The Emphatic *Es* Construction of Colombian Spanish

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1. Introduction[1]

Colombian Spanish, like certain other dialects of Spanish, has a construction referred to here as the emphatic *es* construction, which is not found in standard Spanish nor in many other varieties. This construction uses what appears to be a finite form of the copula verb *ser* 'to be' in a sentence with another finite verb:[2]

(1) S: *Ella   está   estudiando   **es**   derecho   no?*
        she   is   studying   is   law   no
        'She's studying (is) law, isn't she?'

This sentence can be contrasted with a standard Spanish pseudo-cleft construction, and a straightforward simple sentence:

(2)   ***Lo que***   *ella   está   estudiando   **es**   derecho no?*
       the which   she   is   studying   is   law   no
       'What she's studying is law, isn't it?' (constructed example)

(3)   *Ella   está   estudiando   derecho   no?*
       She   is   studying   law   no
       'She's studying law, isn't she?' (constructed example)

While it might appear that this emphatic *es* construction is just a pseudo-cleft with the determiner and relative marker omitted, things are not that simple. There are pseudo-cleft sentences which cannot be made into emphatic *es* examples, and emphatic *es* examples which cannot be turned into pseudo-clefts. Thus the pseudo-cleft sentence (4) is potentially still an acceptable sentence if the determiner (*lo*) and the relative marker (*que*) are omitted, but it has a distinct meaning in this case as indicated in (5), with a comparative rather than a superlative reading. In the reverse case, the emphatic *es* example in (6) cannot be converted to a pseudo-cleft by adding *lo que*.

(4) F: .. ***Lo   que***   *más   nos   gusta   hacer, a Claudia y   a mí   **es**   eso.*
        .. The which more us   please do   to Claudia and to me is   that
        'What Claudia and I most like to do is that.'

(5)   *?Más   nos   gusta   hacer   a   Claudia   y   a   mí   **es**   eso.*
        more us   please do   to Claudia and to me   is   that
        'Claudia and I prefer to do (is) that.' (constructed example)

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[1] We would like to thank the reviewers of this paper, who gave us several helpful suggestions. The idea for this paper arose during a workshop on copulas run by Bob Dixon and Sasha Aikhenvald at the RCLT, La Trobe University; we are grateful to them for the opportunity which led to us noticing the phenomenon.

[2] For details on the corpus, transcription method and translation conventions, see section 2.

(6) D: *Sálgase,   pues,   que   no   puedo ver **es**   nada*
      Get.out-REFL then   that   not I.can   see   is   nothing
      'Get out of the way, I can't see (is) a thing!' (overheard example)

(7)   *..**lo   que**   no   puedo   ver   **es**   nada*
      the   which not   I.can   see   is   nothing

Interestingly, simple (non-clefted) sentences are possible wherever emphatic *es* sentences are possible and apparently vice versa; however a pseudo-cleft cannot always be replaced by a simple sentence, nor vice versa. That is, ignoring pragmatic differences, simple sentences and emphatic *es* sentences are inter-convertible; pseudo-cleft sentences are distinct.

2. Corpus and previous work

The emphatic *es* construction does not occur in most dialects of Spanish or in 'standard' Spanish, but has been noted as occurring in dialect studies of the Spanish spoken in countries such as Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador and Colombia, as well as in Brazilian Portuguese (see Bosque (1999) for references).

As with other 'non-standard' grammatical features, it is important to study the emphatic *es* construction using naturally occurring corpus data. Many speakers, even those who use this construction in conversation, are aware that it is not found in standard Spanish, and consequently in direct elicitation will not use it, and consider it 'ungrammatical'. Even without this additional problem, the emphatic *es* construction is clearly pragmatically conditioned, and consequently it cannot be studied by any means except by observing its use in natural speech.

The only corpus-based study of emphatic *es* of which we are aware is the work of Sedano (1988, 1990, 1994). However her Venezuelan data is based on sociolinguistic interviews, or what she terms **careful** informal conversation. While her findings are extremely interesting, we might expect that in the constraints of an interview situation or in (relatively) careful speech, more standard constructions might be used, and the distribution of forms might be skewed.[3]

Our corpus consists of seven hours of spontaneous casual conversation (30,000 Intonation Units, 65,000 words) recorded in Cali, Colombia in 1997 by two native speakers, talking with their husbands, family and friends. There are 27 speakers in total (19 women, 8 men) between the ages of 20 and 60, all middle class. (For further details on the corpus, see Travis (forthcoming).)

