

## Bad words in the right places: Mexican Spanish stance-taking and the communicative functions of *wey*

*Malas palabras en los lugares correctos: la toma de postura en español mexicano y la funciones comunicativas de wey*

**ABSTRACT:** In everyday conversation speakers adopt a position (or stance) regarding how they express individuality, relationships with others and their relationship with language itself. As Du Bois (2007) argues 'One of the most important things we do with words is take a stance' (p. 139). This is more often than not achieved through the use of proper words in proper places, to quote Jonathan Swift, but in Mexican Spanish this can be done through the potentially 'bad' or improper word *wey* which enables speakers to demonstrate either solidarity, affiliation and closeness or discordance, detachment and distance as they seek to establish, maintain, neglect or terminate interpersonal relationships. Besides communicating the content of their message, speakers can also use the word *wey* to convey their awareness of the world along with their independence, histories, attitudes and experiences. Finally, the use of the word *wey* allows speakers take up a position towards language itself, using it for creative, ludic and rhetorical reasons.

First of all, we define the concept of *wey* and subsequently describe its use in terms of Halliday's ideational, interpersonal and textual language functions. We subsequently identify how the use of *wey* can reflect an interlocutor's positionality (or stance) within a specific context. We then answer our research question regarding how the use of word *wey* can signal individuality, interpersonal relationships and the relationship with language itself. After presenting the research data, we then consider how the use of the word *wey* can be seen to empower interlocutors to come across in their own way and express their independence, unique histories and personal attitudes.

**KEY WORDS:** Mexican Spanish, stance taking, language functions.

**RESUMEN:** En la conversación diaria, los oradores adoptan una posición (o postura) con respecto a cómo expresan la individualidad, las relaciones con los demás y su relación con el lenguaje mismo. Como Du Bois (2007) argumenta "Una de las cosas más importantes que hacemos con las palabras es adoptar una postura" (p. 139). Esto se logra a menudo mediante el uso de palabras apropiadas en lugares

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apropiados, para citar a Jonathan Swift, pero en español mexicano esto se puede hacer a través de la palabra potencialmente "mala" o inapropiada *wey* que permite a los hablantes demostrar solidaridad, afiliación y cercanía o discordancia, desapego y distancia mientras buscan establecer, mantener, descuidar o terminar relaciones interpersonales. Además de comunicar el contenido de su mensaje, los hablantes también pueden usar la palabra *wey* para transmitir su conocimiento del mundo junto con su independencia, historias, actitudes y experiencias. Finalmente, el uso de la palabra *wey* permite a los hablantes tomar una posición hacia el lenguaje mismo, usándolo por razones creativas, lúdicas y retóricas.

En primer lugar, definimos el concepto de *wey* y posteriormente describimos su uso en términos de las funciones de lenguaje ideacional, interpersonal y textual de Halliday. Después identificamos cómo el uso de *wey* puede reflejar la posición (o posición) de un interlocutor dentro de un contexto específico. Luego respondemos a nuestra pregunta de investigación sobre cómo el uso de la palabra *wey* puede indicar la individualidad, las relaciones interpersonales y la relación con el lenguaje mismo. Después de presentar los datos de la investigación, consideramos cómo se puede ver el uso de la palabra *wey* para empoderar a los interlocutores para que se crucen a su manera y expresen su independencia, historias únicas y actitudes personales.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Mexicano, toma de postura, funciones del lenguaje.

## Introduction

In purely denotational terms, the word *wey* is often considered disrespectful and disdainful and sometimes offensive. Its use 'is often perceived by its critics as being no more than verbal filler and hence as damning evidence of the inarticulateness of youth' (Bucholtz, 2009, p. 151). However, its meanings ranging from buddy or man/bro to dummy or idiot indicate that Mexican Spanish speakers continuously make localised everyday conversational choices as they use the term to express engagement / commitment (or a lack of) with both the communicative context and other interactants.

In this paper, we look at how stance as social activity can be conveyed by the word *wey* in Mexican Spanish since it expresses ideational, interpersonal and textual

functions (Halliday, 1997). We go further by examining how *wey* gives interactants choices in: responding to real-life experiences; positioning themselves as individuals when interacting with others; evaluating a given situation and; co-constructing relationships; and planning deliberate courses of action. In other words, *wey* as stance is open to public scrutiny in terms of interlocutor motivation, communicative objectives and discursive meaning.

In order to analyse and understand the choices afforded by the use of the word *wey*, we examine the wide range of communicative functions behind the use of the word *wey* through ethnographic and participant observation in the Guadalajara metropolitan area in Mexico. Opportunistic in nature and limited to Mexico's second largest conurbation, the research presents

six informants' observations regarding the everyday use of *wey* on public transport, in the street, at restaurants, in shopping malls etc. and through participant observation when in casual conversation with friends, colleagues, acquaintances and family members. The results indicate that rather than being a static characteristic of Mexican Spanish, *wey* offers a resource for interactants to co-construct their own ways of coming across and establishing their own identities.

### Defining the word *wey*

In defining the *wey*, we do not intend to provide an exhaustive description and characterisation of its function and uses. The everyday meaning, spelling and pronunciation of the word *wey* has undergone, and is still undergoing, change in Mexican Spanish. Rather, we show how individual interactants adapt it to convey sociopragmatic use according to a given context.

