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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Tracing the grammar–discourse interface in Spanish (2000–2025): A bibliometric analysis of epistemological shifts

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| ABSTRACT

This study provides a bibliometric analysis of the grammar–discourse interface in Spanish-language academic production between 2000 and 2025. It aims to identify how theoretical frameworks, methodological practices, and research trends have evolved in the field over time. The analysis is based on a corpus drawn from Google Scholar and CORE, combining automated topic modelling with qualitative analysis of research domains. The findings reveal a clear shift from predominantly theoretical approaches toward empirically grounded, interdisciplinary, and computationally oriented paradigms. Functionalist frameworks—especially Systemic Functional Linguistics and Functional Discourse Grammar—emerge as central in articulating the relationship between grammatical structure and communicative context. At the same time, the field has expanded toward new domains, including academic literacy, political discourse, and social media, where grammar is increasingly examined as embedded in multimodal and ideological practices. Taken together, the results position the grammar–discourse interface as a productive domain for understanding how linguistic structure and social meaning interact in contemporary discourse.

| KEYWORDS

Grammar–discourse interface, Spanish linguistics, Bibliometric analysis, Multimodal discourse analysis.

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### 1. Introduction

Type Contemporary linguistic theory has increasingly moved beyond the traditional dichotomy that conceives grammar as an autonomous formal system for the expression of thought and discourse as the exclusive domain of contextualized interaction (Ginzburg & Poesio 2016; Molnár et al. 2019). While these domains have historically been regarded as divided by an epistemological gap (Maciocco & Tagliagambe, 2009; Mithun, 2015; Morgan, 1982), empirical evidence indicates that speakers must simultaneously satisfy local structural constraints and global communicative demands. This dual requirement points to a convergence of grammar and discourse in every speech event (Harder, 2008, 2013; Haselow & Hancil, 2021). From this perspective, the relationship between the two domains is best understood as bidirectionally related: discourse conditions the selection of grammatical forms in accordance with interactional goals, while grammar conventionalizes patterns of language use (Ariel, 2009).

Within this framework, the long-standing distinction between competence and performance appears to have been substantially reconfigured at least within usage-based and interactional approaches (Prince, 1988; Suci, 2019). It is now widely accepted that clauses and sentences function as units of interaction that arise from the demands of real-time language use (Thompson & Couper-Kuhlen, 2005). This shift toward a discourse-oriented perspective not only reshapes our understanding of syntactic analysis, but also extends to interdisciplinary domains concerned with the social and ideological dimensions of language use. However, recent decades have witnessed significant changes in approaches, methodologies, and objects of study that call for systematic reassessment. In particular, the first quarter of the 21st century constitutes a particularly productive period for

examining the evolving conceptualization of the grammar–discourse interface. A number of studies have attempted to capture these developments (Gordon, 2021; Keizer et al., 2022; Phan, 2025; Xuan & Chen, 2020). Yet such contributions tend to adopt a broad perspective and often fail to consider the extent to which specific geographic contexts shape theoretical preferences and research agendas, frequently under the influence of extralinguistic factors (Adli & Guy, 2022; Mattissek & Glasze, 2016). This limitation is particularly evident in the case of Spanish, where the study of the grammar–discourse interface reveals a set of distinctive configurations, not only in terms of its thematic orientations but also in terms of its theoretical models and methodological strategies. Addressing this complexity requires the adoption of a bibliometric methodology complemented by a qualitative approach, enabling a more fine-grained reconstruction of how epistemological positions are articulated and transformed over time.

The present study aims to provide a bibliometric analysis of academic research on the grammar–discourse interface in Spanish over the period 2000–2025. To this end, it examines the theoretical frameworks that have been proposed to model this interface, with particular emphasis on functional approaches across different areas of linguistic inquiry. The analysis seeks to demonstrate that contemporary linguistic theorization in Spanish is characterized by identifiable configurations, developmental phases, and methodological orientations. This bibliometric corpus approach enables a systematic reconstruction of how theoretical foundations and key concepts in discourse analysis evolved and shaped the interface in Spanish-language academic research.

