in spite of the use of the present simple, needs to be understood as elaborating on the hypothetical situation construed by the preceding clause with *yo*. The commenter adopts the role of a tenant and articulates what the landlady should refrain from doing in that scenario.

- (8) Lo lógico es cambiar la cerradura cuando te mudas a una casa que no es tuya ya que no sabes quien ha podido estar antes y la propietaria no se puede negar ya que es tu intimidad y seguridad, vamos *yo* es lo que haría, ni la propietaria tiene que entrar que *yo* estoy pagando un alquiler < suc-S24H-150421-com >  
 ‘It’s only natural to change the door lock when you move into a home that is not yours, since you don’t know who may have been there before, and the owner cannot refuse since this is about your privacy and your safety. Well, that’s what *I’d* do, and the owner need not enter the place, since *I’m* paying the rent.’

In the latter clause, *yo* appears to become referentially generic and pragmatically similar to the speaker-inclusive uses of the second person at the beginning of the excerpt (*cuando te mudas* ‘when you move’, *no sabes* ‘you don’t know’), whereby the viewpoint of the speaker is displaced to that of the audience. The singular first person a priori seems least inclined to generic readings, but these do exist in different languages (Zobel 2016). It is plausible that they simply be more difficult to discern, given the ease with which ‘the speaker’ as an element of discourse is conflated with the actual individual speaking or writing. Examples like (8) suggest that epistemic uses of *yo* tend to promote broader referential interpretations by presenting the speaker’s stance or behavior as exemplary.

Also, the implementation of the behavior suggested frequently falls outside the purview of the commenter, since it involves measures that fall within the competence of the public administration, security forces, or other institutions. Besides, such measures are often overtly controversial. The use of pseudonyms engenders a significantly higher level of expressive freedom in comparison to that exercised by journalists in informational texts. The authors of the following comments accentuate the personal scope of their contributions by introducing them with the first-person pronoun, in the typical fashion of the epistemic stance uses reviewed above.<sup>5</sup>

- (9) Que falta de Justicia! A estos niños e ocho días, les enseñaba *yo* respeto y educación < suc-S24H-180621-com >  
 ‘What a lack of justice! In eight days *I’d* teach respect and good manners to these spoiled brats.’
- (10) *Yo* legalizaba todas las drogas y que se maten, selección natural < suc-S24H-130421-com >  
 ‘*I* would legalize all drugs and let them kill one another – plain natural selection.’

<sup>5</sup> Although not strictly related to the subject pronoun, it is worth to note the recurrence of the imperfective past tense (*enseñaba*, *legalizaba*) in examples of the sort, as against the more prototypical conditional (*enseñaría*, *legalizaría*). The former choice, rather than being merely a ‘colloquial’ variant of the latter (RAE & ASALE 2009: §23.11), apparently endows hypotheses with higher assertiveness. Its co-occurrence with the preverbal subject pronoun may have stylistic implications that merit further investigation.

#### 4. *Yo* and evidentiality

As with merely epistemic contexts, epistemic-evidential ones can be classified according to two primary sources of evidentiality: personal witnessing and personal experience. These categories are distinguished by the semantic class of the main verb and other contextual elements, as will be elaborated upon in the following subsections.

##### 4.1. *Personal witnessing*

The self-attributed authority of a commenter often comes from having personally witnessed some event, as in (11), with the verb *ver* ‘to see’, whereby the writer provides his/her own version of the events narrated in the corresponding news piece.

- (11) *Yo la vi cuando salía del Mercadona dando gritos e insultando al vigilante. Como si hubiera sido ella la víctima. Parecía muy joven* < suc-S24H-010621-com >  
 ‘I saw her when she was leaving the Mercadona supermarket, shouting and insulting the security guard. As if she was the victim. She looked very young.’

Note that perception verbs are also common in personal-stance epistemic contexts (see example 3 above). The difference in pragmatic function often correlates with differences in verbal aspect—imperfective in those cases, perfective in these ones, alluding to specific facts in the past—and lexical meaning—a more abstract, intellectual sense of the act of perception vs. the more literal, physical one that is manifest in (11).

In example (12), a commenter states *yo estaba allí* ‘I was there’, immediately contradicting a previous participant's assertion that the individuals responsible for a certain transgression might be affiliated with ‘the ethnic group’, meaning Romani people. In (13), which is another comment issued in response to the same participant, there are two instances of preverbal *yo* amidst the assertion of personal authority based on other factors. This is made evident by the parenthetical annotation *por mi trabajo* ‘due to my job’ and the specification that the commenter was raised in the city district alluded to.

