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Alternatives and Definitions: Two Practices for Repairing Lexical Items in Spanish Interdialectal Conversations

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Abstract
This paper examines how speakers of dialectally diverse varieties of Spanish manage lexical items that emerge as trouble sources in interaction. Drawing upon a collection of other-initiated repair sequences and self-reformulations, the analysis reveals two main practices for repairing a lexical trouble source: (1) providing an alternative referring expression or (2) offering a definition of its meaning. When participants provide an alternative, they orient to an equivalence in meaning, while distinguishing the equivalents based on their normative status (e.g., standard or dialectal). When speakers employ definitions, they aim to secure mutual understanding by resorting to the general, lexical meaning of the trouble source. At times, participants contest the repair initiation or negotiate the normative status of the lexical item, showing how they locally negotiate the boundaries of their respective dialects and hold each other accountable for interdialectal understanding. The data are drawn from naturally occurring conversations among Spanish speakers in Germany.

Keywords: Conversation Analysis – Dialect contact – Repair – Spanish – Lexical variation.

German abstract
Dieser Artikel untersucht, wie Sprecher dialektal unterschiedlicher Varietäten des Spanischen mit lexikalischen Einheiten umgehen, die in der Interaktion als Problemstellen auftreten. Basierend auf einer Sammlung von fremd-initiierten Reparatursequenzen und Selbstreformulierungen identifiziert die Analyse zwei zentrale Praktiken zur Reparatur einer lexikalischen Problemstelle: (1) das Anbieten eines alternativen referentiellen Ausdrucks oder (2) die Angabe einer Definition. Wenn die Teilnehmenden eine Alternative anbieten, orientieren sie sich an einer Bedeutungsäquivalenz, unterscheiden die Begriffe jedoch hinsichtlich ihres normativen Status (z. B. standard- oder dialektalsprachlich). Wenn Sprecher Definitionen verwenden, zielen sie darauf ab, gegenseitiges Verstehen zu sichern, indem sie auf die allgemeine lexikalische Bedeutung der problematischen Einheit zurückgreifen. Mitunter hinterfragen die Teilnehmenden die Reparaturinitiierung oder verhandeln den normativen Status des Begriffs, wodurch sie gemeinsam die Grenzen ihrer jeweiligen Dialekte definieren und sich gegenseitig für das interdialektale Verstehen verantwortlich machen. Die Daten stammen aus natürlich vorkommenden Gesprächen zwischen spanischsprachigen Sprechern in Deutschland.

Keywords: Konversationanalyse – Dialektkontakt – Reparatur – Spanisch – Lexikalische Variation.

1. Introduction

Spanish is spoken by more than half a billion people and holds official status in twenty countries. Consequently, it is considered a pluricentric language (Norrby et al. 2020), characterized by multiple dialects and a complex interplay of regional, national, and pan-Hispanic normative uses. The geographical diversification of Spanish has even prompted early predictions, such as Cuervo's (1901), that Spanish – like Latin – might eventually fragment into distinct languages. In response to this potential divergence, institutions like the *Real Academia Española* (RAE) and the *Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española* (ASALE) have undertaken concerted efforts to preserve the "essential unity of Spanish" by promoting the concept of "unity in diversity" (Muñoz-Basols/Hernández Muñoz 2019). Through a pan-Hispanic approach, these academies acknowledge regional norms while delineating the boundaries between regional and global uses of the language.

In this paper, I address this issue from the perspective of Conversation Analysis, which considers how interactants themselves set the boundaries of their respective dialects (Raymond 2018). By looking at naturally-occurring interdialectal encounters in the Unites States, Raymond shows some of the ways in which dialectally divergent speakers of Spanish orient to dialectal features as relevant and accountable in real-time interaction. Speakers do not only orient to each other's dialects but also project identities, negotiate group memberships (see also Egbert 2004), and establish dialectal hierarchies. This way, interdialectal encounters provide "micro-lessons of dialectal normativity" and can thus be consequential for ongoing linguistic production between the interlocutors. In sum, Raymond's work opens new avenues for exploring dialect contact through the micro-level lens of social interaction.

Raymond's pioneering study examines a wide range of phenomena, including phonetic, morphological, and lexical variation. Building on this line of research, the present study focuses specifically on how lexical differences between dialects are managed in conversations among Spanish speakers residing in Germany. While Spanish dialects are generally considered mutually intelligible (Merino/Grijelmo 2019), certain lexical items can nonetheless be treated as problematic for mutual understanding. This study investigates how participants address such issues after other-initiated repair by the recipient (Schegloff et al. 1977) and through self-reformulations by the speaker of a (potential) trouble source (Svennevig 2023). In both cases, the data reveal two primary ways for repairing a problematic lexical item: providing an alternative referring expression (e.g., replacing *plata* 'money' with *dinero* 'money') or defining the meaning of the term (Deppermann/De Stefani 2019).

In what follows, this article pursues three main objectives: (1) to examine how Spanish speakers employ alternatives and definitions to resolve lexical understanding problems, (2) to explore how they manage the distinction between dialectal and standard Spanish when using these repair practices, and (3) to assess the extent to which participants hold each other accountable for interdialectal understanding.

2. Alternatives and definitions in conversation

The use of lexical items in conversation is closely tied to recipient design (Sacks et al. 1974; Deppermann 2014; Betz 2015). Since speakers cannot know all the lexical items of a language, lexical selection during turn construction heavily depends on what they assume the recipient knows. Consequently, even when two individuals speak the same language, parts of their lexicons may not overlap due to factors such as professional experience (Kitzinger/Mandelbaum 2013), language proficiency (Svennevig 2023), or dialectal variation (Raymond 2018). When a lexical item becomes a source of trouble, speakers may employ various practices to clarify its meaning (Deppermann 2011; Waring et al. 2013; Traverso/Greco 2016; Deppermann/De Stefani 2024), such as providing an alternative or offering a definition.

Conversation Analysis has long shown an interest in the use of alternative referring expressions. Reference in conversation is "a matter of selection" (Enfield 2013) among various possibilities for referring to an entity. The choice of one form of reference over alternative formulations can reveal important insights into how participants analyze the speech event in which they are engaged (Schegloff 1972). Jefferson (1974) describes such adjustments as "interactional errors" wherein speakers replace one referring expression with another deemed more appropriate for the recipient or the situation. Since then, the use of alternative referring expressions has been extensively studied in relation to various referents: place (Schegloff 1972; Kitzinger et al. 2013; Debois/De Stefani 2022), time (Raymond/White 2017), persons (Sacks/Schegloff 1979; Enfield/Stivers 2007), and events (Antaki 2008; Deppermann 2011), as well as in specific institutional contexts such as therapy (Etelämäki et al. 2021), classroom interaction (Ishino/Okada, 2018), and police interviews (Svennevig 2023), and in studies of Spanish talk-in-interaction (Raymond 2016; Bolaños Carpio 2021).

In the specific context of interdialectal conversations, Raymond (2018) highlights the use of lexical alternatives as a practice for addressing (potential) understanding problems among Spanish speakers in the United States. When a lexical item's meaning is not recognized by the recipient, the speaker may offer an alternative referring expression that is perceived as more appropriate for the recipient's dialect. This practice underscores the participants' awareness of dialectal divergence, as speakers actively monitor the possibility of dialectal differences with their interlocutors. Beyond facilitating mutual understanding, Raymond demonstrates that the use of alternatives also reflects dialect normativity, as speakers negotiate dialect hierarchies in situ through their choices. As such, interdialectal conversations can be understood as intercultural moments (Bolden 2014), functioning as micro-lessons in dialectal normativity.

