



## X Never Mind Y: a cognitive approach within the context of complementary alternation constructions<sup>1</sup>

X Never Mind Y: un enfoque cognitivo dentro del contexto de las construcciones de alternancia complementaria

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**ABSTRACT:** Abstract: Complementary alternation constructions are meaning and form pairings that are used to link two different states of affairs such that the second adds to the first based on a subjective speaker's judgment, as in *I can't afford a luxury car, let alone a private jet*. Other constructions in the family include connectors such as *much less*, *never mind*, and *to say nothing of* (Iza Erviti, 2015). Each of these configurations exhibits a variety of distinctive meaning properties while operating within the spectrum of complementary alternation. This study contends that the various meanings attributed to these constructions result from the activation of different cognitive operations. To support this assertion, this article presents an in-depth study of the *X Never Mind Y* construction, revealing how the different cognitive operations underlying it affect the nature of the intratextual connections it creates and the meaning effects it conveys. Furthermore, this article elucidates why this construction is applicable in a wide array of contexts. These findings support a novel classification of complementary alternation constructions based on the cognitive operations involved in the constructions.

**Key Words:** discourse construction, complementary alternation, cognitive operations, meaning construction.

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RESUMEN: Las construcciones de alternancia complementaria son emparejamientos de forma y significado que se utilizan para vincular dos estados de cosas diferentes de manera que el segundo elemento se suma al primero basándose en el juicio subjetivo del hablante, como en *No puedo permitirme un coche de lujo, y mucho menos un jet privado*. Otras construcciones de esta familia incluyen conectores como *much less*, *never mind* y *to say nothing of* (Iza Erviti, 2015). Cada una de estas configuraciones exhibe una variedad de propiedades de significado distintivas dentro del espectro de la alternancia complementaria. Este estudio sostiene que los diversos significados atribuidos a estas construcciones son el resultado de la activación de diferentes operaciones cognitivas. Para respaldar esta afirmación, este artículo presenta un estudio exhaustivo de la construcción *X Never Mind Y*, revelando cómo las diferentes operaciones cognitivas subyacentes afectan la naturaleza de las conexiones intratextuales que crea y los efectos de significado que transmite. Además, este artículo aclara por qué esta construcción es aplicable en una amplia variedad de contextos. Estos hallazgos respaldan una clasificación novedosa de las construcciones de alternancia complementaria basada en las operaciones cognitivas involucradas en las construcciones.

*Palabras clave:* construcción discursiva, alternancia complementaria, operaciones cognitivas, construcción de significado.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Baicchi and Iza Erviti (2018) and Iza Erviti (2015, 2017a, 2017b) have studied the convergences of traditional discourse markers and conjunctions in terms of their common connectivity functions. These studies have also examined their role in the establishment of conceptual coherence by combining different predications into one complex unit. This approach considers the difference between markers and conjunctions, when applied to combine predications, as irrelevant from a conceptual perspective. It is simply a realizational issue, which, of course, acknowledges the subtle meaning differences which each of the various realizations can bring about in terms of perspective and focus. For example, to express the idea that first there was lightning and then thunder was heard, there are several possible realizations. Let us take the following three:

- (1) There was a flash of lightning; then, a thunderclap was heard.
- (2) After the flash of lightning, a thunderclap was heard.
- (3) The flash of lightning preceded the thunderclap.

Realization (1) uses a discourse marker, (2) a conjunction, and (3) a verbal predicate indicating sequence. The three bring together two predications, each of which captures two related subevents within a more complex event: there was a flash of lightning and there was a thunderclap; the former was perceived before the latter. At a more delicate level of analysis, the first realization provides a balanced description of the two subevents, while the second endows the occurrence of the thunderclap with special focal prominence (the flash of lightning is topical). The third realization focalizes the fact that the thunderclap was preceded by the flash of lightning. That is, from the point of view of the combination of predications as designators of states of affairs, the difference

between these realizations is immaterial. However, from the point of view of focal structure and its accompanying meaning implications, each realization has its own distinct status. Each conventional realization identifies a member of a family of constructions. In the example above, we can talk about *precedence* constructions (the family) within the dimension of temporal sequence.

In recent years, constructionist approaches to language have started focusing on discourse patterns. The earliest efforts by Lambrecht (1996, 2004), Michaelis and Lambrecht (1996), and Croft and Cruse (2004, pp. 242–243) aimed to identify sentence-level constructions with special discourse-pragmatic features. Since then, researchers like Östman and Fried (2005) and Östman and Trousdale (2013) have expanded the analysis to larger pieces of conventional discourse. They argue that the “Construction Grammar methodology can effectively explain discourse phenomena.” More recent studies by Östman and Fried (2005), Fried (2009), Linell (2009), and Wide (2009) have delved into constructions requiring consideration of the dialogic context. Halliday and Matthiessen (2006) and Feyaerts (2006) explored larger units in register-specific discourse, such as recipes and headlines, respectively. Despite these efforts, there remains a scarcity of investigations into discourse phenomena from a constructivist perspective, and a clear definition of what constitutes a discourse construction is still pending. Östman's work (1999, 2005) provides an approximation of what qualifies as a discourse construction. He suggests that it involves a conventionalized association of a specific text type (e.g., argumentative, descriptive, narrative) with a particular genre (e.g., recipes, obituaries, fairy tales). Östman argues for the existence of an inventory of discourse patterns, a “discursicon,” within a language. According to him, native speakers are familiar with this repertoire and can refer to it at will. However, Östman stops short of providing detailed semantic or pragmatic descriptions of the discourse constructions under consideration.

