

Re-visiting *his/hers* communicative strategies in discourse

Re-visitación de las estrategias comunicativas de él/ella en el discurso.



[Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88.26.25b

Berenice Darwich

Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY
(USA)

CE: beredarwich@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4165-8891>

Received: 08/04/2025 Revised: 16/05/2025 Approved: 20/06/2025

Summary.

The main objective of this paper is to review the meaning of he/she proposed by García (1975, 1983, 1996) as well as his/her strategies of use according to the theoretical perspective of the Columbia School (CS), which considers linguistic forms as signs with invariable meaning used by the speaker according to his/her communicative needs. The result of the qualitative analysis yields important discrepancies between the description of communicative strategies and the way these forms are used in natural discourse by speakers of the Corpus sociolingüístico de la ciudad de México (CSCM). It also lays the groundwork for proposing a new hypothesis of meaning for them.

Key words: Él/Ella. Monosemic meaning. Columbia School. Communicative strategies.

Resumen.

El objetivo principal de este trabajo es revisar el significado de él/ella propuesto por García (1975, 1983, 1996) así como sus estrategias de uso según la perspectiva teórica de la Escuela de Columbia (EC), que considera las formas lingüísticas como señales con significado invariable utilizadas por el hablante según sus necesidades comunicativas. El resultado del análisis cualitativo arroja importantes discrepancias entre la descripción de las estrategias comunicativas y la manera en que estas formas son usadas en el discurso natural por hablantes del Corpus sociolingüístico de la

How to cite this article (APA):

In paragraph (parenthetical citation):
(Darwich, 2025, p. __).

In reference list:
Darwich, B. (2025) Re-visitng *his/hers* communicative strategies in discourse. *Synchrony Journal*. XXIX(88). 547-573. DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88.26.25b

ciudad de México (CSCM). Igualmente, sienta las bases para proponer una nueva hipótesis de significado para las mismas.

Palabras clave: Él/Ella. Significado monosémico. Escuela de Columbia. Estrategias comunicativas.

Introduction

The present qualitative paper aims to review the meaning of *he/she* proposed by García (1975, 1983, 1996) as well as his/her usage strategies according to the theoretical perspective of the Columbia School, a cognitive-functional theory (Stern 2019) (Huffman, 2012, 1995; Diver 1995 [2012] that has similarities with cognitive linguistics (Stern 2019; Langacker, 2004) and usage-based linguistics (Otheguy and Shin, 2022).

The analysis presented here tests the *he/she* meaning hypothesis proposed by García (1975, 1983, 1996) by contrasting the communicative strategies described in those works with examples of usage obtained from speech samples compiled in the Corpus sociolingüístico de la ciudad de México (CSCM) (Martín Butragueño and Lastra, 2011-2015).

The result of this evaluation points to the reformulation of the hypothesis of meaning of *he/she* in the light of new evidence in natural discourse, as they contribute to identify discrepancies between García's (1975, 1983, 1996) descriptions of the strategies of use of *he/she* and the exploitation of this signal in oral discourse by speakers that should not be ignored.

The Columbia School

The Columbia School (CS) has as its unit of analysis the linguistic sign, which, in turn, consists of the pairing of a sign and a meaning (Contini-Morava 1995; Diver, 1975 [2012]; Reid 1995; Huffman, 1995; Davis, 2006; Huffman and Davis 2012).

The perspectives that guide and delimit the theoretical principles of CE are the communicative function of language and the human factor; thus, language is seen as one more instrument at the service of human beings, used to communicate the matters that interest them and that takes shape - organized in linguistic signs - according to the

communicative needs of the users and their environment. In this sense, linguistic signs are mental instruments to which the user resorts to communicate, and these can be lexical or morphosyntactic, so their signs are of all kinds: words, suffixes, inflections or word orders (Stern, 2019, p. 4).

The purpose of the analyses of this theoretical perspective is to explain the asymmetrical distribution of observable linguistic phenomena, it tries to explain what motivates the speaker to produce certain sound waves when doing so, for which it takes into account not only the selection of signals in a speech utterance, but also the particular circumstances in which the communication takes place. In this regard, it is pertinent to emphasize that these signals and their meanings, united in a sign, are not established beforehand by the linguist nor are they accessible to simple observation, but result from the analysis in the postulation of a hypothesis (Reid, 1991; Huffman, 2021). In other words, once the linguist, in his study of the data, believes he has identified a sign, he must postulate a meaning for it and then test its validation through the analysis of spoken or written texts (Davis, 2002).

Thus, for CE, the sign is the union of a signal and its meaning. The meaning is the constant and invariable semantic content of a sign that makes up the linguistic system of a language (Davis, 2017, p. 107); it is not visible to the naked eye nor does it exist a priori, but is discovered through analysis and postulated as a hypothesis to explain the facts of language - the asymmetric distribution of the linguistic forms to which the speaker resorts to convey his messages. Thus, the meaning of a signal is precisely the reason why it is used by the speaker with the intention of facilitating the communication of the messages he wants to convey (Reid, 2002, x). For its part, the *message* in this theory is what is communicated, it is what results from the combination of the meanings used by the speaker in different communicative situations and what is inferred from the use of the meanings in a given situational context (Davis, 1917). In other words, messages are the interpretive result of the use of a sign (or several, usually) in which various contextual, situational and sociocultural factors also play a role (Stern, 2019, p. 5).