The data has been transcribed following Du Bois et al (1993). Any sentence with no attribution comes from this corpus — other examples are marked as either constructed or overheard.[4] Additionally, examples from the corpus always indicate the speaker(s) with an initial letter. To assist non-Spanish-speaking readers, emphatic *es* sentences have been

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[3] Indeed, while we will not discuss it in this paper, the distribution of forms reported by Sedano and that in our data are distinct in several interesting ways.

[4] These non-corpus examples are not included in any of the counts, but are occasionally used to illustrate a particular point.

translated into idiomatic English, but an element (*is*) or (*was*) has been inserted in the translation at the point where the emphatic *es* occurs in the Spanish.

In the seven hours of conversation, there are 37 emphatic *es* tokens, and 58 pseudo-cleft tokens.

3. Syntax

3.1 Form of the marker

In our data, the emphatic marker takes three forms — *es*, *fue* and *era* — with *es* being the most common, accounting for almost three-quarters of the tokens. These three words correspond in form with the third person singular subject forms of the verb *ser* 'to be' — present, preterite and imperfect respectively. The singular is used in our corpus regardless of the number of the following noun phrase:

(8)　D: *Son*　　　***es***　*contrabandistas.*
　　　　　they.are　is　smugglers
　　　　　'They are (is) smugglers'

However additional data, not in our corpus, suggests plural forms (*son*, *fueron*) are possible.

The choice of 'tense' of the marker depends entirely on the tense of the (other) finite verb, with *es* used when the other finite verb is present tense, *fue* used with preterite, and *era* with imperfect; we have no examples in our corpus of emphatic *es* in sentences with future, subjunctive or conditional verbs.[5]

3.2 One clause

The form of the emphatic marker makes it appear to be a finite inflected verb. However there is evidence that, unlike a pseudo-cleft, the emphatic *es* structure does not establish an additional clause, and that a sequence containing *es* is a single clause.

The way in which negation applies across *es* seems to suggest this analysis, as can be seen in sentence (6) above, with 'negative concord' (*no ... nada*) happening across *es*. However negation is a complex issue in Spanish, and for reasons of space will not be discussed here.

Clearer evidence comes from clitic climbing, where a pronominal argument of a non-finite verb can 'climb' to occur in front of an inflected 'auxiliary', but cannot 'descend' into a subordinate clause. The details are complicated, but the following example shows that clitic climbing ignores the presence of emphatic *es*, in contrast to a pseudo-cleft.

(9)　S: *pero **me** quiero **es** encerrar　con　mi　tía　allá,*
　　　　　but　me　I.want　is　shut.away　with　my　aunt　there
　　　　　'but I want (is) to shut myself away with my aunt there,'

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[5] As noted by one of the reviewers, it would be interesting to see whether the 'tense' of the marker correlates with the matrix verb or the subordinate verb in cases where *es* occurs in finite complement clauses. Unfortunately, in all cases in our corpus, as in example (19) below, the same tense is used in both matrix and subordinate clauses.

(10)   *pero **me** quiero   encerrar   con mi tía   allá,*
           but   me I.want   shut.away with my aunt there
           'but I want to shut myself away with my aunt there,' (constructed example)

(11)   **pero **lo** **que**   **me**   quiero es   encerrar   con mi tía   allá,*
           but   the which me   I.want is   shut.away   with my aunt there

(12)   *pero **lo** **que**   quiero es encerrar-**me** con mi tía   allá*
           but   the which   I.want is shut.away-me with my aunt there
           'but what I want is to shut myself away with my aunt there,' (constructed example)

While varying formally for tense (and possibly number), emphatic *es* is not an inflected finite verb in (9), but a particle. As mentioned earlier, despite the apparent similarities between emphatic *es* and pseudo-cleft sentences, their structures are quite distinct: pseudo-cleft sentences contain a subordinate clause, emphatic *es* sentences do not.

Syntactically, then, emphatic *es* is a particle, not a finite verb. From the examples below, it will be clear that *es* can precede words of almost any class. While in the majority of examples it follows a verb (leading one reviewer to suggest that it may be a post-verbal clitic), this is not fixed — there are many examples where it follows a finite verb, some where it follows a non-finite verb (plus any verbal enclitics), in example (26) it follows a postposed subject, and in other examples in our corpus it follows an adverb (one example) or an object (two examples).

3.3 Distribution

Within our data there is a strong complementarity in the use of emphatic *es* versus pseudo-cleft, as can be seen from the data in Table 1 on the following page. These differences in distribution will be discussed in terms of whether what follows *es* is an NP argument, a clausal argument, an adjunct, or a (non-argument) non-finite verb.

