Title: Can English provide a framework for Spanish response tokens?

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Abstract

This paper investigates the question of whether response items in Spanish can be analysed using frameworks developed for the study of similar items in English. Data comes from the Spanish corpus COREC, the Corpus Oral de Referencia del Español Contemporáneo, and is compared where appropriate with data from the British English corpus, CANCODE, the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English. The main motivation behind this paper is to assess the possibility and appropriateness of using English-based frameworks for the analysis of Spanish and to further the notion of 'good listenership'. To this end, the study scopes out (a) formal aspects of response items in Spanish, (b) pragmatic coverage of the items and their translatability and transferability, and (c) insights into potential cross-cultural misunderstandings with English as the comparison language. We conclude that there is a good but not complete match between English and Spanish, that response tokens are an essential element in being an active and engaged listener in conversation in any language and that fluency is a process best understood in the context of dialogue.

Keywords: English, listenership, turn-taking, response tokens (Spanish), cross-cultural communication.

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1. Introduction

In this paper we explore a common feature of spoken interaction involving 'small' words (exemplified by words such as *vale, claro* and *bien* in Spanish and *right*, *good* and *okay* in English), which we refer to as *response tokens*. Our aim is to investigate the roles such items play in everyday conversation. We adapt the general corpus methodology used by McCarthy (2002) to illustrate the forms and occurrences of response tokens in British English, along with functional categories and their interpretation as elaborated by O'Keeffe and Adolphs (2008). We apply these English-language-derived frameworks to a corpus of Peninsular Spanish conversation. We examine the Spanish evidence at both the formal and pragmatic levels. We conclude that the frameworks developed for English are sufficiently robust to transfer to Spanish, albeit with certain caveats arising from linguistic and cultural differences between the two languages. Finally, we argue that the use of response tokens is an essential element in being an active and engaged listener in conversation and that they make a significant contribution to fluency.

To illustrate our arguments, we investigate speaker turns which consist entirely, or mostly, of the tokens under scrutiny, where the speaker is engaged in responding verbally but without taking the floor. Extract (1), from the British English CANCODE corpus (see section 3 below), exemplifies the domain of the present investigation (relevant items in bold):

(1) [Speakers are talking about a new version of a computer operating system]
S1: And it's got rid of some of the bugs so it won't crash.
S2: It's not much different. It's not much different.
S3: **Right. Really?**
S2: But it looks more like a website.
S3: **Right.**

We put the word *small* in quotes above for several reasons: (a) some, but not all, of the items we discuss in this paper are 'small' morphologically, in that they are monosyllabic (e.g. *good, right, fine*), (b) such words form part of the high-frequency vocabulary of English and, as such, often go unnoticed and remain on the subliminal level of native-speaker consciousness just as common items such as discourse markers have been shown to do (Watts, 1989), and (c) although many of the items we examine in this article are 'small', we hope to demonstrate that they have 'big' meanings on the interactive plane of discourse. In this last respect we concur with the stance taken by John Sinclair in relation to high-frequency items as expressed in his plenary address to the American Association for Applied Linguistics annual conference in 2006, the title of which was *Small words make big meanings*[1].

Informal, casual conversations typically contain response tokens in great number, since participants will often find themselves in the recipient role where they may not wish to assume the floor, or where it may be inappropriate to do so, for example in the midst of a

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[1] The notion of 'small' words having important meanings in interaction is also captured in the title of a paper on the present topic by McCarthy (2003), and a book on oral assessment by Hasselgreen (2005).

personal anecdote or other report delivered by another speaker, or during the reception of important, extended information. Responses may be simply expressions of body-language (e.g. head-nods, eyebrow-raising) or what have commonly been referred to as backchannel responses, in English typically realised by items such a *mm, uhum, yeah, yes, no* (see Yngve, 1970 and further works reviewed below in section 2). Kendon (1967) suggests that speakers rely upon such feedback for guidance as to how the message is being received, while Tottie, (1991: 255) states that such tokens 'grease the wheels of the conversation but constitute no claim to take over the turn'. Here we refer to these listener contributions as indices of *listenership*[2], and we suggest that good listenership is an aspect of fluency, especially where fluency is considered in relation to the collaborative production of conversation by all participants (McCarthy, 2010). We offer the term *confluence* to refer to this way of looking at fluency, and discuss it briefly in section 7. Good listenership is effected without floor-grabbing, through a set of small, but non-minimal, lexical tokens in English and Spanish. By investigating Spanish response items in the present paper, we especially wish to test the transferability of frameworks designed for English data and to extend the debate to cross-linguistic issues.

2. Previous studies of response

2.1. The back channel and beyond

Fries (1952) provides us with an important early study of listener responses in telephone calls. He looked at a range of responses from vocalisations such as *unh* and *hunh*, to the use of *yes* and lexical words and phrases such as *good* and *I see* (Fries, 1952: 49). But it was Yngve (1970) who introduced the notion of the 'back channel', which has since become a standard term for short, non-floor-grabbing responses. Yngve looked at items such as *uh-huh*, *yes, okay*, and brief comments (e.g. *Oh, I can believe it*). However, what researchers have included within the notion of back channel in subsequent research has varied greatly from study to study.

A wide variety of communicative behaviour on the part of the speaker, from body language to changes in phonological pitch, pauses, opportunities for syntactic completion, and fully finished turns (e.g. questions, statements with low pitch termination, etc.) may offer the listener a chance to jump in and respond in some way (see Duncan, 1972, 1974; Jucker, 1986). Especially where the listener's contribution is very brief (often just one or two words), it is often impossible to judge whether the utterance is just backchannel feedback signalling no desire to take the floor, or whether such utterances should be classed as turns which shift the identity of 'current speaker'. As a result, much of the literature on backchannel behaviour has been unable definitively to provide exact and replicable criteria for judging the status of listeners' contributions. Duncan and Niederehe (1974) acknowledge the imprecision of the boundary between brief utterances and proper turns, while accepting the notion that backchannel utterances create an understanding between speaker and listener that the turn has not been yielded. The wide range of options that listeners may exploit, from body language to

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[2] We do not claim to have invented the term, which is used by Tannen (1984) to refer to engaged participation in conversation. We adapt the term to our present needs in order to create a distinction between engaged, active participation and 'listening comprehension', which has traditionally focused on message-processing skills.

non-turn-yielding comments, probably explains why the more easily identifiable, non-word vocalisations have become the focus of more extensive research than lexically- or lexico-grammatically-based responses.