Finally, another important aspect of this approach is that it rejects a priori sentence constructions and categories, thus establishing a direct link between the linguistic sign and its use by the speaker, thus eliminating inherited constraints that may interfere with the analysis of language as used by its users (Otheguy, 2002; Huffman, 2006).

The meaning of he/she in the Columbia School

An early study of the *él/ella* forms in the line of CE is found in *The Role of Theory in Linguistic Analysis: The Spanish pronouns* (García, 1975), in which her primary interest was to analyze the form *se*, but in which she offers an exhaustive analysis of the so-called pronouns in the tradition, and of which *él/ella* is a part. This analysis is foundational because the hypothesis of meaning proposed therein is the one that is maintained in two later studies by the same author (García, 1983, 1996). Specifically, García (1975) proposes that *he/she* has a meaning within the semantic substance of Deixis, which has to do with "the force with which the listener is instructed to look for the referent of the pronoun" (p. 65), and attributes to them the meaning Deixis Alta,¹ which indicates that the identification of the referent is relevant to the message. In other words, García's (1975) analysis proposes that whenever the speaker makes explicit the form *él/ella*, it is because *he/she* considers the exploitation of the meaning Deixis-High relevant for his/her communicative purposes.

Thus, for García a (1975), the speaker uses the High Deixis meaning of these forms when the antecedent (or referent) is difficult to identify in the discourse (p. 116-117). Moreover, the presence of *he/she* in communication occurs in situations where the entity being referred to is not very obvious in the discourse, or is not so present in the mind of the interlocutor (García, 1983). In other words, the presence of the forms *he/she* is relevant in communicative interactions whenever the intention is to help identify one entity among several, hence its meaning Deixis Alta is relevant, as it "serves to distinguish one referent from others" (García, 1983, p. 188). Similarly, these signs serve to solve the problem of

¹ As opposed to that of DEIXIS-BAJA, attributed to the form *se*, which indicates that the identification of the referent is not relevant to the message, often due to the obviousness of the message, and which is outside the scope of the present work.

reference to the third person (García, 1996, p. 10), so the speaker will resort to them when there are problems in identifying the entity to which they refer and it is necessary to distinguish between several referents.

Summarizing, and according to García's analyses (1975, 1983, 1996), the speaker resorts to the High Deixis meaning of *he/she* signs (i.e., the identification of the referent is relevant to the message) in situations in which:

- The antecedent being referred to is difficult to identify.
- It is necessary to look for the person *he/she* is referring to whose antecedent is not obvious.
- It is necessary to distinguish one referent among many.
- The identification of the referent is problematic.

These situations are presented in García's works as communicative *strategies*. In multiple works in CE the concept of communicative *strategy* use strategy is used to describe the way in which speakers conventionalize the way they use the signals and meanings of their linguistic systems to suggest a certain type of message (Stern 2019; Contini-Morava, 1995; Reid, 1995; Risco, 2023), and it is the way in which García (1975, 1983, 1996) also presents them in his works.

As will be seen in the analysis in section 3, these strategies that Garcia (1975, 1983, 1996) reports for the use of the meaning Deixis Alta of *he/she/it* do not match the facts of the language.

Analysis

In this section we review the four communicative strategies described by García (1975, 1989, 1996) with which he describes the routine uses for which speakers resort to the use of the Deixis Alta meaning of *él/ella*, while carrying out a new analysis using as reference speech samples from the Corpus sociolingüístico de la Ciudad de México (Martín Butragueño and Lastra, 2011-2015). The purpose is to show that the description of meaning proposed by

García (1985, 1983, 1996) does not agree with the facts of the language, so it is pertinent to outline or postulate a new meaning for these forms.

In total, four pairs of examples are presented (1a and 1b, 2a and 2b, and so on); each with the same speech sample, with one variation: version (a) of each pair presents the manipulated fragment, without any explicit form of *him/her*, purposely removed in order to illustrate the analysis. In contrast, version (b) of each pair does transcribe the speech sample as uttered by the speaker, i.e., the fragment is presented with all the *he/she* forms expressed by the speaker and, in addition, they are highlighted in bold for better visualization.

Strategy 1.

According to García: The exploitation of the High Deixis meaning of the *él/ella* forms facilitates the identification of an antecedent that is difficult to **identify**.

