

Hyperbolic markers in modeling hyperbole: a scenario-based account

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Abstract. This article discusses hyperbolic markers in modeling hyperbole from the perspective of a scenario-based account of language use within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics. In this view, hyperbole is seen as a mapping across two conceptual domains (Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017), a source domain, here relabeled as the *magnified scenario*, which contains a hypothetical unrealistic situation based on exaggeration, and a target domain or *observable scenario* which depicts the real situation addressed by the hyperbolic expression. Since the hypothetical scenario is a magnified version of the observable scenario, the mapping contains source-target matches in varying degrees of resemblance. Within this theoretical context, the article explores resources available to speakers for the construction of magnified scenarios leading to a hyperbolic interpretation. Among such resources, we find *hyperbole markers* and the setting up of domains of reference. Finally, the article also discusses *hyperbole blockers*, which cancel out the activity of the other hyperbolic meaning construction mechanisms.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics; magnified scenario; observable scenario; markers.

[es] Escenarios hiperbólicos en la modelación de la hipérbole: una explicación basada en escenarios.

Resumen. Esta propuesta analiza diferentes marcadores que tienen lugar en la modelación hiperbólica desde el punto de vista de una explicación basada en escenarios dentro del marco de la Lingüística Cognitiva. Según esta perspectiva, la hipérbole se considera un sistema de correspondencias entre dos dominios conceptuales (Peña y Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017), un dominio fuente, o *escenario magnificado*, que contiene una situación hipotética irreal basada en la exageración, y un dominio meta, o *escenario observable*, que representa la situación real de esa expresión hiperbólica. Puesto que el escenario hipotético es una versión exagerada del escenario observable, el sistema de correspondencias muestra dichas correspondencias entre los dominios fuente y meta en diversos grados de semejanza. Haciendo uso de este marco teórico, esta propuesta explora los recursos disponibles que tienen los hablantes para la construcción de escenarios magnificados que conducen a una interpretación hiperbólica. Entre esos recursos encontramos los *marcadores hiperbólicos* y el establecimiento de dominios de referencia. Finalmente, el artículo también analiza algunos *bloqueadores hiperbólicos*, que anulan la actividad de los otros mecanismos de construcción de significado hiperbólico.

Palabras clave: Lingüística Cognitiva; escenario magnificado; escenario observable; marcadores.

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1. Introduction

Within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, this article offers an analysis of the linguistic mechanisms employed by speakers in conveying hyperbolic meaning. The treatment of hyperbole within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics has been insufficient if compared to other figures of thought such as metaphor or metonymy (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2005; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2011; Bierwiazzonek, 2013). Hyperbole has received some attention in psycholinguistics (Colston & O'Brien, 2000), discourse analysis (McCarthy & Carter, 2004), literary studies (Johnson, 2010), and pragmatics (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Norrick, 2004). Respectively, these disciplines pay attention to processing, conversation structure, rhetorical impact, and language use. They necessarily miss, since it is not within their purview, the connection between all these aspects and such issues as conceptualization and construal. A

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scenario-based account can add this perspective thus contributing to a better understanding of the meaning potential of hyperbolic utterances based on cognitive phenomena.

Within this approach, hyperbole, just like metaphor, can be accounted for in terms of a cross-domain conceptual mapping. An initial and still programmatic proposal was made in this connection in Ruiz de Mendoza (2014), where the emphasis is on understanding the reasoning process in the attitudinal component of hyperbole. According to Ruiz de Mendoza (2014: 194), the impact of the speaker's complaint in the sentence *This suitcase weighs a ton* is a matter of mapping a virtually impossible scenario depicting a one-ton suitcase onto the real scenario where we have a very heavy suitcase that is difficult to handle. The speaker's frustration in the real situation, which is the attitudinal component, is seen as coming close to the degree of frustration that someone would have if hypothetically trying to lift and carry a one-ton suitcase.

The data collected for this article show that hyperbole is indeed highly situational, as taken for granted in the scenario-based account. It should be observed that the notion of scenario has proved analytically adequate in other domains of linguistic enquiry, such as illocution (Panther & Thornburg, 1998), implicational structure (Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera, 2014), and irony (Ruiz de Mendoza & Lozano, 2019). The present account thus adopts the initial proposal in Ruiz de Mendoza (2014) but offers a different focus that goes beyond the understanding of the attitudinal ingredient. Peña and Ruiz de Mendoza (2017) have discussed hyperbole as a cross-domain conceptual mapping, with some emphasis on the relationship between its cognitive and its communicative aspects. Their account distinguishes between inference-based and constructional hyperbole. This second type of hyperbole is triggered by specific linguistic expressions, here called hyperbolic markers. However, in our account we contemplate the existence not only of pointers to a likely hyperbolic reading of an utterance or to devices that reinforce the impact of hyperbole, but also of mechanisms that can mitigate or even cancel out the potential hyperbolic reading of an utterance. In this connection, the present paper offers a detailed analysis of a hyperbole marker, *of all time*, and a preliminary account of some *hyperbole mitigators* and *blockers* (e.g. *may be*, *might be*). The more refined account arising from the present work thus pays attention to linguistic cues for the construction of the scenarios playing a role in the production and recognition of hyperbolic meaning. It also introduces a higher degree of elaboration into the nature of the scenarios.

