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# *Ni* as the introductory particle for expressions of negation in three dialectal variants of Spanish

**Abstract:** When looking at expressions of negation/rejection in Spanish, the conjunction *ni* is one of the most prolific words. However, the extent of locutions employing *ni* has not been widely analyzed. For this reason, we conducted a comparative descriptive examination of discourse markers of rejection and refusal for three different dialectal variants of Spanish: those of Spain, Colombia and Mexico. The participants completed a survey to evaluate their familiarity with some of these pragmatic expressions and to provide new ones. Results show that speakers of these dialectal variants all use the most common markers that start with *ni*, but also other phrases not recorded in many of the available sources. This paper aims to broaden the horizon of work on phraseological units of negation, which are often difficult to gather and study in depth because of their dialectal variability, colloquial use, and, in some cases, short lifespan.

**Keywords:** Spanish phraseology, expressions of negation, discourse markers, *ni* phrases, new locutions

## 1 Introduction and theoretical framework

### 1.1 Phraseology and discourse markers


Penadés (2012) refers to the field of phraseology by stating that:

En las lenguas existen combinaciones de palabras en cuya utilización el hablante carece de libertad para alterar o modificar la sucesión de elementos y para variar los propios elementos que constituyen la combinación.

Phraseology embraces a wide variety of elements, including collocations, locutions and sayings. Among them are also some discourse markers, sufficiently

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grammaticalized expressions that operate on the pragmatic level. Described by Schiffrin (1987: 32) as “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk”, their form varies greatly: some discourse markers consist of only one word. For instance, in Spanish, the words *bueno* or *pues*, are the focus of several in-depth pragmatic studies.<sup>1</sup> However, a very broad group of discourse markers formed by two or more words, intersects with the field of phraseology. Ruiz Gurillo (2010: 176) explains this intersection, referring specifically to Spanish, but his observation is equally applicable to other languages:

Es previsible que, tras una fase intermedia, diversos complementos circunstanciales se gramaticalicen como marcadores del discurso de diversos tipos (...). Algunos de ellos son de carácter complejo, es decir, se definen como unidades fraseológicas.<sup>2</sup>

Corpas (1996) includes a large number of discourse markers in her book *Manual de Fraseología Española*, mostly under the “locutions” and “routine formulas”<sup>3</sup> sections. Ruiz Gurillo (2001: 45–46) includes a “marker locution” in her organization. However, García-Page (2008: 89) highlights that there are several groups of locutions, not only one, that have a purpose in discourse. There is, therefore, a meeting point where the study of discourse markers and the study of phraseology converge.

Phrases of rejection of a proposition or a statement, such as the ones that start with *ni*, the focus of this paper, are certainly a part of this group. The word *ni* has been studied in grammar and discourse studies as a polyvalent particle with scalar value. As Martí (1998: 79) points out, it is not enough to say that it functions as a conjunction that links negative members. The author differentiates the conjunction *ni* from a modal particle *ni*. Albelda Marcos and Gras (2011) focus on the discursive value and the scalarity<sup>4</sup> of the word, including a function to introduce a negative answer as a response to a previous intervention while providing an example with the adverbial phrases *ni hablar*, *ni pensarlo*, *ni soñarlo* and *ni borracho*. Although we do not focus on the scalarity structure in this paper, it constitutes the basis for the continuous creation of new expressions, especially non-canonical ones in negation (Amaral and Schwenter 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years, we have seen examples of studies of *bueno* in Gozalo Gómez (2013), Hidalgo Navarro (2016) or Martínez Hernández (2016), and *pues* in Guevara (2015), Sánchez Carranza (2013) or Muñoz Medrano (2017).

<sup>2</sup> “Unidad fraseológica” is the main term referring to the group of phrases that are part of the phraseology of a language (García-Page 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Simpson-Vlach and Ellis define formulas as “highly frequent recurrent sequences of words” (2010: 487).

<sup>4</sup> When looking at discourse markers, we encounter scalar particles with different strength in replies to previous interventions (Fuentes 2016).

## 1.2 Phrases of negation and rejection

This work focuses on the functions of rejection/negation/refusal/disagreement<sup>5</sup> and the phrases speakers use to express them. There is a wide variety of forms for saying “no” to a statement, a suggestion or a question. In Spanish, some common ones are formed with the conjunction *ni* followed by an infinitive, like in *ni hablar*; by a noun phrase, like in *ni en sueños*; by an adjective, like in *ni loco*; and sometimes by a verbal phrase, like in *ni lo pienses*. As Pérez-Salazar (2017: 270) points out:

La renovación de secuencias se produce, en algunos casos, sobre la base sintáctico-semántica de ciertas estructuras; es decir que el español aprovecha modelos fraseológicos para crear fórmulas nuevas (...). Así, puede hablarse, en diacronía, de patrones productivos.