Researchers have, over time, expanded the description of response. Duncan (1974) broadened the debate to embrace items such as *right* and *I see*, and included sentence completions, requests for clarification and brief restatements. Öreström (1983) observed features of backchannel response such as degree of overlap with the main speaker's turn and loudness. Öreström also extended the range of items to include lexical tokens such as *quite* and *good*.

Tottie (1991) investigated backchannel phenomena in British and American English corpus data, and placed vocalisations such as *mm, mhm* and *uh-(h)uh*, alongside 'bona fide words and phrases' (Tottie, 1991: 255). Tottie also noted cases where an utterance is very short, in the characteristic manner of backchannel feedback, but is responded to by the interlocutor, suggesting that such utterances could be seen as full turns.

Gardner (1997, 1998 and 2002) defines backchannels as 'the vocalisation of understandings' and places them as existing 'between speaking and listening' (both quotations from the title of his 1998 paper). Gardner (1997) looks at 'minimal responses', for example *mm-hm*, which he refers to as a 'continuer', encouraging the speaker to go on (see also Schegloff, 1982), alongside the 'stronger, more aligning/agreeing' *yeah*. Gardner (1998) classifies listener responses into backchannel items such as acknowledgements and continuers (e.g. *yeah, mm-hm*), newsmarking items (e.g. *oh, really*), evaluative items (e.g. *wow, how terrible*), and clarification requests. The different functions of seemingly similar vocal responses such as *um* and *uh* have been teased out by Clark and Fox Tree (2002).

Stubbe (1998) refers to 'supportive verbal feedback' in the title of her paper, distinguishing between neutral tokens (e.g. *mm, uhuh*) and supportive tokens (e.g. *oh gosh*). Stubbe's study is concerned with cross-cultural issues, and the repudiation of negative evaluations and stereotypes which may arise from differences in realisations of listener feedback across different cultures (see also Holmes & Stubbe, 1997, which adds a gender dimension to the study of differences in listener behavior). As in the other works reviewed here, the key point is the acceptance that lexically-based responses need not be turn-grabbing but can be seen as an aspect of listener behaviour.

2.2. Exchange structure and adjacency

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) collected first-language spoken classroom data which led to the construction of a rank-scale for spoken exchanges based on the core notion of speaker 'moves'. The classroom exchanges they observed consisted of *initiating moves* (utterances structurally independent from previous turns), and *answering* or *responding* moves by the recipients of initiating moves (1975: 26-7; see also Sinclair & Brazil 1982: 49). There was also a third move in the classroom data, the *follow-up*, by which teachers acknowledged and evaluated the responding moves of their pupils. Such patterns have been given the shorthand label of *IRF* exchanges, and the R-move is clearly of relevance to the current study. We shall

also argue for including the F-move in the notion of response, and comment on the two types further, below, in section 4.

The conversation analysis (CA) literature on adjacency pairs (see Schegloff 2006) has included a focus on 'assessments' (evaluations of people and other entities), and has provided data on how listeners respond to evaluations (see in particular Pomerantz, 1984). Antaki (2000, 2002) investigates what he calls 'high-grade assessments' (emphatic variations of some of the lexical response items we examine here) in recipients' responsive moves. Likewise, Stenström (1990) discusses features which partly overlap with the present study, and other CA researchers have also examined the role of 'third-turn receipts' (a parallel term for the F-move in the IRF sequence; see for example Heritage, 1985).

Research into how listeners behave has given strength to the notion of conversation as a joint enterprise, what Erickson (1986: 295) refers to as the 'relationship of intertexuality between speaking and listening'. The notion of listenership in the present paper similarly stresses the jointly occupied territory between speaking and listening. Research into verbal and non-verbal behaviour on the part of listeners (e.g. Goodwin, 1981) underscores how listeners respond at appropriate points and in appropriate ways, and also how speakers respond to such verbal and non-verbal feedback and adjust their talk as a result. Duranti (1986) also states the importance of examining how speakers are responded to by their interlocutors, while Erickson (1986) views listening as 'an activity of communicative production as well as one of reception' (Erickson 1986: 297). Erickson and Shultz (1982), in a study of interview data, refer to moments of listening-response relevance (LRRM), after which a speaker may persist with the same point or make a new one. An LRRM is a primary opportunity for the listener to respond, and the role of responses in enabling the discourse to proceed smoothly is seen as crucial. Similarly, oral narrative (see Goodwin, 1986) has provided illuminating data for how listeners engage actively to express something more than just 'hearership' (Goodwin, 1981: 103). Studies of the joint activity of speakers and listeners point to the importance of listener response, and the ongoing and shifting effects of responses on the way speakers continue their turns (see Bublitz, 1988; McGregor & White, 1990). Schegloff (1982) states that to neglect the listener and to focus only on the main speaker results in the misleading characterisation of the discourse as 'a single speaker's, and a single mind's, product' (Schegloff 1982: 74). The notion of listenership in the present paper embraces the view of conversation as joint production; good listeners not only acknowledge talk, they offer non-floor-grabbing increments which enable the discourse to flow onwards in a manner satisfactory to all participants.

Within the CA tradition, the turn-taking system is central, and responses are understood as elements of turn construction, allocation and sequencing. Schegloff (1982) posits that the system is fundamentally designed to 'minimize turn size' (Schegloff 1982: 73). There is an inbuilt economy: speakers say no more than what is essential. Above we mentioned the 'smallness' of the response tokens which are our present concern, and this would seem, on the face of it, to support a notion of economy (in that we often find monosyllabic turns). However, it is the additional matter, over and above the bare acknowledgements of vocalisations and *yes/yeah* and *no* which interests us here, and that extra matter is where the interactional engagement takes place and listenership is most clearly

displayed. For many of the turns examined in this paper, a simple *yes* would suffice to acknowledge receipt and understanding, and yet listeners so often 'do more', using tokens such as *right, fine, vale, ya, venga, claro, anda*, which indicate encouragement, engagement, involvement, empathy, enthusiasm, topic-management and a range of other reactions. Communicative 'economy', therefore, seems to be governed by both the propositional and interactional elements of discourse: neither aspect can be threatened or sacrificed simply to keep one's contribution brief. Speakers seem unwilling to economise as regards sociability, human engagement and conversational flow, except in the most pressing circumstances where a purely transactional response suffices. Schegloff (ibid.) observes, interestingly, that repetitive use of the same response item by the same listener over an extended portion of talk may risk being heard as a sign of boredom or inattention; thus listeners normally vary their responses to obviate such risks of misinterpretation. Nonetheless, tight sequences of repeated items could also be heard as a sign of enthusiasm or encouragement; it is only within local contexts that plausible interpretations of the affective intentions of listeners' contributions can be properly assessed and inferred.