- (12) *Yo estaba allí y no eran de la etnia...además solo se especifica “la etnia” cuando a todas horas hay problemas de este tipo* < suc-S24H-150421-com >  
 ‘I was there and they didn’t belong to the ethnic group. Besides, they only talk about “the ethnic group”, when issues of the sort are happening at all times.’
- (13) *Siempre hay noticias...de este tipo ...fiestas en pisos ...gente k yo por mi trabajo e visto como se saltaban la cuarentena...niñatos haciendo botellón...en fin y ya te digo MALOTE..k no eran gitanas ..así k dejar de echar la culpa a los de siempre...yo me criado en ese barrio y ni punto de comparación con lo k hay en otros* < suc-S24H-150421-com >  
 ‘There are always news headlines of the sort – parties in apartments, people that I, due to my job, have seen skip quarantine regulations, brats doing drinking rallies... Well [I] can tell you, *Malote*, that these ones were not Romani. You guys stop blaming the same people all the time. I was raised in that district and there’s no comparison with what you get in others.’

The verb in *yo estaba allí* ‘I was there’ (12) is not a perception one, but rather points to the physical location of the speaker as the basis for the act of witnessing. In turn, *yo me he criado* ‘I was raised’ in (13) underscores life experience, thereby ascribing the latter token to the evidential subtype to be examined in §4.2. As pointed out, the evidential function of these sequences, rather than being coded in the verb or the subject pronoun, results from pragmatically selecting the most relevant interpretation of their

presence in the context.

In connection with this, evidential uses of the first person frequently lead to the coordination or juxtaposition of clauses that appear to be semantically unrelated, yet become pragmatically coherent through the assumption that the speaker's presence in discourse is relevant for the argumentation developed. In (12) above, the writer does not specify any semantic connection between 'I was there' and 'they didn't belong to the ethnic group'. It is the readership that must pragmatically establish such a connection through the inference that their presence enabled the observation of those individuals, thereby validating the final assertion. This suggests that perception verbs may be inherently present in evidential contexts, even if only by way of pragmatic inference. The same sequence *yo estaba allí* appears in this other example, which includes an additional instance of evidential *yo* with an explicit perception verb (*yo vi* 'I saw'):

- (14) *Yo estaba allí.... Eran tres los intervinientes y fueron 2 locales los primeros en llegar y detuvieron al agresor. Enhorabuena a ambos!!! Yo vi que estaban muy bien coordinados y preparados < suc-S24H-180421-com >*  
 'I was there... Three people intervened, of whom two local policemen were the first to arrive and arrested the aggressor. Congratulations to both of them! I saw they were very well coordinated and trained.'

Example (15) is a comment on a news piece about a driving accident. The initial mention of the writer's presence may be ambiguous as to its relationship with the main event. It may actually be establishing a context for the latter, meaning that the accident happened just when they were passing by. It would even be possible to infer a cause-and-effect relationship between both events, though this is probably not the case here (compare with e.g. 'I was waving to her and she crashed against the wall'). Instead, the remark 'I was passing by' is most likely used as an evidential resource to substantiate the veracity of the information provided.<sup>6</sup>

- (15) *Yo pasaba por la carretera y se ha estampado contra el muro. Llovía bastante pero es raro chocarse así < suc-S24H-130421-com >*  
 'I was driving along the road and she crashed against the wall. It was raining quite a lot but still it's strange to collide that way.'

As can be observed, evidentiality based on personal witnessing is a frequent function in reader's comments and correlates with a number of recurring traits. These include perception verbs—often being inferable from location ones—and the coordination or juxtaposition with a clause that conveys the fundamental argument. Readers are tasked with establishing the relevant pragmatic connection between these elements.

