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CATALAN AND SPANISH NEUTER PRONOUNS IN IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS: DIACHRONIC AND DIALECTAL VARIATION[1]

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that neuter pronouns in Catalan and Spanish are used in a variety of ways: a number of uses may imply the loss of some of their morphosyntactic features or even their class membership as pronouns. It is argued that neuter 'personal' pronouns in impersonal constructions that have previously been described as expletives fulfil a quite different role, i.e. they function as discourse markers. The uses of neuter pronouns in Catalan and Spanish are discussed; Catalan in particular is examined in a corpus study. The question whether these neuter pronouns are 'true' expletives or should be more adequately analysed as discourse markers and the theoretical implications of such an analysis are addressed at the end of this article.

Keywords

pronoun, impersonal construction, expletive, Catalan, Spanish.

1. Introduction: uses of neuter pronouns in Catalan and Spanish

Latin demonstrative pronouns are the source of Romance third person subject pronouns: already this linguistic change implies a grammatical and pragmatic shift involving loss of deictic force. A quite similar development has ocurred with respect to the function of Catalan and Spanish neuter demonstrative pronouns (see Table 1) which may be reduced to mere sentence connectors like in Catalan *per ço, per això, malgrat això* and in Spanish *por eso* or, if they are used together with the copula, actually seem

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to have the status of an expletive. In both instances they completely lose their deictic force.

	proximal	medial	distal	'personal' pronouns
CAT	açò	això	allò	ell
SPA	esto	eso	aquello	ello

Table 1. Neuter demonstrative and 'personal' pronoun system in Catalan and Spanish

1.1. Impersonal constructions with neuter pronouns

Neuter or expletive pronouns are used in impersonal constructions with e.g. weather verbs or impersonal expressions in non-null subject languages like French, German, and English (1a, c): they are obligatorily used in these constructions and they are without any reference, i.e. they are semantically empty.

(1a) FRE **Il** pleut.
ENG **It** rains.
(1b) FRE (coll.) **Ça** pleut.
(1c) FRE **Il** semble qu'**il** y a deux manières de classifier.
ENG **It** seems that **there** are two ways to classify.

The interchangeability of French *il / ça* (1a, b) — an expletive subject pronoun and a neuter demonstrative — demonstrates their tight relation in subject position. In Catalan and Spanish — and in null subject languages in general —, the use of a subject pronoun in these constructions is considered ungrammatical (for Catalan cf. Todolí, 1998: 27, Wheeler *et al.*, 1999: 459-461), see (2):

(2a) CAT *__Ell__ plou.
SPA ***Ello** llueve.
(2b) CAT *__Això__ plou.
SPA ***Eso** llueve.
(2c) CAT *__Ell__ sembla que hi ha dues maneres de classificar.

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SPA *__Ello__ parece que hay dos maneras de clasificar.

Haider (2001: 285) claims that with respect to the assumed clustering of properties of the *pro*-drop parameter "only the correlation of *pro-drop* and the absence of subject expletives holds without exception [translation MOH]". However, subject pronouns do occur in precisely these impersonal constructions in non-standard varieties of null subject languages like Balearic Catalan and Dominican Spanish (3):

(3a) BAL-CAT Si 'm demànas ¿Qui n' hora es? / et respòng;
éll es estàda: / S' hòra que señy jà 's passàda, /
de mòdo que jà no 's res. (Amengual, 1858: 609)

(3b) DOM-SPA **Ello** estaba lloviznando un poco. (Jiménez Sabater, 1975:165)

1.2. Copular constructions and sentence connectors with neuter demonstratives

Neuter demonstratives may be used as impersonal subjects in certain impersonal constructions (usually involving the copula) in Catalan and Spanish. This is in contradiction to the canonical definition of demonstratives which prominently features a deictic component:

> Les *démonstratifs* sont des déictiques, adjectifs ou pronoms, servant à «montrer», comme avec un geste d'indication, les êtres ou les objets impliqués dans le discours. (Dubois *et al.*, 1994: 134)

In the following examples in (4), it is hard to actually define the deictic component:

(4a) BAL-CAT **Això** és el mateix dianye en persona! (*eiv*, 20)

(4b) ANDAL-SPA **Aqueyo** está cada vez peor. (Spitzer, 1917: 714)

The neuter demonstratives used in (4) only show an 'abstract' discourse or textual deixis, i.e. a quite unspecific reference to something mentioned before in the discourse or to the situation in general. The deictic force of demonstratives, thus, depends to a

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large extent on the syntactic environment — or the neuter form of the demonstrative tends to be less canonical, i.e. less deictic and lends itself to other uses.

