

Two Discourse Markers in Argentinean Internet/Youth Language

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Introduction

How can third-wave sociolinguistics understand 'overlap' between different linguistic styles?

Drawing on data collected from a larger study on language and globalization in media fan communities in Argentina, this project examines two discourse markers (Schiffrin 1987) used in the computer-mediated communication of Spanish-speakers in Argentina:

- *Ahre* [are] used in informal speech and writing
- The non-alphabetic expression (?)
 - Possible variants: (?), (???)
 - Limited to written language, typically Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Both markers key (Goffman 1974) stances of humor, exaggeration, or nonseriousness, enacting stances that index youth styles (Bucholtz 2009, Kiesling 2004). Investigating how these discourse markers are used in CMC may illuminate the overlapping indexical links between youth-based and Internet-based linguistic styles (Tagliamonte 2008, 2016).

Goals of this project:

- Determine pragmatic functions of and constraints *ahre* and (?).
- Connect quantitative data on use of markers to metalinguistic commentary linking *ahre* and (?) to particular social styles.
- Interrogate the overlapping indexical relationships between linguistic styles associated with 'Internet' and 'youth' cultures (Eckert 2008).

In Context

Example 1.

Tenés mucho talento. ¿Que haces en Argentina? *ahre*.

You've got a lot of talent. What are you doing in Argentina? *ahre*.

- *Ahre* indicates that a potentially offensive comment should be taken humorously/nonseriously.

Example 2.

En *Torchwood*, Russell saca a relucir todo su Moffatism (?).

In *Torchwood*, Russell brings out all of his Moffatism (?).

- (?) indicates that "Moffatism" is a nonsensical word that readers might find strange or surprising.

Example 3.

Tenés que comprar la vip y la general si o si, si no, te retan (? *Ahre* no fuera de joda, tenés que comprar las dos, así dice en la página del evento).

You have to buy the VIP and the general no matter what, if you don't they scold you (? *Ahre* no but seriously, you have to buy both, that's what it says on the event page).

- *No fuera de joda*, "no but seriously" (lit. "outside of (the) joke") makes explicit the shift in key between the two clauses marked by (?) and *ahre*: from joking, nonserious, silly to helpful, factual, informative.

Example 4.

Y encima te llamas Sol (? *Ahre* nada q ver xD And on top of that you're named Sol (? *Ahre* that's nonsense xD

- *Nada que ver*, "that's nonsense" (lit. "nothing to do [with that]") reinforces what (?) and *ahre* do here: marking the first clause in the turn as humorous and nonsensical.

Methods

336 conversational turns with tokens of *ahre* and 208 turns with tokens of (?) and variants were collected by hand and via Python script. Each turn was coded for:

- **SOURCE:** Twitter (manually collected vs. scripted Twitter scrape), Facebook (6 different groups, plus individual profiles), Instagram, Tumblr, and WhatsApp threads.
- **TURN POSITION:** Final, Medial, Initial, Solo
- **TURN LANGUAGE:** Spanish, English, Mixed
- **LAUGHTER TOKENS:** Included in same turn as token, not included
- **INTERTEXTUAL LINKS:** Included in same turn as token, not included (i.e., memes, video clips, hashtags, media references)

Chi-square tests run to compare results of each coding category across the *ahre* and (?) collections.

Discourse analysis of metalinguistic commentary on *ahre* and (?) from informal conversations and popular discourse.

Results

Chi-squared tests revealed:

Significant relationship between turn position and discourse marker.

- $\chi^2 (3, N=544) = 51.05 = p<.001$.

Significant relationship between turn language and discourse marker.

- $\chi^2 (2, N=544) = 6.34 = p=.042$.

Significant relationship between use of intertextual link in a turn and discourse marker.

- $\chi^2 (1, N=544) = 7.95 = p=.005$.

No significant relationship between a laugh token appearing in a turn and discourse marker.

- $\chi^2 (1, N=544) = 2.24 = p=.13$.

