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Cognitive Sociolinguistics: Variationist & Interactional
Sociolinguistics from a CL Point of View

{ On the choice of grammatical person as
cognitive perspective: Spanish *yo* vs. *nosotros*

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Research Project: *Los estilos de comunicación y sus bases cognitivas en el estudio de la variación sintáctica en español.*

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'Yo' vs. 'nosotros'. A communicative resource



Mónaco. Una historia diferente

*'Hoy por desgracia no **logramos** tener buen ritmo, algo que sí **solemos** tener los domingos'*

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The singular and plural first persons in Spanish

- Prototypical persons
- Degree of involvement of the subject referent
- Different degrees of subjectivity?
- Not just a singular and a plural form

The cognitive meanings of the singular and plural first persons

- Variation in syntax is inherently **meaningful**
- The meaning of a syntactic choice cannot be **identical** to that of its alleged alternatives
- The expression and omission of subject pronouns can be explained through the variable **salience** and **informativeness** of their referents

The formulation of the singular first person

En cualquier caso sobre este tema (las prospecciones petrolíferas) hay que buscar el consenso \ eso es lo que *yo* entiendo que hay que hacer \ *yo* ratifico todo lo que ha dicho Esteban \ (CCEC <Med12 BDC132>)

‘Anyway, regarding this subject [oil prospecting], consensus must be sought. This is what *I* see as most necessary. *I* confirm everything Esteban has said.’

The use of the singular vs. the plural first person

Es lo que *yo* decía antes \ en estos casos Ø *estamos* en acto profesional y es necesario que Ø *recurramos* a los colegios profesionales \ (CCEC <Med12 BDC73>)

‘This is what *I* was saying before. In these cases [*we*] find ourselves amidst professional duties and [*we*] need to resort to professional organizations.’

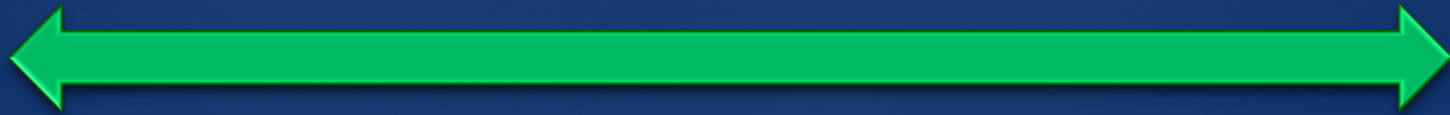
Ø *Digamos (digo)* que hoy cualquiera quiere escribir en voz alta, hasta el punto de que no son precisamente pocos los que, sin ningún pudor, se lanzan al vacío con un luminoso de neón bajo sus nombres que dice “escritor”. (MEDIASA <Art-Ga-121203-5b>)

‘[*We*] can say—[*I*] say—that these days everyone wants to write out loud, to the point that more than a few people shamelessly dive into the void carrying a neon sign under their names that reads *writer*.’

The cognitive meanings of the first persons

+ Informative

+Salient



Singular first person

Plural first person

Salience, informativeness and markedness

- **Salient** elements possess a less marked status and **informative** elements a more marked one
- Less marked elements can be expected to generate a wider range of **meanings**; higher markedness will mean focusing on the particular **referent**
- **Yo** is generally more marked than ***nosotros***

Corpora **and methodology**

Corpus Conversacional del
Español de Canarias (CCEC)

Spontaneous conversations
(79,544 words)

Oral mass-media texts
(171,258 words)

Corpus de Lenguaje de los
Medios de Comunicación de
Salamanca (**MEDIASA**)

Oral and written mass-media
texts

(302,577 words)

- Relative variables
- Absolute variables

Spontaneous conversations. Indexing the speaker

	Items	Frequency
Singular first person	820	103.1
Plural first person	246	30.9

Absolute frequency of singular and plural first-person subjects
in spontaneous conversations (CCEC)

Spontaneous conversations. Indexing the speaker

Yo me encuentro bastante bien \ *yo* no sé si es por eso porque *Ø me tomé* un tranquilizante \ pero *yo* me encuentro bastante bien (CCEC Conv <ElEn08>)

'*I* feel quite well. *I* don't know if it's because [*I*] took a tranquilizer, but *I* do feel quite well.'