In the special case of sentence connectors (see above), neuter pronouns lose their deictic force entirely in the grammaticalisation process and are reduced to sentence connectors like the former PPs Catalan *per ço, per això* and Spanish *por esto, por eso* (and also *por ello*), as well as Catalan *malgrat això* (and Spanish *pese a ello* 'nevertheless').[2]

2. A corpus study of neuter pronouns in Old Catalan and contemporary Balearic Catalan

2.1. Introduction

In this investigation (cf. Hinzelin 2006), the usage of the 'neuter' pronoun *ell* and the neuter demonstratives is studied. First, the synchronic usage in Balearic Catalan is described and then, through an analysis of Old Catalan corpora, the existence and usage of these pronouns are clarified. In the next subsection, the occurrences of *ell* in two dictionaries around 1500 are discussed. The main part of this section consists in an analysis of five *rondaies* (folktales) corpora and a corpus with an account of the Christmas feasts, all from contemporary Balearic Catalan.

Synchronic occurrences of 'neuter' *ell* are best known and most frequently documented in Balearic Catalan: there are early modern documentations (Amengual, 1835, 1858), and *ell* is frequently used in *rondaies* (folktales) and folk songs. It is therefore quite likely that its use is a feature of spoken language in rural areas. This use is documented in the *Diccionari Català-Valencià-Balear (DCVB)* as the examples in (5a-c) show:

(5a) **Ell** tanmateix és gros, **això**! (Men.) (*DCVB* IV: 701)

(5b) **Ell això** no acaba mai! (Mall., Men., Eiv.) (*DCVB* IV: 701)

(5c) A Pollença vaig anar / a dur una pollencina, / i la volia fadrina; / varen dir:

[2] This evolution may be compared with Catalan *però* and Spanish *pero* < PER HOC – here, the Latin neuter demonstrative HOC has become now a part of a sentence connector with adversative meaning 'but'.

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Ell no n'hi ha! (cançó pop. Mall.) (*DCVB* IV: 701)

2.2. Previous proposals for the analysis of the use of 'neuter' ell in impersonal constructions

In previous studies an analysis as an expletive pronoun has been proposed by Amengual (1835), Barnils (1916), and Spitzer (1917, 1918, 1920, 1941). Recently also Silva-Villar (1998) has defended such a view, using examples from these and other sources from the literature and in comparison to the other Ibero-Romance languages.
There has been an early debate between Tallgren (1914: 77-78, 1918: 87-88, 1920) and Spitzer (1917: 715-716, 1918: 69-70, 1920, 1941) about the status of *ell*, which Tallgren has analysed as an adverb.

2.3. Etymology and use of Catalan neuter demonstratives

The medial neuter demonstrative *això* (< IPSÚM, *DECat*: 236 (entry *eix*) is also used as subject in sentence-initial position without referential meaning according to the *DCVB* (I: 374-375):

> –h) *Això és…:* serveix per introduir una ampliació o formulació més explícita del que s'ha dit abans; cast. *esto es, es decir*. Baixàrem a St. Joan de l'Erm pel dret, això ès [sic!], pel camí, Verdaguer Exc. 17. […]
> –v) *Això era…:* fórmula per iniciar la narració d'una rondalla (Mall.). També diuen «això era i no era…» o «això era una vegada…».

This last mentioned usage in Majorcan corresponds to the use of the expletive in folktales in non-null subject languages, cf. French ***il*** *était une fois*… vs. Spanish *érase una vez*…

Allò (< ILLÚD, *DECat*: 267 (entry *ell, ella*), *DCVB* I: 586) shows less variation in usage (it is mainly used for *aquella cosa* 'that thing' or to designate persons or animals). In subject position it is only rarely encountered. *Açò* (< ECCE HOC, *DECat*: 719 (entry *est*), *DCVB* I: 122) can be used – much like *allò* (*DCVB* I: 122) – for *aquesta cosa* 'this thing' or to designate persons or animals. No use as a non-referential subject is reported.

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In Old Catalan, *ço* is a (functional) equivalent of *això.* Nowadays, it is mostly found in the combinations *per ço, ço de, en ço de,* and *ço que* (*DCVB* III: 229-230, *DECat*: 720-721).