Most of these *ni* sequences are prototypical of informal speech.<sup>6</sup> They are considered slightly impolite, and are less studied than other discourse markers, for instance, those used in accepting a proposal or making a statement.<sup>7</sup> The context of informal *ni* expressions is usually a spontaneous conversational dialog, as Holgado Lage and Rojas point out in reference to *ni hablar* (2016). Fuentes Rodríguez mentions that this particular marker absolutely rejects what another interlocutor said (2009: 226), nevertheless, Holgado Lage and Rojas found that it can also work in a monolog (2016: 114). These contexts also naturally host other *ni* expressions that have become phraseological units (Pérez-Salazar 2009: 38):

Una vez alcanzada esta condición es mi intención mostrar que han adquirido la capacidad de negar expresivamente constituyendo por sí solas un enunciado (esto es, como enunciados fraseológicos) o bien como elementos oracionales, rasgo éste que se tiene como propio de las locuciones.

When looking at the current literature on expressions of negation with *ni*, the phrase that appears most regularly is *ni hablar* and some of its variants. This very common marker is the focus of study in Holgado Lage and Rojas (2016), who, in addition to the habitual function, analyze the marker as a positive response (showing acceptance) in Río de la Plata. Frequently, *ni hablar* is the only

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<sup>5</sup> We are aware that there are several differences and nuances in these four functions, but we have grouped them together to have a manageable focus throughout the paper.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to include the varieties of texting and chatting as “oralized written text” (Yus 2011) when discussing the use of these locutions.

<sup>7</sup> Some works on markers of acceptance include Holgado Lage and Serrano Reyes (2020), Porroche Ballesteros (2011) or Martín Zorraquino (2001: 2015).

*ni* phrase recorded in general linguistic works such as Casamiglia and Tuson Valls (1999: 239), Perona (2000: 450) or Landone (2009: 287). In Corpas (1996: 196), the same expression is mentioned along with the variant *ni hablar del peluquín*, which is falling into disuse.<sup>8</sup>

Some works are a little broader and incorporate other rejection phrases besides the ubiquitous *ni hablar*. One of the seminal articles in rejection locutions in Spanish, by Pérez-Salazar (2009), analyzes the historical process through which some *ni* combinations became phraseological units. The author focuses on three particular locutions: *Ni hablar*, *ni pensar*, and *ni soñar*. The same author (Pérez-Salazar 2017) studies negation expressions diachronically, focusing on sequences that are productive, including *ni en sueños*, *ni pensar*, *ni por lumbres*, *ni por asomo*, and *ni por el forro*. *Ni hablar* is also the most detailed *ni* expression in Santos Río (2003). Olza (2011) studies some phrases of rejection, including *ni qué narices*, which also starts with *ni* but requires a different syntactic structure, since it needs to be preceded by the actual object that is being rejected.

Some sources do not incorporate any locutions that start with *ni*. For instance, Martín Zorraquino and Portolés (1999), contribute to the field with one of the original lists of discourse markers in Spanish, but do not provide expressions of rejection. Their work includes, however, some of the opposite function, for instance *desde luego*, *por supuesto* or *claro*. The *Diccionario de Partículas Discursivas del Español*<sup>9</sup> (Briz, Pons and Portolés 2004) also does not focus on the function of rejection.

However, there are some other dictionaries of Spanish discourse markers that include a higher number of expressions of rejection.<sup>10</sup> Fuentes Rodríguez (2009) records a list similar to the one mentioned by Pérez-Salazar (2009): *ni hablar (del peluquín)*, *ni pensarlo*, *ni soñarlo*. In Holgado Lage (2017) there is a longer list of *ni* phrases: *ni de broma/coña*, *ni en sueños*, *ni pensarlo*, *ni por todo el oro del mundo*, *ni loco/a*, *ni soñarlo*, *ni hablar*. Seco *et al.* (2004) include an ample repertoire of *ni* expressions in their *Diccionario Fraseológico Documentado*. Not all of them can be included in the group that is pertinent to this study.<sup>11</sup> The list of expressions that follow the productive pattern used to strongly reject what was said before

<sup>8</sup> As we will see in the results section, not a single participant in our fieldwork mentions this variety.

