The case of Italian *seguente*: an European instance of current change from verb to demonstrative?

My proposal aims at discussing a potential instance of grammaticalization in current Italian, i.e. the change of the adjective *seguente* 'following' from an endophoric meaning to the function of proximal demonstrative.

There is no agreement in the literature regarding the development of demonstratives from lexical sources. Contra Diessel (2006), Heine et al. (2020) recently showed that demonstratives may origin at least from locative adverbs and from verbs, quoting many examples from studies on non-European languages. My analysis attempts to show that something very similar is occurring in current Italian, namely the potential origin of a new demonstrative from a verbal source.

Seguente is an adjective originating through transcategorization from the present participle of the verb *seguire* 'follow'. It means "that comes immediately after in time, in space, in an ordering". Given this lexical meaning, in its standard usage it has a mandatory cataphoric value, both as adjective and when it is nominalized, in the absence of a head noun. However, in my corpus – primarily consisting of a variety of Italian written by students (exam texts, chapters of theses, term papers, and e-mails), but also of some institutional communication texts – *seguente* also occurs either pointing to a previous referent (e.g. -Question: *Identifica il sintagma nominale nella frase seguente* ('Identify the noun phrase in the following sentence') -Answer (after the sentence): *Nella seguente frase…* ('In the following sentence…')) or without any endophoric values (e.g. *Nel seguente capitolo* ('In the following chapter'), with reference to the chapter in which the PP occurs, not only at its very beginning).

Therefore, my hypothesis is that an innovation is taking place, and that it is in the direction of grammaticalization as a spatial deictic, specifically as proximal demonstrative, due to the presence of the feature [+ (immediately) PROXIMAL] in *seguente*.

Considering that in standard Italian the proximal demonstrative is *questo* 'this', my first reason is that in my data the equivalence [ART + *seguent-* (+ N)] ~ *quest-* (+ N) works everywhere. Moreover, the phenomenon fits diachronically into a process of desemantization of *seguente* that has already begun in its transcategorization from present participle to adjective (loss of causative value and intransitivization). Eventually, in my data there are bridge contexts, *seguente* appears frozen in prenominal position, there is extension of contexts (from immediately proximal to proximal deixis), and obligatory co-occurrence with the article, hence forming a phonological word.

A tentative explanation for the phenomenon is a restructuring of the demonstrative system, not unrelated to the weakening of the definite article.

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