2.4. Analysis of three Old Catalan corpora

Three Old Catalan corpora are analysed in this study: *hom*: *Homilies d'Organyà*, around 1203; *usatges*: *Usatges de Barcelona*, the Catalan manuscript dates from the 2nd half of the 13th century; and *doc-hist*: *Documents d'història de la llengua catalana*, only the texts 1-6, 8-9, 11-14, 16-22 have been considered, they date from 1031 / 1035 until the 2nd half of the 13th century.

corpus	*ell / el*	*això / axò*	*allò*	*açò / a(i)zo*	*ço / zo*
hom	*	*	*	33	47
usatges	*	*	*	41	51
doc-hist	*	1	*	23	30
total	*	1	*	97	128

Table 2. Neuter pronouns in the Old Catalan corpora[3]

The results are shown in Tables 2 and 3: not a single occurrence of neuter *el(l)* and no instance of the neuter demonstratives *allò* and *a(i)xò* have been found (with the exception of one isolated occurrence of *axò* in *doc-hist*). Only the neuter demonstratives *açò* (variants *assò, ayçò, aico, azo, aizo / ezo*), and *ço* (variants *so, co, zo / zó*) are used and only *ço* is used quite frequently in subject position (see Table 3).

corpus	*això / axò*				*açò / a(i)zo*				*ço / zo*			
	S	O	P	o	**S**	O	P	o	**S**	O	P	o
hom	*****	*	*	*	**7**	7	17	2	**15**	9	20	3
usatges	*****	*	*	*	**3**	11	25	2	**24**	*	4	23
doc-hist	**1**	*	*	*	**10**	9	4	*	**2**	*	21	7
total	**1**	*	*	*	**20**	27	46	4	**41**	9	45	33

Table 3. Neuter demonstratives – functions in the Old Catalan corpora[4]

[3] * = Form does not occur in the text.

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The following examples feature the neuter demonstratives in the (apparent) subject position:

(6) E jatsesia que **axò**·s pusca entendre […] (*doc-hist*, 47; 2nd half of the 13th c.)

(7a) **Aizo** dona anos exe*m*ple qenos deue*m* […] (*hom*, 6v, 1)

(7b) **Aizo** porta significa*n*za de tot peccador qi esta […] (*hom*, 8v, 15)

(7c) […] Sen*n*iors **aizo** uol dir emostra*r* (*hom*, 1v, 4)

(7d) **aizo** es laparaula de deu. (*hom*, 6r, 9)

(8a) […] si tot **açò** fal, […] (*usatges*, 149)

(8b) **[A]çò** són lo(s) Usatges dels usame*n*s de la cort; […] (*usatges*, 53)

(9a) […] ja fos **ezo** que li prohome lo i dizien ben; […] (*doc-hist*, 26; end of 12th / beginning of 13th c.)

(9b) —Ja, **azo** é En Bla*n*c, e·n Talafer, e·n Guiamet es q*ui* vene*n* veer mo pare. (*doc-hist*, 34; 1250)

(9c) **Ayçò** ben se pot provar, Pere. (*doc-hist*, 44; 2nd half of the 13th c.)

(9d) […] e **ayçò** s'esdevén a alscuns a lur profit, […] (*doc-hist*, 44; 2nd half of the 13th c.)

(9e) Per què apar que **ayçò** viu per nós, […] (*doc-hist*, 45; 2nd half of the 13th c.)

(9f) **Assò** és carta feta entre […] (*doc-hist*, 56; 1276)

(9g) Feit fo **assò** en Exàtiva […] (*doc-hist*, 56; 1276)

(10a) **Zo** es qe noa cor emal afer. (*hom*, 2r, 20-21)

(10b) **zo** qoue asab*er* q*e* es la a*nim*a qi deu p*re*gar […] (*hom*, 8r, 14-15)

(11) […] e ab conseyl en totes coses, **ço** és assab*e*r, pleyts ta*n* gra*n*s co*m* pocs; […] (*usatges*, 97)

(12) […] **so** és p*er* les ligs, […] (*doc-hist*, 53; 1272)

In summary, neuter pronouns are almost always used referentially (with reference to the discourse or the situation) and there is no clear non-referential usage. But some examples occur with quite unspecific reference with no clear deictic function or where the use of the demonstrative seems to be unnecessary. This applies especially to *açò / ço* in copular constructions (7d, 8b, 9a, b, f, g, 10a, 11, 12). My assumption is therefore that the process of grammaticalisation and desemanticisation (bleaching) starts already

[4] **S** = (apparent) subject, O = direct object, P = after preposition, o = other usage; * = function does not occur in the text.

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in Old Catalan: the usage of the demonstratives in certain constructions with the copula *(és)ser* in Balearic (see below) has its roots in this early development.