<sup>9</sup> Dpde.es

<sup>10</sup> It is relevant to note that many studies and compendiums on discourse markers focus on less variable expressions, such as monoverbal ones or extremely grammaticalized ones like *desde luego* or *sin embargo*, therefore there is a number of sources that do not include *ni* expressions

<sup>11</sup> Some of them follow a different pattern or have a different meaning.

includes: *ni amarrado*, *ni atado*, *ni de coña*, *ni en broma*, *ni en sueños*, *ni hablar*, *ni hablar de eso*, *ni hablar del asunto*, *ni hablar del peluquín*, *ni lo pienses*, *ni lo sueñes*, *ni loco*, *ni pensarlo*, *ni por broma*, *ni por pienso*, *ni por sueños*, *ni por todo el oro del mundo* and *ni soñarlo*. This is the most exhaustive list we have found in the literature.

Two of the most relevant general dictionaries of Spanish were also consulted, since they are the tool that most speakers would use if they wanted to find a locution. A search in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* (Real Academia Española 2014) shows that there is not one expression of rejection under the word *ni*.<sup>12</sup> However, one can find some of these locutions when looking by the most relevant word. For instance, *ni hablar* under “hablar”, *ni pensarlo* under “pensar”, *ni soñarlo* under “soñar”, *ni en sueños/ni por sueños* under “sueño”, *ni de broma/ni en broma* under “broma”, *ni loco* under “loco”, *ni de coña* under “coña”, *ni borracho* under “borracho” or *ni de fundas* under “fundas”. It is difficult to know if there are others included (for instance, some outdated ones that are not widely used, or some regional ones) since they are not grouped together anywhere within the dictionary. The second-most renowned general dictionary of Spanish, *Diccionario de Uso* (Moliner 1966: vol. 2, 507), includes several expressions under the definition of *ni*: *ni por mientes*, *ni pensarlo*, *ni por pienso*, *ni por sombra*, *ni soñarlo*, *ni lo sueñes*, *ni en sueños*. And it adds that there might be other ones not included in the list.

While none of the sources mentioned incorporates every one of these expressions<sup>13</sup> – an arduous task, anyhow, since they are constantly appearing (García-Page 2008: 120) – this is also not the main objective of most of them.

## 2 Research justification and questions

As pointed out in the introduction, a relatively small number of sources incorporate a large number of *ni* expressions. It would be a complicated task to unify all the *ni* locutions because of the variability of these phrases (some of them have a very short lifespan), and the orality of the function of negation/rejection.

Given the linguistic relevance of recording and studying these popular markers, and the fact that there are no studies that compare their use in different

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<sup>12</sup> The only two expressions that appear under *ni* are *ni bien* and *ni que*.

<sup>13</sup> Some participants added some expressions that seem to be very new.

dialectal variants, we conducted fieldwork<sup>14</sup> in three different geographical areas – Spain, Mexico and Colombia – in order to describe their diatopical variation based on the collected data. The Peninsular variety has been vastly researched, sometimes due to the nationality of the researchers, so the decision was to contrast it with other varieties. The following are the main questions that we were hoping to answer in relation to the usage and the variation of the locutions in these three different dialectal variants:

- What expressions with *ni* are produced and accepted in these three different varieties of Spanish?
- Are these expressions often recorded and analyzed in the sources?<sup>15</sup>
- Is *ni hablar* widely used, since it appears frequently in the literature?
- Do the sources include expressions from several dialectal variants of the Spanish language?
- Does the use of new *ni* expressions vary depending on the age of the speakers?

Our general hypothesis was that there is a group of *ni* phrases that are known and frequently used in these three varieties of Spanish but that have been overlooked in the studies, maybe because mostly younger speakers use them in oral interactions. We expected to encounter *ni hablar* highly frequently in every dialectal variant, and we wanted to contrast the *ni* expressions from our study with the ones found in the bibliographical sources.

### 3 Methodology

In order to answer these questions, confirm our hypotheses and reach our objective of broadening the horizon of work on phraseological units of negation, we designed a survey for native speakers of Spanish. The aim was to verify their level of familiarity with some expressions of rejection/negation, while obtaining data about other phrases that the sources did not include. After reviewing the existing literature, we reached the conclusion that it was necessary to add more discourse markers to the survey, so we consulted with competent native Spanish-speakers, to create our own inventory. The list could have been more extensive but we considered that the selection we settled on, including several

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<sup>14</sup> IRB protocol #0000007574.

<sup>15</sup> Our initial account of the sources seemed to indicate that several expressions did not appear in the bibliography, but we needed the responses from the participants to prove it.

*ni* expressions, is representative in the majority of the Spanish-speaking world. Participants were also encouraged to provide new phrases that were not part of the main selection.

