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Third Person References: Forms and Functions in Two Spoken Genres of Spanish

Description

This volume, a case study on the grammar of third person references in two genres of spoken Ecuadorian Spanish, examines from a discourse-analytic perspective how genre affects linguistic patterns and how researchers can look for and interpret genre effects. This marks a timely contribution to corpus linguistics, as many linguists are choosing to work with empirical data. Corpus based approaches have many advantages and are useful in the comparison of different languages as well as varieties of the same language, but what is often overlooked in such comparisons is the genre of language under examination. As this case study shows, genre is an important factor in interpreting patterns and distributions of forms.

The book also contributes toward theories of anaphora, referentiality and Preferred Argument Structure. It is relevant for scholars who work with referentiality, genre differences, third person references, and interactional linguistics, as well as those interested in Spanish morphosyntax. [*From the Publisher*]

Keywords

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The opening chapter of Professor Dumont's book is available by clicking the download link above.

Third person references: Forms and functions in two spoken genres of Spanish

Jenny Dumont

1 Introduction

1.1 *Discourse Analysis*

The study of language, or the discipline of linguistics and related fields, has been revolutionized over the course of the last five decades with the advent of voice recorders and other technology that have allowed researchers to capture spontaneous language at the time of production and preserve it in a way in that it can be analyzed at a later date. As such, the field of Discourse Analysis has grown exponentially as researchers have access to phenomena that were once fleeting. Consequently, our understanding of language structure and grammar has been radically altered.

At first glance, to the untrained eye, a transcript of conversational language appears messy and disorganized. Language in its raw and unedited form appears chaotic—full of unfinished sentences, the haphazard stringing together of clauses or fragments of speech with no punctuation, and the frequent occurrence of nuisances or interruptions such as pauses, hesitations, truncated words, laughter, and other speakers. It bears little resemblance to the more polished written genres. However, when our expectations are adjusted and we dismiss the notion that speech is but a poor representation of an underlying grammar, patterns and order become visible. Organization is viewed in the highly sophisticated turn-taking system, which allows for speakers to practically seamlessly transition from one speaker to another with remarkably few problems (cf. Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Structure is revealed in the architecture of the clause, in which the same patterns are repeated over and over, building conversations and narratives (cf. Chafe, 1994;

Du Bois 1987). Punctuation is found in the intonation patterns that regulate the flow of information and contribute to the turn-taking system (cf. Chafe, 1994; Ford & Thompson, 1996).

What, then, are the factors that contribute to the organization and structure of spoken language? A great deal of work has concentrated on the cognitive factors that shape the grammar of spoken language. The work of scholars such as Wallace Chafe (1980, 1987, 1994, *inter alia*), Talmy Givón (1981, 1983, 1995, *inter alia*) and John Du Bois (1980, 1987, 2003a and 2003b) have shown how cognitive concerns contribute to patterns of language use. Through these and similar studies, we have learned a great deal about how speakers manage the translation of thoughts and memories into coherent speech. In the process of verbalization, speakers are faced with limitations regarding how much information can be in the focus of consciousness at one time (cf. Chafe, 1994), as well as how to keep track of multiple referents in a conversation at a time without creating confusion. Grammar is said to reflect speakers' need to distinguish between what information is presumed to be in the consciousness and what is not.

Discourse analysis has also shed light on categorization. Hopper and Thompson (1984) show that while speakers universally orient toward *things*, which are represented by nouns, and *actions*, represented by verbs, it is only within actual discourse that categories are imposed on the forms. In a similar vein, Hopper and Thompson (1980) and Thompson and Hopper (2001) show that intransitive, transitive and ditransitive are not discrete grammatical categories, but that transitivity is scalar and depends upon several markers of transitivity within the clause. The valency of a verb is determined by its use in discourse, rather than the other way around. The significance of these studies is that language is a dynamic system which is grounded in use. Without discourse, there are no nouns or verbs, nor transitive or intransitive verbs, and referentiality is not inherent to linguistic form. Without discourse, our assumptions about linguistic

structure are often misguided. Where the traditional view of language or grammar may be somewhat unidimensional, the analysis of discourse reveals that there are a multitude of interrelated dimensions (cognitive, pragmatic and interactional, among others) which bear relevance on linguistic form.