2.5. Occurrences of ell in two dictionaries around 1500

It seems that around 1500, neuter *ell* was more widely used in Catalan as this usage is documented in two dictionaries from this period (cf. Hinzelin 2006). Many examples can be found, mostly with the copula *(és)ser* and the reflexive passive. Barnils (1916) and Spitzer (1920) first mention these examples from the two dictionaries. In the following, I give some examples (13a-j) from the *Liber elegantiarum* by Joan Esteve (1489: 149-150), in the majority of cases *ell* could be translated by 'it':

(13a) **Ell** es de usança,
(13b) **Ell** se vol ab tot studi ente*n*dre ales letres per que en vides la edat del home basta a aço.
(13c) **Ell** es cosa p*er*tine*n*t al a*nim*o ge*n*til demostrarse gracios.
(13d) **Ell** es necessari q*ue* una de aq*ue*stes coses s[']esdevinga.
(13e) **Ell** li pla en aquesta manera.
(13f) **Ell** es una bruta cosa.
(13g) **Ell** es mester fe[,] amor y diligencia.
(13h) **Ell** se p*er*tany molt ala nostra amiçicia de fer seruici lo hu al altre.
(13i) **Ell** es util algu*n*a a refrenar la iniquitat dels homens.
(13j) **Ell** ha fet iniuria a tuli.

Barnils (1916: XVIII) gives the following Catalan examples (14a-f; with a German translation of the time) in the introduction of his edition of the Catalan-German dictionary *Vocabolari molt profitos per apendre Lo Catalan Alamany y Lo Alamany Catalan*, originally published in 1502:

(14a) **El** crema – Es brint (1810)
(14b) **El** es plen – Es ist fol (2076)
(14c) **El** ha gran te*m*ps [= hi ha molt temps] – Sein ist lang zyt (2343)
(14d) **El** es ver – Es ist war (2364)

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(14e) **El** bull – Es walt (2550)

(14f) **El** significa – es bedu^{o}t (2700)

Flasche (1955: 280-281) devotes two pages to neuter *el(l)* in his study of the dictionary of 1502. He points out that indeed impersonal subjects may be encountered in nearly all Romance languages but he underlines the fact that he could not find any instance of neuter *ell* in Catalan authors of this period. He then discusses the importance of an Italian-German dictionary which served as a basis for the Catalan-German one as Klaiber (1936) has shown (cf. in addition Stegmann, 1991: 12-15). Flasche (1955: 281) attributes the existence of *ell*-examples in both dictionaries to Italian influence:

> Ocasión inmediata para escoger la expresión «el crema» (por ejemplo), fué para el autor del vocabulario catalán el italiano-alemán. Éste deja ver aproximadamente tres veces más que el vocabulario catalán-alemán frases con sujeto impersonal. En comparación con el modelo la obra de Rosenbach [printer of the Catalan-German dictionary – MOH] omite la palabra «el» en cierto número de frases, en otras escoge construcción diferente, como por ejemplo, *Jo me enutg*, en vez de *el me rechresse*. Tan solamente en los siete casos citados se impuso el modo de expresión italiano. Ya que, como hemos mencionado, «el» neutral en función de sujeto no desempeña ningún papel en los autores del siglo XIV y XV y que el Diccionario de J. Esteve se imprimió en el año 1489 en Venecia, no nos equivocamos si consideramos el uso italiano como fuente del catalán.

Flasche's (1955) reasoning shows convincingly that one has to assume a strong (dialectal) Italian influence during the preparation of the dictionary, especially as far as the *ell*-examples are concerned. (Northern Italian dialects ― among these the Venetian one ― still use expletive subject pronouns today.)

2.6. Analysis of six modern Balearic corpora

Strikingly frequent occurrences of *ell* can be found in *rondaies* (folktales) (see above). I present here the analysis of five *rondaies* corpora from all Balearic Islands (*salom; mall*, *men*, *eiv*, *form*) and of an account of the Christmas feasts (*nadal*).

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corpus	*ell*	*això*	*allò*	*açò / ço*
salom	4 (1)	7 (4)	*	* / *
mall	56 (2)	81 (8)	36 (3)	3 (0) / *
nadal	29 (6)	14 (0)	9 (0)	7 (1) / *
men	31 (7)	1 (0)	7 (0)	52 (11) / 1 (0)
eiv	14 (2)	103 (10)	14 (0)	* / *
form	8 (3)	44 (4)	12 (1)	* / *
total	142 (21)	250 (26)	78 (4)	63 (12)

Table 4. Neuter pronouns in the Balearic corpora[5]

The results (see Tables 4 and 5) may be summarised as follows: neuter *ell* appears only rarely in the (apparent) subject position of impersonal constructions (in only 21 of 142 cases). *Això* (in Minorca *açò*) is very frequent as the subject of impersonal constructions: its expletive-like usage in copular constructions is predominant, especially in the opening formula of the *rondaies*. *Allò* and *açò / ço* rarely appear in the subject position of impersonal constructions.[6]

corpus	**eS**	nS	oS	na	na / opr
salom	**1**	*	*	3	*
mall	**2**	15	21	17	1
nadal	**6**	*	7	14	2
men	**7**	*	5	16	3
eiv	**2**	*	5	6	*
form	**3**	*	*	4	1
total	**21**	15	38	60	7

