

From demonstrative to discourse expletive: types of *chillo* in Neapolitan and their diachronic relation

Besides their basic exophoric use for ‘pointing’ towards the extralinguistic context, demonstratives typically also take on other (endophoric) functions, including anaphoric, discourse-deictic, and recognitional uses (Diessel 1999). The distal demonstrative *chillo* in Neapolitan is no exception: it can have all these three endophoric functions, see e.g. (1) where it is used as an anaphoric pronoun. More rare cross-linguistically is the use of *chillo* as a left-peripheral pronoun: it can double the semantic subject, marking it as a newly introduced topic (the double-subject construction, DSC, (2)), and it can be used as a discourse expletive referring to a situation or proposition active in the discourse (3) (cf. Sornicola 1996; Ledgeway 2009: 290–294, 915–922; 2010, a.o.):

- (1) *Giovanni vuleva jì a magnà 'na pizza cu Ccìro ma chillo steve malato.*
Giovanni wanted go to eat a pizza with Ciro but that.M.SG stayed ill
‘Giovanni wanted to go eat a pizza with Ciro but he was ill.’
- (2) *Chella Napule è 'a città cchiù bbella ro munno!*
that.F.SG Naples.F.SG is the city most beautiful of.the world
‘Naples is the most beautiful city in the world!’
- (3) *Chello ha fatto troppo cavere 'nda 'sti juorni.*
that.N has done too warm in these days
‘(That’s because) it has been too warm these days.’

Little is known about the grammaticalisation path leading to the DSC and discourse expletive *chello*, partly because it is typical of spoken language; its only written attestations are in plays from the late 19th century onwards when it is already fully grammaticalised. This presentation aims to take a first step in filling this lacuna by comparing the different uses of *chillo* on a featural and structural level. This is done by applying a series of tests proposed in pronoun typologies (Cardinaletti & Starke 1999; Déchaine and Wiltschko 2002; Patel-Grosz & Grosz 2017). Data come from informal grammaticality judgments by native speakers of Neapolitan collected by the author.

These tests show that deictic *chillo* is clearly a strong pronoun with DP syntax, whereas DSC *chillo* is not; anaphoric *chillo* behaves mostly like a strong personal pronoun but unlike strong pronouns, it is less accepted in coordination and always needs an antecedent. Based on these data, and building further on anonymous (2025), the following grammaticalisation path is proposed:

- (4) *exophoric deictic pronoun > anaphoric pronoun > left-peripheral topic marker > discourse expletive (> discourse marker?)*

All these uses are still attested in modern Neapolitan. Four changes have occurred, leading to different - but coexisting - types of *chillo*:

- i. from exophoric deictic pronoun to anaphoric pronoun
- ii. from anaphoric pronoun to left-peripheral topic marker
- iii. from left peripheral topic marker to discourse expletive
- iv. from discourse expletive to discourse marker?

The change from exophoric deictic pronoun to anaphoric pronoun (change i) is commonly attested across languages of the world (cf. e.g. Diessel (1999) for an overview). This is part of a grammaticalization path whereby erstwhile deictic elements lose their deictic feature and grammaticalize into personal pronouns (cf. van Gelderen 2011: chap. 2). Initially, however, there is a systematic difference between demonstrative pronouns and personal subject pronouns, which has been equated to the difference between strong and weak articles (Patel-Grosz & Grosz 2017). Demonstratives, containing an anaphoric index, are structurally more complex than personal pronouns and therefore more costly: their use is therefore only licensed when

pragmatically required, e.g. in emotive contexts such as exclamatives (6) or to mark the referent pejoratively (Patel-Grosz & Grosz 2017).

- (6) *Ajere Paolo ha avuto 'na bella idea. Chillo tene sempe belli idee!*
 yesterday Paolo has had a beautiful idea that.M.SG has always beautiful ideas
 'Yesterday Paolo had a nice idea. He always has such brilliant ideas!'

Another context that licenses the less economical demonstrative is when disambiguation is needed; demonstratives are preferred in antitopical contexts (e.g. in (2) *chillo* is preferred over *isso* 'he' when the embedded subject is to be interpreted as *Ciro*/disjoint from the matrix subject). This switch in topic marked by *chillo* is shared by the DSC, which is typically used to mark a newly introduced or shift topic (Ledgeway 2011). Here, we hypothesise that the combination of antitopical pronoun *chillo* with a DP as an afterthought, has been reanalysed as *chillo* in left peripheral position and a postverbal subject in the VP (change ii):

- (7) [CP [IP *chillo* V [VP]]] .. DP → [CP *chillo* [IP V [VP DP]]]

This reanalysis has allowed for the DP to occupy different positions within the clause as a regular subject. Evidence for the putative origin of the DSC from pronominal *chillo* rather than determiner *chillo* comes from prosody (cf. anonymous 2025).

We further propose that left peripheral *chillo* (in its 'neuter' form *chello*) then has been extended to refer to propositions in the discourse (change iii), leading to a discourse expletive similar to situation topic pronouns (cf. anonymous 2024: §2.1). This is supported by the finding that other varieties in the upper South of Italy, e.g. those spoken in Noicattaro (BA) and Castrovillari (CS), feature the DSC but a more limited use of expletive-like demonstratives.

Finally, if the expletive *chello* can be extended to categorical sentences, i.e. in combination with a topic, we can assume that it has grammaticalised further up (change iv). The sentence in (8) (with code-switching between Neapolitan and regional Italian) containing both a DSC and a discourse expletive *chello* seems to point in that direction, but, crucially, is accepted only by some speakers:

- (8) %*Chello chella 'a colpa è degli acquedotti.*
 that.N.SG that.F.SG the fault is of.the aqueducts

'The thing is, the fault lies with the aqueducts.' (M. Troisi, *La smorfia napoletana*)

This indicates that this last change is still incipient, perhaps in regional Italian only (cf. Cerruti (2014) for a case of grammaticalisation that has reached a further stage in regional Italian than in the dialect from which the pattern was borrowed).

In sum, the proposed grammaticalisation path in (6) is represented by the patterns displayed by *chillo*, and contributes to our knowledge of the diachrony of the demonstrative-pronoun continuum.

Selected references: Cardinaletti, A. & Starke, M. 1999. The typology of structural deficiency: A case study of the three classes of pronouns. In Van Riemsdijk, H. (ed.), *Clitics in the Languages of Europe*, 145–233. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. Cerruti, M. 2014. From Language Contact to Language Variation: A Case of Contact-Induced Grammaticalization in Italo-Romance. *Journal of Language Contact* 7(2). 288–308. Déchaine, R.-M. & Wiltschko, M. 2002. Decomposing Pronouns. *Linguistic Inquiry* 33(3). 409–442. Diessel, H. 1999. *Demonstratives: Form, Function, and Grammaticalization*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. * Gelderen, E. van. 2011. *The linguistic cycle: language change and the language faculty*. New York: Oxford University Press. Ledgeway, A. 2009. *Grammatica diacronica del napoletano*. Tübingen: Niemeyer. Ledgeway, A. 2010. Subject licensing in CP: the Neapolitan double-subject Construction. In Benincà, P. & Munaro, N. (eds.), *Mapping the left periphery*, 257–296. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Patel-Grosz, P. & Grosz, P. 2017. Revisiting Pronominal Typology. *Linguistic Inquiry* 48(2). 259–297. Sornicola, R. 1996. Alcune strutture con pronome espletivo nei dialetti italiani meridionali. In Benincà, P. et al. (eds.), *Italiano e dialetti nel tempo. Saggi di grammatica per Giulio C. Lepschy*, 323–340. Rome: Bulzoni editore.