The polysemy of the conjunction y in Spanish proverbs

Introduction

This paper analyzes the different semantic interpretations, polysemy, of the Spanish coordinating conjunction y ‘and’ in a particular linguistic structure: proverbs. As linguistic structures, proverbs generally consist of two phrases or clauses linked by a conjunction. A corpus of 200 proverbs connected by y was analyzed in terms of semantic functions, commutative properties, and temporal meaning (simultaneous or sequential). These findings were corroborated by native speakers’ semantic interpretations of y in a multiple-choice test. Both the frequency of use and the preference for a particular conjunction provided the basis for establishing a hierarchy of the various meanings of y in Spanish proverbs. This hierarchy explicitly models the radial structure (as defined by Lakoff, 1987) of the category y: there is a central category (addition) and non-central extensions (adversativity, concession, etc.).

Proverbs

Proverbs reflect the popular wisdom and beliefs of a culture; they tell us what people think, believe, condemn, approve of, or find interesting. Webster’s (1983) defines a proverb as “a short saying in common use expressing a well-known truth or common fact ascertained by experience or observation.” In other words, a proverb is a sentence or phrase stating a universal truth about life, such as in Sin conocer, amor no puede haber ‘Without knowledge, love cannot exist;’ or giving advice, such as in Ni bebas agua que no veas, ni firmes cartas que no leas ‘Don’t drink water you haven’t seen, nor sign letters you haven’t read.’

Although proverbs are essentially products of experience, the origin of most proverbs is unknown. Proverbs were transmitted orally from generation to generation, undergoing changes and modifications through the years. The typical form proverbs display today was most likely defined when an anonymous editor polished folk insights by giving them perfect cadence, rhyme, meter, and figurative language. These inherent characteristics of proverbs allow for easier memorization. Not all proverbs, though, come from direct experience; some originate in legends and romances, such as A buen capellán, mejor sacristán ‘For a good priest, a better sacristan.’ Others are based on historical events, as in Allá van leyes donde quieren reyes ‘There go laws where people want kings,’ which refers to the public reaction to King Alfonso VI’s decision to establish a Roman rather than a Mozarabic rite in the church of Toledo, despite the people’s preference for the latter (Iscla, 1989, pp. 20-21).

The meaning of a proverb is sometimes ambiguous. A given proverb can be interpreted as having a literal meaning, a figurative meaning, or as having both readings simultaneously. For example, Más vale bien comido que bien vestido ‘Better well fed than well dressed’ can only be interpreted literally. A proverb with a figurative meaning is Quien siembra vientos recoge tempestades ‘He who cultivates winds harvests storms;’ and a proverb with partly a literal sense, and partly a figurative interpretation is found in La manzana podrida, pudre a su vecina ‘One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel.’

Moreover, proverbs use a wide variety of linguistic resources. Metaphors are often used in proverbs claiming that two things have the same qualities, as in El gallo es el reloj del campo ‘The rooster is the clock of the countryside.’ Metonymy, the technique
of referring to something as something else that is closely connected with it, comes into play in the use of faldas ‘skirts,’ which refers to women in *En España mandan las faldas* ‘In Spain, skirts govern.’ Among the many other devices enriching the language of proverbs are: comparison, as in *El dinero llama al ladrón como el queso al ratón* ‘Money is to thieves like cheese is to mice;’ hyperbole, as found in *Nazca mi hijo varón, aunque sea ladrón* ‘May my baby be a boy, even though he is a thief;’ irony, as in *Aquí yace Juan, un español que, estando bueno quiso estar mejor* ‘Here lies Juan, a Spaniard who, being well, wanted to be better;’ contrast, exemplified in *Mucho gasta el huésped que viene, pero más el que el mantel tiende* ‘The visitor spends a lot, but the host even more;’ and personification, as in *El gato y el ratón nunca son de una opinión* ‘Cats and dogs never have the same opinion’ (Iscla, 1989, pp. 27-38).