The current proposal supports Ruiz de Mendoza and Gómez Gonzalez's (2014) definition of discourse constructions, according to which discourse constructions are idiomatic pairings of form and meaning that express logical relations like cause-effect or evidence-conclusion, temporal relations such as precedence and simultaneity, or conceptual relations like addition, exemplification, and contrast. These relations are grounded in high-level cognitive models. Typically, a discourse construction (e.g., *X Let Alone Y*; cf. Fillmore et al., 1988) comprises a fixed part and two variables. The fixed part is a connector, which can be a discourse marker or conjunction.

Unlike previous studies which focus their attention on a particular marker and investigate the coherence relations associated with it (Fillmore et al., 1988; Hannay et al., 2014; Noordman, 2001), Iza Erviti (2015, 2021) has identified and studied the family of *complementary alternation* discourse constructions, providing a fine-grained description of its members. This constructional family spans a range of configurations containing connectors such as *let alone*, *much less*, *even less*, *never mind*, *not to mention*, and *to say nothing of*, among others. The treatment of these connectors in defining the various members of a family of constructions is essential in order to understand, for example, how the same form can have several meanings (constructional polysemy) or when two different forms are used with the same function. This perspective has an advantage over previous analyses typically based on just one construction, such as *X let alone Y* (Cappelle et al., 2015; Fillmore et al., 1988; Janssen and Van der Leek, 2010; Sawada, 2003; Toosarvandani, 2008ab, 2009) and *Just Because X Doesn't Mean Y* (Bender & Kathol, 2001; Kanetani, 2019; Wan and Wu, 2022; Zaika, 2022). These studies provide a wealth of details on the syntactic, semantic and/or pragmatical properties of the constructional

pattern in question. However, these studies do not consider the discourse dimension of the connectors analysed and the fine-grained descriptions that they contain, while formulated with impressive accuracy, are not used to provide higher-level generalizations which can be applicable to the global understanding of discourse connectivity.

In addition, motivating the different constructional choices is a pending task. In the present paper, it is argued that such a task requires an account of meaning construction based on cognitive operations, i.e., the basic mental activity that gives rise to the meaning effects which characterize a construction. Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2014) and Ruiz de Mendoza (2017) have provided a fully-fledged account of such operations for many areas of linguistic description. This account will prove useful for the re-examination of constructional meaning put forward in this article. As will be evidenced below, the combination of different cognitive operations underlies the different meaning effects that characterize the various discourse constructions and it fully motivates their meaning and realizational behaviour.

To illustrate this approach, we have selected the *X Never Mind Y* construction. The choice of this configuration over the rest of the members of the complementary alternation family is based on the fact that it is the most neutral and, as a result, the more encompassing construction in the family. Moreover, unlike its sister construction *X Let Alone Y*, *X Never Mind Y* has received no attention in the cognitive-linguistic literature despite its productivity. Thus, the following sections will address the cognitive grounding of the *X Never Mind Y* discourse construction in relation to its meaning potential in the context of the complementary alternation constructional family.

With this goal in mind, the rest of this paper is structured as follows. The second section provides brief overviews of the concept of cognitive operation and of the main characteristics of complementary alternation constructions. The third section specifies the methodology for data collection and analysis. These developments set the stage for the fourth section, which constitutes the core of this study. This section accounts for the cognitive grounding of the *X Never Mind Y* construction and proposes a new classification of the meanings that this construction can profile. The goal of this section is to make significant connections between constructional meaning, its underlying cognitive activity, and other linguistic phenomena. Finally, the fifth section offers some final remarks and a summary of the most important findings of this paper.

## 2. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

### 2.1. COGNITIVE OPERATIONS

By cognitive operation, we understand any kind of mental activity bearing a specifiable effect derived from the way in which the brain responds to human interaction with the world (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2011; Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera Masegosa, 2014; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017). Cognitive operations act on *cognitive models*, i.e. knowledge constructs such as frames, or meaning structures capturing world knowledge relations among entities, and image schemas or topological constructs arising from the way people interact with the world in terms of visual and motor experience (cf. Lakoff, 1987), thereby giving rise to meaning implications of various kinds. For example, a *correlation* operation between quantity (an abstract magnitude) and height is used in the metaphorical reasoning underlying the sentence *Housing prices have sky-rocketed*, used to refer to a sudden, quicker than usual increase in prices. For such correlation to be possible we need to select

relevant conceptual structure about market activity and put it into correspondence with selected conceptual structure about upward motion. This selection process is in turn activated by lexical cues that point in the direction of the knowledge schemas that are relevant for the interpretation of the sentence above.

The organized list of cognitive operations offered by Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2014) and Ruiz de Mendoza (2017) places each category in relation to others and adds categories, like domain *expansion* and *reduction*, which had not been identified in the standard cognitive-linguistic literature. Part of the strength of this study lies in their recognition of the cognitive status of other categories, such as echoing and completion, which have only been treated as pragmatic phenomena, and in the inclusion of other general categories used in traditional semantics, as is the case of contrast. Moreover, these categories are defined in terms of their role as ‘operations’ acting on conceptual materials of different sorts (i.e., different kinds of cognitive model), of which the theory offers a detailed classification.

In their research, Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2014) have also discussed the ubiquity of many cognitive operations in different domains of linguistic description. For example, hyperbolic meaning is the result of applying a *strengthening* cognitive operation to a scalar concept (*This bag weighs a ton*). This operation is also active in the use of emphasizees with imperative constructions in the domain of illocution (e.g., *Do have some more cake*). Some cognitive operations have been linked to such discourse phenomena as focalization. This is the case of domain *reduction* in the use of stress prominence marking off contrasts: *He stole the WÁTCH* (e.g., not the wallet).

