Various studies (Östman 1981; Stubbs 1983; Schiffrin 1987; Fraser 1990; Maschler 1994; inter alia) have considered pragmatic functions of discourse markers (DMs) in English and other languages.¹

This paper examines the use of the deverbal marker *si quieres* ‘if you please’ (literally, ‘if you want’) in utterances that require mitigation.² The main goal is to analyze its non-canonical use in natural conversations and to determine systematic contexts of its occurrence. For this reason, examples similar to (1) and (2) will be considered.

(1) Eso te lo puedes llevar *si quieres.*
    ‘You can take it *if you please*’

(2) Pues, *si quieres*, casi mejor pasarse esta tarde ¿eh?
    ‘Well, *if you please*, it’s even better to stop by this afternoon, ok?’

In (1), a travel agent attenuates the impositive force of an offer, and in (2), another agent mitigates a suggestion. Both examples demonstrate that *si quieres* is used as a DM which conveys speaker’s (S) polite attitude towards his/her addressee (H). Such use of *si quieres* seems to invoke Brown and Levinson’s (1978) concept of face as well as Lakoff’s (1973) politeness rules, and Leech’s (1983) Tact Maxim. As opposed to the standard politeness marker *por favor* ‘please’, *si quieres* focuses on the benefit or interest of the H, and may be used only in specific speech acts.

In this study, *si quieres* is considered an ‘interaction marker’, a type of DM (see Sankoff et al. 1997), whose function is to encode speaker’s (S) attitude towards addressee. Also, going beyond Montolío’s (1992, 1993) accounts on the use of the conditional structures in Spanish, it is argued here that *si quieres* is a grammaticalized politeness marker in offers and suggestions. Unlike various accounts (cf. Schiffrin 1987; Fraser 1990; and Traugott 1995b; inter alia), this study highlights the metacommunicative function of DMs as opposed to the textual one.
1. **Si-clauses.** Before we proceed with the analysis of *si quieres* which functions as a politeness marker only in certain impositive speech acts in Spanish, it is necessary to recall some considerations from previous studies (Levinson 1983; Dancygier 1990; Sweetser 1990; Prieto de los Mozos 1992; Montolío 1992, 1993; Geis 1995, to mention the most relevant) which have led us to the observations presented here. In general, these accounts deal with the functions of *if*-clauses or speech-act conditionals.

With regard to English, Levinson (1983:266) observes that *if*-clauses may occur in requests or indirect requests, but not with direct or indirect questions. He also indirectly alludes to the grammaticalization of certain syntactic constructions motivated by specific pragmatic principles (Levinson 1983:267). The last allusion as well as the studies carried out by Traugott (1996) and Kay (1997) lead to the conclusion that some ‘formulaic’ expressions in different languages may undergo similar evolution. Here, we argue that Spanish *si quieres* is a grammaticalized politeness marker in offers and suggestions.

Furthermore, despite the surface structure of *si quieres*, the use of this construction does not rest on the use of true conditionals (*if p then q*), but rather on felicity conditions of the performed illocutionary act, as mentioned by Levinson (1983). It will be demonstrated that the felicitous acts involving *si quieres* are not contingent upon truth conditions but rather upon principles of politeness.

Geis (1995:144) calls similar *if*-clauses (e.g., *I would like a hot chocolate if you don’t mind*) ‘politeness conditionals’, proposing that they are present ‘in order to redress the negative face-threat associated with the request’. Similarly, *si quieres* mitigates the impositive force of a speech act, by invoking Brown and Levinson’s (1987:172) strategy ‘Don’t coerce H’. In our view, the function of polite conditionals (a sub-type of metalinguistic conditionals) is mainly to reduce the unwelcome illocutionary force of utterances (cf. Sweetser 1990).

*Si quieres* should also be considered an interpersonal marker (see Maschler 1994), since it seems to establish metaphorically a relationship between the S and his/her interlocutor/s by referring to the presence of him/her/them. Thus the origin of this marker is clearly prompted by its canonical/referential meaning. In fact, Sweetser (1990:131–32) also notes that one of the factors which makes a speech act with a conditional-like protasis more polite is the conditional structure which produces a less assertive reading of the metalinguistic conditionals than their non-conditional counterparts.

