

# Changing frequencies in a constructional landscape

## The case of two epistemic constructions in Spanish

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Many studies on Spanish verbal periphrases either discuss the general features of the syntactic category or analyse the semantic and functional differences between specific members of that category. The present paper focusses on one particular periphrasis, *parecer* “to seem” + infinitive but, at the same time, takes into account a similar, impersonal construction with *parecer*. Adopting a constructionist, usage-based approach, data are drawn from a large diachronic corpus, which makes it possible to describe the interplay between the two competing constructions and identify different semantic and syntactic contexts that favoured the increase of the periphrasis in the 19th century at the cost of the impersonal construction. More generally, the paper addresses the relevance of studying individual constructions in the context of other semantically and/or formally related constructions, since a change in one particular area of the constructional landscape can have repercussions on other areas as well.

**Keywords:** periphrasis, impersonal construction, Spanish, construction grammar, frequency, productivity, distinctive collexeme analysis, semantic category

### 1. Introduction

In recent years construction grammar has proved to be a promising framework for historical syntax. The ways in which constructions arise, increase in frequency or fall into disuse, the ways in which they are subjected to changes in form and/or meaning and the ways in which they interact with each other are all interesting and pressing issues that have been approached within this strand of research.

One basic tenet of construction grammar is that constructions are learned pairings of form and meaning or of form and function (Goldberg 2012: 15–17; see

also Barðdal & Gildea 2015: 10–11). In many constructions there is no linear link between form and meaning; that is, the overall meaning is not just the sum of the meanings of the integrating parts but conveys a new sense that is sometimes only loosely related to the separate meanings of the parts.

Verbal periphrases in Romance languages constitute a typical category of semantically non-compositional constructions. Many were created in the early Romance period, since Latin only had a small number of these multiverbal constructions (see Bassols de Climent 1956:I, 339–346; Spaulding 1925–1928:230–234; Squartini 1998). These constructions eventually grammaticalised and developed unitary procedural meanings, particularly aspectual and modal, grounded in the original meanings of the now-auxiliary verbs.

Spanish is no exception to this pattern and, in fact, it shows an impressive amount of verbal periphrases, generally consisting of a combination of a finite verb form followed by a non-finite verb (infinitive, gerund or participle), often connected by a preposition. Because of the vast number of periphrases and the rich range of meanings they cover, numerous studies have been carried out on this topic, focussed either on the structure of this syntactic category in general or on a specific periphrasis or group of periphrases (see Fernández de Castro 1990; Fontanella de Weinberg 1970; Garachana Camarero 2017; García Fernández 2006; Gómez Torrego 1999; Olbertz 1998; RAE & ASALE 2010: 2105–2222; Roca Pons 1958; Yllera 1980).<sup>1</sup>

Here I focus on one specific verbal periphrasis, i.e., the sequence of *parecer* + infinitive “to seem to”. This periphrasis is particularly interesting, since, in addition to the sequence in (1), Spanish has an impersonal construction with similar meaning: *parece que* + finite verb “it seems that”, exemplified in (2).<sup>2</sup> Both structures are used in Modern Spanish and are found in Spanish texts from at least the 13th century onwards. Both constructions are epistemic in meaning, i.e., they express “an evaluation of the chances that a certain hypothetical state of affairs under consideration (or some aspect of it) will occur, is occurring or has occurred in a possible world” (Nuyts 2001:21).

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1. Also see the work of the research group *Gradia* (<http://gradiadiacronia.wixsite.com/gradia>).

2. In other languages, similar verbs are found, which very often also allow the double construction as in Spanish. On the English *seem*, see for example Aijmer (2009), who analyses instances of this verb in Swedish translations, and Kibbee (1995), who does the same for French; Usoniene (2003) makes a comparison between English and Lithuanian; Sanders & Spooren (1996), as well as Vliegen (2011), treat a number of epistemic modals in Dutch; Diewald (2001) discusses the development of the evidential *scheinen* in German.

- (1) En su medio natural cada animal *parece saber* perfectamente lo que es bueno y lo que es malo para él sin discusiones ni dudas.

(Fernando Savater, *Ética para Amador*, 20C)

“In its natural environment every animal *seems to know* perfectly what is good and what is bad for it without discussions or doubts.”

- (2) *Parece que* la única forma de salvar el barco y la tripulación es arrojar por la borda el cargamento, que además de importante es pesado.

(Fernando Savater, *Ética para Amador*, 20C)

“*It seems that* the only way to save the boat and the crew is to throw the cargo overboard, which in addition to being important is heavy.”

In §2, I begin my discussion of the two constructions with a brief overview of previous work, focussing on similarities and differences between the periphrasis and the impersonal construction. This leads me to formulate the main research questions. Section 3 examines the distribution of the two constructions and their productivity from a diachronic perspective, followed in §4 by a semantic analysis of the verbs involved in the two constructions as well as a syntactic analysis of the grammatical persons with which they appear. The paper closes in §5 with a general discussion of findings and conclusions.

## 2. The periphrasis vs. impersonal construction

In past years, a number of studies have been conducted on the periphrasis and the impersonal construction with *parecer*, all approaching the issue from distinct theoretical perspectives and focussing on different aspects (see Ausín & Depiante 2000; Bolinger 1991; Cornillie 2007, 2008, 2012; Fernández Leborans 1999: 2441–2454; Fernández Leborans & Díaz Bautista 1990; Porroche Ballesteros 1990: 128–144).

One of the questions at issue is the origin of the two constructions. While the Spanish verb *parecer* stems from the vulgar Latin verb \*PARĒSCĒRE, an inchoative form of the verb PARĒRE “to be visible”, “to be seen” (Corominas & Pascual 1985: 400), both constructions seem to be a syntactic calque of the Latin constructions with the passive VIDEOR “to be seen”, which could combine with an infinitive or, in its impersonal use, could appear with a subject clause and an evaluative adjective as subject complement (Pinkster 2015: 208, 213; Gómez Torrego 1999: 3341). However, Bolinger (1991: 34) argues that the periphrasis developed out of the impersonal construction and reports that infinitive complements in Old Spanish must have been rare, a claim challenged by Cornillie (2007: 76, 2012: 7), who maintains that the origin of *parecer* + infinitive probably lies in an extension of the copular construction of *parecer* + adjective. In this way, constructions like *parece difícil* “it

seems difficult” were extended and reinforced with the copular verb *ser* “to be”, rendering *parece ser difícil* “it seems to be difficult”.<sup>3</sup>

Several researchers have tried to pinpoint the semantic and functional differences between the two constructions and identify different pragmatic factors that are involved in the interpretation of the meaning of the periphrasis and impersonal construction. Fernández Leborans (1999: 2448), stating that the two are relatively equivalent, though not semantically identical (see also Fernández Leborans & Díaz Bautista 1990: 370), claims that the periphrasis allows paraphrasing with a complement clause: *Juan parece saber la noticia* “Juan seems to know the news” > *parece que Juan sabe la noticia* “it seems that Juan knows the news”. The author relates the differences between the two constructions to their information structure. In constructions like *Juan parece triste* “Juan seems sad” and *los niños parecen entender lo que dices* “the children seem to understand what you (singular, informal) say”, the grammatical subject constitutes the theme or topic of the utterance, whereas the rest of the proposition is conceived as the rheme or comment. On the other hand, in constructions with a complement clause (*parece que Juan está triste* “it seems that Juan is sad”; *parece que los niños entienden lo que dices* “it seems that the children understand what you (singular, informal) say”), it is this clause that constitutes the topic, while the focus is on the impersonal verb *parece*. However, according to Fernández Leborans (1999: 2453–2454), in some cases the whole impersonal construction can be considered rhematic, although the author leaves no explanation of what circumstances or factors induce this interpretation.