However, despite the importance of cognitive operations in the creation of meaning, to date there has been no systematic attempt to address their role in any discourse construction, much less in the context of families of constructions. The present paper is the first such attempt. We will now focus our attention on the subset of operations from the account provided by Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2014), which the present study has found to be relevant for the analysis of the *X Never Mind Y* construction. These are: *addition*, *abstraction*, *domain expansion*, *domain reduction* and *highlighting*, *contrast*, *strengthening*, *mitigation*, *correlation*, and *echoing*. These operations have been defined in Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera (2014) and they have been applied to various areas of figurative and non-figurative language use. Let us briefly discuss them.

(i) *Addition*: a formal operation involving the combination of conceptually consistent representations into a larger whole thus preparing the output of the operation for further constructional interpretation as guided by linguistic devices (connectors) and contextual factors:

(4)

A: Finally, they went to that fancy restaurant.

B: Yes, and had a lovely evening.

(5)

A: Finally, they went to that fancy restaurant.

B: Yes, but they didn’t have a lovely evening.

Connectors like *and* and *but* are used to combine predications, with the difference that *but* requires a further contrastive operation to be combined with the formal additive value of *and*.

(ii) *Abstraction*: a formal operation consisting in deriving generic-level structure from multiple lower-level items. For example, the generic verb *do* captures

our ability to abstract knowledge away from more specific actions. It can thus be used to stand metonymically for those actions through the generic for specific metonymy (Ruiz de Mendoza & Pérez, 2001): *Do the dishes/the carpets/your hair*, etc. ('wash', 'clean', 'fix').

- (iii) *Domain expansion*: a content operation that results in the broadening of the scope of activity of a concept, as is the case with metonymies whose target domain includes the source domain: *The sax has the flu*, where the target meaning for 'sax' is 'sax player'.
- (iv) *Domain reduction and highlighting*: the latter is a content operation which endows a conceptual characterization with greater conceptual prominence. This operation combines with domain reduction (which narrows down the scope of activity of a concept) to endow it with a heightened meaning effect. For example, in *Proust is hard to read*, domain reduction works on our knowledge of Proust to direct our attention to the target metonymic meaning that is consistent with the rest of the predication ('hard to read'), i.e., Proust's literary work. By reducing the scope of the source concept, it acquires greater conceptual prominence.
- (v) *Contrast*: a content operation involving the clash of two or more concepts. It is typical of irony, paradox, and oxymoron. Such clashes are resolved by reframing or reconstruing the concepts. For example, the expression *a sober drunkard*, where the qualifying adjective denotes an impossible attribute of drunk people, can be reinterpreted by thinking of a situation in which a drunken person has outspokenly expressed an apparently lucid view.
- (vi) *Strengthening*: a content operation that converts a lower-level scalar representation into one that is higher up along the same scale. It is often found in hyperbole (*This bag weighs a ton*), but also, as noted in the introduction, to emphatic directive meaning in speech acts.
- (vii) *Mitigation*: the opposite of strengthening. It is found in understatements: *That's just a minor inconvenience* (for 'a big problem').
- (viii) *Correlation*: a content operation consisting in bringing together co-occurring events according to our experience. It can give rise to metaphorical thought, but also to metonymy, or it can simply be made part of an implicature-generation process. The metaphor *more is up* (*Prices are rising*) is based on our experience of seeing levels go up as a greater amount of a substance accumulates (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Effects and their causes belong together experientially, thus giving rise to metonymies where the effect can stand for its cause (*What's that noise?* means 'what's the cause of that noise?'; cf. Panther & Thornburg, 2003). In a marriage proposal scenario, if a man gives a lady a ring, that action can stand for the rest of the elements of the proposal. Thus, *Did he give you the ring?* can implicate: *Did he propose marriage?* (Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera, 2014: 164).

- (ix) *Echoing*: this content operation involves the full or partial repetition of a previous utterance or thought. It is found in reported speech and in many cases of verbal irony (Wilson & Sperber, 2012). For example, if a father makes his son the promise that he will take him to the zoo on Sunday and then fails to keep his promise, the son may react ironically by echoing the father's promise: *Son, I'll take you to the zoo, yeah, right.*

## 2.2. COMPLEMENTARY ALTERNATION CONSTRUCTIONXS

Complementary alternation constructions link two different states of affairs such that the second one adds to the first based on a subjective speaker's judgment, as in *I would never eat that garbage, never mind pay for it* (Iza Erviti, 2015). What distinguishes this meaning relation from other relations at the discourse level –such as addition or contrast– is precisely the implicit subjective meaning load all the associated constructional configurations convey. This meaning load transcends the simple addition or contrast of elements to express the speaker's attitude to the situation in question. As part of this meaning-making process, complementary alternation constructions assign either intrinsic or extrinsic conceptual prominence to one of the alternates.<sup>2</sup>

Different individuals may assign different degrees of prominence in terms of the kind of situation at work. But what matters is the 'meaning potential' of the construction, which is then adjustable in terms of degree on the grounds of personal and/or contextual factors.

For example, from a logical perspective, *neither John nor Mary* is the same as *neither Mary nor John*, and it may happen that there is no practical difference in most contexts either. But there are discourse situations where this is not the case:

(6)

A: His father is definitely not a medical doctor and I think his mother is not a doctor either.

B: Neither his father nor his mother, for that matter, is a doctor.

B': # Neither his mother nor his father, for that matter, is a doctor.

*For that matter* is used to emphasize that the remark that the speaker is making is as relevant or true as a previous, related remark. This predicational qualifier cannot be applied to *neither his father* in the example since *for that matter* requires us to qualify what the speaker thinks is the less obvious case. Indirectly, the use of this qualifier applies to the item which receives greater attention through the focal arrangement of its right-hand side element. This phenomenon is one of the many manifestations of the traditional *end-focus* principle, according to which, in a default interpretation, non-initial elements tend to receive greater focus than sentence initial elements (Quirk et al., 1991: 1362).