#### 4.2. Personal experience

Another source of authority is the commenter's life experience, based on his or her education, job, residence, habits, and so on. In general, these uses are primarily intended to support personal arguments, rather than to add first-hand detail to the information in the news item. Nevertheless, they seem to form a continuum with some of the cases

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<sup>6</sup> From approaches based on functional compensation (Otheguy 2014: 377-379), it might be posited that overt *yo* in this example circumvents the potential ambiguity of the verbal form *pasaba*, which may be interpreted as either first- or third-person. In the absence of the pronoun, the writer might actually intend to say 'She was driving along the road and she crashed against the wall'. It is important to emphasize that different pragmatic and discursive factors of variation need not be mutually exclusive, but also that general explanations should be sought that can simultaneously account for all of them.

discussed in the previous subsection, and may even have semantically analogous predicates. In (16), the writer metaphorically uses *ver* ‘to see’ to recount something that has happened to him/her *más de una vez* ‘more than once’, the temporal expression being obviously aimed at reinforcing the veracity of the assessment. The latter strategy becomes more evident in (17) with the formulation of *siempre* ‘always’, again in adjacency to *ver* with a non-literal meaning of recurrent experience.

- (16) *Yo más de una vez he visto peligrar mi integridad física por esos mamelucos fitipaldis, así que, estoy con el señor. Bravo por enfrentarse a esos mercenarios del volante < suc-S24H-160421-com >*  
 ‘I have seen my physical integrity endangered more than once by those brainless Fiti-paldi imitators, so [I] support the gentleman. Bravo on fighting those driving mercenaries.’
- (17) *Estoy sorprendido por los comentarios. Yo siempre he visto que los propietarios tienen llave de los pisos alquilados < suc-S24H-150421-com >*  
 ‘[I] am surprised by the comments. I have always seen owners keep copies of the keys to their rented apartments.’

While the preceding examples appear to recount iterated episodic events, in other cases it is states prolonged over time that are described with imperfective verbal tenses. Example (18) shows yet again the coordination of clauses lacking an explicit semantic relationship (*yo vivo aquí* ‘I live here’ and *se vive muy tranquilo* ‘life is very peaceful, lit. one lives very quiet’), of which the first one is pragmatically interpreted as lending support to the second one. Again, it is noteworthy to observe the rapid transition from the writer’s personal viewpoint to a quasi-generic one with the impersonal reflexive construction *se vive*, this being a significant resource for discourse desubjectivization (Serrano 2022: 12).

- (18) *Para los que dicen que si [el barrio de] Garrido está mal que si cada vez peor yo vivo aquí y se vive muy tranquilo así que no exagereis hombre que tontos hay en todos los sitios!!! < suc-S24H-170421-com >*  
 ‘To those who say that [the] Garrido [neighborhood] is in bad shape, that it is getting ever worse: I live here and life is very peaceful, so don’t exaggerate, folks—stupid people there are everywhere!’

In other cases, the epistemic-evidential intention is more subtle, since the commenter limits him/herself to exposing an experience or habit, letting the readership infer its connection with the events recounted in the news text. In (19), the suggestion is made that it is not such a grave matter for a child to lose his/her way in the street, given that the writer personally had the same experience on numerous occasions.

- (19) *yo me perdi 100 veces de pequeño... bendita juventud madre mia la que nos espera < suc-S24H-170521-com >*  
 ‘I got lost 100 times when I was little... Oh my, we’ve got a lot of growing up to do with these youngsters.’

Examples like the previous one show that it is only within the broader discourse context that evidential uses can be discerned from the merely epistemic recounting of facts specifically associated with the speaker. The subsequent section aims to elucidate whether there are any significant correlations between the pragmatic contexts discussed and the position of *yo* within the clause and the wider context, and whether these

correlations can tell us something about the basic meanings of pronoun placement.

## 5. The variable placement of *yo* and its relationship with viewpoint construction

### 5.1. General distribution

The 124 tokens of expressed *yo* found in the comments were classified according to the four types of contexts discussed—two within the epistemic function (personal stance and personal behavior) and two within the epistemic-evidential one (personal witnessing and personal experience). These tokens were then subjected to quantitative analysis according to the position of the pronoun. This methodological approach may offer further insights into pronoun placement as the construction of discourse viewpoint. The examples are initially grouped into preverbal and postverbal ones, following common practice in grammatical variation studies. Preverbal *yo* is by far the prevalent choice, with 104 tokens that account for 83.9% of the total (Table 1). This is coherent with the general tendency of first- and second-person pronouns to occupy the preverbal position usually assigned to the most salient participant in the event (Aijón Oliva & Serrano 2013: 72-73). Of course, the omission of these pronouns is altogether much more frequent than their formulation, partly owing to the fact that their correlative verbal endings and clitics are most often unambiguous as to their reference.