Proverbs and their syntactic structures

As linguistic structures, proverbs generally consist of two phrases or clauses joined by a formal marker. Consider the following examples: *No hay que vivir para comer, sino comer para vivir* ‘Eat to live, but don’t live to eat;’ *Más vale tarde que nunca* ‘Better late than never;’ and *Muchos son los que cantan, pero pocos cantando encantan* ‘Many sing, but few entertain with their singing;’ in which *sino, que,* and *pero,* respectively, join the two phrasal/clausal units. The syntactic function of connecting grammatical units is carried out by connectors, which are words or relational locutions, such as *pero* ‘but,’ *aunque* ‘though,’ and *luego* ‘then,’ whose purpose is not only to link two structures, but also to contribute to the text cohesion (Gómez, 1998, p. 285).

Cohesion is an autonomous concept, not necessarily related to any particular grammatical unit. The explicit indicators establishing connecting relations are conjunctions, both coordinating and subordinating (Cepeda et al., 1997, p. 8). Most Spanish proverbs exhibit syndetic coordination, which is defined by the presence of coordinators or coordinating conjunctions.

Coordination and subordination in Spanish proverbs

Two phrases or sentences are coordinated if there is no dependence relation between them. Coordinated clauses can be expressed separately and still make sense (Roa, 1993, pp. 208–209). The relation between coordinated elements is semantic and defined according to the coordinating conjunction employed. Although coordinating conjunctions may be categorized as either additive, adversative, consecutive, alternative, or explicative (Gómez, 1998, pp. 232-237), my analysis of proverbs using y found only the addition, adversativity, and consequence interpretations. To demonstrate these meanings, I have included in Table 1 several proverbs with their usual corresponding coordinators.
Table 1: Coordinating conjunctions and Spanish proverbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Additive conjunctions denote pure addition. The most common are: y ‘and,’ e ‘and,’ and ni ‘neither... nor/not... not.’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. | a. *Al pan, pan y al vino, vino*  
    | ‘To the bread, bread; and to the wine, wine.’ |
| 2. | b. *Ni cuartel sin ratas, ni libro sin erratas*  
    | ‘Not a prison without mice, not a book without errors.’ |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adversative conjunctions indicate a contrast that either restricts (2.1) or excludes (2.2) in the second clause what has been expressed in the first clause.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>(2.1) Restrictive adversative conjunctions show a contrast implying no incompatibility between the units connected: pero ‘but,’ mas ‘but,’ and sin embargo ‘however’ are among the most common.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|   | a. *La esperanza no es pan, pero alimenta*  
    | ‘Hope is not bread, but it can feed you.’ |
|   | b. *Muchos van a misa y al sermón, mas no todos con la misma intención*  
    | ‘Many go to church to hear the sermon, but not everyone with the same intention.’ |
|   | (2.2) Exclusive adversative conjunctions display a contrast in which the second unit totally excludes what is said in the first unit. The most used conjunction is sino ‘but.’ |
|   | a. *El cerdo no sueña con rosas, sino con bellotas*  
    | ‘A pig does not dream of roses, but of acorns.’ |
|   | b. *La mayor desgracia no es tenerla, sino merecerla*  
    | ‘The worst evil is not to have misfortune, but to deserve it.’ |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Consecutive conjunctions denote consequences or results of what was said previously. The most commonly used is luego ‘then.’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3. | a. *Dime con quién andas y (luego) te diré quien eres*  
    | ‘Tell me who your friends are, and then I’ll tell you who you are.’ |
|   | b. *Haz ruido, y (luego) sacarás partido*  
    | ‘Make noise, and then you’ll be noticed.’ |

Some Spanish proverbs make use of subordinating conjunctions, which also have the syntactic function of linking units. Subordination differs from coordination by implying a non-symmetrical relationship between two phrases or clauses. The analysis of the coordinating conjunction *y* in Spanish proverbs revealed three types of subordinating
relations: concession, purpose, and causality. These meanings are conveyed with the use of the appropriate subordinators in Table 2.

