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A corpus and lexical analysis of the Spanish idiom *a conciencia*

Abstract: The aim of this study is to make a detailed description of the polysemic structure of the phraseme *a conciencia*. The methodology is based on an understanding of lexical semantics including the parameter of frequency of use in corpora (see Sinclair 1991), with data drawn from *Corpus del Español del Siglo XXI* (CORPES XXI). I will first discuss briefly certain issues relating to polysemy that will arise in the analysis; second, I will make an initial approach to the meaning of *a conciencia* based on lexicographic information, to be followed by a presentation of the corpus analysis itself. Finally, I will consider the semantic study of this particular phraseme by considering its combinability as seen in the contexts studied. In the conclusions I will try to show the internal structure of the form.

Keywords: phraseology, polysemy, Spanish

1 Introduction¹

According to Mellado Blanco (2014: 180), phraseological semantics is distinguished by its vagueness, seen “*en un alto grado de polisemia, con frecuencia difícil de sistematizar y formalizar, dada la variedad de situaciones comunicativas que puede albergar el uso de un determinado FR[raseologismo]*” [‘in a high degree of polysemy, frequently difficult to systematize and formalize, given the variety of communicative situations that can host the use of a given phraseme’]. In this regard, the greatest difficulty that phraseology faces is perhaps in the distinction between general meaning and polysemy, a distinction which Mellado Blanco

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believes can be established with the best guarantee of success through the inductive analysis of contexts extracted from linguistic corpora (Mellado Blanco 2014: 180). Such an analysis will be undertaken in the following pages, in the belief that a study of this kind can transcend the mere description of a particular linguistic element and offer analytical patterns of more general use.

1.1 On polysemy

The most widespread conception of polysemy is probably that of Bréal (1897), who coined the term to identify the phenomenon of the multiplicity of meanings or senses of words (see, for example, Pottier Navarro [1991: 7] and Muñoz Núñez [1999: 47–48]). Within the framework of cognitive linguistics, where meanings are conceived of as conceptualizations (Langacker 2008: Ch. 2) or categorizations (Taylor et al. 2003: 1), the development of the concept involves several factors (Gries 2015: 473): it is considered that linguistic knowledge cannot be separated from encyclopaedic knowledge (Evans and Green 2006: 160–162; Valenzuela et al. 2012: 48–52; Taylor 2016), context is recognised as having great importance (Cruse 2000a: 14; Ravin and Leacock 2000: 5–6; Gries and Divjak 2009; Glynn 2014), and the theory of prototypes is incorporated into the linguistic analysis (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2007; Taylor 2008; Geeraerts 2010: 183–203).

Thus, Croft and Cruse (2004: 109) understand polysemy as “variation in the construal of a word on different occasions of use”, a variation that causes the fragmentation of its meaning in a series of sense units that are autonomous in nature. The authors here consider three different types of autonomy: attentional autonomy, also called antagonism, which “means that two units are mutually exclusive as foci of attention” (Croft and Cruse 2004: 112); relational autonomy, according to which the various units maintain distinct sense relations (synonymy, antonymy, meronymy, etc.); and compositional autonomy, which refers to the peculiar combinatory possibilities of each of the units.

Polysemic words, therefore, are complex categories, or in Lakoff’s (1987: Ch. 6) terms, are radial categories (see also Brugman and Lakoff 1988), which implies that their internal structure “*incluye una constelación de sentidos con diferentes grados de representatividad*” [‘includes a constellation of senses with different degrees of representativity’] (Cuenca and Hilferty 1999: 127), these organized around a central element, the prototypical one (see, among others, Evans and Green 2006: Ch. 8, 9, 10; Tay 2014). According to Mellado Blanco (2014: 180), the phrasemes with the greatest tendency to generate different meanings from a prototypical central meaning are those which have the highest rates of discursive frequency, that is, those which show greatest expressiveness. Turning

to the phraseme under scrutiny here, the data from CORPES XXI indicate a frequency which, while not high, is nevertheless sufficient: it has a normalized frequency (number of cases per million words) of 2.14, higher than other lexical units with similar meanings, such as *concienzudamente* ‘conscientiously’ (0.86), *meticulosamente* ‘meticulously’ (1.29), *con esfuerzo* ‘with effort’ (1.92), *aposta* ‘on purpose’ (0.31) or *adrede* ‘intentionally’ (1.05); although lower than some others, such as *cuidadosamente* ‘carefully’ (8.81) or *conscientemente* ‘consciously’ (2.28).²

1.2 Lexicographic information on *a conciencia*

The Latin term *conscientiā* led to two nouns in Spanish, *consciencia* and *conciencia* (in English, broadly ‘consciousness’ and ‘conscience’), which share the general sense of ‘perception or knowledge’ but which differ in that only the latter, *conciencia*, is used with the meaning of ‘ability to distinguish between good and evil’ (definitions taken from the DPD).³ Also, Spanish *consciencia* tends to be used to refer to a specific type of knowledge, that which we humans have of ourselves and of the world that surrounds us, as the following example illustrates:

- (1) *Sólo eso [lo que llamamos alma] es lo que convierte el instinto en consciencia.*
 ‘Only that [what we call the soul] is what turns instinct into *consciousness*.’
 (CORPES XXI-España: Eugenio Fuentes: *Las manos del pianista*)

Conciencia, therefore, is equivalent to ‘knowledge’, a broad meaning fragmented into different conceptualizations, these constituting the different units of meaning of this polysemic word. Spanish dictionaries include, *grosso modo*, the following meanings:

1. Knowledge of oneself and one’s own actions.
2. Knowledge of good and evil; ethical and moral sense.
3. Clear and reflexive knowledge of reality.
4. Spontaneous knowledge of reality.