Table 1. Preverbal vs. postverbal placement of *yo* and pragmatic functions

Function	Contextual use	Preverbal <i>yo</i>		Postverbal <i>yo</i>		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Epistemic	Personal stance	41	87.2	6	12.8	47	37.9
	Personal behavior	29	70.7	12	29.3	41	33.1
	<i>Total epistemic</i>	70	79.5	18	20.5	88	71
Evidential	Personal witnessing	13	100	0	0	13	10.5
	Personal experience	21	91.3	2	9.5	23	18.5
	<i>Total evidential</i>	34	94.4	2	5.6	36	29
Total		104	83.9	20	16.1	124	100
$\chi^2 = 9.06489$ ; degrees of freedom: 3; $p = 0.02844$							

The table indicates that preverbal placement is categorical in contexts of personal witnessing and is also strongly dominant in the rest of evidential contexts, with just two tokens of postposition. This means that evidentiality has just 5.6% of postverbal subject placement altogether. The result stands in contrast to the 20.5% prevalence of this variant in epistemic uses, which is primarily attributable to the comparably high frequency of postverbal *yo* (29.3%) when exposing or hypothesizing personal behavior. The subsequent analysis will delve into each positional variant individually, in order to elucidate its relationships with the construction of viewpoint and the deployment of the functions distinguished.

### 5.2. Preverbal *yo*

Elements placed at initial positions tend to influence the interpretation of the

subsequent discourse (Virtanen 2004: 84-88). Personal forms, in particular, are metonymic expressions whose intended references can set up certain discourse viewpoints (Dancygier 2017: 9-10). From this it can be inferred that *yo*, when placed before the verb with which it agrees, indicates that what comes after it needs to be interpreted within the conceptual space of ‘the speaker’. This results in a variety of pragmatic manifestations. In most examples of preverbal placement discussed so far, the presence of the pronoun generates clearly marked meanings as against its absence. Furthermore, the notion that pronoun formulation marks emphasis or contrast with other participants is insufficient to capture its full scope and function. The preverbal subject pronoun is itself an interactional resource with a range of pragmatic repercussions.

As discussed in Section 2, the tokens of preverbal *yo* can be further subdivided according to whether they are comment-initial, utterance-initial, or just clause-initial, i.e. in a preverbal position within the clause. This classification will allow for more accurate determination of the possible statuses of the pronoun in discourse. The results are displayed on Table 2.

Table 2. Position of preverbal *yo* within the comment, the utterance and the clause

Group	Function	Comment-initial		Utterance-initial		Clause-initial		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Epistemic	Personal stance	17	41.5	10	24.4	14	34.1	41	39.4
	Personal behavior	8	27.6	6	20.7	15	51.7	29	27.9
	<i>Total epistemic</i>	25	35.7	16	22.9	29	41.4	70	67.3
Evidential	Personal witnessing	8	61.5	4	30.8	1	7.7	13	12.5
	Personal experience	8	38.1	5	23.8	8	38.1	21	20.2
	<i>Total evidential</i>	16	47	9	26.5	9	26.5	34	32.7
Total		41	39.4	25	24	38	36.5	104	100
$\chi^2 = 7.94796$ ; degrees of freedom: 6; $p = 0.2419$									

While the general distribution in this case is not conclusively significant, the value of  $p$  being over 0.1, the figures do suggest some differences in the positional behavior of *yo* with both types of evidential contexts. Personal-witnessing uses are the ones more clearly oriented to the comment-initial spot (61.5%), which adds up to more than 90% with comment-internal, utterance-initial tokens (12 of a total 13). This reflects the recurrence of comments akin to those discussed in §3.1, commencing with a statement like *Yo estaba allí* ‘I was there’ or *Yo lo vi* ‘I saw it’ to substantiate a subsequent argument. The result is quite telling as to the potential of the first-person pronoun to establish a conceptual space for interpretation. In personal-experience contexts, the figures are more evenly distributed—comment-initial uses achieving the same percentage as clause-initial ones (38.1%)—which makes it difficult to discern a clear pattern other than the general tendency of *yo* to appear before the verb. Personal experience is a more diffuse notion than the witnessing of specific events, thus possesses a wider range of contextual possibilities and can be invoked at any point in discourse progression.

Compare examples (16), (17), and (18) above, which respectively illustrate the comment-initial, utterance-initial, and clause-initial variants.