With regard to *si quieres*, the nature of *querer*—a desiderative verb—seems to be crucial as well. However, *si quieres* used as a politeness marker appears to have lost some of its referential meaning in impositive contexts. This would seem to indicate grammaticalization of the construction as a discourse marker (Traugott 1995b, in press). Also, the encoded subjectification of *si quieres* is another proof of context-induced inferencing (ibid 1995b); the marker conveys S’s polite attitude towards H.
Turning to studies on Spanish, Polo (1971), Alcalá Alba (1979), and Prieto de los Mozos (1992) have already put forward some intuitions about conditionals in Spanish, but only Montolío (1992, 1993) gives them more detailed attention. In both studies carried out by Montolío (1992, 1993), one of the forms of ‘metadiscoursive’⁴ conditionals is a type of protasis which addresses politeness rules and/or principles (Lakoff 1973; Leech 1983, respectively), as in, *Si me permite, yo bajo en la próxima* ‘If you allow me, I will get off at the next (stop?)’, or *Si no te importa, acércame ese cenicero* ‘If you don’t mind, can you pass me that ashtray?’ (Montolío 1992:456).

Montolío does not elaborate on the grammatical nature of the *si*-constructions and the type of speech acts in which these ‘polite protases’ may be used. Based on examples presented by Montolío (1992:456; 1993:130–34), only *si*-clauses with a limited number of verbs (e.g., *permitir* ‘to allow’) and some lexical expressions (e.g., *si puedo interrumpir* ‘if I may interrupt’) may be employed in polite conditionals. Furthermore, in her account these expressions seem to be used only in indirect requests.

In contrast to Montolío, our analysis will demonstrate that *si quieres* is an interpersonal discourse marker which serves to mitigate impositive speech acts, such as offers and suggestions. In addition, patterns of the use of *si quieres* and contexts of its occurrence will be set up.

2. Polite uses of *si quieres*. Montolío (1993:135) notes that *si quieres* may serve an S to correct a term he/she has used previously in the utterance. This use, however, is not motivated by any politeness principle, but it is a strategy to maintain the S’s credibility.

The examples below will demonstrate another contextual meaning of *si quieres*, but here the usage of the marker specifically calls on the theory of politeness. Let us first consider a few utterances which recall Montolío’s (1993) indirect request with the verb *importar* ‘to matter’, as in: *Si no te importa, acércame ese diccionario* ‘If you don’t mind, can you pass that dictionary for me?’

(3)   Aw⁵ Coja, *si quiere*, una silla de mi compañera.
      ‘Take, *if you(P)*⁶ please, a chair from my colleague’

(4)   Am Siéntate un ratito. Déjalo aquí *si quieres*.
      ‘Sit down for a while. Leave it here *if you please*’

(5)   Aw Llévense los tres *si quieren*. Como pueden. Así lo miran y lo que les guste.
      ‘Take(P) all three *if you(P) please*. Since you(P) can. This way you see it and whatever you(P) like’

*Si quieres* as a grammaticalized politeness marker in Spanish
Examples (3)–(5) clearly indicate the purpose of the use of *si quieres* in these utterances. It is evident that the agents do not need to employ this marker, constituted by an apparent *si*-clause and the verb *querer* ‘to want’, in order to convey the propositional content. In fact, *si quieres* mitigates the force of commands, which become offers due to the use of this marker. Thus, the occurrence of the *si*-construction with the desiderative verb *querer* ‘to want’ may serve to encode the S’s polite attitude in offers, appealing to Lakoff’s (1973) rules ‘Don’t impose’ or ‘Give options’.

Although the position of *si quieres* in our examples varies from Montoliú’s (1992, 1993) indirect request (expressed by a command preceded by a *si*-clause), we may also note that the corresponding markers of politeness in Catalan (*si us plau*) and in French (*s’il vous plaît*) serve a similar purpose. However, we cannot directly claim that *si quieres* is used in comparable contexts. On the contrary, our analysis will show that *si quieres* occurs only in two kinds of speech acts: in offers, as in (3)–(5), and in suggestions, as in example (6). Note that in suggestions S suggests to do something and in offers S suggests to accept something from him/her (S).

(6) Am  O consúltaseló *si quieres*. Sobre todo que tendríamos que hacer la reserva sobre los que pidamos. Y luego nos contestan por si nos dan un día o dos días.

‘Or consult it if you please. Especially that we would have to make a reservation for those we request. And then they reply whether they give us one day or two.’

In (6), an agent employs *si quieres* following an imperative which may consequently be interpreted as a suggestion; also due to the subsequent explanations given by the S. It is worth mentioning that an analysis comparing the intonation or, in general, prosodic features of sentences such as *Siéntate* ‘Sit down’ and *Siéntate *si quieres* ‘Sit down if you please’ might show considerable differences. This is, however, beyond the scope of our study.