Tao (2003), using a spoken corpus, investigated turn-initial items in an attempt to measure their contribution to a turn-construction grammar. Tao regarded as particularly important how speakers start their turns. Turn-initial elements in English, Tao concluded, tend to be syntactically independent items and are mostly lexical. He found that, at the turn-initial slot, items such as *yes, well, right, okay* and pronouns introducing fixed expressions such as *I think, you know, I mean, that's* + adjective (*that's right, that's true*) were dominant. Tao demonstrated clearly how interlocutors attend to the prior turn before they turn to their own transactional concerns, with the turn-initial items being responsible for the creation of much of the interactional side of the communication (see also McCarthy, 2010).

2.3. Response tokens in Spanish: discourse- and pragmatic-marking

In research into spoken Spanish, response tokens have been studied under the umbrella of discourse markers or pragmatic markers (in English too, see Brinton, 1996). In recent years, the debate over what counts as a discourse marker has been robust , and mostly emanates from Schiffrin's (1987) seminal work, which is firmly grounded in the contribution of marker-items such as *well*, *oh* and *you know* to a theory of discourse coherence. Fraser (1999) takes a circumscribed view of discourse markers, locating them principally within word- and phrase-classes such as conjunctions, adverbs and prepositional phrases that serve linking functions. However, in his (1996) paper on pragmatic markers, a broader picture is presented which includes sentence adverbials that show stance such as *certainly,* and *frankly*. This broader view of markers encompassing pragmatic acts is that taken by Carter and McCarthy (2006) and Carter et al (2011:175), where markers are seen to include response tokens of the type that are the focus of the present study. However, the distinction between markers functioning to contribute to discourse coherence and markers showing pragmatic stance remains somewhat fuzzy. This is understandable, as a short response (e.g. *right, okay*) may be simultaneously functioning as a non-floor-grabbing backchannel item signalling engagement and as a boundary marker of some sort (see McCarthy, 2003 for a discussion of responses at pre-closing and topic-transitional points). Thus, in discussing the autonomy of discourse markers in the context of Spanish, Martín Zorraquino and Portolés (1999) observe that

'ciertos marcadores del discurso –sobre todo, aquellos que denominamos conversacionales (*bien, bueno, hombre*, etc.) - aparecen frecuentemente solos en un turno de palabra' (Martín Zorraquino and Portolés, 1999: 4068). This point may be illustrated with the following example from the Spanish COREC corpus used in the present paper (see below):

 (2) [From a telephone conversation:]

S1: ¿A qué hora vendrás a comer?
S2: Pues a las tres.
S1: ¿Sobre las tres?
S2: Sí.
S1: **Vale**.
S2: Hasta luego.
S1: Hasta luego, hijo.

[S1: What time will you come for lunch?
S2: I'd say… at three
S1: Around three?
S2: Yes
S1: Right/Okay
S2: See you later
S1: See you later, son.]

Vale is an example of what we call a response token, but likewise here it shares some of the characteristics normally attributed to discourse markers, signaling, in this case, (pre-) closure. Like discourse markers, response tokens may be syntactically optional while nonetheless important from a pragmatic perspective: they are seen as responsive signals and are also a means to achieve conversational continuity and flow. Another parallel is that, without them, the conversation may be grammatically well-formed but will often appear unnatural, dysfluent, sometimes even impolite or unfriendly, epithets often attributed to 'non-nativeness' at a communicative level, and there is always a risk that their absence may result in communicative breakdown or (cross-cultural) 'pragmatic failure' (see Thomas, 1983). In the present paper, we make no necessary distinction between response tokens which occur *in medias res* and those which mark boundaries or display other discourse-marking characteristics, but accept their potential for multi-functionality, and comment on this phenomenon where appropriate.

2.4. Research across languages and varieties of languages

A small, but growing body of comparative research into response tokens exists. A common thread of these studies is that while response tokens have counterparts in other languages, they do not always display direct correlations or transferability. Sorjonen (2001) looks at two responses particles in Finnish, *nii*(n) and *joo*, which in some usages have *yeah* and *yes* as their closest English counterparts. She identifies a number of sequential and contextual uses of these forms, including their use as answers to *yes-no* questions and directives, as responses to a stance-taking by the prior speaker, and during an extended storytelling by the co-participant.

She also points to a fine-grained division of how the forms function. She relates this to the epistemic and affective character of the talk and the continuation versus closure-relevance of the activity.

Clancy et al. (1996) look at response tokens in three languages, Mandarin Chinese, English and Japanese. They use the term 'reactive tokens' which seems to equate to 'response token'. They define reactive tokens as 'short utterance[s] produced by an interlocutor who is playing a listener's role during the other interlocutor's speakership… [they] will normally not disrupt the primary speaker's speakership, and do not in themselves claim the floor' (Clancy et al. 1996: 355). They draw on corpora of conversations from each of the three languages and distinguish among several types of reactive tokens: (1) backchannels which in all three languages manifest as non-lexical vocalisations; these carry a 'continuer' function (after Schegloff, 1982) and display interest and 'claim of understanding'; (2) reactive expressions which are short, non-grabbing lexical phrases or words (including assessments, Goodwin, 1986) uttered by the non-primary speaker. Examples of these in the three languages include *oh really, really,* in English, *sugoi* in Japanese, meaning approximately *great/terrible*, and *dui* in Mandarin, meaning approximately *right*; (3) collaborative finishes, when the non-primary speaker finishes the previous speaker's utterance (see Lerner, 1989); (4) repetitions where the non-primary speaker repeats a portion of what the primary speaker has said.

In another contrastive study, Tao and Thompson (1991) look at response tokens in the conversations of Mandarin speakers in Mandarin and in English. They find that, counter to most studies of interference of first language on second language, there is evidence to suggest interference in the opposite direction.

Variation is also found within languages. In an intra-varietal study, O'Keeffe and Adolphs (2008), compare response tokens in British and Irish English. Their findings bring to light a number of points of difference between these two geographically close varieties. Even within a common language, they found variation in the distribution of response tokens. The British English speakers used more response tokens than the Irish English speakers. British speakers were also found to use a broader range of forms. McCarthy (2002) noted a broad range of forms in the British English single-word range that also occur in North American English, but with different frequencies (*right, absolutely, sure, good, lovely, exactly, great, definitely, true, really*). In contrast, the Irish single word forms only have *really, sure* and *right* in common with McCarthy's findings for American English.