In contrast to alternative referring expressions, the study of definitions in interaction is a more recent area of inquiry (Traverso/Greco 2016). Definitions have

been mostly approached from the perspective of interactional semantics (Deppermann 2011), which examines conversational phenomena that reflect participants' semantic work. In conversation, definitions are highly indexical (Deppermann/De Stefani 2019), inherently partial (Schmale 2016), and tailored to the practical purposes of the participants (Deppermann 2024). While definitions are often formulated with existential structures (Deppermann 2016), specific formats have also been documented, such as the German *X heißt* construction (Helmer 2020), definitions introduced with negative definitional components (Deppermann/De Stefani 2019), or those conveyed through embodied means (Traverso/Ravazzolo 2016; Deppermann 2016). Definitions serve various functions in interaction: resolving problems of understanding (Helmer 2020), disambiguating the meaning of terms (Deppermann/De Stefani 2019), and achieving argumentative goals (De Stefani/ Sambre 2016).

Definitions differ from other forms of clarification, such as specifications. While definitions are used to convey the general, context-free meaning of a lexical item, specifications are employed to communicate the relevant, context-specific meaning for a particular recipient in the here and now (Deppermann 2024:13). Definitions are most often utilized to explain technical terms, whereas specifications address the use of ordinary expressions (Deppermann 2024). Consequently, definitions prove especially productive in contexts of epistemic asymmetry, such as interactions between L1 and L2 speakers (Svennevig 2023), pedagogical settings (Kääntä 2021), or guided tours (Traverso/Ravazzolo 2016). Nevertheless, the distinction between definitions and other clarification practices, such as explanations or descriptions, remains somewhat blurred (Deppermann 2024). In sum, although analyzing semantics from a Conversation Analysis perspective presents methodological challenges (Deppermann 2011), interest in this area has grown (Deppermann/De Stefani 2024). In this regard, the emergence of lexical differences across dialects provides a perspicuous locus for exploring how speakers define the meanings of lexical items or negotiate the appropriateness of alternative referring expressions.

Alternatives and definitions both relate to the recipient design of turns, but they differ in terms of what the speaker assumes the recipients knows. Definitions presuppose that the recipient is at least partially unaware of the meaning of the referent, whereas alternatives are presented as equivalent referring expressions that may not be recognized for other reasons, such as dialectal variation. The analysis that follows builds on this research by examining how dialectally divergent Spanish speakers use alternatives and definitions to address lexical differences that emerge as the interaction unfolds.

3. Data and method

The data come from video-recorded, naturally occurring conversations among Spanish speakers in Germany. The recordings were made by setting up cameras in familiar locations for the participants and capturing routine activities, such as cooking dinner or having coffee. All participants provided informed consent for the use of these materials for academic and didactic purposes, and all personal information has been anonymized. The use of screenshots was permitted and included when deemed necessary for the analysis. Illustrative excerpts have been transcribed using

conversation analytic conventions (Jefferson 2004; Clift et al. 2024) and include multimodal annotations following Mondada (2024).

The recordings feature naturally occurring talk among 2 to 4 individuals and are part of a larger corpus focused on studying Spanish Talk-in-Interaction. Importantly, the dialectal configurations were not pre-established and vary significantly across the recordings. Some of the recordings include speakers of different dialectal backgrounds, reflecting the context of Spanish-speaking immigrants living in Germany, a non-Spanish-speaking country where Spanish speakers often gather regardless of their countries of origin. Consequently, the setting provides a natural environment for observing spontaneous and diverse instances of dialect contact.

This article is based on 20 recordings (13 hours and 10 minutes) involving participants who speak different dialects. These recordings include participants from twelve different countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Spain, and Venezuela), as well as different regional varieties from Colombia, Mexico, and Spain. It is important to note that categorizing speakers by the dialectal features of their talk is an analyst's category (Raymond 2018). Speakers themselves typically do not overtly orient to dialectal features as relevant for the interaction. In other words, they usually perceive the conversation as occurring in the same language (Spanish), rather than in different dialects. However, this can serve as a starting point for identifying moments when "interactants can be seen to hold one another (and themselves) accountable for dialectal differences in and through their ongoing talk with one another" (Raymond 2018:8). Specifically, I collected a total of 72 instances where lexical differences are made relevant by participants either explicitly initiating repair on a lexical item (Schegloff et al. 1977; 26 instances) or by using preemptive self-reformulation practices (Svennevig 2023; 46 instances).

4. Analysis

The analysis is organized into three sections. First, it discusses the use of alternatives and definitions as responses to other-initiated repair by the recipient. This section outlines the organization of the two practices and examines an extended case where alternatives and definitions complement each other to repair the trouble source. The second section focuses on the use of alternatives and definitions as preemptive practices of self-reformulation. This section provides further insight into the use of alternatives and definitions and reflects on the speaker's assumptions about interdialectal intelligibility. The third and final analytical section examines the invocation of linguistic normativity when providing alternatives and definitions as repair solutions. The focus here is on adopting an emic perspective with regard to the participants' use of linguistic categories, such as "standard" or linguistic resources, such as dictionaries. Taken together, the analyses aim to describe the use of alternatives and definitions as practices for repairing lexical items, while also attending to the accountability involved in managing interdialectal (mis)understanding in naturally occurring dialect contact.

4.1. Responding to other-initiated repair with alternatives and definitions

Lexical differences across dialects can occasion other-initiated repair. In such cases, after a speaker uses a lexical item, a problem of understanding emerges, highlighting that, although Spanish dialects are generally considered mutually intelligible, certain dialectal features can disrupt intersubjectivity. Excerpt (1) illustrates how speakers use alternative referring expressions to repair the trouble source. Two friends, Alberto from Spain and Lilli from Colombia, are talking while having breakfast together. At the beginning of the excerpt, Alberto's Italian roommate, Silvia, enters and asks him for the *colastick*, an Italian word for glue stick. After Silvia leaves the room, Alberto translates into Spanish what Silvia was referring to.

Extract 1. Cola de barra 'Glue stick'

```
01 SIL: voi non è che avete una colastick vero?
        you don't have a "colastick" right?
02 LIL: >qué?<
         what
03 ALB: colastick, eh puo darsi en quel armarietto lá de la entrata.
        glue stick uhm maybe in that small cabinett by the entrance
04 SIL: quello:: (.) il nero.
        that one:: the black one
05 ALB: sí.
        yes
06 SIL: okey.
        okey
07      (3.2) ((Silvia leaves the room))
08 ALB: una cola de# barra.
        a cola de barra (glue stick)
   fig              #fig.1a
→ 09 LIL: (1.0) +↑cola# de barra.+
                cola de barra? (glue stick?)
   lil          +frowns----------+
   fig                #fig.1b
```