Based on an analysis of the attributive construction of *parecer* (*parece muy enfermo* “he seems/you (singular, formal) seem very ill”) and the sequence with a complement clause (*parece que está muy enfermo* “it seems that he is/you (singular, formal) are very ill”), Porroche Ballesteros (1990: 136–137) concludes that the former requires a non-factive reading, whereas the latter, beside the non-factive reading, can also have a close to factive interpretation.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the semantic difference

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3. Diewald (2001: 99–106) proposes the same kind of development for German, where a copulative construction with the verb *scheinen* “to seem” was originally reinforced with the infinitive *sein* “to be”. Afterwards, the construction also attracted other infinitives. However, compared to Spanish, in German the appearance of *sein* and the later extension of the construction to other infinitives took place at a relatively late date, i.e., from the 16th century onward. In Spanish, *parecer* appears with a range of different infinitives already in the 15th century.

4. I will not address the grammatical status of the infinitive here in detail. Scholars have proposed different interpretations of the syntactic structure of the periphrasis.

Fernández Leborans (1999: 2446–2448) offers three possible interpretations: (i) the infinitive is attributive; (ii) the infinitive is a direct object; (iii) the infinitive is part of a verbal periphrasis. In addition, in Fernández Leborans & Díaz Bautista (1990: 365ff.), a fourth interpretation is put forward, namely the categorisation of the infinitive and the subject as a nominal phrase that

between the two constructions is related to the degree of factivity of the utterance, although the author also asserts that these differences are sometimes hard to perceive.

Whereas the findings of previous researchers seem to be grounded in single examples without any context and apparently are not extracted from samples of real language, Cornillie (2007: 26ff., 2008, 2012) uses two digital language corpora to collect data for his analysis of the periphrasis and the impersonal construction, as well as three other related constructions with *parecer*. According to him (2007: 6–7) the periphrasis and the impersonal construction are both evidential in meaning, in the sense that they make reference to the knowledge on which the proposition is based and/or indicate the source of the information of the proposition.<sup>5</sup> Several linguistic tests allow the author to claim that a proposition with *parecer* + infinitive is based on inference from direct evidence or reasoning, while a proposition with *parece que*, apart from inference, also licenses a hearsay reading. He further maintains that the reliability of a statement made by means of the periphrasis is not high, unlike the impersonal construction, which renders a statement with rather high reliability (2007: 38ff.). Moreover, Cornillie (2007: 42ff.) points to a difference in the subjectivity of the two constructions, in the sense that the periphrasis entails a subjective statement, while in the case of the impersonal construction the statement can be intersubjective.

Apart from the difference in source of information, Cornillie (2007: 16, 2008: 59, 2012: 3) finds a striking skew in the distribution of the two constructions in Modern Spanish. Whereas both are more frequent in written language than in spoken language, it is in this last modality that the impersonal *parece que* appears rather frequently; by contrast, the periphrasis is very rare in spoken language.<sup>6, 7</sup>

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functions as the subject of *parecer*. For a detailed syntactic analysis of *parecer* + infinitive see Nieuwenhuijsen (2017).

5. I do not address the question of whether *parecer* is epistemic, evidential or both. Following Aijmer (2009), who studies the various uses of the English verb *seem*, and Nuyts (2001: 27), I consider epistemic modality and evidentiality to be different but closely related. Thus, *parecer* can encode more or less certainty depending on the type of evidence and the source of the information.

6. Cornillie (2007: 16, 2008: 59, 2012: 3) articulates his conclusions in a slightly different way, since he takes into account five different constructions with *parecer*, but this does not alter the observation that the periphrasis hardly shows up in spoken language.

7. Although the English verb *seem* appears to have a lot in common with the Spanish *parecer*, syntactically as well as semantically, according to Aijmer (2009: 74), *seem*, especially when followed by an infinitive, is typical of spoken language rather than of written language.

The claims concerning information structure and interpretation of the two constructions made by Fernández Leborans (1999) and Porroche Ballesteros (1990) are undoubtedly relevant and interesting, but they are rather seriously weakened by the fact that the authors also admit that the differences are sometimes hard to capture. Moreover, in the case of the impersonal construction there seem to be two possible interpretations of the information structure, which immediately raises the question of how interlocutors are able to determine the correct interpretation. On the other hand, Cornillie (2007, 2008, 2012) distinguishes between the source of information of utterances in which the two constructions are involved, but he finds that both have in common that the statement they express is based on inference. His data do establish a clear difference between the written and oral modality, since the periphrasis seems to be strongly restricted to written language.

Fernández Leborans (1999) and Porroche Ballesteros (1990) do not examine the constructions diachronically; their accounts are based on modern use. Cornillie (2007: 70–77, 2008: 60–67, 2012: 4–8), however, pays attention to the diachronic development of the periphrasis, albeit without presenting quantitative data in order to corroborate his observations. His diachronic account is mainly a check of Bolinger's (1991) claims concerning *parecer* + infinitive.

Despite several interesting comments on the periphrasis and impersonal construction, we are left with at least the two following pressing issues:

- i. Cornillie's data on Modern Spanish show that in written language the periphrasis is almost three times as frequent as the impersonal construction. Has this distributional pattern been stable throughout the history of Spanish, or does it present any change in terms of frequency of the two constructions?
- ii. If a diachronic change in frequencies is found, how can this be accounted for and what possible factors have been involved in this change?

The present study takes a constructionist approach and is guided by important tenets of construction grammar (Goldberg 2012). As already noted, Spanish verbal periphrases are clear examples of learned form-function pairings. In this sense, the periphrasis with *parecer* is related to other verbal periphrases in a network and also, at the same time, to the impersonal construction with *parece que*, with which it shares lexical as well as semantic features. Even so, since I adhere to the idea that language first and foremost serves to communicate, any formal difference between two linguistic elements necessarily entails a semantic or pragmatic distinction (Goldberg 2012: 16). Moreover, I take a usage-based approach, according to which grammar and usage cannot be separated but are inextricably bound up with each other (see also Barðdal & Gildea 2015: 31–33). As I argue, this makes it possible to shed light on more general issues as to how competition in diachronic

variation can be accounted for and how constructional changes have implications for the constructional network and for the language system as a whole.

### 3. Diachronic development of the periphrasis and the impersonal construction

In this section I present quantitative data on the use of the periphrasis and the impersonal construction in order to assess their frequency patterns and gain insights into possible changes in these patterns over the course of time.

#### 3.1 Text frequency

Since text frequency is a common way to measure constructional change (Hilpert 2012), I examine the frequency of occurrence of both constructions in a particular set of texts in order to try to answer the first research question. For that purpose, I compiled a corpus of examples extracted from the *Gradia* corpus, a collection of 490 texts of different genres, which covers roughly the period from the 13th century to the present.<sup>8</sup> In this corpus, I collected all instances of *parecer* + infinitive and *parece que* + finite verb. However, I excluded all cases in which the verb *parecer* appears with an indirect object in the capacity of experiencer or conceptualiser, since there *parecer* arguably does not function as a modal verb denoting mere perception but is a full lexical verb that expresses an opinion (Ausín & Depiante 2000; Fernández Leborans 1999: 2443–2446; RAE 2005, *s.v. parecer*; RAE & ASALE 2010: 2827ff.). For that reason, in cases like (3) and (4) *parecer* may behave differently from the instances of *parecer* in Examples (1) and (2).