2.5 Corpora and the functions of English response tokens

While the present paper deals with Spanish, frameworks derived from studies of English provide a useful benchmark for comparison. O'Keeffe and Adolphs (2008) undertook an analysis of response tokens in British and Irish English, using data from The Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE), a five million word corpus of spoken British English (McCarthy 1998) and the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE), one million words of spoken Irish English (Farr, Murphy and O'Keeffe 2004). From these, they sampled two sub-corpora of 20,000 words each, consisting of recordings of conversations of young women around 20 years of age. They analysed each response token in the 40,000 words of data and compared their forms and functions. For the purposes of this

paper, their findings in terms of the functions of the response tokens will provide the backdrop for our analysis of Spanish. The functions identified across both sub-corpora are summarised as follows:

Continuer responses: These are facilitative in that they maintain the flow of talk. They encourage the current speaker to continue. As noted by Schegloff (1982), Maynard (1989) and Gardner (1997; 1998; 2002), this function is typically realised by a minimal response token, such as *mm*.

Convergence responses: Some response tokens (e.g. *exactly, no*) were frequently found at points of convergence in conversations, that is, where participants agree, or simply converge on opinions or mundane topics facilitating the negotiation of topic collaboratively, so that topic can be shifted or changed. Convergence can also be followed by a conversational closure point.

Engagement responses: These function at an affective level, signalling the addressee's enthusiasm, empathy, surprise, shock etc. at what the speaker is saying, without grabbing the turn. They are typically non-minimal and English items include *brilliant, absolutely, wow, cool, gosh, really* and short phrases, such as *that's tough, that's true, you're not serious, Is that so?*

Information receipt tokens: A small number of response tokens in both datasets did not fit any of the above categories. These seemed to have an organisational function and were usually marked by falling pitch. In the few examples that were found, they seemed to serve a global discourse-marking function (cf. Lenk 1998) within the orientation stage of narratives.

McCarthy (2003) noted that some response tokens are strongly associated with particular contexts. *Fine*, he suggests, most typically occurs in making arrangements and reaching decisions and *certainly* most typically occurs in reply to a request for a service or favour. He also notes that adjectives such as *excellent, fine, great, good, lovely, right*, *perfect* offer positive feedback to the speaker and often mark the boundaries of topics, where speakers express their satisfaction with phases of business such as making arrangements, agreeing on courses of action, and marking the satisfactory exchange of information, goods and services.

3. Data for the present study

The focus of this study is on the application of English-language corpus-based frameworks to spoken Spanish, and to this end, we used the Corpus Oral de Referencia del Español Contemporáneo (henceforth referred to as COREC[3]), a corpus of Peninsular Spanish containing 1,100,000 transcribed words which was compiled at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in the early 1990s (http://www.lllf.uam.es/corpus/corpus_lee.html). We concentrate on the conversation sub-corpus of COREC, which contains 211,632 running words in total.

4. Analysis

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[3] We are grateful to Francisco Marcos Marín for granting us permission to quote from the corpus.

4.1. Identifying response tokens

Response tokens are often divided into *minimal* and *non-minimal* tokens, though the distinction is not entirely clear-cut. It is also worth noting that spoken corpora, for the most part, have been based on transcriptions of audio recordings only and usually fail to capture non-verbal responses such as head nods and shoulder shrugs[4]. Usually, minimal responses in English are defined as interjections (for example *yeah, okay*) or non-word vocalisations (such as *mm, umhum*), while non-minimal response tokens are mostly (morphologically speaking) adverbs or adjectives, for example *good, really great, absolutely*, or short phrases/minimal clauses, such as *is that so? by all means, fair enough, that's true, not at all*.

In the present paper we focus only on non-minimal response tokens and restrict our analysis to lexical items taken from the major word-classes. We disregard minimal tokens such as *yes, sí, no, okay*, and vocalisations such as *ah, oh, uhum, ay, oy*. These types of responses are typically already well-covered in the literature on backchannelling (e.g. Drummond & Hopper, 1993).

In identifying response tokens, position in the exchange or adjacency pair is obviously important. However, in terms of the exchange structure model proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), most conversational exchanges consisted of the three moves referred to above (the IRF pattern). Non-classroom conversation requires a slightly different perspective. A typical three-move conversational exchange is illustrated in extract (4), from the British data:

(3) [Speaker 1 is confirming that he will fax something to the listener]

S1:	I'll send that to you in the morning	Initiation
	when I've confirmed where it's going.	
S2:	**Fine. Yeah. Yep that's okay**.	Response
S1:	**Okay**.	Follow-up

S1's *okay* is itself a response to S2's response *Fine. Yeah. Yep that's okay*. Moreover, in multi-party conversation, more than one participant may construct the exchange, making the distinction between response moves and follow-up moves even less obvious:

(4)
S1:   We bought a rare record. It's supposed to be worth five hundred pound isn't it.
S2:   **Right**.
S3:   **Really**?
S2:   **Yeah**.
S1:   Freddie Mercury when he first started under the name of Larry Lurex.

For this reason, we eschew the distinction between response and follow-up in the present paper and treat all the items in bold in (4) as response tokens.

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[4] However, recent multi-media corpus projects may be able to obviate this problem by the use of synchronised video records alongside the conversational transcript, see, for example, Knight et al (2009).

English non-minimal response tokens can occur in pairs or clusters. Carter and McCarthy (2006: 190-191) note that clustering is particularly evident when a topic is being closed down or at a boundary in the talk when another topic is introduced. Such pairs function to signal a boundary *and* interactive convergence, or else simply to express friendly social support. Occasionally, triple response tokens occur, as in extract (5):

(5)
[Couple asking permission to look at a disused railway line]
S1:   It went through, it goes through. Straight, straight on.
S2:   **Right. Wonderful. Great**. Can we look round then?
S1:   Yes certainly.
S2:   Thank you.

In summary, the examples above show that single-word non-minimal response tokens in English may be (morphologically-speaking) adverbs or adjectives, they may occur in clusters or be reduplicated. They may occupy the whole turn, or begin a turn which consists of a small amount of further conversational matter.

4.2. Analysis of the Spanish data

The present study follows McCarthy's (2002) procedure and applies it to the Spanish data. McCarthy took frequency lists of the British and American corpora he used and scrutinised them manually. The most likely items for consideration as response tokens (based on previous studies and on observation and intuition) were then extracted from the frequency lists. At least 100 occurrences in each corpus was set as the level below which items would be excluded from consideration. Once the initial list was established, a maximum of 1000 concordance lines from each corpus were isolated for each item in the list (via the random sampling option in the analytical software). These concordance lines were examined to see how many of them actually showed the particular word functioning as a response token. The total number of occurrences of the word used as a response item was then listed and presented as part of the word's lexical profile. McCarthy then discussed various functional aspects of their use.