The origin of the word *wey* derives from *güey* where any discussion of its present-day usage needs to begin. (At the same time, *güey* is derived from *buey*, meaning an ox). *Güey* has been long been identified and catalogued as a distinctive feature of spoken Mexican Spanish (Escobar Hernández, 2002; *Real Academia de España*, 2016). Defined as a *Mexicanismo* (i.e., a word or expression which is characteristic of Spanish spoken in Mexico), the word *güey* is given two entries by Spain's leading linguistic authority, *la Real Academia Española* (Royal Spanish Academy). In *el Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (the Dictionary of the Spanish Language), the *Real Academia de España* (2016) defines the word as '*una persona tonta*' (a stupid/silly person). In an

additional entry, the dictionary states that it is used as an interjection. They give as an example: '*para dirigirse a alguien que ha tropezado*' (to speak to someone who has just tripped themselves up) – perhaps a more charitable illustrative example could have been chosen. More importantly, the *Real Academia Española* makes no mention of the solidary or affiliative function of the word.

In contrast, Mexican language reference books define the word *güey* as both disparaging and solidary. This widens its meaning since it indicates that interlocutors have pragmatic choices regarding use and interpretation. For instance, Escobar Hernández (2002) in the *Manual del Español Coloquial de México*, offers the following definition:

**güey.** *tonto, estúpido, torpe (deformación de buey). También se usa entre amigos, como muletilla.*

**güey.** fool, idiot, clumsy (distortion of *buey* [meaning ox]). It is also used between friends as a filler (p. 215).

Whilst offering another dimension to the denotative meaning of the word, Escobar Hernández does not underscore its contextual use i.e. how it is used to convey and co-construct interpersonal meaning within a given situation.

Giving much more prominence to possible social meaning and use, *El Diccionario del Español Usual en México* (1996) identifies colloquial meanings:

**güey** s m **1** (*Popular*) Buey: “Le vendí mis *güeyes* a mi compadres” **2** (*Popular, Ofensivo*) Persona desconocida y

despreciada: “La entrada a la oficina estaba llena de *güeyes*”, “Había un *güey* parado en el zoológico” **3** (*Popular, Ofensivo*) Tonto: “¿Qué *güey* soy, no traje el pasaporte!, “¿Qué me ve, *güey*?” **4** De *güey* (*Popular*) De tonto: “De *güey* que me dejó asaltar” **5** Entre los jóvenes, manera de conservar la atención de su interlocutor y de asegurar su solidaridad “¡No, *güey*, te aseguro que no lo supe!” (Diccionario del Español Usual en México 1996)

(**güey**, noun, masculine **1** (colloquial) Ox: “I sold my oxen to my *compadres*” **2** (colloquial, offensive) Unknown and despised person: “The entrance to the office was full of *güeyes*”, “A *güey* standing there in the zoo” **3** (Colloquial, offensive) Idiot: “I’m so stupid, I didn’t bring my passport!”, “What are you looking at, idiot?” **4** De *güey* (Colloquial) Like an idiot: “Like an idiot, I allowed myself to be robbed” **5** Among young people, a way of maintaining the attention of one’s interlocutor and assuring solidarity “No, *güey*, I assure you that I didn’t know about it!”) (p. 472).

The use of the word has also been observed in the United States where it is used by Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans (see Bucholtz, 2009). In both Mexico and the United States it is not clear when the word *güey* was transformed into *wey* and the word adopted both offensive and solidary meanings. A further change took place with regards to spelling since *wey* can also be written as *buey*, *huey*, *wuey*, *we* and *way*. Whilst there is no standardised

colloquial spelling, the current predominant spelling in social media is *wey*.

With regards to its morphological features, the word *wey* at one time did have a feminine counterpart, *güeya*, which was also used with the suffix *-ota* as seen in *güeyota* or *weyota* (meaning girl). However, the feminine form, *güeya* is less used as it seems that *wey* is now the most commonly used term. The word *wey* also has a plural, *güeyes* or *weyes*. With respect to stance, the gender-neutral *wey* points to possible signs of egalitarianism in interpersonal relationships.

The pronunciation of *wey* varies across society from the extremely colloquial /wei/ (pronounced as ‘whey’ in English) to the more upper-class /wɛɪ/ (pronounced as ‘wye’ in English). This socially identifiable pronunciation of *wey* surfaces in everyday expressions such as *cámara wey* (yep or yeah buddy) which is extremely colloquial and *osea wey* (I mean, man/mate buddy) which is stereotypically seen as an upper middle class stock phrase. From a stance point of view, the pronunciation of *wey* allows interactants to project or identify with a social class. The way *wey* is pronounced may even be the object of mockery. For instance, in the following example, two female shop assistants mimic the condescending attitude of an upper-middle-class customer in her forties who had just left the store. They elongate her pronunciation of *wey* to *g-o-o-e-y* which for them reflects an upper-middle-class pronunciation of the word.

#### Extract 1

First employee: *o sea, g-o-o-e-y, ¿esta blusa la tienes en chica?*

Second employee: *sí, g-o-o-e-y, pero no te queda porque estás bien gorda, g-o-o-e-y.*

First Employee: hey, g-o-o-e-y, do you have this blouse in a small?

Second Employee: yes, g-o-o-e-y, but it doesn't fit you because you're really fat, g-o-o-e-y.

The word *wey* allows interactants to describe and react to everyday occurrences in extremely colloquial ways which can express closeness or offence. Syntactically, for instance, *hacerse wey* means: to go very slowly; to do nothing; to waste time; to pretend not to know something; or even to ignore something on purpose. The use of *hacerse wey* can be seen in the following example where three working-class girls in their twenties are chatting in a shopping mall about Fatima and her indecisiveness:

#### Extract 2

First girl: ¿Y Fátima ya compró?