Table 2: Subordinating conjunctions and Spanish proverbs.

| (1) Concessive conjunctions introduce an unexpected condition in the dependent clause that does not impede the fulfillment of what is said in the main sentence. The most common conjunctions are: aunque ‘(even) though,’ and a pesar de que ‘despite.’
| a. Madre casadme, aunque sea con un fraile
| ‘Mother, have me married, even though it is to a friar.’
| b. Déme Dios marido rico, aunque sea borricho
| ‘May God give me a husband, even though he is a fool.’

| (2) Purposive conjunctions indicate in the subordinate clause the goal or intention of what is said in the main sentence. The conjunctions commonly used are para que ‘so that,’ and a fin de que ‘so that.’
| a. El burro adelante, para que no se espante
| ‘The donkey goes in the front, so that he doesn’t run away.’
| b. Para que toleren tus defectos, tolera tú los ajenos
| ‘So that people tolerate your defects, tolerate others.’

| (3) Causal conjunctions indicate logical causation, and the more frequently used are porque ‘because,’ pues ‘because,’ and ya que ‘since.’
| a. El amor reina sin ley, porque de los reyes es rey
| ‘Love reigns without law, because it is the king of kings.’
| b. Segura oye la alcaldesa el pregón, pues reza con todos y con ella no
| ‘The mayor listens to the proclamation confidently, because it concerns everybody but her.’

Coordinating and subordinating conjunctions establish a type of semantic relationship between the two grammatical units they connect. These different meanings depend on the type of conjunction used. Thus, proverbs linked by adversative conjunctions display contrast relations between the two connected units, and proverbs with purposive conjunctions indicate in the subordinate clause the goal of the main sentence. Nevertheless, it is also possible that a single conjunction conveys not only a default meaning, but also other semantic relations. In this case, when a single form expresses several semantic interpretations, we talk about polysemy.
The polysemy of y

As a concept used in semantic analysis, polysemy refers to a lexical item presenting a range of different meanings (Crystal, 1997, p. 297). Spanish proverbs linked by the conjunction y display distinct polysemies. This phenomenon can be explained by Schwenter’s analytical framework on viewpoints (2000). In general, proverbs are considered to be monologues, sayings uttered by one physical speaker, conveying only one point of view. Nevertheless, proverbs can also express more than one perspective. For example, Consejos vendo y para mí no tengo ‘I offer advice, even though I don’t have any for myself’ expresses both a viewpoint constructed argumentatively parallel leading to the same conclusion (monological), and an argumentatively opposing viewpoint oriented to different conclusions (dialogical) (p. 260). The monological viewpoint of the above proverb is clear: there is a person who, despite not following it herself, offers advice to people. The dialogical viewpoint lies in the common assumption that if someone does not follow her own advice, then she should not be giving it to others. Consequently, this example demonstrates how a monologue, in this case a proverb, can also convey a dialogical viewpoint, and thus have more than one interpretation.

The various semantic relationships or polysemies expressed by y in the Spanish proverbs analyzed in this paper are found in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Polysemies of y in Spanish proverbs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las cuentas claras y el chocolate espeso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Clear accounts and thick chocolate.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Adversativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uñas de gato y hábitos de beato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The nails of a cat, but the habits of a devout.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Consequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al villano dale el pie y se tomará la mano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Give the villain your foot, and he will eventually grab your hand.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Concession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canta la rana y no tiene pelo ni lana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The frog sings, even though it doesn’t have talent.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No las hagas y no las temas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Do nothing wrong, so that you won’t feel scared.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Causality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quien espera desespera, y quien viene, nunca llega</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘He who is waiting gets desperate, because he who is coming never arrives.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Related studies

In a study of the functions of the conjunction *and* in both spoken and written English, Lazaraton (1992) first describes the characteristics of clauses coordinated by *and*: they can be freely ordered, can convey only addition, and can be parallel, bearing structurally and semantically similar elements (p. 192). Moreover, the author distinguishes between a coordinating *and* and a cohesive *and*, in which no connection of structurally equal elements exists. In the latter case, other semantic relationships, besides addition, can be established. These include result, sequence, and contrast (p. 201).

