

Diachronic change and cyclicity in psych predicates: The case of Spanish complex verbs

Elisabeth Gibert-Sotelo & Isabel Pujol Payet
(Universitat de Girona)

Object of study. We aim at testing whether the changes undergone by a group of Spanish morphologically complex psych verbs in their argument (and event) structure can be argued to conform a cycle. We concentrate on a particular group of complex verbs that have developed psych readings: the ones that contain the verbalizing suffix *-izar*, such as *martirizar* ‘to torment’, *horrificar* ‘to horrify’, or *encolerizar* ‘to irritate, to annoy’, the psych uses of which typically involve an object experiencer and therefore belong to class 2 according to Belletti & Rizzi’s (1988) typology.

Background. Van Gelderen (2018: 143) has identified three fundamental changes in the argument structure of English psych verbs that define a cycle: a) the reanalysis of agent subjects as object experiencers (e.g., *stun* ‘to deprive of consciousness by a blow’ > ‘to astonish’), b) the reanalysis of object experiencers as subject experiencers (e.g., *fear* ‘to frighten’ > ‘to fear’), and c) the reanalysis of subject experiencers as agentive subjects (e.g., *like* > *be liking*). In Spanish, Batllori et al. (2019) have also pointed out that the diachronic changes suffered by some psych verbs with dative experiencers (which belong to Belletti & Rizzi’s 1988 class 3) partially fit this cyclical change.

Methodology. Our corpus of study contains the 13 Spanish verbs suffixed with *-izar* that have a psych reading:

(1) *atemorizar* ‘to frighten’, *aterrorizar* ‘to terrify’, *desmoralizar* ‘to demoralize’, *encolerizar* ‘to anger, to annoy’, *enfervorizar* ‘to fire up, to inspire fervor in’, *horrificar* ‘to horrify’, *intranquilizar* ‘to worry’, *martirizar* ‘to torment’, *melancolizar* ‘to affect with melancholy’, *ruborizar* ‘to make blush’, *simpatizar* ‘to get on, to like’, *tranquilizar* ‘to calm down’, and *traumatizar* ‘to traumatize’.

We have studied the evolution of these predicates by examining their occurrences in the CDH (*Corpus del Diccionario histórico de la lengua española*) from their first attestations to the current stage of the language, paying attention to the syntactic constructions in which they appear in a personal form (given that non-personal forms usually do not display the whole argument structure of the verb). It should be noted that CDH includes texts in both European Spanish and American Spanish.

First results. The survey of psych *-izar* verbs in the CDH reveals that many of them have developed the three argument structure configurations used by van Gelderen to draw the cyclical changes of English psych verbs. Hence, for example, the verb *atemorizar* ‘to frighten’ is first attested in a personal form as an object experiencer verb (2a), extending later its use to agentive configurations (2b) and, finally, to intransitive (unaccusative) pronominal structures featuring a(n internal argument) subject that corresponds to the experiencer (2c):

- (2) a. Muchas mas cosas [...] nos espantan e nos *atemorizan*. [CDH: 1453]
‘Many more things scare and frighten us.’
b. Un indio llamado Ciguayo que *atemorizó* la isla con las muertes de españoles. [CDH: 1527]
‘An Indian called Ciguayo who terrorized the island with the deaths of Spaniards.’
c. D’esto *se atemorizaron* los otros. [CDH: 1542]
‘The others were frightened of this.’

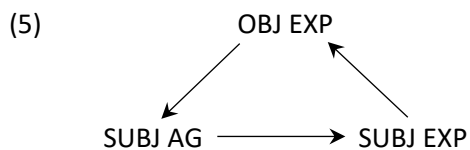
Other verbs, like *encolerizar* ‘to annoy’, have evolved from pronominal structures with a subject experiencer (3a) to transitive structures with an object experiencer (3b), developing later transitive uses with an agentive subject (3c):

- (3) a. Mire que [él] no se *encolerice* mucho. [CDH: 1570]
 ‘Make sure he doesn’t get too angry.’
 b. Me *encolerizó* tu resistencia. [CDH: 1850]
 ‘I was angered by your resistance.’
 c. Bajaban corriendo y dándose manotazos en las espaldas y *encolerizando* a un perro pinto una docena de chiquillos descalzos. [CDH: 1958]
 ‘A dozen barefoot kids were running downstairs, slapping each other on the back and angering a pinto dog.’

Finally, a verb like *martirizar* ‘to torment’, first attested in agentive configurations (4a), developed an object experiencer psych use (4c). Note, though, that before being documented with object experiencers, it is used in reflexive structures with a subject experiencer that is coreferential with the object (4b):

- (4) a. Atharic, rey de los godos, se esforço de perseguir los catholicos et *martirizo* muchos. [CDH: 1377]
 ‘Atharic, king of the Goths, went to great lengths to persecute the Catholics and martyred many of them.’
 b. Señora, mire que [yo] me *martirizo* con penas. [CDH: 1580]
 ‘Madam, I am martyring myself with pains.’ / ‘Madam, I am tormented by sorrows.’
 c. Mil males me *martirizan*. [CDH: 1585]
 ‘A thousand woes torment me.’

The evolution of these verbs, therefore, seems to define a cycle parallel to the one proposed by van Gelderen (2018) but which, crucially, follows the opposite direction: object experiencer > agent subject > subject experiencer.



References

- Batllori, M., E. Gibert-Sotelo & I. Pujol (2019). Changes in the argument and event structure of psych verbs in the history of Spanish. In M. Bouzouita, A. Breitbarth, L. Danckaert, & E. Witzgenhausen (eds.), *Cycles in Language Change*, 249-270. Oxford: OUP.
- Belletti, A. & L. Rizzi (1988). Psych-Verbs and Theta-Theory. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 6: 291-352.
- [CDH] = Real Academia Española. *Corpus del Diccionario histórico de la lengua española*. Available at <<https://www.rae.es/banco-de-datos/cdh>>.
- Gelderen, E. van (2018). *The Diachrony of Verb Meaning: Aspect and Argument Structure*. New York/London: Routledge.