According to García (1975), the speaker chooses to use the meaning Deixis Alta in contexts in which it is difficult for the listener to identify the entity referred to; that is, *he/she* resorts to the expression *he/she* in order to facilitate the unequivocal identification of the entity in question. For the author, the exploitation of the meaning Deixis Alta implies an antecedent that is more difficult to identify (in contrast to Deixis Baja, attributed to *se* and which implies an antecedent whose identification is not problematic because it is less obvious or, in fact, unimportant)² (García 1975, pp. 116-117). In other words, the speaker will choose to make the *he/she* forms explicit in order to help his/her interlocutor distinguish a referential entity considered important for communication.

We begin the review of the first strategy. The same speech sample is given below in the pair of examples (1a) and (1b). In (1a) it is presented without explicit forms of *he/she*, and in (1b) with the original *he/she* utterances (highlighted in bold) as the speaker enunciated the fragment.

Let us first look at (1a). Here the speaker answers the question of how he/she became interested in art and especially in architecture, his/her profession. In her response she shares

² Translation by me.

how she became a painter, provides information about her mother's life, and mentions the reason why her grandfather traveled to Mexico.

(1a)

look my mommy studied architecture, look my mommy was from Baltimore Maryland in the United States and she studied at the University of Pennsylvania thousands of years ago so, no, she didn't finish, she came to Mexico on some vacations or something with her pa- ah no, her daddy wanted to put a correspondence school, She came to Monterrey and married my dad and didn't finish, but because she was American and stayed in Mexico, she instilled in us everything that was about appreciating Mexico, appreciating the colors, appreciating everything we have in terms of handicrafts and everything else, didn't she? So from the time we were little she started to take us to painting classes and she took us to paint in the countryside and that's when my vocation as a painter began to grow.

(Entr. 31)

According to this first strategy of García (1975), when there is an expression of *he/she* it is because one of the antecedents is difficult to identify, but in (1a), the referential entities of whom some information is provided are well identified by means of specific nominal syntagms and the relation of the speaker with them is much more identified by means of the possessives that precede the nouns: *mi mamá*, *su papá*, *mi papá*.

In addition, the person about whom most information is provided in this fragment is the speaker's mother: she was born in the United States, studied architecture in Baltimore, traveled to Mexico, got married, stayed to live in that country and had two daughters to whom she passed on her love for crafts, art and the country. We also learn that it was the father of the speaker's mother who, in the beginning, had the initiative to travel to Mexico with a view to opening a business and, finally, that the narrator is now a painter because of her mother's influence. In other words, in this fragment:

The antecedent is not difficult to identify

And yet, in the original text there are several expressions of *her*. The fact that this form is expressed three times in the fragment indicates that even in situations where it is not difficult to identify the antecedent or referent being spoken of, it is possible to find instances of *he/she*, as shown in (1b), where each occurrence of *she* is highlighted in bold:

(1b)

look my mommy studied architecture, look my mommy stu- **she** was from Baltimore Maryland in the United States and **she** studied at the University of Pennsylvania thousands of years ago so, no, she didn't finish, she came to Mexico mm on some vacations or something with her pa- ah no, her daddy wanted to put a correspondence school, She came to Monterrey and married my dad and didn't finish, but because she was American and stayed in Mexico, she instilled in us everything about appreciating Mexico, appreciating the colors, appreciating everything we have in terms of handicrafts and everything else, didn't she? So from the time we were little she started to take us to painting classes and **she** took us to the countryside to paint and that is when my vocation as a painter began to grow.

(Entr. 31).

In the first line, the speaker's mother is fully identified by the syntagma *mi mami* twice and, despite this, the form *ella* appears immediately after, also twice immediately after, creating the sequence: *mi mami, mi mami, ella, ella, ella*. By the time the first expression of *she* in the beginning of this fragment is resorted to, there is enough information about the mother, she is no longer difficult to identify, so it becomes even more redundant to use *she* a second time. Moreover, near the end of the fragment, after narrating several activities her mother did, the speaker again exploits the meaning of *she* (*she used to take us to paint...*).

Given that the antecedent (*mi mami*) is well identified from the beginning, then what is the motivation for the presence of *ella* in this fragment? On the one hand, it would be difficult to accept the explanations of traditional variationist and functional linguistics (cf. Alarcos Llorach, 1999; Alonso Hernández, 1996; Silva-Corvalán, 1994; Cameron, 1994) that

allude to compensation (with the expression *ella*) to resolve the ambiguity or insufficiency of inflectional information in forms such as *era* or *llevaba*, since these same methodologies propose that, once the referent is established, it is unnecessary to resort to a pronominal form especially when there are consecutive sentences with the same subject (cf. Luján 1999; for a different analysis, from CE, see Darwich 2019), and that is what happens with the use of *ella* before *estudió* and the other two occurrences. On the other, the strategy suggested by García questions the interlocutor's ability to establish inferences that were made without problem from the information available in 1(a), where the fragment appears without the original *ella* occurrences. There is no doubt that the interpretation made from 1(a) is maintained once it is compared with the information in 1(b).