Lazaraton analyzed spoken and written discourse from adult native speakers. Focusing on the types of semantic relationships *and* expressed, she classified the 143 instances of clausal *and* in her data, and found 22 cases in which *and* co-occurred with adverbials, making her categorization relatively straightforward. For example, all three cases of *and* showing a concessive relationship between the clauses appeared with *yet*. In other cases, she replaced *and* with an adverbial to see the type of relationship conveyed. Her findings reveal that clausal connection by *and* was five times more common in speech than in writing (118 versus 25). Furthermore, the semantic relationships *and* expressed covered a wide range of meanings, including: result (20 instances), sequence (27 cases), contrast (4 examples), concession (3), addition (19), comment (7), coordination (27), and internal sequence (36). According to Lazaraton, the most common meaning is internal sequence, in which events are marked as next in the speaker/writer’s mind.

In a study on coordination in Spanish, Cepeda, et al. (1997) investigated the discourse functions of coordinating conjunctions occurring in semi-formal interviews. This study sought to determine whether coordinating conjunctions had only a syntactic function at sentence level or whether they also had a discourse function at text level. For the authors, conjunctions not only establish structural relationships between the elements of a sentence, but also carry semantic values that constrain what can be connected. These values interact with the meanings of the joined propositions (p. 8). The data consisted of 18 semi-informal interviews of 30 minutes between the investigator and each participant: 9 women and 9 men aged 11-79. The findings show that from a total of 3,675 coordinating conjunctions in the data, both at syntactic and discourse levels, copulative *y* ‘and’ was the most frequent conjunction (57%), followed by adversative *pero* ‘but’ (14.1%), and causal *porque* ‘because’ (10.6%). The authors concluded that coordinating conjunctions function both as relational words at sentence level, and as semantic-pragmatic connectors at discourse level.

Matras (1997) used a functional grammar framework to study data from different languages and language contact situations. He approached coordination from a perspective combining aspects of typology, discourse pragmatics, and language contact. Based on his analysis of Arabic and Romani, both of which display two distinct expressions for *and*, the author tried to account for opposing combinatory expressions by recurring to the operations involved in communication. He attempted to demonstrate that coordinating conjunctions assume functions concerning “the categorization of pieces of knowledge in discourse” (p. 178). Matras further suggested that the opposition of the type *and* versus *but*, the semantic opposition of combinatory versus adversative, differs gradually in relation to the intensity with which the hearer interprets the speaker’s message as either a continuation of ongoing speech or as a return to an earlier position in the discourse (p. 179). He also examined data from language contact involving Ladino
and Hebrew, which reveal that only the adversative but is borrowed into a second language. Although the author himself stated that some of his claims are to be considered preliminary, he suggested that the hierarchical nature of and and but supports the behavior these conjunctions exhibit in language contact situations.

Although these studies are concerned with both coordination and conjunctions, they approach the additive coordinating conjunction from different perspectives: Lazaraton (1992) described only the different meanings of the English and, Cepeda et al. (1997) contrasted the semantic functions of y at sentence and discourse levels, and Matras (1997) considered the study of conjunctions from typological, pragmatic, and language contact views. These investigators neither organized hierarchically the different semantic functions of the coordinating conjunction y nor focused on proverbs. This paper addresses these issues.

Method
Corpus

200 Spanish proverbs connected by the coordinating conjunction y were selected (Junceda, 1996). These proverbs were analyzed with respect to their semantic function, commutative properties (reversibility of the order of the two elements), and temporal meaning (sequential or simultaneous time). It was observed that when the commutative feature was positive, the sequential feature was negative, and vice versa.

To determine the different meanings of the conjunction y in the corpus data, and to clarify the type of semantic relationship expressed between the two linguistic units, adversative, consecutive, concessive, purposive, and causal conjunctions were used in place of y. These were pero, luego, aunque, para que, porque, respectively.