This study of language in spoken form allows us a privileged glimpse into how social and interactional practices, which are absent from many other genres, influence grammar. In addition to the cognitive pressures associated with creating language on-line with no time to edit, speakers are also simultaneously faced with additional interactional concerns, ranging from taking turns to ways of expressing stance and attitude. These interactional pressures have grammatical consequences that are manifested in a number of ways.

Numerous studies have examined the turn-taking system (Ford & Thompson, 1996; Ford, Fox & Thompson, 2002; Goodwin, 1981; Lerner, 1991; Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 1996; *inter alia*). This research indicates that turn-taking is a highly organized and predictable system within conversation. Participants recognize the appropriate times in a conversation in which to take a new turn at talk, have developed strategies for dealing with problems that arise when turn-taking does not follow as anticipated, and can even collaboratively construct sentences across two speaker turns.

One of the fundamental principles of interactional linguistics is the idea that grammar emerges as a set of patterns that arise in response to repeated actions (cf. Bybee, 2007, 2010). For example, Thompson's (2002) study of complement clauses challenges the traditional view of these clauses as subordinate to complement-taking predicates (e.g., *think, know, realize, wonder*, etc.) by showing that complement-taking predicates are more accurately described as epistemic/evidential/evaluative fragments denoting a speakers' stance toward the clause. Here, our

understanding of these structures as main clause + subordinate clause must be abandoned as we see the rich interactional functions that they perform in conversation.

1.2 *Genre*

It must be noted that discourse analysis is not limited to just the study of conversation, but includes other spoken and written genres of language. It should be emphasized that one genre does not take precedence over another in the field of discourse analysis, rather the focus is on naturally-occurring data and the study of language beyond isolated sentences. This study, building upon previous studies of the cognitive and interactional dimensions of language use, examines two genres of spoken language—spontaneous conversations and monologic narratives of the Pear Film—and finds that genre is an important notion in interpreting differences in frequency and distribution of form between the two datasets.

The shift toward usage based study of language has prompted a closer look at the divergent ways that language is used and has called for a refinement in the way scholars talk about language variation as it relates to different situational or communicative demands. Terms such as genre, register, style and diaphasic variation have all been used in an attempt to capture these differences. The canonical works of Douglas Biber (cf. Biber, 1988, 1995; Biber & Finegan, 1994; Biber, Conrad & Reppen, 1998; Biber & Conrad, 2009) have made great gains toward a deeper theoretical understanding of nuances of this type of variation, yet it can be argued that many linguistic subfields lack an awareness of the importance of considering contextual variation and the necessary methodological tools for doing so.

Variation in distribution of linguistic forms between genres and styles was noted even in the earliest usage based studies. Early sociolinguistic studies emphasized the style as a linguistic variable (cf. Labov, 1972; Trudgill, 1974), but as later studies have alluded to (cf. Biber & Finegan,

1994), when the variation is only understood in a limited range of styles, the bigger picture of how different types of situational variation relate to linguistic form fails to develop. As corpus linguistics has evolved, the notion of contextual or situational variation has been explored in a number of other types of studies. A few of these are discussed in more detail here, and important connections to the present study are highlighted, but a fuller discussion of the complexities of register, genre, style and the like are better found in the aforementioned works of Biber.