Be that as it may, all complementary alternation configurations serve to reinforce a given idea. This can happen either by (1) double-negating what the speaker believes are someone's assumptions (e.g., *Neither Brian nor his wife mentioned anything about*

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<sup>2</sup> To talk about greater weight and/or prominence is a matter of degree, which involves scales. But the role of 'degree of focal prominence' is greater than the invocation of a scale. The scale lends support to the phenomenon under study: prominence. That is, without a scale the phenomenon is not operationalizable, but the paper wants to draw attention to the power of a construction to lend greater prominence to some aspects of a concept over others.

*moving to a new house*), or (2) double-affirming a personal stance through the addition of reinforcing evidence (e.g., *It would be an enormous amount of work, to say nothing of the cost*, where the speaker considers performing the proposed action impractical for the two reasons provided).

These uses are marked by such connectors as *let alone*, *much less*, *even less*, *never mind*, *not to mention*, or *to say nothing of*, among others. Figure 1 below lists the complementary alternation constructions that have been identified to date.

**Figure 1. Complementary alternation constructions (Iza Erviti, 2021: 51)**

Neither/Not X Nor Y	X In Particular Y	X Still Y
Not X Even/Still Less Y	(Not) X Let Alone Y	X To Say The Least
(Not) X Leave Y	(Not) X To Say Nothing Of Y	X Needless To Say Y
Not X Much Less Y	X Even Y	(Not) X Never Mind Y
Not X Not Even Y	X Go Further Y	(Not) X Not To Mention/Say Y
X It Goes Without Saying That Y	X In Fact Y	

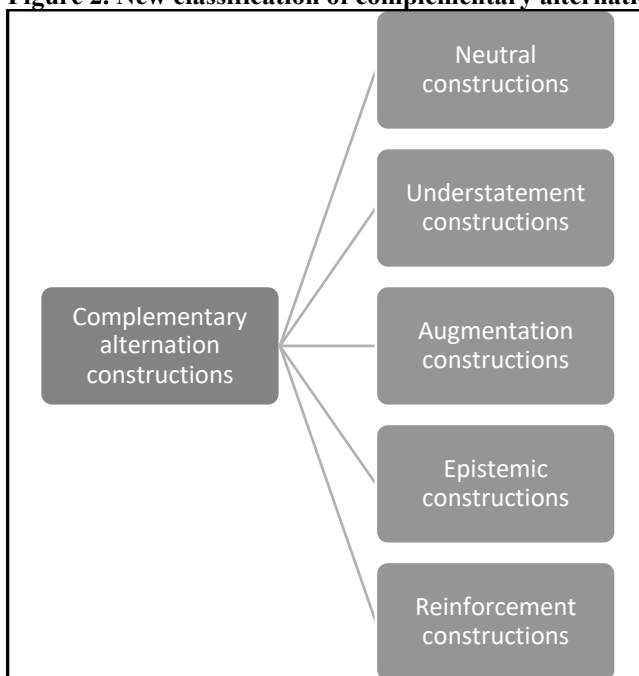
Each member of this group of constructions introduces subtle changes in focal structure, resulting in additional changes in the meaning implications that contribute to the coherence of the text, while responding to the speaker's communicative intentions.

Dictionaries often treat the connectors used in these configurations as largely (or even fully) equivalent (cf. *No one insulted him, let alone/much less/still less did physical harm to him; She has produced an amazing musical project, not to mention/to say nothing of her new DVD*). However, in some contexts they are not necessarily interchangeable.

On the basis of initial corpus evidence, Iza Erviti (2015, 2021) provides a classification of complementary alternation constructions into five different categories, where each category agglutinates related meaning profiles: *neutral*, *reinforcement*, *probability judgment*, *enhancing*, and *demonstrative*. The present proposal improves this initial classification by introducing as an additional taxonomic criterion the cognitive operations involved in the activity of each connector (see Figure 2 below). Building this refined taxonomy has first required verifying that all the previously identified constructions had been correctly categorized as *complementary alternation* constructions and then identifying the cognitive operations through the exploration of examples of real language use for each of the identified configurations. As a result, new meaning profiles have been added to the initial study thus giving rise to an improved classification.



**Figure 2. New classification of complementary alternation construction**



*Neutral* complementary alternation constructions are used to link (at least) two negative alternatives that complement each other. They are constructionally neutral as far as assessing the likelihood of the X and Y variables. However, once in context (even in their predicational environment arising directly from the explicit content of the clause), they are subject to pragmatic differences that may adjust X or Y in terms of the values that are defined below in the list of constructional profiles. This phenomenon is not any different from what is the case with the coordinating construction *and*. In principle, the pattern *X And Y* is constructionally neutral. However, there is a host of factors that can endow X or Y with different meaning values. For example, in *John and Mary went to the theatre (together)*, we understand that there is only a mere additive value, but in actual use *John and Mary* is not necessarily identical with *Mary and John*. There can be differences arising from stress prominence assignment or from previous discourse factors that may override the logic of the neutral ordering:

- (7) Mary is not particularly fond of going to the theatre, but as far as I can tell, John and MARY went to the theatre.

In the complementary alternation family, the least marked constructional arrangement is provided by the patterns that only convey an additive value with an equally likely negative assessment of X and Y. That is, the *addition* cognitive operation is responsible for the creation of this meaning profile, since two elements are combined into a single statement, as in *She neither knows nor cares!* The rest of the members of the family provide us with more or less notable differences that affect the meaning relationships of the constructions and the consequent cognitive operations involved in modelling the conceptual material that they contain.