In the context of these initial considerations, the present paper is organized as follows. Section 2 defines hyperbole taking into account the notion of *scenario*. Section 3 is concerned with the methodology used as well as with the nature and characteristics of the corpus. Section 4 presents the scenario-based account of hyperbole, while Section 5 discusses how to build magnified scenarios. Section 6 is devoted to the analysis and discussion of the data. In Section 7 different mitigating and blocking mechanisms are presented. Finally, Section 8 summarizes the main findings and sketches some lines for future research.

2. Defining hyperbole

One of the most extensive treatments of hyperbole is provided in Claridge (2011). It contains a wealth of data and insights into them. However, the overall picture of hyperbole that results from this study would highly benefit from taking conceptualization and construal issues into account. For example, Claridge classifies hyperbolic forms into seven different categories: single-word, phrasal, clausal, numerical hyperbole, superlative-based, comparison-based and repetition-based (Claridge, 2011: 44–66). The problem is that, as observed in Peña and Ruiz de Mendoza (2017: 53–54), this classification only considers formal aspects, which results in a crisscrossing of categories. Numerical hyperbole, for example, could also be regarded as a case of single-word hyperbole. Following Claridge's classification (2011), the expression *millions of times* could be treated as both phrasal and numerical hyperbole. Evidently, this classification is to be complemented with a conceptual one that contrasts the meaning impact of *millions of times* with *dozens/hundreds/thousands of times* and also with others like *countless times* or *an infinity of times*.

In connection with absolute and/or extreme hyperbolic expressions, Pomerantz (1986) and Norrick (2004) use the term *Extreme Case Formulation* (ECF) to make reference to a sub-category of hyperbole. ECFs are “built around extreme expressions such as *every*, *all*, *none*, *best*, *least*, *as good as it gets*, *always*, *perfectly*, *brand new*, and *absolutely* [...]” (Norrick, 2004: 1728). However, the notion of ECF as a type of hyperbole is somewhat unclear since what may be viewed as an extreme case by some speakers may not be so for others. This is evidenced by the fact that even theoretically absolute expressions can have values relative to given domains of reference. For example, the ECF value of *best* has to be reinforced by phrases denoting a domain of reference like *in the world/universe*, *of all times*, *ever*. In view of this, it is probably safer not to distinguish ECFs from hyperbole and simply acknowledge the existence of degrees of magnification of hyperbolic meaning through the use of an array of linguistic devices that can work in cooperation. Thus, in a default interpretation, *Jimmy is the best* could be ambiguous between a hyperbolic and a non-hyperbolic reading. If we include a domain of reference like *Jimmy is the best in his class/in town*, the hyperbolic interpretation is clearly disfavored. By contrast, in *Jimmy is the best boy in the world/the universe/ever*, etc., we have a straightforward hyperbolic interpretation. A non-hyperbolic reading would require a very unusual context.

The problems identified above can be best addressed from a conceptual perspective where linguistic cues prompt for the activation of the relevant scenarios. In this view, hyperbole consists in the mapping of conceptual structure from a hypothetical *magnified scenario* to a non-hypothetical *observable scenario* based on what the speaker as-

sumes is knowledge that can be potentially manifest to the hearer. The mapping contains matches in different degrees of likelihood, since the hypothetical scenario is a magnified version of the observable scenario. To further assess the value of this view, let us take an example that makes use of an ECF whose hyperbolic value is independent of the existence of a domain of reference. Imagine a couple, Peter and Sally. Peter is driving and Sally, who feels tired after a long drive in the car, complains: *This is an endless road*. Sally's utterance constitutes a hyperbolic statement, as the road cannot be literally endless but is simply too long. The source domain consists of an imaginary scenario in which the speaker (Sally) envisages the road as endless. This imaginary scenario maps onto a real-world situation in which the road is too long according to Sally's subjective perception. Moreover, Sally's hypothetical emotional reaction to the imaginary situation maps onto Sally's emotional reaction in the real-world scenario; she is upset and frustrated because she wants to arrive at their destination as soon as possible. Evidently, the expression *endless* becomes hyperbolic when assessed against the context of situation (a road cannot be endless), which means that no further linguistic prompts are necessary. The scenario-based approach can accommodate well the three analytical situations that we have seen so far: one in which the hyperbolic expression is not extreme, another in which the expression is an extreme formulation working in cooperation with a domain of reference, and a third one in which the extreme formulation is self-standing as such to produce hyperbolic meaning. Therefore, we can distinguish between two types of Extreme Case Formulation. The first type comprises those cases that include a superlative and that need an explicit domain of reference. In the second type a domain of reference is not necessary, as the expression is fully absolute.

3. Research methodology

Burgers et al. (2016) have proposed the Hyperbole Identification Procedure (HIP), drawing from the Metaphor Identification Procedure, MIP, established by the Pragglejaz Group (2007) and the Verbal Irony Procedure, VIP (Burgers et al., 2011). However, this procedure has been conceived to identify hyperbole at the single word level (2016: 167), and many cases of hyperbole are predicational. For example, the central hyperbolic meaning of *This road is endless* is also conveyed by *Is this road never ever going to end?*, *There is no end to this road*, *This road is never ending*, *This is a never ending road*, and the like. Also, in a default interpretation, *He's the best student in town* makes a non-hyperbolic use of *best*, but the same superlative adjective becomes more clearly hyperbolic in *He's the best student in the whole darn world!* Evidently, some potential hyperbole-signaling devices such as superlative adjectives and adverbs are only so when interpreted within a domain of reference against which they acquire full hyperbolic meaning. So, because of the nature of the present study, the analyst's intuition has been necessary to make the selection of examples.