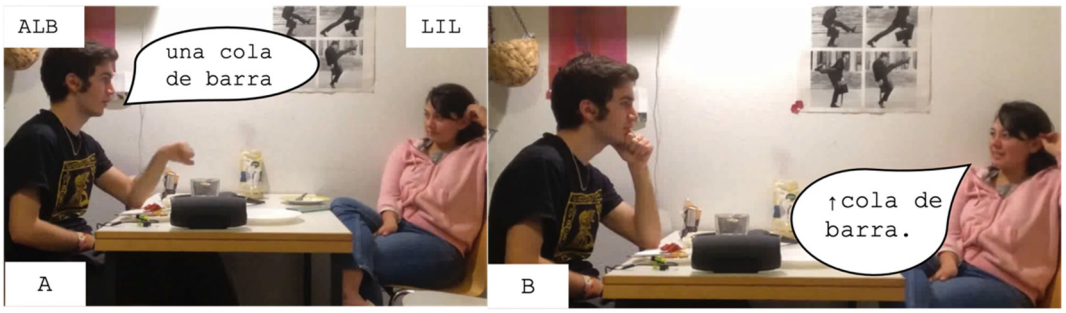

Fig. 1a-b: Lilli initiates repair on *cola de barra*.

```
10 ALB: como un- cola:: (.) no sé cómo se llama:- (1.4) [una:]
          like a  cola       I don't know how it's called

11 LIL:                                                [  es]coba?
                                                         a broom?

12 ALB: (0.5) | no^no^no, una cola de de de de- uh perdón perdón,
                no no no  a cola of of of of uf uf sorry sorry

13 LIL: [((laughs))              ]

→ 14 ALB: [estoy (.) estoy borracho.]  pegamento de barra.
           I'm       I'm drunk          glue stick

15 LIL: ((laughs)) ↑ah pero tú es que a eso le dicen cola,=
                   ah but you it's like you call that "cola"

16      =a la cola, a la (.) [al blanco. ]
         to the cola to the  the white one

17 ALB:                      [es la cola.] sí.
                             it's the cola, yes

18 LIL: sí sí sí.
        yes yes yes

19 ALB: cola blanca. Pegamen- (.) pero pegamento se dice.
        white cola     gl-        but glue it's called

→ 20 LIL: pegamento, sí sí sí. (0.8) pegaSTICK le decimos hhnosotros.
          glue       yes yes yes     pegastick   we call it
```

Silvia enters the room and asks in Italian where to find a glue stick (l.01). Lilli displays non-understanding (l.02), while Alberto explains to Silvia in Italian where she might find it (ll.03-06). After Silvia leaves the room, Alberto translates for Lilli what Silvia was looking for, referring to it as *cola de barra* (l.08, Figure 1a). However, Lilli does not recognize this expression and initiates repair with a trouble-presenting repeat (Dingemanse et al. 2014, Figure 1b), thereby treating the lexical item itself as the source of trouble (l.09). Alberto struggles to find a repair solution, as evidenced by multiple turn restarts while searching for another way to refer to the object (l.10). Lilli offers a candidate solution – *escoba* ('broom', l.11), but Alberto emphatically rejects it, uttering *no* three times with the prosodic format of a multiple saying (Stivers 2004) (l.12). Alberto continues to struggle, initiating another word search by repeating the preposition *de* ('of') multiple times (l.12). Notice that he orients to his word search as accountable by explicitly apologizing (l.12) and providing a figurative account ('I'm drunk', l.14), thereby assuming responsibility for the misunderstanding.

The repair sequence is ultimately resolved when Alberto offers an alternative referring expression: *pegamento de barra* (l.14). Although *cola* and *pegamento* are semantically equivalent, the participants treat these expressions as differing in their normative status. Lilli identifies *cola* as dialectal (ll.15-16), whereas Alberto treats *pegamento* as the standard form (l.19). This distinction is observable in Alberto's use of the impersonal construction *se dice* ('it's called'), which contrasts with Lilli's prior formulation, 'you call that cola' (l.15). Lilli aligns with Alberto's orientation by contributing her own dialectal variant, 'pegastick we call it' (l.20). In this way, the participants collaboratively establish "dialectal hierarchies" (Raymond 2018: 21) among the referring expressions. However, in contrast to Raymond's findings, neither participant abandons their dialectal allegiance or fully adopts the other's expression as preferred. Instead, this case reveals that certain expressions – such as

pegamento – are treated as pan-Hispanic (i.e., as shared among different Spanish varieties) and can function as a form of linguistic brokering to resolve lexical misunderstandings (see also Bolden 2012; Raymond 2014a; 2014b).

Beyond using an alternative referring expression, speakers sometimes resort to defining a problematic lexical item as a repair solution, as seen in excerpt (2). In this case, Edgar, from Chile, and Geraldine, from Mexico, discuss a hot sauce placed on the table during a dinner among friends.

Extract 2. Búfalo ('Búfalo')

```
01 GER: #((places bottle on the table))
   fig  #fig.2
02 EDG: esa es:: Valentina?
        is that Valentina?
03 GER: sí. (-) también tienen ustedes,=en Chile,
        yes     do you also have it? in Chile
04 EDG: no.
        no
05 GER: ((gasps)) [((gasps))][no puede] se[::r      ]
                               It cannot be
06 EDG:           [     solo][:::     ]   [((click))]#
                        only
   fig                                              #fig.3
```

Fig. 2: Geraldine places sauce on the table.

Fig. 3: Edgar displays thinking.

```
07 GER: eh:[: Búfalo.]
        uhm   Búfalo
08 EDG:    [hay como:]
            there is like
09      (0.4) ah?
              ha?
10 GER: (0.3) Búfalo.
              Bufalo
→ 11 EDG: >qué es eso?<
          what is that
→ 12 GER: otra salsa picante. (0.2) no?
          another hot sauce,        no?
13 EDG: no. tampoco.
        no, that one either
```

After Geraldine places a bottle on the table (l.1, Figure 2), Edgar requests confirmation on whether that sauce is *Valentina* (l.02), a famous hot sauce from Mexico. Upon receiving confirmation, Geraldine asks Edgar if they have it in Chile (l.03). Edgar denies this (l.04), which causes surprise for Geraldine (l.05), evident in her gasps (Ben-Moshe 2023), signaling that the information is unexpected. Edgar then initiates a word search about a sauce they do have in Chile (l.06), displaying signs of thinking (Figure 3), while Geraldine provides a candidate solution to the word search: *Búfalo* (l.07), another brand of hot sauce. Edgar then initiates other-repair with an open-class format (l.09), prompting Geraldine to repeat her candidate solution (l.10). However, Edgar does not recognize this sauce and initiates repair again, this time using a closed-class format (l.11), which indicates specifically that he does not know what *Búfalo* is.

To repair the trouble source, Geraldine provides a definition of the product, stating that it is a hot sauce. In this context, a definition of the trouble source is better suited than an alternative referring expression as a repair solution. The trouble source pertains to the name of a specific product – i.e., a proper noun. While trademark names can often function as common nouns (Bellido/Pottage 2019) and be replaced by semantically equivalent alternative referring expressions (as seen with *pegastick* in Excerpt 1), this is not the case in Excerpt 2, where the name is used to reference the trademark directly. Indeed, the product's name is particularly relevant to the participants' ongoing activity – namely, clarifying which Mexican hot sauces are available in Chile. By providing a definition instead of seeking an alternative referring expression, Geraldine not only contributes to intersubjectivity by ensuring mutual understanding but also better aligns with the participants' interactional goals.

As seen in excerpts (1) and (2), both the participants' interactional goals and the properties of the problematic lexical items are central when deploying either alternatives or definitions as repair solutions. These two practices, however, can be used simultaneously by different participants and deployed in a complementary way to resolve more complex problems of understanding. Excerpt (3) serves as an illustrative case. Edwin (EDW), Juan (JUA), and Adrián (ADR) are having dinner at Edwin's place. While they are cooking, Edwin tells the others about a small zoo he had at his house in Bolivia.