Ø Decidimos acatar los plazos de las residencias de Las Palmas, *Ø recogimos* las firmas, *Ø presentamos* el escrito que estaban pidiendo y se lleva a cabo la primera reunión (CCEC Conv <ElEn08>)

'[*We*] decided to comply with the deadlines fixed by the residences in Las Palmas, [*we*] collected signatures, [*we*] submitted the statement they demanded, and then the first meeting was held.'

Singular and plural first persons in spontaneous conversations

	Expression		Omission		
	Items	Freq.	Items	Freq.	Total
Singular first person	382	48.2	468	58.8	850
Plural first person	41	5.1	205	25.7	246

Absolute frequency of expressed and omitted singular and plural first-person subjects in spontaneous conversations (CCEC)

Transactional and interpersonal communicative stances

[Transactional]

Nosotros en esta reunión no teníamos noticia de que eso fuera legal\ porque cuando se toman acuerdos a nivel general/ tiene que haber acuerdo con la empresa\ (CCEC Med12 <ElEn08>)

'At the time of that meeting *we* were not aware that such a procedure was legal. Because whenever general agreements need to be made, compliance with the company is mandatory.'

[Interpersonal]

Yo estoy trabajando en una escuela de inmigrantes menores\ *Ø estuve* en una escuela de idiomas\ pero *Ø llevo* dos semanas en la escuela de inmigrantes (CCEC Conv<ElEn08>)

'I'm working at a school for immigrant children. *[I]* used to work at a language school, but *[I]*'ve been at this immigrant school for two weeks now.'

Transactional and interpersonal communicative stances

Stance	Singular first person		Plural first person	
	Items	Frequency	Items	Frequency
Transactional	293	93.3	105	33.4
Interpersonal	557	115.6	141	29.2
Total	850	103.1	246	30.9

Absolute frequencies of singular and plural first persons according to speaker communicative stance in spontaneous conversations (CCEC)

Singular and plural first persons in mass-media discourse

	Items	Frequency
Singular first person	1180	68.9
Plural first person	1512	88.2

Absolute frequency of singular and plural first-person subjects in mass-media texts (CCEC)

	Items	Frequency
Singular first person	2165	71.6
Plural first person	2659	87.9

Absolute frequency of singular and plural first-person subjects in mass-media texts (MEDIASA)

Singular and plural first persons in mass-media discourse

	Expression		Omission		
	Items	Freq.	Items	Freq.	Total
Singular first person	654	38.1	526	30.7	1180
Plural first person	117	6.8	1395	81.4	1512

Absolute frequency of expression and omission of singular and plural first-person subjects in mass-media texts (CCEC)

	Expression		Omission		
	Items	Freq.	Items	Freq.	Total
Singular first person	569	18.8	1596	52.7	2165
Plural first person	96	3.1	2563	84.7	2659

Absolute frequency of expression and omission of singular and plural first-person subjects in mass-media texts (MEDIASA)

Singular and plural first persons across mass-media genres

Genre	Singular		Plural	
	Items	Freq.	Items	Freq.
Magazines	345	56.2	432	70.4
Informational debates	494	118.3	319	76.4
Talk shows	127	100.1	87	68.5
News reports	214	38.5	674	121.4
Total	1180	68.9	1512	88.2

Absolute frequency of singular and plural first-person subjects according to textual genre in mass-media texts (CCEC)

Singular and plural first persons across mass-media genres

[Informational debate]

Yo quería insistir en el punto que ha hablado Carmen\ se trata de imitar el modelo de Aena\ que es lo que ha provocado el anuncio de huelga\ (CCEC Med12<ElEnv103>)

I would like to insist on the point made by Carmen. This is all about imitating the Adena model that prompted the strike call.'