## 2. Fundamental concepts of the grammar-discourse interface

To understand the close interrelationship between grammar and discourse, it is necessary to adopt a perspective in which context factors play a central role in the actualization of both form and meaning. From this need for convergence emerges the concept of the grammar–discourse interface, positioned at the theoretical intersection between structural competence and communicative performance (Altshuler & Truswell, 2022; Slabakova & Ivanov, 2011). Rather than conceiving of syntax as an autonomous and self-contained system, contemporary functionalist frameworks conceptualize language as a dynamic and adaptive system that reflects recurrent patterns of use, in which formal structure is primarily motivated by communicative functions in social contexts (Harder, 2013). From this perspective, discourse is not merely the domain of grammatical realization but a fundamental source of its formation, as linguistic structures emerge from the ways in which speakers use language in authentic communicative settings.

From the standpoint of formal analysis, the interface may be approached through two complementary analytical orientations. On the one hand, discourse-related constraints—particularly those associated with the management of interpersonal relations and the maintenance of textual coherence—actively regulate the selection of grammatical forms throughout interaction (Ariel, 2009). On the other hand, grammar operates as a mechanism of progressive conventionalization, transforming recurrent interactional patterns into stable formal structures (Heine et al., 2021). A comprehensive understanding of this interface therefore entails recognizing that morphosyntactic organization is intrinsically conditioned by the purposes of verbal interaction and that contextual factors play a central role in structuring the architecture of the sentence (Alturo et al., 2014; Royo Viñuales, 2025).

To model and functionally account for the intersections between form and use, contemporary linguistics draws on theoretical frameworks that are explicitly oriented toward discourse. Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG), as developed by Hengeveld and Mackenzie (2006, 2008), constitutes one of the most systematically articulated models in this domain. Its architecture is characterized by a strictly top-down organization, whereby the speaker’s prelinguistic intention, located in the Conceptual Component, is progressively mapped onto formulation processes at the Interpersonal and Representational Levels, and ultimately encoded within the Morphosyntactic and Phonological Levels (Hengeveld & Mackenzie, 2008; Keizer et al., 2022). A central strength of this framework lies in its capacity to account for interface mismatches or asymmetries. Rather than assuming a fully transparent correspondence between levels, FDG shows how pragmatic features—such as attenuation markers or polarity operators—may induce substantial morphological effects without necessitating empty syntactic nodes (Contreras-García, 2021). Furthermore, the model adopts a highly constrained conception of context through its Contextual Component, which only tracks situational and discursive information that exerts a systematic and demonstrable influence on grammatical structure (Alturo et al., 2014).

Complementarily, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), as formulated by Halliday (Martin, 2016), addresses the grammar–discourse interface by conceptualizing language as a social semiotic system organized around networks of choice. This framework rejects strict modular divisions in favor of an integrated architecture that simultaneously encodes three metafunctions: the ideational, which represents experience; the interpersonal, which encodes interaction and speaker stance; and the textual, which organizes these meanings into coherent discourse (Banks, 2024; Cheng, 2024; Hart, 2014). More recently, SFL has undergone a significant expansion through the consolidation of multimodal discourse analysis, integrating linguistic resources with visual, gestural, and spatial modes in processes of resemiotization and meaning-making. This evolution reflects the growing importance of multimodal and transcultural perspectives in contemporary discourse studies (Kress & Bezemer, 2023; Liu, 2022; Zhao et al., 2025).

Discourse markers are commonly conceptualized as procedural elements that constrain access to context information and regulate the inferential processes of the interlocutor. From a diachronic perspective, these elements exemplify a fundamental

dynamic at the grammar–discourse interface: many markers originate in integrated syntactic constructions that undergo processes of grammaticalization or co-optation, gradually losing their original morphosyntactic dependencies to operate at the level of the overall communicative situation (Degand, 2019; Heine et al., 2021).

