

Gender-neutral or not: feminine forms as self- reference in Spanish

The Spanish personal pronoun paradigm allows for a typologically rather rare (Siewierska 2004) gender distinction in the 1st person plural, viz. plural *nosotras* ‘we’ refers to an all-female group (instead of *nosotros*). In addition, the indefinite pronoun *uno* (‘one’), which is often associated with speaker-reference, also has a feminine counterpart *una*. Whereas the grammatical tradition is quite unanimous as to the use of *nosotras* by women, the use of *una*, however, has been described in a more nuanced way, with some authors highlighting regional differences (Butt & Benjamin 1988, NGLE 2010) or differences related to the degree of self-reference (Butt & Benjamin 1988) or expression of the own opinion (NGLE 2010:1132). I will argue that the use of feminine forms for self-reference is not only related to the sex of the speaker and to self-reference, but also to the conceptualization she wishes to convey, relying crucially on the concepts of subjectivity and intersubjectivity (Benveniste 1966, Lyons 1994, Traugott 2003)

In this paper, I will analyze the use of both *nosotras* and *una* in contexts where a female identity is particularly at stake, namely conversations, debates and blogs on women's rights or other topics that are typically associated with women, such as pregnancy. From this analysis, it will become clear that women may refrain from using the feminine forms in view of certain conceptualization choices, namely when their female identity seems less at stake or, crucially, to achieve an intersubjective effect when affiliation with male interlocutors is being sought.

In the second place, I will look into the differences between *nosotras* and *una*, as it seems that the more direct speaker inclusion realized by 1st person plural pronoun *nosotras* makes it less likely for women to refrain from using the feminine form. The vaguer speaker inclusion realized by indefinite *uno/una*, on the contrary, seems to license more easily the use of masculine *uno*, even for reference to a female speaker or group.

Thus, I will show that the use of feminine pronouns is not only determined by the sex of the speaker, but that female speakers may conceptualize different subjective positions and create intersubjective effects through pronoun choice.

References

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