[Talk show]

Yo vendo las fresas aquí\ con todo el trabajo de plantarlas y recogerlas y luego *Ø las traigo* al supermercado\ (CCEC Med12<R72010>)

I sell strawberries here, together with the tasks of planting and collecting them, and then [*I*] bring them to the supermarket.'

Singular and plural first persons across mass-media genres

[News reports]

Domingo 11 de diciembre Ø *tenemos* estas noticias y otras que contarles\ Ø *sepamos* a esta hora de la noche cómo se encuentran las carreteras\ Ø *nos encontramos* en plena operación retorno\ (CCEC Med12 <CanDi1112>)

‘Sunday, December 11th. [We] have these stories as well as others to tell you. Let [us] now get an update on traffic conditions. [We] are in the middle of the back-from-vacation operation.’

[Informational debate]

Ø *Estamos confundiendo* el objetivo con el camino y la gran diferencia es que *nosotros* estamos al 29% de paro\ pero es que Canarias no puede prescindir de los planes de empleo ni de las infraestructuras\ (CCEC Med12 <ElEnv2710>)

‘[We] are mistaking the goal for the path to achieve it. The big difference is that *we* have a 29% employment rate. But the fact is that the Canary Islands cannot do without employment plans and infrastructures.’

Singular and plural first persons across mass-media genres

Genre	Singular first person		Plural first person	
	Items	Frequency	Items	Frequency
Opinion pieces	207	68.7	206	68.4
Letters to the editor	144	94.7	122	80.3
News items	69	11.6	99	16.6
Stories	73	24.1	66	21.8
Interviews	216	141.3	145	94.8
<i>Written-press total</i>	<i>709</i>	<i>47.1</i>	<i>638</i>	<i>42.4</i>
Commercials	34	22.3	141	92.6
News reports	68	37.5	196	108
Sport programs	474	134.6	349	99.1
Music programs	109	52.2	297	142.1
Magazines	771	123.6	1038	166.3
<i>Radio total</i>	<i>1456</i>	<i>95.8</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>133</i>

Absolute frequencies of singular and plural first-person subjects
according to textual genre in mass-media texts (MEDIASA)

Singular and plural first persons across mass-media genres

[Opinion piece]

Como le sucedía al coronel del cuento de García Márquez, Ø no *tengo* quien me escriba. Ø *Me refiero* que [sic], a diferencia de otros columnistas que presumen de co-rrespondencia copiosa, a mí los lectores no me dicen ni palabra. (MEDIASA <Art-Ga-091204-5a>)

‘As happened with the colonel in García Márquez’s tale, [I]’ve got no one to write to me. [I] mean, unlike other columnists who boast their copious incoming mail, my readers don’t send me a word.’

[Commercial]

ahora no tienes excusa: / por llevar el coche sucio en Autolavado Los Olivos / viernes sábado y domingo / Ø *festejamos* nuestra ina(u)guración / y Ø *te lavamos* tu coche / ¡gratis! (MEDIASA <Anu-Di-200503-12:30>)

‘You have no excuse anymore. Just to celebrate our opening, if you bring your dirty car to the Los Olivos washing station from Friday to Sunday [we]’ll wash it for free!’

Singular and plural first persons across socioprofessional ascriptions

Journalists

Politicians

**Public
figures**

**Private
individuals**

Singular and plural first persons across socioprofessional ascriptions

Group	Singular first person		Plural first person	
	Items	Freq.	Items	Freq.
Journalists	302	47.3	725	113.7
Public figures	193	41.3	302	64.7
Politicians	532	138.7	320	83.4
Private individuals	153	67.9	165	73.2
Total	1180	68.9	1512	88.2

Absolute frequencies of singular vs. plural first-person
subjects according to speaker socioprofessional ascription in
mass-media texts (CCEC)

Singular and plural first persons across socioprofessional ascriptions

[Informational debate, politician]

Esa ha sido la decisión y *yo* como miembro del gobierno la respaldo
\pero *yo* sí creo que todo el mundo puede entender la decisión que este
gobierno ha tomado\y *yo* ya no voy a entrar en la valoración de esa
decisión\ (CCEC Med12<ElEnv103>)

‘That is the decision made and *I* need to endorse it as a member of the
Government. But *I* do think that everyone can understand such a
decision, and *I* won’t undertake any evaluation of it.’