More generally, a review of the theories on the grammar–discourse interface reveals a clear increase in empirical and interdisciplinary approaches that extend beyond sentence-level analysis. A particularly influential trend in this regard is the consolidation of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Cárcamo Morales, 2018; O’Halloran, 2021). Based on the assumption that human communication rarely unfolds through a single semiotic mode, this framework expands the analytical tools to examine how verbal grammar interacts with other semiotic resources in the co-construction of meaning (Schröder, 2015).

In parallel, the increasing use of large-scale corpora in variationist sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics has enabled a productive methodological triangulation. This approach is essential for overcoming the limitations of purely observational methods and exclusively experimental designs, and for securing robust empirical evidence (Szmrecsanyi, 2017). The use of annotated spoken and written corpora, such as the PRESEEA interviews and the Val.Es.Co corpus, provides a solid ecological and structural basis for analyzing discourse variables in their natural interactive contexts (Royo Viñuales, 2025). In this way, researchers can move beyond prescriptive intuitions toward the analysis of statistically significant patterns of language use (Sanders & Evers-Vermeul, 2019).

Taken together, these contemporary developments reaffirm a central theoretical premise: the architecture of human language can only be adequately understood when its grammatical structures and contextual motivations are analyzed as mutually conditioning of linguistic organization.

### **3. Study methodology**

The analysis presented in this study is based on a bibliometric approach aimed at identifying the principal theoretical, methodological, and thematic trends characterizing research on the grammar–discourse interface in Spanish-language academic production over the period 2000–2025. To ensure the breadth, reliability, and consistency of the corpus, two major bibliographic databases were selected: Google Scholar (Google Scholar, 2026) and CORE (Knoth et al., 2023). Google Scholar was chosen for its extensive indexing capacity across a wide range of academic publications, while CORE was included for its structured data and the availability of API-based access for systematic data retrieval.

The search strategy was designed using Boolean operators to enable the identification of relevant concepts. Specifically, the following keywords were employed: “grammar–discourse interface,” “Discourse Grammar,” “grammar-based discourse analysis,” “Systemic Functional Linguistics,” and “syntax–discourse interface”. These descriptors were selected for their prominence within the specialized literature and their capacity to encompass both established theoretical paradigms and more recent developments in the field. Furthermore, strict inclusion criteria were applied: only articles written in Spanish and published within the specified temporal range (2000–2025) were considered.

Given the limitations of Google Scholar for the automated retrieval of large-scale datasets, web scraping procedures were implemented using the Scholarly library in Python. To avoid access restrictions, a retrieval threshold of 847 results across all queries was established, with controlled intervals between them. In parallel, the CORE database was accessed via its API, enabling iterative querying and the extraction of more structurally consistent datasets, although with some constraints on volume and download rates. This database returned 828 results in total, which served as a reference point for aligning the retrieval volume from Google Scholar. The integration of these two data sources facilitated a balanced corpus construction, optimizing both quantitative scope and qualitative reliability.

Once the records were retrieved, a unified database was created in CSV format. For each entry, the following fields were systematically extracted: article title, author(s), year of publication, journal name, and abstract. This was followed by a data cleaning procedure involving the elimination of duplicate records—frequently arising from database overlap—as well as the filtering for linguistic consistency. In this process, articles written in Portuguese were deliberately excluded, given that their typological proximity to Spanish introduced noise and compromised the internal consistency of the corpus.

The refined dataset was subsequently segmented into five-year intervals (2000–2004, 2005–2009, etc.), enabling the diachronic analysis of patterns over time. On this basis, a mixed-methods approach was implemented. On the one hand, automated techniques were used to detect lexical patterns and co-occurrences in titles and abstracts, enabling the identification of recurrent thematic clusters and shifts in dominant terminology. For this purpose, BERTopic was employed for its embedding-based representations and its capacity to model semantic regularities, making it particularly effective for short-text analysis (Grootendorst, 2022). On the other hand, a qualitative interpretive phase was conducted. Here the data were manually organized into higher-order analytical categories, including theoretical frameworks, methodological orientations, and objects of study.

