

***Por tanto, a VS suplico:***  
**The functions of discourse markers in Colonial Louisiana Spanish**

In spite of its importance in the history of the American continent, colonial Louisiana has received scarce attention in scholarly work, particularly in the linguistics literature. Although Spanish was the *de facto* legal language of government interactions in Louisiana for nearly half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there is a dearth of work dedicated to the language of this period. During the 40 years of Spanish rule in Louisiana, many business letters were circulated both within the different settlements in the colony as well as from the different settlements to the government seat in New Orleans. These letters reflect a multitude of different aims: descriptions of local situations, petitions to government officials, offers of goods and services, and adjudications of legal matters.

In recent decades, the literature in sociopragmatics has seen a shift from analysis of isolated speech acts to a focus on phenomena which affect the global meaning of a message. The widespread interest in discourse markers (DMs) seen in the literature has been a natural result of this trend, as these components of language “play a crucial role in the relation of separate utterances and the creation and understanding of extended discourse” (Curc6 2004:180). Given that a key focus of sociopragmatics is the contextual meaning of a message, DMs are appropriately seen as playing an important role in guiding an interlocutor to inferences realized in communication (Mart6n Zorraquino & Portol6s L6zaro 1999:4057). However, it is widely acknowledged that many DMs, such as the oft-studied *well*, *y’know*, and *so* are of a primarily oral nature; thus, most investigations of DMs are relegated to oral data gathered in informal contexts.

In addition to their functions in relating distinct elements of a message, DMs have been found to play other key roles as well. Holmes (1995) discusses several objectives of DMs involving the expression of politeness, including hedging, boosting a message, garnering sympathy, and signaling shared values. Tka6ukov6 additionally argues that “discourse markers are often indicative of power relationships as they help to structure and control the interaction as well as negotiate the roles of speakers” (2015:145).

The corpus for the current study consists of 200 business letters stemming from three different settlements of the colonial Louisiana territory. The linguistic focus of this study is the discourse markers noted in the corpus; both the presence of these markers, as well as their role in signaling power relations within the discourse represented by the corpus documents, are taken into account under the specter of critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk 1993; Hamilton 2001). Results reveal a stark contrast between the linguistic behavior of interactants in superior and inferior positions of power: While discourse markers are all but absent in the letters penned by superiors in this period, inferiors frequently employ these elements in order to mitigate a message (as in the case of *creo* ‘I think’), to explain and justify their actions (*por esta raz6n* ‘for this reason’), and to introduce a petition (*por tanto* ‘therefore’). These results add to previous work on the language of this period which indicates patently distinct patterns of linguistic behavior based on a speaker’s level of institutional power (Author 2011, in press).

The current study seeks to fill gaps in the literature involving the expression of power via linguistic means in colonial Louisiana, as well as the employment of discourse markers in written registers.