Extract 3. Cuchucho 'ring-tailed coati'

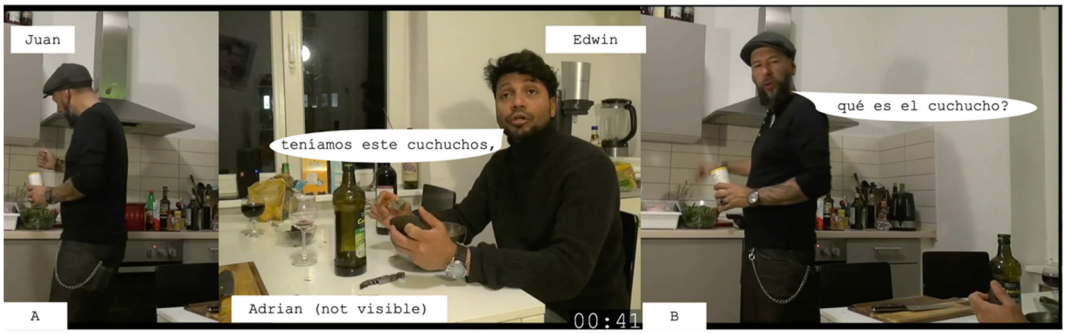

Fig. 4a-b: Juan turns around and asks what *cuchuchos* are.

01 EDW: teníamos un pequeño zoológico en el patio, teníamos conejos,
we had a little zoo in our backyard, we had rabbits,

02 teníamos este cuchuchos, #teníamos tig[rillos, tenía#mos lo-]
we had um ring-tailed coatis, we had ocelots we had lo-
fig #fig.4a #fig.4b

→ 03 JUA: [+qué es el cuchucho?]
what is a ring-tailed coati?
jua: +turns towards edw-->

→ 04 EDW: (0.6) cuchuchos son unos *ani[males que tienen-]
cuchuchos are animals that have
edw: *.....gestural depiction-->l.08

→ 05 JUA: [tor+tuga;=o qué?]
tortoise or what?
jua: -->+turns back towards table-->

06 EDW: no. que tienen una+ una: (-) nariz# (-) larga #bien larga,
no. that have a a big very big nose
jua: -->+turns around and faces edw-->l.22
fig #fig.5a #fig.5b

07 y que tienen como# unas- como unas líneas negras.*
and that have like some like some black lines
fig #fig.5c
edw: --,,,,,,,>*

Fig. 5a-c: Edwin depicts some features of *cuchuchos*.

08 JUA: pero es un ave [o qué es?]
but is it a bird or what is it?

09 ADR: [son bien] lindos.
they are quite cute

10 no:, eso es un Mono,
no, that is a monkey

11 EDW: no:. [qué eres loco?]
no, are you crazy?

12 ADR: [es como una ardilla;]
it's like a squirrel

13 EDW: como una ardilla sí. como una ardilla sí. (-) pero grande,
it's like a squirrel, yes, like a squirrel, yes, but big

14 más *o menos de este porte, cuatro patas, un un rabo
[bien largo,]
more or less this size, four legs, a a very long tail
edw: -->*..gestural depiction-->

15 JUA: [peludo.]
furry

```
16 EDW: peludo* [también.]
        also furry
   edw:    -->*
17 JUA:         [ un rabi]pelado.
                  a black-eared opossum
18 EDW: (0.6) no sé cómo es. pero *una-
              I don't know what it is but but
   edw:                        -->*..gestural depiction-->
29 JUA: un armadillo.
        an armadillo
20 EDW: no, armadillo no. Tienen [una una así             ]
        no, not an armadillo, they have a a like this
21 JUA:                          [una trompa larga así como] el oso
        hormi*guero.
                                  a long trunk like an anteater
   edw:   -->*
22 EDW: exacto ya. (0.5) teníamos+ estos, teníamos uno,
        yes, exactly, we had those, we had one
   jua:                       -->+turns back towards table-->>
```

While Edwin lists different animals he used to have in his backyard (ll.1-2), Juan turns around (Figure 4a-b) and self-selects in overlap to ask what *cuchuchos* ('ring-tailed coaties') are (l.03). Unlike in excerpt (1), where the speaker does not directly define the lexical item, here Edwin provides a direct definition of the word's semantic content (l.04). Juan, however, offers a candidate alternative (*tortuga*, 'tortoise,' l.05), orienting to *cuchucho* as possibly having a dialectal equivalent. Notably, Juan then turns around and returns his attention to the cooking activity (l.05), possibly projecting a resolution of the repair sequence. Edwin, however, rejects this alternative and continues to describe the animal, providing more detailed information about its features while gesturally depicting them (ll.06-07, Figure 5). Notice that, after Edwin rejects the candidate alternative, Juan turns back to face Edwin, fully abandoning the cooking task (Figure 5a).

As the conversation progresses, Juan attempts to classify the animal, placing it within the category of birds (l.08). In doing so, he momentarily abandons the search for an alternative and shifts his focus to collaboratively constructing the referent's definition. Adrián, who had already displayed recognition of the referent ('they are quite cute', l.09), rejects the classification as birds and instead categorizes *cuchuchos* as monkeys (l.10), drawing a comparison to a squirrel (l.12). Edwin overtly rejects the comparison to monkeys (l.11) but accepts the comparison to a squirrel, although he clarifies that *cuchuchos* are bigger (l.13). Subsequently, he continues to specify additional features of the animal, once again using gestures to accompany his verbal description (l.14). After confirming whether the animal is furry (ll.15-16), Juan offers a new candidate alternative: *un rabipelado* ('a black-eared opossum', l.17). Notice that Juan's turn is designed with falling intonation, signaling a high degree of certainty that this candidate is correct. Indeed, *rabipelados* and *cuchuchos* share more characteristics than the previous alternatives. However, Edwin does not know what *rabipelados* are (l.18) and cannot confirm or reject the suggestion. Juan then proposes a comparison with an armadillo (l.19), which Edwin rejects (l.20), and with an anteater (l.21), which Edwin accepts (l.22). After this, Edwin

returns to his original listing of animals, while Juan turns back toward the table to resume the cooking activity (l.22)

Excerpt (3) illustrates that both alternatives and definitions are simultaneously available practices to address problems of understanding related to a lexical item. While Edwin provides a definition, Juan offers multiple candidate alternatives to identify the referent. These two practices complement each other: definitions in progress enable participants to propose candidate alternatives, while alternative referring expressions can serve as comparables, thereby contributing to the definition of the referent. However, identifying a referent by offering alternative referring expressions requires a certain level of competence in dialects beyond one's own. As demonstrated in excerpt (3), the speaker of the trouble source, Edwin, does not recognize the referent of one of Juan's candidate alternatives (*rabipelado*, 'black-eared opossum'). This suggests that, although a lexical item may have an equivalent alternative in some Spanish variety, for this alternative to be a viable repair practice in an interaction, all participants must be familiar with it.

In sum, this section has shown that lexical differences between dialects can lead to problems of understanding among dialectally divergent speakers. In these cases, recipients initiate repair using closed-class formats that highlight the lexical item itself as the trouble source, such as a trouble-presenting repeat (e.g., Ex. 1) or *¿qué es X?* ('What is X?') (e.g., Ex. 2 and 3, see also Leinonen/Oloff 2023). These issues can be resolved in several ways: by using an alternative referring expression (e.g., Ex. 1), by providing a definition (e.g., Ex. 2), or by combining both practices (e.g., Ex. 3). In the case of alternative referring expressions, the participants' orientation toward whether an expression is dialectal or standard emerges in their linguistic practices. They either propose dialectal alternatives using personal pronouns (you/ we say) or explicitly treat an expression as the standard way of referring to the object through impersonal forms (it's said).