The fieldwork was conducted during the Spring/Summer of 2017.<sup>16</sup> Participants (N=223) were adults from three different Spanish speaking countries and they were required to answer some questions, via the anonymous survey, about their use of discourse markers of rejection/negation (a total of eighteen, nine of them *ni* expressions). Initially participants were recruited through contacts in the selected countries, but eventually more participants were needed from some age groups, so the researchers resorted to campaigning in person in the three countries, mostly around the capital areas: Madrid, Mexico City and Bogota, and handing out the surveys on hardcopy. Afterwards, the results were uploaded manually to the survey system that stored the data from the ones completed online. The goal was to be able to analyze all of the data together. By the time the research was completed, the participants were distributed by country as shown in Tab. 1.

**Tab. 1:** Distribution of participants by country

| Country  | Number of participants | Percentage of total |
|----------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Spain    | 90                     | 40.36%              |
| Mexico   | 66                     | 29.60%              |
| Colombia | 67                     | 30.04%              |

The survey consisted of two parts: In the first, participants evaluated some negation/rejection markers from 1 (I wouldn’t use it) to 5 (I use it frequently). Nine of the expressions started with *ni* but, as explained above, there were other markers of negation to respond negatively to a proposal, invitation, question or suggestion, in an informal context. An example was provided in order to guide the participants. The restriction of the context was important, as some of these phrases are not considered “polite” in a formal context, a few are even curse words in some dialectal variants. In Fig. 1 there is an extract of this first part of the survey.<sup>17</sup>

**16** We would like to thank the Princeton Center for Language Studies for their financial support towards this research.  
**17** The survey also included another section with markers of acceptance that is not pertinent to the current paper.

\* 1. Valore estas posibles respuestas **negativas** desde 1 ("no lo diría nunca") hasta 5 ("lo digo con frecuencia") para una proposición en un contexto informal. Si sus respuestas de la PARTE 1 aparecen en la lista, valórelas igualmente.

Ejemplo de proposición: *¿Me puedes/podés prestar mil dólares?*

|                   | 1 (no lo diría nunca) | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5 (lo digo con frecuencia) |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Anda ya           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| De ninguna manera | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| Nanay             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| Ni a palos        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| Ni cagando        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| Ni de coña        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| Ni en pedo        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| Ni hablar         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| Ni madres         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| Ni modo           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |

Fig. 1: Screenshot of first part of the survey

This extract contains some negative expressions, including several that include *ni*. Some of them were rated very low in every dialectal variant considered in this study<sup>18</sup> so they are not included in the results.<sup>19</sup> The locutions that are pertinent for this study are the following six:

1. *Ni de coña*
2. *Ni en pedo*
3. *Ni hablar*
4. *Ni madres*
5. *Ni modo*
6. *Ni pensarlo*

In the second part of the survey, participants had the opportunity to provide variations of the markers above or new locutions that were not listed. Also, they were expected to provide an evaluation of those expressions. There was an option to include three of these variations, as seen in Fig. 2.

Logically, the participants rated most of the phrases they provided at the highest value. This part of the survey resulted in a list of very innovative

<sup>18</sup> The selection of expressions was common to the entire Spanish-speaking world. For this reason, some of them were not relevant in all three varieties studied. They will be analyzed in a future study.

<sup>19</sup> Specifically *ni a palos* (average value 1.40) *ni pal coño* (average value 1.03) and *ni cagando* (average value 1.36).



2. Si alguna de las opciones anteriores presenta una variación que le resulta más familiar, o si hay otra expresión que conoce y no aparece en la lista, puede escribirlas y valorarlas aquí:

|            | 1 (no lo diría nunca) | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5 (lo digo con frecuencia) |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1.         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| Expresión: | <input type="text"/>  |                       |                       |                       |                            |
| 2.         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| Expresión: | <input type="text"/>  |                       |                       |                       |                            |
| 3.         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| Expresión: | <input type="text"/>  |                       |                       |                       |                            |

Fig. 2: Screenshot of second part of the survey

expressions that had not been registered before<sup>20</sup> and will be analyzed in Section 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4. We also looked at the age and gender of the participants providing these new varieties to see if there was a pattern, as summarized in Section 4.5.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 General results

First, we analyzed the *ni* expressions that appeared in the general survey, contrasting the three varieties. We were expecting to see a preference for some discourse markers above others in the dialectal variants. Fig. 3 shows the average value for each expression (1–5) on the vertical axis. As can be seen, there was a lot of variation between dialectal variants.