The correlation between evidential uses and the comment-initial position suggests that the pronoun is used as an interactional evidential. Elements of the sort, according to Clift (2006: 583), “work to index the relative authority (or indeed subordination) of the speaker over a co-participant with respect to what is said”, and frequently require formulation at strategic positions to fulfill this function. The presence of *yo* at the beginning of a comment implicitly acknowledges the sequential nature of these contributions, which reproduce some mechanisms of dialogue; at the same time, it accentuates the fact that the content is viewed as basically concerning the author and not necessarily generalizable to others. This characterization can of course be applied also to comment-initial *yo* in epistemic contexts, particularly personal-stance ones. In (20), a metadiscursive assessment (*yo estoy leyendo los comentarios* ‘I’m reading the comments’) initiates a highly subjective stretch with abundant first-person pronouns in either subject or object function, where clearly personal views are put forward.

- (20) *Yo estoy leyendo los comentarios y estoy flipando la verdad donde se vio esta falta de respeto no se yo tengo 50 años y estoy flipando como puede levantar la mano un hijo a un padre nose llamarme antiguo pero eso yo no lo veo ni medio normalasi nos va emos perdido todos los valores k nos inculcaron de niños ami ni se me pasa por la cabeza levantar la mano ami padre yo no se donde vamos a llegar < suc-S24H-250421-com > ‘I’m reading the comments and [I]’m really freaking out. Where have we seen such lack of respect? I’m 50 and [I]’m freaking out—how can a son raise his hand against his father? Call [me] old-fashioned, but it doesn’t seem half normal to me. We’re losing all the values that were instilled in us as children. It wouldn’t even occur to me to raise my hand against my father. I don’t know where we’re going to end up.’*

The different occurrences of preverbal *yo* across the preceding stretch accentuate its argumentative orientation by underlining personal stance (*eso yo no lo veo ni medio normal* ‘it doesn’t seem half normal to me’). In some sense, the aforementioned characterization of the preverbal pronoun as an interactional evidential applies even to uses associated with the epistemic function: commenters seem to draw on circumstances that somehow endow them with authority (e.g. *yo tengo 50 años* ‘I’m 50’). In fact, as an interactional evidential, the first-person pronoun formulated at the beginning of comments or utterances is more specifically related to the display of authority than that of epistemic accountability (Clift 2006: 584). This is also consistent with the general results. In turn, the latter dimension may become more prominent in text-internal uses, either preverbal or postverbal ones.

### 5.3. Postverbal *yo*

The postposed variant of the pronoun should not be expected to build discourse viewpoint in the same way as initial *yo* does. Indeed, it often seems more difficult to interpret pragmatically. Postposed subjects have traditionally been interpreted as correlating with informational focusing and/or contrast with other possible references in the context (Silva-Corvalán & Enrique-Arias 2017: 271-272). However, such factors alone do not necessarily promote the formulation of the pronoun after the verb; as noted earlier (see example 7), preverbal *yo* is also often amenable to contrastive interpretations. An approach based on the gradual salience of referents in connection with their syntactic placement (Aijón Oliva & Serrano 2013: 119-124) provides a more explanatory account of postposition. Example (21) makes it possible to observe two distinct instances of contrast between *tú* ‘you (sing.)’ and *yo*. The first one has preverbal pronouns—even

though *yo* does not agree with an overt verb, thus this token was not considered in the statistical analysis, such a verb could only be expected to appear after *no*—while in the second one both pronouns are respectively postposed to forms of *ir* ‘to go’. The latter positional choice appears to be favored by the presence of another constituent before the verb, in this case the focalized element in an interrogative structure (*a qué supermercados habrás ido tú* ‘which supermarkets you may have been to’).

- (21) *Tu mirarás hacia otro lado porque yo no. Sigo cumpliendo las medidas y me esfuerzo en ello por mi, por mi gente y por nuestra salud y trabajo. No sé a qué supermercados habrás ido tu porque a los que voy yo exigen desinfección de manos y mascarilla bien colocada* < suc-S24H-270621-com >  
 ‘You may look away, but I won’t. [I] keep complying with the norms and [I] try hard in the best of my interests, those of my people and of those our health and work. [I] don’t know which supermarkets you (postv.) may have been to, because the ones I (postv.) go to prescribe hand disinfection and a properly placed mask.’