Analysis of the corpus

Results indicate that in 38% of the proverbs y conveyed addition, 32.5% expressed an adversative relation, 20.5% supported a consecutive meaning, 5.5% had a concessive meaning, 3% of the proverbs showed a purposive function, and 0.5% implied a causal relation. This data is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Different meanings of y found in the corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additive</th>
<th>Adversative</th>
<th>Consecutive</th>
<th>Concessive</th>
<th>Purposive</th>
<th>Causal</th>
<th>Total Proverbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results related to the capacity of freely reversing the order of the clauses without the implication of a temporal sequence appear in Table 5.
Table 5: Relationship between meaning and the features of commutativity and temporal meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning of y</th>
<th>+ commutative / - sequential</th>
<th>- commutative / + sequential</th>
<th>Total proverbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addition</td>
<td>76 (100%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adversativity</td>
<td>27 (42%)</td>
<td>38 (58%)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consecutivity</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>41 (100%)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concession</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>11 (100%)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causality</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total proverbs</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A correlation was found between addition and both commutation and absence of temporal sequence, since in all the cases in which y means addition, the two propositions can be freely inverted.

1) *Acuérdate de ti y olvídate de mí*
   ‘Remember yourself and forget about me.’

2) *Lo poco agrada y lo mucho enfada*
   ‘What’s little pleases, and what’s abundant upsets.’

3) *Al buey por el cuerno y al hombre por la palabra*
   ‘The ox by its horn and the man by his word.’

The order of the two grammatical units in these proverbs can be reversed without altering their meaning. Addition also implies simultaneity, and the lack of temporal sequence. In contrast, proverbs establishing a relationship of consequence, concession, causality, or purpose have a sequential order, so no inversion is possible.

4) *Acogí al ratón en mi agujero y (luego) volvióseme heredero*
   ‘I welcomed the mouse in my cave, and then he became my heir.’

5) *Buscáis cinco patas al gato y no tiene más que cuatro*
   ‘You look for the cat’s five feet, even though he only has four.’

6) *Quien espera desespera, y quien viene, nunca llega*
   ‘He who is waiting becomes desperate, because he who is coming never arrives.’

7) *No las hagas y no las temas*
   ‘Do nothing wrong, so that you won’t feel scared.’
In the adversative case, though, there is no discernable pattern. Such proverbs display erratic behavior with respect to the properties of commutativity and temporal meaning: 42% of them can be inverted without significantly altering their meaning.

8) Guarda que comer y no guardes que hacer
   ‘Save food, but don’t save work.’

9) A Dios rogando y con el mazo dando
   ‘Pray to God, but keep on working.’

10) Uñas de gato y hábitos de beato
    ‘The nails of a cat, but the habits of a devout.’

11) ¡Viva Fernando y vamos robando!
    ‘Long live King Ferdinand, but let’s continue stealing.’

However, 58% of proverbs with an adversative meaning cannot be inverted without altering somehow their meaning or their temporal sequence. For example:

12) El hombre propone y Dios dispone
    ‘Man proposes, but God disposes.’

13) Muerto estará, y aún lo del entierro regateará
    ‘He will be dead, but will still complain about the funeral.’

14) La locura no tiene cura, y si la tiene, poco dura
    ‘Madness has no cure, but if it does, it doesn’t last long.’

15) Escucha a la vieja y ríete de la conseja
    ‘Listen to the old woman, but laugh at her advice.’

The primary analysis of the data suggests that the adversative relation could be the link between those relations that allow commutativity and those that do not. The conjunction pero sometimes loses its connecting function when it is used as an expressive element, as in ¡Pero será posible! ‘¡But is it possible!’ (Gómez, 1998, p. 236).

These findings were corroborated by native speakers’ semantic interpretations of y. A multiple-choice test was administered to 10 Spanish speakers, who were asked to select the conjunction that best reflected the meaning of y in each of 12 proverbs. For each proverb, the following choices were presented: a) pero, b) aunque, c) luego, d) porque, and e) para que. The test included three proverbs with adversative meaning, three showing a consecutive relation, three expressing concession, two displaying a purposive meaning, and one indicating causality. One of the test items is included here, and the entire test is in the Appendix.
16) El criminal va a caballo y la justicia, en carreta.
‘The criminal rides a horse, but justice rides by cart.’

a) pero
b) aunque
c) luego
d) porque
e) para que

The meaning of y in this proverb is adversative, so subjects were expected to select a) pero, and nine of the ten did. (See the Appendix for the overall subjects’ responses). The findings of the test confirmed the polysemy of y in the corpus. For nine of the twelve proverbs, (75%), at least half the subjects selected the same semantic interpretations assigned to those proverbs in the corpus analysis.