On the other hand, both general and phraseological dictionaries tend to list two adverbial phrases consisting of a preposition + the noun *conciencia* with neither modification nor determination: *en conciencia* and *a conciencia*. Definitions given for the first of these, all very similar, are not particularly explicit, although

² This consultation was made in January 2017, whereas the data which serve here as a basis for the analysis were extracted at a significantly earlier date (see the Bibliography).

³ The dictionaries consulted in this study are identified in the text by abbreviations (see Bibliography).

accompanying examples serve to clarify the meaning, which is established on the basis of the unit of meaning that we identify with the sense (2) above: “*de acuerdo con la conciencia de una persona*” [‘according to the conscience of a person’] (DLe, s.v. *conciencia*): *actuar, obrar en conciencia* [‘to act or proceed in good conscience’].⁴ Of the second phrase, the object of the present analysis, we found two lexicographical meanings.

The first of these, found in all the dictionaries consulted except DFE, is explained in terms such as the following: “*concienzudamente; con atención, esfuerzo, detenimiento, rigor, empeño, cuidado, responsabilidad, interés, meticulosidad, ahínco, trabajo*” [‘conscientiously; with attention, effort, detail, rigor, commitment, care, responsibility, interest, meticulousness, dedication, work’]. On the other hand, in the accompanying examples, the verbs modified by the locution are almost always *hacer* ‘make, do’ or *trabajar* ‘work’. From all this information it can be deduced that the central sense of the meaning also relates to the unity of the sense represented by sense (2) of the noun *conciencia*, in that when an activity is carried out with effort, attention, interest, etc., it is done “*como tiene que hacerse*” [‘as it should be done’] (DELE, s.v. *a conciencia*), that is, with an ethical or moral sense.

The second meaning of *a conciencia* is scarcely present in three of the dictionaries, with the following definitions: “*intencionadamente o a propósito*” [‘intentionally or on purpose’] (DLe); “*de una manera consciente, sabiendo muy bien lo que se hace*” [‘in a conscious manner, knowing very well what one is doing’] (DFE) and “*con plena conciencia*” [‘in full conscience’] (DFDEA). In the latter of these dictionaries, the example given also contains the sequence *a conciencia de que*, which other lexical works list as a separate phrase.

Thus is the case in GDUEA, for example, which defines it in the following way: “*conociendo muy bien los aspectos y circunstancias de aquello que se menciona o de lo que se trata*” [‘knowing very well the aspects and circumstances of that mentioned or which is being dealt with’]. Whatever the truth here,⁵ the bulk of the examples used to illustrate definitions of *a conciencia (de que)* seem to suggest that, again, it is the value that we have identified in (2): *Desobedeció a conciencia* [‘He disobeyed consciously’] (DLe); *Tus picaduras más fulminantes [...] las hincas a conciencia de que estás mintiendo* [‘You drive home your most fulminating blows ... knowing that you are lying’] (DFDEA); *Pegó a su hermano aun a conciencia de que lo que hacía estaba mal* [‘He struck his brother even in the

⁴ In some dictionaries (DELE, DUE, DP) a second meaning is given: ‘con sinceridad, francamente’ [‘with sincerity, frankly’]: *decir algo en conciencia* [‘to say something frankly’].

⁵ The limitations of the present study do not allow for an analysis of the segment *a conciencia de que*. I will therefore ignore instances of it in CORPES XXI.

knowledge that what he was doing was wrong'] (GDUEA). In these three cases, the subject performs an action which is normally censurable (disobey, lie or hit) in the full knowledge of this.

1.3 Description of the corpus

As previously noted, the corpus used for data on *a conciencia* is CORPES XXI, which contained about 500 instances of the phraseme at the time the search was made. In order to achieve representative data, I have limited the analysis to those geographical areas in which both the absolute frequency (AF) and the normalized frequency (NF: number of cases per million words) reached the highest levels: Spain, Mexico and Central America, Río de la Plata, and the Continental Caribbean.⁶ These four areas together account for 427 of the 497 instances of *a conciencia*, that is, almost 86% of the total number of occurrences. Table 1 sets out data by area as given in CORPES XXI.⁷

Tab. 1: Geographical distribution

Zone	AF	NF
Spain	243	3.06
Mexico and Central America	88	1.97
Río de la Plata	51	1.59
Continental Caribbean	45	1.63

I will analyse all instances from the four areas, and through using the two parameters of external fixation in the analysis it will be possible to specify very clearly the semantic description of *a conciencia*: the more important of these parameters is syntagmatic verbal combination, which will be analysed closely; secondly, relevant information on other co-occurring elements in the phrase will be extracted, notably on elements maintaining a relationship of coordination with it.

⁶ Zones will be identified with the following abbreviations: Spain: ES; Mexico and Central America: MC; Río de la Plata: RP; Continental Caribbean: CC.

⁷ The table includes figures that the corpus facilitates when statistical data is requested. Those relating to absolute frequency are not completely consistent with those I use in the analysis, since I deleted some instances, for several reasons: typos, repetitions, absence of context (e.g., *a conciencia* as a newspaper headline), impossibility of interpretation (unintelligibility), etc. The instances analysed number 402 in total.