Second girl: *Nomás se está haciendo wey.*

Third girl: *Fátima ya está güey.*

First girl: And did Fatima buy anything yet?

Second girl: No, she is doing nothing but wasting time like an idiot.

Third girl: Fatima is already an idiot.

Meanwhile, *estar wey* means to be an idiot. However, one does not have to be a complete idiot: There are degrees of being a *wey*: one can be *bien wey* (a complete idiot) or only go half way and be *medio wey* (a bit of an idiot). Both degrees of being a *wey*

can be found in the following conversation between two high school students and their teacher:

#### Extract 3

Paco: *Es que ese morro siempre hace comentarios bien güeyes.*

Adrián: *Sí profe, la neta sí está medio güey el bato.*

Paco: It's just that that kid is always saying really stupid things.

Adrián: Yeah Mr. Johnson, that kid is honestly kinda stupid.

One can see that the conversation also contains the plural of *güey*, *güeyes*, used as an adjective. In Spanish, adjectives normally agree with nouns, regarding gender and number, in this case with the word 'comentarios'. The word is also found in such idiomatic expressions as *a lo güey* (in an idiotic way).

In conclusion, the word *wey* is in a state of flux and reflects the dynamic and constantly changing use of language as interactants use language for their own intentions and purposes. The research findings in this paper indicate that, at least in the Guadalajara metropolitan area, the word *wey* can be heard among different social classes and age groups and irrespective of gender in order to express individual identity, affective meaning and to engage in the co-construction of interpersonal relationships.

Language as social activity

Language as social activity examines how interactants demonstrate their relationship

with the world, their relationship with other interactants and relationships within the language system itself. If the widespread use of the word *wey*, especially among young people (Loaeza, 2007), is any indicator, then Mexicans are fully engaged in language as social activity or what Halliday has identified as ideational, interpersonal and textual language use: ideational represents interactants' experiences and attitudes; the interpersonal reflects relationships with others; and the textual allows interactants to shape utterances into meaningful discourse (Martin & Rose, 2003). Ideationally, the word *wey* can be employed to reflect past experiences, responses to situations and contemplated and/or real-life actions. Interpersonally, the word also conveys how interactants want to project themselves and how they relate to each other and co-construct relationships with others. Textually, *wey* as a discourse marker underlines the cohesive relationship between interactants. Halliday's framework offers a useful way of understanding how Mexican interactants employ the word *wey* in language as social activity

To further understand *wey* as ideational language use, we adopt Halliday's (1973) definition in that ideational is 'concerned with the content of language, its function as a means of the expression of our experience, both of the external world and of the inner world of our own consciousness...' (p. 36). Therefore, *wey* can be used for narrating and interrelating events and passing judgement on those events. Rather than merely categorising *wey* as possibly ideational, its function needs to be understood within a given context in an individual instance of usage. For instance, in the follow-

ing example. Claudia uses the word *wey* to narrate and criticise her own behaviour:

*Extract 4*

Claudia: *Soy bien wey, me puse la blusa al revés.*

I am a complete idiot, I put my blouse on inside out.

Claudia negatively evaluates her own conduct by concluding that she is *bien wey* (a complete idiot). This self-criticism is followed by an account (Goffman 1974, 1997) which provides cohesion: I put on my blouse inside out. Claudia's use of *wey* is a self-judgmental and a deliberate attack on her own *face* (Goffman, 1955). Goffman (1967) defined face as 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact' (p. 5). Following Chen's (2001, p. 96) reworking of Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies (bald, with redress, off record and withhold the self-face threatening act), Claudia has adopted a bald on-record strategy. Although underlining the severity of her forgetfulness, Claudia presumably does not feel under threat from other interactants since other interactants would be expected to follow Leech's (1983) approbation maxim i.e. 'minimise dispraise of others' (1983, p. 132). The ideational use in this instance has a disarming function which is aimed at precluding others from criticising her. Whilst it is difficult to generalise over the ideational uses of *wey* it can be seen as a pragmatic resource that allows an interactant to refer to present or past experience in his/her own way.

Whilst ideational language reflects narrative and experience, interpersonal language conveys individual ways of interacting and group participation. Therefore, the use of *wey* may reflect an individual trait or be characteristic of a certain group of interactants. Halliday (1973) argues that interpersonal language ‘may be understood by the expression of our own personalities and personal feelings on the one hand, and forms of interaction and social interplay with other participants in the communication situation on the other hand’ (p. 36). Halliday labels this personal and interactional language use.

In terms of Halliday’s interpersonal function, the word *wey* can be used to establish a personal stance. In the following example, overheard in a women’s clothing store in Zapotlanejo, a town just outside Guadalajara, two women in their twenties are looking at blouses:

*Extract 5*

First woman: *Mira estas blusas.*

Second woman: *Son puras chicas. Yo no soy chica, wey.*

First woman: Look at these blouses.

Second woman: They are all smalls. I am not a small *wey*.

By using the word *wey*, the second woman expresses emphatic disagreement with her outspoken use of *wey* and, by doing so, potentially distances herself from the other interlocutor.