Table 5. Non-referential *ell* — functions in the Balearic corpora[7]

[5] * = Form does not occur in the text. In brackets: number of pronouns (of the total) in (apparent) subject position of *impersonal constructions*.
[6] Though *açò* replaces *això* in Minorca and is therefore very frequent in this variety.
[7] **eS** = (apparent) expletive subject, nS = *ell* cannot be the subject of the sentence considering its meaning, even though the verb is in the 3SG and no other subject is realised, oS = other, non-pronominal subject realised, na (/ opr) = no agreement with the verb (or no (finite) verb present), opr = and another pronoun is realised. * = Construction does not occur in the text.

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In the following (15-20), I give some of the (very rare) examples of *ell* used as an (apparent) subject in impersonal constructions:

(15) —¡Jo ’t posaré a sa presó! li diu es Bal·le.
—¡**Ell** no hu provará! s’ exclama En Salom. An es qui creu es Bal·le, no’l posen dins sa presó. (*salom*, 154)

(16) ¿Què me’n direu? **Ell** era sa mateixa murtera a on s’eren enredonides ses seues germanes; […] (*mall*, 133)

(17a) —**Ell** no hi haurà perill que patesca gaire fam! (*nadal*, 102)

(17b) —**Ell** va de lo bo a millor! (*nadal*, 153)

(18a) –No, **ell** és ben cert –deia En Pere–; i si no, mirau. (*men*, 20)

(18b) **Ell** no hi ha qui la confongui. (*men*, 67)

(19a) —**Ell** és veritat! (*eiv*, 74)

(19b) **Ell** no me’n puc avenir! (*eiv*, 132)

(20a) **Ell** era veritat, que a sa finestra n’hi havia un, que enguaitava! (*form*, 20)

(20b) **Ell** va ser ver. (*form*, 50)

In these rare cases (21 of a total of 142 tokens), in which *ell* seems to be used as an (apparent) subject, it is almost always sentence-initial and *never* obligatory in impersonal constructions. But in the majority of cases (examples 21-22), *ell* is found in a different syntactic environment:

(21a) I comensa a fer-se en fora i en fora, i es pareier darrera ell; i **ell** revolts d’ aquí i d’ allá; i assetsuaixí sonava a rompre, […] (*salom*, 151)

(21b) —[…] No he fet més que lo que vostè m’ ha dit.
—¡**Ell** no poren fer una berba amb tu, segons veig! diu es Bal·le. (*salom*, 153)

(22a) **Ell** aquella dona no maltractà pus Na Catalineta; […] (*mall*, 26)

(22b) —**Ell** ja torn esser jo, es descuidat! (*mall*, 43)

(22c) —**Ell** ja ho hauríem d’esser! — contesta Na Catalina. (*mall*, 145)

Here, *ell* co-occurs either with a non-pronominal subject or there is no agreement with the verb. *Ell* is almost always **—** like in the impersonal constructions **—** sentence-initial. It occurs primarily in dialogues. The adverbial character of *ell* is manifest and its role is to mark emphasis or speaker’s attitude.

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corpus	*això*				*allò*				*açò / ço*			
	S	O	P	o	**S**	O	P	o	**S**	O	P	o
salom	**5**	1	*	1	*****	*	*	*	*****	*	*	*
mall	**34**	14	24	9	**9**	17	8	2	**1**	1	*	1
nadal	**2**	1	7	4	**2**	1	6	*	**3**	1	*	3
men	*****	*	1	*	*****	3	3	1	**25**	7	15	6
eiv	**47**	14	25	17	**10**	*	*	4	*****	*	*	*
form	**16**	4	13	11	**6**	1	3	2	*****	*	*	*
total	**104**	34	70	42	**27**	22	20	9	**29**	9	15	10

Table 6. Neuter demonstratives – functions in the Balearic corpora[8]

The demonstrative *això* (*açò* in Minorca) appears many times in copular constructions as non-referential subject (see Table 6), especially in the typical folktale beginning (23-26):

(23) **Això** era un homo que li deien En Salom, […] (*salom*, 150)

(24) **Això** eren tres germanes fadrines, que estaven totes soletes: […] (*mall*, 5)

(25) **Açò** vol dir que era una viuda que tenia un fii que era de nom Pere. (*men*, 13)

(26) **Això** vol dir que era un ca pagès que mai havia baixat a Vila. (*eiv*, 7)

Nevertheless there are also some examples (27-28) of *això* used referentially but mostly with unspecific reference to the whole situation:

(27a) —Salom, no siguem al·lots, diu es Bal·le: qu**e això** acabarà malament. (*salom*, 157)

(27b) —No res, idò. A ca-meua t'esper, i ¡com som Bal·le! que, si vens, no te 'n tornaràs viu!