Alternative referring expressions – especially those that are oriented to as semantically equivalent – are arguably the most direct way of identifying the referent of a lexical trouble source (except, perhaps, for resorting to visual aids, such as pictures). As shown in Ex. 3, speakers propose candidate alternatives to secure understanding when identifying certain referents, such as animals. However, using alternative referring expressions presupposes that such an alternative exists, that it is "good enough" for all practical purposes (Garfinkel 1967), and that speakers are familiar with the alternative referring expression. If these conditions are not met, participants can provide a definition as a repair solution, accomplished by linking the lexical item with a description through the Spanish copula *es* ('is') or distinguishing the trouble source from comparable lexical items (such as other animals).

4.2. Self-reformulating through alternatives and definitions

Given the possibility of lexical differences leading to OIR, speakers are seen to deploy self-reformulation (Svennevig 2023) as a practice for preempting potential breakdowns in intersubjectivity before they occur (Raymond/Gill 2025). Self-reformulations take place when "speakers produce a second saying of what they have already said" (Svennevig 2023:251). Similar to repair solutions after OIR, preemptive practices of self-reformulation involve the use of alternatives and definitions. In both cases, speakers assume that a lexical item may not be part of the recipient's

common ground. However, the use of alternatives treats the problem as one of dialectal variation, whereas definitions locate the problem within the more general lexical domain.

Excerpt (4) shows an instance of self-reformulation through an alternative referring expression. By self-reformulating a lexical item with an alternative, the speaker self-repairs their turn-at-talk through "replacing" (Schegloff 2013:43), producing a dialectal translation from the lexical item. Renata (REN) from Argentina and Violeta (VIO) from Peru talk about the governments in their respective countries while they are having coffee and cookies at Violeta's place.

Extract 4. Plata 'money'

```
01 REN: no sé cómo es en Perú, pero:- (-) en Argentina es el: (-) el-
        I don't know what it's like in Peru, but in Argentina it is the
02        a ver, m:e toca, llego al gobierno, bueno, son: cuatro años,
        so, it's my turn, I'm in the government, well, it's four years
03        qué puedo hacer en estos cuatro años para llenarme
          what can I do in these four years to get a lot
→ 04      de plata: de [dinero:], y bueno,
          of money (plata), of money (dinero), and yeah
05 VIO:               [mhm_hm;]
                       hm
06 REN: no sigo un programa (.) a: no sé (.) a veinte treinta años.
          I don't follow a program for I don't know twenty thirty years
```

In this excerpt, Renata reflects on the political situation in Argentina and asserts that individuals who gain governmental positions primarily focus on maximizing their personal financial gains during their tenure. In line 04, she uses the term *plata*, a dialectal expression common in Argentinian Spanish that refers to money. However, Renata hesitates, as evidenced by the lengthening of the final vowel, and she replaces *plata* with *dinero*, a more standard term that is semantically equivalent. This hesitation provides the interactional space for Violeta to produce a continuer (l.05), acknowledging Renata's talk and displaying understanding of the talk-so-far. Interestingly, the term *plata* is also used in Peru to mean 'money', suggesting that Violeta could understand the term without difficulty. Nevertheless, Renata's replacement from *plata* to *dinero* signals that she oriented to *plata* as potentially problematic for the recipient, showing that interdialectal understanding involves the speaker's assumptions about dialectal intelligibility.

In sum, this self-reformulation highlights Renata's sensitivity to the dialectal nature of *plata* and her concern about how it might be received or understood in interaction. By replacing it for *dinero*, she selects a less marked, more universally recognized term, aligning her linguistic choice with what she perceives as a shared communicative ground. Such lexical work illustrates the speaker's awareness of potential issues in interdialectal conversation and their proactive attempts to preemptively resolve them.

Plata and *dinero* are arguably complete semantic equivalents. The same practice can be observed when speakers replace one lexical item with another semantically similar one, if this item is oriented to as being good enough to secure mutual understanding. In excerpt (5), from the same conversation as excerpt (6), Violeta and

Renata discuss Christmas traditions in their respective countries. Renata explains that some members of her family enjoy making cookies for Christmas.

Extract 5. Masitas 'Cookies'

```
01 REN: mi hermano con sus hijos también hace- bueno la mujer.
        my brother and his sons also make, well the wife (does)
02      él no se pone mucho a cocinar pero su mujer le gusta también,
        he doesn't cook a lot, but his wife also likes it
→ 03    y hacen siempre masi#tas- ga#lletas así# para navidad,=o; (-)
        and they always make cookies, cookies for christmas
   fig                      #fig.6a #fig.6b    #fig.6c
04        °h o para qué [se yo. ]
             or I don't know what for
05 VIO:                 [pero di]cen que aquí es como más
          tradicional, no?
          but they say that here it's more traditional, right?
06      hacer galletas, siempre. °h navidad es hacer galletas.
        make cookies, always, christmas means making cookies
07 REP: sí::,
        yes
```

Fig. 6a-c: Renata points towards the cookies on the table.

Renata tells Violeta that her brother and his family usually cook for Christmas (l.01). She then clarifies that it is primarily her brother's wife who enjoys cooking (l.02) before mentioning that they always make cookies for Christmas (l.03). Initially, Renata uses the term *masitas* but quickly replaces it with *galletas* before continuing her turn. During this self-reformulation, Renata also gestures toward the cookies on the table, saying *así* ('like this'), which visually anchors her verbal reference (Figure 6a-c).

Unlike the previous excerpt, where *plata* and *dinero* were argued to be complete semantic equivalents, the terms *masitas* and *galletas* in Argentinian Spanish are not entirely interchangeable. *Masita* refers to a specific type of cookie that resembles small pastries, while *galleta* is a broader term with a higher semantic extension, encompassing all types of cookies or biscuits. Renata's choice to replace *masitas* with *galletas* – combined with the deictic gesture pointing to the cookies on the table – suggests that, on the one hand, *galletas* is not precise enough to fully replace *masitas*, but, on the other hand, she perceives *galletas* as a more intelligible term for Violeta in this context. The effectiveness of the self-reformulation is confirmed by Violeta's uptake in the subsequent lines, where she adopts the term *galletas* (l.06), which is, in fact, the more common expression in Peru for this type of cookie,

while elaborating on the cultural importance of making Christmas cookies in Germany (ll.05-06). This exchange highlights how Renata balances precision and progressivity in her lexical choices, utilizing embodied actions to secure mutual understanding that is sufficient for all practical purposes.

Similar to cases of other-initiated self-repair, using alternatives to replace a potentially problematic lexical expression requires both that such an alternative exists in the lexicon and that the speaker is aware of it. If this is not the case, a speaker can resort to definitions as a preemptive practice. As an example, consider excerpt (6). Raúl (RAU), from Spain, and Adrián (from Mexico), have been talking about the fact that, in Germany, people are allowed to drink in public spaces. In the excerpt, Raúl explains to Adrián that, in Spain, public drinking is only permitted during a *botellón*.