Offers and suggestions may also be expressed by declarative sentences, as illustrated by examples (7) and (8):

(7) Am  De todas formas, yo te doy esto *si quieres*.

‘Anyway, I’ll give you this if you please’

(8) Aw  Te echas un vistazo *si quieres*.

‘Have a look at it if you please’

In (7), the agent makes an offer to his client. The S strategically employs *si quieres*, explicitly giving him (the client) the option not to accept what he (the agent) offers. According to Brown and Levinson (1987:173), this kind of strategy (*Be pessimistic*) serves Ss to redress ‘negative face’ in requests and/or offers. In (8), a suggestion, the
use of si quieres appears to be similar to (7). Other examples of offers are presented in (9) through (11):

(9) Am Entonces, o bien, si quieres, nos quedamos con este hotel para la primera de julio y si no… no sé. Intentar lo que tú me digas. ‘So, either, if you please, we hold on to this hotel for the first (week) of July and if not… I don’t know. I’ll try whatever you tell me’

(10) Aw …Ese sería uno. Luego, si quieres, uno un poco más al mar. ‘…That would be one. Then, if you please, one a little more toward the sea’.

(11) Aw Te cuesta aproximadamente unas 51. [ ] Luego, hombre, ya depende ¿me entiendes? Y luego tienes, bueno, si quieres un poco más de cuatro. ‘It costs you approximately 51. [ ] Then, well, it depends, you know. And then you have, well, if you please, a little more than four’.

In (9)–(11), the medial position of si quieres and the surrounding context indicate an existing problem which requires mitigation from the agents in order to satisfy their clients’ wants. In (11), the occurrence of ¿me entiendes? (cf. Chodorowska 1997) constitutes another signal of a problematic situation for the S. Similarly to ¿me entiendes?, si quieres in (9) to (11) functions as a mitigating marker which conveys S’s search for his/her interlocutor’s cooperation. The S metaphorically steps out from the proposition (an offer) and metacommunicates his polite attitude towards the H, invoking Lakoff’s rule ‘Don’t impose’.

The same marker occurs in suggestions, as in (12):

(12) Aw Mire. Para ir, si quiere, podría ir a las 9:50 pero en clase club. Es decir sería [ ] pesetas más. Y para volver, si quiere volver en clase turista tenía que ser el día 29, o sea la noche del 28 al 29 a las 5:40 o a las 7:45 de la mañana. ‘Look(P). To go, if you(P) please, you could go at 9:50, but in the club class. It means it would be [ ] pesetas more. And to return, if you want to return in the tourist class it needs to be the 29th, that is the night from the 28th to the 29th at 5:40 or at 7:45 A.M.’

In (12), an agent suggests a possible flight to her client. The offered flight turns out to be more expensive than the one desired. The suggestion is attenuated by the marker si quiere, which is the non-canonical use of this construction. The difference
between the canonical and non-canonical use of this construction is syntactic. The canonical use of the construction is followed by an infinitive (si quiere + V_{inf}), whereas the non-canonical is not. Interestingly, in the second part, the agent uses the si-construction in the canonical manner (si quiere volver), referring to the client’s wish regarding the returning flight.

In summary, si quieres may be used as a conventionalized strategy to encode S’s polite attitude in offers and suggestions. It is also an example of a discourse marker which metaphorically relates the S with the H in situations of mitigation.

3. Patterns of the usage of si quieres. Examples (1)—(12) reveal two clear patterns of the use of si quieres in offers and suggestions. Before we define them, let us consider the contexts of the occurrence of the marker (M). We may represent them in the following manner (1)'—(12)'

(1)' offer (of)→M
(2)' suggestion (sg)→M→continuation (sg)
(3)' imperative statement (is)→M→continuation (is)
(4)' two imperative statements (is) + (is)→M
(5)' imperative statement (is)→M→explanation (E)
(6)' imperative statement (is)→M→explanation (E)
(7)' offer (of)→M
(8)' suggestion (sg)→M
(9)' offer (of)→M→continuation (of)
(10)' tentative offer (of)→M→continuation (of)
(11)' explanation (E) + offer (of)→M→continuation (of)
(12)' suggestion (sg)→M→continuation (sg) + explanation (E)

Thus, si quieres, as a politeness marker, is only seen to occur in two patterns:

(i) ______→(M) (final)
(ii) ______→(M)→_______ (medial)

In the first pattern, (i), si quieres in (1, 4, 7, 8) occurs at the end of the utterance. S may employ it after an imperative statement (4), offers (1, 7), and a suggestion (8). Comparing the imposition of these utterances to the remaining ones, it is clear that the illocutionary force of the sentence-final type is weaker.