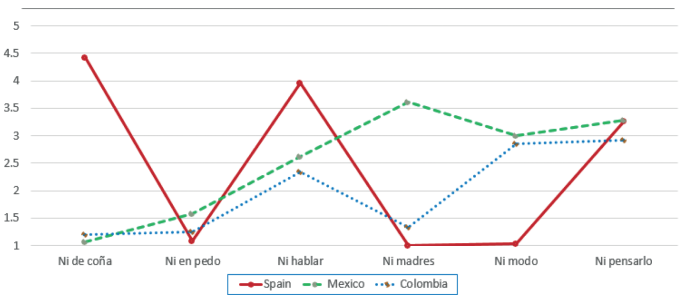


Fig. 3: Frequency of *ni* expressions from the survey in the three different varieties

<sup>20</sup> They did not appear in any of the main sources consulted in Section 1.

For example, the Peninsular Spanish speakers demonstrate a high level of comfort with *ni de coña* (value 4.42), and *ni hablar* (value 3.96). These are the highest values given to any marker in the three dialectal variants, as can be seen in Fig. 3. *Ni de coña* is rejected by the other two dialectal variants (Mexico 1.07 and Colombia 1.21). The answers from Spain attribute the lowest possible value to *ni madres* (1) and to *ni modo* (1.03). The most neutral phrase, according to the chart, would be *ni pensarlo*, as the three groups of participants all rated it high (3.27 Spain, 3.27 México and a little higher, 2.92 in Colombia). The one phrase that is not known or used on a regular basis by any of the dialectal variants is *ni en pedo* (rated 1.08 in Spain, 1.58 by the Mexican participants<sup>21</sup> and 1.25 in Colombia).

*Ni hablar*, although it appeared in almost every source that included *ni* expressions, and many times was the only one, is not the most preferred expression in any of the dialectal variants, with Mexico rating it at 2.63 and Colombia at 2.35. *Ni madres* is the most preferred phrase in Mexico (3.62), with a low value in both Spain and Colombia (1.33). *Ni modo* is given a high value in both Mexico (3.00) and Colombia (2.85), but not as high as others are. This might be because although sometimes used for rejection, the main function of the marker is to express acceptance with resignation, so it is possible that for many speakers, answering *ni modo* to the example given did not fully mean a strong rejection, as the other expressions did.<sup>22</sup>

In Tab. 2 there is a summary of the values given to every item in the three countries.

**Tab. 2:** Average values given by participants

| Marker/Country     | Spain | Mexico | Colombia |
|--------------------|-------|--------|----------|
| <i>Ni de coña</i>  | 4.42  | 1.07   | 1.21     |
| <i>Ni en pedo</i>  | 1.08  | 1.58   | 1.25     |
| <i>Ni hablar</i>   | 3.96  | 2.63   | 2.35     |
| <i>Ni madres</i>   | 1.00  | 3.62   | 1.33     |
| <i>Ni modo</i>     | 1.03  | 3.00   | 2.85     |
| <i>Ni pensarlo</i> | 3.27  | 3.27   | 2.92     |

<sup>21</sup> During the analysis of the results by country, results will show that some participants from Mexico prefer the variation *ni de pedo*, which was not in the survey, that is the reason why this marker is considered pertinent for this study regardless of the low values.

<sup>22</sup> This theory is based on a personal observation of the uses of the discourse marker, there is a need for more pragmatic studies on *ni modo* to verify it.

One of the most innovative features of the survey was the opportunity for participants to provide new expressions that were not part of the original list and that they know or use on a regular basis. The differences between dialectal variants were conspicuous as shown in the next three sections.

4.2 Results by country: Spain

As seen in Fig. 3, the prototypical *ni* expression for the Peninsular dialectal variant is *ni de coña* (value 4.42), with *ni hablar* and *ni pensarlo* ranked really high as well. This is interesting as *ni de coña* was not listed in most of the sources consulted<sup>23</sup>. The reason could be that it is slightly vulgar. Participants from Spain provided seven different new ways to reject a proposition like the one given as an example. In Tab. 3 is a list of how many times they appear in the results:

Tab. 3: New expressions provided by participants from Spain

| Expression               | Number of times | Age of participants <sup>24</sup> |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Ni lo sueñes</i>      | 2               | 35–44, 55–64                      |
| <i>Ni loco/a</i>         | 2               | 25–34, 25–34                      |
| <i>Ni en sueños</i>      | 1               | 35–44                             |
| <i>Ni hartó/a a vino</i> | 1               | 45–54                             |
| <i>Ni borracho/a</i>     | 1               | 25–34                             |
| <i>Ni lo pienses</i>     | 1               | 25–34                             |
| <i>Ni de palo</i>        | 1               | 25–34                             |

As seen in the chart, the phrases *ni lo sueñes* / *ni en sueños* (very similar variations) are the most popular, with three instances in total, followed by *ni loco/a*. Both of these locutions appear in some of the sources consulted.

<sup>23</sup> With the exception of Holgado Lage (2017), Real Academia Española (2020) and Seco *et al* (2004).  
<sup>24</sup> In the anonymous survey, the participants did not provide their actual age but chose from a range. All of the ranges are shown in Fig. 4.