Extract 6. Botellón 'Mass public drinking'

```
01 RAU: +*a ver en España, no se pue- tú no puedes beber+ en la calle,
        let's see, in Spain it's not, you can't drink on the street
   rau  +>>gazes down-------------------------------------+at adr-->
   adr  *>>gazes at rau-->>

→ 02    pero sabes? el botelló:n? #que se le llama, (.)
        but you know, the botellón, as it's called
   fig                            #fig.7

→ 03    es+ que todo el mundo queda en una +plaza,
        it's that everyone goes to a square
   rau  ->+gazes down---------------------+at adr-->>

  04    y- (.) pues (.) está controlado. (-)
        and  well     it's controled

  05    y ahí sí que puedes beber.
        and there you can drink

  06 ADR: $ahí #sí puedes beber.          $
        there you can drink
   adr  $opens eyes and raises eyebrows$
   fig       #fig.8
```

Fig. 7: Raúl and Adrián share mutual gaze Fig. 8: Adrián displays surprise

In line 02, Raúl introduces the term *botellón* as an exception to the prohibition of public drinking in Spain. Unlike expressions such as *plata* (ex. 4) or *masitas* (ex. 5), *botellón* does not necessarily have a semantically equivalent expression, as evidenced by the lack of an official English translation. Raúl treats the term accordingly. Instead of providing a dialectal translation, he marks it as a sort of "technical term" by using the phrase *que se le llama* ('as it's called'), a construction commonly used for epistemic brokering in institutional contexts (Raymond 2014a). He then

provides a definition of the term, explaining that it refers to a gathering where people go to a specific square, which is monitored by the police, and where public drinking is allowed (ll.03-05).

To avoid having his definition treated as a claim of epistemic primacy, Raúl designs it in a way that gives Adrián opportunities to display understanding before the term is fully defined. Raúl's explanation of *botellón* is delivered step-by-step, using multiple intonational phrases. Before introducing the term, he says *sabes?* ('you know'), signaling that the upcoming formulation might be difficult for the recipient to grasp (Clayman/ Raymond 2021: 8). He then adds *que se le llama* ('as it's called'). Notice that Raúl uses an impersonal construction rather than the first-person plural ('we call it', as in ex. 1), which avoids asserting dialectal priority over the use of the term. Additionally, Raúl introduces *botellón* while maintaining mutual gaze with Adrián (Figure 7), who neither claims understanding nor nods in acknowledgment. This ensures that Raúl can reasonably assume that Adrián is unfamiliar with the term before proceeding with his definition. Adrián's response – repeating Raúl's words (l.05) and raising his eyebrows (Figure 8) – displays surprise and marks the information as new to him.

In summary, speakers preempt potential problems of understanding by employing practices similar to those used after other-initiated repair, namely offering alternative referring expressions or defining the semantic content of a term. In the first case, they replace a dialectal expression with another, effectively translating their dialect into a more widely intelligible form of Spanish. These alternatives need not be complete semantic equivalents but are oriented to as good enough for all practical purposes. Furthermore, while alternatives function as replacement operations, they do not erase the first version from the interaction (Jefferson 1974), making both available to the recipient. This way, alternative referring expressions complement each other in securing mutual understanding. In contrast, by providing a definition, speakers signal that the lexical item lacks a direct equivalent in other varieties. What these practices share is a preemptive orientation to a possible misunderstanding that the recipient might otherwise raise. This preemptive orientation effectively blurs the line between self- and other-initiated repair (Raymond/Gill 2025) and demonstrates that Spanish speakers actively monitor the intelligibility of their turns-at-talk during interdialectal conversations.

Interestingly, comparable practices are found in interactions where L1 speakers address L2 recipients (see Svennevig 2023). This suggests that dialectally divergent speakers of Spanish may, at times, treat their interlocutors as lacking sufficient competence in their dialect to understand certain expressions. However, unlike L1-L2 interactions, where recipients are second-language users, interdialectal conversations occur between speakers of different varieties of the same language. Under these conditions, speakers risk implying that recipients lack competence in their own language. To mitigate this, they create opportunity spaces for recipients to claim understanding before resorting to providing a definition of a lexical item.

4.3. Invoking linguistic normativity as an interactional resource

Alternative referring expressions are often oriented to as equivalent (or "equivalent enough") in terms of their meaning. However, speakers may perceive these expressions differently with respect to the normative expectations associated with their

use. This was evident in Excerpt (1), where *cola de barra* and *pegastick* are treated as dialectal, while *pegamento de barra* is oriented to as the standard. In what follows, this section presents two excerpts in which participants explicitly invoke linguistic normativity to account for the use of an unrecognized lexical item.

Excerpt (7) below presents an extended sequence in which the speaker of the trouble source resists offering a repair solution. Mirco (MIR) and Andy (AND) talk about a mutual acquaintance who speaks too fast, making him difficult to understand. They repeatedly use the word *mae*, which can function as both a vocative and a reference to a third person (similar to 'man' or 'dude'). This expression is typical in some Central America countries, among them Nicaragua. Andy is from Nicaragua and Mirco is from Germany, but he learned Spanish in Nicaragua, so they both speak this dialect. Bernarda (BER), who is from Venezuela, asks them what *mae* is.

Extract 7. Mae 'Dude'

```
01 MIR: es igual con los españoles,= el pepe al inicio no
        it's the same with the Spanish people, at the beginning, Pepe,
02        le [entendía ni papa a ese] mae
           I didn't understand that dude at all
03 AND:     [↑ah-=jaja- sí mae.    ] ese ma:e. ((click))
             ah haha yes dude, that dude
04 MIR: es que [creo que es] igual en todos los [idiomas.    ]
           I think it's the same in every language
05 AND:         [sí,=hombre.]                    [es que todos]
                 yes, man                    the thing is that everyone
06        [creo-]
           I think
→ 07 BER: [  ese] #mae? qué es eso?
             that dude? What is that?
   fig            #fig.9
```