Thus, the corpus used for the present article consists of 200 examples of hyperbole retrieved from Google searches, the *Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)*, and the author's personal annotation of everyday language use over time. Google and *COCA* have been selected on account of the vast amount of examples they can offer from sources of a varied nature, such as advertisements, newspaper headlines, novels or transcripts of TV series.

All the examples contain the hyperbole marker *of all time*, which, in cooperation with a superlative (or functionally equivalent) expression, seems to be a strong hyperbole pointer. Even though there are other hyperbole markers of a similar kind (e.g. *of my entire life*, *in the universe*, *in the whole world*), *of all time* is attested more frequently (2,532 occurrences in *COCA* versus 47 for *of my entire life*, 2,258 for *in the universe*, and 389 for *in the whole world*) and it has not been widely examined by scholars in connection to hyperbole. However, as we will see in Section 4, not all utterances containing this phrase are automatically hyperbolic. In fact, our corpus includes occurrences where the use of this phrase in combination with the superlative does not involve a hyperbolic interpretation, but they have not been our focus of attention.

One important aspect of the analysis of our data is to determine the domain of reference of each utterance. By domain of reference we understand the conceptual domain against which the potential hyperbole-signaling device is to be interpreted. The role of a domain of reference is best understood in relation to Langacker's (1987; 1999) well-known distinction between profile and base. Any concept can be profiled against more than one base domain. For example, the notion of ring is profiled against the domain of finger, but also against the domains of size, shape, material, etc. A domain of reference is the base domain selected from the matrix of base domains associated with a concept which, in a default interpretation, more closely cooperates with the potential production of hyperbolic meaning. A domain of reference can be either implicit (you have to deduce it from context) or explicit (it is directly supplied by the utterance). Take the utterance *8 best flares that will flatter all body shapes*. In this case, there are two hyperboles at work. In the first one, *8 best flares*, the domain of reference is implicit; it has to be deduced from the context that the 8 flares mentioned in the sentence are the 8 best flares that exist anywhere, but it could have been the 8 best flares that one can find in a particular shop or those of a specific brand; whereas in the second one, *all body shapes*, the domain of reference is explicit, *all*. The delineation of the domain of reference is crucial. If we change it, we can create or cancel out the hyperbole. *My mother controls everything* is hyperbolic, as it is impossible that a single person controls all possible things; however, changing the domain of reference can result in the sentence having a non-hyperbolic interpretation; e.g., *My mother controls where all the kitchenware is*. In this case, *all* is no longer a hyperbole marker because the domain of reference, which is explicit, cancels out the possibility of a hyperbolic interpretation.

We have retrieved all the cases manually, and we have taken several methodological steps. First of all, we have constructed a corpus of examples that contain the hyperbole marker *of all time*. After that, we have studied if each of those cases was hyperbolic or not. During this classification process, we discovered that there are other markers that, instead of pointing to a hyperbolic reading, dilute or cancel out a hyperbolic interpretation. We will provide examples of all those cases in Section 7.

4. A scenario-based account of hyperbole

Cognitive operations, according to Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2014), are mental mechanisms used to build up semantic representations that can be adjusted to contextual requirements. Hyperbole can be analyzed in terms of the cognitive operations of strengthening and mitigation. Strengthening and mitigation are converse content cognitive operations. As pointed out by Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2014: 94), they make use of scalar concepts such as distance or height. These two cognitive operations respectively upscale or downscale concepts. In hyperbole, the speaker upscales a scalar concept, while the hearer, upon interpretation, downscales the same concept to bring it into line with contextual requirements. By way of illustration, take the hyperbolic expression *I told you a million times not to do that*. The use of ‘a million times’ is the result of the speaker upscaling frequency. The hearer, in turn, is expected to adjust frequency to the appropriate proportions in order to grasp the speaker’s intended meaning. For this expression, the idea is that the speaker has told the hearer many times not to do something, but not literally a million times. However, this explanation only gives us a partial picture of the phenomenon.

Ruiz de Mendoza (2014) and Peña and Ruiz de Mendoza (2017) give us a still more developed proposal where hyperbole can be analyzed in terms of a cross-domain mapping, in a way that is similar to that proposed for metaphor in Conceptual Metaphor Theory within Cognitive Linguistics (Lakoff, 1987; 1993). A conceptual mapping is defined as a set of correspondences across two conceptual domains. The structure and logic of one of these two domains, called the *source*, is used to reason about the other domain, called the *target*. In the metaphor *Her teeth are pearls*, the pearls, which constitute the source domain, are used to reason about the target domain, in this case, the teeth. The whiteness of the pearls is seen in terms of the whiteness of the teeth. To illustrate how this proposal works for hyperbole, let us take again the sentence *This is an endless road*. As previously noted, this sentence, uttered after many hours of driving, suggests that the speaker is frustrated by the unexpected length of the journey. Descriptively a road cannot be endless, but, interpretively, thinking of it as if it were endless somehow conveys the intensity of the speaker’s frustration. This meaning effect is absent in a descriptive correlate like *This road is too long* (see Figure 1 below). The attitudinal component of hyperbole is essential, as hyperbole has the function of drawing the hearer’s attention to the speaker’s emotional reaction with respect to a real-world situation (see Peña, 2016: 491-494).

