

# The connective *doncs* in dialogue and the QUD

Elena Castroviejo and Laia Mayol

CSIC and Universitat Pompeu Fabra

**Abstract.** This paper addresses the use in dialogue of the Catalan discourse connective *doncs* (and Spanish *pues*). We propose that *doncs* has two different uses (it introduces a reply or it participates in the rhetoric relations of consequence/solutionhood), but we also show that they share a core property, namely the acknowledgment of a previous assertion that does not resolve the current Question Under Discussion.

**Keywords:** Discourse connective, Question Under Discussion, reply, consequence, solutionhood

## 1 Introduction

This paper addresses the use in dialogue of the Catalan discourse connective *doncs* (and Spanish *pues*), which has evolved from being a temporal connective meaning “then” (*tunc* in Latin) into being a more elusive discourse connective. *Doncs* does not have a uniform semantic and pragmatic import. Here we focus on the *doncs* that occurs sentence initially in dialogue and attempt a formalization of the descriptive literature on the topic. We propose that *doncs* has two different uses (it introduces a reply or it participates in the rhetoric relations of consequence/solutionhood), but we also show that they share a core property, namely the acknowledgment of a previous assertion that does not resolve the current Question Under Discussion (QUD, henceforth).

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 contains a brief review of the descriptive literature on *doncs* and Spanish *pues*, and presents the data we aim to account for. In section 3 we present our analysis and show how it explains the different uses of *doncs*. Finally, section 4 concludes.

## 2 Previous literature and data

Although there is virtually no work on the formal semantics of *doncs*, there is considerable literature on Catalan *doncs* and Spanish *pues* from the discourse analysis perspective. For example, [3] and [4] offer interesting descriptions of Spanish *pues*. According to these authors, *pues* has a causal use (absent in Catalan), a consecutive use, an adversative use, and a continuative use, which merely links the current utterance with the previous utterance, as will be illustrated below.

[1] presents a corpus study of pragmatic markers in oral narratives. According to her data, *doncs* can convey a plethora of meanings and is most commonly used

as a concluding device, to gain time for the speaker to think, as a device to initiate a narrative segment, and as a resumptive device, to regain an argumentative thread.

The discourse connective *doncs* has a complex syntactic distribution. In this paper, we will focus on its use in dialogue in the initial position of an utterance. As acknowledged by previous studies and as is often the case with discourse discourse connectives, *doncs* has several meanings. (1) illustrates the most delexicalized use of *doncs*. The speaker uses it as a filler word while she is thinking what to say (cf. [1]).

- (1) A: Who is coming to the party?  
 B: Doncs... la Maria.  
 'DONCS... Maria.'

We will not be concerned with this *doncs* (and Spanish *pues*), but rather with the two unstressed uses illustrated in (2)–(3).<sup>1</sup>

- (2) A: I did not like 'The King's Speech'.  
 B1: Doncs a mi sí. / B2: Doncs a mi tampoc.  
 'DONCS I did.' / 'DONCS neither did I.'

(2) illustrates the use of *doncs/pues* as a discourse connective that introduces an assertion that consists in the interlocutor's reply to a previous statement.

- (3) A: No he estudiat gens aquest estiu.  
 'I haven't studied at all during the summer.'  
 B: Doncs suspendràs.  
 'DONCS you'll fail.'

Examples like (3) are slightly different. They usually introduce a sentence in the future tense and/or in the imperative mood. The sentences introduced by *doncs* and *pues* can be considered to describe a consequence of the content of the previous assertion (as in (3)) or else a solution, as in (4).

- (4) A: I did not like 'The King's Speech'.  
 B: Doncs no tornis a anar a veure una pel·li d'en Tom Hooper.  
 'DONCS don't go watch another movie by Tom Hooper.'

---

<sup>1</sup> There is a stressed use of *doncs* and *pues* in monologue which belongs to formal speech and which roughly parallels French *donc* in cases such as (i-a) and (i-b) (from [3, p.60]) and (i-c) (see [3] for a discussion).

- (i) a. Si le parece oportuno, pues, háganoslo llegar. Spanish  
 b. S'il vous semble donc opportun, faites-le nous parvenir. French  
 c. Si li sembla oportú, faci'ns-ho, doncs, arribar. Catalan  
 '(lit.) If you think this is appropriate, send it DONCS/PUES/DONC to us.'

Our goal is to analyze the two uses of *doncs* depicted above, and also to explain why it is unacceptable out of the blue and why it cannot introduce just any rhetorical relation ((5)).

- (5) A: You are late.  
 B: #Doncs el tren ha passat tard.  
 ‘DONCS the train is delayed.’

### 3 Analysis

We claim that despite the apparent diversity of uses, the examples in (2)-(4) can be accounted for by appealing to the notion of *implicit QUD* ([6]). Our proposal is that the core discourse function of *doncs* is the following:

- (6) *Doncs*’s contribution in dialogue: (i) it acknowledges that the preceding QUD has not been resolved and (ii) it indicates that the content of the sentence it introduces is not opening a new QUD.