- (3) Yo no lo dudaba: *me parecía ver* en Román un fondo inagotable de posibilidades.  
(Carmen Laforet, *Nada*, 20C)

“I did not doubt it: *I seemed to see* [lit. *it seemed to me to see*] in Román an inexhaustible source of possibilities.”

- (4) Yo estaba en camisón, descalza, todavía *me parece que siento* aquella angustia.  
(Carmen Laforet, *Nada*, 20C)

“I was in my nightdress and barefoot, still *it seems to me that I feel* that anguish.”

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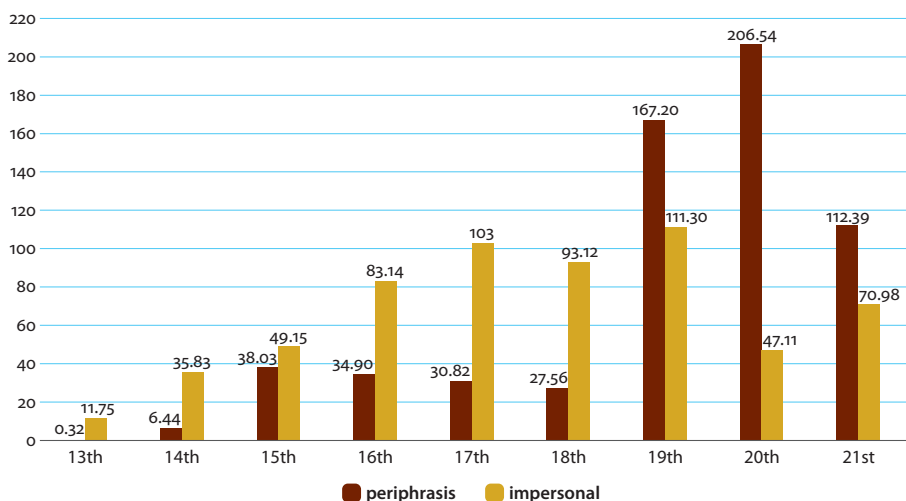
8. The *Gradia* corpus contains a set of 26 transcriptions of oral communication. These documents were excluded from the present analysis, since Cornillie (2007: 16, 2008: 59, 2012: 3) found a clear-cut difference between written and spoken language in Modern Spanish.

Thus, in compliance with this selection criterion, the corpus totals 2,229 cases, of which 996 correspond to the periphrasis and 1,233 to the impersonal construction.

Since the *Gradia* corpus differs in the number of texts per century and in the number of words per individual text, the figures given in Table 1 correspond to frequencies per million words per century. In addition, the results of Table 1 are presented graphically (Figure 1).

**Table 1.** Text frequency of the periphrasis and impersonal construction in the *Gradia* corpus; number of occurrences per century and million words

| century | periphrasis            | impersonal             |
|---------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 13th    | 0.32 (1/3,150,007)     | 11.75 (37/3,150,007)   |
| 14th    | 6.44 (16/2,484,159)    | 35.83 (89/2,484,159)   |
| 15th    | 38.03 (82/2,156,450)   | 49.15 (106/2,156,450)  |
| 16th    | 34.90 (149/4,269,738)  | 83.14 (355/4,269,738)  |
| 17th    | 30.82 (73/2,368,888)   | 103.00 (244/2,368,888) |
| 18th    | 27.56 (29/1,052,363)   | 93.12 (98/1,052,363)   |
| 19th    | 167.20 (323/1,931,802) | 111.30 (215/1,931,802) |
| 20th    | 206.54 (285/1,379,888) | 47.11 (65/1,379,888)   |
| 21st    | 112.39 (38/338,101)    | 70.98 (24/338,101)     |



**Figure 1.** Text frequency of the periphrasis and impersonal construction in the *Gradia* corpus per century



Though the two constructions may be similar in meaning, as Fernández Leborans (1999) and Porroche Ballesteros (1990) assert, the respective text frequencies found in the *Gradia* corpus are far from similar. Until the 19th century the data show a clear difference in frequency in favour of the impersonal construction, a pattern that changes radically in the 19th century, when the periphrasis takes over as the most frequent construction.

Cornillie's (2007, 2008, 2012) conclusion that the periphrasis in written language is much more frequent than the impersonal construction was based on two (sub) corpora of Modern Spanish. My data from the 20th and 21st century convincingly corroborate his conclusion, in particular in the 20th century, where the frequency of the periphrasis is more than four times that of the impersonal construction.

Cornillie (2007: 16, 2008: 59, 2012: 3) also noticed that in oral language the impersonal construction had a much higher frequency than the periphrasis. An analysis of a subset of oral texts of the *Gradia* corpus (see fn. 8) in terms of text frequency renders 23.76 occurrences of the periphrasis per million words against 83.85 of the impersonal construction; that is, the impersonal construction is more than three times as frequent as the periphrasis. My data on oral language, therefore, unequivocally confirm Cornillie's findings.

### 3.2 Relative frequency

In addition to text frequencies, I also analysed the relative frequencies of the two constructions. As Hilpert (2012: 463) states: "A slight increase in the frequency of one construction may not appear significant if viewed in isolation, but if simultaneously a similar construction decreases in frequency, the two developments may add up to a phenomenon worthy of investigation".

Table 2 displays the relative frequencies in percentages per century for both constructions, while Figure 2 constitutes the graphical representation.

Figure 2 unveils a pattern in which until at least the 18th century the impersonal construction was always more frequent than the periphrasis. In the 19th century the latter starts to extend its use considerably, now surpassing its impersonal counterpart as far as frequency is concerned, a state of affairs that is maintained to this day.<sup>9</sup> The chi-square indicates that there are significant differences between the two

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9. Several recent studies have shown that the Spanish 19th century witnessed an important alteration in the general periphrastic constructional landscape, as the result of a considerable increase in use of a number of different periphrases (see Garachana Camarero 2017). Whether this increase is related to the birth of modern journalism, as was suggested by one of the anonymous reviewers, is an issue that remains to be explored in future work. In order to explain why the growth of constructions of uncontrolled state or event slowed down, Elvira (2011: 202) adduces

constructions. Crucially, the standardised residuals show that until the 19th century the impersonal construction displays only positive values, which at the same time are all bigger than 2, except for the 15th century. Therefore, I conclude that until the 19th century the impersonal construction is actually found with more cases than expected. However, this picture changes radically in favour of the periphrasis, to the point that from the 19th century onward this construction occurs with more cases than expected, as the positive standardised residuals certify (see fn. 10).

**Table 2.** Relative frequency of the periphrasis and impersonal construction in the *Gradia* corpus; percentage per century

| century      | periphrasis        | impersonal           |
|--------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 13th         | 2.6% (1)           | 97.4% (37)           |
| 14th         | 15.2% (16)         | 84.8% (89)           |
| 15th         | 43.6% (82)         | 56.4% (106)          |
| 16th         | 29.6% (149)        | 70.4% (355)          |
| 17th         | 23% (73)           | 77% (244)            |
| 18th         | 22.8% (29)         | 77.2% (98)           |
| 19th         | 60% (323)          | 40% (215)            |
| 20th         | 81.4% (285)        | 18.6% (65)           |
| 21st         | 61.3% (38)         | 38.7% (24)           |
| <b>total</b> | <b>44.7% (996)</b> | <b>55.3% (1,233)</b> |

chi-square 444.81 ( $df = 8$ ,  $N = 2,229$ ),  $p < 0.0001^{***10}$

the fact that the 19th century was the era in which the vocabulary of Spanish as the official standard language of Spain was established. Perhaps this fact also played a part in the extension of the Spanish verbal periphrases.