*Understatement* constructions are used to emphasize that what has just been said could be of greater importance, and thus more striking, than what was previously suggested, as in the sentence *It is easy to become sensitive, not to say paranoid*. The data in our corpus shows that *strengthening* and *contrast* can combine with either *expansion* or *reduction* resulting in the highlighting and strengthening of one of the contrasted elements. In the example above, ‘sensitive’ and ‘paranoid’ are contrasted on a scale of how a person is affected by a given circumstance, ‘sensitive’ being lower on that scale. To take the hearer from the notion of sensitive to that of paranoid, the speaker uses a domain *expansion* operation focusing on this latter stronger resultative adjective. As a result, the speaker conveys the idea that it is in fact easy to become paranoid.

*Augmentation* constructions serve to locate the hearer in an expanded scenario that contains more elements than expected. As a result, constructions of this kind are used to emphasize something that speakers are adding to a list. What distinguishes these configurations from *understatement* constructions is that *augmentation* constructions are grounded in an *addition* cognitive operation. For example, in the sentence *He's nuts, not to mention spoiled*, ‘spoiled’ is added to ‘nuts’, and both concepts, although belonging to the broad domain of character traits, do not enter into a contrastive relationship, since this can only happen when concepts are sister elements of a hierarchy or represent different points of the same scale. This *addition* operation is also present in *neutral* complementary alternation constructions. However, *neutral constructions* convey the idea that none of the elements is the case, whereas in *augmentation* constructions both elements are combined, invoking a new and richer scenario containing more elements, by means of an *expansion* operation.

*Epistemic* constructions are used to point out that something is evident from the speaker’s perspective. In these constructions, two elements are compared on a scale of probability, where, if one of the elements is likely to take place, the other one is certain to be the case due to the internal relationship –based on world knowledge– that holds between the compared elements. This is illustrated by the utterance *With this knee injury I can't walk, never mind run*. That is, running can have negative consequences on a person’s knees, so if the person in question cannot walk, it is beyond question that this person will not be able to run either. In terms of cognitive operations, these constructions are the result of the combination of *contrast*, *highlighting*, and domain *expansion* or *reduction*. As opposed to *augmentation* constructions, in these configurations there is no addition of different domains (i.e., the second element introduced is obtained by reducing or expanding the domain of the first element). For example, in the previous knee example, the hearer is taken from the scenario where the person in question ‘walks’ to the scenario where he/she ‘runs’; thus, the expansion operation is present. By contrast, in *This is one of the best restaurants in the country, never mind Cambridge*, *contrast* and *highlighting* combine with domain *reduction*, since Cambridge is located in England.

*Reinforcement* constructions are used to emphasize a given idea by concentrating on particular aspects that support the speaker’s opinion or attitude towards the element or state of affairs in question. To profile this meaning, speakers first depicts a situation or event that they believe is true, and then draw attention to specific elements of such a situation or event that the speaker believes are worthy of notice. For example, in *From the short jungle came no sound, not even the rustling of leaves*, the speaker counters the hearer’s possible interpretation that ‘no sound’ may be a hyperbolic description by counteracting the hearer’s potential expectation that at least the leaves may make some noise. Thus, domain *reduction*, *strengthening* and *highlighting* are the operations

responsible for the creation of this meaning implication. What distinguishes these constructions from the previous *epistemic* constructions is that the latter are based on world knowledge; as a consequence, the *strengthening* operation is not as strong as in *reinforcement* configurations. In fact, in these constructions the speaker focuses on any factor that the speaker believes the hearer may have not considered.

Nonetheless, depending on the example selected, other operations mentioned in section 2.1 above – such as *echoing*, *mitigation* or *abstraction* operations – can also participate in the creation of these meaning implications. In this section we have simply detailed the basic operations responsible for the creation of the meaning profiles identified for *complementary alternation* constructions. But, as will be evidenced in section 4 below for the case of *X Never Mind Y*, these basic operations can combine in several ways with other cognitive mechanisms to produce different meaning connotations.

Table 1 below offers the reader a more visual presentation of this improved classification, which contains the constructions that profile each of the meanings involved.

**Table 1. Improved classification of complementary alternation constructions**

CONSTRUCTIONAL PROFILES	IDENTIFIED CONSTRUCTIONS	BASIC COGNITIVE OPERATIONS*	EXAMPLES
<b>Neutral complementary alternation constructions</b>	<i>Neither/Not X Nor Y</i> <i>X Never Mind Y</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addition</li> </ul>	-She neither knows <b>nor</b> cares! (ODO) -I won't drink that wine, <b>nor</b> pay for it
<b>Understatement constructions</b>	<i>X Go Further And Say Y</i> <i>X Never Mind Y</i> <i>X Not To Say Y</i> <i>X To Say The Least Y</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthening</li> <li>Contrast</li> <li>Expansion/reduction</li> <li>Highlighting</li> </ul>	-Until the accident, I led the very busy, <b>not to say</b> frantic, lifestyle of a criminal lawyer (Google) -I shall <b>go further and say</b> that Joe is a fool
<b>Augmentation constructions</b>	<i>(Not) X Not To Mention Y</i> <i>(Not) X To Say Nothing Of Y</i> <i>X Never Mind Y</i> <i>X Still Y</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addition</li> <li>Expansion</li> </ul>	-The weather here is gorgeous, <b>not to mention</b> the wonderful food. -He's nuts, <b>not to mention</b> spoiled. (COCA, 1990) -You can also help yourself, <b>to say nothing of</b> your sister and nephew. (COCA, 2010)
<b>Epistemic constructions</b>	<i>(Not) X Leave/Let Alone Y</i> <i>(Not) X To Say Nothing Of Y</i> <i>X It Goes Without Saying That Y</i> <i>X Needless To Say Y</i> <i>X Never Mind Y</i> <i>X Not To Mention Y</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expansion/reduction</li> <li>Mitigation/intensification</li> <li>Contrast/comparison</li> <li>Echoing</li> <li>Correlation</li> </ul>	-A free fall from 130 feet will most probably kill you, <b>not to mention</b> from 13.000 or 130.000. (Google) -This is one of the best restaurants in the country, <b>never mind</b> Cambridge. -With this knee injury I can't walk, <b>never mind</b> run. (Google) -On August the 12th 1991 it was feared that Brian Waites might not live, <b>let alone</b> play golf ever again. (BYU-BNC)
<b>Reinforcement constructions</b>	<i>(Not) X Not To Mention Y</i> <i>(Not) X To Say Nothing Of Y</i> <i>Not X Not Even Y</i> <i>X Even (Less) Y</i> <i>X In Fact Y</i> <i>X In Particular Y</i> <i>X Much Less Y</i> <i>X Never Mind Y</i> <i>X Still Less Y</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domain reduction</li> <li>Strengthening</li> <li>Highlighting</li> </ul>	-Voters will not want that big program, <b>not to mention</b> the cost (Google) -The hotel had everything. There was <b>even</b> a swimming pool (CCD) -From the short jungle came no sound, <b>not even</b> the rustling of leaves. (COCA, 2011) -All the time I was there, I stayed inside the house. <b>In fact</b> , I never left my room (COCA, 2012).