4.3 Results by country: Mexico

Mexican speakers follow a very similar pattern to that described in 4.2. There is a prototypical expression, *ni madres* (value 3.62) ranked much higher than in the other two countries. *Ni modo* also had a high rate<sup>25</sup> along with *ni pensarlo*. The locution *ni en pedo* was rated much lower than expected, only 1.58, but another variation was provided three times, as shown in Tab. 4, along with the other new phrases recorded by speakers of the Mexican variety.

Tab. 4: New expressions provided by participants from Mexico

| Expression            | Number of times | Age of participants |
|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| <i>Ni loco/a</i>      | 3               | 45–54, 45–54, 35–44 |
| <i>Ni de pedo</i>     | 3               | 35–44, 35–44, 35–44 |
| <i>Ni en broma</i>    | 2               | 25–34, 25–34        |
| <i>Ni de broma</i>    | 1               | 35–44               |
| <i>Ni sueños</i>      | 1               | 45–54               |
| <i>Ni soñando</i>     | 1               | 35–44               |
| <i>Ni de loco/a</i>   | 1               | 55–64               |
| <i>Ni borracho/a</i>  | 1               | 35–44               |
| <i>Ni de chiste</i>   | 1               | 25–34               |
| <i>Ni de desmadre</i> | 1               | 45–54               |

As shown above, some of the answers are very similar to the ones in Peninsular Spanish, especially *ni loco/a* or *ni de loco/a* (4 instances in total) and the variations *ni sueños* and *ni soñando* (2 instances in total). Some new discourse markers that do not appear in the other two dialectal variants are *ni de pedo* (3 instances), which also did not appear in any of the sources, and *ni en broma/ni de broma* (2 instances).

4.4 Results by country: Colombia

The data collected from participants in Colombia are slightly different from those collected in the other two countries. It appears that there is no prototypical expression generally used in the Colombian area that is valued significantly lower

<sup>25</sup> It is important to remember that this expression has two different meanings, and there is a possibility that some speakers misunderstood the connotations.

in the other two varieties. *Ni pensarlo* and *ni modo* have relatively high values, but at 2.92 and 2.85 they are far from the highest-rated locutions in Spain and Mexico, plus they are also highly accepted in the other two countries. This lack of a high-rated marker translates into a higher rate of responses for expressions that were not a part of the main list: ten additional phrases were provided, some of them similar to the ones from Mexico and Spain, some of them completely new. In Tab. 5 the complete list is included:

Tab. 5: New expressions provided by participants from Colombia

| Expression                           | Number of times | Age of participants        |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Ni loco/a</i>                     | 4               | 25–34, 25–34, 25–34, 55–64 |
| <i>Ni de fundas</i>                  | 2               | 25–34, 55–64               |
| <i>Ni en sueños</i>                  | 2               | 25–34, 18–24               |
| <i>Ni a bate</i>                     | 1               | 35–44                      |
| <i>Ni a palo</i>                     | 1               | 25–34                      |
| <i>Ni po’el putas</i>                | 1               | 55–64                      |
| <i>Ni puel</i>                       | 1               | >65                        |
| <i>Ni de riesgo</i>                  | 1               | 25–34                      |
| <i>Ni en joda</i>                    | 1               | 18–24                      |
| <i>Ni se te ocurra</i> <sup>26</sup> | 1               | 55–64                      |

The most common locution provided was *ni loco/a* (4 instances) which was also used in the other two countries. *Ni de fundas* appears twice, as does *ni en sueños*. The latter phrase also appeared in the results from Spain and some variations that included the word verb *soñar*<sup>27</sup> were recorded in Mexico. However, seven of these expressions only appear in the Colombian surveys (eight if we include *ni a palo*, for which there is a very similar variety, *ni de palo*, in Spanish from Spain), which might be an indication of the wide variety of options that the speakers can choose from. This also provides an explanation for the lack of a prototypical phrase that is highly rated in the survey by most speakers.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> This expression also has a different meaning, ‘don’t you dare’.

<sup>27</sup> *Soñar* means *to dream*, and there are several ways to reject a proposal using this word.

<sup>28</sup> It would be interesting to conduct fieldwork in order to learn the extent of *ni de fundas*, since it appears in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia* as a prototypical phrase from Ecuador.

