

Neuter Demonstrative Expressions and Temporal Perspective: An Integrated Approach

Do 10.30 – 11.00

Despite their noticeable categorial dissimilarities, demonstrative neuter expressions and natural language tense seem to share some basic features. In their purely deictic usage, both categories are to be interpreted relative to some object in the context of utterance: the speaker or addressee and the utterance time, respectively. Another common feature is that they both have an anaphoric nature. As in other languages Spanish neuter demonstratives are often used to refer anaphorically to entities which have been previously mentioned in discourse (Asher, 1993) whereas natural language tense shows its anaphoric character through narrative sequences of events in which one tense is to be interpreted relative to another which temporally precedes or is subsequent to it. Finally, natural language tense and neuter demonstratives also show an identical semantic behavior in certain syntactic contexts such as when embedded under certain complementizer clauses.

On the basis of the similarities presented above and the evidence collected from a corpus study I hypothesize that the presuppositional content of Spanish neuter demonstratives can be conceived in temporal instead of purely spatial terms. Previous research on the discourse-dialogic behavior of Spanish demonstrative determiners **este/ ese /aquel** has shown that these expressions are to be better characterized in terms of a "+/ – spatial proximity" presupposition (Gutiérrez-Rexach, 2002; Gutiérrez-Rexach & Zulaica, 2005). This presuppositional content should be understood as the relative closeness (or distance) of the speaker/addressee with respect to the object pointed at. But when it comes to analyzing the presuppositional content of neuter demonstrative expressions **esto /eso/ aquello** the picture is not that clear. In their typical discourse function there is no explicit act of pointing attached to these expressions and, furthermore, they do not commonly refer to any explicit physical object in the utterance situation. For this reason I believe that the clear correlation observed between neuter demonstratives and tense in well-defined discourse situations in Spanish suggests some kind of perspectival transfer in the semantic content of the neuter expressions subject to scrutiny.

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