2 Parameters of fixation

Prior to any description it will be useful to review briefly the degree of internal fixation of the phraseme. For this the test of insertion is used, which checks the level of cohesion between the preposition and the noun. Searches made with CORPES XXI have shown that it is not possible to insert a determiner between the preposition and the noun (**a {la/esta/su/una} conciencia*) or, in general, to add an adjective adjacent to the noun, with the exception of the adjectives *plena* ‘full’ (in the subcorpus, six cases before and one case after the noun) and *pura* ‘pure’ (one case after the noun). As the following examples illustrate, modification is always made in uses corresponding to the second of the two lexicographical meanings outlined above (‘on purpose’):⁸

- (2) a. *Hacer el imbécil a plena conciencia solo se justifica cuando es para que los amigos lo pasen bien.*
 ‘Playing the fool *knowingly* is only justified when it is for the enjoyment of friends.’
 (ES, Albert Boadella: *Memorias de un bufón*)
- b. *Fue a conciencia pura que perdí tu amor, nada más que por salvarte.*
 ‘It was *in full knowledge* that I lost your love, nothing more than to save you.’
 (RP, Paco Maglio: *La dignidad del otro*)

However, the phraseme *a conciencia* corresponds to a structural semantic scheme in which the preposition *a* carries a modal value, the basic features of which can be expressed in the following formula: [a + S_[abstract, singular]]. Other realisations of this scheme could be *a gusto* ‘to one’s liking’, *a disgusto* ‘to one’s disliking’, *a pulso* ‘freehand’, *a placer* ‘to one’s pleasure’, *a tiento* ‘groping’, *a antojo* ‘on a whim’ and *a capricho* ‘to one’s fancy’. Like some of these other realisations, *a conciencia* can be modified through a quantifier: *tan a gusto* ‘so much to one’s liking’, *completamente a placer* ‘completely to one’s pleasure’.

- (3) a. *Con las rotaciones se trabaja muy a conciencia, y aún cuando la agricultura del CREA se hace en muchos campos alquilados, la tendencia es a mantener una rotación adecuada.*
 ‘The rotations are done *without fail*, and even when the CREA’s agriculture is on rented fields, the trend is to maintain an adequate degree of rotation.’
 (RP, Héctor A. Huergo: «Capital de la directa», *Clarín.com*)

⁸ I have also found three cases of the adjacency of a prepositional phrase with a restrictive value, which I have excluded from the analysis (example: *Abre [el libro] hacia el final, a conciencia de lo que busca* [‘He opens the book by the end, knowing what he sought’] (CC, Arnoldo Rosas: *Uno se acostumbra*), but not **a propósito, adrede de lo que busca* [‘on purpose of what he sought’]. Cf. footnote 5.

- b. *Varios prohombres, incluido don Marcelino, habían propuesto al escritor para el premio Nobel desde hacía muchos años. Pero la vez en que más a conciencia se hizo prendió la resistencia de la caverna.*

‘Several notable people, including don Marcelino, had proposed the writer for the Nobel Prize over many years. But precisely at the moment when it was done *with the greatest resolve* came the resistance of the die-hards.’

(ES, Jesús Ruiz Mantilla: *Ahogada en llamas*)

This brief formal characterisation allows us to affirm that this is without doubt a lexicalised prepositional group (NGLE: § 30.15b), that is, a modal adverbial phrase. As such, its function in the clause is principally that of an adjunct or circumstantial complement of mode or manner (for example, *Se lava las manos a conciencia* ‘He washes his hands thoroughly’), although in the corpus I have also detected some cases of a syntagmatic modifier, almost always of a participle (*(un entrenamiento) preparado a conciencia* ‘a well planned (training)’) and on occasion a noun (*un trabajo a conciencia* ‘a job well done’). Given the predicate value that both categories carry in these contexts (in that the majority of localised nouns are eventive), I will group these forms along with verb forms in my exposition for reasons of simplicity.

3 Lexical and combinatory analysis of *a conciencia*

As I have already noted, in the field of cognitive linguistics the complex meaning of a polysemic lexical element is explained on the basis of a central or prototypical sense unit. If we consider the relevant lexicographical information, we might assume in principle that this corresponds to the first of the two meanings mentioned *supra* (‘with attention to detail, effort and rigor’).

In this sense a brief historic review of the presence of the phrase in the texts is useful: data from the CORDE suggest that *a conciencia* arises from an elision of the expression *conforme a conciencia* (that means ‘according to what ethics dictate’): a search of the segment *a conciencia* in the corpus only yields cases from the sixteenth century onwards, with four examples from this century, all of these corresponding to *conforme a conciencia*.⁹ In the seventeenth century, five examples of the full expression are found, as well as three of the abbreviated

⁹ Apart from the following case, eliminated because it has a free syntagma, the preposition of which is controlled by the verb: *En negocios que tocan a conciencia...* [‘businesses that touch one’s conscience’] (Gabriel de Toro: *Tesoro de misericordia divina y humana*, 1548).

expression, these being from texts in verse, whether or not this is coincidental. In any case, the meaning of the abbreviated expression does not vary with respect to the full one, as the following example makes clear:

- (4) Si he cortado quatro caras,
 ha sido tan *a conciencia*,
 que en mi vida me he quedado,
 ni aun con dos dedos de tela.
 ‘If I have slit four pieces of cloth / it has been *so ethically done* / that in my
 life I remain / with not even two fingers of cloth.’
 (Luis Quiñones de Benavente: *Entremés de los galeotes*, 1651)

This meaning coincides with that of the phrase *en conciencia* (see *supra*),¹⁰ of far greater vitality in CORDE, with 53 instances in the sixteenth century and 137 in the seventeenth. This unbalanced competition culminates in the eighteenth century, in which we find no cases of (*conforme*) *a conciencia* yet 75 of *en conciencia*. In the nineteenth century the second phrase solidifies its presence, with 195 instances, although some cases of *a conciencia* (12) are also detected. Of interest here is that the meaning of the phrase with *a* is seen, through a process of specialisation, to be increasingly less linked to that which it previously had, clearly seen in the verbal combination: in half the recorded cases the phrase can be interpreted in terms of the previously indicated sense (‘in conscience, in agreement with the dictates of ethics’); for example, *cobrar a los clientes a conciencia* [‘charge clients in a right manner’], *escribir la historia a conciencia* [‘write history fairly’], whereas in the other half, it combines with verbs which denote activity of an intellectual or physical character the optimal realisation of which implies effort, care, attention to detail or rigor (that is, ‘according to that which ethics dictate’): *examinar un caso* ‘examine a case’, *estudiar leyes* ‘study laws’; *barrer un patio* ‘sweep a patio’, *cantar una ópera* ‘sing an opera’, etc. In relation to this we ought to note the fact that the full structure *conforme a conciencia* ‘according to (one’s) conscience’ has disappeared from the texts. The use of *a conciencia* increases notably in the twentieth century,¹¹ where it reaches 111 instances in the data; the consequences of such an increase will be the focus of our interest in what follows.

