

Split intransitivity or split ergativity? Tendencies of western Peninsular Spanish

Victor Lara Bermejo

Universität Bern

Peninsular Spanish possesses two main causative constructions: an analytical one formed by the verb *hacer* ('to make') plus an infinitive (1), and a lexical one constituted by two different verbs, one of which is transitive and expresses cause and the other is intransitive and denotes effect (lexical pairs) (2 a – c).

- (1) a. Le hice ver la película ('I made him see the film')
b. El vaso (se) cae / La chica tira el vaso ('The glass falls' / 'The girl throws the glass')
c. Los libros se quedan en la mesa / La chica deja los libros en la mesa
('The books stay on the table' / 'The girl leaves the books on the table')

El coche entra en el garaje / La chica mete el coche en el garaje ('The car enters the garage' / 'The girl puts the car into the garage')

However, the western part of Spain is characterised by eliminating three transitive verbs by favouring the choice of the intransitive lexeme to express both cause and effect (3 a – c).

- (2) a. La chica ha caído el vaso (lit. 'The girl has fallen the glass')
b. La chica ha quedado los libros en la mesa (lit. 'The girl has stayed the books on the table')
c. La chica ha entrado el coche en el garaje (lit. 'The girl has entered the car into the garage')

This phenomenon is cross-linguistically known as labiality and it is mainly attested in Caucasian languages and also in English (Letuchiy 2009). Nevertheless, although labiality is rarely witnessed, it is usually associated with an ergative pattern.

In this presentation I will show that western Peninsular Spanish exhibits labiality, among other things, because it has a series of syntactic behaviours that puts it closer to split ergativity (Dixon 1994), unlike standard Spanish, which may only develop split intransitivity (Elvira 2001). The phenomenon recorded in western Peninsular Spain likewise shows that labiality emerges only in unaccusative verbs that denote motion or change of state. I will compare this phenomenon to similar processes undergone by French (Heidinger 2014), English (McMillion 2006) and even Russian (Letuchiy 2015), whose labile verbs have arisen in quite similar contexts as the ones attested in Spanish, and I will argue that the prompt of them is extremely linked to semantic nuances such as willingness, intention, control or animacy.

References

- Dixon, R.M.W. 1994. *Ergativity*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Elvira, J. 2001. Intransitividad escindida en español: el uso auxiliar de ser en español medieval. *Estudios de lingüística*. Alicante: U. Alicante, 201 – 245.
- Heidinger, S. 2014. The persistence of labile verbs in the French causative-anticausative alternation. *Linguistics* 52 (4): 1003 – 1024.
- Letuchiy, A. 2009. Towards a typology of labile verbs: labiality versus derivation. *New challenges in typology: transcending the borders and refining the distinctions*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 247 – 268.
- Letuchiy, A. 2015. Historical development of labile verbs in modern Russian. *Linguistics* 53 (3): 611 – 647.
- McMillion, A. 2006. *Labile verbs in English: their meaning, behaviour and structure*. Stockholm: U. Stockholm.