In contrast, social interplay can be seen in the following example where the word *wey* has a bonding function. In making

weekend plans to visit Mazamitla (a popular resort town outside of Guadalajara), Ricardo, a computer programmer, and Sergio, a restaurant manager, use *wey* to demonstrate ongoing solidarity:

*Extract 6*

Ricardo: *Wey, vamos a Mazamitla para el próximo fin.*

Sergio: *Nel, wey. No pienso salir hasta después del Rally.*

Ricardo: *¿Cuándo es, wey?*

Ricardo: *Wey, let’s go to Mazamitla next weekend.*

Sergio: No, *wey*. I am not planning on going until after the Rally.

Ricardo: When is that, *wey?*

In Halliday’s third function, textual language use, *wey* as a discourse marker can reinforce the organisation of a text, especially when turn taking as seen in the following example. This conversation was overheard in an up-market shopping plaza in Guadalajara as two middle-class female university students, in their twenties, talked about a social event one of them had been to:

*Extract 7*

First student: *Hubo muchas personas, wey.*

Second student: *¿Y eso no está bien wey?*

First student: *Si wey, pero, ¿por qué las pasan sin permiso?*

Second student: *Son paros, wey.*

First student: There were a lot of people, *wey*.

Second student: Isn't that good, *wey*?  
First student: Yes *wey*. But why did they  
let them through without permission?  
Second student: They have influence  
*wey*.

Besides marking solidarity, the word *wey*, functions as an example of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's (1974) 'transition-relevance place (TRP) – 'a point at which it is obviously possible for another speaker to begin speaking' (Sutherland, 2016, p. 33). The use of *wey* after each turn gives the other interactant the opportunity to intervene. The textual function of language

Has an enabling function, that of creating text, which is language in operation as distinct from strings of words or isolated sentences and clauses. It is this component that enables the speaker to organize what he is saying in such a way that it makes sense in the context and fulfils its function as a message (Halliday, 1973, p. 36).

Halliday's categorisation of ideational, interpersonal and textual language use identifies the language function. However, we now want to consider how the use of *wey* reflects positionality within a specific context. This will be attempted in the next section by examining how concept of stance reflects individual reactions, feelings and reciprocity.

Stance: A language of description

We argue that the concept of stance helps reveal the evaluative, affective and interactive position(s) that an interlocutor adopts

in a given situation. As Wu (2004) argues, stance is 'a speaker's indication of how he or she knows about, is commenting on, or is taking an affective or other position toward the person or matter being observed' (p. 3). It may not reveal, as Tracy & Robles (2013) note, the interactants true feelings but it is a public display which 'is perceivable, interpretable, and available for inspection by others' (Englebretson, 2007a).

On one level stancetaking can be defined as 'taking up a position with respect to the form or the content of one's utterance' (Jaffe, 2009, p. 3) or 'the communicative display a person makes toward an interactional other and the event, issue, or person being discussed' (Tracy & Robles 2013, p. 198). However, it is also important to note that stancetaking is empowering:

One of the most important things we do with words is take a stance. Stance has the power to assign value to objects of interest, to position actors with respect to those objects, to calibrate alignment between stancetakers, and to invoke proposed systems of socio-cultural value (Du Bois, 2007, p. 139).

Furthermore, stancetaking is not about neatly identifying and categorising but understanding the principles behind adopting stance:

Because the diversity of observable stances extends in principle without limit, it is necessary to go beyond merely cataloguing their contents or classifying their types. To frame a theory of stance means to provide a general account of the mode of production of

any stance and of its interpretation in a context of interaction (p. 139).

Therefore, we examine how stance is constructed or co-constructed and identify the affective and interactive manifestations of stance.

In line with Halliday's ideational function of language, stance as evaluation "concerns the speaker or author's evaluation and assessment, either of some object of discourse or of an interlocutor" (Irvine, 2009, p. 53). The word *wey* may convey how the interlocutor judges the communicative content of a given interaction and / or the contributions of other interlocutors. Therefore, epistemic stance "which concerns the truth-value of a proposition and the speaker's degree of commitment to it" (p. 53) can be seen as an individual reaction to the truth-value of an utterance. As a result, *wey* may be voiced as an exclamation, confrontation, affiliation or as disalignment.

With regard to Halliday's interpersonal language function, the personal dimension can be seen in stancetaking that "is self-expressive, in that it serves to indicate how the speaker is constructing the self to be perceived by others" (Englebretson, 2007b, p. 74). Irvine (2009) further identifies the personal function of language in terms of "affective stance" and "self-positioning" (p. 54). In affective stance, the interlocutor shows his/her "feelings about a proposition, an utterance, or a text – an attitude, that is, toward some bit of discourse" (p. 54). Meanwhile, stance as self-positioning is found in how interactants relate "to an interlocutor, or some social dimension of an interaction and its personnel as might be

found in an utterance such as "Who are *you* to tell *me* what the moon is made of? And call me 'sir' when you speak to me" (p. 54). Consequently, in terms of self-positioning, *wey*, on a personal level, may be used to express resistance to using more 'refined' and so-called educated speech and in asserting individuality.