Biber (1988) dedicates an entire volume to genre effects on a wide range of linguistic phenomena, from tense and aspect to negation, and this fine grained focus on the form-genre connection is further explored in the present study. As corpus linguistics has expanded, these fundamental concepts have been subjected to empirical testing in an increasing number of languages, different theoretical frameworks and different practical models are emerging. One influential example of this extension to non-English languages and the incorporation of a more sophisticated form of modeling is found in Biber et al. (2006), which reports the findings of a Multi-Dimensional analysis of register variation in Spanish that describes six different dimensions of variation (that correspond to different registers) that can be identified by the co-occurrence of linguistic features (e.g., the subjunctive mood, progressive aspect, present tense, etc.). In a sociolinguistic account of variation, Travis (2007) explores genre effects and subject expression in two varieties of spoken Spanish, finding genre to be a significant factor in the rate of first person subject expression in spoken Spanish, as well as in the duration of the priming effect. A greater understanding of how this dimension of variability is related to linguistic form is essential; in particular a greater understanding of how to differentiate disparate rates of occurrence of linguistic forms between genres and true differences in linguistic conditioning between genres is an important development in discourse analysis (and related fields of study), and has significant

implications for the advancement of linguistic study. As more and more researchers conduct quantitative research of language and comparisons between studies are drawn, it is essential that we understand how the external or situational circumstances may shape the linguistic patterns uncovered in one study.

Having highlighted the importance of recognizing register differences or genre effects and the need to produce a coherent and consistent understanding of this dimension of variation, this study focuses on the functional basis for differences in linguistic patterning that emerge in two different genres of spoken Ecuadorian Spanish. The word genre is used throughout this work in the following manner, following Bauman (1999, p.84): a genre is a “speech style oriented to the production and reception of a particular kind of text”. Note that genres can be defined broadly, as in conversation versus narrative, or on a more specific level, as in the comparison of spontaneous service encounters (as a type of conversation) and oral narratives of personal experience (one type of narrative), or even more specifically within those levels. The genres that provide the data for the analyses presented in this work are as follows: 1) spontaneous conversations between friends and family members, and 2) Pear Film narratives (cf. Chafe 1980). The notion of genre is invoked in order to provide functionally based interpretations of the data within the specific situational circumstances in which they were produced; and the analyses within this work should be understood with respect to these particular datasets and not understood as entirely representative of the larger genres to which they belong. That is, these conversations are not intended to be representative of all conversations between Spanish-speakers or even all Ecuadorians, nor are these narratives representative of all oral narratives (and indeed this particular narrative genre is unique in that it was designed by linguists for the explicit purpose of obtaining data for linguistic analysis). The analysis centers on the communicative actions common to the genre, rather than the genre

itself. It should be noted that most of the communicative actions are not exclusive to one genre or the other (for example, introducing referents and narrating events occur in both genres), although a few communicative actions (such as turn-taking) are exclusive to the conversations. More specific information about the speakers, the genres and how these data were collected is given in Chapter **Error! Reference source not found.**

1.3 *The present study*

This tome is a case study of the linguistic forms used to designate third person as they occur in two genres of spoken Ecuadorian Spanish. Why was third person chosen? The sheer abundance of third person references in any given corpus immediately makes it an attractive candidate for a quantitative study. It is through the quantitative study of language that we achieve an understanding the routinized linguistic structures that are the grammatical realization of recurrent social and communicative needs. In addition, the study of third person expressions provides a veritable gold mine of information about the underlying cognitive processes involved in language production—it is through the study of the third person that we trace the information status of referents, study anaphora, and measure the ways in which information flow pressures shape discourse. The frequency of third person expressions also guarantees that they occur in a wide variety of interactional contexts, allowing for an understanding of how interactional factors help shape grammar.

Only those linguistic expressions used to designate third person are examined here. One reason for this is purely practical—1st and 2nd person references are nearly absent from one of the genres under consideration (narratives of the Pear Film). It is also because third person has been less widely studied than first and second person in Spanish (e.g., Cameron, 1994; Flores-Ferrán, 2002; Torres Cacoullós & Travis, 2015; Travis, 2005, 2007 *inter alia*; but see Bentivoglio', 1993

and Dumont, 2006) and because there are different factors that affect the linguistic coding of first and second person references that do not apply to third person. Lastly, there is simply more variation in both the information flow parameters (discourse referentiality, information status, specificity, identifiability) for third person than first or second person, and a wider range of linguistic expressions used to designate third person. It is precisely this variation which is central to the investigation of the cognitive processes involved in language production examined here.