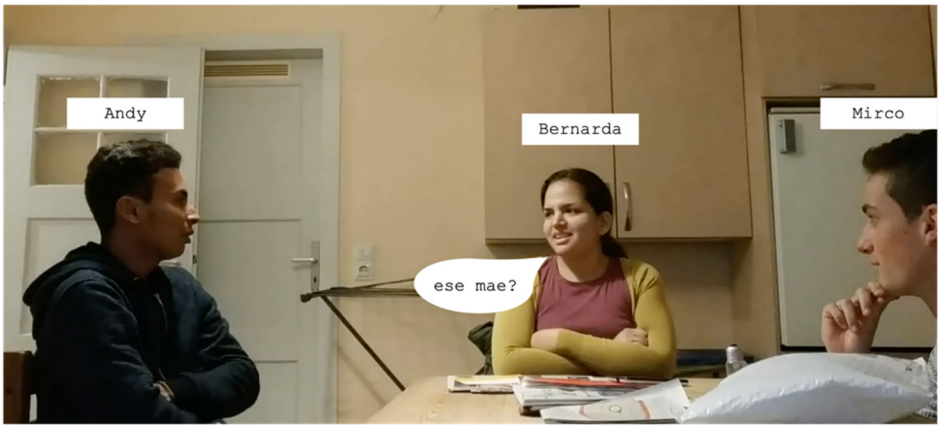

Fig. 9: Bernarda initiates repair on the word *mae*

08 MIR: ese [ese-]
that that

09 AND: [#ese mae,]
that dude
fig #fig.10

10 BER: [#ese #mae.#]
that dude
fig #fig.11

Fig. 10: Andy displays surprise

Fig. 11: Bernarda mocks Andy's use of *mae*

11 AND: [eso no existe:] (.) no existe:-
that doesn't exist, it doesn't exist

12 BER: #ese mae;#
that dude

13 AND: [no existe] en venezuel[a mae?]
does dude not exist in Venezuela?

14 BER: [no.] [no.] eso no hay.
no *we don't have that*

15 AND: ↑en serio?
really?

16 MIR: pero es [una palabra que existe en el diccionario]
but it's a word that's in the dictionary

17 AND: [pero es que es como global]
but it's like global

18 BER: no[:.]
no

19 MIR: [existe en el diccio]nario [mae;]
it's in the dictionary dude

20 BER: [bueno-]
well

21 AND: ajá.
yeah

22 MIR: maje. eme a [jota e.]
dude (maje), d u d e

23 BER: [maje?]
dude (maje)?

24 MIR: maje;
dude (maje)

25 BER: [qué es eso?]
What's that?

26 MIR: [sólo que e]llos dicen como mae;
it's just that they say it like dude (mae)

27 AND: sólo que decimos mae;=pero es [maje.]
we just say dude (mae), but it's dude (maje)

28 BER: [no.=no sé] qué es eso;
no, I don't know what that is

29 MIR: el maje; (0.8) o sea es [como]
the dude (maje) I mean it's like

→ 30 AND: [es como]: broder algo así;
It's like brother something like this

Before the transcript, Andy and Bernarda were complaining that some Germans speak too fast, making it difficult to understand them. In line 01, Mirco, who is from Germany, argues that the same thing happens with Spaniards, using a mutual acquaintance, nicknamed Pepe, as evidence (ll. 01-02). After Andy agrees with Mirco's assessment of Pepe's way of talking (l.03), Mirco adds that it is the same in every language (l.04), once again obtaining agreement from Andy (l.05). Notice that both use *mae* 'dude' several times, referring to a third person (l.02 and l.03), as well as using it as a vocative (l.03). In line 07, Bernarda self-selects in overlap and asks what *mae* means (l.07, Figure 9). Andy reacts with a display of surprise (l.08, Figure 10), while Bernarda repeats her turn twice, mocking Andy's use of the word (l.10-12, Figure 11).

Instead of repairing the trouble source directly, Andy requests confirmation of whether the word exists in Venezuela (l.13), again displaying surprise with *¿en serio?* 'really?' after Bernarda responds negatively (l.14-15) . Both Mirco and Andy account for their use of the word *mae* by resorting to linguistic normativity. Mirco claims that *mae* is part of the dictionary (ll.16, l.19), while Andy categorizes the word as *global* (l.17). Furthermore, they both initiate their turns with the adversative conjunction *pero* ('but') to display a contrast (Ford, 2000) with Bernarda's claim that 'it does not exist in Venezuela' (l.14). Subsequently, Mirco spells the word (l.22), and both Mirco and Andy suggest that differences in pronunciation might account for Bernarda not recognizing the problematic lexical item. However, Bernarda still avoids claiming understanding of the lexical expression and insists on her initiation of repair by again uttering *qué es eso* ('what is that') (l.25). After Bernarda denies recognition of the referent once more (l.28), both Mirco and Andy move toward a repair solution (l.29-30), which is eventually completed by comparing *mae* with the alternative referring expression *broder*, a common vocative of English descent used in various Latin American countries.

This excerpt shows how participants invoke 'global' Spanish and dictionaries to hold others accountable for not recognizing the meaning of a word. By treating the trouble source as 'global', Andy implies that it is not dialectal, thereby resisting the suggestion that the misunderstanding arises from dialectal features in his speech. Furthermore, claiming the word's presence in the dictionary implies its official status, positioning Bernarda's initiation of repair as a problem of general lexical competence. In contrast, Bernarda resists this implication by mocking the use of *mae* (ll.10 and 12) and by repeatedly denying recognition of the expression without offering any sort of account.

The participants' dialectal competence (or lack thereof) likely plays a role in this excerpt. Although the word *maje* does indeed appear in the dictionary of the Spanish language (Real Academia Española 2024), it is marked as a dialectal term, with only its third and final definition relating to the Nicaraguan use of the word. Furthermore, it is officially registered as part of the *Diccionario de Americanismos* (Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española 2010). However, a speaker's dialectal competence is unlikely to be developed through reading dictionaries. Rather, it is more likely acquired through interaction with speakers of other varieties of Spanish. From the participants' perspective, dialectal features of speech only become "dialectal" once speakers become aware that their own speech differs from that of others. As Raymond (2018:21) points out, interactions between dialectally divergent speakers can serve as learning moments and thus be consequential for future interdialectal encounters. In other words, it could be argued that Mirco and Andy might not display surprise the next time someone asks what *mae* means, nor would Bernarda initiate repair on *mae* if she were to find herself in conversation with another Nicaraguan speaker.

Excerpt (8) provides another example of participants mobilizing linguistic normativity and interactively managing the dialectal nature of lexical items while addressing problems of understanding. Martín (MAR), from Chile, and Iris (IRI), from Colombia, are having dinner at Martín's place.

Extract 8. Troglodita 'troglodyte'

```
01      (7.7)((eating at the table))
02 MAR: ↑ah, quieres cuchillo?
        ah, do you want a knife?
03 IRI: mh^mh.
04      (1.2)
05 MAR: perdón; es que soy como medio:- (1.1)
        sorry, I'm like a bit
06 IRI: simio?
        monkey-like?
07      (0.6)
08 MAR: sí;=pero estaba buscando otra palabra, (0.8) hm. (-)
        yes, but I was searching for another word, hm
09      troglodita. (1.2) un poco troglodita para comer.
        troglodita, a bit troglodita when it comes to eating
→ 10 IRI: qué es eso.
          what's that?
11 MAR: troglodita?
        troglodita?
12 IRI: mhm.
        mhm.
→13 MAR: es eh:m (1.2) son como hombres de las cavernas.
         it's um they are like men of the caves
14 IRI: ↑hm::_hm. (0.2)+(0.3)
   mar:              +...reaches into his pocket-->
```

```
15 MAR: hm. déjame ver si es una palabra estándar,
        hm, let me see if it is a standard word
16      ↑ay,=no tengo+ celular. +bueno.           +
        uh, I don't have my cell phone, well
   mar:           -->+          +throw away gesture+
17      (3.4)
18      tú dices celular o móvil?
        do you say cell phone or mobile phone?
19 IRI: yo digo cavernícola.
        I say cavemen
20      (2.4)
21 MAR: sí.=pero- ((laughs)) [((laughs))]
        yes but ((laughs))
22 IRI:                      [((laughs))]
```

After eating in silence for a while, Martín asks Iris if she wants a knife (l.02), displaying remembering by initiating his turn with *ah* (Vázquez Carranza 2016). Iris, her mouth full, denies the offer with a bi-syllabic *mm* (l.03; González Temer/Ogden 2021). Martín then provides an account for not placing a knife on the table (l.05). During his account, he initiates a word search, which is collaboratively completed by Iris (l.06). Martín ratifies her candidate solution, thereby confirming Iris's correct understanding of his account. However, Martín reveals he was searching for a different word – *troglodita* – which he uses to complete his account (l.09). Iris initiates repair on this term with *qué es eso* ('what is that,' l.10), indicating that the trouble lies in the word's meaning. After a sequence confirming *troglodita* as the trouble source (l.11-12), Martín initiates a repair solution (l.13). However, he hesitates and pauses for over a second, signaling difficulty in solving the issue. Subsequently, Martín defines *trogloditas* as *hombres de las cavernas* ('men of the caves'), marking the definition as approximative through the use of the comparative *como* ('like,' l.13). Iris again responds with a bi-syllabic *mm* due to having her mouth full. This time, however, it is characterized by lengthening of the initial part and a higher onset. This prosodic response aligns with patterns observed in change-of-state tokens followed by *okey* (Helmer et al. 2021), thereby claiming her understanding of the term while also displaying remembering.

Although mutual understanding is now achieved, Martín reaches for his cellphone (l.14) to check whether *troglodita* is a *standard* word (l.15). On one hand, bringing up the normative status of the word raises the possibility that the misunderstanding could stem from the existence of an alternative referring expression, highlighting how Spanish speakers attribute the unrecognizability of lexical items in interdialectal conversations to dialectal differences with the interlocutor. On the other hand, however, it could have face-threatening implications for Iris: if *troglodita* is confirmed as a standard word, Iris's unfamiliarity with it might suggest a lack of lexical competence, thereby shifting the responsibility for the misunderstanding onto her.