Based on the same methodology, for the purposes of the present paper, a word-frequency list was generated for the Spanish corpus, using *Wordsmith Tools* (Scott, 2011). In this case, the 800 most frequent words were then gleaned manually, and those words considered as potential candidates for response tokens were selected. The same procedure as for the English data was then followed, with concordance lines scrutinised for actual occurrences as response tokens. As Table 1 shows, the Spanish list contains words that fall under different morphological categories (nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verb forms including the imperative, the subjunctive, etc.). Each item was analysed in the context of the conversation in which it appears, which allowed us to single out the instances that functioned as response tokens. The first numerical column shows the total frequency of occurrence of the item; the second column indicates the number of occurrences which function as single-word response tokens for each individual item, and the third column gives the normalised totals per million words.

Table 1: Response tokens in the Spanish data

item	frequency	occurrences as response token	normalised total (per 1m words)
vale	270	28	132
claro	911	26	123
anda	99	18	85
joé	39	14	66
exactamente	48	13	61
venga	167	12	57
fíjate	106	12	57
madre	191	10	47
hombre	318	8	38
jolín	26	8	38
hostia	45	7	33
joder	36	7	33
Ya	1,575	4	19
bueno	1,241	4	19
bien	617	4	19
vaya	90	4	19
¿ves?	120	3	14

In the Spanish forms, we see a broad range of items which function as response tokens[5]. McCarthy's English list consisted entirely of items morphologically classified as adjectives, adverbs, or (in the case of *gosh* and *wow*) interjections. Morphological types in the Spanish data cover adjectives, adverbs and interjections, but also nouns (*madre, hombre*) and verbs (e.g. *vale, vaya, ¿ves?*). Verb responses do occur in English, but they tend to be phrasal, for example *Go on!* and *Get away!*, and since the lists under discussion here are only of single-word items, this potential comparison is put to one side. English does also have noun responses, but principally in the religious and scatological domains (*God, shit*, etc.). While *ya*, *bueno* and *claro* have the highest overall frequencies in the Spanish corpus, *vale* has the largest individual number of occurrences as a response token, closely followed by *claro*. *Vale* often translates appropriately into English as *right*, which was also the most frequent item in

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[5] Unlike McCarthy's earlier study, where taboo or religious expressions were deliberately excluded, we include them here in the Spanish list. *Joe* and *jolin* are euphemistic forms of the taboo *joder* (fuck). *Hostia* is a religious reference, which is not translatable into English. In a literal sense, it means *host,* the unleavened bread used in the Catholic mass to represent the body of Christ. While we cannot compare religious references and taboo words in this study, another study which uses CANCODE data and compares it with Irish English response tokens points to more frequent use of religious reference in the Irish data compared with the British data (e.g. *Oh my God, God help us, Jesus, Jesus Christ*), see O'Keeffe and Adolphs (2008). The authors note that religious references are found more in Catholic and post-Catholic contexts such as Ireland, and in this case Spain, where these words' potency as swear words has greater cultural relevance (see Andersson & Trudgill, 1990).

the English list, so there is a neat symmetry in this case. *Vale* is used widely in casual conversation[6], and, although it used to be a clear sociolinguistic marker of age (i.e. it was initially mostly heard among teenagers) its use is nowadays widespread in Peninsular Spanish, and it is employed by speakers of all ages, as can be observed in the following interaction between S2 (a father) and S1 (his daughter):

(6)
S1:   Bueno papá, ¿te sientas ahí mismo?
S2:   Aquí, <simultáneo> bueno.
S1:   Sí </simultáneo>.
S2:   **Vale**.

[S1: Ok, dad, are you sitting there?
S2: Here, <overlapping> Ok.
S1: Yes, <overlapping>
S2: Right.]

  Claro can also often translate as *right* (typically with rise-fall intonation), and it is possible that *vale* and *claro*, taken together, occupy a similar pragmatic space to that of *right* in English. Other possible overlaps occur between *right* and *ya*, while *fine*, in its typical use of signaling agreed decisions and arrangements, may overlap with *vale* and *bien*.

  A number of the Spanish items, like the English ones, are exclamatives (e.g. *anda*, *vaya*, *hombre, hostia*), expressing affective reactions, and may translate variously as English *wow, gosh, really*, depending on context, though the more taboo-related expressions in Spanish will also have taboo-related equivalents deliberately excluded from McCarthy's original analyses (items such as *God, Christ, shit*, etc.). The precise delineation of pragmatic coverage of the various items, in the final analysis, can only be achieved by examination of their occurrences in context. It is thus to the contextual functions of the Spanish items that we now turn.

5. Functions of Spanish response tokens

5.1 . Convergence

Functionally, most of the Spanish forms signal convergence, but when we examine them closely we find that there are subtle variations. *Claro,* for example, marks agreement, as an alternative to *sí*, in contrast with which *claro* implies cooperation between speakers. *Claro* reinforces the interlocutor's view, suggesting that no other position than that taken by their co-conversationalist would be possible. It emphasizes solidarity and convergence. Example (7) illustrates this:

(7)
[Speakers are trying to find a space in a car park]
S1:   Ya está. Madre mía, se nos ha aparecido la Virgen.

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[6] For functions in classroom contexts see Amador, Chambers & O'Riordan (2006).

S2:   Pues sí. Ha habido suerte.
S1:   Es que ha querido quitármelo pero no ha podido.
S2:   Ya, ya lo sé. Porque no te has ido.
S1:   Es que... no.
S2:   Si llegas a ser un poco más blando y te vas.
S1:   Sí. No y además es que él no puede aparcar tal y como está y yo sí.
S2:   **Claro.**

[S1: That's it. My God, we've been blessed by luck (lit. the Mother of God has appeared to us)
S2: Yes, we were lucky
S1: He tried to take it before me, but he couldn't
S2: Yes, I know. Because you stayed there
S1: Well…no
S2: If you had been softer and went…
S1: Yes. No, and besides, he can't park the way he's facing and I can
S2: You're right.]

Hombre also marks convergence, in a friendly, informal way, projecting a close relationship between speakers:

(8)
S1: También depende de cómo sea la otra persona, ¿no? <simultáneo> El carácter... y todo eso, ¿no?
S2: Sí, sí, sí.
S3: **¡Hombre!**

[S1: It also depends on what the other person is like, doesn't it? <overlapping> Their personality and all that, doesn't it?
S2: Yes, yes, yes.
S3: Absolutely.]