Interactional language use is expressed through alignment and supportiveness. Linking the relational dimension to stance, Scheibman (2007) argues that "Speakers and groups of speakers ... don't only position themselves with respect to propositional material, they also situate themselves in relationship to one another, or expectation, and to sociocultural beliefs" (p. 113). Furthermore, stancetaking is not static as argued by Kärkkäinen (2003): "Stance-taking is essentially interactively organized. It is an emergent *interactive activity*, an interactional practice engaged by coparticipants in conversation, rather than an isolated mental position of an individual speaker" (p. 16). The interactive activity involves alignment and distancing in that interactants may adopt convergent or divergent positions (Haddington, 2007). As Scheibman (2007) argues 'speakers ... express stance by allying themselves with (or sometimes separating themselves from) one another' (p. 113). These positions can be expressed through co-construction which Scheibman (2007) identifies as "the local activities of participants in interactive contexts, and ... the sharing of beliefs and attitudes among participants as members of communities" (p. 125). Interactionally, *wey* can convey solidarity and a sense of intimacy between interactants. However, it should be noted that *wey* is not usually used between *novios*

(boyfriends/girlfriends) and significant others. Although this now seems to be changing as seen in the following example, when during a family meal, Bernardo said to his girlfriend, Laura:

*Extract 8*

Bernardo: *Ey, wey, me llené bien rápido.*

Bernardo: Hey, wey. I felt full very quickly.

There was no negative response regarding the comment either from the girlfriend or from the family. On an interactional level, the use of *wey* can therefore be seen to convey closeness and a feeling of intimacy between interactants.

An analysis of textual language use helps ‘to keep track of who or what is being talked about at any point’ (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 145). This becomes especially important with the use of *wey* which may reference more than one interactant in a given text, e.g. the speaker, the hearer or a third party, and may be used in contrasting ways e.g. to express solidarity and to convey offence all in the same text. Stance is rarely stable in a given interaction as interactants position themselves, align, realign and distance themselves. Therefore the textual function helps identify the stance being taken. Furthermore, it is important to examine the co-text (Kärkkäinen, 2007, p. 184) and the recycling of previously uttered linguistic elements (Du Bois, 2014) that surrounds the use of word *wey* as this can help identify interlocutor individuality, relationships with others and their relationship with language itself. Since the word

*wey* on its own may not signify stance, it is important to take into consideration context when trying to understand interlocutor meaning.

### Research question

Given the widespread use of the word *wey* in Mexican Spanish, in this paper we identify and analyse its function and situated use in Mexico’s second largest city, Guadalajara. Whether the word is used in similar ways in other parts of Mexico is a subject for further investigation. We seriously question the popular belief that the word *wey* is merely a filler and/or reflects inarticulateness. By building on Halliday’s ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of language, we examine whether interlocutors employ *wey* to convey positionality or stance.

We conducted qualitative research that examined instances of use rather than seeking an all-embracing categorisation or a table of frequency of use. Therefore, the overarching research question in this study is: Does the use of word *wey* help signal interlocutor stance as they express individuality, relationships with others and their relationship with language itself?

### Method

In this section, we outline data collection methods and describe the participants and investigators, the empirical setting and the use of participant observation and reconstructed dialogue for conducting research.

#### *Descriptive categories*

In order to understand how interactants use *wey* to signal stance, we examine how the word *wey* can express ideational, individuality, relationships with others and

their relationship with language itself. It is important to state from the outset that these are not discrete categories and often an utterance can be examined for stance in different ways as we saw in the previously.

With regards to the ideational function, we will examine how the word *wey* is used for evaluation and expressing the truth of the moment. The evaluation and truth of the moment may focus on another interactant or his/her actions or lack of actions. We will also review, as part of the interpersonal function, how *wey* may reflect personal concern for another interactant or for their situation or how an interactant may self-position themselves as self-critical or confrontational.

*Wey* can be used to convey the interactional aspect of the interpersonal function with others in order to construct, develop and maintain social relationships, interlocutors may demonstrate alignment or solidarity/distancing.

With regards to the textual function, the word *wey* can add cohesion, allow interactants to play with language or act as a creative resource.

### *Participants*

Participants in this paper were recorded or observed in the Guadalajara metropolitan area which principally consists of Guadalajara, Tlajomulco de Zuñiga Tlaquepaque, Tonalá, Zapopan and whose population exceeds four million inhabitants. The conurbation largely consists of commercial offices, service industries, universities and shopping plazas.

The data in this paper were collected by six Mexican informants. They are all middle-class university students aged be-

tween twenty and twenty-five. In total 100 examples of the use of *wey* were collected. The data do not reflect a balanced sociolinguistic analysis according to social class, gender, age etc. as this was not the purpose of the study. The focus is to analyse the use of *wey* as a resource rather than as categorization.

To record instances of the use of *wey*, the researchers carried out participant observations and fieldwork i.e. collecting data in real-life situations (Denscombe, 2010). Participant observation was carried out in the researchers' homes, at university and in social get-togethers. Fieldwork took place on public transport, in restaurants and cafes or on the city streets. Fieldwork involved anonymous observation and was recorded through reconstructed dialogue. Given the opportunistic nature of the fieldwork research, relevant contextual data may be missing which would clarify meaning and language use. However, the data are still worth examining because it was spontaneous and interactive.

### *Analysis*

In this section we examine how the word *wey* was used by interactants to adopt a stance as they evaluated a given interaction, assessed the truth of other interlocutors' contributions, engaged in confrontational exchanges, distanced themselves from others, expressed affect or self-positioned themselves.

As previously mentioned in terms of the ideational function of language, *wey* is used to evaluate and focus on the speaker's perception of truth behind a proposition. We analyse two examples of each characteristic below.

### *Evaluation*

An example of evaluation is illustrated in the following conversation where two working class men, in their twenties, are talking about the cost of studying at a local language school

#### *Extract 9*

Felipe: *¿Cuánto cobran en ese lugar?*

Bernardo: *Como 2 000, esos weyes cobran caro.*

Felipe: *Y sí, no me imaginaba que fuera tan costoso.*

Felipe: How much do they charge there?