How do we investigate the role of third person references in the cognitive and interactional processes of language production? Or conversely, how do we investigate the role of cognitive and interactional pressures in shaping the grammar of third person references in spoken language? The best approach toward beginning to answer these questions is to first sort out the cognitive factors from the interactional pressures. For that reason, two genres of spoken language—monologic narratives of the Pear Film and dialogic conversations—were chosen for this study. These genres differ from each other in two important ways—the information flow pressures and the level of interaction. In terms of cognitive processes, these narratives have higher information flow pressures (cf. Du Bois, 1987), which allows us to understand how speakers maximize the available grammatical resources of a language to keep track of a relatively high number of referents. The low information pressures of the conversations allow for a comparison of the form-function links as evidenced in references to the third person under different conditions. As far as interactional concerns, the conversational data teems with interaction as speakers take turns, compete for the floor, finish either other's sentences, question what others have said, and jointly build narratives. Interaction is not absent from the narratives (cf. Schegloff, 1982 and Goodwin, 2007), but we can expect interactional concerns to be less pervasive in narratives than in the conversations and there

may also be fewer types of interactional concerns (i.e., turn-taking is less important in a largely monologic narrative). Compare examples

(1) and (2), for example. In the first example, two speakers are jointly constructing a narrative, taking turns with each other, competing for the floor (overlapping speech is seen in square brackets, see the Appendix for a full list of transcription conventions), agreeing and disagreeing with each other. In the second example, the speaker is recalling the story on her own—she has the floor to herself, there is no one to help her remember details or to challenge her memory, nor to agree with her.

(1) Jointly constructed narrative in conversational data

A: ... (H) *vos te fuiste una vez trotando con nosotros?*
R: .. *hasta el --*
claro,
pues,
hasta= --
y después [Ø cogimos bus].
A: [que fue] --
no,
y esa camioneta,
que nos llevó hasta la Mitad del Mundo,
R: *ah,*
claro,
para llegar hasta la Mitad del Mundo.
A: .. (H) *y que luego nos Ø querían llevar <@ más allá @>.*
.. y Ø estaban borrachos,
Ø creo.
R: *claro,*
se iban para Calacalí,
creo.
A: .. *ah,*
a la costa,
a dónde también Ø se irían?
R: .. *pero Ø estaban --*
bien borrachos,
nosotros golpeábamos el [vidrio],
A: [hm],
R: .. *para que Ø nos pare,*
A: *y Ø no nos pa-- --*
Ø nos paró más allá del redondel?
R: ... *<@ claro @>.*
A: *una media [cuadra].*
R: [y de ahí] *Ø queríamos subir trotando de*
nuevo.
A: ... *no,*
Ø cogimos bus hasta .. <@ Pomasqui @>.

R: *Ø cogimos bus y Ø nos bajamos en --
claro,
[en Pomasqui].*

A: *[Pomasqui].
y de ahí [Ø seguimos trotando].*

A: *\... (H) did you go jogging with us one time?*

R: *.. to the --
of course,
well,
to= --
and then [we caught a bus].*

A: *[that went] --
no,
and that pickup truck,
that took us to La Mitad del Mundo,*

R: *ah,
of course,
to get to La Mitad del Mundo.*

A: *.. (H) and then later (they) wanted to take us
<@ farther @>.
.. and (they) were drunk,
(I) think.*