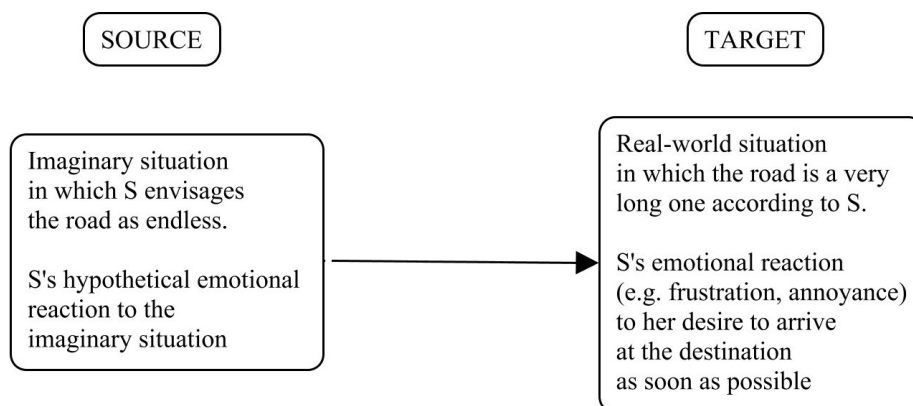


Figure 1. This is an endless road

Hyperbole can occur in combination with other figures of speech such as metaphor or metonymy. For example, the sentence *I love you from here to the moon and back* uses the correlation metaphor LENGTH OF PHYSICAL DISTANCE IS INTENSITY OF EMOTION to construct the (hypothetical and unrealistically magnified) hyperbolic source domain. Distance is measurable in distance units. These can map onto the intensity of feeling on the grounds that in our experience of the world intensity correlates with the concentration of power or force. That is why it is possible to use expressions like *I love you from the moon and back* or *I love you from London to Paris*. In *I love you from the moon and back* the enormous length of physical distance denoted by a return travel to the moon suggests an unrealistic mind-boggling intensity of feelings, which builds the hyperbolic source. This kind of expression can be compared with others such as *I love you tons*, which is also metaphorical (PHYSICAL WEIGHT IS INTENSITY OF EMOTION), and the non-metaphorical comparative sentence *I love you a million times more than anyone could love you*, which is based on an ECF.

We can also find cases in which hyperbole co-occurs with metaphor and metonymy as in the Spanish expression *Esta tía está cañón* (lit. ‘This chick is cannon’, i.e. ‘This chick is really hot’), which does not have a literal equivalent in the English language. Sp. *cañón* is metonymic for the effect that a cannon would produce on the speaker. This is an example of the metonymy CAUSE FOR EFFECT, which combines with the metaphor PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT IS PHYSICAL IMPACT. The rationale for the combination is the following: the physical impact that firing a cannon would produce on the speaker in terms of the intensity of the noise is metaphorically mapped onto the psychological impact that this girl causes upon seeing her. The magnified psychological impact is used to build a hyperbolic source domain that maps onto a real-world target where an extremely good-looking girl impresses the speaker.

Evidently, this account of hyperbole is consistent with one in terms of upscaling and downscaling scalar concepts. Whichever the mechanism chosen, (e.g. intensifiers, Extreme Case Formulations, metaphors involving intensification, etc.), the upscaling operation is used to construct the source domain of the hyperbolic mapping, which is here termed *magnified scenario*. Conversely, downscaling is applied to align the source and target magnitudes, the target being based on the real situation addressed by the hyperbolic expression. The following section addresses the building of magnified scenarios in more detail.

5. Building magnified scenarios

In this section, we first draw on Attardo’s (2000) distinction between *irony markers* and *factors*. In Attardo’s words, “an irony marker/indicator alerts the reader to the fact that a sentence is ironical. The sentence, would, however, be ironical even without the marker” (2000: 7). He distinguishes between *markers* and *factors*: “[...] a marker may be removed without affecting the presence of the irony (only, perhaps, its ease of recognition), while a factor may not be removed without destroying the irony” (Attardo, 2000: 7). The purpose of markers, according to Attardo, “is to facilitate the speaker’s recognition of the irony” (Attardo, 2000: 15), i.e. they do not code irony. Among those listed by Attardo, we find intonation, nasalization, exaggerated stress, some specific phonological features (e.g. slowed rate of speaking), kinesic markers, and some textual (text-internal clashes) and contextual elements (e.g. the text-context clashes). Irony factors are constitutive elements of irony that, together, lead to an ironic interpretation, which, in Attardo’s account, are a matter of relevant inappropriateness (i.e. producing an inappropriate utterance that is relevant in context). In consonance with Attardo’s distinction for irony, we assign the term *hyperbole marker* to any linguistic device that points to a hyperbolic reading. However, we also attest the existence of *hyperbole mitigators* and *blockers*, for which there is no parallel in the study of irony. Mitigators are linguistic mechanisms that lessen the hyperbolic impact of an utterance, while blockers cancel out a potential hyperbolic interpretation. In this connection, Edwards (2000) talks about softeners in relation to ECFs, among those softeners he includes qualifiers such as *mostly*, *almost*, or *few*. There are various authors in the previous literature that have made reference to linguistic pointers to hyperbole, some of these authors are Norrick (2004), Peña and Ruiz de Mendoza (2017), Pomerantz (1986), or Whitehead (2015), among others. This being said, the present study contributes to the identification and to a detailed study of hyperbolic markers, focusing specifically on *of all time*.

The corpus of analysis of the present study attests the following *hyperbole markers*: *ever*, *in the world*, *of all time*, *of my life*, and *of my dreams*. These are the *hyperbole blockers* and *mitigators* found in the same corpus: *according to*, *one of*, *in terms of*, *to my mind*, *I think*, *may be*, *might be*, negation (*I won’t go so far as to*), *but if*, *sure*, interrogative sentences, *deem*, *considering*, *among the*, *designated*, *ranking*, *probably*, *or seems to be*, *as chosen by*, *our list of*, and *three of the*.