This concern appears relevant from Iris's perspective. When Martín realizes he does not have his phone with him (l.16), he abandons the search by uttering *bueno* 'well' and performing a throwaway gesture (l.17), a movement often used to display disengagement or to dismiss a topic of talk (Bressem/Müller 2014). After an extended silence (l.17), Martin initiates a new sequence by asking Iris whether she

refers to cellphones as *celular* or *móvil* (l.18), two semantically equivalent dialectal expressions. Iris seizes this opportunity to provide an alternative referring expression for *troglodita,* namely *cavernícola* (l.19), which elicits laughter from both participants (l.21-22) due to the apparent incongruence between first and second pair parts. Beyond this affiliative moment, Iris's contribution of an alternative referring expression and its placement within her idiolect reframes the trouble source *troglodita* as a matter of dialectal competence – or at least an issue tied to individual lexical repertoires.

Interestingly, the dictionary provides the same definition for both terms, *troglodita* and *cavernícola*: "que habita en las cavernas" ('one who lives in caves,' cf. Real Academia Española 2024) and considers them synonyms (Real Academia Española, 2024). However, neither term is included in the *Diccionario de Americanismos* (Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española 2010), nor are they explicitly categorized as dialectal expressions (Real Academia Española 2024). This highlights how labels such as "dialectal" or "standard" are not intrinsic properties of lexical items but can be instead interactionally constructed by participants, contingent on the situational goals and contingencies of the interaction.

In sum, this section discussed the accountability involved in repair sequences in interdialectal conversations. Initiating repair on a lexical item can imply a lack of lexical competence on the part of the repair initiator, with the face-threatening implication of being unaware of certain lexical elements in one's own language. Linguistic normativity, such as invoking dictionaries or categories like "standard" or "global", can be mobilized as an interactional resource to mitigate or enhance these implications. Furthermore, from the participants' perspective, lexical competence and dialectal competence are not equivalent. Failing to recognize a dialectal expression is arguably less face-threatening, as evidenced by the lack of accounts provided by participants when initiating repair on lexical items treated as dialectal. Finally, this section argued that engaging in repair sequences involving lexical differences contributes to the development of speakers' dialectal competence, illustrating how dialectal awareness emerges through interaction with others.

5. Results and discussion

The study highlighted how Spanish dialects, though generally considered mutually intelligible, may include lexical items that become trouble sources for mutual understanding. Using Conversation Analysis, the study showed how speakers of different Spanish varieties address these issues in real-time, naturally occurring interaction, thereby contributing to the growing body of Conversation Analytic research on Spanish. Notably, the data was collected to study Spanish talk-in-interaction, without any predefined arrangement of dialectal varieties. The context of Spanish-speaking immigrants living in Germany, a non-Spanish-speaking country, provided a natural setting for observing spontaneous and diverse instances of dialect contact.

The analysis focused on how speakers manage problematic lexical items following other-initiated repair or through preemptive self-reformulations. Two primary practices for repairing a lexical trouble source were identified: offering alternative referring expressions and providing definitions. While alternative referring expressions act as practical translations between dialects, definitions are often used when

the lexical item has a lower semantic extension, such as brand names (ex. 2), cultural practices (ex. 6) or geographically restricted animals (ex. 3). Lexical alternatives are not necessarily synonyms; they can be oriented to as semantically equivalent expressions (e.g., ex. 1 and ex. 4), but also as approximations considered good enough for ensuring mutual understanding (e.g., ex. 5 and ex. 7). Similarly, definitions in the excerpts presented here aim to secure mutual understanding and, therefore, do not need to be complete, illustrating that definitions in interaction are always tailored to the practical purposes of the participants (Deppermann 2024). Although these practices are argued to be distinct, they are often complementary (see ex. 3); for example, a definition may help the recipient suggest candidate alternatives, or candidate alternatives may assist the speaker in refining a definition by comparing it with the trouble source.

When used as a repair practice, alternatives and definitions differ in terms of what the speaker assumes the recipient knows. While replacing the trouble source with an alternative treats the issue as one of dialectal variation, providing a definition frames it as belonging to the broader lexical domain. Consequently, speakers often take care to ensure that the recipient does not already know the term's meaning before self-reformulating with a definition, to avoid asserting epistemic primacy over mutually known lexical items. In this way, although the use of alternatives and definitions in this data resembles that found in L1–L2 interactions (Svennevig 2023), in interdialectal conversations participants must achieve mutual understanding while balancing epistemic rights associated with speaking the same language.

Another important finding concerns how participants make interactionally relevant distinctions between "dialectal" and "standard" items. When two lexical items are presented as alternatives, their normative status becomes relevant. Alternatives may be framed as dialectal, using first-person plural forms (e.g., "we say X"), or as "standard", by invoking categories such as "global", referencing normative resources like dictionaries, or employing impersonal verb constructions (e.g., *se dice X*, 'it's called X'). Some alternatives are treated as pan-Hispanic, serving as a bridge between unrecognized dialectal expressions and effectively functioning as translations across dialects. Furthermore, participants invoke linguistic normativity as an interactional resource to address accountability in interdialectal understanding, regardless of official normative classifications. For example, treating a lexical item as "standard" or claiming its inclusion in dictionaries can imply that a lack of recognition is a competence issue for the recipient. By contrast, repair on items oriented to as dialectal is less dispreferred, as evidenced by the lack of accounts for initiating such repairs. In other words, while initiating repair on pan-Hispanic lexical items might be oriented to as signaling limited lexical competence, initiating repair on dialectal items is treated as a routine interactional contingency. This distinction highlights how participants view lexical competence and dialectal competence as accountably diverse linguistic competencies.

Although dialect contact has received extensive attention in other linguistic disciplines, such as sociolinguistics and contact linguistics, its study in naturally occurring conversation remains in its infancy. For instance, it would be valuable to compare the findings presented here with other contexts of dialect contact, whether in languages other than Spanish or under varying geographical and sociolinguistic conditions. Moreover, while the excerpts analyzed here support Raymond's (2018) claim that interdialectal encounters serve as micro-lessons on dialectal normativity,

future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to better understand how participants' interactional practices evolve over time (Deppermann/Pekarek Doehler 2021). Such an approach would involve collecting data that tracks participants' interactional histories, shedding light on how repair sequences and self-reformulations involving lexical items shape lexical selection in future encounters.

From the perspective of interactional semantics, there is much to explore regarding the deployment of definitions and alternatives. For example, future studies could investigate how these practices relate to other methods of securing mutual understanding, such as specifications (Deppermann 2024) or explanations (Waring et al. 2013), or examine their use in relation to specific types of lexical items, such as place names (Debois/De Stefani 2022). Comparing how certain categories of lexical items, like brand names or animal names, are defined or replaced with alternative referring expressions could further uncover participants' semantic work in interaction.

In conclusion, alternatives and definitions emerged as two key practices for repairing a lexical trouble source in interdialectal conversations among Spanish speakers in Germany. Beyond securing mutual understanding, the analysis highlighted that, when deploying these practices in repair sequences or self-reformulations, participants engage in a process of dialectal socialization, illustrating some of the ways in which knowledge of other dialects develops through interactional encounters. The findings also emphasized how participants distinguish between "dialectal" and "standard" items, revealing that dialectal awareness and linguistic normativity are routine concerns when designing recipient-oriented turns-at-talk in Spanish interdialectal conversations.

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