10. Standardised residuals of chi-square test for relative frequency (see Table 2).

| century | periphrasis | impersonal |
|---------|-------------|------------|
| 13th    | -3.9        | 3.5        |
| 14th    | -4.5        | 4.1        |
| 15th    | -0.2        | 0.2        |
| 16th    | -5.1        | 4.6        |
| 17th    | -5.8        | 5.2        |
| 18th    | -3.7        | 3.3        |
| 19th    | 5.3         | -4.8       |
| 20th    | 10.3        | -9.2       |
| 21st    | 2.0         | -1.8       |

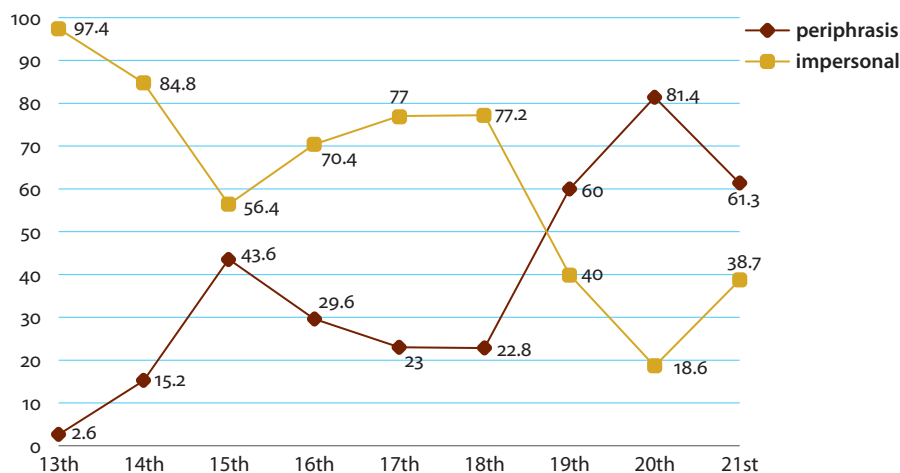


Figure 2. Diachronic development of the periphrasis and impersonal construction in the *Gradia* corpus

### 3.3 A change in productivity

According to Hilpert (2012: 464–465), frequency developments may not only have a bearing on token frequency, i.e., the number of occurrences in a given corpus, but can also take place at the level of type frequency. An increase in type frequency, then, points to a greater productivity of a particular construction (see Barðdal 2008; Barðdal & Gildea 2015: 34–37; Bybee 2007: 14; Bybee & Thompson 2007: 275–276). As is well known, the concept of productivity refers to the extensibility of constructions, particularly to the extent to which they can spread to new items or are able to attract new items.<sup>11</sup>

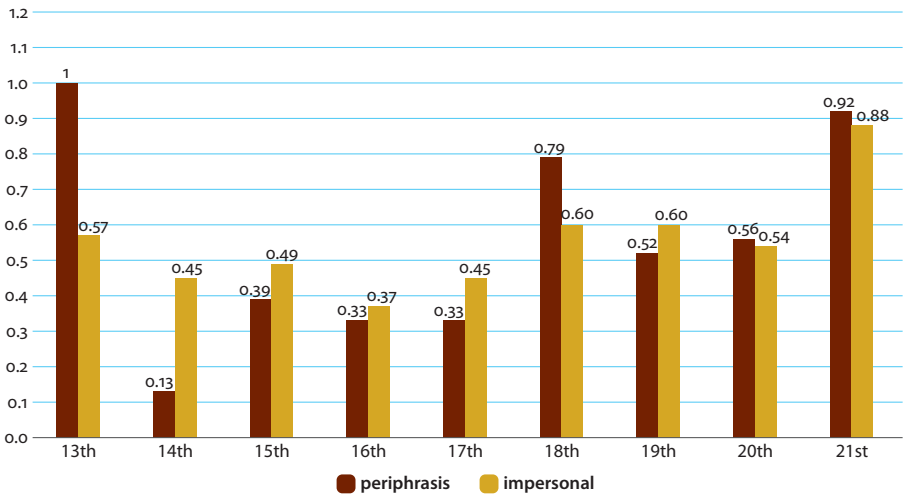
In order to measure type frequency, I computed the type/token ratio (TTR) for both constructions per century. In the case of the periphrasis, the number of different infinitives that co-occurred with *parecer* was taken into account, whereas in the case of the impersonal construction the number of different subordinated verbs following *que* was considered. Table 3, as well as Figure 3, displays the results of this analysis.

The TTR of the impersonal construction shows a relatively stable pattern between the 13th (0.57) and 20th (0.54) century; the surprisingly high TTR in the 21st century perhaps is due to the limited number of texts, genres and words on

11. For a discussion of the different interpretations of the notion of productivity, see Barðdal (2008: 10ff.).

**Table 3.** TTR of the periphrasis and impersonal construction in the *Gradia* corpus per century

| century | periphrasis    | impersonal     |
|---------|----------------|----------------|
| 13th    | 1 (1/1)        | 0.57 (21/37)   |
| 14th    | 0.13 (2/16)    | 0.45 (40/89)   |
| 15th    | 0.39 (32/82)   | 0.49 (52/106)  |
| 16th    | 0.33 (51/149)  | 0.37 (132/355) |
| 17th    | 0.33 (24/73)   | 0.45 (110/244) |
| 18th    | 0.79 (23/29)   | 0.60 (59/98)   |
| 19th    | 0.52 (167/323) | 0.60 (130/215) |
| 20th    | 0.56 (160/285) | 0.54 (35/65)   |
| 21st    | 0.92 (35/38)   | 0.88 (21/24)   |

**Figure 3.** TTR of the periphrasis and impersonal construction in the *Gradia* corpus per century

which the search was based. On the other hand, the TTR of the periphrasis clearly increases when we compare the period of the 13th to the 17th century with the period from the 18th century onward, thereby coming closer to the TTR of the impersonal construction. On the basis of the present data, therefore, I conclude that the periphrasis became more productive in the course of time, since, as noted before, an increase in TTR can be taken as a sign of greater productivity.

## 4. Expansion of the periphrasis

The remarkable increase in frequency of the periphrasis obviously calls for an explanation, since it seems unlikely the sequence randomly started to invade new contexts in an unstructured way (see Aitchison 2013: 100ff.). Addressing the second research question, I undertake a semantic analysis of the verbs that appear with the periphrasis versus the impersonal construction. Subsequently, I discuss correlations of grammatical persons with the constructions.

### 4.1 Semantic analysis of infinitives and complement verbs

To gain insight into the range of verbs through which the periphrasis increased its productivity, it is useful to conduct a distinctive collexeme analysis (Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004; Stefanowitsch 2013), to measure the preference of the periphrasis and the impersonal construction for certain (types of) verbs. For this reason, I classified every verb according to its semantic profile, based on *ADESSE*, a Spanish database created at the University of Vigo, which offers a syntactic-semantic characterisation of a large number of verbs and verbal constructions.

The *ADESSE* classification contains six major semantic categories: ‘existential process’, ‘material process’, ‘mental process’, ‘relational process’, ‘verbal process’ and ‘modulation’. Every category consists of several subcategories. For example, the category of ‘mental processes’ comprises the subcategories ‘feeling’, ‘perception’, ‘cognition’ and ‘choice’. In some cases, these subcategories are subdivided into even smaller classes. Thus, the subcategory ‘cognition’ includes ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief’.