Bernardo: Like 2 000, those *weyes* charge a lot.

Felipe: And yeah, I didn't think that it would be so expensive.

The word *wey* refers to more than one person and it is essentially aimed at those in the language school responsible for setting the prices. It is not, however, criticising the institute as a characterless entity. More specifically, Bernardo is censuring the school administration or the management. Therefore, even in its plural form, *wey* may not be referring to specific people.

In the following conversation, Sergio and Manuel, two twenty-year-old, middle-class men, are preparing a meal.

#### *Extract 10*

Sergio: *¿No tenemos cebollas?*

Manuel: *¿No trajimos verdad?*

Sergio: *Mmm, ¡qué weyes!*

Sergio: We don't have onions?

Manuel: We didn't bring them, did we?

Sergio: Mmm, what *weyes* we are!

Sergio passes judgment on themselves for forgetting the onions with *¡qué weyes!* By using the plural *weyes*, Sergio is including Manuel in his self-judgment. By doing so, he is attacking his own *face* as well as that of Manuel.

### *Perception of truth*

*Wey* can also be used to convey how a given interactant perceives the truth of a proposition and his/her commitment to it. In the following example, Juan, a 26-year-old manual worker, uses the word *wey* to establish his opinion about Pablo avoiding work and one's obligations.

#### *Extract 11*

Juan: *Y pues sí nomás se hace güey, eso no sirve socialmente.*

Juan: And so yes if one only pretends not to know something, that will not work socially.

Whilst Juan's utterance can be analysed as evaluative and directed at Pablo, the use of *wey* reflects a strong belief that a certain type of behaviour is not acceptable. Juan's utterance aims to reflect a 'general truth' which goes beyond examining Pablo's behaviour and implies that in general such behaviour is ineffective.

*Wey* can be used to show vagueness regarding other interactants when emphasising the ineffectiveness of a proposed course of action as seen in the following example. Salvador, a 26-year-old, middle-class male, is discussing the options that his hearer has. He uses *wey* to refer to someone whose name he does not know and who he has never met personally:

Extract 12

Salvador: *Porque si por ejemplo, vas con el wey de idiomas y después te vas al departamento va a salir algo parecido, y pues así no.*

Salvador: Because if, for example, you go with the *wey* in languages afterwards you go to the department, something similar is going to occur, and so not that way.

Salvador is stating that a course of action, as a general truth, is not going to function even though he does not have all the details, especially the names of the relevant people involved.

Interpersonal

Interpersonally, *wey* can be used to demonstrate individual concern and self-positioning as part of the personal dimension or to demonstrate alignment or solidarity/distancing as part of the interactional dimension.

An example of individual concern can be seen in the following example as Carmen shows her individuality by using *wey* to show supportiveness for Ana. The two women, Carmen, a lawyer and Ana, a teacher, both twenty years old, are discussing boyfriends:

Extract 13

Carmen: *¿Y tú qué onda, wey? ¿Ya no has salido con nadie?*

Ana: *No, wey. Estoy mejor así de forever alone. ¿Para qué quiero tener novio? ¿Para estar peleando todos los pinches días?*

Carmen: *No pos sí. Por una parte está mejor.*

Carmen: And what's up with you, *wey*? You haven't been out with anybody recently?

Ana: No *wey*. I like being "forever alone". What do I want a boyfriend for? So we can get into arguments every frigging day?

Carmen: Well, yeah, I guess so. In one way you are better off.

Carmen's *¿Y tú qué onda wey?* (And what's up with you, *wey*?) appears to be a real, as opposed to a phatic question since this is followed by *¿Ya no has salido con nadie?* (You haven't been out with anybody recently?). Ana's answer "forever alone" implies that she has not had much success at relationships recently. The use of *wey* reflects a solidary concern for Ana. Ana corresponds with *wey* in her negative response – appearing to echo an appreciation for Carmen's concern and consequently reinforcing their closeness.

The personal characteristic of interpersonal language use can also be expressed through self-criticism as seen in the following examples. In example 11, David, a middle-class 24-year-old university student criticises his own lack of activity as he chats to Clara, a middle-class 24-year-old teacher:

Extract 14

Clara: *¡Qué onda, güerito! ¿Qué haces?*

David: *Nada. Aquí haciéndome güey. ¿Y tú?*

Clara: What's up *güerito*? What are you doing?

David: Nothing. Here wasting time. And you?

Clara's simple greeting *¿Qué haces?* (What are you doing?) is matched by preferred response in Spanish from David: *Nada* (Nothing). Reflecting on his lack of activity, David says he is *aquí* (here) – as if he should be somewhere else – and that he is *haciéndome güey* (wasting time). Seemingly, without any provocation, he starts attacking his own *face* as if his conscience is telling him that he should be doing something else. However, his uneasy conscience may not be that serious as he quickly turns the conversation towards Clara by asking her what is she doing with *¿Y tú?* (And you?)

The following example shows a confrontational dimension to the personal aspect of interpersonal language use as Francisco tells his classmate, Héctor, to stop bothering him. Both are middle-class sixteen year olds.

*Extract 15*

Francisco: ¡*lá, wey!* *lá no me llevo.*

Héctor: *No, wey, el que se lleva aguanta.*

Francisco: That's enough *wey!* I can't take any more.

Héctor: No *wey*, you get what you give.