In the second pattern, (ii), represented by (2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12), si quieres occurs in the middle of utterances, sometimes even interrupting their flow (2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12), in order to convey the S’s attitude. Here, the marker, on the one hand, is preceded by imperative statements (3, 5, 6), offers (9, 10, 11) or a suggestion (2, 12), and on the other hand, is followed either by the interrupted speech act (3, 9, 10, 11, 12) or by an explanation (5, 6). As mentioned above, the illocutionary force of these
utterances appears to be greater, as they help S to maintain a deferential attitude towards H and mitigate problematic situations.

In general, *si quieres* can be found in the function of interpersonal DM of mitigation in contexts of imperative statements (IS), suggestions (SG), and offers (OF).

4. Grammaticalization of politeness through *si quieres*. As mentioned before, the non-canonical use of *si quieres* in Spanish seems to lead to the process of grammaticalization of politeness in specific speech acts. In support of Traugott’s (1995b, in press) accounts, we would like to suggest grammaticalization of the deverbal construction studied into interpersonal discourse marker of S’s polite attitude towards H.

One argument in favour of grammaticalization may be the encoding of S’s subjective attitude and thus an increase in pragmatic function (see Traugott 1995a). If we compare the use of this construction in its canonical and non-canonical (politeness) meaning, we can clearly note partial loss of the referential meaning of *si quieres* in place of the expression of S attitude in utterances whose force is attenuated.

The origin of the linguistic encoding of interpersonal distance through discourse markers rests on a context-induced process (metonymy) which, from the synchronic point of view, may seem to be a metaphor (Schwenter & Traugott 1995 and Traugott 1997). Also, Bybee et al. (1994:296) observe that ‘metaphor is only possible in the very early stages’ of grammaticalization. Although they do not consider metonymy to be a more appropriate manner of explaining change or extension in language, they argue that context is the most important factor among the mechanisms of change (op. cit. 297).

As is shown in this paper, the implicature of politeness, conveyed by *si quieres* may only arise in specific impositive contexts. Thus it is the metonymy which seems to have given rise to the process of grammaticalization of this construction as a marker of politeness.

5. Conclusion. In Section 2, we have shown, using examples taken from natural conversations, that *si quieres* can be used as a marker of mitigation of the assertive force of utterances. This marker invokes various politeness principles (Lakoff 1973; Brown & Levinson 1978; Leech 1983). It is a discourse marker, since it coordinates the ‘ongoing talk’ while metacommunicating S’s feelings and attitudes. Its function can only be determined pragmatically in a given context in relation to the participants.

Bearing in mind these considerations, we have established two patterns of the use of *si quieres*: 1) sentence-final, and 2) sentence-medial. There were no examples of sentence-initial use of the marker. These patterns confirm that utterances which require ‘softening’ cannot be mitigated prior to production. A further argument for the non-occurrence of this marker in initial position may be that there is a partial
retention of the meaning of their ‘source constructions’. Thus, the marker may not be used as a discourse marker to encode politeness in the sentence-initial position, because its use could overlap with the referential meaning.

Overall, *si quieres* may be grammaticalized as a discourse marker to encode politeness only in the medial and final position.

The increasing number of studies of discourse markers points to the variety of different functions which these pragmatic expressions may serve in discourse. This paper has only considered one function *si quieres* may serve in conversations. Future accounts should study other possible functions of this construction.

The main contribution of this paper lies in the description of the deverbal construction *si quieres* which can be used as a polite marker in offers and suggestions. It also shows that, Ss in search of the expression of their attitude towards Hs, may conventionalize new linguistic devices.

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1 I received many valuable comments on previous versions of this paper from Bernard Comrie and Carmen Silva-Corvalán.

2 According to Fraser (1980), ‘conversational mitigation’ entails politeness.

3 The endings of *querer* depend on the interlocutor/s to whom the S refers. *Si quieres* or *si queréis* addresses an H or Hs informally. *Si quiere* or *si quieren* addresses an H or Hs formally. While discussing the expression in general terms, we will refer to it as *si quieres*.

4 Another term for speech-act conditionals (Van der Auwera 1986) or ‘metalinguistic’ conditionals (Dancygier 1990; Sweetser 1990), coined by Roulet et al. (1985).

5 The following abbreviations are used in the data: A- agent, w- woman, m- man, and [ ]-irrelevant for the analysis.

6 ‘You(P)’ marks more polite forms of addressing an H or Hs.

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