Discussion
Both the frequency of use of a particular meaning of y found in the corpus analysis, and the preference for a particular semantic interpretation given by native speakers yielded the same hierarchy of meanings of y in Spanish proverbs. Considering the frequency of use of specific meanings of y in the corpus, the following hierarchy is established:

Table 6: Hierarchy based on the frequency of use in the corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additive</th>
<th>Adversative</th>
<th>Consecutive</th>
<th>Concessive</th>
<th>Purposive</th>
<th>Causal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(76/200)</td>
<td>(65/200)</td>
<td>(41/200)</td>
<td>(11/200)</td>
<td>(6/200)</td>
<td>(1/200)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The subjects’ responses to the test generate a similar hierarchy. For instance, there are three proverbs in the test in which y conveys adversative meaning, indicating a possible total of 30 correct responses (pero). For these three proverbs, the number of subjects choosing pero were seven, nine, and, eight, respectively, for a total of 24 preferences for adversative pero out of 30 expected adversative semantic interpretations. Using analogous calculations, the subjects’ preferences for the expected meaning for y in each proverb yielded the following hierarchy, which coincides with the hierarchy based on the frequency of use in the corpus.

Table 7: Hierarchy based on the subjects’ preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additive</th>
<th>Adversative</th>
<th>Consecutive</th>
<th>Concessive</th>
<th>Purposive</th>
<th>Causal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(24/30)</td>
<td>(22/30)</td>
<td>(15/30)</td>
<td>(10/20)</td>
<td>(1/10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This hierarchy explicitly models the radial structure (as defined by Lakoff, 1987) of the category y: there is a central case exhibiting the prototypical meaning of addition, and non-central subcategories that are extensions of this central case with the meanings
of adversativity, consequence, concession, purpose, and causality. Within a radial category, the less central categories are considered conventional variations on the central case and must be learned (p. 84). They follow general principles common to systems of human categorization, including centrality, which means that the basic member of the category is central; and chaining, which implies that the central member is linked to other members, and these to others, and so on (pp. 95-96).

Thus, the category \( y \) consists of an internal structure with a prototypical sense linked to peripheral senses. There are common properties shared by all its members, such as their connecting function, and properties perceived as conceptually distinct, such as addition conveying the idea of putting two or more units together and adversativity expressing contrast between only two units. Moreover, the hierarchy displayed by the members of the category shows centrality gradience, “[t]he idea that members (or subcategories) which are clearly within the category boundaries may still be more or less central” (p. 12). Adversative and consecutive meanings display more centrality than other members: they are higher in the hierarchy and are coordinating conjunctions. Less centrality is attributed to meanings of concession, purpose, and causality, which are lower in the hierarchy and correspond to subordinating conjunctions. Since centrality gradience is the result of the interaction of cognitive models, which “structure thought and are used in forming categories” (p. 13), the overall category structure of \( y \) can be characterized by a theory of cognitive propositional models. These models specify elements, their properties, and the relationships among them (p. 113). A propositional model characterizing our knowledge of linguistic connectors would necessarily include conjunctions as important elements, and thus hierarchies similar to that established in my analysis of proverbs.

Conclusions

One of the reasons for the semantic complexity of Spanish proverbs is the varying interpretations of the conjunction \( y \) appearing in these structures. Therefore, establishing the type of semantic relationship \( y \) conveys will lead to a fuller understanding of these linguistic expressions by second language learners.

The results of both the analysis of the corpus and the multiple-choice test were expected, since \( y \) occasionally coordinates grammatical units conveying different meanings, such as concession, consequence, and conditionality (Gómez, 1998, p. 233). What was unexpected, though, were the meanings of causality and purpose, which are not generally discussed in Spanish grammar texts.

One issue arising from these findings is how the different meanings of \( y \) are related. The conjunctions \( y \) and pero are interchangeable when used as expressive or emphatic elements.