This methodology enables a theoretically grounded reconstruction of the evolution of the field, highlighting the transition from predominantly theory-driven models toward empirically oriented and multimodal paradigms. In this way, the study provides a structured review of the development of the grammar–discourse interface in Spanish-language scholarship during the first quarter of the 21st century.

#### 4. Discussion of the results

Table 1 summarizes the evolution of research trends across five-year intervals, based on the bibliometric analysis of the documentary corpus.

Table 1. Analytical categorization of thematic, theoretical, and methodological components in the corpus.

Period	Predominant topics and themes	Theories and conceptual frameworks	Applied methodologies	Objects of study
2000-2004	Textual cohesion and clause structure	Textual Grammar and Classical Pragmatics	Descriptive qualitative analysis	Traditional written texts
2005-2009	Anaphoric resolution and interfaces	Systemic-Functional Linguistics and Critical Analysis	Corpus linguistics and acceptability judgments	Learner discourse and journalistic texts
2010-2014	Academic literacy and disciplinary rhetoric	Gender Analysis and Valuation Theory	Contrastive corpus analysis	Research articles and manuals
2015-2019	Multimodality and cyberlanguage	Social Semiotics and Multimodal Critical Analysis	Use of annotation and ethnography software	Social networks and digital press
2020-2025	Digital Humanities and Crisis Discourses	Computational Linguistics and Media Ecology	Data mining and theme modeling	Virtual platforms and massive corpora

The analysis provides a panoramic view of the development and diversification of research on the grammar–discourse interface in Spanish. The systematic organization of thematic domains and conceptual frameworks points to the emergence of a dynamic and evolving field, characterized by a progressive reorientation from predominantly theory-driven approaches toward empirically grounded and interdisciplinary paradigms. Within this configuration, the studies examined converge around a set of central thematic axes that structure academic production in the following areas:

- informational structuring of the clause,
- word order, referentiality, and anaphoric relations,
- processes of grammaticalization affecting discourse markers and operators,
- pragmatic attenuation phenomena,
- grammatical metaphor as a resource for meaning construction,
- coherence and cohesion relations in the organization of discourse.

To provide a structured account of this landscape, it is necessary to establish a set of categories capable of organizing the principal trends identified in the data. The first category encompasses theoretical and epistemological frameworks. Within this domain, SFL occupies a central position, along with its extensions such as Appraisal Theory for the analysis of interpersonal meaning and social semiotics approaches (Martin, 2018; Phan, 2025). Equally significant are FDG, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)—drawing on sociocognitive and sociological traditions—and models derived from cognitive and interactional linguistics. The prominence of SFL and FDG in the results is unsurprising, given their explicit inclusion in the search criteria. However, the presence of derivative models points to a continuum of theoretical development within the field.

The second category concerns the areas of knowledge targeted by empirical studies. Here, a high degree of diversity is evident, reflecting the expansion of applied linguistics. Studies on language acquisition occupy a salient position, with numerous works focusing on academic literacy, the teaching of writing in higher education, and the development of pragmatic and discourse competence in second language learners, especially in relation to challenges associated with the syntax–pragmatics interface (Cheng, 2024; Martí Sánchez, 2004; Morado Vázquez, 2022; Sorace & Serratrice, 2009). Another major area concerns political and media discourse, where analyses focus on strategies of ideological legitimation, the construction of otherness, processes of polarization, and the representation of marginalized social actors (Atienza Cerezo, 2007; Barreiros & Cingolani, 2007; Hart, 2014). Additionally, sociolinguistic studies address dialectal variation and language change in specific speech communities, while research in translation and specialized terminology further contributes to the empirical scope of the field (Seghezzi, 2011).

