Stancetaking and stylization through the use of "ye" in Asturian Spanish

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Asturian Spanish, a contact variety spoken in the Spanish northwestern region of Asturias, is characterized by the alternation between Spanish and Asturian linguistic variants (Sánchez Álvarez, 1979; D'Andres, 2002; Barnes, 2013). Many Asturian Spanish speakers are aware of the variable incorporation of Asturian features in their speech and they often point to the stylistic nature of the variation, claiming to use Asturian features in informal contexts, to talk among friends and family and in a humorous key (Sánchez Álvarez, 1979; Llera Ramo, 1994; D'Andrés, 1997).

Among these Asturian features is the use of the diphthongized forms of the present tense of the verb "ser" ('to be'). Diphthongization is restricted to the second and third person singular forms, resulting in "yes" ('you are'), instead of Spanish "eres", and "ye" ('he/she/it is'), as opposed to Spanish "es". Diphthongized forms of "ser" have the highest symbolic value as markers of Asturian speech. Thus, when speakers are asked to characterize their linguistic variety they invariable mention the use of "ye".

This study investigates the relation between the use of Asturian third person "ye", interactional stance and sociolinguistic style in the variety of Asturian Spanish spoken in the city of Gijón. Stance is generally defined as the expression of speakers' relationship to the propositional content of their utterances (Biber & Finegan, 1989; Ochs, 1996). Researchers have found that language can index different types of interactional stance, which include affective stances - the speakers' display of personal feelings towards a stance object - and epistemic stances - the marking of the speakers' quality of knowledge, among others (Biber & Finegan, 1989; Ochs, 1996; Dubois, 2007).

Using interview data from 12 speakers from Gijon, quantitative and interactional analyses were performed in order to explore how Asturian "ye" is used at the local level to mark particular types of stance. In the quantitative analysis, all the uses of Spanish "es" and Asturian "ye" were coded for the types of stances indexed in the utterance in which the variants occurred, using as cues other linguistic markers of affect (such as intensifying adverbs, interjections and repetitions), expressions of certainty/uncertainty and contextual information. The results show that the Asturian variant is significantly more likely to occur when the utterance contains markers of uncertainty, such as "no sé" ('I don't know') or "puede que" ('might').

In order to fully understand the use of the "ye"/"es" variation as a stancetaking mechanism, interactional analyses of short extracts of each interview were also performed. These analyses reveal that the Asturian variant is often used to mitigate the speaker's commitment to the propositional content of the utterance. For instance, speakers use "ye" instead of "es" in hyperbolic statements or when making negative evaluations (such as insults) while simultaneously showing playfulness or lack of seriousness.

Through the repeated use of "ye" as a way to defer the speakers' commitment to the propositional content, speakers perform particular acts of styling – or stylization (Coupland, 2007; Jaffe, 2009; Snell, 2010) - in which they present themselves as playful, informal and laid-back. This stylization often contains other Asturian features and connects the individual performance to variation on a larger social scale, by which the use of Asturian features is associated with working-class and rural speech (Ochs, 1996; Jaffe, 2009; Kiesling, 2009; Barnes, 2013).

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