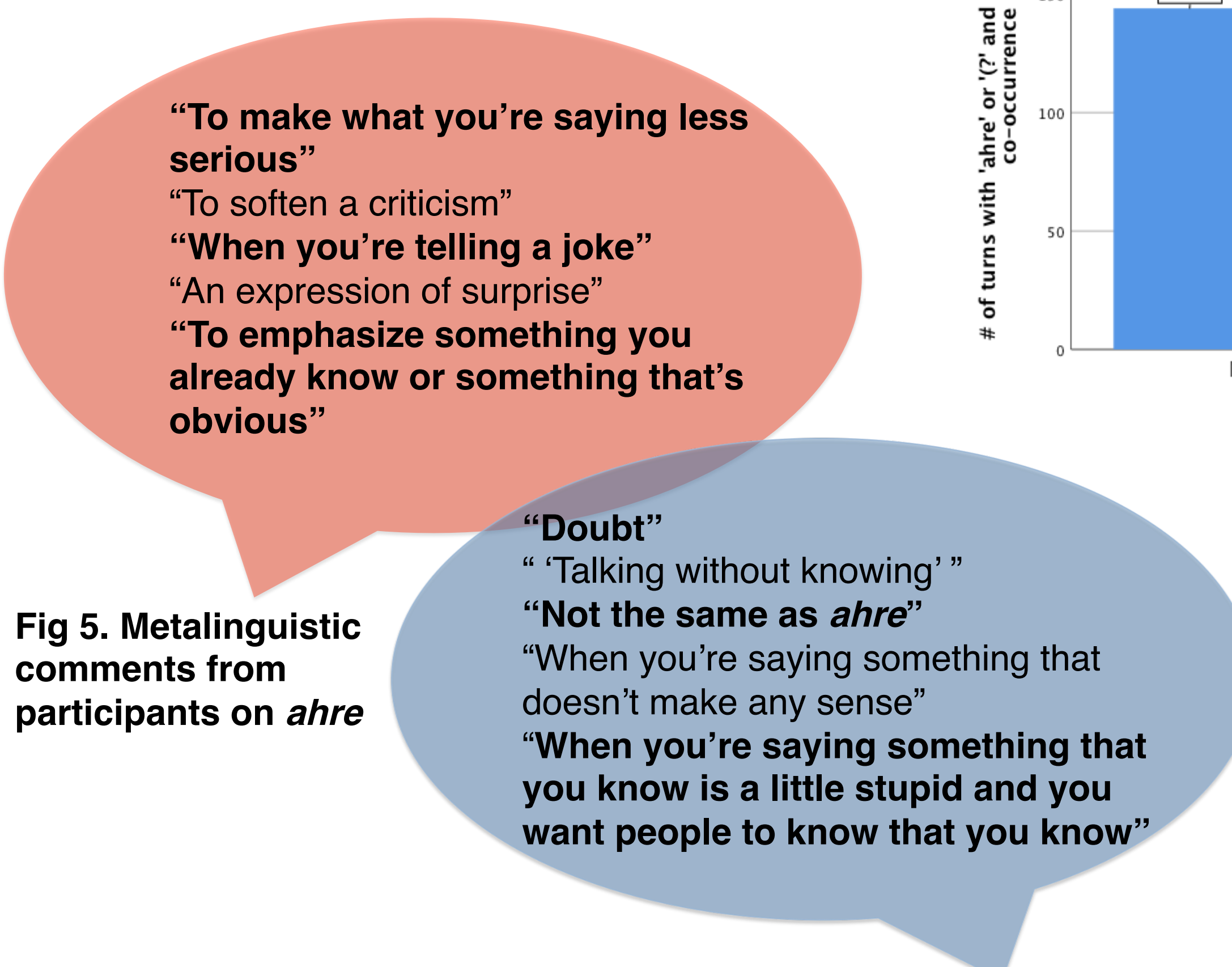
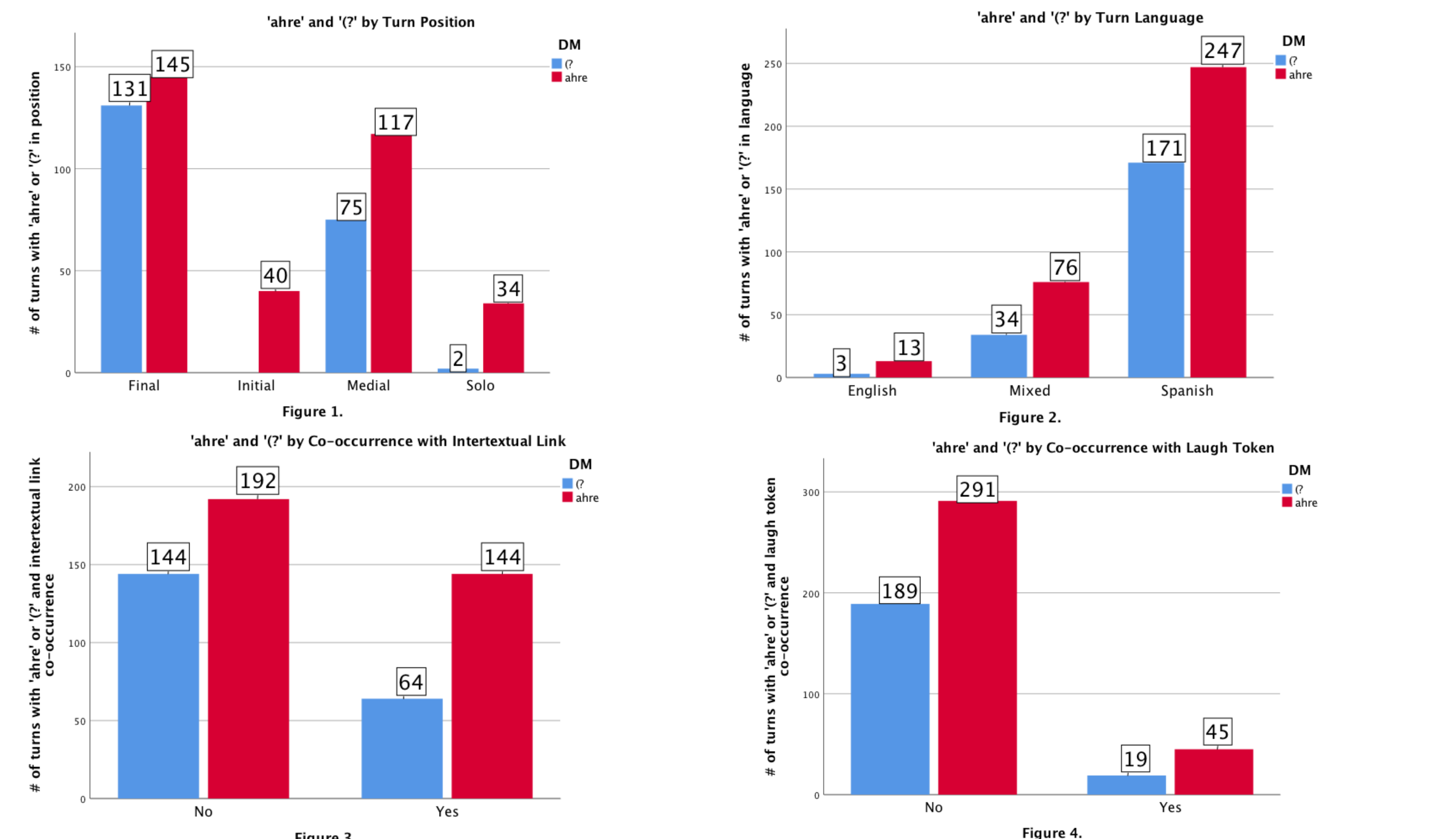