3.3.1 NP/pronoun arguments

Emphatic *es* is used in our data before pronominal and non-pronominal objects and indirect objects, and copula complements; of these, the occurrence before direct objects is overwhelmingly most common.

(13) D: *no necesita **es** agua dulce,*
        not needs   is   water sweet
        '... doesn't it need (is) fresh water …?'

(14) R: *ellos buscan   **es** eso.*
        they search.for is   that
        'they're searching for (is) that.'

(15) D: *Son   **es** contrabandistas.*
        they.are is   smugglers
        'They are (is) smugglers.'

Table 1. Distribution of emphatic *es* and pseudo-clefts

	Emphatic *es*	Pseudo-cleft
Subjects	1	11
Direct objects	12	7
Indirect objects	2	0
Copula complement	1	0
Total NP/Pronoun arguments:	**16**	**18**
Clausal subjects	0	17
Clausal objects	3	15
Total clausal arguments:	**3**	**32**
Adverb adjuncts	4	0
PP adjuncts	8	0
Clausal adjuncts	2	0
Total adjuncts:	**14**	**0**
Between auxiliary and verb:	**1**	**0**
Unclear (truncated):	**3**	**8**
TOTAL USES:	**37**	**58**

Pseudo-clefts on the other hand are used primarily before subjects:

(16) A: *pero **lo que** nos va es la platica.*
          but the which us goes is the money-DIM
          'but what we're running out of is money.' (lit. 'but what goes to us is the money')

There are also some examples of pseudo-clefts with objects, but most of these are examples where emphatic *es* could not be used for other reasons, such as:

(17) S: *se le ve que **al que** más quiere **es** a Pedro.*
          REFL to.it sees that to.the which more loves is to Pedro
          'You can tell that the one who she loves most is Pedro.'

Thus, although we find both pseudo-clefts and the *es* construction occurring with objects, they seem to occur in different contexts; we will not pursue this issue here.

In one example emphatic *es* is used with a subject; however this is with the verb *gustar* 'pleases', and subjects of this verb have many similarities with objects rather than subjects:

(18) R: *o   que   les   gusta   es   la   arquitectura   autóctona,*
　　　　or   that   to.them   pleases   is   the   architecture   local
　　　　'or that they like (is) the local style of architecture,'

3.3.2 Clausal arguments

Emphatic *es* is rare with clausal arguments, and only occurs with clausal objects. We have one example before a *that*-clausal object (19) with the verb *esperar* 'hope, wait'; and two before infinitives with *querer* 'want',[6] example (9) above and example (20):

(19) A: *yo   creo   que   ya   están   esperando   es   que   el- --*
　　　　I   believe   that   now   they.are   hoping   is   that   the
　　　　que   le   den   la   pieza.   la   habitación.
　　　　that   to.him   give   the   room   the   room
　　　　'I believe that they're waiting (is) for the- -- for them to give him the bed, the room.'

(20) M: *es   que   quiere   es   jugar   con   las --*
　　　　is   that   he.wants   is   play.INF   with   the
　　　　'it's that he wants (is) to play with the --'

Pseudo-clefts are much more common with clausal arguments (17 examples of subjects, 15 of objects). However it should be noted that 13 of the subject examples are with the verb *pasar* 'happen' and 6 of the object examples with the verb *hacer* 'do', where the pseudo-clefts cannot be 'reduced' to simple (non-clefted) sentences without deleting *pasar* and *hacer*; neither can they occur as emphatic *es* examples. Examples of this sort are:

(21) A: *.. **Lo   que   pasa   es   que**, yo   ahorita   no   estoy   trabajando.*
　　　　.. the   which   happens   is   that   I   now   not   am   working
　　　　'What's happening is that I'm not working at the moment.'

(22) R: ***lo   que   hace   es*** *rescatar   la   arquitectura   ancestral   del --*
　　　　the   which   he.does   is   rescue   the   architecture   ancestral   of.the
　　　　'What he does is rescue old-style architecture of the --'

3.3.3 Adjuncts

Adjuncts of time, place and manner, whether expressed by a single word such as an adverb, by a prepositional phrase or by an adverbial clause, are only found with emphatic *es*; in our data these never occur with pseudo-clefting.

(23) S: *Pero   lo   están   investigando   es   desde   el   94,*
　　　　but   him   they.are   investigating   is   from   the   94
　　　　'But they've been investigating him (is) since 1994,'

(24) N: *la   tiene   es   allá.*
　　　　it   she.has   is   there
　　　　'She's got it (is) there.'