Because of the fine-grained classification of *ADESSE* many subcategories identified in my corpus contain relatively few examples, which would seriously affect the reliability of the analysis. For that reason, I decided to collapse the subcategories headed under the same general semantic umbrella, so that for the present analysis only the previously mentioned six major categories were applied. Furthermore, verbs that belonged to two categories because they semantically combined two processes were excluded from the calculations. Of these 67 excluded verb forms, 41 involved the periphrasis, and 26 the impersonal construction. This was the case, for example, with *referir*, which according to *ADESSE* integrates the semantic subcategories of ‘relation’ and ‘communication’ and therefore is assigned to the overall categories of ‘relational process’ and ‘mental process’.

The calculation of the association strength, that is, the statistical strength of the relationship between one of the two constructions and a group of semantically related verbs, was conducted by way of a two-by-two contingency table and was repeated for each of the *ADESSE* categories. Next, the contingency tables were

analysed with a Fisher Exact test in order to determine whether the particular group of verbs occurred significantly more frequently with one of the two constructions or whether it did not deviate significantly from its expected chance distribution (Stefanowitsch 2013: 296).

For the present analysis, data were taken from the last five centuries. For the 18th and 21st centuries, no significant association of either of the constructions with any of the semantic categories was found, possibly due to the relatively low absolute numbers of examples with the periphrasis. For this reason they were not included in Table 4, which lists the results with the six semantic categories for the remaining three centuries. For each category the *p*-value, based on the Fisher Exact test, is provided. If it points to a significant association, the value is collocated below the corresponding construction. If no significant association was found, this is indicated in the far right column.

**Table 4.** Distinctive collexeme analysis of six semantic categories in the periphrasis and the impersonal construction in the 17th, 19th and 20th century in the *Gradia* corpus

| century | process             | association with<br>periphrasis ( <i>N</i> = 73)  | association with<br>impersonal ( <i>N</i> = 244) | no<br>association    |
|---------|---------------------|---|--|----------------------|
| 17th    | existential (6:19)  |   |  | <i>p</i> = 1.0 ns    |
|         | material (9:56)     |   | <i>p</i> = 0.0053***                             |                      |
|         | mental (5:29)       |   |  | <i>p</i> = 0.5232 ns |
|         | modulation (1:32)   |   | <i>p</i> = 0.0019***                             |                      |
|         | relational (50:89)  | <i>p</i> = 0.0001***                              |  |                      |
|         | verbal (0:11)       |   |  | <i>p</i> = 0.0745 ns |
|         |                     | association with<br>periphrasis ( <i>N</i> = 323) | association with<br>impersonal ( <i>N</i> = 215) | no<br>association    |
| 19th    | existential (14:15) |   |  | <i>p</i> = 0.2417 ns |
|         | material (99:95)    |   | <i>p</i> = 0.0018***                             |                      |
|         | mental (56:38)      |   |  | <i>p</i> = 1.0 ns    |
|         | modulation (5:8)    |   |  | <i>p</i> = 0.1505 ns |
|         | relational (97:40)  | <i>p</i> = 0.0033***                              |  |                      |
|         | verbal (38:11)      | <i>p</i> = 0.009***                               |  |                      |
|         |                     | association with<br>periphrasis ( <i>N</i> = 285) | association with<br>impersonal ( <i>N</i> = 65)  | no<br>association    |
| 20th    | existential (18:8)  |   |  | <i>p</i> = 0.1143 ns |
|         | material (92:12)    | <i>p</i> = 0.0346**                               |  |                      |
|         | mental (43:3)       | <i>p</i> = 0.0243**                               |  |                      |
|         | modulation (10:7)   |   | <i>p</i> = 0.0228**                              |                      |
|         | relational (83:27)  |   |  | <i>p</i> = 0.0557 ns |
|         | verbal (18:3)       |   |  | <i>p</i> = 0.7765 ns |

Table 5 summarises the various associations as given in Table 4.

**Table 5.** Summary of associations between six semantic categories and the periphrasis and impersonal construction in the *Gracia* corpus

|      | existential | material    | mental      | modulation | relational  | verbal      |
|------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| 17th | ns          | impersonal  | ns          | impersonal | periphrasis | ns          |
| 19th | ns          | impersonal  | ns          | ns         | periphrasis | periphrasis |
| 20th | ns          | periphrasis | periphrasis | impersonal | ns          | ns          |

Tables 4 and 5 reveal the existence of a very significant association in the 17th century between the periphrasis with verbs that denote relational processes. Relational processes include verbs like *comprar* “to buy”, *convenir* “to suit”, *dar* “to give”, *deber* “must”, *estar* “to be”, *recibir* “to receive”, *ser* “to be” and *tener* “to possess”. This century also displays a very significant association between impersonal constructions and verbs that denote material processes and modulation. The first of these two processes contains verbs like *acompañar* “to accompany”, *andar* “to walk”, *comer* “to eat”, *hacer* “to make”, *ir* “to go”, *poner* “to put”, *proceder* “to proceed”, *tomar* “to take”; the second contains verbs like *ayudar* “to help”, *dejar* “to leave”, *permitir* “to permit” and *poder* “can”.

As far as the 19th century is concerned, apart from most of the associations already observed in the 17th century, we now also find a very significant association between the periphrasis and verbal processes, which include verbs like *anunciar* “to announce”, *confirmar* “to confirm”, *decir* “to say”, *hablar* “to speak” and *pedir* “to ask for”. However, the former significant association between impersonal constructions and verbs indicating modulation has ceased to be significant, although in the 20th century it gains significance again. Interestingly, the 20th century exhibits a significant association between the periphrasis and material processes, formerly the domain of the impersonal construction, as well as mental processes, which includes verbs like *admirar* “to admire”, *escuchar* “to listen”, *importar* “to be important”, *indicar* “to indicate”, *sentir* “to feel” and *ver* “to see”. By contrast, the semantic groups of relational and verbal processes, which in the 19th century were associated with the periphrasis, do not display a significant association in the 20th century.

The semantic categories with which the periphrasis is associated in the 17th and 19th century, ‘relational processes’ and ‘verbal processes’, have in common that the verbs they contain do not describe physical or tangible processes or actions. The category of ‘relational processes’ mainly consists of verbs of attribution and possession. ‘Verbal processes’ are described by verbs of communication and assessment. Moreover, ‘mental processes’, which become significantly associated with the periphrasis in the 20th century, evidently also denote non-physical processes or actions. Now, the association between this type of processes and actions and the

periphrasis is compatible with the idea that utterances in which this construction occurs do not receive a high score on the reliability scale (Cornillie 2007: 38ff.) and exhibit a relatively low degree of factivity (Porroche Ballesteros 1990: 136–137). Thus, the periphrasis appears to be particularly appropriate for expressing processes and actions that are not directly observable in the external real world but are confined to the internal, mental sphere.

On the other hand, the category of ‘material process’ contains verbs that designate all kinds of physical processes. Whereas in the 17th and 19th centuries this was a semantic category typically associated with the impersonal construction, in the 20th century it seems to have been encroached upon by the periphrasis. This is particularly surprising, since verbs describing physical processes and actions seem to fit in better with the impersonal construction, in so far as this construction expresses close to factive and highly reliable statements, which speakers may be more inclined to make about actions they can assess and verify in the external world.