## 4.5 Age and gender of participants

### 4.5.1 Age

One of our research questions was whether the age of the participants was a relevant factor when providing new expressions, since there is a link between young age and innovation in language.<sup>29</sup> On analyzing the data, we found ten new locutions<sup>30</sup> that did not appear in the bibliography or the first part of the survey. Most of them were recorded in Colombia and Mexico.<sup>31</sup> The list includes: *ni de palo* (Spain), *ni de chiste* (Mexico), *ni de desmadre* (Mexico), *ni a bate* (Colombia), *ni a palo* (Colombia), *ni po'el putas* (Colombia), *ni puel* (Colombia), *ni de riesgo* (Colombia), *ni en joda* (Colombia) and *ni se te ocurra* (Colombia). While it was of great interest to analyze the speakers' age and gender, the results did not match our hypothesis.

Fig. 4 shows participants per age group who provided new expressions. Thirty-nine participants included some *ni* expressions in the optional second part of the survey:

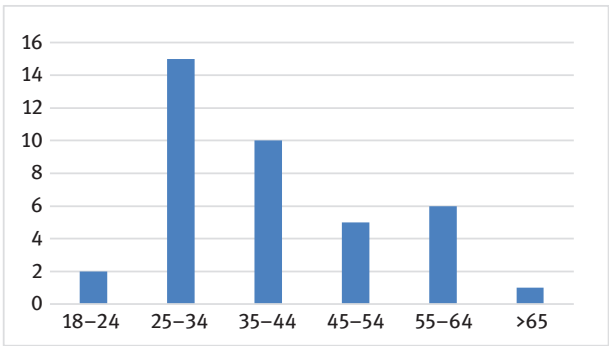


Fig. 4: Age of participants providing new *ni* expressions

Only two of the participants were younger than 25 years old, with most of the speakers in the 25–34 and 34–44 sections. While this did not match the proposed

<sup>29</sup> For instance, see Labov (2001).

<sup>30</sup> Not including variations of the same expression.

<sup>31</sup> This is logical, as there is a higher incidence of authors from Spain analyzing discourse markers and they often provide varieties.

theory, the numbers match the age distribution of the entire pool of participants, as seen in Fig. 5:

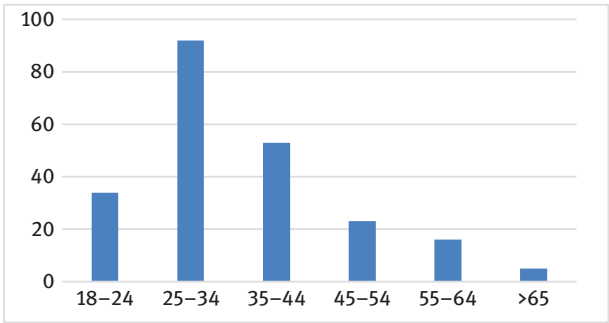


Fig. 5: Age of participants, total

It seems that the participants that decided to provide new expressions with *ni* were a similar small percentage from every age group.<sup>32</sup> The only exception would be the 55–64 age group. The percentage is slightly higher among the participants that provided new locutions (15%) than among the general pool of participants (7%). Therefore, there is not a reliable age group that provides a higher number of new markers, but every range of age included some participants that took the time to fill out the second part of the survey and were familiar with some *ni* expressions that were not included in the original list.

4.5.2 Gender

Similarly, the gender of the participants that provided new expressions did not affect our results. In both the total number of respondents and the ones that included new markers, there are more female answers than male. The percentage varies slightly but the difference is not too great, as seen in Tab. 6.

<sup>32</sup> We only include participants who provided expressions that start with *ni*: many other participants completed the second part with different answers, for instance, in Mexico there is a very popular variation of *no*, *nel*, that was suggested by the participants 20 times. In this paper, we only consider expressions that we hypothesized young speakers would use with a higher frequency.

Tab. 6: Gender of participants

| Number of participants | Gender |     | Percentage |
|------------------------|--------|-----|------------|
| Providing new answers  | Male   | 16  | 41%        |
|                        | Female | 23  | 59%        |
| Total participants     | Male   | 76  | 34%        |
|                        | Female | 147 | 66%        |

## 5 Discussion

As presented in the Section 2 of the current study, one of the main objectives of this fieldwork was to record a number of expressions of negation (for instance to refuse a proposal, question or suggestion) that start with the particle *ni*, usually followed by either a noun phrase, adjective or infinitive.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, we wanted to know how familiar speakers were with some of these existing phrases.