Turning now specifically to the current state of the language (as we know, CORPES XXI includes texts from the twenty-first century), we note that the meaning with the greatest occurrence in texts is indeed that which is most

¹⁰ Also, *grosso modo*, with that of the syntagm *con conciencia*, which for reasons of space we will not deal with in this study.

¹¹ CORDE includes texts until 1974.

frequently collected in Spanish lexicography, the one with the genesis outlined above. Given that this contribution is intended to be a corpus-based analysis, it seems logical to assume that the central or prototypical meaning of *a conciencia* would be that with the greatest presence in CORPES XXI. Hence we will begin the description with this.

3.1 The meaning ‘with attention to detail, effort and rigor’

Of the 402 cases included in the analysis (see footnotes 5, 7 and 8), 277 correspond to this meaning, that is, almost 70% of the total. Some examples are given below:

- (5) a. *El filipino reconoció que en 2011 pasó unos meses de excesos alejado de su familia, lo que propició que no se preparara a conciencia en su combate con Márquez.*

‘The Filipino acknowledged that in 2011 he spent a few months of excess away from his family, which meant that he did not prepare *properly* for his fight with Márquez.’

(RP, «El peor año en boxeo de “PacMan” Pacquiao», *ABC Color*)

- b. *Entre estas plantas existen algunas que, en realidad, tienen antigua aplicación terapéutica y traen alivio o mejoría a los males comunes. Varias de ellas han sido después estudiadas a conciencia.*

‘Among these plants there are some that, in fact, have old therapeutic applications and bring relief or improvement to common evils. Several of them have subsequently been studied *in depth*.’

(CC, Luis Eduardo Vargas Rocha: *Ibagué: médicos y medicina 1880–1940*)

- c. *La “presión” se soporta porque si has trabajado duro y a conciencia, seguramente todo saldrá bien.*

‘The “pressure” is tolerable because if you have worked hard and *conscientiously*, surely everything will turn out well.’

(ES, Lola González: *Paso a paso. Prepárate a fondo para alcanzar tu sueño*)

- d. *Sin pensarlo, tomó un cubo lleno de agua y un trapo y comenzó a lavar el auto a conciencia.*

‘Without thinking, he took a bucket full of water and a rag and began to wash the car *thoroughly*.’

(MC, Francisco Alonso: *El imperio de las drogas*)

Example (5a) is one of the 56 cases of the combination of *a conciencia* with *preparar(se)* ‘to prepare (oneself)’, the most representative of a group of verbs denoting preparation or planning (see REDES, *s.v. a conciencia*), of which other verbs include *entrenar* ‘train’ (7 cases), *ensayar* ‘try, try out’ (2), *adiestrar* ‘train,

instruct', *formarse* 'teach or form oneself' and *practicar* 'practice'. The combination with this first group of verbs accounts for 72 instances, that is, almost 26% of the total occurrences of the phrase with this meaning.

A second group, with 43 instances, is constituted by verbs denoting study, reflexion or analysis (see REDES). In addition to *estudiar* 'study' (5b), which accounts for 10 cases, others include *examinar* 'examine' (5 cases), *analizar* 'analyse' (4), *investigar* 'investigate' (2), *considerar* 'consider', *meditar* 'meditate' and *rumiar* 'ruminate'.

To these examples we can add a third group, with 19 instances, including verbs denoting search, verification of the exploration of something (see REDES), such as *registrar* 'register' (5 cases), *revisar* 'revise' (2), *buscar* 'seek', *comprobar* 'confirm', *inspeccionar* 'inspect' and *supervisar* 'supervise'.

A fourth group, with 37 cases, includes the verb *trabajar* 'work' (5c) and the expression *hacer un trabajo* 'carry out a job' (28 cases in total), as well as others that "*designan la acción de poner esfuerzo en alguna cosa*" ['designate the action of putting effort into doing something'] (REDES, s.v. *a conciencia*) such as *emplearse* 'strive' (3 cases), *aplicarse* 'apply oneself', *dedicarse* 'dedicate oneself' and *involucrarse* (*en una actividad*) 'involve oneself (in an activity)'.

Finally, example (5d) illustrates a group which seems not to be present in REDES, although it is among the largest, with 54 instances (thus representing 20% of the total number of cases in the data). It includes verbs denoting bodily care, washing and cleaning: *lavar(se)* 'wash (oneself)' (14 cases), *limpiar* 'clean' (12), *frotar(se)* 'rub (oneself)' (2), *rasurar(se)* 'shave (oneself)' (2), *cepillar* 'brush' (2), *fregar* 'wash up' (2), *asearse* 'visit the toilet', *barrer* 'sweep', *desinfectar* 'disinfect', *tallarse* 'scrub oneself', etc.

These five groups together account for 225 instances, more than 82% of the total (of the 277 examples of *a conciencia* with the meaning which interests us here). The remaining 18% cases, some 52, are more heterogeneous in nature, although in general they involve verbs describing activities of various kinds which require (or might require) time, trouble or attention, such as *conducir* 'drive', *machacar* (*en el mortero*) 'grind (in a mortar)', *olfatear* 'smell', *patrullar* 'patrol', *probar* (*un coche*) 'test, try out (a car)', *remozar* (*una casa*) 'remodel, modernise (a house)', *tritular* 'grind, crush', etc. Within this group we find a subgroup of verbs which denote physical aggression, such as *destruir* 'destroy', *depedazar* 'tear up', *machacar* (*a alguien*) 'pulverise, beat (someone) up', *martirizar* 'torment', *sacudirse* 'beat off' and *vapulear* 'beat up'; I will return to these later on.