Besides markers, blockers, and mitigators, the setting up of domains of reference also contributes to either constructing a hyperbolic utterance or to eliminating it, as has been discussed in Section 2 above.

The following section (Section 6) analyzes a selection of examples from our corpus; the examples have been chosen on account of their representing how the different markers interact.

6. Analysis and discussion

The hyperbole marker *of all time* can co-occur with a superlative adjective. Of these two co-occurring elements, one of them is dependent and the other independent. The superlative is independent, whereas the hyperbole marker *of all time* is the dependent element; the ability of this phrase to act as a hyperbole marker arises from its function as what we can call a *hyperbolic domain of reference indicator*; i.e. this phrase cannot produce hyperbolic meaning on its own, but only in cooperation with another expression for which it acts as a domain of reference. Note that this base-domain role of the phrase is consistent with its constructionally dependent nature: the profiling concept is expressed through an independent marker, while the cooperating marking element is dependent. Take the sentence *Jimmy is the best*, uttered in a context in which 20 people are presenting their work. In that context, this utterance would be literal; however, if we use the domain of reference indicator *of all time*, as in *Jimmy is the best of all time*, the hyperbole arises, since we are expanding the domain of reference. On some occasions, *of all time* combines with the noun *top*, which is not, grammatically speaking, a superlative, but has a functionally equivalent value from a semantic perspective, as in *Top Albums of All-time* or *The Top Live Bands Of All Time*; both examples are hyperbolic.

We find many cases in our corpus in which the combination of the independent element (a superlative adjective or the adjective *top*) and the dependent prepositional phrase *of all time* create a hyperbolic effect, as in examples (1) to (5) below (in all examples of analysis, italics has been added by the author for convenience):

- (1) V-Line: The *most successful* spark plug assortment *of all time*.
- (2) Listed below are the *most outstanding* teachings *of all time*, espoused by some of the greatest teachers and representative [...]
- (3) ‘The *greatest* game *of all time*’: Celebrations continue for England’s World Cup triumph.
- (4) *Top 25* quarterbacks *of all time*: Patriots’.
- (5) *Top 8* Most Ban-Worthy Modern Decks *of All Time*.

Some examples are also attested in which there is more than one hyperbole marker at work in the same sentence, thus creating a more forceful hyperbole. Besides the hyperbole marker *of all time*, our corpus contains other hyperbole markers: *top*, *by far*, and *surely*. Take (6), where the superlative *greatest* in combination with the hyperbole marker *of all time* are sufficient to create the hyperbole. In (7) and (8), there is a combination of *top* and the superlative, which also reinforces the hyperbolic interpretation, making it more powerful.

- (6) All these great writers are the authors of some of the *greatest* literary masterpieces *of all time*.
- (7) *Top Ten Greatest* Sports People *of All Time*.
- (8) *Top 50 Best-Selling* Artists *of All Time*.

Using the hyperbole marker *top* with the superlative is apparently redundant; however, as we can see in sentences (7) and (8) it is not infrequent to find this combination in our corpus. Using *top* is more impactful than simply using the superlative. The adjective *top* is conceptually metaphorical; the metaphor IMPORTANT IS UP is inherent in the word *top*. On a perceptual basis, important things are located upper in a scale than unimportant ones. A clear example is the medieval social class pyramid, where we find the king in the upper part of the pyramid, and peasants in the lower part of it. Thus, using the adjective *top* highlights the important component and makes it visible. In (8), for example, while the superlative marks the artists mentioned as the ones that have sold most, the adjective *top* adds to them an importance ingredient arising from metaphorical thought.

By far also acts as a hyperbole marker. In (9), it emphasizes the already hyperbolic utterance. It is metaphoric, as it correlates space and quantity; these two concepts are bound up in our minds as they usually co-occur in our experience. When there is more physical distance between two points in space, it is more likely to find more objects between them, that is, the probability of finding more objects increases with greater distance.

- (9) [*sic*] provides that. # Bones is *by far* the *most successful* light heavyweight *of all time* with a slew of Hall of Fame-caliber victims on his resume. With Ronda Rousey.

Surely is another hyperbole marker. (10) below offers an example in which it acts in combination with the superlative *greatest* and *of all time*, emphasizing the hyperbolic interpretation.

- (10) [*sic*] how they carried off what is *surely* the *greatest* English language publishing coup *of all time* -- the publication, in 1623, of what is known as The First Folio.

In examples (9) and (10), we found the hyperbole markers *surely* and *by far*. Even if these markers can be seen as syntactically and functionally equivalents, a closer look reveals some relevant differences. While *surely* acts on the level of subjectivity, *by far* acts simply as an intensifier, on an objective level. *Surely* uses epistemic modality, that is, it acquires its value on a certainty scale. Both, *surely* and *by far* are optional. They have a secondary function with respect to *of all time*, which establishes, in conjunction with the superlative, their domain of reference. Note in this respect that, even if the speaker had not added *by far* in (9), the sentence would be hyperbolic: *Bones is the most successful light heavyweight of all time with a slew of Hall of Fame-caliber victims on his resume. With Ronda Rousey*. However, by adding the hyperbole marker *by far*, the speaker intensifies the already present hyperbole. Something similar happens with (10), where removing the hyperbole marker *surely* does not affect the hyperbolic value of the sentence: [*sic*] *how they carried off what is the greatest English language publishing coup of all time -- the publication, in 1623, of what is known as The First Folio*. Nonetheless, adding *surely*, we imbue the sentence with the speaker’s subjectivity.