Furthermore, García (1975) does not clarify what he means by "force" when he describes that the semantic substance of *Deixis* has to do with the force with which the hearer is instructed to look for the referent of the pronoun, much less how it relates to, or manifests in, the meaning High *Deixis* would imply (nor with the meaning Low *Deixis*). In any case, why is "force" needed in these occurrences if, in fact, the presence of it is not necessary to identify the referent? In other words, García's (1975) strategy fails to explain why the speaker decided to use the meaning of *she* in this passage if the reference is not problematic.

Thus, if the referent is already known and identified through other cues and inferences, why does the speaker resort to the use of the form *ella*? What is the contribution of the form *ella* in this passage?

Strategy 2.

According to García: *Deixis Alta* tells the speaker, "look for the person *he/she* refers to whose antecedent is not obvious."

Now let us turn to the second strategy associated with the exploitation of the meaning *Deixis Alta* that García assigns to *he/she*. According to García (1975), the presence of one of these two forms in the discourse instructs the speaker: "find the third person to

whom reference is being made";³ relevant instruction, he/she expands, in situations where the antecedent of *he/she* is not obvious and should not go unnoticed (p. 69). In other words, the speaker will resort to the *he/she* meaning and use this form in circumstances where the listener needs to be guided to identify the antecedent that the passage or fragment in question is about because he/she cannot clearly recognize it.

Let us review this strategy. In examples (2a) and (2b), the same speech sample is presented, but with modifications; in the first one, the explicit forms of *he/she* that appear in the original version have been eliminated and have been retained in the second version.

In (2a), below, the interviewee, a bonsai expert, describes the negative effect on a tree of the lack of confidence of the person who makes drastic modifications to it. The narrator attributes to a bonsai emotions such as trembling with fear and the ability to perceive sensations such as the insecurity of the one who manipulates it, to support his argument:

(2a)

... if we grab the trunk of a tree and we do it in a U or fork shape, then it is something very drastic, the tree trembles with fear when it perceives insecurity in the one who is doing the work, but when you are transmitting your confidence to it...

(Entr. 14)

In the segment of (2a) there is no doubt that the tree is, precisely, the matter being talked about. The speaker focuses his speech on the tree. The references to it are obvious: it is the one who experiences the modifications in its trunk -which can be manipulated in various ways-, perceives the negative emotions of the one who performs such manipulation and, moreover, is able to react to them.

With all this available information, then, we can affirm that:

³ Translation by me.

The antecedent (*the tree*) is obvious and is not ignored (*it is not be missed*).

And yet, in the original enunciation of this fragment, i.e., as spoken by the speaker, now presented in (2b), we see that there is an explicit form of *it* (highlighted in bold for easy identification):

(2b)

... if we grab the trunk of a tree and make it U-shaped or fork-shaped, then it is something very drastic, the tree trembles with fear when **it** perceives insecurity in the one who is doing the work, but when you are transmitting your confidence to it....

(Entr. 14)

Repeating García (1975), when the antecedent is not obvious and is so important that it should not go unnoticed, the speaker resorts to the exploitation of the meaning Deixis Alta of the forms *él/ella*. However, what is observed in (2b) is that the antecedent is obvious, not overlooked, and yet the *he* form appears. If the listener is not required to be alerted to look for the referent-in fact, no effort is required to identify it because the obviousness of the referent is clear-then why is it present? What is the speaker's motivation for expressing *he* here? If the speaker does not need to guide the listener to identify the antecedent, which is the tree, and there is so much information available that it is impossible for it to be ignored, and rather it receives full attention, how is it explained that *he* appears here? What is the contribution of this form in this fragment?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to explore a new hypothesis of meaning for this sign and to test it again with data.

Strategy 3.

According to García: The Deixis High meaning of *he/she* serves to distinguish one referent among many.

In describing the exploitation of the High Deixis meaning of *he/she* forms, García (1975, 1983) also notes that these forms serve to distinguish one referent among many; more specifically, to "distinguish a third person referent among others that have comparable

prominence" and that may not be obvious in the mind of the interlocutor (Garcia, 1983, p. 187). Put differently, the exploitation of the meaning of *he/she* is relevant whenever the intention is to help identify one entity among several (for which also the exploitation of the meaning of gender is important, as it distinguishes between a masculine and a feminine entity).

Let us test this strategy in the fragment presented in examples (3a) and (3b). In the first one, (3a), the *he/she* forms have been omitted on purpose. In this excerpt from the conversation, the speaker, a graphic designer, narrates how his brother helped him establish contact with the owner of the business where he worked so that, after an interview, he would agree to apply the knowledge contained in his dissertation.

(3a)

What happens is that my brother is an electrical mechanical engineer and works there, so I told my brother that I needed to look for a place to apply my thesis. He said: "no, well, do it here, let me talk to the owner and then you can propose what you want to do". Well, I arrived, I talked and everything, and he said yes, I mean, anyway, I was not going to get out of it in a fifth.

(Entr. 1)

From the available information, it is known that the participants in these interactions are men, three human beings of male gender: the speaker, his brother and the owner of the business, and that all three have a prominent role in the events narrated, since without the collaboration of the latter two, the young professional would not have been able to apply the knowledge of his thesis (in graphic design) in a project for a business to which would design (information that is discussed earlier and later in the same interview) the logo and stationery.