—**Això** se veurà, diu En Salom. (*salom*, 157)

(28a) —**Això** no és un home –digué, tot regirat, as altres dos criats–.

Això és el mateix dianye en persona! (*eiv*, 20)

[8] **S** = (apparent) Subject, O = direct object, P = after preposition, o = other usage, * = Form does not occur in the text.

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(28b) —**Això** és parlar com es àngels! –exclamà el rei, totcontent–. Endavant. (*eiv*, 46)

To summarise the results for the demonstratives: on the one hand, *allò* in subject position is only rarely used (and if it is used, then referentially) and *açò* is — apart from Minorca — used scarcely or not at all. On the other hand, *això* occurs in copular constructions as non-referential subject and referentially with unspecific reference.

3. *Ello* in Dominican Spanish: an analysis of its usage

3.1. Introduction

The eminent Dominican linguist Pedro Henríquez Ureña (1939, 1940) is the first to study the pronoun *ello* in Spanish in general and its peculiar use in Dominican Spanish in particular. He considers it to be a "linguistic fossil" which survives as an archaism in Dominican Spanish. González Tapia (2001: 146-147) states that is still frequently used:

> Se trata del empleo del pronombre arcaico, considerado por don Pedro [Henríquez Ureña – MOH] como "fósil lingüístico", pero que está vivito y coleando, con una amplia extensión diatópica [...].

Henríquez Ureña (1940: 226-228) also reports *ello* to be used in Dominican Spanish in constructions unfamiliar to Iberian Spanish. It is used in particular:

- as an impersonal subject:

(29a) **Ello** es fácil llegar...

(29b) ¿**Ello** hay dulce de ajonjolí?

(29c) **Ello** hay maíz.

- in order to express emphasis:

(30) **–Ello** veremos.

- concessively or evasively:

(31a) **–Ello**, quizás no viene.

(31b) –¿Es usted verde, azul o rojo? [nombres de partidos políticos].

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–Ello, yo le diré; yo soy… santiaguero.

(31c) **–Ello**… Así decían.

- to express hesitation, probability or approval ("para indicar vacilación o probabilidad o aceptación"):

(32a) –¿Vas al pueblo? **–Ello**… [= eso dependerá].

(32b) –¿Quiere bailar? **–Ello**… [= sí, ya que me invita].

(32c) –¿Y usté cree que está muerto de verdá verdá? **–Ello**…

(32d) **–**De modo que habrá otra barrida como la del año pasado. **–Ello**. Así parece.

- to assure something emphatically ("aseveraciones enfáticas"):

(33a) **ello** sí

(33b) **ello** no

3.1. Is ello really a 'true' expletive or only an apparent one and more likely a discourse marker?

The question is once again (see the above discussion of the role of *ell*) whether *ello* is best analysed as an expletive pronoun or something else. There are examples (29) where it could be interpreted as an expletive. Nevertheless, there are a number of arguments against this analysis: again, it only occurs in first sentence position. Some examples show no agreement, e.g. when it is used for emphasis or with evasive meaning (30, 31b). Furthermore, *ello* can be found without a verb before 'yes / no' to strengthen an affirmation / negation (33a, b) or before e.g. a present participle when used for emphasis (34):

(34) **Ello** no obstante… (Henríquez Ureña, 1939: 212)

It is also encountered on its own or detached from the sentence with concessive meaning (31a-c, 35a, b) and on its own expressing uncertainty or hesitation (32a-d):

(35a) – **Ello**, po aquí no se ha sentío na (Henríquez Ureña, 1939: 225)

(35b) – **Ello**… si la prima quiere…

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3.2. Investigation of variation in ello usage in impersonal constructions by means of a survey in the Dominican Republic

This usage has been studied by means of a questionnaire with grammaticality judgements on sentences with or without *ello*. The main results are the following (for a detailed account, cf. Hinzelin & Kaiser, 2006, 2007):

- Its highest acceptability is reached in sentences like *ello hay que..., ello lo dijeron, ello parece..., ello llegan..., ello hay* + noun but not with weather verbs – the prototypical expletive construction –, nor in copular constructions.
- *Ello* is never obligatory, a sentence without *ello* is preferred by a majority of informants.
- There is a clear preference for *ello* in first sentence position.