In order to answer the first research question (what expressions with *ni* are produced and accepted in these three different varieties of Spanish?), we looked at both the evaluation of some markers by speakers of Peninsular, Mexican and Colombian Spanish and the new locutions that they were given the option to incorporate into the form. Results show that preferences vary greatly depending on the geographical area. For instance, in Spain the preferred expressions are *ni hablar* and *ni de coña*, in Mexico they are *ni madres* and *ni modo*, and in Colombia they are *ni pensarlo* and *ni modo* although these were not rated as highly as those preferred in the other two countries. In all three countries, participants included *ni loco/a* and a phrase or two that included the verb *soñar* or the noun *sueños*,<sup>34</sup> along with others, sometimes related to being drunk.<sup>35</sup>

This list leads towards the second question we wanted to answer – are these expressions often registered and analyzed in the best-known sources? – and confirms our hypothesis that there are several *ni* expressions that were not in any of the inventories of discourse markers of negation consulted in the bibliography. One of the new phrases, *ni de pedo*, was mentioned more than once in the survey results.

Since *ni hablar* is the expression that appears in most of the sources consulted for this work, we wanted to examine the extent of its use. *Ni hablar* had

<sup>33</sup> In some cases, followed by a verbal phrase like *ni lo sueñes*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ni lo sueñes, ni en sueños, ni sueñes, ni soñando*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ni harto/a a vino, ni borracho/a, ni de pedo*.



remarkably high scores in Spanish from Spain, but the results were not as strong in Colombian and Mexican Spanish (although most speakers seem to be familiar with it). Taking into consideration that many of the sources mentioned in the Section 1.2 were written and published in Spain, it is logical that it is the one listed with the most frequency. However, it would be useful to include the main *ni* markers from other dialectal variants in the list to be more linguistically inclusive and adopt a more panhispanic approach. It would also be more sociolinguistically accurate and would help other fields, like Spanish as a Second Language, with a more diverse range of options for the students to choose from when learning these functions.

One of the questions introduced a comparison between the sources consulted and the results from the survey: by looking at the prototypical discourse markers from every dialectal variant, plus the ones provided by the speakers, we could get an idea of whether the sources are representative of several varieties. Results show that most phrases used in the Peninsular variety are included with one noteworthy exception: *ni de coña*, the preferred phrase for speakers from Spain. This is not found in hardly any of the sources consulted. Conversely, when looking at the locutions provided by Peninsular Spanish speakers, like *ni lo sueñes*, *ni hart/a a vino*, *ni lo pienses*, they make some appearances in the sources consulted, whereas very few of the locutions provided by speakers of Mexico and Colombia are included. Furthermore, the main Mexican marker, *ni madres*,<sup>36</sup> did not appear in any of the specialized works.

Results pertaining to our last question (does the use of new *ni* expressions vary depending on the age of the speakers?) did not confirm our hypothesis that young speakers would be the ones providing new example of these markers. In reality, a small percentage from every age range provided new *ni* phrases, corresponding almost identically with the general distribution by age, so it seems that the whole population is aware of the use of these less common negation phrases, regardless of their age.

## 6 Conclusion

This study is an initial approach to an ongoing dilemma, which is the recording of innovative discourse markers that represent informal oral language variety of the

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<sup>36</sup> Like *ni de coña*, this expression is vulgar and this might be why it has been overlooked in some studies.

population of a place in a particular moment in time. One of the obstacles is the difficulty of obtaining oral data, usually done by recording interviews and transcribing them. However, the main setback is probably the brief duration of some of these phrases, sometimes as short as one generation. The focus of this paper specifically is the extension of the usage of phrases that start with *ni* in Spanish, for instance, *ni hablar*, to show an effusive—sometimes even not polite—rejection to a proposal, suggestion, statement or question.

After reviewing the existing literature on refusal utterances, we reached the conclusion that many common initiators had not been included. *Ni hablar* was the marker appearing in most of the sources, often the only one, and sometimes along with the variation *ni hablar del peluquín*.<sup>37</sup>

For this reason, we decided to create an online survey<sup>38</sup> that included several expressions starting with *ni*. We sent it to native speakers from Spain, Colombia and Mexico, with 223 of the solicited participants completing the form. Results show that *ni hablar* is known in all of the three countries but not used to the same degree. *Ni de coña* is the preferred one in Spain, *ni madres* in Mexico and *ni pensarlo* (also used in the other two dialectal variants) in Colombia. Furthermore, participants provided 23 new *ni* expressions that were not a part of the first section of the survey, some of them repeated in more than one dialectal variant. Most of these were not registered in the main sources consulted, especially the phrases produced in Mexico and Colombia.<sup>39</sup>

The analysis of the results shows the current need for further studies on these discourse markers to give a better overview of the way the different dialectal variants of Spanish function in informal oral situations. Such data would be of relevance to several fields, including the field of phraseology.

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<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, none of the participants suggested this variation in the second part of the survey.

<sup>38</sup> Also completed in hard copy by some participants.

<sup>39</sup> The reason for this difference could be the fact that many of the authors from the literature are from Spain.

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