A key methodological and theoretical development emerging from the analysis is the increasing centrality of multimodality and critical literacy studies (Londoño Vásquez, 2015; Manghi et al., 2014). Texts are no longer conceived as exclusively verbal artifacts, but rather as complex semiotic ensembles in which linguistic, visual, typographic, and spatial resources interact in processes of meaning-making (Hart, 2014; Pujol Dahme, 2015). In this context, digital discourse and social media interactions have emerged as autonomous objects of analysis, requiring the adaptation and extension of existing analytical frameworks to account for

identity construction in digitally mediated environments such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Similarly, there is an increasing number of research addressing issues of gender, dissidence, and socio-environmental conflict, where grammatical structures are shaped by social demands—such as inclusive language—highlighting the active role of grammar in the construction of social reality (Menéndez, 2020; Zhao et al., 2025).

Table 2 provides a synthesized overview of the principal findings corresponding to each of the periods under analysis.

Table 2. Evolution of major research trends in the grammar–discourse interface in Spanish (2000–2025).

Period	Major research trends
2000–2004	This period is characterized by the predominance of foundational research on textual grammar, interactional pragmatics, and clause delimitation. Research focuses primarily on cohesion and the taxonomy of discourse markers, relying mainly on qualitative, descriptive, and theoretically introspective methodologies.
2005–2009	SFL begins to consolidate as a central theoretical framework for the analysis of linguistic metafunctions. At this stage, empirically oriented studies on language acquisition, bilingualism, and anaphoric resolution in learner populations gain prominence, while strictly formalist and context-independent generative approaches are progressively marginalized.
2010–2014	Research attention shifts significantly toward academic literacy and the rhetoric of scientific and academic discourse. Genre-based discourse analysis emerges as the dominant paradigm, particularly in the study of the structural organization of doctoral dissertations, research articles, textbooks, and conference papers.
2015–2019	Social semiotics, multimodality, and CDA—particularly as applied to digitally mediated communication—undergo significant expansion. Appraisal Theory is widely adopted as the analytical framework for examining evaluative meaning, stance, and engagement in digital media and contemporary political discourse. Social media platforms become the primary sources of data, while literary texts and controlled interactions assume a secondary role.
2020–2025	The increasing influence of computational methods marks this period. Hybrid methodological configurations—large-scale data mining, sentiment analysis, and co-occurrence network modeling—become dominant in the analysis of extensive corpora. Research topics reflect global socio-political challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, feminist movements, electoral polarization, misinformation and disinformation. In this context, small-scale, manual, and introspective approaches are progressively displaced by computational analyses of large annotated datasets.

## 5. Conclusions

The bibliometric analysis demonstrates that research on the grammar–discourse interface in the Spanish-speaking context has undergone a substantial transformation over the period 2000–2025. This transformation is characterized by a progressive reorientation from predominantly theoretical approaches toward empirical, interdisciplinary, and computationally oriented paradigms. Rather than constituting a rupture, this development reflects the consolidation of an epistemological continuum in which functionalist frameworks—most notably SFL and FDG—have played a central role in articulating the interdependence of structural and contextual dimensions of language.

In this regard, the findings support the central premise of the study: grammar cannot be viewed as an autonomous system, but must instead be understood as shaped by the intersection of usage patterns and interactional dynamics. The recurrence of themes such as information structure, anaphoric relations, pragmatic attenuation, and the analysis of discourse markers suggests that formal phenomena are best accounted for with reference to broader discursive processes. Furthermore, the diversification of research domains—from academic literacy to digitally mediated discourse and global sociopolitical crises—highlights the expansion of the field into areas where grammatical structures are embedded within social, ideological, and multimodal practices. This thematic expansion is accompanied by an increase in methodological sophistication, particularly through the adoption of large-scale corpus analysis and computational techniques.

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