Postverbal *yo* is not uncommon in clauses with a different element that is clearly more topical, often thematically connected with the preceding utterances. However, this does not necessarily entail for *yo* to be described as a ‘new’, ‘unexpected’ or ‘focalized’ element. In fact, most instances of the postverbal pronoun are formulated right after the verb rather than at the utterance- or clause-final position. In such cases, pragmatic interpretation proves more elusive, the speaker becoming less salient than it is at the preverbal position and, at the same time, less informational or contrastive than it is at the final one. It thus suggests lesser involvement of the speaker than preverbal *yo* does (Aijón Oliva 2019: 137), while still establishing a personal viewpoint that can condition how the content is interpreted.

The results of the corpus indicate a frequent association between postverbal placement and epistemic contexts in which the commenter places him/herself in an imaginary situation (§3.2). In (22), *si soy yo* ‘if it had been I, lit. if it’s I’ construes a hypothetical situation where the speaker is the main actor of the event recounted, subsequently stating what he/she would have done in that case. In this example, the subject pronoun is occupying the slot of the predicate of the copulative verb; preverbal placement would seem less natural (?*si yo soy*). Interestingly, in other cases the hypothetical interpretation of the [verb + subject] pattern is the relevant one even in the absence of particles like *si* ‘if’, as happens in (23) and (24). Such an interpretation is promoted by the coordination with a subsequent clause that details the consequence of the hypothesis. It is also noteworthy that, in all three examples, *irrealis* events are construed with the present simple, which endows the argumentation with higher assertiveness.

- (22) *Si soy yo, le pateo otra cosa* < suc-S24H-160421-com >  
 ‘If it had been I, [I]’d have kicked him elsewhere.’
- (23) *Y ya para terminar, soy yo el de la furgoneta y de la primera ostia que le mete, ya estoy fuera, vaya aguante que ha tenido el amigo...* < suc-S24H-160421-com >  
 ‘And finally, had I been the one inside the van and after the first blow he gave it [I] would have gotten out. That fellow was way too patient...’
- (24) *Hago yo eso en mi época y voy para casa caliente, pero claro ...ya se ve..... Visto el padre visto el hijo!!!! Que pena por Dios* < suc-S24H-250421-com >  
 ‘Had I done that in my time and [I]’d have gone back home with a sore bottom, but you see... Like father, like son! God, what a shame.’

Although the aforementioned coordination appears to be necessary for the hypothetical interpretation of (23) and (24), the postverbal placement of *yo* also plays a role. The preverbal subject would not as clearly favor the reading of the first clause as hypothetical; rather, it would more easily be interpreted as an assertion. In the preceding examples, commenters emphasize that, if they had been in the situation instead of the actual participants, their actions or treatment would have differed. The situation remains unchanged; it is just one of its participants that changes. The postverbal variant can even be found in contexts like that of (25), where *rompo yo* ('I'd have broken') follows other verbs with omitted *yo*. The former clause is interpretable as 'I'd have broken the glass myself instead of waiting for others to come and do it'. This interpretation partly relies on prior awareness about the events recounted in the text.

- (25) Puedo entender el agobio de la madre, pero para este viaje no habían hecho falta tantas alforjas. Hay una terraza al lado, cojo una silla y rompo *yo* directamente el cristal < suc-S24H-200421-com >  
 '[I] can understand the mother's anxiety, but there was no need to make such a fuss. There is a bar terrace next door, so [I]'d just have picked up a chair and broken the glass *myself*.'

The analysis shows that the postponement of *yo* is a choice where syntactic, discursive and cognitive factors become intermingled. With this variant there is always some suggestion that the reference of the writer needs to be distinguished from other possible ones—which explains its usual interpretation as contrastive or focalizing. However, it does not entail the imposition of a personal viewpoint over discourse as clearly as is done with initial *yo*, which signals the fact that the subsequent content should be interpreted as associated with the speaker. Rather, what the postposed pronoun suggests is the introduction of the speaker's viewpoint in a predefined situation where that viewpoint need not be the dominant one. In many cases, an antecedent with a higher degree of thematicity is placed before the verb, thereby establishing the primary viewpoint—the supermarkets in example (21), or the mental space constructed by *si* 'if' and/or the verbal nuclei in (22)-(25), which itself entails the assertion of the situation construed as hypothetical (see Serrano 2024b).

This also helps explain the pragmatic repercussions of the postverbal subject in epistemic contexts with verbs like *creer* 'think', *saber* 'know', *decir* 'say', etc., as in (26). The speaker suggests that the stance expressed is to be attributed only to him/herself, while avoiding to establish his/her viewpoint as the dominant one, as would be done with preverbal *yo*. There is often another participant or idea that is treated as the main one within the sequence.