For the analysis, we ask ourselves what information (or signals) help us to distinguish one referent among many, in this case, among two others? In the fragment there are several pieces of information that serve this purpose. First, each of these referents is well identified by his or her profession or occupation: the speaker's brother is an electrical mechanical

engineer, the other person is the owner of the business where the brother works and, finally, the speaker is a university student who is about to graduate (*I needed to find a place to apply for my dissertation*). Secondly, and very importantly, they are also well identified by their participation in the events: the brother puts the speaker in contact with the owner of the business where he works to propose him to apply his dissertation, the speaker explains the proposal to the owner and the latter accepts.

The linguistic forms that help us to delimit the participation of each of these referents in the events being narrated are various: noun phrases such as *my brother*, *the owner*; actions denoted by verbs, such as *I commented*, *let speak*, *you propose*, *I arrived*, *I spoke*, *he said yes*... Likewise, it is these same forms that give us indications that each referent is in the mind of the interlocutor, since we can establish associations between them: *my brother* - *let speak*, *you propose*; *the speaker* - *I commented*, *I arrived*, *I spoke*; *the owner of the place* - *he said yes*.

Thus, the above explanations give us grounds to affirm that in this fragment:

There is enough information to *distinguish* one referent among many others.

However, in the original enunciation, i.e., as recorded in the interview, there are two explicit occurrences of *it*, which are highlighted in bold in (3b) for better visualization.

(3b)

What happens is that my brother is an electrical mechanical engineer and works there, so I told my brother that I needed to look for a place where I could apply for my thesis. He said: "no, well, do it here, let me talk to the owner and then propose what you want to do". Well, I got there, I talked to **him** and everything, he said yes, I mean, *in* any case, **he** wasn't going to get it in a fifth. (Entr. 1)

At this point, it is pertinent to comment, as you may have already noticed, that in (3a) the prepositions that precede *él*: *con* and *a* were also eliminated. This decision is supported by the same linguistic structures. Generally, when these prepositions appear in the discourse to add more information about the event denoted by a verb, they require a complement, and

this can be a noun, a nominal syntagm or a sentence; in fact, any option is possible. What would be almost impossible to happen is the opposite, that the pure addition of con and a to the description of an event would be considered as a contribution with full meaning: *#spoke with; #a was not going to come out in a fifth*.

Then, as noted in the analysis of this fragment, the absence of *with him* and *to him* in (3a) does not interfere, on the one hand, in grasping that *I spoke with* and *I was not going to leave him in a fifth* inform about the events they describe and, on the other hand, neither are they needed to distinguish each of the referents in this fragment. The question to be answered again is: what is *his* contribution in this enunciation? If, as demonstrated in the analysis, the three referents are obvious, that is, they are in the mind of the interlocutor, and there is enough information through other cues to distinguish them clearly from each other, then what is the speaker's motivation for resorting to the exploitation of the form *he* twice?

Trying to answer this question justifies the possibility of hypothesizing a different meaning for *him/her*.

Strategy 4.

According to García: *he/she* should be used when the identification of the referent to which *he/she* refers is problematic.

A strategy more associated with the exploitation of the Deixis Alta meaning of the *he/she* forms, García notes, is when the identification of the entity mentioned in the discourse is problematic (García, 1996, p. 10). But how does one determine whether the identification of an entity is problematic? To answer this, it is pertinent to review in detail all the information available in the discourse and make sure that the presence of *him/her* allows the full identification of the referent in question.

For the purpose of determining whether the identification of the referent being referred to is problematic and that, therefore, the *he/she* signal is resorted to in order to resolve it, let us analyze the fragment of speech shown in the pair of examples (4a) and (4b).

In example (4a), all the original explicit forms of *she* that appear in the interview have been purposely removed - there are none of *he*. In the excerpt, the speaker recounts that her mother decided to discontinue her dialysis treatment because of the exhaustion and physical pain caused by having to move from one location to another to receive it, in addition to the inconvenience of traveling with medical equipment attached to her body and the emotional toll it all took on her:

(4a)

- I saw my mother all the time with the usual red bag, she was writhing in pain, tears were running down her face and so on, that is, while she was recovering from the study and coming back, a horrible pain on the way back to Veracruz in the car.

- And in Veracruz he is dialyzed?

- She left that many years ago because she says that it was a suffering and that if she was going to die, she would rather die in peace than suffering and there she is, but in the hospitals she has been to, that is to say that she has been treated there and that she came here, she signed, they made her sign! because they told her that she was not well at all! And that she had to continue being treated, but she decided, she made the decision now!