In sum, some hyperbole markers are tinged with subjectivity (*surely*), while others are descriptive or content-oriented (*top*, *by far*).

Of all time can be used to set up an extremely broad domain of reference, as in (11). However, this is only a potential function that can be cancelled out through metonymically supported pragmatic adjustment (cf. Panther, 2005, for other situations where metonymy provides an inferential schema). In example (11), *of all time* sets up a domain of reference through metonymic reduction from the universal value it denotes to the time period during which the TV series was released. Thus, this utterance, although apparently hyperbolic, is not so when considered within the wider

context, because of the denotational adjustment of *of all time* through metonymic reduction. In (12), *of all time* refers to all those quotes that the speaker has read; thus, the real domain of reference is implicit, obtained through metonymic reduction, as in sentence (11). Hence, in some cases, the hyperbole marker *of all time* may have lost its initial meaning thereby reducing its scope on the basis of metonymic narrowing:

- (11) Before 'Discovery: the best 25' Star Trek' episodes *of all time* # CLEVELAND, Ohio -- "Star Trek: Discovery" premieres on CBS Sunday.
- (12) [*sic*] 're not missing out on these experiences! *One of my favorite quotes of all time* is by Virginia Woolf, which speaks to this theme. She wrote:

The corpus also reveals that not all occurrences of *of all time* necessarily give rise to a hyperbolic interpretation. This happens when the potential of this phrase to generate hyperbole is canceled out by other mechanisms. In the ensuing analysis, we will address the use of hyperbole mitigators and restrictors.

7. Mitigating and blocking mechanisms

There are different mechanisms that can mitigate or even block a potential hyperbolic interpretation. Among those mechanisms, we find: (1) the setting up of domains of reference; (2) eroding the emotional or attitudinal component of the potential hyperbole; (3) affecting the epistemic modality assessment of the utterance (i.e. the speaker has little certainty on the judgment he/she is expressing, and thus, the hyperbolic interpretation is no longer possible); and, (4) making use of evidentiality markers such as *I hear that X, according to X, in X's opinion*, etc.

7.1. The setting up of domains of reference

Of all time can be contrasted with other devices to mark domains of reference. In this section, only for the purpose of contrast, we will provide a few cases that are worthy of mention. An objectifying mechanism is provided by making reference to lists, rankings, and scales. In (13), the expression *in the ranking* thus acts as a hyperbole blocker. It narrows down the potentially universal domain of reference, urging us to interpret the sentence as non-hyperbolic. A similar role is played by the reference to *the fund's performance*, which, as part of the ranking, contributes to restricting the domain of reference still further. Examples (14) and (15) are alternative formal variants of expressions of the type referred to here, where the domain of reference restricts the possibility of a hyperbolic reading. In (16) and (17), the domain of reference also restricts a hyperbolic reading.

- (13) *The fund's performance places it amongst the "Best equity funds of all time"* in the *ranking* published by a large-circulation German investment magazine.
- (14) *Ranking the top 100 Cleveland celebrities of all time* # Oscar winners Tom Hanks and Halle Berry are two of the greatest stars in.
- (15) gold': An ambitious, grown-up *ranking* of the *best YA novels of all time* # Fifty years ago, a teenager from Oklahoma accidentally created a literary genre
- (16) The *Greatest Pop Culture Villains of All Time as Chosen By You Share*: # Throughout the last month we asked you.
- (17) argument started. The following is *our list of the best young-adult novels of all time*. # These are not only the acknowledged classics and other swing-for-the-fence efforts.

7.2. Eroding the emotional or attitudinal component of the potential hyperbole

The emotional or attitudinal component of a potential hyperbole can be toned down and even blocked by means of partitives. In this connection, a common hyperbole blocker is *one of*. At first glance, example (18) could be read as hyperbolic, as the superlative *greatest* co-occurs with the hyperbole marker *of all time*. However, the use of *one of the* places limitations on the universal application of the phrase *of all time* thus restricting its domain of reference to potentially non-hyperbolic proportions:

- (18) This was engineered by John Paul II working together with Ronald Reagan and other world leaders, [...] and was reported in Time magazine as a clandestine campaign which was *one of the "greatest secret alliances of all time"*.

Other partitives from our corpus acting in a similar manner are *two of* and *three of*. Look at examples (19) and (20).

- (19) Victor Fleming managed to direct *two of the most important movies of all time* that were released in 1939.
- (20) [*sic*] new LeBron 14 GS colorways inspired by *three of the greatest WWE superstars of all time*. # The releases, which come only in kids' sizes, are influenced.

The blocking power of these and possibly other partitives results from the fact that they introduce a sense of indeterminacy into the scope of the superlative. For example, it is not the same to say *the two best* than *two of the best*. The former leads to hyperbole in combination with *of all time* since it is logically almost impossible to determine which were the best movies ever filmed. The latter simply selects any two movies from among all possible movies that could be considered the best. If no magnified scenario is built, there is no hyperbolic mapping but a descriptive rendering of the sentence that erodes the emotional or attitudinal component of any potential hyperbolic interpretation.

The hyperbole blocker *considering* suggests that the speaker can contemplate all possible cases within a certain category. This affects the hyperbolic potential of the expression containing hyperbole markers by objectifying the content of the utterance, which is thus deprived of its potential to convey speaker's emotions. This situation is illustrated by (21), where the speaker presents the information on the best American players as if he or she had the ability to take all of them into account objectively, again, eroding the possibility to activate a hyperbolic mapping conveying speaker's attitude:

- (21) [*sic*] while Donovan belongs squarely in the discussion when *considering* the *best* American players *of all time*, there is a sense that this country's soccer fans wish for even more.