As I noted above, the lexicographic descriptions of this meaning use nouns such as "*esfuerzo, trabajo, empeño, atención, rigor*" ['force, work, effort, attention, rigor'], which indicate what is socially most acceptable from an ethical perspective, be it material or mental. Hence it is not surprising that the phrase *a*

conciencia appears with a certain frequency coordinated with adverbial elements such as *bien* ‘well’, *duro* ‘hard’, *fuerte* ‘strongly’ or *a fondo* ‘in full’: *trabajar duro y a conciencia* [‘work hard and conscientiously’], *prepararse fuerte y a conciencia* [‘prepare yourself strongly and conscientiously’], *estudiar a fondo y a conciencia* [‘study thoroughly and conscientiously’], etc. The following examples illustrate this important feature of the meaning (see also (5c)):

- (6) a. *Fue un trabajo interpretativo profundo, hecho a conciencia, que Ntaca dirigió e interpretó con pericia prometedora de nuevos logros en su ascendente carrera.*
 ‘It was an in-depth interpretive work, done *well*, that Ntaca directed and performed with an expertise promising new achievements in his rising career.’
 (RP, Héctor Coda: «La Sinfónica, con pie derecho», *La Nación*)
- b. *En los entrenamientos los muchachos se están preparando fuerte y a conciencia para dejar en alto el nombre de Panamá.*
 ‘In the training sessions the boys are preparing themselves *strongly and conscientiously* to put the name of Panama on high.’
 (MC, Elisinio González: «Le sonrío al futuro», *Panama America.com.pa*)

Yet in addition to this trait of meaning, another stands out, described in dictionaries with terms such as “*detenimiento*” ‘attention to detail’ or “*meticulosidad*” ‘meticulously’; in regard of this we note that verbs which combine with *a conciencia* denote material or mental processes which in general involve duration; thus, to carry out an activity “*a conciencia*” not only means doing it as well as possible, but also in a complete way, taking all the time necessary. Hence we find coordinations like *a conciencia y con la constancia necesaria* [‘well and with the necessary perseverance’], *a conciencia y sin tregua* [‘well and ceaselessly’] and *a conciencia y permanentemente* [‘well and permanently’]. The exhaustive nature of the way an activity is carried out is seen clearly in the following examples:

- (7) a. *Por años, siendo soltera, había imaginado a conciencia la índole de esas relaciones, las había en verdad preformado de cien maneras distintas.*
 ‘For years, as a single woman, she had *diligently* imagined the nature of these relationships, had indeed rehearsed them in a hundred different ways.’
 (RP, Gustavo Ferreyra: *Piquito de oro*)
- b. *El lavado de manos es una medida muy eficaz cuando uno la realiza a conciencia, cumpliendo con los distintos pasos y durante unos minutos.*
 ‘Handwashing is a very effective measure when one does it *properly*, fulfilling the different steps and for a few minutes.’
 (RP, «5 preguntas sobre diarrea infantil», *La Voz*)

The preferences of *a conciencia* in its verbal combinations has meant that in some cases its profile has shifted from the denoting of perfection or excellence towards completion, as happens, among others, with the group of verbs that denote physical aggression, mentioned above: if, for example, we say that Warsaw was “*machacada a conciencia durante la II Guerra Mundial*” [‘completely destroyed during the Second World War’] (ES), or that a person takes ten or twelve hours to “*despedazar a conciencia*” [‘carefully tear apart’] some dead bodies (MC), we are moving the focus of attention of the listener towards one of the aspects of the meaning of *a conciencia*, that of the completion or completeness in the carrying out of the activity concerned.

If the focus is fully situated in the scope of quantification, we might perhaps speak of a differentiated sense unit; it would no longer be equivalent to *concienzudamente* ‘conscientiously, painstakingly’, but rather to *plenamente* ‘fully’ or even *mucho* ‘a lot’. This happens when *a conciencia* combines with verbs denoting activities which are not susceptible to a qualitative modal change (relative to their “quality”), but rather a quantitative one, as with *reír* ‘laugh’, *llorar* ‘cry’, *congelar* ‘freeze’, *inspirar (aire)* ‘inhale (air)’ or *inocular* ‘innoculate’ (in general, one does not laugh or cry “better” or “worse”, but “more” or “less”). In the corpus, 28 cases were found in which the value is essentially quantitative, some of which are shown here:

- (8) a. *El sol caía a conciencia sobre el patio de Palacio donde la viuda de Montagut, los Montemayor, Venancio el alcalde y el comisario Fuentes escenificaban el duelo.*
 ‘The sun shone *hard* on the patio of the Palace where widow Montagut, the Montemayors, Mayor Venancio and Commissioner Fuentes were present at the duel.’
 (ES, Teresa Viejo: *La memoria del agua*)
- b. *Se la llevó al recibidor y se pegó a ella a conciencia, los demás asistentes al guateque le tacharon de salido e indecentón.*
 ‘He took her to the hall and clung to her *a lot*, and the others at the party saw him as out of order and indecent.’
 (ES, Jesús Riosalido: «El esfuerzo de Juan Valdés». *Despedida y más aspectos de la tristeza*)

