



Object-Experiencer verbs in Catalan and other Romance languages

Activity contrast and morphosyntactic Marking

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1 Introduction

- Introduction
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 - Cross-linguistic correlations in annotation parameters
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 - Learnings and tasks for future studies
- Conclusion

1.1 Object-experiencers in Romance

Examples as a start

- (1) a. *Això ha entristit els grassos.* (Catalan)
This has saddened the fatties.
'This has saddened the fatties.'
- b. *A dor no peito preocupou a vovó.* (Brazilian Portuguese)
the pain in:the chest worried the grandma
'The pain in her chest worried grandma.'
- c. *Total mă deprimă.* (Romanian)
everything.the me depresses
'Everything depresses me.'

1.1 Object-experiencers in Romance and beyond

Object-experiencer verbs & Psych properties

- Object-experiencer verbs (OE verbs) as a central problem for modelling the syntax-semantics interface (since Belletti & Rizzi 1988)
 - The OE differs from the direct object of typical transitive verbs
- Landau (2009: 75)'s cross-linguistic overview of "psych properties"
 - Accusative/dative alternations of the object; restrictions on reflexive constructions, periphrastic causatives and verbal passives; special binding properties; constraints on nominalization.

1.1 Object-experiencers in Romance and beyond

Class 2 (preoccupare) Verbs: Inaccusatives or Causatives!?

- Belletti & Rizzi (1988): Psych-properties due to inaccusativity
 - Problems (Kailuweit 2005, 2015; Temme 2018): morphological accusative, high type and token frequency
- Grimshaw (1990) / Pesetzky (1995): transitive OE verbs are causative
 - Problems (Kailuweit 2005, 2015; Temme 2018): Psych-properties despite causativity?!
- Subclasses / Subconstructions
 - Agentive / non-agentive (Ruwet 1995; Arad 1998; Primus 1999, Pylkkänen 2000; Kailuweit 2005; Verhoeven 2010; Marín 2011, 2015; Royo 2017, 2020)
 - Eventive / stative (Landau 2009, Alexiadou & lordāchioaia 2014)
 - Causative / non-causative (Primus 1999; Kailuweit 2005, 2015; Alexiadou & lordāchioaia 2014; Royo 2017, 2020)

1.1 Object-experiencers in Romance and beyond

Asymmetries in valency reduction

- Passive constructions (Landau 2009)
- Pronominal constructions
 - Alternations between a transitive OE verb and an intransitive construction with the experiencer as subject
 - Marked by the same means as reflexives and anticausatives
 - Alexiadou & lordāchioaia (2014): “psych causative alternation”
- Differences in acceptability
 - *Linda ärgert sich (über), freut sich (über), *erfreut sich (über), *betrübt sich, stört sich *(an + daran, dass)*
- Significant differences in frequency (see e.g. Pijpops & Speelman 2017 for Dutch; Verhoeven 2017 and Wiskandt 2021 for German)

1.1 Object-experiencers in Romance and beyond

Recent research

- Recent research on OE verbs in our target languages
 - Catalan
 - Royo (2017, 2020)
 - Brazilian Portuguese
 - Cançado (2012, 2015)
 - Cançado et al. (2018, 2021, in prep.)
 - Romanian
 - Alexiadou & Iordachioaia (2014)
 - Engelberg (2018)
 - Illoaia (2021)
- Recent research based on systematic and quantitative corpus work (other languages)
 - Miglio et al. (2013) for Spanish & Italian; Vázquez & Miglio (2016) for Spanish
 - Grafmiller (2013) for English; Verhoeven (2017) for German; Pijpops & Speelman (2017) for Dutch

1.1 Object-experiencers in Romance and beyond

Our preliminary studies

- previous studies on OE verbs in Spanish
- Wiskandt (2020)
 - Data from CORPES XXI, 15 verbs, 200 tokens per verb
 - Focus: explaining where the pronominal construction is used and why
 - Results: A higher degree of agentivity corresponds to a lower frequency of the pronominal construction
- Kailuweit & Wiskandt (2021)
 - Pronominal constructions seem to be more frequent with verbs tending to the a dative experiencer in their OE-construction

1.2 A task at the interface of theoretical and empirical linguistics

A sketch of the problem range

- Sorting OE verbs into clear-cut subclasses is problematic
- Larger empirical study needed
 - built on large data sources, e.g. corpora
 - Aim: classification and formal modelling
 - Hypotheses about correlations among a range of parameters
 - Morphosyntactic properties (argument realization, case marking, valency reduction, word order, ...)
 - Distributional properties (Types of arguments, ...)
- A model based on such a study must bridge the gap between empirical linguistics and theoretical debates, and makes a substantial contribution to cross-linguistic research!