(Entr. 14)

Let us analyze the content of (4a). In this fragment two referents are clearly identified: the speaker, identified with the form *yo*, who is the daughter who tells what she has seen and heard, and her mother, identified with the nominal syntagm *mi mamá* and who has experienced the events narrated. Of the two of them, the one about whom more information is known is the mother. The passage describes her sufferings from her mortal illness (*she was writhing in pain, a horrible pain, my mother with the usual red bag*), as well as and the unpleasant experiences she went through in hospitals (*she preferred to die in peace rather than suffering*), in addition to the decision she made to suspend her medical treatment in order to be able to be at home. The abundance of information about the mother confirms that her identification is not problematic. It is true that we also know of some events in which some people participate who are not fully identified, that is, we do not know who they are

(*they have treated her there, they made her sign, they told her*), but this information is not relevant in the enunciation, since what is pointed out is the affectation of the mother by these actions, with the forms *la* and *le*.

Now, to confirm that the presence of *ella* is not needed to identify the mother, let us focus on the content of the speaker's first utterance in (4b). In the first lines of the transcription, in the sequence of actions *se retorció de dolor, se le escurrían las lágrimas, se recuperaba del estudio*, there is not really a signal that identifies any of the women, but it is possible to infer, with the help of *se* and *le* that these events are associated with the mother, since these two forms point to a singular entity that is neither the speaker nor her listener, the only two other singular human referents that participate or are mentioned in the conversation, apart from the sick mother.

For the verb forms *regresaba* and *devolverse*, it could be argued that *regresaba* is a verb form whose inflection only indicates that the referent performing the action is one person (and not two, or more), but since it does not indicate whether it is the speaker or the person spoken of, an expression of *it* could well fit here; a similar argument could be proposed for *devolverse*, since the verb appears in its base form and *se*, in this case, does not provide information as to which entity is performing the movement, the car or a person. Under the circumstances, one might also consider whether an explicit mention of *it* is necessary here. But we showed earlier that no mention of *her* is needed to identify the referents of this fragment.

The second part of the example continues to focus on the mother, now on her decisions and the consequences they entail. In this part, the verbs describe the process from the time the mother considered stopping her treatment until she made the decision to do so (*she stopped that many years ago, she says that if she is going to die, she would rather die more peacefully*, etc.). In addition, when there are verbs conjugated in plural, they are preceded by a third person singular pronoun, as in *le dijeron*, and, in addition, feminine, as in *la han tratado, la hicieron*, which contributes, once again, to identify the referent of whom is spoken throughout the enunciation: the mother.

Thus, and based on the analysis of (4a), we can well affirm that:

The identification of the referent referred to is not problematic.

However, in the original text of this fragment, explicit forms of *it* appear. To visualize them easily, they are all highlighted in bold in example (4b):

(4b)

- all the time I saw my mother with the usual red bag, **she** was writhing in pain, tears were running down her face and so on, that is, while she was recovering from the study and coming back, a horrible pain on the way back to Veracruz in the car
- And in Veracruz you dialyze?
- **She** left that many years ago because she says that it was a suffering and that if she was going to die, she preferred to die in peace rather than suffering and there she is, but in the hospitals she has been to, that is to say that she has been treated there and that she came here, **she** signed, they made her sign! because they told her that **she** was not well at all! And that she had to continue being treated, but **she** decided, she made the decision to go! (Entr. 14)

In total, five of *her* expressions are recorded. In view of the fact that, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, *Deixis* is defined as "the force with which the hearer is instructed to look for the referent of the pronoun" (Garcia, 1975, p. 65), then *Deixis Alta* could imply "the greater force" with which the hearer is instructed to look for the referent of *he/she*. But as demonstrated by the explication of (4a), the identification of the referent referred to in this fragment is not problematic, no effort has to be made to identify it. In other words, the explication of *she* in: she left that many years ago and in she signed, as well as in she was not well at all and she decided does not occur because it is problematic to identify the referent *my mom*; neither is "greater force" needed in the instruction, for, as has become evident, there are other cues and inferences that help to identify it throughout the passage. Moreover, if this were so, the analyst would expect there to be an explicit form of *she* in

there is, but there is not; the speaker does not draw on the meaning of this form in that setting.

So what is the speaker's motivation for resorting to five explicit forms of *she* in the excerpt in (4b)? The strategies García (1975, 1983, 1996) proposes fail to answer why one would need to resort to the meaning Deixis Alta if the identification of the referent is neither problematic nor difficult; it still remains unexplained what the contribution of *ella* is in this passage.

The need to postulate a new meaning

In sections 3.1 to 3.4 it has been shown that Deixis Alta, the semantic content attributed to *he/she* by García (1975, 1983 and 1996) and which indicates that the identification of the referent is relevant to the message, does not agree with the way in which these forms appear used in the discursive contexts analyzed, nor are these represented in the strategies identified by her.

When comparing each of the communicative strategies proposed by García with data from Mexican Spanish, the analysis yields a different result from that reported in previous works: in each and every one of the cases in which the exploitation of the sign *él/ella* is examined, the referent or antecedent with which it is associated is obvious, it is not problematic or difficult to identify and, moreover, it is relevant throughout the discourse.