[Talk show, journalist]

Yo aplaudo al gobierno*yo* aplaudo al gobierno aunque sea una
obscenidad aplaudir a un gobierno*yo* aplaudo a la oposición\
(CCEC Med12<TertPe2612>)

‘*I* applaud the Government, even if applauding a government may be
considered obscene. *I* applaud the opposition.’

Singular and plural first persons across socioprofessional ascriptions

Group	Singular first person		Plural first person	
	Items	Freq.	Items	Freq.
Journalists	493	27	1140	62.4
Public figures	983	141.7	888	128
Politicians	241	101.1	362	151.9
Private individuals	448	168.5	269	101.2
Total	2165	71.6	2659	87.9

Absolute frequencies of singular vs. plural first-person
subjects according to speaker socioprofessional ascription
in mass-media texts (MEDIASA)

Singular and plural first persons across socioprofessional ascriptions

[Private individual]

uno de los recuerdos que tengo *yo:* / precisamente / es / e / e: / N:O
estando en la Plaza Mayor sino estando a: ochocientos kilómetros de
Salamanca / aproximadamente / un año que Ø *estuve: trabajando*
e:n:- / en Andorra // y::- / y: el:- / e:s uno de los recuerdos así gratos
que Ø *tengo* / y de cuánto se puede echar de menos / a la Plaza
Mayor (MEDIASA <Var-SE-011204-13:20>)

‘One of the memories *I* keep is actually not from the Salamanca
major square, but rather from some 800 kilometers away — *[I]* spent
a year working in Andorra. It’s one of the most cherished memories
[I] keep, and it shows how much one can miss the square.’

Singular and plural first persons across socioprofessional ascriptions

[Politician]

Pero el grado de satisfacción de los ciudadanos, que son los que determinan si se gobierna bien o mal, se demuestra en el resultado de las elecciones, y *Ø hemos* ganado con claridad las cuatro que ha habido en los últimos años. Así que la autocrítica *Ø la haremos* partiendo de un hecho positivo: que los ciudadanos nos entienden, valoran nuestra gestión, les gusta lo que *Ø hacemos*; pero a pesar de todo *Ø no nos conformamos* y *Ø queremos* más. (MEDIASA <Ent-Ad-131104-17>)

‘But the degree of satisfaction on the part of citizens—who are the ones to decide whether one has ruled well or not—is shown by election results, and *[we]* have clearly won the last four elections held. So *[we]*’ll undertake self-criticism starting from a positive fact—that the citizens understand us, they value our policies, they like what *[we]* do. But, in spite of this all, *[we]* are not yet satisfied; *[we]* want more.’

Conclusions

- The singular first person is the more frequent one in **spontaneous conversations**. It is particularly dominant when speakers adopt interpersonal stances
- In mass-media texts, the **singular** is used when focusing on personal experiences and opinions (informational debates and oral interviews in CCEC; interviews and letters to the editor in the written-press section of MEDIASA)
- The **plural** achieves higher frequencies of use whenever it is advantageous to blur the presence of the particular speaker (news reports in both corpora, music programs and magazines in MEDIASA)

Conclusions

- **Politicians** and **private individuals** are more inclined to choosing the singular first person
- **Journalists** show a preference for the plural, which seems to help them reduce the suggestion of personal responsibility
- Each of the syntactic choices studied, through the deictic involvement of one or more referents in the clause subject, may serve different **communicative goals** and help create different **stylistic meanings**