Since it indicates that the preceding QUD has not been resolved, it is impossible to use it out of the blue. However, *doncs* is subject to further constraints (cf. the unacceptable discourse in (5)) and it can appear in two different flavours which we develop separately, namely it can instantiate a reply, or it can introduce a consequence or solution.

#### 3.1 Replies

In order to account for examples such as (2), we propose that the following property needs to be added to the core discourse function of *doncs*:

- (7) *Doncs*’s contribution in a reply: (iii) the utterance it introduces contains a proposition which contrasts with the content of the previous move or with its inferences.

The first reply in example (2) is the canonical use of this type of *doncs*, by which the speaker disagrees with his interlocutor. In B1, *doncs* indicates that the preceding QUD (‘Is ‘The King’s Speech’ a good movie?’) has not been resolved and the utterance it introduces contrasts with the utterance of the previous move. However, note that the speaker can also use *doncs* to agree with his interlocutor, such as in B2 in (2). This reply, though, is only acceptable if B assumes that A thinks that most people liked this movie, while he is the exception. Therefore, B’s utterance contrasts with the expectation he assumes A to have.

This proposal explains why the reply B1 in (8) is not acceptable, as noted by [4]. The utterance is not in contrast with the assertion of the previous move. However, it should be noted that as soon as the additive particle *también* (‘also’) is added, the reply in B2 is acceptable as long as the speaker B is assuming that A thinks that most people, unlike him, do not like the Olympics.

- (8) From [4, p.130]  
 A: ¡Qué bien, empiezan los juegos olímpicos!  
 ‘It’s so good the Olympics are starting!’  
 B1: ?Pues a mí me gustan.  
 ‘PUES I like them’  
 B2: Pues a mí también me gustan.  
 ‘PUES I also like them’

Finally consider (9). The assertion in B is only acceptable if the discourse connective is present. The use of *pues* in B makes it explicit that the previous QUD is not closed and that the content of the proposition it introduces is related to the previous QUD. Otherwise, B’s assertion could be viewed as answering a brand new QUD, and there would be no hint as to which QUD that could be. As it is, B is contrasting with some inference the speaker has derived from A’s assertion, such as ‘Owning dogs is a good thing’.

- (9) From [4, p.130]  
 A: Tengo un perro.  
 ‘I own a dog.’  
 B: ?(Pues) la rabia es una enfermedad terrible.  
 ‘PUES rabies is a terrible disease’

To sum up, the use of *doncs* in a reply conveys that the speaker does not consider that the previous QUD is closed and he wants to convey a proposition that contrasts with the proposition (or its inferences) of the previous move. In other words, when a proposition  $p$  is asserted,  $?p$  is added as the QUD, which allows the addressee to accept or reject it. By means of *doncs*, the addressee makes it clear that he is not accepting  $p$  and that the QUD is still open for discussion.

### 3.2 Consequence and Solutionhood

This use of *doncs*, the previous utterance is taken by the speaker as the antecedent of a conditional ( $p$ ) and the sentence uttered behaves as its consequent ( $q$ ). Depending on the interpretation of the antecedent, the consequent is viewed as a consequence (i.e., it is a reply to the implicit QUD “What is going to happen?”) or as a solution (i.e., it is a reply to the implicit QUD “How can this situation be solved?”).

We assume that in (3), B’s answer is short for (10).

- (10) Doncs si no has estudiat gens aquest estiu, suspendràs.  
 ‘DONCS If you haven’t studied at all during the summer, you’ll fail.’

That is, the presence of *doncs* has a number of implications: it forces the acknowledgment of the previous utterance and it presupposes an implicit QUD that the speaker is addressing with his utterance. On top of it, it requires that we consider a hypothetical sub-common ground where the content of the previous

utterance is true, and that we interpret B's utterance with respect to this common ground ([5]). Hence, failing is evaluated against those hypothetically worlds where A hasn't studied at all during the summer. *Doncs* typically appears in conditionals that occur in causal contexts, where the (*q*) is in the future tense or includes modality, so the uttered sentence is interpreted as a consequence.

Now, compare (3) with (11), identical except for the presence of *doncs*.

- (11) A: I haven't studied at all during the summer.  
 B: Suspendràs.  
 'You'll fail.'

This dialogue has a different flavor because there is no overt instruction to take the previous assertion as an *if*-clause and to generate a hypothetical common ground. Instead, *You'll fail* is evaluated against the actual context set. In other words, the reading where B's utterance is not subordinated into an implicit conditional is available.

Moving on to (4), we propose the underlying structure of B's utterance to be different, namely (12).

- (12) Si no et va agradar 'El discurs del rei', doncs no tornis a anar a veure una pel·li d'en Tom Hooper.  
 'If you didn't like 'The King's Speech', DONCS don't go watch another movie by Tom Hooper.'