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[6] In fact, *querer* 'want' acts in certain ways more like an auxiliary than a matrix verb; in particular, provided that the 'subordinate' verb is non-finite, clitic-climbing occurs across *querer*.

(25) A: *lo   hace,   **es**   porque   lo   mandan.*
      it   he.does   is   because   him   they.order
      'he does it (is) because they order him to.'

3.3.4 Between auxiliary and verb

While *es* never occurs before finite verbs, it may occur before a non-finite verb, either an infinitive (as in example (20)), or even before a participle used after an auxiliary, as in:

(26) P: *termina   uno   **es**   aprendiendo   fisioterapia,   administración,*
      ends   one   is   learning   physiotherapy   administration
      'You end up (is) learning physiotherapy, administration,'

Emphatic e*s* sentences of this type cannot be converted to pseudo-cleft sentences without the addition of the dummy verb *hacer* 'do' ('what you end up *doing* is …').

4. Semantics/Pragmatics

4.1 Information status

Terms such as 'emphasis' or 'focus' are not necessarily very precise, and are defined in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most generally accepted idea is that there are two broad-based categories, often called contrastive focus or identificational focus versus new information or information focus, essentially something which is not part of the presupposition (cf. É. Kiss 1998).

The previous studies on emphatic *es* have generally claimed that emphatic *es* is used purely for contrast (Bosque 1999:3, Sedano 1994:496-7). And, indeed, our data shows that emphatic *es* can be used in contrastive situations — of 34 interpretable tokens of *es*, 25 are used for contrast:

(27)   (About 140 Intonation Units discussing how S talking with A is not enough, and he needs to talk instead to A's mother)
    A: *Tú   tienes   que   decírselas   **es**   a ella.*
       you   have   that   say-to.her-them   is   to her
       'You have to say these things (is) to her.'

(28)   (Discussion of various aspects of a new book, the drawings, the text)
    P: *Ahora   tenemos   que   discutir,   **es**   estos   espacios.*
       now   we.have   that   discuss   is   those   spaces
       'Now we have to talk about (is) those blank spaces.'

However while emphatic *es* can be used in contrastive situations, it also occurs in 9 sentences where there is no contrast. In some of these cases, even any suggestion of a possible 'implicit' contrast is clearly excluded.

(29)   (Discussion of various magazines in the house)
    A: *Yo vi   **fue**   un   poco de= -- Deporte   Gráfico,   allá   en   tu -- estante.*
       I   saw was a   little   of   sport   graphic   there   in   your bookshelf
       'I saw (was) some copies of *Sports Illustrated* there in your bookshelf.'

(30)   (Talking about various medical exams F had at one point)
   D: *Examen   de   sangre?*
      test   of   blood
   F: *Me -- Hermana,   me   hicieron   un   poco   de   exámenes   oyó?*
      to.me   sister   to.me   they.did   a   few   of   tests   heard
   D: *Pero= --   le   sacaron   **fue**   sangre?*
      but   you   they.took   was   blood
      D: 'Blood test?'
      F: 'They -- sister, they did a whole lot of exams, you understand?'
      D: 'But -- did they take (was) blood?'

Thus it is clear that emphatic *es* can be used non-contrastively. However in all cases where emphatic *es* is used non-contrastively, the information marked with *es* is being asserted as (or inquired about as) new information. Emphatic *es* can be used in cases of contrasting new information as in (28), contrastive old information as in (27), or non-contrastive new information as in (29); but it is never used with non-contrastive old information.

That is, emphatic *es* shows both contrastive focus (or identificational focus) and new information (or information focus).

4.2 Position of *es*

4.2.1 Contrastive *es*

Contrastive *es* always occurs to the left of the contrastive element, and as close to it as possible. Most commonly, this means immediately preceding the contrastive element, as with contrastive arguments or adverbs:

(31) R: *ellos   buscan   **es**   eso.*
        they   search.for   is   that
        'They look for (is) that.'

(32) A: *Tú   tienes   que   decírselas   **es**   a   ella.*
        you   have   that   say-to.her-them   is   to   her
        'You have to say these things (is) to her.'

(33) N: *la   tiene   **es**   allá.*
        it   you.have   is   there
        'You've got it (is) there.'

(34) S: *Mi   mamá   no   toma   agua.*
        my   mother   not   drinks   water
     F: *[Toma   **es**   pura   gaseosa].*[7]
         drinks   is   only   softdrink
     S: *[Ella   toma   gaseosa].*
         she   drinks   softdrink
     S: 'My mother doesn't drink water.'
     F: '[She drinks (is) only softdrink].'
     S: '[She drinks softdrink].'