R: *of course,
they were going to Calacalí,
I think.*

A: *.. ah,
to the coast,
where would (they) go?*

R: *.. but (they) were --
really drunk,
we hit the [window],*

A: *[hm],*

R: *.. so that (they) would stop,*

A: *and (they) didn't st- --
(he) let us out past the roundabout?*

R: *... <@ of course @>.*

A: *a half a [block].*

R: *[and from there] we all wanted to go jogging
again.*

A: *... no,
(we) took a bus to .. <@ Pomasqui @>.*

R: *(we) took a bus and (we) got off in --
right,
[in Pomasqui].*

A: *[Pomasqui].
and from there [(we) kept jogging].'*

(Fumar: 155-194)

(2) Excerpt from monologic narrative

*Ø está yendo en la bicicleta,
eh,
.. en el que misma --
en el mismo camino,
pero en el sentido contrario,
pasa una niña,
en otra bicicleta.
.. (H) a lo que Ø están pasando juntos,
eh,
.. el sombrero del niño vuela,
(H) y el niño,
por regresar a ver el sombrero,
no ve una piedra grande y se choca.
... (H) eh,
Ø se choca y se caen las manzanas,
se cae el canasto,
se riegan todas las peras,
(H) la niña sigue su camino,
(H) y el niño a lo que= --
.. a lo que Ø esté en el piso,
se levanta su pantalón,
se baja sus medias,
se X su pierna lastimada,
y se da cuenta que a lado de él están parados tres niños.*

*'(he) is going on the bicycle,
eh,
.. in the same --
on the same road,
but on the other side,
comes a girl,
on another bicycle.
.. (H) when (they) pass by each other,
eh,
.. the boy's hat flies off,
(H) and the boy,
upon looking back at the hat,
doesn't see a big rock and crashes.
... (H) eh,
(he) crashes and the apples fall,
the basket falls,
the pears all spill out,
(H) the girl goes on her way,
(H) and the boy when --
.. when (he) is on the ground,
raises his pants,
lowers his socks,
X his hurt leg,
and realizes that standing next to him are three boys.'*

(PS 100:131-154)

The corpus used for this study is described in detail in Chapter 3. The data are from a larger, three genre corpus of Ecuadorian Spanish. Fifteen narratives of the Pear Film were selected, totaling 6430 words, from which all linguistic expressions used to designate 3rd person were extracted (exclusions are discussed in Chapter 4). An equal number of speakers were chosen for the conversational data. A sample of third person references from these speakers was extracted from transcripts of ten conversations, totaling 74,673 words.¹

The findings presented in this work shed light on a number of important issues. The comparison of two genres allows for an empirically based understanding of what recurrent grammatical forms are linked to the different actions of narrative and conversational data, and to better interpret the subsequent patterns by observing links between form and function. For example, the higher information flow pressures (communicative action or goal) in the narrative data are reflected in the forms used in this genre, notably a higher rate of transitive constructions, proportion of referential to non-referential mentions of third person, and a stricter adherence to Preferred Argument Structure (PAS, cf. Du Bois, 1987). In other words, the collective patterning of these forms together in the narratives but not the conversation is interpreted as intrinsically linked to the unique communicative goals of the Pear Film narratives. Other grammatical forms are seen at different rates in the conversations than in the narratives and are linked to different communicative actions, such as the use of the definite article to introduce of new referents with

¹ Although at first blush it looks as though there is a large discrepancy in the proportion of the corpus that belongs to the narratives and the proportion that belongs to the conversations, it was necessary to take a sample from a larger set of conversational data for several reasons. The narratives contain almost exclusively 3rd person, whereas 3rd person in the conversations is interspersed with first and second person, meaning that one needs to have a larger corpus to get the same number of tokens. Secondly, given the wider range of communicative actions in the conversations, it was decided to extract more tokens from this genre to ensure a better representation of the discourse functions of third person expressions. Lastly, only a sample of NPs was taken from the 74,673 words in the conversations, so the actual word count of the proportion used is much smaller (but very difficult to count precisely, as often only one speaker's NPs were used, but the speech of others intervenes between turns of the target speaker).

definite markers, which is interpreted to reflect genre-specific discourse actions. In this case, different coding reflects the more frequent action of introducing referents that are assumed to be shared between speakers in the conversations than in these Pear Story narratives.