The difference between positive and negative response is sometimes reflected prosodically: with the appropriate intonation, *hombre* can indicate divergence and distancing, as can be observed in example 9[7]. Here, S2's disagreement with S1 is made evident later on, but it is signalled first by the use of *hombre*:

(9)
S1: Es que... es que lo de menos es el dinero, en Harvard
S2: **Hombre...**
S1: <ininteligible> cualquier universidad. Y si no te admiten, por muchos millones <ininteligible>
S2: No; estás equivocada, mamá. Con mucho dinero...
S1: No, (eso es así)

---

[7] Rising intonation, by contrast, tends to indicate agreement.

[S1: Well, the least important thing is money in Harvard
S2: Well…
S1: <unintelligible> any university. And if you don't get accepted, regardless of the millions <unintelligible>
S2: No, you're wrong, mum. With a lot of money…
S1: No, that is the way it works.]

As Martín Zorraquino and Portolés point out, "Con *hombre* el hablante atenúa, en las intervenciones reactivas, la expresión de la disconformidad con lo dicho por el oyente e incluso introduce efectos paliativos para calmar su posible enfado" (1999, pp. 4173-4174) .

Venga is also used to indicate convergence, as can be seen in example 18. Note how it co-occurs with *vale* in S3's turn, to reinforce the agreement expressed by *venga* (see section 5.5 for more on how items cluster):

(10)
S1:   No, bajamos aquí <simultáneo> y yo me voy a aparcar.
S2:   **Venga.**
S3:   **Venga, vale.** <ruido=aullidos de perro>
S2:   Descargamos maletas. ¡Quieto, tín! <ruido=ladridos de perro>

[S1:   No, we'll get off here and I'll go and park
S2:   Ok
S3:   Yes, Ok <noise=dog whining>
S2:   We'll take out the suitcases. Stay, Tin! <noise=dog barking>]

5.2. Partial/ modified convergence

Ya and *bueno* have a similar function to the tokens exemplified in 5.1. They both indicate convergence. However, some of the nuances expressed by them are worthy of mention here. *Ya*, compared with *claro*, for example, indicates a more neutral type of response, to the extent, sometimes, of suggesting a lack of engagement or even disinterest:

(11)
S1:   Es que el Chiqui cambia totalmente de casa a estar en el colegio. O sea, en casa le verás revoltoso, le verás que se pega con sus hermanos.
S2:   Sí.
S1:   Pero en cuanto que sale de la puerta para ir al colegio... o sea, cambia totalmente.
S2:   <fático=afirmación>
S1:   Digo: "no puede ser". O sea, si no le ve que está sentado en, en la silla, no sabe que hay niño.
S2:   Parece que no está.
S1:   Entonces a mí no me gusta eso tampoco, Tere, ¿entiendes?
S2:   **Ya**.

[S1:   Well, the kid behaves completely different at home compared to school. I mean, at home he's hyper, you'd see him fighting with his siblings.
S2:   Yes.
S1:   But as soon as he goes out the door to go to school…I mean, he changes completely
S2:   <phatic=agreement>
S1:   And I say: "this can't be". I mean, if you don't see him sitting on the chair, you wouldn't know there's a child there
S2:   It's as if he wasn't there
S1:   So, I don't like that either, Tere, do you know what I mean?
S2:   Yes.]

Note that, if we replace *ya* with *claro* in example (11), S2 seems to show more engagement and greater convergence in the conversation, whereas in the original version, S2 is simply letting S1 speak. *Ya* can also express other nuances in context, such as irony or incredulity, as in example (12):

(12)
S1:   '…' me han dicho <silencio> que está muy difícil. Gente que lleva aquí <silencio> varios años en Madrid y les cuesta mucho trabajo, o sea que...
S2:   Sí, no es fácil.
S1:   Pero yo te puedo indicar más o menos dos o tres caminos por los que a lo mejor puedes tener suerte.
S2:   **Ya.**
S1:   Que eso siempre es mejor que nada.

[S1:   '...' apparently <pause> it's very difficult. People who have been here <pause> in Madrid for a few years even find it difficult, I mean…
S2:   Yes, it's not easy
S1:   But I can give you two or three pointers that might help you get lucky.
S2:   Oh yeah.
S1:   That's always better than nothing.]

Apart from indicating agreement, *bueno* also functions to mitigate those cases when agreement is preceded by disagreement, or when the speaker is trying to avoid giving a more direct answer, as in example (13) (a telephone conversation between a mother and her daughter):

(13)
S1:   Pero lo que tienes que hacer es venir aquí.
S2:   **Bueno**.
S1:   Sí.
S2:   Iré para allá. '…' Hoy voy a ir con Papá a... a una exposición y eso.
S1:   No; hoy yo no puedo, que tengo que dar un... una charla en alemán.
S2:   ¿Sí?
S1:   En mi clase. Sí, que es el último día del curso ya.

S2:   **Bueno.**

[S1:   But what you should do is come here
S2:   Ok
S1:   Yes
S2:   I'll go over '…' Today I have to go with dad to an exhibition and that
S1:   No; I can't today, because I have to give a talk in German
S2:   Really?
S1:   In class. Yes, it's the last day already
S2:   Ok.]

In comparison with *claro*, *bueno* is a less enthusiastic way of converging; it shows a lower degree of conviction. As Bauhr (1994: 92 ff.) points out, '[bueno] se utiliza a menudo en situaciones en que el hablante cede ante la insistencia de su interlocutor o acepta una propuesta, invitación, etc., con desgana; de ahí que su utilización en los contextos en los que podría competir con expresiones alternativas como *sí, claro, muchas gracias* y *con mucho gusto* pueda tacharse de renuente o poco cortés'.

Another token used to indicate convergence is *bien*. Fuentes Rodríguez (1993), whose analysis is based on a corpus of Spanish spoken in Sevilla, looks at the use of *bueno, bien* and *pues bien*. As she indicates, *bien* has a phatic function, and it can be used to convey happiness or annoyance. In comparison to *bueno*, *bien* can be perceived as being a more distancing response, as can be seen in example (14), where speakers 1 and 2 are discussing flat-hunting. The use of *ya* here also indicates that 1 is not fully convinced by 2's advice:

(14)
S1:   Ese precio estamos pensando, '…' setenta mil pesetas. '…'
S2:   Pues... hay una zona, en el norte de Madrid, en Alcobendas...
S1:   ¿Perdón?
S2:   Alcobendas <ininteligible> '…' Normalmente, la gente que yo conozco que ha encontrado piso, ha sido gracias a carteles, que ha puesto él mismo.
S1:   **Bien.**
S2:   Entonces, el... en la Universidad, en la Complutense, '…' en los tablones de anuncios de todas las... o sea facultades, poner anuncios. Eso... eso puede funcionar.
S1:   **Ya**.