### 3. X NEVER MIND Y

As noted above, this section provides a detailed study of the *X Never Mind Y* construction. The analysis adopts two complementary perspectives: the constructional profile of this pattern within the domain of *complementary alternation* constructions and the cognitive grounding of the construction.

#### 3.1. A BRIEF NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

This section focuses on data collection, sampling criteria, the identification of the patterns from which the new proposed classification derives, and the formulation of generalizations in the analysis of the cognitive operations underlying the *X Never Mind Y* construction. As will be evidenced below, this research has required substantial manual work on a large corpus compiled for the identification of the new meaning profiles.

The starting point was the realization that, within the domain of complementary alternation constructions studied in Iza Erviti (2015, 2021), the pattern *X Never Mind Y* stood out as a highly versatile one, since it could occur in more contexts than other members of the family. To find out what made this construction different, it became apparent that it was necessary to determine its properties in connection to their motivating factors. This assumption led to the investigation of the cognitive operations underlying the construction. The first step involved creating a bigger corpus of examples of the construction by searching in different dictionaries such as *Wordreference.com*, *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, *Collins Cobuild Dictionary* or *Merriam Webster Dictionary*. Then, these examples were complemented with others obtained from searches in the *COCA*, *WebCorp* and *Google*. Preliminary small-scale searches (of not more than 50 occurrences) in the *COCA* revealed that *never mind* could be used in more contexts than those described in the dictionaries mentioned above. Then, these new examples were studied and organized into patterns.

The initial focus was on those cases in which *X Never Mind Y* constitutes a *neutral* complementary alternation. It was evident that the *addition* operation was behind all the uses of *never mind* in these contexts. This was only to be expected given the basic nature of *addition* operations in terms of their experiential grounding. The next step involved investigating cases where the construction profiled other meanings. This work refined the classification in Iza Erviti (2021) by giving evidence of the relationship between the cognitive operations and the meanings involved in this configuration. The third step required exploring other constructions within the *complementary alternation* family to check for the viability of the new classification. The result of this task gave credence to the assumption that different connectors can be supported by the same cognitive operations thus producing similar meanings.

#### 3.2. COGNITIVE OPERATIONS BEHIND THE *X NEVER MIND Y* CONSTRUCTION

Underlying the use of the idiomatic connector *never mind* is a *strengthening* operation, which is otherwise typical of hyperbole (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017). Because of its idiomatic nature, *X Never Mind Y* is non-compositional. In it, the adverb *never* is not to be taken in its central sense of ‘at no time in the past or future’, thus suggesting that something should never be considered. Instead, it should be taken in the extended sense that the predication in the X part should not be considered at this particular stage of the

argumentation or in this context. From a discourse perspective, this connector can be described as linking two different states of affairs (e.g. X and Y) such that the second adds to the first based on a subjective speaker's judgment (Iza Erviti, 2015). However, depending on how this addition takes place, the connector *never mind* can have different meaning implications, which is where a constructional perspective can be more fruitful than other approaches for the study of discourse connectivity (see Table 2 below).

To begin with, when *X Never Mind Y* profiles a *neutral* complementary alternation meaning, both elements (X and Y) represent two alternatives that are equally (un)likely to happen from the speaker's perspective, but where the second alternative is presented as an addition that might not have been considered by the hearer, while it is of greater subjective consequence. This meaning is clearly reflected by the sentence *I always cry watching sad films, never mind reading their scripts*, where reading the film scripts is singled out constructionally as a cause of the speaker's crying which is not to be ignored from a subjective perspective, but where both causes are at the same objective level. This interpretation is supported by an *addition* cognitive operation whereby the hearer is invited to understand that the speaker's constructional choice is guided by the speaker's assumption that the hearer is not aware that the speaker reads the scripts and *also* cries every time he does so. In this case, *never mind* highlights the fact that the hearer might be disregarding the real force of the second member of the alternation.

