Non-primary person features and the evolution of Romance ternary demonstrative systems

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Demonstrative forms encode deictic features that define the location of a referent in the external world in relation to a deictic centre. In this paper, I account for featural changes in how deixis is encoded in Romance ternary demonstrative systems. Building on their evolution patterns, I argue that change is linked to formal markedness and to the structure of deictic person features, and that the seeming unpredictability of the attested reorganisation patterns is consistent with the take that person features are ontologically equivalent operators (Harbour 2016).

I assume that Romance (nominal and adverbial) demonstrative systems are defined by person features, instead of locative ones (e.g. Lander & Haegeman 2018). The deictic centre that is relevant for Romance demonstrative systems is either the speaker (1) or the discourse participants (2), yielding two contrastive forms (binary systems); additionally, some varieties have a dedicated form for the hearer-related domain (3) (ternary systems):

(1)   acest   /   acela   (Romanian, L&S16:880)
       this (close to me)   that (far away from me)

(2)   (i)cist   /   (i)cil   (Old French, L&S16:880)
       this (close to the participant(s)) that (far away from the participant(s))

(3)   custu   /   cussu   /   cuddu   (Sardinian, L&S16:884)
       this (close to me)   that (close to you)   that (far away from me and you)

Therefore, Romance demonstrative systems are best described as person-oriented systems, rather than distance-oriented ones (contra Anderson & Keenan 1985). I hold that this calls for their characterisation in terms of person features. I follow Harbour (2016) in positing two person features (Author, A, and Participant, P) that can each have two values (+ and −) and that (successively) compose with π, the set of discourse-related atoms (speaker, hearer, others), to yield different partitions thereof. Binary systems are derived by the composition of only one person feature with π: $\pi_{[\pm A]}$ for (1) and $\pi_{[\pm P]}$ for (2); ternary systems (3), instead, are derived by the composition of [±Author] with π, the result of either of which is subsequently composed with [±Participant]: $\pi_{[\pm P(\pm A)]}$. For brevity, I will only refer to [±P], [±A] and [±P(±A)] (or generally: [±F]) in what follows.

Further, I argue that, in demonstrative systems, person features compose with the π head only after a spatial function, χ, has composed with it to yield the region occupied by the discourse participants. Upon composition with the sequence [χ [π]], person features yield a subregion of π, namely the one related to one of the discourse atoms, i.e. the deictic centre, as specified by the relevant person features, which I will represent as [$\chi_{[\pm F]}$] for brevity. The forms in (1-3) are then featurally representable as (1'-3'), respectively:

(1') {[φ], [$\chi_{[+A]}$]} / {[φ], [$\chi_{[−A]}$]} (binary system; centre: speaker)
(2') {[φ], [$\chi_{[+P]}$]} / {[φ], [$\chi_{[−P]}$]} (binary system; centre: participants)
(3') {[φ], [$\chi_{[+P(+A)]}$]} / {[φ], [$\chi_{[+P(−A)]}$]} / {[φ], [$\chi_{[−P(±A)]}$]} (ternary system)

This featural system makes some predictions related to markedness. Under the assumption that formal markedness correlates with the presence vs absence of a feature, binary systems are predicted to be less marked than ternary ones, as they only require one feature to combine with π. Further, within ternary systems, the most marked spatial domain is predicted to be the hearer-related one, because under no conditions will its definition be reduced to matching feature values (of the [+α] or [−α] type, as is the case respectively for the speaker-related and, partly, the other-related domains), *i.e.* to the iteration of one and the same operation. Taking diachronic change to generally bring about an overall decrease in markedness, these predictions are borne out, as patterns of diachronic evolution (and change in contact) show.

In diachrony, ternary systems can remain stable (L&S16: 882-886), but more frequently evolve either into Participant-based binary systems (e.g. (4)), or into Author-based ones (e.g. (5)), with different morphological options as to which forms of the original pronominal and adjectival

(4a,5a) or adverbial (4b,5b) paradigms are kept:

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(4a) aquest / *aqueix* / aquell > aquest / aquell (Catalan, L&S16:886)
$[\chi_{[+P(+A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[+P(-A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[-P(\pm A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[+P]}]$ $[\chi_{[-P]}]$

(4b) *aicí* / aquí / allí > aquí / allí (Catalan, L&S16:892)
$[\chi_{[+P(+A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[+P(-A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[-P(\pm A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[+P]}]$ $[\chi_{[-P]}]$

(5a) este / ese / *aquel* > este / ese (Riopl. Spanish, Saab, *p.c.*)
$[\chi_{[+P(+A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[+P(-A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[-P(\pm A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[+A]}]$ $[\chi_{[-A]}]$

(5b) qui / *costì* / lì > qui / lì (Italian)
$[\chi_{[+P(+A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[+P(-A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[-P(\pm A)]}]$ $[\chi_{[+A]}]$ $[\chi_{[-A]}]$

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The patterns in (4-5) are directly accounted for by formal markedness: the resulting systems display only one person feature, and the hearer-related domain either has the same exponent as the speaker-related one (4), or is no longer consistently referred to by only one form ((5); if so, it falls in the speaker-related domain or in the other-related one, depending on the position of the hearer w.r.t. the speaker). Morphologically, the Romance domain displays an overall preference for forms that originally encoded matching feature values (*i.e.* $[\chi_{[\pm\alpha]}]$, as in (4a), (5b)).

Data from Italo-Romance varieties in contact with Argentinian Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese and Quebec French show comparable evolution patterns. 32 *émigrés* and 7 heritage speakers of Italo-Romance varieties that originally displayed ternary demonstrative systems were tested over 5 syntactic contexts for each of the 3 spatial domains (speaker-, hearer- and other-related). Out of 174 elicited forms for the hearer-related domain, 51,7% are morphologically medial forms (type: (3)), 29,3% are proximal ones (type: (4a)) and 19% are distal ones (type: (5b)); such patterns can be shown to be independent from the demonstrative systems of the contact languages. Thus, featural reorganisation follows the same lines in contact and in diachrony: loss of one feature and new encoding for the hearer-related domain (the other domains being overly stable in contact contexts: 100% of morphologically proximal forms for the speaker-oriented domain, 90,6% of morphologically distal forms for the other-related one).

The predictions made by the featural system proposed here are proven right by diachronic and contact data. Yet, person features are stable in diachrony (contrary to agreement phenomena related to person), as is the case for the tripartitions instantiated by person pronouns in e.g. the Romance domain. Similarly, they are predicted not to change in heritage varieties, due to their 'salience', i.e. their being at the top of the relative functional structure (Polinsky 2018:63-65). I build on this observation and translate it into the word-internal domain: stability correlates with primacy of composition, i.e. features that compose with the root of their functional node first are more stable. On these grounds, the derivation of the internal structure of demonstratives I put forward plainly captures the unexpected instability of person features when encoded in demonstrative systems: here, person features are not the first to compose with π (hence: not word-internally 'salient'), but compose with the result of the composition of χ with π. Due to the computational complexity of reiterated compositions with π, in ternary systems it is possible for one person sub-feature to be delinked from the deictic $\pi_{[\chi]}$ layer (while still being available in the person pronominal system, where it is primary) in a given language. This provides a principled explanation for the asymmetry between demonstrative systems and personal pronouns ones.

Further, the person features assumed here account for the apparent unpredictability of the (featural and morphological) evolution patterns of demonstratives (*i.e.* the variation in (4-5)). Given that person (sub-)features are ontologically equivalent functions that apply to π, no logical precedence or dependency relation can constrain their combination with π, leaving this as a point of undecidability that is mirrored by the attested variation.

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