- (26) Ha estado más año delinquiendo y abusando que condenado. Encima como saldrá antes del trullo. A este muy bien sé *yo* lo que le hacía. No iba a tener donde tocar el ASQUEROSO < suc-S24H-050521-com >  
 'He's spent more years offending and abusing than he's been convicted. On top of that, he will get out of jail early. To this one *I* (postv.) know well what I'd do. The creep wouldn't have a place to lay his hands.'

These findings build on earlier observations that postverbal-*yo* epistemic constructions like *creo yo* 'I think' or *digo yo* 'I say' entail lesser responsibility on the part of the speaker than their preverbal-*yo* counterparts do (Aijón Oliva 2019: 136-137; Aijón Oliva & Serrano 2013: 129-130). This pragmatic interpretation is based on the power of clause-initial elements to establish the primary viewpoint of discourse. In evidential

contexts as described here, postposition might seem to be a less coherent choice, diminishing the validity of the speaker's first-hand experience by implicitly ascribing a less relevant role to this participant.

## 6. Conclusions and prospects

First-person pronouns involve the explicit introduction of 'the speaker' into discourse. In the interactional domain analyzed here, the formulation of *yo* at the beginning of a comment is a strategy for making the commenter present and claiming entitlement to the ground. It signals the fact that the sequence is to be interpreted as primarily associated with the participant responsible for discourse—whose relationship with the extralinguistic individual speaking or writing is a complex, context-dependent matter. This function is maintained in other utterance-initial or merely clause-initial uses of *yo*, even if the scope of the speaker's viewpoint is progressively narrowed down in such cases. In turn, the postverbal pronoun shares the function of introducing such a viewpoint, but without making it the dominant one.

By considering two partly different kinds of pragmatic contexts—epistemic and evidential ones—and more specific uses within each of them, it has been possible to better specify the respective contribution of the positional variants to the interpretation of discourse. While the epistemic function is usually contained within the clause—conveying personal stances or modes of behavior—the evidential one is an extension of it that rests on the broader context, whereby it can be interpreted that the speaker's experience is being invoked as support for independent argumentation. Such uses can thus be described as epistemic-evidential, representing a more specific discursive projection of the intrinsic meaning of the pronoun. While comment-initial *yo* is categorical in contexts where personal witnessing is highlighted, and strongly dominant in evidential ones at large, postverbal uses show some correlation with epistemic contexts proposing situations where the speaker hypothetically places him/herself.

The fact is also worth noting that pragmatic strategies in comment threads resemble those found in conversation, with initial *yo* being employed as a strategy for floor taking, even if in the absence of literal 'floor holding'. The pronoun facilitates a transition towards the viewpoint of the commenter. In fact, when some expository or argumentative content is placed before the first-person clause, the expressed pronoun is not as frequent. Example (27) contains two verbs with omitted *yo*, the first one (*lo digo* 'I say this') indicating epistemic stance and the second one (*lo sufro* 'I suffer it') conveying personal experience with an evidential function. It is conceivable that the pronoun could have been formulated in both contexts, albeit more naturally in the latter one, which is consistent with our findings regarding evidential uses. However, this appears to be less necessary once the participant's contribution is underway.

- (27) Lo de los padres de hoy en día, es para analizar y Ø lo digo porque Ø lo sufro en el colegio todos los días. < suc-S24H-250421-com >  
'It would be worth analyzing what the matter is with today's parents, and [I] say this because [I] suffer it at school every day.'

While the present study has focused on expressed *yo*, examples like the preceding one suggest some lines along which the study of variation between expression and omission should also be pursued. Subject pronouns offer a rich avenue for research when approached from functional-cognitive models including viewpoint and mental space building (see further Serrano 2022, 2024a, b). Correlational studies typically consider a wide range of (supposedly independent) variables, aiming to identify those that

generate statistically significant effects and distinguish them from those that do not. However, even within classic variationist models the need has been pointed out to explore “more encompassing phenomena that give fuller social, linguistic, and communicative meaning to the choices made by the speakers” (Martín-Butragueño 2020: 312). The analysis has shown that the formulation of a pronoun subject, particularly at the onset of an utterance, facilitates the anchoring of discourse in the viewpoint of its co-referential participant. Other choices related to pronoun formulation and placement will in turn cause subtle modifications in the cognitive status of that participant and the interpretation of discourse.

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