Similarly, it has been seen that in situations where the speaker would be expected to resort to the Deixis Alta meaning proposed by García to solve the problem of reference and identify who is being talked about, *he/she* does not do so; that is, it remains unresolved, as is the case in example (3b) with *ahí está*, where the reference (if there is one) remains unidentified.

In this sense, the analyses also show that there are linguistic forms that do identify referents, such as nouns or nominal syntagms, and there are others that contribute to inferring their identification, such as forms like *la*, *le*, *se*, possessives or some verbal inflections; and, in general, each and every one of the signs that make up the enunciation.

A new hypothesis of meaning for him/her

By way of summary, we can affirm that, in the examples reviewed, the forms *he/she* does not appear explicitly because the identification of the referents is problematic, since they are all identifiable without having to resort to their use in each of the segments analyzed. Moreover, in none of the times in which the expression *he/she* is recorded is a situation reported in which it is necessary for the listener to make an effort, or more effort, to search for, identify, distinguish or locate the entities that are relevant to the message.

Rather, and according to our observations, the presence of *he/she* highlights an entity that is well identified and relevant throughout the discourse, that is, it is not problematic or difficult to identify and, moreover, it is in the mind of the interlocutor.

We illustrate our proposal, now, with the analysis of the fragment of speech presented in (5a) and (5b), where the speaker narrates the visit of a public servant from Mexico City to her neighborhood, who among her plans is to eliminate a soccer field in the area.

For the sake of analysis, in (5a) *her* expressions have been omitted on purpose:

(5a)

the week that there was this last operation, I think a week or two weeks ago, Dolores Padierna came here to the neighborhood and according to this, this woman, you see she is the delegate there in Cuauhtémoc, according to her plans is to remove the field, you know there is a soccer field, right? well, what happens is that during the day it is covered (Entr. 8).

After reading (5a), we notice that the nominal syntagms *Dolores Padierna*, *this woman* and *delegate* establish the unequivocal identification of the most outstanding referential entity in this fragment. Not only is her name and surname made explicit, but also her characteristic of being a human being of the female gender is emphasized and, in addition, her public position is specified; we are talking about Dolores Padierna, a very well identified referent. Moreover, she is the one who goes to the speaker's neighborhood and who has the power

to modify the urban landscape of the place, even eliminating a public space such as the soccer field.

In fact, in this fragment there is no situation in which *Dolores* is difficult to identify, or in which her reference is problematic; nor is there a situation in which she has to be distinguished among many other referents, or in which her reference is not obvious. However, the speaker does resort to the expression *her* (highlighted in bold) once in this fragment (5b):

(5b)

the week that there was this last operation, I think a week or two weeks ago, Dolores Padierna came here to the neighborhood and according to this, this woman, you see she is the delegate there in Cuauhtémoc, according to **her**, her plans are to remove the soccer field, you know there is a soccer field? No? Well, what happens is that during the day it is covered (Entr. 8).

As can be observed in this passage, *her* presence attracts attention, it further highlights an entity that has already been fully identified: the delegate *Dolores Padierna*, who is present in the mind of the interlocutor (*this woman, delegate*) and has remained relevant throughout the discourse because of the information provided previously.

The fact that the result of the analysis of (5a) and (5b) is similar to that of the pairs analyzed in section 3, confirms that in Garcia's analyses (1975, 1983, 1996) there is a discrepancy between the meaning proposed for *he/she* (High Deixis) and the communicative strategies associated with its use. In each and every one of the examples reviewed, we note that the presence of *he/she*:

- Does not identify a referent that is relevant to the message; as all are fully identified.
- Is not necessary to identify antecedents, as there is enough information to do so in any of these contexts.
- Does not distinguish or locate difficult-to-identify antecedents; there are no difficult-to-identify antecedents.

To reiterate, in these examples, the *he/she* forms do not identify antecedents or referents relevant to the message. Rather, what we do find is that the presence of *he/she* highlights an entity that has already been identified and has discursive salience, it also signals more attention for this referent in the discourse of which it is already a part. Thus, a new hypothesis of meaning for the sign *he/she* may well be presented for now as follows:

<i>he/she</i>	Discursive Entity kept in the foreground
---------------	---

Conclusions

The analysis presented here reviews previous work on the proposed meaning hypothesis for *él/ella* within the CE framework and contrasts it with speech samples of Mexico City Spanish. The results of the analysis register important discrepancies between the meaning Deixis Alta, attributed to *él/ella*, and his/her usage strategies described by García (1975, 1983 and 1996).

By asking over and over again the questions: *What motivates the speaker to express he/she every time he/she does it? What is the contribution of he/she in the discourse*, we have realized that the speaker uses these forms to highlight an entity that has already been identified and has discursive prominence and, also, draws more attention to this referent in the discourse of which it is already a part.

The results obtained from the examination of the data lay the groundwork for rejecting the Deixis Alta meaning hypothesis to explain the speaker's use of *he/she* for *his/her* communicative purposes and, thus, reformulating it in the light of the new evidence obtained in this paper. Now, the next step will be, following the CE methodology, to validate by analysis the new meaning hypothesis for the *he/she* signal.