To sum up, the increase in frequency of the periphrasis from the 19th century onwards seems to have mainly taken place through the semantic category of ‘material process’, which formerly was the domain of the impersonal construction.<sup>12</sup> In particular, the data suggest that within this category it is the subcategory of ‘displacement’, with verbs like, *conducir* “to conduct”, *entrar* “to enter”, *llegar* “to arrive”, *venir* “to come” and *volver* “to return”, where the periphrasis particularly creeps in, since, in the 20th century, of the 18 material processes distinguished, only the association with displacement is significant ( $p = 0.0121$ ).

#### 4.2 Grammatical person and increase of frequency

Considering the structure of the periphrasis and the impersonal construction, it may be argued that their formal similarity is greatest when the periphrasis is used with 3rd person singular (*parece* + infinitive “he/she/it seems to/you (singular, formal) seem to” vs. *parece que* + finite verb “it seems that”). This similarity is favoured by the fact that Spanish does not require an overt subject pronoun, while in the English translation of the two constructions the respective subjects need to be made explicit, as is illustrated in Examples (5) and (6).

- (5) *Parecía estar en acecho, movida de una curiosidad semejante a la de Santa Cruz,*  
 ... (Benito Pérez Galdós, *Fortunata y Jacinta*, 19C)  
 “She seemed to lie in wait, moved by a curiosity similar to that of Santa Cruz, ...”

12. Note that in ADESSE the category of ‘material process’ contains the largest number of verbs: 2304. The other categories contain 605 (‘mental process’), 476 (‘relational process’), 396 (‘verbal process’) and 172 (‘modulation’) verbs.



- (6) *Parecía que estaba* de muy mal humor.  
 (Benito Pérez Galdós, *Fortunata y Jacinta*, 19C)  
 “It seemed that she was in a very bad mood.”

From a structural point of view, in (5) the impersonal construction could easily be replaced with the periphrasis, rendering

- (5a) *Parecía que estaba* en acecho, movida de una curiosidad semejante a la de Santa Cruz, ...  
 “It seemed that she lay in wait, moved by a curiosity similar to that of Santa Cruz, ...”

In (6) the opposite substitution yields the following:

- (6a) *Parecía estar* de muy mal humor.  
 “She seemed to be in a very bad mood.”

Therefore, if we expect the periphrasis in the course of the 19th century to have taken over contexts originally favoured by the impersonal construction, it is likely that the change first took place in the 3rd person singular. Table 6 lists the relative frequency of both constructions in the 3rd person singular. In order to assess whether the 3rd person singular is the first grammatical context in which the periphrasis extends its use, I also include data for the 3rd person plural.<sup>13</sup>

From the earliest attestations of the two constructions onwards the impersonal construction is always more frequent than the periphrasis in both grammatical persons, except for a slight dominance of the latter with 3rd person plural in the 15th century. Table 2 already revealed that the dominance of the impersonal construction started to erode towards the 19th century and, in line with what I expected, the 19th-century change is only clearly observed in the 3rd person singular. As far as the 3rd person plural is concerned, the 19th century does not witness any prevalence for any of the two constructions at all, and it is only in the 20th century that the periphrasis establishes itself as the most frequent construction in the 3rd personal plural (82.7%). This pattern continues throughout the 20th and 21st century for both grammatical persons. Whereas the outcome of the chi-square test suggests there are significant differences between the two constructions as far as grammatical person is concerned, the standardised residuals point to the 19th century as the crucial moment of change, since for 3rd person singular the periphrasis

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13. The corpus does not allow me to compare 3rd person with 1st and 2nd person, since the absolute numbers for 1st and 2nd person with the periphrasis are too low; the corpus does not contain any cases of 1st person singular or 2nd person plural, and it only registers 6 instances of 1st person plural and 2 of 2nd person singular.

only exhibits positive values from this century onward. Overall, the same trend is observed for 3rd person plural, with the exception of the 15th century (see fn. 15).

**Table 6.** Relative frequency of the periphrasis and impersonal construction with 3rd person singular and plural in the *Gratia* corpus; percentage per century<sup>14</sup>

| century | 3rd p.s.    |             | 3rd p.PL.   |            |
|---------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
|         | periphrasis | impersonal  | periphrasis | impersonal |
| 13th    | 3.4% (1)    | 96.6% (28)  | 0% (0)      | 100% (7)   |
| 14th    | 15.7% (11)  | 84.3% (59)  | 17.2% (5)   | 82.8% (24) |
| 15th    | 43.2% (54)  | 56.8% (71)  | 54.2% (26)  | 45.8% (22) |
| 16th    | 33.7% (124) | 66.3% (244) | 19.8% (22)  | 80.2% (89) |
| 17th    | 28.5% (67)  | 71.5% (168) | 7.5% (4)    | 92.5% (49) |
| 18th    | 30.8% (28)  | 69.2% (63)  | 3.1% (1)    | 96.9% (31) |
| 19th    | 66.6% (261) | 33.4% (131) | 50% (58)    | 50% (58)   |
| 20th    | 82.8% (221) | 17.2% (46)  | 82.7% (62)  | 17.3% (13) |
| 21st    | 67.4% (29)  | 32.6% (14)  | 72.7% (8)   | 27.3% (3)  |

chi-square 470.191 ( $df = 24$ ,  $N = 2,102$ ),  $p < 0.0001^{***15}$

As for the reason why the extension of the periphrasis also came to take place in the 3rd person plural, I argue that analogy could have been responsible. If analogy is understood as the process “whereby new paradigms come into being through formal resemblance to already established paradigms” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 22),

14. Obviously, whereas in the periphrasis the grammatical person refers to the finite form of *parecer* (*parece/parecen*), in the case of the impersonal construction the grammatical person refers to the finite verb that follows *que* (*parece que va/van* “it seems that he/she/it goes/you (singular, formal) go/it seems that they/you (plural, formal) go”).

15. Standardised residuals of chi-square test for relative frequency with 3rd person singular and plural (see Table 6).

| century | 3rd p.s.    |            | 3rd p.PL.   |            |
|---------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
|         | periphrasis | impersonal | periphrasis | impersonal |
| 13th    | -3.4        | 3.7        | -1.8        | 0.9        |
| 14th    | -4.3        | 3.2        | -1.3        | 2.7        |
| 15th    | -1.4        | 0.4        | 2.7         | -0.5       |
| 16th    | -4.3        | 4.1        | -3.1        | 2.6        |
| 17th    | -4.0        | 5.2        | -4.3        | 1.3        |
| 18th    | -2.7        | 2.1        | -3.0        | 3.3        |
| 19th    | 4.9         | -4.8       | 1.9         | -1.6       |
| 20th    | 8.0         | -7.6       | 5.8         | -5.1       |
| 21st    | 1.9         | -1.6       | 1.5         | -1.7       |

it seems logical that the 3rd person plural was attracted to a pattern that by the 19th century had already established itself rather firmly in the 3rd person singular, since the 3rd person plural pattern only differs from the singular in its ending, i.e., the plural marking by the morphological *-n* (*parece ir/parecen ir* “he/she/it seems/you (singular, formal) seem to go / they/you (plural, formal) seem to go”).

While it seems that the impersonal construction never showed any restriction as far as grammatical person is concerned, the use of the periphrasis, on the contrary, is confined to 3rd person contexts until the 19th century. The corpus contains 123 cases of the impersonal construction with a subordinate verb in 1st or 2nd person as opposed to 8 cases of the periphrasis with 1st or 2nd person. This raises the question of whether the pattern attraction has been restricted to the 3rd person or whether it is starting to jump over or already has jumped over to the 1st and 2nd person.