4. The status of Catalan and Spanish neuter pronouns

4.1. Proposal for an analysis of ell and ello as discourse markers

Many examples of *ell* and *ello* with unspecific reference are not found in impersonal constructions but in sentences where an analysis as subjects is not possible (and therefore neither as expletives), as the following sentences taken from the *DCVB* (IV: 701) and Henríquez Ureña (1939, 1940) exemplify:

(36a) BAL-CAT **Ell** tu saps que crides! (Eiv.) (*DCVB* IV: 701)

(36b) BAL-CAT **Ell** sabeu quina al·lota que és! (Alcover Cont. 2) (*DCVB* IV: 701)

(37) DOM-SPA **Ello** veremos (Henríquez Ureña 1939: 224)

(38) DOM-SPA –¿Es usted verde, azul o rojo? [nombres de partidos políticos].
–Ello, yo le diré; yo soy… santiaguero. (Henríquez Ureña 1940: 227)

Here, *ello* or *ell* cannot function as subjects because they do not occupy the subject position, which is filled by another overt subject pronoun, or there is no agreement.

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My proposal is thus to analyse of *ell* and *ello* as discourse markers or 'topic expletives' (cf. Faarlund, 1990; Silva-Villar, 1996, 1998).

Trask (1993: 84) describes a "discourse item" as having the following properties:

> Any lexical item or grammatical form which typically serves to relate one utterance to another in a discourse, or to relate the utterance in a particular way to the discourse as a whole.

The functioning of *ell* and *ello* in (36-38) is adequately subsumed by this definition.[9] This analysis can be further extended to all other examples including those where these items seem to occupy the subject position in impersonal constructions.

The following facts suggest an analysis of *ello / ell* as a discourse marker: the missing agreement of 'pronoun' and verb found in some sentences means that *ell / ello* cannot be subjects here. The existing agreement in other sentences is only the default agreement (3rd person singular). I argue that this 'agreement' is only superficial as these sentences would exhibit the same verb form without *ell / ello*. They behave much like a 'Vorfeldexpletivum' in German that can be realised in the 'Vorfeld' (specifier of the CP) only – but not in the subject position (SpecIP) and that does not bear any personal features: (39b) and (39c) are not attested and supposed to be ungrammatical:

(39a) BAL-CAT **Ell** era veritat, […] (*form*, 20)
(39b) BAL-CAT *?Veritat era **ell**.
(39c) BAL-CAT *?Era **ell** veritat?

Ell / ello is almost always encountered in sentence-initial position:[10] this peculiar distribution is at odds with the distribution of normal 'true' expletives in French and English. 'True' expletives also appear in other positions and in embedded sentences: (40b) and (40c) are not attested and supposed to be ungrammatical:

(40a) BAL-CAT **Ell** no n'hi ha! (*DCVB* IV: 701)
(40b) BAL-CAT *?No n'hi ha **ell**!

[9] Interestingly, the Sardinian (question) particle *ello / ellu / ellus* as referenced in Puddu (2000) and Blasco Ferrer (1994: 219-220) has very likely its origin in Catalan *ell* (cf. Remberger & Hinzelin 2009).
[10] Only in very rare cases *ell* is not sentence-initial but occurs after other sentence-initial adverbs / discourse markers or extraposed at the end of the sentence (one example in *nadal*).

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(40c) BAL-CAT *?No n'hi ha **ell**?

Ell / ello may occur in front of the subject (36-38), in this case they are not adjacent to the verb and do not agree with it neither. There is no correlation in the frequency of use of *ell / ello* with that of other subject pronouns. Assuming that the prototypical expletive construction is with weather verbs, Catalan *ell* does not occur in this environment the analysed corpora.[11] In non-null subject languages with 'true' expletives, their use is obligatory in impersonal constructions but *ell / ello* are never obligatory as the examples (41-42) show:

(41a) BAL-CAT […] que ___ era un gust; […] (*men*, 15)

(41b) BAL-CAT Però ___ no hi va haver remei; […] (*men*, 20)

(42) DOM-SPA –¿ ___ Es difícil llegar? –**Ello** es fácil llegar.
(Henríquez Ureña, 1939: 223)

Considering all this evidence, I favour an analysis as discourse markers in *all* instances: their use conveys the speaker's attitude to the described events like emphasis, surprise, consternation, doubt, etc. These are characteristics of a discourse marker. Therefore, *ell* and *ello* are elements without pronominal features. Neither the grammar nor the syntax dictates their use but it depends solely on the information structure. This applies also to cases where an analysis as an expletive would be possible superficially. These elements are only *apparent* expletives – *ell* and *ello* are more consistently analysed as discourse markers in all cases (cf. Hinzelin & Kaiser, 2006, 2007; Hinzelin, 2006).