The synonymic replacement in both cases shows that the focus of attention has shifted: in (8a) we could say *el sol caía a plomo* [‘the sun shone *hard*’], but not **caía concienzudamente, con ahínco, con esfuerzo* [‘*shone painstakingly, with great care, with effort’]; in (8b), *se pegó a ella completamente*, [‘he clung to her a lot’] but not **meticulosamente, con trabajo, con cuidado* [‘meticulously, with work, with care’]. This change also has to do with the orientation of the modification made by the phrase: we know that adverbs and phrases of mode or manner can extend to other elements in the phrase, particularly the subject-agent, as is the case

with *a conciencia* with the central meaning: if we say, for example, that someone prepares or cleans something *a conciencia*, we are offering information about the mode in which he or she performs this action, but also about the attitude of the person: it is someone rigorous, thorough and careful when preparing or cleaning (NGLE: § 30.9). This orientation towards the agent does not seem to occur when the focus of attention has slipped towards the quantitative (exhaustive) value of the phrase:

- (9) *Eva se apartó entonces de la claraboya y se acurrucó a llorar entre las tejas. Lloró a conciencia, hasta que los lagrimales se le secaron, y durante un rato más siguió llorando en seco.*

‘Eva then left the skylight and curled up to weep on the tiles. She cried *a great deal*, until the tear ducts ran dry, and for a while she continued to cry dry-eyed.’

(ES, Rubén Abella: *El libro del amor esquivo*)

Through *a conciencia* here we understand that Eva cried a lot, until she could cry no more, but it does not seem that the phrase provides information on her attitude in relation to crying; we do not learn whether she was thorough or rigorous in her crying. On the other hand, the subject already has no reason for being a volitive agent; indeed, not even an animated entity, as seen in (8a).

In all, the number of cases here is very small (just 9% of the total), almost all from the subcorpus of Spanish from Spain, and therefore with a low level of representativeness; there are also quite a few contexts where it is difficult to establish whether there are two antagonistic units (see Croft and Cruse 2004: 112–113). In the following examples, although it can be said that the focus is on quantification, it also seems that the qualitative aspect of the meaning cannot be excluded:

- (10) a. *Había cogido un cubilete y agitaba dentro el dado a conciencia, no muy rápido, como si contase uno a uno los golpes de muñeca necesarios para arrancar al dado el número que convenía.*

‘He had picked up a goblet and shook the dice *a lot*, not very fast, as if he counted one by one the blows of the wrist necessary to throw the number he wanted.’

(ES, Javier Montes: *La vida de hotel*)

- b. *Los enamorados de los boleros son unos plastas que siempre se están despidiendo y encima dicen «reloj, no marques las horas» para seguir dándonos la chapa a conciencia.*

‘The lovers of boleros are nuisances who are always saying goodbye and on top of that say “clock, do not mark the hours” to continue being a *thorough* pain to us.’

(ES, Begoña Amezttoy: *Escuela de mujeres*)

3.2 The meaning ‘on purpose’

The second of the meanings has a far lower occurrence in CORPES XXI than the one we have just discussed, with only 81 instances, 20% of the total. Some examples follow:

- (11) a. *Salimos de excursión, mi padre iba borracho... y a la vuelta... chocamos de frente contra un camión. ¿Sabe lo peor de todo esto? Siempre he creído que lo hizo aposta. Quiso matarnos a conciencia.*
 ‘We went out on a trip, my father was drunk... and on the way back... we collided head-on with a truck. Do you know the worst of it? I have always believed that he did it on purpose. He *intentionally* wanted to kill us.’
 (ES, Paco Bezerra: «El piano de la bruta», *Teatro. Promoción Resad 2004*)
- b. *El tipo del retrete aseguraba que los autores de los disparos eran dos personas. No mentía a conciencia cuando afirmó que les había oído hablar, pero el miedo altera la memoria y aquel parroquiano se había llevado un susto de espanto.*
 ‘The guy in the toilet claimed that there were two people responsible for the shots. He did not lie *deliberately* when he said that he had heard them speak, but fear alters the memory and that local guy had been well frightened.’
 (ES, Alfonso Rojo: *Matar para vivir*)
- c. *[Isabel] se había preguntado qué estaba haciendo y se había respondido que se estaba entregando al Mal. Se había repetido, a conciencia, sabiendo lo que se decía, que ella estaba premiando al malvado.*
 ‘[Isabel] had wondered what she was doing and answered that she was giving herself to Evil. She had repeated herself, *consciously*, knowing what she was saying, that she was rewarding the wicked.’
 (RP, Marcelo Birmajer: *Historia de una mujer*)
- d. Óscar [...], *no sigas mortificándote por eso. Yo tomé esta decisión a conciencia, [...] no culpemos solamente a uno de los dos.*
 ‘Óscar [...], do not keep mortifying yourself for that. I made this decision *in full knowledge*, [...] let us not blame only one of the two.’
 (MC, Ramón Varela Morales: *Primum*)

Although in this sense there is far more heterogeneity in the verbal combinations than we saw above, some preferences can be found: example (11a) illustrates the most numerous group of verbs (10 cases), composed of those denoting physical aggression or in general some sort of hostile action (see REDES): as well as *matar* ‘kill’ (2 cases), we might mention *arrasar* ‘raze’, *desmantelar* ‘dismantle’, *drogarse* ‘drug’ and *infligir daño* ‘inflict damage’; (11b) illustrates the group of verbs

denoting lying or cheating (7 instances): *mentir* ‘lie’ (3 cases), *omitir información* ‘omit information’ (2), *cometer una falsedad* ‘commit a falsehood’ and *engañar* ‘cheat’; (11c) exemplifies the group of verbs of communication (6 instances), such as *decir* ‘say’, *hablar* ‘speak’ or *repetir* ‘repeat’; finally, (11d) illustrates the group of “*verbos que denotan elección o valoración de algo*” [‘verbs that denote the choice or valuation of something’] (REDES, *s.v. a conciencia*) (5 instances): *elegir* ‘choose’ (2), *tomar una decisión* ‘take a decision’, *tomar una opción* ‘take an option’. These four groups together total just 28 instances, scarcely reaching 35% of the total for this meaning, and thus a notable difference is established between the two senses we are considering here, in that the former shows a far more pronounced combinatory preference.