(1) \( ¡y/pero tendré mala suerte! \)
   ‘And/but don’t I have bad luck!’

(2) \( ¡y/pero tú piensas que yo lo hice! \)
   ‘And/but you think I did it!’
The subordinating conjunction *aunque* can become an adversative coordinating conjunction, and thus can be replaced by *pero* in certain contexts.

(3) *Gabriela es dulce, aunque/pero mañosa*  
‘Gabriela is sweet, though/but spoiled.’

(4) *Se entrenó mucho, pero no ganó*  
‘He trained hard, but didn’t win.’

(5) *Aunque se entrenó mucho, no ganó*  
‘Although he trained hard, he didn’t win.’

The meanings of causality and consequence are also related, as seen in the use of *porque* and *luego*.

(6) *Tendrás tu propio dinero, porque tienes trabajo*  
‘You’ll have your own money, because you have a job.’

(7) *Tienes trabajo, luego tendrás tu propio dinero*  
‘You’ve got a job, so you’ll have your own money.’

However, there is no apparent relation between the purposive *para que* and the other meanings of *y*. This suggests other issues for future research concerning the polysemy of *y*. Are there other uses related to the central meaning of *y* that do not connect to the other non-central meanings? Are there other possible meanings that flow naturally from addition, but were not found in the corpus?

The number of proverbs included in the test given to the native speakers was very limited, and the different meanings of *y* were not equally exemplified. This instrument must be expanded for future research. Moreover, native versus non-native interpretations were not considered in this study. So, another important direction for further research is examining second language learners’ behavior when interpreting *y.*
References
Appendix

Test

Instrucciones: Lee los siguientes refranes y encierra en un círculo la posible interpretación (o interpretaciones) de la conjunción y. Si encuentras más de una interpretación, indica al lado cuál prefieres.

1. A Dios rogando y con el mazo dando.
   a) pero
   b) aunque
   c) luego
   d) porque
   e) para que

2. Hablar de la mar y en ella no estar.
   a) pero
   b) aunque
   c) luego
   d) porque
   e) para que

3. Escarba la gallina y halla su pepita.
   a) pero
   b) aunque
   c) luego
   d) porque
   e) para que

4. No las hagas y no las temas.
   a) pero
   b) aunque
   c) luego
   d) porque
   e) para que

5. El criminal va a caballo y la justicia, en carreta.
   a) pero
   b) aunque
   c) luego
   d) porque
   e) para que

6. Canta la rana y no tiene pelo ni lana.
   a) pero
   b) aunque
   c) luego
d) porque

7. Al villano dale el pie y se tomará la mano.
   a) pero
   b) aunque
   c) luego
   d) porque
   e) para que

8. Quien espera, desespera, y quien viene, nunca llega.
   a) pero
   b) aunque
   c) luego
   d) porque
   e) para que

9. Anteayer tu pan comí y ayer no te conocí.
   a) pero
   b) aunque
   c) luego
   d) porque
   e) para que

10. Haceos de miel y os comerán las moscas.
    a) pero
    b) aunque
    c) luego
    d) porque
    e) para que

    a) pero
    b) aunque
    c) luego
    d) porque
    e) para que

12. Quiera Dios que orégano sea y no se nos vuelva alcaravea.
    a) pero
    b) aunque
    c) luego
    d) porque
    e) para que
Table 8: Number of subjects who responded correctly to the expected meaning of $y$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semantic interpretation of $y$ in each test item (# of items= 12)</th>
<th>Number of subjects who interpreted $y$ according to meaning assigned in corpus (N=10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Adversative: pero</td>
<td>7 subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Concessive: aunque</td>
<td>1 subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Consecutive: luego</td>
<td>8 subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Purposive: para que</td>
<td>6 subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Adversative: pero</td>
<td>9 subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Concessive: aunque</td>
<td>8 subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Consecutive: luego</td>
<td>5 subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Causal: porque</td>
<td>1 subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Adversative: pero</td>
<td>8 subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Consecutive: luego</td>
<td>9 subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Concessive: aunque</td>
<td>6 subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Final: para que</td>
<td>4 subjects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>