This analysis is sustained by a number of comments that can be found in the literature on these elements. Veny (1999: 89-90) describes their expressive force in exclamations, he states: "És interessant l'ús d'*ell* introductori d'oracions exclamatives per a augmentar-ne la força expressiva [...]". And already Alcover & Moll (1951: 701) annotate in the *DCVB*: "partícula que s'usa al començament d'una frase exclamativa, per renforçar-ne l'expressió […]". Todolí (2002: 1370-1371) characterises *ell* as a non-argument:

[11] The only example (from the DCVB IV: 701) featuring *ell* in such an environment is at least extremely marginal (cf Hinzelin, 2006: 55-56).

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> Finalment, en el dialecte balear la forma *ell* del pronom de tercera persona pot aparèixer en contextos com els exemplificats en (32), on no representa cap argument del verb, sinó que funciona com una partícula exclamativa […]
> A diferència dels pronoms de tercera persona acabats de descriure, el pronom que apareix en les oracions [...] és invariable i no realitza cap funció argumental. De fet, ocupa sempre una posició externa a l'oració i apareix fins i tot amb verbs meteorològics [...], que es caracteritzen perquè són zeroargumentals i, per tant, no poden dur arguments.

As far as Spanish *ello* is concerned, Henríquez Ureña (1939: 223) regards it as a fossil and a pure element of emphasis ("*Ello* fósil como mero elemento de énfasis"):

> *Ello* subsiste como *elemento mecanizado* en determinados esquemas de construcción, pero ya no es sujeto, *ni siquiera sujeto impersonal*: de su función pronominal sólo le queda el lugar en la oración, pero su papel se reduce ahora a dar énfasis. Subsiste como fósil lingüístico. [Italics by me – MOH]

Henríquez Ureña (1939: 228) later revisits his interpretation and even concludes that the pronominal function may have vanished and *ello* is used like an adverb with a special emphatic value:

> Pero en estos casos es probable que *ello* tenga valor enfático, sobrepuesto a su función pronominal, y que agregue el matiz que darían fórmulas adverbiales como *realmente, en verdad*. O bien sólo existe este matiz, y la función pronominal se ha desvanecido: *ello* se mantiene como fósil lingüístico.

4.2. Near-expletive usage of neuter demonstratives in copular and existential constructions

Balearic Catalan *això* (*açò* in Minorca) exhibits a clear non-referential usage in copular constructions. The development of a near-expletive usage (only) in these constructions is therefore probable. In the *rondaies* beginnings its use is stylistically obligatory. It occurs also in non-sentence-initial position: *Vol dir que açò era…* Spanish *eso* and *aquello* without a deictic function are less frequently attested in these

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constructions, e.g. Andalusian Spanish *Aqueyo está cada vez peor* (Spitzer, 1917: 714). The question remains whether the demonstratives are used as near-expletives or also as discourse markers. A further investigation is needed to answer this question.

5. Conclusions

In this study, I have shown that there is a frequent use of neuter demonstratives like *açò / a(i)zò* and *ço / zo* in the Old Catalan corpora. In copular constructions, these have sometimes an unspecific reference. The analysed Old Catalan texts do not contain any example of *ell* used with unspecific reference. The use of *ell* in Catalan dictionaries around 1500 has been dismissed as (dialectal) Italian influence. *Ell* is frequently encountered in Balearic Catalan, especially in folktales. In impersonal constructions, it has been previously analysed (like Dominican Spanish *ello*) as an expletive subject pronoun. On the basis of their distribution and use, I have argued against such a view. In contemporary Balearic Catalan and Dominican Spanish, *ell* and *ello* occurring in the initial position of certain constructions encode sentence pragmatics and not subjecthood. This is a very different function compared to 'true' expletives like English *it* and French (neuter) *il*. The analysis of *ell* and *ello* as discourse markers is suggested by those sentences in which an overt subject is already used or when there is no agreement between verb and apparent expletive. This analysis can be extended even to superficially ambiguous sentences where both interpretations of the 'pronoun' – as an expletive and as a discourse marker – would be valid logical possibilities.

Balearic Catalan *ell* in *ell no n'hi ha!* shares with French *ça* in *ça pleut* the discourse function of encoding sentence pragmatics. But *ell* has discourse meaning only and is not involved in feature checking as this is still the job of pro_{expl} as it is in all null subject languages: [$_{CP}$ ell [$_{IP}$ pro_{expl} no n'hi ha]]. *Ça* on the contrary fulfils a double role by also checking the [EPP]-feature in the sentence: [$_{CP}$ ça$_i$ [$_{IP}$ t_i pleut]]. Interestingly, certain uses of the demonstrative *això* (or *açò*) in Balearic Catalan exhibit characteristics of an expletive. In the beginning of Balearic *rondaies* a copular construction like ***això*** *era…* (or ***açò*** *vol dir que era…* in Minorca) is used – this constitutes a clear analogy to the traditional French folktale beginning ***il*** *était une fois...*

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