**Table 2. Meanings profiled by the *X never mind Y* construction and the cognitive operations responsible of them**

CONSTRUCTIONAL PROFILES	BASIC COGNITIVE OPERATIONS	EXAMPLES
Neutral complementary alternation constructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addition</li> </ul>	- I always cry watching sad films, never mind reading their scripts.
Understatement constructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthening</li> <li>Expansion/reduction</li> <li>Highlighting</li> <li>Contrast</li> </ul>	- Specialists are worried by a recent survey showing that most Britons are still totally unaware of the disease, never mind its life-threatening potential. (BYU-BNC)
Augmentation constructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addition</li> <li>Expansion</li> </ul>	- I have so much to do today—clean the house, finish my work report...never mind all the errands I need to run. (Google)
Epistemic constructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expansion/reduction</li> <li>Mitigation/intensification</li> <li>Contrast/comparison</li> <li>Echoing</li> <li>Correlation</li> </ul>	-This is one of the best restaurants in the country, never mind Cambridge. -With this knee injury I can't walk, never mind run. (Google)
Reinforcement constructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction</li> <li>Strengthening</li> <li>Highlighting</li> </ul>	-Specialists are worried by a recent survey showing that most Britons are still totally unaware of the disease, never mind its life-threatening potential. (BYU-BNC)

In other cases, the speaker endows the Y element with greater prominence or perceives Y as more valuable than X. For example, in (8) below, people under the age of 25 should be able to identify a *Renaissance masterpiece* or an *Andy Warhol*, but the first is perceived as a greater work of art than the second:

- (8) The show is custom-built by Janet Street-Porter's rapidly expanding youth and entertainment empire and is aimed squarely at people under the age of 25 who might have difficulty identifying an Andy Warhol, never mind a Renaissance masterpiece. (BYU-BNC)

This example would be a case of what we have labelled *understatement* constructions. To properly understand this meaning, several intertwined processes hold. First, the utterance gives more prominence to the Y part. Second, the verb *mind*, which generally reflects the metonymy instrument for action, thus highlighting the instrumental nature of the mind in thinking, in this example suggests 'think of performing a specific action', which would be a subdomain of 'thinking'. This peculiar use suggests the activity of the more complex metonymy instrument for generic action for specific action, which makes use of domain *expansion* (the mind for thinking) and domain *reduction* (thinking for thinking of doing something specific) (see Brdar, 2015; Hilpert, 2007; and Ruiz de Mendoza, 2008 for an account of multiple conceptual shifts in metonymic thought). Finally, in general, when people think about a particular thing for a long time this is because they consider it important. Thus, the *correlation* between thinking about something for a long time and considering something important takes place, allowing us to understand *never mind* as 'completely unimportant'.

The *X Never Mind Y* construction can also be used to emphasize that what has just been said could be of greater relevance or more surprising than what was previously suggested when it acts as an *augmentation* construction, as in *I'd be terrified if I found myself alone in London, never mind New York* (BYU-BNC). When the construction profiles this 'enhancing' meaning, the connector *never mind* acts on a scale of quantity to exploit hypothetical situations, as in the following examples:

- (9) 'I'll put in a request for them to check out Albany' George grumbled, 'but it takes months to get them to do your office never mind your home'. (BYU-BNC)

In (9), the speaker reasons that it is not likely that the people referred to will 'do' homes, because it is hard enough for them to 'do' offices. The improbability meaning is the result of comparing the amount of time that it takes them to complete work for an office (which is perceived as easier from the speaker's perspective) within the expected time frame for a house.

In (10) below, expressing affection for a Felton, in Y, is worse than looking at a Felton in X. In this example, the degree of shame felt by the subject would be greater in the hypothetical Y situation than in the one described in X:

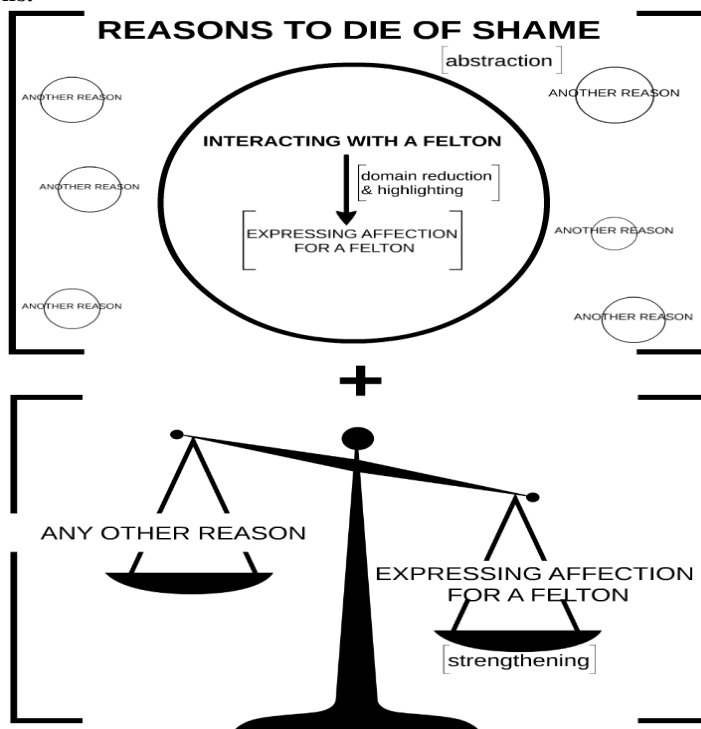
- (10) She would die of shame if she knew that you were even looking at a Felton, never mind expressing affection for one. (BYU-BNC).

The uses of the *X Never Mind Y* construction illustrated in (9) and (10), as cases of augmentation, contain an emotional component in Y where domain *reduction* and *highlighting* combine with *strengthening*. As a result, these uses convey the idea that,

from the speaker’s perspective, X is a difficult or challenging situation to take place, but that Y is even more so. In (9) and (10) the speaker presupposes that Y is not only already known by the hearer, but also that hearer agrees with the speaker about Y, so that it is not surprising to the hearer. That is, in (9) the speaker assumes that the hearer knows that it is harder for the subjects in question to finish a home than an office, whereas in (10) the speaker presupposes that the hearer is aware that expressing affection for a Felton is more serious than simply looking at one, but he makes it explicit anyway.