Finally, negation can have blocking effects too. This is the case of sentence (22) below, where the speaker, by means of this mechanism, explicitly discards the possibility of activating a magnified source scenario to achieve hyperbolic effects:

- (22) to point out that his show's ratings *weren't* actually the *worst of all time*. Much like when he responded to Colbert calling him a "cock-holster" for.

7.3. Affecting the epistemic modality assessment of the utterance

The third mechanism has to do with the doubtfulness with which a speaker produces an utterance. When the speaker shows hesitancy as to the descriptive value of a given utterance, the hyperbolic interpretation is no longer possible. The reader may be reminded that epistemic modality may have a subjectivization and intensifying function, as discussed in Section 6 above. It may involve moving up the certainty scale (thus emphasizing the hyperbole) or moving down the scale, thereby reducing the likelihood of a hyperbolic interpretation.

The hyperbole mitigators *may be* and *might be* show the speaker's uncertainty and lack of full commitment as to the truthfulness of a potential hyperbolic statement. This diminishes the power of the expression to convey an ostentatious pretense thus affecting the emotional or attitudinal impact. If the speaker cannot be committed to the absolute value of what he or she says, it follows that his or her emotional reaction or attitude is not clearly a strong one either. Examples (23) to (25) illustrate this mitigated impact:

- (23) Watercooler This *may be* the *most hilariously* NSFW game show opening *of all time* # 8 Out Of 10 Cats Does Countdown is already chaotic enough as it is.
 (24) [*sic*] 's not going to be record-breaking bad. # The *worst* traffic jam *of all time* just *might be* one that struck China a few years ago. The billion-person-strong Asian.
 (25) A few years ago, his father-in-law told him that he and Daniel Webster just *might be* the two *greatest* senators *of all time*.

Deemed is another hyperbole blocker. It points to a statement arising from someone's opinion, thus canceling out any potential hyperbolic value, as evidenced by (26):

- (26) [*sic*] course, because so many (including himself) *deemed* Bonds the *greatest of all time*, his ego created a team culture that pretty much catered to Bonds. #

The same holds for the adverb *probably* and the hyperbole blocker *or seems to be*. They both reveal that the speaker is not sure about the hyperbolic sentence that he/she is going to produce. Example (27) illustrates such a blockage. In example (28), the speaker first produces a hyperbolic statement, and then cancels it out by using this hyperbole blocker. It seems as if the speaker, while speaking, had become aware of the fact that the content of the utterance might be untruthful, thus requiring repair in terms of modality.

- (27) [*sic*]. "He'll *probably* go down as the *best* individual instruction coach *of all time*." see also # In 1983, he led Boston University to its.
 (28) [*sic*] by the comparison. # "His accomplishments, he's the *greatest of all time*, *or seems to be*," Dixon said. "With the competition over.

Hyperbole can also be blocked by means of interrogative sentences, since by questioning speakers convey their uncertainty as to the validity of the propositional content of utterances, as illustrated in (29), (30) and (31):

- (29) A true original, Ali *is* The *Greatest of All Time*?
 (30) NBA: *Is* Stephen Curry the *Best Point Guard of All Time*?
 (31) [*sic*] was playing when he was 90. # *What's* your favorite book *of all time*? Illustrated Man by Ray Bradbury. I was about 10 or 11 when I.

7.4. Making use of evidentiality markers

The last mechanism available to speakers for the delineation of hyperbole mentioned above is making use of evidentiality markers such as *I hear that X*, *according to X*, *in X's opinion*, etc. These markers block the possibility of a hyperbolic interpretation. From example (32) to example (39), you can find cases in which evidentiality markers are used to cancel out the apparent hyperbolic interpretation.

It is possible to find cases in which apparently more than one hyperbole is at work. However, this sometimes-apparent hyperbole is cancelled out. This is the case of (32). In this example, *countlesslists* [*sic*] is inherently hyperbolic. It is an example of ECF. Moreover, there is a superlative in conjunction with the hyperbole marker *of all time*. However, *to my mind* expresses an opinion. Thus, this hyperbole blocker cancels out the hyperbolic interpretation of *the scariest TV villain of all time*. There is a hyperbolic default interpretation, and the speaker, discursively, de-hyperbolizes the statement; the speaker objectivizes it by establishing the domain of reference. Sometimes, as example (32) demonstrates, more than one mechanism can be used. In this particular case, the setting up of a domain of reference is used in combination with the use of the evidentiality marker *to my mind*.

- (32) Bads. He's appeared on *countlesslists* of the "best TV villains *of all time*." *To my mind*, he is the *scariest* TV villain *of all time*.

According to is another hyperbole blocker that combines with the superlative and *of all time*. This hyperbole blocker is more powerful than the combination of the superlative and the hyperbole marker *of all time*; thus, *according to* can cancel out the hyperbolic interpretation of (33) to (36):

- (33) The 10 *Best Comedy Movies Of All Time, According To* IMDB.
 (34) The 50 *best* video games *of all time, according to* critics.
 (35) Can you name the 100 *greatest* NBA players *of all-time according to* ESPN (#NBArank 2016)?
 (36) [*sic*] lasted almost two hours and was termed as "the *best* recruiting presentation *of all time*," *according to* a source within Iguodala's camp. # The Rockets left.