In general, we can say that each of the two senses is associated with different verbal combinations, except verbs which denote aggression or hostility, with which *a conciencia* can display either; cfr. (11a) with (12):

(12) *El ingeniero nicaragüense Héctor Khalona es uno de los tres expertos designados por el Banco Mundial para realizar el proyecto de reconstrucción de la red eléctrica de Kabul, que –según dice– ha sido destruida “a conciencia” en los 25 años de guerras que ha vivido Afganistán.*

‘The Nicaraguan engineer Héctor Khalona is one of the three experts designated by the World Bank to carry out the reconstruction of the Kabul power grid, which –according to him– has been destroyed “fulsomely” over the last 25 years of wars that Afghanistan has experienced.’

(MC, «Nicaragüense proyecta red eléctrica de Kabul», *La Prensa*)

The need to rebuild Kabul’s electricity network here is seen as a consequence of the fact that the destruction inflicted upon the city was thorough, meticulous and detailed;¹² in (11a), however, a physical strike on a truck is described as a procedure aimed at killing someone, hence an action which is non-durative in nature, and this, together with the co-occurrence of the synonym *aposta* ‘on purpose’, blocks the interpretation of sense 1. In Croft and Cruse’s (2004) terms, the different contexts reflect different circumstances, and these mean that we are looking here at different conceptualizations.

According to these authors, we can say that between the two sense units there is an antagonism, given that both “are mutually exclusive as foci of attention” (Croft and Cruse 2004: 112). For example, in the sequence *Disparó a conciencia* [‘He fired on purpose’] the two interpretations compete and the context resolves

¹² The inverted commas might indicate the paradox of the use of an expression which perhaps the speaker still associates with the value of ‘moral or ethical sense’ of the noun *conciencia*.

the ambiguity by raising one of them as the focus of attention: *Disparó a conciencia a pesar de las consecuencias* [‘He fired deliberately despite the consequences’] vs. *Disparó a conciencia hasta que agotó la carga* [‘He fired on and on until no ammunition remained’]. Of course, they have relational autonomy, in that they maintain different sense relations; cfr., for example, the following synonyms: *adrede* ‘deliberately’, *a propósito* ‘on purpose’, *aposta* ‘on purpose’, *intencionadamente* ‘intentionally’, *deliberadamente* ‘deliberately’ vs. *a fondo* ‘thoroughly’, *concienzudamente* ‘conscientiously’, *meticulosamente* ‘meticulously’, *minuciosamente* ‘minutely’.

With this second sense, *a conciencia* is used as an adverb of volition by the subject-agent; hence, the property that it denotes is predicated on this argument (Torner Castells 2005: 75) and not on the predicate itself. As such, it can behave as a cause of action, like a mode adverbial, “*de manera próxima a los evaluativos*” [‘in a way close to evaluatives’] (Kovacci 1999: 753), which are adverbs external to the *dictum* (the representative content of the sentence, Kovacci 1999: 740). When this latter is the case, the external situation of the phrase is reflected in the parenthetical position and in the fact of not being affected by negation (Kovacci 1999: 753), as we can see in (13):

- (13) a. *Lope deja escapar, a conciencia, su tema.*
 ‘Lope lets his subject escape, intentionally.’
 (ES, Antonio Gala: «Reunión de trabajo en primavera». *Los invitados al jardín*)
- b. *Lope no deja escapar, a conciencia, su tema.*
 ‘Lope does not let his subject escape, intentionally.’

On the other hand, the verbal combinations which we have described above show that in this meaning we can perceive two different focalisations. When *a conciencia* appears with verbs of communication or choice, the focus is on knowledge: in (11c) we see that the phrase is followed by a segment that it paraphrases: “*sabiendo lo que se decía*” [‘knowing what she was saying’]; in (11d) allusion is made to the consequences of the taking of a decision. In both cases *a conciencia* implies that the agent carries out the action with knowledge of the cause. When *a conciencia* appears with verbs that denote hostile or generally aggressive actions, a further significant trait is added to the knowledge of this: the fact that an action is performed in the knowledge that it is censorable or reprehensible implies that the agent acts, or might act, with the will to do wrong.

- (14) *Las líneas han sido desmanteladas a conciencia, con el ánimo de destruirlas, lo que sucedió en los cinco años en que gobernaron los talibanes, de 1996 a 2001.*

‘The lines have been dismantled *deliberately, with the aim of destroying them*, which occurred in the five years that the Taliban governed, from 1996 to 2001.’

(MC, «Nicaragüense proyecta red eléctrica de Kabul», *La Prensa*)

In any case, it does not seem that we are looking here at a different sense unit, given that neither antagonism nor autonomy is detected, be it relational or compositional (see Croft and Cruse 2004: § 5.2.3). Moreover, the analysis of the corpus has shown that the distribution of the senses of *a conciencia* differs in the different geographical zones considered, and thus in order to offer a more complete description of its meaning, it will be necessary to review briefly this aspect.