References

- Alarcos, E. (1999). *Grammar of the Spanish Language (RAE)*. Madrid, Editorial Espasa Calpe, S. A.
- Alonso, C. 1984 [1996]. *Gramática funcional del español*. Madrid, Gredos.
- Contini-Morava, E. (1995). Introduction. In: Contini-Morava, E. and Sussman Goldberg, B. (Eds.) *Meaning as explanation: Advances in linguistic sign theory*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 1-39.
- Darwich, B. (2019). Discourse subject stabilization. Strategy for the use of so-called subject personal pronouns in co-referential conditions in Spanish. In: Stern, N., Otheguy, R., Reid, W., & Sackler, J. (Eds.) *Columbia School Linguistics in the 21st Century*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 123-159.
- Davis, J. (2006). Consistency and change in Columbia School linguistics. In: Davis, J., Gorup, R. J., & Stern, N. (Eds.) *Advances in functional linguistics: Columbia School beyond its origins*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 1-16.
- Diver, A. (1995) [2012]. Theory. In: Contini-Morava, E. and Sussman Goldberg, B. (Eds.) *Meaning as explanation: Advances in linguistic sign theory*. Leiden, Brill Publishers, pp. 43-114.
- Diver, A. (1975) [2012]. The nature of linguistic meaning. In: Huffman, A. and Davis, J. (Eds.) *Language: Communication and Human behavior: The Linguistic Essays of William Diver*. Leiden, Brill Publishers, pp. 47-64.
- Garcia, E. (1996). What "reflexivity" really looks like. *Linguistics* 34. 1-51.
- Garcia, E. (1983). Context dependence of language and of linguistics analysis. In: Klein-Andreu, F. (Ed.) *Discourse Perspectives on Syntax*. New York and London, Academic Press, pp. 181-207.
- Garcia, E. (1975). *The role of theory in linguistic analysis: The Spanish pronoun system*. Amsterdam and Oxford, North-Holland Publishing Co./American Elsevier Publishing Co.

- Huffman, A. (2012). Introduction: The Enduring Legacy of William Diver. In: Huffman, A. and Davis, J. (Eds.) *Language: Communication and Human behavior: The Linguistic Essays of William Diver*. Leiden, Brill Publishers, pp. 1-20.
- Huffman, A. (2006). Diver's Theory. In: Davis, J., Gorup, R. J., and Stern, N. (Eds.) *Advances in functional linguistics: Columbia School beyond its origins*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 41-62.
- Huffman, A. (1995). The purpose of a grammatical analysis. In: Contini-Morava, E. and Sussman Goldberg, B. (Eds.) *Meaning as explanation: Advances in linguistic sign theory*. Leiden, Brill Publishers, pp. 185-211.
- Langacker, R. (2004). Form, meaning, and behavior. In: Contini-Morava, E., Krisner, Robert S. and Rodriguez-Bachiller, B. (Eds.) *Cognitive and Communicative Approaches to Linguistic Analysis*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 21-60.
- Luján, M. (1999). Expression and omission of the personal pronoun. In: Bosque, I. and Demonte, V. (Eds.) *Gramática de la Lengua Española* (vol. 1). Madrid, Espasa Calpe, S. A., pp. 1275-1316.
- Martín, P. and Lastra, Y. (Coords.) 2011-2015. *Corpus sociolingüístico de la Ciudad de México (CSCM)*. 1st ed. Mexico City, El Colegio de México.
- Otheguy, R. (2022). A Columbia School Perspective on Explanation in Morphosyntactic Variation. In: Jensen, T. and Christensen, T. (Eds.) *Explanations in sociosyntactic variation*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 90-119.
- Otheguy, R. (2002). Saussurean anti-nomenclaturism in grammatical analysis: A comparative theoretical perspective. In: Reid, W., Otheguy, R. and Stern, N. (Eds.) *Signal, meaning, and message: Perspectives on sign-based linguistics*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 373-403.
- Reid, W. (1995). Quantitative analysis in Columbia School theory. In: Contini-Morava, E. and Sussman Goldberg, B. (Eds.) *Meaning as explanation: Advances in linguistic sign theory*. Leiden, Brill Publishers, pp. 115-152.

- Reid, W. (1991). *Verb and Noun Number in English: A functional explanation*. London and New York, Longman.
- Risco, R. (2023). The communicative strategies of *a* in Spanish. *Anuario de Letras. Linguistics and Philology*, Vol. XI, 1, pp. 127-159.
- Stern, N. (2019). Introduction: Columbia School linguistics in the functional-cognitive space of the 21st century. In: Stern, N., Otheguy, R., Reid, W., & Sackler, J. (Eds.) *Columbia School Linguistics in the 21st Century*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 1-32.
- Silva-Corvalán, Silvia (1994) [2002]. *Language contact and change. Spanish in Los Angeles*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.