In view of the fact that the *Gradia* corpus does not yield sufficient cases of the 1st and 2nd person,<sup>16</sup> I compiled an additional corpus extracted from *CREA* and *CORPES XXI*, two digital corpora created by the *Real Academia de la Lengua Española* (RAE), which cover the last 25 years of the 20th century (1975–2000) and the first 15 years of the 21st century (2001–2015). For reasons of clarity, and given that neither of the corpora covers a whole century, I merged the data of the two. Moreover, in order to be able to assess properly the results for 1st and 2nd person I also added the relevant data for 3rd person. Because of the homogeneity of the data for singular and plural per grammatical person with no significant *p*-values for the chi-square test, I decided to collapse them, which resulted in the following Table 7. The results are also displayed graphically in Figure 4.

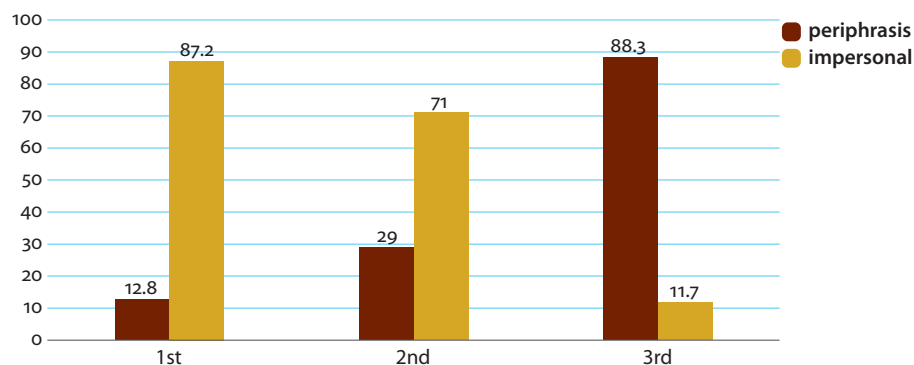
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16. I can only guess at the reason for this absence. In my view, there are three possible explanations: (i) it could be due to an idiosyncrasy of the *Gradia* corpus; (ii) it could be due to the fact that many diachronic historical corpora contain relatively few texts in which 1st and 2nd persons are involved, at least before the 20th century; or (iii) it could be due to the fact that the use of the periphrasis with these grammatical persons, especially with 1st person, creates, according to Bolinger (1991:38–40), a certain pragmatic or logical conflict, since the speaker expresses a state of affairs or action concerning himself while indicating the non-factivity and low reliability of his statement. There are no indications that the *Gradia* corpus differs from other historical corpora as far as its composition is concerned (see for its text selection <http://gradiadiacronia.wixsite.com/gradia/corpus-gradia>). It is certainly true that Spanish historical corpora do not include numerous texts in which 1st and/or 2nd persons play a part, as a quick search in the historical corpora of the RAE (*CORDE* and *CDH*) confirms, but it is equally true that, as far as the impersonal construction is concerned, they do contain instances of the 1st and 2nd person. Thus, their absence seems to be only characteristic for the periphrasis. The third reason probably partially holds, but it does not prevent the infinitive pattern from occurring with these grammatical persons, as will be seen.

**Table 7.** Relative frequency of the periphrasis and impersonal construction in *CREA* and *CORPES XXI*; percentage per grammatical person

| person | periphrasis    | impersonal    |
|--------|----------------|---------------|
| 1st    | 12.8% (123)    | 87.2% (837)   |
| 2nd    | 29% (144)      | 71% (352)     |
| 3rd    | 88.3% (58,885) | 11.7% (7,816) |

chi-square 6154.331 ( $df = 2$ ;  $N = 68,157$ ),  $p < 0.0001^{***17}$



**Figure 4.** Relative frequency of the periphrasis and impersonal construction in *CREA* and *CORPES XXI*; percentage per grammatical person

First, Figure 4 confirms the earlier claim that in contemporary Spanish the impersonal construction has actually lost ground in the 3rd person, since with this grammatical person the periphrasis manifests itself as the dominant construction. Secondly, and more important for this matter, the reverse pattern is observed in the 1st and 2nd person, where the impersonal construction is dominant, with percentages that equal or parallel those of the periphrasis with the 3rd person. While the observed differences for grammatical number were not significant for either of the grammatical persons, grammatical person itself does show statistically significant differences, as reflected by the outcome of the chi-square test. In addition, the standardised residuals are positive for the impersonal construction with 1st and 2nd

17. Standardised residuals of chi-square test for relative frequency and grammatical person (see Table 7).

| person | periphrasis | impersonal |
|--------|-------------|------------|
| 1st    | -24.6       | 63.1       |
| 2nd    | -13.8       | 35.4       |
| 3rd    | 4.1         | -10.6      |

person, thus indicating that 1st and 2nd person occur more with this construction than expected. By contrast, it is the 3rd person that happens to occur more than expected with the periphrasis (see fn. 17).

On the other hand, Figure 4 offers support for the hypothesis that in the 20th century the periphrasis has started to encroach precisely into 1st and 2nd person contexts, since a considerable number of cases are registered for both persons. Consider the following representative examples.

- (7) Sé que *parezco ir* a contrapelo de la moda, y mis vecinos, los Seymour, ya están criando ovejas, mas yo me llevo mejor con las vacas, ...  
 (CORPES XXI, Cristina Loza, *El revés de las lágrimas*, 21C)  
 “I know *I seem to go* against fashion, and my neighbours, the Seymours, are already raising sheep, but I get on better with cows, ...”
- (8) Bueno, padre, cuando tú entraste solo en el hotel tampoco *parecías tener* miedo a morir. (CREA, José Luis Olaizola, *La guerra del general Escobar*, 20C)  
 “Well, father, when you entered the hotel alone *you* (informal) *did not seem to have* a fear of dying either.”
- (9) ... podrían ayudar a entender, pienso, por qué a veces los españoles de este siglo *parecemos vivir* en otro, damos la impresión de movernos en la Modernidad de hoy con los esquemas de una que nunca triunfó.  
 (CREA, José Luis Pinillos, *ABC*, 20C)  
 “... they could help to understand, I think, why *we* Spaniards of this century sometimes *seem to live* in another, we give the impression of moving in today’s Modernity with the schemes of one that was never successful.”
- (10) – ¡No juzgo! – protesto. Sólo quiero saber. Aquí todos *parecéis compartir* cosas que desconozco. Siempre me siento excluido.  
 (CORPES XXI, Sara Mesa, *Cuatro por cuatro*, 21C)<sup>18</sup>  
 “– I do not judge! – I complain. I only want to know. Here *you* all *seem to share* things I do not know. I always feel excluded.”

Moreover, the 2nd person seems to be more favourable to the periphrasis than the 1st person, which suggests that the construction is not taking over the two contexts at the same rate but is first creeping into the grammatical person that formally is

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18. The absolute numbers for 2nd person plural are quite low (periphrasis 7 cases, impersonal construction 13 cases), which is probably due to the fact that this grammatical person is not used in Spanish America and that the two corpora contain a relatively high number of texts of Spanish American origin (70% Spanish American texts and 30% Spanish texts; see RAE 2013, 2015).

more similar to the 3rd person singular, i.e., the 2nd person, which in the singular only differs from the 3rd person in its ending *-s*.<sup>19</sup>

In short, the data point to a path of extension of the periphrasis through the 3rd person singular in the 19th century and the 3rd person plural in the 20th century. They also suggest that in contemporary Spanish the ongoing pattern attraction is affecting the 1st and 2nd person as well.