When using *according to*, and functionally equivalent expressions, such as *in X's opinion*, *in terms of X*, or *to my mind*, the utterance stops being a matter of the speaker's opinion and attitude. Examples (37) and (38) bear out this point:

- (37) *In terms of* adjusted OPS, those are the three *best* offensive seasons *of all time*: # Rank # Player # OPS+ # Year # 1 # Barry Bonds #.
 (38) [*sic*] time. "*To my mind*, he is the *scariest* TV villain *of all time*. I personally can still barely look at a patch of windy trees, or.

Another hyperbole blocker is *sure*, which, by expressing full certainty, objectifies the content of the potentially hyperbolic expression impeding an emotional reading, as exemplified in (39):

- (39) [*sic*] since Maradona. *Sure*, he is now Juve's *most expensive* signing *of all time*, too, but they're a club accustomed to thinking of themselves as part.

As happened with hyperbole markers, we have also found examples in our corpus in which more than one hyperbole blocker appears in a single sentence. We have found even three hyperbole blockers in a single sentence.

From (40) to (45), we will concentrate on examples in which two hyperbole blockers appear. In (40), *I believe* and the negation *will not be* work as restrictors to the hyperbolic statement *the most perfect thing of all time*. In (41) *nearly* and *among the* block out the hyperbolic statement *the greatest of all time*. *One of*, already discussed above, also combines with other hyperbole blockers such as *I think*, as evidenced by examples (42) and (43); in (42), the speaker has tried to objectivize it using *I think*, that is, expressing his/her opinion, however, it has been impossible, so the sentence remains hyperbolic, because the meaning of *ridiculous* is subjective. The speaker is doubtful about his/her statement. In example (44) *I won't go so far as to* and *but if* block the hyperbolic reading of *the best game of all time*. In (45) *among the* and *designated* cancel out the hyperbolic reading of *the best seventh-inning pitchers of all time*.

- (40) There are intermediate stages and *I believe* a Public Prosecutor of this kind *will not be the most perfect thing of all time*, either.
- (41) *Nearly* all the architects and artists who conceived, built and adorned these masterpieces, *among the greatest of all time*, remained gloriously unknown.
- (42) [*sic*] champagne saber, which *I think* is *one of the most ridiculous things of all time*. It shouldn't exist. # I'm going to now try to saber.
- (43) Ooh boy. *I think* visually *one of the most interesting fantasy stories of all time* is Garth Nix's Sabriel. So I would love to see an adaptation of that because.
- (44) *I won't go so far as to call it the best game of all time -- but if* such a title can exist objectively, this one is certainly in.
- (45) [*sic*] beside a plaque that reads, "*Among the best designated seventh-inning pitchers of all time.*" # Of course, once a week these by-the-book managers lament their spent.

In examples (46) and (47), we will concentrate on cases taken from our corpus in which three hyperbole blockers cooperate to cancel out the hyperbolic reading of those sentences. In (46), *considers, one of the* and *from the perspective of* function as hyperbole blockers of the potential hyperbolic statement *the most important Spanish leaders of all time*. In (47) the hyperbole blockers *isn't, could be* and *one of* restrict the possibility of a hyperbolic reading of *the biggest security breach of all time*.

- (46) The author *considers* the international dimension of *one of the most important Spanish leaders of all time from the perspective of Political Science*.
- (47) The Equifax hack *isn't* the *biggest security breach of all time*, but it *could be one of the worst in history for Americans* # The.

The accumulation of hyperbole blockers in one single sentence is used when the speaker becomes aware that he/she is using hyperbolic meaning-making mechanisms, but has no intention to produce any hyperbolic meaning. When the hyperbole is really strong, it is possible to mitigate it through more than one mechanism (as we have seen above).

The destruction of a hyperbolic interpretation depends: (1) on the reliability of the source, and (2) on the assignation or not of a hyperbolic interpretation to the source by the hearer.

8. Conclusions

The analysis of *hyperbole markers, hyperbole blockers, and hyperbole mitigators* provided in this article contributes to the previous work on the scenario-based account of hyperbole as proposed by Peña and Ruiz de Mendoza (2017). The review of the previous literature on hyperbole (McCarthy & Carter, 2004; Norrick, 2004; Claridge, 2011) supports Peña and Ruiz de Mendoza's (2017) scenario-based approach and the still programmatic account of hyperbolic meaning effects on the basis of conceptual mappings. Here, this proposal is further refined, and it is effectively illustrated, through a broader range of corpus examples. In this proposal, the conceptual mapping is argued to occur from a magnified scenario to an observable scenario. In the mapping, perfect matches are supplied by all non-magnified elements of the two scenarios whereas imperfect matches arise from the mapping of either unreal or unrealistic magnified elements to real observable ones, where the former supply a distorted view of the latter. It is the mapping of imperfectly matching elements that produces hyperbolic meaning effects, which are of an attitudinal kind. In this context, the reader has been provided with a description of some of the resources available to speakers for the construction and delineation of magnified scenarios, and it includes an analysis of what we have called *hyperbole markers, hyperbole blockers and hyperbole mitigators*. These are linguistic mechanisms that signal the presence of hyperbole or that reinforce it, mitigate it, or even restrict its occurrence. The article has argued for the analytical value of the notion of domain of reference to understand the construction and interpretation of hyperbole. Even if we have mainly concentrated on the hyperbole marker *of all time*, we have also listed some other hyperbole markers; however, further research should be conducted in order to get a wider view of the picture. It would be very interesting to study not only more hyperbole markers, but also blockers and mitigators in more depth in order to find more patterns.

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