Both Francisco and Héctor have been teasing one other but now Francisco has decided that he has had enough so he tries to stop. Whilst to some degree solidary, the use of *wey* is emphatic in that Héctor wants to put a halt to their bantering with the *¡lá, wey!* (That's enough *wey!*). By using *wey*, they are both signalling that their relationship is still close even through there is conflict at that moment.

A similar individual stance can be seen

in the following example when a middle-class female student in her twenties takes on a group of students in the centre of Guadalajara who appear to be bothering her and challenges them:

*Extract 16*

Female student: *¿Cuál es el problema, wey?*

Female student: What's the problem *wey?*

In Spanish, *¿Cuál es el problema?* (What's the problem?) is confrontational. By adding *wey*, the female student is being even more aggressive. Furthermore, the singular *wey*, rather than the plural *weyes*, is more effective in a confrontational situation even though it involves more than one person.

The interactional dimension can be seen in the following instances. In example 17, the interactants' speech reflects alignment with the use of *wey* in nearly every utterance. Two twenty-year-old working-class men were recorded as they met each other in the street:

*Extract 17*

Working-class man 1: ¡*Eh wey, qué onda!*

Working-class man 2: ¡*Qué onda, wey!*

Working-class man 1: *¿A dónde vas, wey?*

Working-class man 2: *Al mercado wey!*

Working-class man 1: *¿Y eso, wey?*

Working-class man 2: *Pues invité unos compas a comer, les dije que les haría una comida y no tengo nada en el refri.*

Working-class man 1: Hey *wey*, what's up?

Working-class man 2: What's up *wey*!  
 Working-class man 2: Where are you going *wey*?  
 Working-class man 2: To the market, *wey*.  
 Working-class man 1: How come?  
 Working-class man 2: Well, I invited some mates over to eat, I told them that I would get a meal ready and I don't have anything in the fridge.

The continual use of *wey* shows a close alignment between the two interactants. From a discursual point of view, the use of *wey* appears to act as a preferred response as the interlocutors confirm and reinforce their relationship. The greeting seems to reflect an adjacency pair with greeting-greeting: ¡*Eh wey qué onda!* (Hey *wey*, what's up?) - ¡*Qué onda wey!* (What's up *wey!*). The word *wey* seems to be an integral part of the greeting and indeed the ongoing conversation.

Besides showing closeness, the interactional dimension to the interpersonal function may also show playful distancing as seen in the following exchange during break time between two lower-middle-class eleven-year-old primary school pupils, Ángel and Bernardo, who are discussing video games:

*Extract 18*

Ángel: *Yo tengo un PSP en mi casa.*  
 Bernardo: *Sí, pero estás bien wey y no sabes usarlo.*  
 Ángel: *Tú estás más wey y ni siquiera tienes uno, mejor ni hables.*  
 Ángel: I have a PSP in my house.  
 Bernardo: Yes, but you're a total idiot.

You don't know how to use it.  
 Ángel: You're more of an idiot! You don't even have one so shut up!

Ángel boasts that he has a PSP (a PlayStation Portable) in his house. To undermine his bragging, Bernardo uses *wey* (*estás bien wey* -- you are a total idiot) to show playful distance and mocking by claiming that Ángel does not know how to use it. Whilst not denying Bernardo's accusation, Ángel creates even more playful distance by claiming that Bernardo is more of an idiot i.e. *más wey* because he does not have one. The use of *bien wey* and *más wey* creates a mock distancing between the two interactants. However, their relationship, no doubt, will soon return to closeness and solidarity later on.

*Textual*

Regarding the textual function of language, *wey* is often used in a playful way as seen in the three following examples. In the first example, Sergio, a middle-class, forty-five-year-old businessman asks Ricardo, his son, a nineteen-year university student, how he refers to his friends Renato, Diego and César. The conversation occurred in Zapotlanejo, a town just outside Guadalajara:

*Extract 19*

Sergio: *Oye, ¿cómo llamas a Renato?*  
 Ricardo: *Eh, wey.*  
 Sergio: *¿Y a Diego?*  
 Ricardo: *Wey.*  
 Sergio: *¿Y a César?*  
 Ricardo: *Wey.*  
 Sergio: *¿O sea que son puros weyes?*

Ricardo: *Pues sí. ¿Qué tiene de malo?*

Sergio: *Vaya nombrecitos.*

Sergio: Hey, what do you call Renato?

Ricardo: Hey *wey*.

Sergio: And Diego?

Ricardo: *Wey*.

Sergio: And César?

Ricardo: *Wey*.

Sergio: So hey are all just *weyes*?

Ricardo: Yeah, What's wrong with that?

Sergio: What a way to call people.

As Ricardo says that he calls each of his friends by the same name, *wey*, Sergio adds the suffix *-cito* to the Spanish for names to indicate criticism. Whilst verbally playing with his son, Sergio is perhaps relating *wey* and *weyes* to the more denotational use of *güey* to refer to a farm animal, the ox. Whilst *cito* can have several meanings, in this case, it conveys negativity. However, given that Sergio uses the word *wey* in his everyday speech, it must be assumed that he is playing with his son.

In the second example, a man and a woman in their twenties are studying English as a foreign language and talking in the classroom before class.

#### *Extract 20*

Rafael: *Do you have a piece of paper?*

Esmeralda: *¿Ah sí para rayar a lo wey?*

Rafael: *Cada quien raya como quiere, a lo wey.*

Rafael: Do you have a piece of paper?

Esmeralda: For you to just scribble on

like an idiot?

Rafael: I can scribble like an idiot if I want and so can you.