Categoriality is explored, especially with respect to the distinction between referential and non-referential forms, and the typology of the different groups of non-referential forms. The terms referential and non-referential are used here in the sense of Du Bois (1980) and Hopper and Thompson's 1984 "discourse manipulable" sense. Referential expressions are those that speakers use to track a referent whereas the different kinds of non-referential expressions perform different discourse functions, including predicating, classifying and characterizing. Compare the noun *sol* ('sun') in (3) and (4). It is the same lexical form, yet the discourse function, and consequently the grammar, is very different between the two examples. In the first example, *sol* is referential, that is, it exhibits the prototypical functions of a noun—it refers to an entity that has continuity of identity within the discourse. In addition, it shows nominal morphology (i.e., the definite article), whereas non-referential expressions tend to exhibit less morphology characteristic of NPs (e.g., bare NPs, as in (4)). The difference between the linguistic expressions referentiality and non-referentiality will be discussed in depth in Chapter 5, where the operationalization of the coding for referential and non-referential expressions is explained, but perhaps one of the easiest ways to understand the difference between the two is the often used analogy of computer files (cf. Du Bois 1980, p. 220-23, 1987 p. 817). When a speaker mentions referent for the first time in a conversation, the listener creates a new file or accesses an existing cognitive file for that referent. The identity of this referent is stable, information about this particular referent is stored in the mind, and new information can be added to the file. Linguistic expressions of non-referentiality, on the other hand, such as the noun *sol* in (4), have no associated cognitive file. The noun *sun*

in this example is not used to talk about the entity that is yellow, is a star, and is located approximately 149.6 million kilometers from the Earth. The discourse function of *sol* in this second example is part of a verbal predicate and refers to the weather conditions. As we will see throughout this volume, there is ample evidence in the discourse that the grammar of linguistic forms used to designate third person reflects the differences between referentiality and non-referentiality and that speakers use them for quite distinct discourse functions.

(3) Referential use of the noun *sol*

F: *amarillo es el sol,*

F: 'the sun is yellow,'

(Birthday: 286)

(4) Non-referential use of the noun *sol*

A: *pero está haciendo **basta=nte so=1.***

A: 'but it's really sunny' (lit. '(it) is making a lot of sun')

(Clases: 7)

The previously understudied roles of free NPs (see *gastroenteritis* and *hepatitis* in (5)) are also explored in this work. We see that speakers use these NPs for a variety of functions related to both information flow and interactional concerns.

(5) Free NP

E: *qué problema es el que da,
cuando está --
.. cuando Ø hacen cosas sucias?
...(2.0) cómo se llama?*

L: *.. **gastroenteritis.***

E: *.. **gastroenteritis.***

*o la otra,
que te pones amarillo?*

L: *.. **hepatitis.***

E: *.. **hepatitis.***

E: 'what problem is it,

when it -
.. when (they) do dirty things?
...(2.0) what's it called?
L: .. **gastroenteritis**.
E: .. **gastroenteritis**.
or the other,
when you turn yellow?
L: .. **hepatitis**.
E: .. **hepatitis**.'

(Food, 6:13-622)

As we trace the form and distribution of references to third person throughout discourse, we see how the varying forms and roles reflect local cognitive and interactional demands. At the local level, we can situate a reference within the immediately surrounding discourse and understand why it is that a speaker has chosen a particular way of encoding the reference. On a more global scale, clusters of similar form-function links within genres and the comparison of these clusters across genres reveal patterns that are in turn interpreted as evidence of the unique of communicative actions and goals of each genre, and the value of a discourse analytic approach to the study of language. The findings here attest to the view that spoken language is in fact orderly and structured and that speakers are highly capable of managing several dimensions of external circumstances (i.e., turn-taking, information flow) in the on-line production of language.

