

Discourse participants in impersonal constructions: the case of first and second person object pronouns with Spanish non-anaphoric third person plural subjects

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This paper offers a quantitative and qualitative analysis of object pronouns referring to discourse participants used with Spanish non-anaphoric third person plural subjects, e.g. me han criticado por largas respuestas ('they have criticized me for long answers'). Non-anaphoric third person plurals being agent-defocusing mechanisms which are sometimes considered to be impersonal, the discourse participant objects have a higher referentiality than the subject. We will show how this impacts the construction and conceptualization as a whole. By combining data from oral and written mode and informal and formal register, we examine the syntactic and semantic roles of discourse participants as well as the verb types they are used with. Our fine-grained study highlights that the use of discourse participant object pronouns and their roles are closely associated with the presence of relational verbs and communication verbs. Moreover, we show how the higher referentiality of the discourse participant object with respect to the subject is reflected through its being the main anchoring point for topic continuity. Finally, results indicate that the combination of a discourse participant object pronoun with a non-anaphoric third person plural is highly associated with the informal register and, whereas within oral conversations discourse participants tend to be oriented towards the speaker, in written interactions from a digital forum they rather involve the interlocutor.

Keywords: agent-defocusing structure, discourse participant, referentiality, register, mode