

The grammaticalization of the discourse particle *esque* in Spanish

In this paper we attempt to shed light on the grammaticalization process that has given rise to the Spanish expressive discourse particle *esque*, from reanalysis of a “verb + complementizer” sequence. As a two-word sequence, clause-initial *es que* ‘(it) is that’ may appear, for instance, in pseudoclefts where the referent of the empty pronoun in subject position can be contextually recovered, as in (1). It is also used in inferential constructions (Declerck 1992), where it has causative value and can be paraphrased as ‘it is because’, as in (2).

- (1) sólo hay una cosa que me cague más que los mentirosos. Y *es que* no me crean.
(*Suerte*: 124)
‘Only one thing bothers me more than liars. And *it is when* people don’t believe me’
- (2) Vierte la mezcla con delicadeza y ponla a cocer al baño maría a fuego muy lento 40 minutos más o menos. Comprueba si está cocida con la ayuda de una aguja de punto o similar. Si se pega, *es que* aún no está hecha. (Karlos Arguiñano, *1069 recetas*, 1996, España, CREA)
‘Pour the mixture carefully and cook it slowly in a water bath for about 40 minutes. Check that it is ready with a knitting needle or similar object. If it sticks, *it’s that* it is not done yet.’

In the contexts we have considered so far, Spanish *es que* is merely a “verb + complementizer” sequence, equivalent to English *it’s that* or its literal translation in other languages as well. However, there are other usages that clearly suggest that *es que* has been reanalyzed as a discourse particle, *esque*. Consider the examples in (3) and (4). In (3), the *esque* clause expresses an excuse or objection and is equivalent to the contradictory-justificational expression *lo que pasa es que* ‘what happens is that’; which is also a fixed expression (see Reig Alamillo 2011). In this usage, in colloquial American English it could perhaps be translated as ‘the thing is (is)’ (see Shapiro & Halley 2002).

- (3) —Ven al jardín —dice la sobrina—. He preparado una limonada.
—*Es que* tengo que irme. (A. Muñoz Molina, *El viento de la luna*, 2006, CREA).
‘—Come to the garden—says the niece—I have made a lemonade’
—*The thing is, is that* I have to leave’

Finally, in (4), *esque* is a discourse particle that basically fulfills the goal of expressing an emotional state and it simply does not have an adequate translation (other than *so*, *well*, or similar particles).

- (4) pues→ no sé→ no sé→ a mí *es que* no↓// *es que* mira no/ yo lo siento ¡pero *es que* no *es que* no puedo con él→/ *es que* es muy pesado→ enton- además *es que*/ se cree// no sé↑// el chico más guapo de toda la facultad cuando es... (*Valesco*, 28.46-52)
‘Well, I don’t know, I don’t know. To me, *esque* no, *esque* he looks at me, no. I can’t stomach him; *esque* he is a bore. Then, also *esque* he thinks he is, I don’t know, the most handsome guy in the whole college, when he is...’

In the contexts in (3)-(4), unlike in the contexts exemplified in (1)-(2), *esque* is an indivisible, invariable particle. There is no possible tense or person variation and no

lexical material can be inserted between its two syllables (whereas in (1), for instance, one could have *y era que* ‘and it was that’). Several dictionaries do in fact include it as a discursive particle (Briz, Pons & Portolés, coord., 2008; Moliner, 1966 [2007]; Seco, Andrés & Ramos, 1999). Its use as a lexical unit also explains that *esque* can be transferred by bilingual speakers from Spanish to Basque, in spite of the typological differences between the two languages: Bq. *eske denak berdinak dira* ‘*esque* they are all alike’ (see Ibarra 2008).

Given its syntactic origin (as a verb+comp sequence), we would expect *esque* to be a strictly clause-initial particle. However, as a discourse particle, it can now also appear after a topic, without a prosodic break: *Es que Juan no sabe* ~ *Juan esque no sabe* ‘Juan *esque* he doesn’t know’, *los ajos esque no los puedo ni ver* ‘I cannot stand garlic (garlic *esque* I can’t even look at it’. On the other hand, it must precede the preverbal focalizing particle *si que*, which we will refer to as *sique*: *Esque Juan sique mola* ~ *Juan es que sique mola* ‘Juan *esque sique* is great!’ (approx. ‘Dude, Juan is really cool!’) vs. ungrammatical **Juan sique esque mola*.

In this paper, we examine the grammaticalization and reanalysis processes that have led to the emergence of the discourse particle *esque* from the pseudocleft sentences, and also consider its syntactic position. The study is based on a balanced corpus of texts from the 13th to the 21st century (with 750.000 words per century). The analysis of this corpus shows that justificational-explanatory *es que* ‘it is because’ is first documented in the 16th century, at the moment when pseudocleft constructions start to proliferate as a discourse strategy. Soon after, we also find examples where *esque* has justificational-contrastive value in reply contexts. The grammaticalization of *esque* as an expressive discourse particle takes place much later, essentially in the 20th century. We will argue that the stage in (3) represents an intermediate stage in the grammaticalization process.

References

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