Here, *doncs* occurs after the *if*-clause and introduces *q*. In this underlying structure, once the hypothetical common ground in which A didn't like the movie is considered, B analyzes this hypothetical situation as problematic. The presence of *doncs* indicates that B is generating an implicit QUD of the shape "How can this situation be solved?", which is addressed by *q*.

Our main claim is that this *doncs* participates in the rhetorical relation called "solutionhood" [2], illustrated in (13).

- (13) A: I'm hungry.  
 B1: Let's go to the Fuji Gardens.  
 B2: DONCS anem als Fuji Gardens.

According to [6], in the previous discourse such a reading is attained because B's answer is interpreted as answering an implicit QUD. That is, B interprets A's speech act as a strategy for pursuing a goal in discourse, and this gives rise to an implicit QUD that B addresses. By using *doncs*, speaker B indicates that he is treating the last move as triggering an implicit QUD ("What can we do if you are hungry?") which needs to be answered, and that he is offering a solution by means of his utterance.

More formally, conditional clauses of the sort  $p \rightarrow \textit{doncs} q$  include the presupposition that *q* is the highest ranked of a set of alternatives *A* evoked by the speaker such that for any  $\alpha \in A$ ,  $\alpha$  is a possible answer to the implicit QUD that the speaker is addressing with her utterance. Consider (14).

- (14) a. Assertion: in all worlds where  $p$  is true,  $q$  is also true.<sup>2</sup>  
 b. Presupposition: the speaker evokes a non-empty set  $A_{\langle st,t \rangle}$  :  
 $\forall \alpha[\alpha \in A \rightarrow \alpha \in \text{QUD} \ \& \ \text{given an ordering source } g \text{ relativized to the speaker, } p\text{-worlds } \prec_g \alpha\text{-worlds}]$

Plainly,  $q$  is treated by the speaker as the best possible answer to the implicit QUD that she can come up with at the moment of utterance.

Note that the choice of underlying structure is not trivial. The position of *doncs* immediately preceding  $q$  is a sufficient and necessary condition for solutionhood to arise. Thus, if instead of (10), (3) were interpreted as (15), we would need to conceive B as someone who does not care about A failing rather than as someone concerned about the consequences of A's actions. That is, failing would be viewed as the best outcome given the circumstances.

- (15) Si no has estudiat en tot l'estiu, doncs suspendràs.  
 'If you haven't studied during the summer, DONCS you'll fail.'

Let us now compare (16) and (17). Depending on B's goals, *pues* is used to introduce an assertion that instantiates different rhetorical relations. In (16), B disagrees with the truth of A's claim that A had a headache, since A had taken an aspirin. However, in (17) B takes the headache to be a problematic situation, and the use of *pues* evokes a set of alternatives whose best candidate is taking an aspirin.

- |      |   |      |   |
|------|---|------|---|
| (16) | Modified from [4, p.125]  | (17) | From [4, p.125]   |
|      | A: Me duele la cabeza.<br>'I have a headache.'                  |      | A: Me duele la cabeza.<br>'I have a headache.'          |
|      | B: Pues te tomaste una aspirina.<br>'PUES you took an aspirin.' |      | B: Pues tómate una aspirina.<br>'PUES take an aspirin.' |

To conclude, recall from (5) that *doncs* cannot introduce the cause of a previous assertion. This follows from our proposal, since cause does not contrast with a previous proposition, and it cannot be viewed as the consequent of an underlying conditional.

## 4 Conclusion

We have examined the Catalan discourse connective *doncs* that occurs utterance-initially. We have considered two uses of *doncs*: one as introducer of a reply, and one that retrieves an *if*-clause and introduces either a consequence or a solution. Solutionhood has been modeled as the presupposition of a set of alternative propositions to the actual utterance which rank lower given an ordering source.

<sup>2</sup> While in the expression of consequence the consequent tends to be in the future tense, in the expression of solutionhood  $q$  tends to be in the imperative mood or else include deontic modality with universal force. This is not a coincidence, since the QUD that is being addressed refers to a problem that needs solving.

## References

1. González, M.: 2004, *Pragmatic markers in oral narrative: The case of English and Catalan*, Vol. 122, John Benjamins Publishing Company.
2. Mann, W. and Thompson, S.: 1986, Relational propositions in discourse, *Discourse processes* 9, 57–90.
3. Miche, E.: 1994, Description sémantico-pragmatique de la marque espagnole *pues*, *Cahiers de linguistique française* (15), 51–76.
4. Portolés, J.: 1989, El conector argumentativo *pues*, *Dicenda* (8), 117–134.
5. Roberts, C.: 1989, Modal subordination and pronominal anaphora in discourse, *Linguistics & Philosophy* (12), 683–721.
6. Roberts, C.: 1996, Information structure in discourse: towards an integrated formal theory of pragmatics, in J. H. Yoon and A. Kathol (eds), *Ohio State University Working Papers of Linguistics*, Vol. 49.