

The pragmatics of person reference: a comparative study of Catalan and Spanish
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In this paper, we will look at some features of the person reference system in Catalan and Spanish. At first sight, both languages seem rather similar: both are Romance languages and they share a number of features at various levels of linguistic analysis, among which their pro-drop character is the most relevant for our research. Furthermore, most speakers of Catalan are also fairly proficient speakers of Spanish, which could lead to interference between both languages. Nevertheless, we will show that, at least in certain types of discourse, Catalan and Spanish speakers tend to use person reference devices in different ways. We will therefore analyse a parallel corpus, consisting of the transcriptions of the 2005 State of the Union debate in the Catalan resp. Spanish parliament. This debate is a major issue in politics and media. It is particularly adequate for the comparison of a multiparty debate in both languages, about a similar topic and with similar participants (the participants have similar roles and both parliaments had a comparable political configuration at the time). Thus, the remaining variables that can influence the use of person reference devices, are the language used and the pragmatic-discursive specificities of each debate tradition.

The research questions are the following.

Since both Catalan and Spanish are pro-drop languages, we will look at the distribution of explicit subject pronouns in each language. Special attention will be paid to first and second person forms, since those forms are most clearly linked to the participants in the interaction. These data will be compared with the distribution of explicit subject pronouns in more general corpora for Catalan and Spanish. Thus, we will combine a contrastive analysis of both languages with a genre-based analysis for each language separately. This comparison allows us to put into perspective the representativity of political discourse for a wider array of language use.

This distributional analysis is necessary in order to proceed to the second research question, which consists of a qualitative analysis of the explicit subject pronouns in first and second person. We will therefore look at the distribution of explicit pronouns according to the discursive functions of the utterances in which they occur, e.g. text-structuring, hedging, speaker commitment expression. It is our hypothesis that there is a functional divergence between explicit subject pronouns in Catalan and in Spanish.

The combination of these two research questions will shed light on the pragmatics of person reference in Catalan and Spanish parliamentary debate. The comparison with general corpora for both languages enables us to point at more substantial differences of the distribution and pragmatics of both person reference systems.