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[7] Note that the brackets here indicate overlapping speech.

However, if the element which contrasts is an NP within a PP, or an adverbial clause, *es* occurs before the preposition or subordinator:

(35) S: *que   ese   término,   lo utilizan   **es**   para   eso.*
      that   that   term   it they.use   is   for   that
      'that they use that term (is) for that.'

(36) A: *le   dio   **fue**   porque   se   aplastó.*
      to.you he.gave   was   because   REFL   squashed
      'He gave it to you (was) because you squashed (your finger).'

In these cases of contrastive *es*, whether the material before or after *es* is new or old information is irrelevant. Thus in (31), the 'that' has been discussed extensively, but the fact that 'they' are looking for it is new; in (32), the entire statement is old information; in (34), the material before *es* (*toma* 'she drinks') is old and that after *es* (*pura gaseosa* 'only softdrink') is new.

4.2.2 Non-contrastive *es*

One might expect that when *es* is used to mark new information rather than contrast, all information before *es* would be old, and all information after *es* would be new. However this is not the case at all. In none of our non-contrastive examples is the new information only an argument, for example; even though *es* itself often occurs before the argument, the new information is the entire predicate ('predicate focus', in Lambrecht's (1994) terms).[8] Thus consider example (30), repeated here as (37):

(37)   (Talking about various medical exams F had at one point)
   D: *Examen   de   sangre?*
      test   of   blood
   F: *Me -- Hermana,   me   hicieron   un   poco   de   exámenes   oyó?*
      to.me sister   to.me they.did   a   few   of   tests   heard
   D: *Pero= --   **le   sacaron   fue   sangre**?*
      but   you   they.took   was   blood
   D: 'Blood test?'
   F: 'They -- sister, they did a whole lot of exams, you understand?'
   D: 'But -- did they *take (was) blood*?'

We have already seen that this example is non-contrastive — D is not asking if they took blood *rather* than anything else; F has already explicitly indicated that this is not the case. She is interested in finding out some new information — as well as other tests, did they do a blood test of some sort. Here it is not 'blood' alone which is new information (indeed, it is not even referential), but rather the entire predicate 'took blood from you' is new information.

Likewise in example (29), repeated here as (38), the new information is the seeing of the magazines on the shelf; and in (39), the fact of having a problem of some sort.

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[8] Of course having an old, topical subject and a new information predicate is the 'typical' distribution of information in sentences. In using *es* to mark this explicitly in some sentences, speakers are presumably emphasizing the newness (and perhaps topic-worthiness) of the predicate in these cases.

(38)   (Discussion of various magazines in the house)
   A: *Yo vi   fue un poco de= -- Deporte Gráfico allá en tu -- estante.*
      I   saw was a   little of   sport   graphic there in   your bookshelf
      'I *saw (was) some copies of Sports Illustrated there in your bookshelf.*'

(39) A: *Parece   que tiene es   como --   .. un problema,*
      it.seems   that he.has is   like   .. a   problem
      'It seems that he *has (is) like a problem,*'

In fact, the general principle seems to be that in order to focus on an entire predicate, put *es* inside it as early as possible. In the cases above, the earliest position in which *es* may occur is before the argument, since it cannot appear sentence initially nor before a finite verb. However in sentences with a non-finite verb, *es* occurs before this verb, but once again marks the entire predicate as new information:

(40) S: *pero me quiero es encerrar   con mi tía   allá,*
      but   me I.want   is   shut.away with my aunt   there
      'but I *want (is) to shut myself away with my aunt there,*'

(41) P: *termina*   uno *es   aprendiendo fisioterapia,   administración,*
      ends   one is   learning   physiotherapy   administration
      'You *end up (is) learning physiotherapy, administration,*'

5. Conclusion

This paper has discussed various of the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of the emphatic *es* construction of Colombian Spanish. It has been shown that the form *es*, *fue* or *era* which occurs in these sentences is a particle, despite its formal identity with a third-person singular finite form of the copula *ser* 'to be'. While there are apparent similarities between the emphatic *es* construction and the pseudo-cleft, they are quite distinct, both syntactically and in terms of their distribution.

The emphatic *es* construction has two uses. In marking contrastive focus, the emphatic *es* occurs *before* the contrastive element, and as close to it as possible — either directly before it, or separated from it by a preposition or subordinator. Emphatic *es* is also used to show an entire predicate as being new information, and in this case it occurs in the first possible position *within* the predicate, either before a non-finite verb if there is one, or before the first argument within the predicate if there is no non-finite verb.

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