In English, Rafael asks Esmeralda for a piece of paper and Esmeralda asks if he wants it to scribble on something like an idiot (*a lo wey*). Playing on the words, *a lo wey*, Rafael retorts that everyone can be an idiot in the way that they want. Therefore, Rafael and Esmeralda engage in bantering by criticising people who scribble without actually mentioning each other's name.

Finally, in the last example, Pamela criticises the behaviour of a friend of hers who she claims uses the word *wey* for everything and produces the following utterance which again interrelates the word *wey* with its denotational meaning of farm animal:

#### *Extract 21*

Pamela: *Te la pasas weyando a todo mundo. Pareciera que vives en un corral de vacas.*

Pamela: You go around calling everyone *wey*. Seems as if you live in a corral for cows.

Whilst the particle *weyando* does not exist even in colloquial Spanish, Pamela has coined a term which she and many others would agree with – her perception of the overuse of *wey* in Spanish. The use of *weyando* reflects a metalinguistic function as Pamela is talking about how the word *wey* is used in the language.

#### Discussion

We have argued that *wey* as stance allows in-

terlocutors to come across in their own ways whether it is to express the ideational, interpersonal or textual functions of language use. However, rather than just trying to categorise language use, we have shown how *wey* empowers interactants and allows them to highlight different aspects of content, position themselves and their interactants, and comment on the use of language itself.

The use of the word *wey* permits interactants to relate to or narrate content in their own individual ways and give emotive emphasis where they feel fit as can be seen in examples 9, 10, 11 and 12. In example 9, instead of ineffectually criticising the decision by a certain institution to charge a high price, the plural *weyes* enables Bernardo to say that there are people, even if their names are not known, who are responsible. In example 10, another use of the plural *weyes* allows Sergio to evaluate an omission that they are both responsible for i.e. forgetting the onions but which avoids allocating blame to either of the interactants. Therefore the utterance ¡que *weyes*! (What weyes!) attacks joint *face* but avoids attacking the individual *face*. In example 11, Juan without naming Pablo, claims that a certain type of behaviour is not going to work socially. As in example 9, Juan has avoided a specific face attack by talking in generalities but obviously the use of *se hace wey* (behave like an idiot) is directed at Pablo. In example 12, Salvador has attacked the *face* of someone he does not know and by doing so has underscored the futility of going to the language department.

Underlining the personal dimension, we have considered how interlocutors project their individuality. For instance, example 13 demonstrates how Carmen rein-

forces her relationship with Ana by asking ¿*Y tú qué onda wey?* ¿*Ya no has salido con nadie?* (And what's up with you *wey*? You haven't been out with anybody recently?). Example 14, shows how *wey* is also employed as self-reflection as David tells Clara that he is doing nothing: *haciéndome güey*. Confrontation in relationships can be seen in example 15 when Francisco calls on Héctor to stop bothering him with *Ya wey!* (That's enough *wey*!) and the female student in example 16 with ¿*Cuál es el problema?* (What's the problem?) directed at a group of students.

Rather than purely considering *wey* as solidary, we have examined the underlying personal and interpersonal functions, especially with regard to how it helps interlocutors establish, construct, maintain and distance relationships. For instance the maintenance of relationships through preferred responses can be seen in example 14 with the adjacency pair greeting-greeting: ¡*Eh wey qué onda!* (Hey *wey*, what's up?) - ¡*Qué onda wey!* (What's up *wey*!) and the ongoing use of *wey* confirms the vibrant state of the relationship. The use of *wey* allows distancing in relationships to be extremely direct as in example 18 with *estás bien wey* (you are a complete idiot) and *más wey* (more of an idiot). However, the underlying solidary marker, *wey*, allows relationships to be repaired.

Textually, the use of the word *wey* frees interlocutors from language restrictions – it allows them to play with language, comment on language use and be creative. This can be seen in the ludic examples 19, 20 and 21. In example 19, Sergio asks how it is that everyone appears to be called *wey* – a widespread phenomenon in Mexico where it is often difficult to know who the appel-

lative is referring to since different people, present or absent, are often referred to as *wey*. In example 20, *wey* is used creatively by Rafael and Esmeralda to criticise each other for potentially scribbling *a lo wey* (like an idiot) without specifically addressing each other and consequently engaging in bantering. In example, 21, Pamela creates an imaginary world of people as she implies that the overuse of *wey* portrays a world full of farm animals: a criticism levelled at her interlocutor or perhaps at the world at large.

### Conclusion

This analysis has gone beyond the traditional explanation of the use of *wey* in Mexican Spanish in that it is used as an insult or as a solidarity marker. A focus on stance adds another dimension to conventional linguistic analysis that merely reduces the word to a sociolinguistic category in that it is a feature of social class, geographical location, age or gender. We therefore have answered our research question in that the

use of *wey* helps signal interlocutor stance as he/she expresses individuality, relationships with others and his/her relationship with language itself.

Halliday's framework of ideational, interpersonal and textual allows *wey* to be seen in term of stance whereby interlocutors can empower themselves to come across in their own way and express their independence, unique histories and personal attitudes. Rather than condemning *wey* as reflecting unconventional, or as uneducated language, the word should be seen in terms of allowing interactants to talk about their own experiences, to position themselves, to play with language and comment on the use of language itself. A more extensive study may find that in Spanish, as well as in other languages, there are words that are denigrated as non-standard but may well have a communicative dimension that really does give interactants a greater ability and range to express themselves in their own words and in their own ways.

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