Fig 5. Metalinguistic comments from participants on *ahre*

Fig 6. Metalinguistic comments from participants on (?)



Fig 7. Los Andes newspaper headline from 21 March 2016



Fig 8. La Nación newspaper headline from 18 July 2017



Fig 9. Lali Esposito tweet

Discussion

Although participants describe them differently (Figs. 5 & 6), *ahre* and (?) do appear to share some overlapping functions. (?) and *ahre* appear in turns with laugh tokens at about the same rate (Figure 4), suggesting they may fulfill similar humor-keying functions. As the Argentine young adults quoted in Figure 6 report, (?) can be used to key the preceding utterance as nonsensical or nonserious—close analysis of the 42 cases where *ahre* and (?) appear stacked/in the same turn supports this analysis. However, (?) and *ahre* do appear to have different distributional constraints (Figure 1).

Ahre is widely discussed in the media, and is associated with youthful linguistic styles in Argentina (Figs. 7 & 8). *Ahre* is used more than (?) in turns written in English or with English elements (Figure 2), which is another marker of youth styles in Argentina (Valentinsson, forthcoming, cf. Nakassis 2016), and also considered to be the lingua franca of the Internet (Thurlow et al. 2004). *Ahre* appears more frequently than (?) when an intertextual reference is also included in the turn (Figure 3), which suggests a link between Internet-based or media-engaged linguistic styles (Sierra 2016). Given that not all young adults understand or use *ahre* (Figure 9), it may specifically index an “always on” (Baron 2018), deeply media-engaged, young adult linguistic style.

(?) is not mentioned much in popular discourse. Results from the Twitter scraping program initially pulled over 500 instances of (?), but most of these were from other parts of Latin America outside of Argentina, so more overt and widely-circulating beliefs about (?) may exist elsewhere.

Future Directions

Further work on (?) requires a finer-tuned approach to computationally collecting tokens. Continued close analysis of stacked cases, and analysis of other discourse markers potentially related to *ahre*—including *ah*, *ahr*, and *re*—in both CMC and oral discourse, may reveal nuances in the pragmatic functions of both. Finally, elicitation of perceptions/stereotypes of CMC and Internet-based linguistic styles from Argentine young adults will be used to continue parsing the relationship between youth-based and Internet-based linguistic styles. This work advances third-wave sociolinguistic theory on how styles are performed, how they overlap, and how boundaries and overlaps between styles work in interaction.

References available upon request.