[S1:   That's the price we were thinking of '…' seventy thousand pesetas '…'
S2:   Well…there's an area in the north of Madrid, in Alcobendas
S1:   Sorry?
S2:   Alcobendas <unintelligible> '...' Normally the people I know who have found a flat, have found it through putting ads themselves
S1:   Right.
S2:   Then the…in the University, in the Complutense…on the noticeboards of all the …I mean, Schools, putting ads. That…that can work.
S1:   I see.]

5.3. Convergence and (pre-)closure

Some forms are found in the context of conversational closings. In examples (15) and (16) we
see *bueno* and *vale* in preambles to the closing of the conversation:

(15)
S1:   Ya verás como no me parezco nada a Teresa. Pero nada, ¿eh? Como una patata a un
        culo.
S2:   <risas> Pero ella misma tampoco se parece en su carné, o sea que...
S1:   **Bueno**, pues entonces **vale**.
S2:   **Bueno.**
S1:   **Bueno.**
S2:   **Bueno**, que nada, que voy a seguir estudiando.

[S1:   You'll see how I don't look like Teresa at all. Not at all, eh? Like a potato to an arse.
S2:   <laughter> But she doesn't even look like the picture on her ID card, I mean...
S1:   Well, ok then
S2:   Ok
S1:   Ok
S2:   Ok, that's it. I'm going to do some more studying.]

As can be seen in example (16), *vale* (1) seems to be confirming receipt of information,
whereas *vale* (2) is signaling a desired (pre-)closure (see McCarthy, 2003) which is then
reinforced/confirmed by *hasta luego*.

(16)
S1:   Bueno, que no te entiendo. Venga, pues a las siete y media bajo al portal y te espero.
        ¿Vale?
S2:   <fático=duda> **Vale (1)**.
S1:   Pues nada, hasta luego.
S2:   **Vale (2)**, hasta luego.
S1:   Hasta luego. Chao.

[S1:   Look, I don't understand what you're saying. Ok, at seven thirty I'll go down to the
door and I'll wait, Ok?
S2:   <hesitating> Ok
S1:   Right. See you later, then
S2:   Ok, see you later
S1:   See you. Ciao!]

5.4. Engagement

Anda, *vaya*, *madre* and *fíjate* are used to express different degrees of surprise. *Anda* and *fíjate*
have in common the fact that they are (being second person singular address forms) addressed
to the listener directly. *Fíjate*, apart from showing surprise, implies a certain degree of
complicity with the listener:

(17)
S1:   Si están muy baratos los viajes en avión.
S2:   A Londres está barato ahora.
S1:   Sale 17000 pelas ida y vuelta.
S2:   **Fíjate**.

[S1:   Yes, they are very cheap, flights.
S2:   To London is cheap now
S1:   It works out at 17000 pesetas
S2:   Wow!]

    Anda is versatile and can appear on its own, expressing surprise, as in (18) below, where two speakers are discussing celebrities; it can also appear, as will be shown in 5.5, below, in combination with other response tokens, reinforcing affective responses:

(18)
S1: Por cierto </simultáneo> que el único invitado del que se ha dado el nombre, que va a ir al cumpleaños ahora del dieciocho es eh... Kashogui.
S2: **¡Anda!**

[S1:   By the way </overlapping> the only guest whose name has been revealed, who is going to the birthday party on the 18th is er…Kashogui
S2:   Go away!]

5.5.   **Other formal and functional features**

As well as showing parallel basic forms and functions, other formal features and their functions also generally correspond between the English and Spanish data. Reduplication and clustering occur in the Spanish corpus. When duplicated, *vale* may indicate that the speaker is defending himself/herself against a perceived accusation, or it may simply be a way of making clear for the listener that there is no need to repeat something that has already been understood. This can be observed in example (19). The interaction takes place in what we assume is a solicitor's office. Speakers 1 and 2 are colleagues:

(19)
S1:   Ese... ese el más importante que tengo, es el más importante que tengo de todos, Paco.
‘…’
S2:   Pero ¿el lunes no dijiste que tú no podías?
S1:   El lunes... pues lo hago el martes si no.
S2:   ¿Lo de Navarro me dijiste que no podía venir?
S1:   Esa era el jueves. Que Navarro tiene el juicio
S2:   **Vale, vale.**

[S1:   That's the most important one I have, the most important of all the ones I have, Paco.
‘…’
S2:   But didn't you say you couldn't on Monday?

S1:   On Monday…but I can do it on Tuesday otherwise
S2:   What about Navarro, you told me he couldn't come?
S1:   That was Thursday. [I said] that he has to go to court
S2:   Right, right.]

S2's use of *vale, vale* here suggests that he does not want to discuss the topic any further.

Reduplication of *anda* may be intended as an expression of disbelief, as can be seen in this conversation between several members of a family, where space distribution is being debated:

(20)
S1:   Mamá, ¿qué dices?
S2:   Que en la cocina del otro piso decía que había que poner puerta corredera para que cupiera el frigorífico.
S3:   Bueno, eso sí. Y lo sigo pensando o quitar un trozo de bañera y poner la bañera pequeña
S4:   ¡Sí, hombre!
S3:   Hubiera sido la solución.
S4:   **Anda, anda.**

[S1:   Mum, what are you saying?
S2:   That in the kitchen of the other flat we had to put in a sliding door so that the fridge would fit
S3:   Yes, Ok, that's right. And I still think that, or cut a bit off the bath and put in a smaller bath
S4:   No way!
S3:   That would have been the solution
S4:   Yeah, right!]

Ya can express impatience when repeated, while reduplication of *venga* may be simply a way of encouraging the interlocutor, as is the case in (21), taken from a TV programme where listeners ring in to participate in a type of raffle. Observe how the repetition of *venga* is first meant to encourage good luck, and is more emphatic than *venga* on its own a few lines further on:

(21)
S1:   Vamos a ver, Consuelo, si tenemos mejor suerte esta tarde.
S2:   **Venga, venga, venga.**
S1:   Del uno al tres. ¿Cuál quieres, Pilar?
S3:   El... tres.
S1:   El tres. Vamos a ver que le vale el número tres a Pilar, a ver si son cartas maravillosas, Consuelo; ¡que sean buenas, hombre!
 S2:   <simultáneo> **Venga.**
S1:   El dos, </simultáneo> el tres, el cuatro, el cinco...