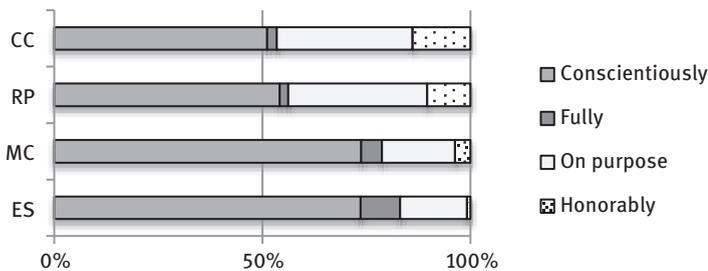
4 Brief diatopic analysis

A detailed reading of all the contexts of use of the phrase in the four geographic areas represented shows significant differences. In the first place, both in the Río de la Plata and the Continental Caribbean we find a notable number of cases in which *a conciencia* is used as synonymous with *en conciencia* (*‘con sinceridad o con honradez’* [‘with sincerity or with honour’], Clave, *s.v. conciencia*). It appears especially in combination with the verb *votar* ‘vote’; cfr. (15a) and (15b). In Mexico and Central America the number of examples is far less, and in Spain no more than anecdotal:

- (15) a. *Hoy es el día definitivo que despejará el camino de los próximos cuatro años. Por eso hay que votar en conciencia por quien pueda recorrerlo con claridad, sin improvisaciones y ser el líder de un país mejor.*
 ‘Today is the very day that will clear the way for the next four years. That is why we must vote *whit honour* for he or she who can take that path clearly, without improvisation and be the leader of a better country.’
 (CC, «¡Elijamos al mejor!», *El Colombiano*)
- b. *La gente se queja de muchas falencias que tiene nuestro Estado, pero cuando tienen que participar y tomar las decisiones no lo hacen, así que es el momento para elegir al mejor candidato. Votemos con tranquilidad y a conciencia.*
 ‘People complain about many shortcomings that our state has, but when they have to participate and make decisions they do not do so, and thus it is time to choose the best candidate. Let us vote calmly and *honorably*.’
 (CC, Jaime Horacio Arango Duque: «Todos a las urnas», *El Colombiano*)

Also, the presence of the meanings varies in different areas. Table 2 sets out the data in percentages, thus taking into account the imbalance that exists in the numbers of instances, especially between Spain and the other areas (represented on the vertical axis). The cases illustrated separately here are those in which the focus of attention lies in the quantitative aspect ('fully, a lot').

Tab. 2: Percentage distribution of meanings



As we can see, there are basically two alternatives in the percentage distribution of meanings: in Mexico and Central America and, above all, in Spain, there is a clear predominance of the first meaning ('with attention to detail, effort and rigor'), while in the Río de la Plata and Continental Caribbean, although it is also the most abundant, there is a greater balance with the second meaning ('on purpose'). This relates to two other issues.

The first of these is that in MC and, in particular in ES, the most abundant contexts are those in which there is a movement in the focus of the first meaning towards completion or completeness ('fully, a lot'); it seems logical to assume that the very frequent use here impacts on the extension of the meaning. Perhaps over time this movement will develop more clearly, leading to the disappearance of ambiguous contexts (such as the examples in (10)) and it will be possible to speak, without any remaining doubt, of a unit of meaning which is clearly differentiated from the others.

The second issue is that in RP and CC the most frequent use of *a conciencia* as a synonym of *en conciencia* might be explained by the greater presence of the second meaning, 'on purpose', in the texts: with this second meaning the phrase is specifically geared towards the subject-agent, at the expense of its ability to modify the mode or manner of action (this ability is found in the first meaning). Such an orientation coincides with the phrase *en conciencia*, which can act as an

adverb of enunciation (*No vi, en conciencia, otra forma de actuar, MC*) [‘I did not see, in all good conscience, any other way of acting’].¹³

5 Conclusion

Figure 1 presents the semantic structure of the phrase in schematic form, from the central or prototypical meaning, the most frequent in the texts, ‘conscientiously’.

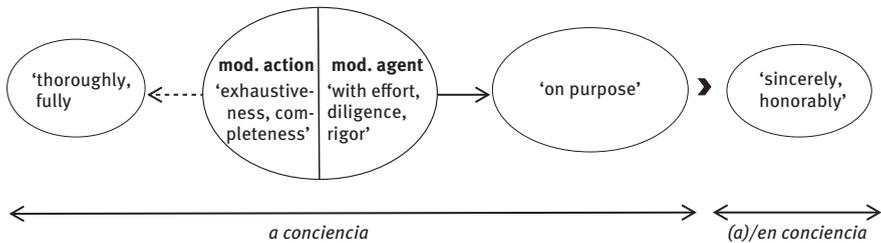


Fig. 1: Semantic scheme of *a conciencia*

The scheme should be interpreted as follows: the prototypical meaning combines two orientations in its modification: on the one hand, a mode or manner of action is indicated; on the other, an attitude of the agent in relation to the same. We have observed that in certain contexts the second orientation is diluted, until it disappears in some cases, so that the focus of attention moves towards the modification of the action, which is essentially quantitative. The arrow that unites this value with the central meaning is discontinuous, in order to signify that it probably cannot be considered a full sense, but perhaps a facet of the prototypical sense (a component distinguishable from the rest, yet with no autonomy; see Cruse 1995: 44–46; Cruse 2000b: 39–47; Croft and Cruse 2004: 116–126). In other contexts, it is the first orientation which stops being in focus, so that the phrase is exclusively oriented towards the agent, thus acting as an adverb of will. In this

¹³ In any case, in constructions [prep + noun.] we can detect some cases of hesitation in the use of the preposition, especially of *a* and *de*, for obvious reasons. For example, in CORPES XXI some instances are found of the combination *de propósito* with the value of *a propósito* (‘on purpose’), as in: *Alguna vez les hablé a mis padres de esta situación. No sé si de propósito o porque se les olvidó, nunca tomaron medidas para corregirla.* [‘Once or twice I spoke to my parents about this situation. I don’t know whether *on purpose* or because they forgot, but they never took measures to deal with it.’] (MC, Amparo Espinosa Rugaría: *Dios Padre, ya no creo en ti*)

case the arrow is continuous because it indicates a sense unit distinct from the central one, to which it is antagonistic (see above). Finally, in a small number of cases the phrase is used as equivalent to *en conciencia*, in contexts where we might talk about an overlap between the two, this favoured in areas where there is a higher occurrence of the second sense, which is closer to this phrase.

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