

Complex Demonstratives and pejoration in Rioplatense Spanish

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Spanish has proximal and distal demonstratives that can be used in prenominal and postnominal positions (Gutiérrez-Rexach, 2002). Gutiérrez-Rexach (2002, 218) proposes that it is possible to analyze proximal demonstratives as (1) and (2), where it could be argued that when a Spanish speaker uses (1) she is proximal to the object being referred, while when she uses (2) the addressee is more proximal to it.

(1) *este* [+proximal] [+speaker]

(2) *ese* [+proximal][+addressee]

In this paper, we will analyze prenominal proximal demonstratives with pejorative readings in Rioplatense Spanish (RpS). To do this, we analyze Twitter (x) utterances that were gathered to construct a small corpus on pejoration in RpS (in the framework of project xxxx) which includes different instances related to political contexts in 2024, and public figures (in Uruguay). The corpus analysis showed that the said readings appeared with common nouns which may involve negative evaluations, (3) and (4), proper names, (5) and (6) and honorifics, (7):

(3) *Este facho sorete está alineando una camada nueva de golpistas.*

‘This[+s] fascist bad-person is aligning a new layer of dictators’

<https://x.com/CarlosP1978CP/status/1745078394562261039>

(4) *Le dan pantalla a esa desquiciada.*

‘You are giving screen time to this[+a] lunatic’

<https://x.com/MAkiurek/status/1766110387965960434>

(5) *Que milico hijo de puta este Manini*

‘What an fucking militar this[+s] Manini’

<https://x.com/kaipyrozka/status/1744855234654998664>

(6) *Esa Romina pertenece o a una cárcel o a un manicomio.*

‘This[+a] Romina belongs to a jail or a sanitarium’

https://x.com/altas_cuotas/status/1786774185567474025

(7) *Este señor Manini no permite que se le contesté*

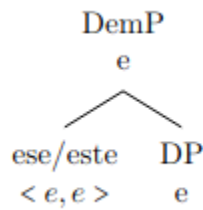
‘This[+s] sir Manning does not allow answers’.

<https://x.com/elisabarrandegu/status/1745084324637016410>

The fact that demonstratives may combine with evaluative nouns, proper names, and honorifics is not new (see Acton and Potts, 2014). Since demonstratives can be used as a resource for constructing some sort of common ground, and they involve an affective reading (Lakoff, 1974, Acton and Potts, 2014, among many others), these pejorative constructions are to be expected in RpS. They have not, however, been described for RpS, specifically for Uruguayan Spanish.

We assume, following Lewis (2014), that demonstratives involve an external-DP DemP, and are different from adjectives and determiners. In addition to the cross linguistic evidence that may be provided to defend this, if the DemP is DP-external, we can explain all of the previous uses with the same syntactic and semantic analysis. Thus, the demonstrative will have the same lexical entry in both cases, and in both cases it will take a DP as a complement, as may be seen in (8).

(8)



We still need to explain how the pejorative reading is obtained. We defend that, in the examples we are analyzing, in addition to providing a linguistic device to establish joint attention (Diessel, 2012), demonstratives involve a context in which its presence “produces or enhances the pejorative effect” (Averintseva-Klisch, 2016, 138). We propose that, in the cases where we are in front of a negative noun, the demonstrative will enhance the pejorative effect, while, in the other cases, it may be produced due to contextual reasons (as in (7)), or it may be produced by the demonstrative (in (5) and (6)). In those cases, the pejorative effect occurs because the speaker intends to mean something that cannot be meant with the use of the bare Proper Name (Leonetti, 2022, 54).

We will further defend that the uses of the different proximal demonstratives cause different pragmatic effects. While in both cases I need to be familiar with the person being referred to (and have a negative emotion toward them), when I use “este” ([+proximal][+speaker]), I associate my ideas with those of the addressee, while when I use “ese” ([+proximal][+addressee]), I distance myself both from the referred and the addressee. (3), for instance, is given as an answer to someone who is criticizing Manini, an Uruguayan senator (who is former military). Thus, the speaker uses “este facho” (‘this fascist’) and solidarizes with the addressee in his rejection to a right winged politician. (4), on the other hand, is given as a response to a news portal that publishes something on someone that the speaker does not like. Thus, he uses “esa desquiciada” (‘this lunatic’) to distance himself from the fact that the news are taking the said character and giving her news-time.

Overall, we defend (with the use of colloquial and pejorative examples) that proximal demonstratives are identity functions that take an entity and give us the same entity (Tsiakmakis and Espinal 2022), and that the pejorative effect it involves can be the result of the enhancement of negative nouns, due to contextual factors, or due to a competition effect.

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