[S1: Let's see, Consuelo, if we have better luck this afternoon
S2: Come on, come on, come on
S1: From one to three, which one do you want, Pilar?
S3: Err…Three
S1: Three. Let's see what number three is worth for Pilar, let's see if they're wonderful cards, Consuelo; let's hope they're good ones!
S2: <overlapping> Let's go
S1: Two, <overlapping> three, four, five…]

Just as in the English data, response tokens cluster, as in (22), where S1 and 2 discuss food they used to have when they were younger (in this case, *anda* reinforces the bonding between speakers and emphasizes the agreement expressed by *claro*):

(22)
S1: Ahí he visto yo hacer muchos chicharros.
S2: Todas... hacía yo las mantecas.
S1: **Claro. ¡Anda!**
S2: Sí.
S1: Menudas estaban de buenas ahí con el pan.
S2: Eso, eso.
S1: Tan <simultáneo> recientitas. ¡Jolín!

[S1: There I saw a lot of "chicharros" (similar to shortbread) being made
S2: All …I used to make the butter
S1: Yes, of course!
S2: Yes
S1: There were so tasty with bread!
S2: They were, they were
S1: So <overlapping> fresh. My God!]

All in all, a reasonably good fit of formal features and interactional functions exists between the Spanish data and those noted by McCarthy (2002) and O'Keeffe and Adolphs (2008) for English. It would seem that both languages possess a repertoire of response tokens which can convey powerful interactional meanings. In both languages these items form part of the high-frequency core vocabulary.

6. Transferability

While the existence of response tokens of some sort is likely to be language-universal, there are equally likely to be problems of transferability and translatability across languages, as the pragmatic analyses of the Spanish items and attempts at ascertaining precise English equivalents above suggests. Here we comment on some of the issues raised by the translatability of the Spanish tokens into English.

At the level of form, Spanish response tokens such as *anda, venga, fíjate*, *vaya, bueno, claro* all display apparent inflection (in this case singular imperative/subjunctive inflexions for *anda, venga, fíjate*, and *vaya,* and masculine gender for *bueno* and *claro*), where their English counterparts do not, a consequence of the differing typologies of the two languages. Although inflected, the inflection is invariable, indicative of their fossilisation as pragmatically specialized tokens. Meanwhile, the noun *hombre* (man), in contrast to *mujer* (woman), can be used as a response token (and, indeed as a discourse marker, see Portolés, 1998: 131-132), regardless of whether the interlocutor is a man or a woman, whereas *mujer*, which can also function as a response token, is only used to address a woman.

Another potential problem area is that suprasegmental features are particularly important: the intonation contour that a speaker applies to a particular response token can determine whether the reaction is perceived as convergent or distancing, and whether other nuances are implied. *Vaya*, for example, can indicate amusement, surprise, or pity, depending on the intonation in context. *Anda* can be an expression of surprise, agreement, emphasis, or commiseration. *Venga* can express impatience. *Claro*, with the appropriate intonational contour, can actually indicate distancing (with a note of irony), or reproach, often realised by rising intonation. The same can be said of *bueno*, which, as we indicated above, is a less rotund way of showing convergence (especially if it is accompanied by low pitch). Similar suprasegmental issues attach to English items such as *really, indeed* and *well*, where a variety of pragmatic effects can be achieved by varying intonation in context. This suggests that cross-linguistic comparisons should always be done on the basis of as much linguistic and contextual information as possible.

Reduplication is another area where there is an apparent lack of direct transferability between languages. Some forms in Spanish can be reduplicated, and this can sometimes affect the pragmatic force. For example, *venga* can be used to support agreement, as we saw in the case of the extract from a TV programme, example (21), above. However, there we also noted that when reduplicated, *venga* may be simply a way of encouraging the interlocutor.

A potential problem item is the often over-extended translation of *claro* into English as *of course*, thus endowing the response with an implicature of 'how could you possibly think otherwise?', which may or may not be appropriate. So the English exchange *May I use your bathroom? Of course!* would be pragmatically well-formed, while the sequence *We were at the Louvre on Sunday. Oh, did you see the Mona Lisa? Of course*! may be heard as pompous and brusque. A mis-translation or an over-extension of a translation can potentially generate misunderstanding. As Travis (1998) points out, *well* does not always translate as *bueno* or *bien*, and *really?*, for example, can be equivalent to *¡anda!* in some contexts. Moreover, reduplication of *anda* may be intended as an expression of strong disbelief, as can be observed example (20) above, where space distribution was being discussed. By contrast, in the British data, *really?* does not occur as a reduplicated response token.

These few examples raise some pertinent cross-linguistic issues, not only to do with semantic meanings, but with pragmatic force, and relate not only to individual uses of words, but the effects of reduplication, clustering and intonation too.

7. Response tokens and fluency

Given the connection between what has been discussed in the previous sections and the concept of fluency, in this section we return briefly to this issue. Spoken fluency is often seen as related to the solo performance of an individual speaker. Corpus evidence consistently shows that speakers in real conversations support one another and co-construct the talk. Conversation and its ability to flow are the joint responsibility of all co-participants; our perception of fluency is much influenced by the cooperatively created flow of talk, rather than just the talent of any individual speaker. The term 'confluence' may be a more apt label for such joint activity (McCarthy, 2010).

The dominant notions of fluency have their roots in linguistic qualities related to lexico-grammatical and phonological flow created by individual speakers, in the ability of participants to converse rapidly, unhesitatingly, coherently and appropriately (see Fillmore 1979 and McCarthy, 2010 for further discussion). Here we argue that fluency is enhanced by the degree of interactive support each speaker gives to the flow of talk, by helping one another to be fluent.

8. Conclusion

We have used a corpus-based methodology to investigate response tokens in Spanish, based on frameworks derived from previous studies of English. Corpora not only provide quantitative evidence to make plain aspects of language use which are often difficult to reflect upon via intuition (in this case, everyday uses of some of the most frequent words in the language); they also offer the opportunity for fine-grained analyses of particular items in multiple contexts. The use of corpora for the analysis of banal, everyday conversational phenomena are discussed at length in McCarthy (1998) and O'Keeffe, McCarthy & Carter (2007), though even there, cross-linguistic comparisons get little attention. This is hardly surprising, given the dominance, until recently, of corpus studies of English, while other languages (relatively speaking) lagged behind. However, that situation has changed and corpora are now available for both widely-taught and lesser-taught languages. Corpus analysis within and across languages, especially the analysis of spoken data, reveal features of language use of paramount interest to researchers. In the present case, the focus has been on listenership, but one can easily envisage equally fruitful investigations of aspects of spoken language use such as vagueness and approximation, conversational boundary marking, rhetorical moves such as hyperbole and understatement, and a variety of other, similar features which are not easily accessed by intuition alone, whether that of native- or non-native users.

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