

Demonstratives as sources for turn-holding devices: the case of Spanish *ESTE*

This talk focusses on the patterns of distribution of *ESTE* in Amazonian Spanish and explores its evolution from a demonstrative into a filler. Although *ESTE* is used as a filler throughout Latin America, there has been no attempt to explain the diachronic connection between the demonstrative use and the filler use. Fillers are devices to deal with word formulation delays, when speakers have difficulties in spontaneous speech production (Fox et al. 1996). Fillers can serve as placeholders, which replace lexical items in specific syntactic slots, or as hesitators, which are non-referential and distributionally free (Hayashi and Yoon 2010). Crosslinguistic studies show that demonstratives are a common source of fillers (Podlesskaya 2010).

In Amazonian Spanish, *este* fulfills five functions synchronically: (1) prenominal demonstrative, (2) postnominal demonstrative, (3) pronominal demonstrative, (4) nominal placeholder, and (5) interjective hesitator. No other demonstrative in PAS displays functions (4) and (5).

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| (1) | <i>al ver a este muchacho corre</i> | ‘when he sees this boy runs |
| (2) | <i>van a apoyar al candidato este</i> | ‘you have to support this candidate’ |
| (3) | <i>este que vive arriba</i> | ‘this that lives above |
| (4) | <i>para comprar este, leche caspi</i> | ‘to buy hm, leche Caspi (Couma macrocarpa)’ |
| (5) | <i>vio que era, este, que vivía solo</i> | ‘she saw that he was, hm, that he lived alone’ |

A usage-based study shows that the primary function of *ESTE* in Amazonian Spanish is that of a filler as the functions (4) and (5) account for 70% of the tokens. Further, the demonstrative *ESTE* and filler *ESTE* have distinct phonetic profiles and uses, which suggest we are dealing with two different categories. The synchronic distribution of *este*, as well as crosslinguistic studies of demonstratives, suggest the following path of change: DEMONSTRATIVE > PLACEHOLDER > INTERJECTIVE HESITATOR. The emergence of the placeholder function of *ESTE* has been facilitated by the pronominal use of *ESTE* for recognitional purposes, in which the demonstrative’s referent is identifiable due to the speaker and hearer’s shared knowledge (Himmelmann 1996). Next, *ESTE* is associated with difficulties in remembering specific lexical items. In the next phase of the development, the placeholder loses referentiality, the speaker does not have something specific in mind thus becoming an interjective hesitator. The proposed diachronic scenario can account for the emergence of the filler-*ESTE* in other varieties of Spanish as well.

References

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