In the next section I summarise the findings and draw more general conclusions.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper I examined two similar, albeit not identical, constructions in Spanish in which the epistemic verb *parecer* is involved, namely the periphrasis *parecer* + infinitive and the impersonal construction *parece que* + finite verb.

The first research question addressed was concerned with the frequency patterns of both constructions across time, that is, with the diachronic dimension of the reported dominance of the periphrasis in Modern Spanish. Data extracted from the *Gradia* corpus showed that until the 19th century the impersonal construction was much more frequent than the periphrasis, in terms of text frequency as well as relative frequency, but from that century onward the latter started to expand its use. This development in frequency was preceded in the 18th century by a change in type frequency of the infinitives that coappeared with the periphrasis. In my view, this finding is highly interesting, as we would expect an increase in type frequency in a given corpus to go hand in hand with an increase in the number of occurrences. Since a high type frequency ensures a construction will be used frequently, an increase of token frequency seems to be the logical consequence of an increase in type frequency (see Bybee 2003: 605; Bybee & Thompson 2007: 275). However, the present research suggests that the increase in type frequency prepared the way for the increase of token frequency but that its effect became visible only a century later. This leads to the tentative conclusion that both phenomena need not

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19. Interestingly, there seems to be no difference between the two constructions as far as the internal ranking of the different grammatical persons in terms of frequency is concerned. In fact, this ranking is very similar for both constructions. The grammatical person with which the two constructions occur most is the 3rd person singular, followed by the 3rd person plural. They occur the least with the 1st person singular and 2nd person plural. The two constructions only differ in the relative ranking of the 2nd person singular and 1st person plural (with the periphrasis the 2nd person singular is more frequent than the 1st person plural; the impersonal construction exhibits the opposite ranking). So, I tentatively conclude that it is not the case that, while the periphrasis favours utterances in the 3rd person, the impersonal construction is specialising for the 1st and 2nd person.

occur simultaneously but that the first may trigger the second, producing a kind of delayed effect.

Given that type frequency constitutes a hallmark of the degree of productivity, I argued that the periphrasis actually experienced an increase in productivity which, however, was not mirrored by a decrease in productivity of the impersonal construction. The relatively stable state of productivity of the impersonal construction obviously requires further exploration which, however, falls outside the scope of this paper. At present, I do not have an explanation for this finding.

In order to answer the second research question, I examined what semantic contexts were susceptible to the change: in concrete, what (kind of) verbs were attracted by the periphrasis. The distinctive collexeme analysis, which was carried out on the basis of six major semantic categories, revealed that it was through the category of ‘material process’, especially with verbs of displacement, that the expansion of the periphrasis took place.

Moreover, the increase of the periphrasis began in the 19th century in contexts with *parecer* in the 3rd person singular, most likely because of its formal similarity with the impersonal construction. In addition to this, whereas utterances in the 1st person could be at odds with the non-factivity and low reliability of the periphrasis, this argument obviously does not apply to the 3rd person, which, by contrast, is pragmatically perfectly compatible with the meaning of the periphrasis.

Subsequently, the expansion also spread to the 3rd person plural, a process in which analogy arguably played a decisive role.

Whereas in former times the use of the periphrasis seemed to be restricted to 3rd person reference, the impersonal construction evidently occurred with all grammatical persons from the beginning. Nevertheless, data extracted from an additional corpus of contemporary Spanish suggest that nowadays the periphrasis has started to encroach into contexts in which a 1st or 2nd person is involved.

On the basis of the quantitative data presented, the question arises whether the two constructions are competitors (see Cornillie 2008: 59, 2012: 4). Bybee & Thompson (2007: 275) state that “[s]ome of the most difficult problems in syntax concern the competition among functionally similar constructions with varying degrees of productivity due to type frequency”. While fully agreeing with this statement, I suggest that until the 19th century both constructions were not actually competing with each other. The diachronic data reflect a stable constructional landscape in which each construction played its part without exerting pressure on the other one. As I hope to have demonstrated, this situation changed radically in the 19th century when the periphrasis started challenging the impersonal construction by extending its use to contexts in which the latter was formerly dominant, a competition that seems to have persisted to this day.

The present research exemplifies the way in which a constructionist approach contributes to mapping out and explaining frequency patterns observed at certain points in the history of a language. Thus, the assumption that constructions form a network provided the setting to study the periphrasis in connection with the impersonal construction, which yielded a plausible explanation for the increase in frequency of the periphrasis. The usage-based approach, in turn, implied a major emphasis on frequencies and authentic data (see Barðdal & Gildea 2015: 31–32). For this reason, I used data extracted from various digital Spanish language corpora. Further, it prompted “questions like how changes in frequency affect the emergence and development of constructions ... and how changes like these alter the constructional landscape within a grammatical system” (Barðdal & Gildea 2015: 34). The change in frequency of the periphrasis with *parecer*, on the one hand, contributed to the more general changes in the constructional landscape of Spanish verbal periphrases evidenced in the 19th century (Garachana Camarero 2017). On the other hand, the frequency change of the periphrasis also had an impact on the impersonal construction, thus altering part of the field of epistemic constructions to which they both belong.

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## Résumé

Beaucoup d'études ont été menées sur les périphrases verbales en espagnol, soit en discutant des traits généraux de la catégorie syntaxique, soit en analysant les différences sémantiques et fonctionnelles entre des membres spécifiques.

La présente contribution examine une périphrase spécifique, *parecer* ('sembler') + infinitif, mais, en même temps, tient compte d'une construction avec *parecer* semblable, à savoir sa construction impersonnelle.

Tout en adoptant une approche basée sur l'usage, les données ont été tirées d'un grand corpus diachronique, ce qui nous permet de décrire l'interaction entre les deux constructions en compétition et d'identifier les différents contextes sémantiques et syntaxiques qui favorisaient l'utilisation de la périphrase au XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle au détriment de la construction impersonnelle.

A un niveau plus général, notre contribution souligne l'importance d'étudier des constructions individuelles dans le contexte d'autres constructions apparentées d'un point de vue sémantique et/ou formel, parce qu'un changement dans un champ spécifique du paysage sémantique peut également avoir des répercussions dans d'autres champs de ce même paysage.

## Zusammenfassung

Eine Vielzahl an Studien zu spanischen Verbalperiphrasen analysiert allgemeine Merkmale dieser syntaktischen Kategorie oder semantische und funktionale Unterschiede zwischen mehreren Verbalperiphrasen. Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Verbalperiphrase *parecer* ('scheinen') + Infinitiv und vergleicht sie mit einer funktional ähnlichen, unpersönlichen Konstruktion mit *parecer*. Auf der Grundlage eines konstruktivistischen, gebrauchsbasierten Zugriffs erfolgt die Untersuchung an einem großen diachronen Korpus des Spanischen. Dabei beschreiben wir das Zusammenspiel der beiden konkurrierenden Konstruktionen und identifizieren verschiedene semantische und syntaktische Kontexte, welche die Zunahme von *parecer* + Infinitiv zu Lasten der unpersönlichen Konstruktion im 19. Jahrhundert begünstigten. Die Studie zeigt somit die Notwendigkeit auf, einzelne Konstruktionen im Kontext anderer, semantisch und/oder formal verwandter Konstruktionen zu analysieren, da ein Wandel in einem bestimmten Gebiet der Distribution von Konstruktionen wiederum zu einem Wandel in anderen Gebieten führen kann.

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