In any event, depending on the content of X and Y, *X Never Mind Y* can also involve *abstraction*, as in example (10) above. The operation of *abstraction* allows speakers to extract a common feature (i.e., being ashamed) observed in apparently unrelated experiences, such as looking at someone and having feelings for that person. In this case this configuration profiles an *adding* meaning relation where *never mind* could be replaced by *and*, but with an emotive connotation on the speaker's part. This meaning implication is achieved when *X Never Mind Y* is used in a *contrasting* operation where common structure needs to be selected to relate both elements.

**Figure 3. The amalgam of cognitive operations for *She would die of shame if she knew that you were even looking at a Felton, never mind expressing affection for one* (BYU-BNC). Domain reduction, highlighting, abstraction, and strengthening operations.**



In turn, *X Never Mind Y* can also indicate that X is difficult to happen, but that it is obvious that Y is less likely to happen than X, which is why Y is to be disregarded, as in *Adrià is a legend in the restaurant world, though most of humanity will never see, never*

*mind taste, his food.* (COCA, 2011). In essence, this use of the construction literally means that the speaker should not care about Y because it is virtually impossible that Y will happen. Consider the following examples:

- (11) With this knee I can hardly walk, never mind run. (MWO)
- (12) She can't boil potatoes, never mind cook a meal. (Google)
- (13) We have two more home games this week, but if we don't improve on Monday night, we can forget the top six, never mind the top two. (BYU-BNC)

What all these examples have in common is the fact that they express emphatically that a particular thing is hard (or impossible) to happen after mentioning something that is easier to happen. Thus, for all of these configurations, there is also a relationship between X and Y such that Y is a subtype of, part of, or contained in X. In the logic underlying example (11) 'running' is an activity that requires more effort than 'walking' and in which the knee suffers more, so if the person in question cannot walk due to his knee condition, he will not be able to run either. In example (12) boiling potatoes is perceived as the most basic action in cooking. Since the subject is not able to perform this task, he/she will not be able to do anything regarding cooking. Finally, in (13) getting to the top 6 is an essential condition for getting to the top 2. By means of domain *reduction*, the speaker can convey the idea that if X does not hold, then Y is less likely to happen than X, preventing the hearer from thinking that Y could be the case. All these examples also exploit *mitigation*, since they compare two elements on a scale of subjective probability where Y is less likely to happen than X (although the speaker cancels out both possibilities). In any case, the focus is not so much on subjective probability, but on emphasizing the impossibility of the situation in question, based on the premise that the hearer has done an erroneous calculation on the possibility of the circumstances in question. Finally, the operation of *echoing* allows the X variable to repeat an individual or social thought attributed to someone. That is, the speaker echoes what he thinks the listener thinks (i.e., that Y may happen). That is why he ventures to mention that X will not happen in the first place. This type of echo also shows a *correlation* based on a social expectation of our cultural schema by which a person who does not tolerate X cannot be asked to tolerate something worse, like Y (from his or her perspective).

But this construction can also be formulated in positive terms to emphasize the assumption that a state of affairs is obvious. In these cases, the speaker posits X as true and Y as something easier to hold compared to X, because when X holds, Y necessarily holds too, either because Y derives from X, or because Y will hold if X holds. In turn, the speaker makes the Y element more prominent by implying that Y must necessarily and obviously occur because X takes place. As a result, this construction expresses the idea that, because Y is so obvious, it should be taken for granted, as in *This is one of the best restaurants in the country, never mind Cambridge*, mentioned in 2.2 above. In a default interpretation, this example, presupposes that the restaurant is in Cambridge and that the speaker is either in Cambridge or refers to Cambridge (e.g., imagine the speaker is in London holding a flyer advertising the restaurant). In the speaker's logic, when praising the restaurant, it is only natural that the property of being one of the best restaurants of



England necessarily applies more clearly if we only focus on Cambridge, since the chances of finding a better restaurant are reduced.

Finally, as shown in Table 1 above, *X Never Mind Y* can also be considered a *reinforcement* construction. It emphasizes a given assumption *Y* by concentrating on a particular aspect of *Y* that supports what is contained in *X*. This is exemplified in (14) below, where the speaker first mentions the disease in general terms and then focuses on its life-threatening potential, which the speaker believes that the hearer had not considered (see Figure 4 below). Through domain *reduction*, the life-threatening nature of the illness is highlighted by the speaker.

- (14) Specialists are worried by a recent survey showing that most Britons are still totally unaware of the disease, never mind its life-threatening potential. (BYU-BNC)

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This article has offered a new classification of *complementary alternation* constructions based on the exploration of the cognitive operations that underlie their inferred meaning. As a result, this study contends that the configurations within the *complementary alternation* family can be organized into neutral, understatement, *augmentation*, *epistemic*, and *reinforcement* constructions.

In this context, this article explores the subject in greater detail by studying the cognitive grounding of the *X Never Mind Y* construction, thus illustrating the explanatory potential of this classification. No other *complementary alternation* configuration has been found to be allowed in as many different contexts as *X Never Mind Y*. This comprehensive range of meanings is the result of the ability of the idiomatic connector *never mind* to engage in a broader range of cognitive operations than other more specific connectors.

The findings reported here certainly add to our understanding of discourse markers from a constructionist perspective offering a research pattern for the investigation of new discourse constructional families which have yet to be identified. Moreover, it demonstrates the importance of cognitive operations and the need for their analysis in the creation of meaning at bigger levels of analysis.

The discoveries unveiled in this research could also serve as an effective tool for advanced language learners or teachers of English since the paper identifies and substantiates the uses of discourse connectors such as *let alone*, *never mind* or *much less* that have generally been treated as fully equivalent in common lexicographic practice. Moreover, it establishes the link between discourse connectors that had not been previously related in the literature, explaining the grounding of such connection.

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