1.2 A task at the interface of theoretical and empirical linguistics

Questions for today

- Design and results of a pilot study
- Sub-questions to be focussed
 - How frequent is the **pronominal construction**, and what does that tell us?
 - What kind of **Non-Experiencer argument PPs** appear with pronominal constructions and passives?
 - What tendencies can we observe in **word order**?
 - What about **semantic dimensions** like causativity?)
- Comparative perspective - intra- & cross-linguistic
- Corpus study



2 Methodology

2.1 Sample

Language sample

- Catalan – Brazilian Portuguese – Romanian
- languages that lack sufficient corpus-based research on OE verbs so far
- Sub-sample
 - larger study following the pilot should include Spanish (≥ 2 varieties), European Portuguese, French, Italian

2.1 Sample

Verb sample

- 4 verbs per language
- aiming for cross-linguistic comparability
- representing different basic emotions (cf. Ekman 1992)
 - ANGER => ‚disturb‘
 - FEAR => ‚worry‘
 - HAPPINESS => ‚amuse‘
 - SADNESS => ‚depress‘
- verbs need to be sufficiently frequent
- cognates chosen where possible (but not always)

2.1 Sample

Verb sample

- HAPPINESS (‘amuse’)
 - Catalan: *divertir*
 - Portuguese: *divertir*
 - Romanian: *distra*
- FEAR (‘worry’)
 - Catalan: *preocupar*
 - Portuguese: *preocupar*
 - Romanian: *îngrijora*
- ANGER (‘disturb’)
 - Catalan: *molestar*
 - Portuguese: *molestar*
 - Romanian: *enerva*
- SADNESS (‘depress’)
 - Catalan: *entristar*
 - Portuguese: *deprimir*
 - Romanian: *deprima*
- 125 analyzable tokens per verb and language => 1,500 tokens in total

2.2 Data retrieval

Corpora

- Corpus textual informatitzat de la llengua catalana
 - < 101 million words, lemmatized, POS annotated
 - Catalan Academy project (Institut d'Estudis Catalans) since 1985
 - <https://ctilc.iec.cat/scripts/>
- Corpus computațional de referință pentru limba română contemporană
 - < 1 billion words, lemmatized, POS annotated
 - Romanian Academy project
 - <https://korap.racai.ro/>
- Corpus do Português (Web/Dialects)
 - > 1 billion words, lemmatized, POS annotated
 - created by Mark Davies at Brigham Young University, UT, USA
 - <https://www.corpusdoportugues.org/>
- Problems in corpus selection
 - Finding sufficiently large and recent corpora for a parallel study => comparability of data
 - Accessibility and tagging
- Retrieval
 - extract sufficient data (counting in exclusions)
 - double randomization

2.3 Annotation

Method & parameters

- Annotation methodology
 - Manual annotation
 - Standardized parameters and values
 - First annotation by one author, cross-check in case of doubt
- Annotation parameters
 - Voice (active; passive-ev; passive-st; pronominal; labile-intr) – always assigned
 - Word_order – always assigned
 - NE_Semantic_Type (animate; concrete; abstract; event; state; 0) – assigned if NonExp realized
 - NE_PP (yes; no; 0) – assigned if Voice≠active
 - NE_Preposition (a; b; ...; 0) – assigned if Voice≠active, NE_PP=yes
 - Exp_Case (accusative; dative; 0) – assigned if Voice=active, Exp3SG pronominal/doubled
 - Exp_Redundancy (yes; no; 0) – assigned if Voice=active

2.3 Annotation

Examples

■ (2) Catalan

Identifier	Short hit	Language	Verb	Voice	Word_order	NE_Semantic_Type	NE_PP	NE_Preposition	Exp_Case
ctetr0106	s' entristien pensant que aquelles nines	Catalan	entristir	pronominal	V_eN	state	no	0	0

■ (3) Portuguese

Identifier	Short hit	Language	Verb	Voice	Word_order	NE_Semantic_Type	NE_PP	NE_Preposition	Exp_Case
bppoc0083	mas diz que isso não o preocupa . "« Fomos	Portuguese (brazilian)	preocupar	active	NCl_eV	abstract	0	0	accusative

■ (4) Romanian

Identifier	Short hit	Language	Verb	Voice	Word_order	NE_Semantic_Type	NE_PP	NE_Preposition	Exp_Case
rodst0032	Mă distrez excelent!	Romanian	distra	pronominal	Cl_eV	0	no	0	0

2.3 Annotation

Excluded data

- False hits (False tagging / Participles in property-concept-like use)
- Duplicates
- Non-psych uses of the verbs

(5) *în absența acestor receptorii hipoxemia severă deprimă centrii respiratori prin efect direct asupra centrilor respiratori.*

‘In absence of these receptors severe Hypoxemia suppresses the respiratory centres through a direct effect on the respiratory centres.’

- Hits in the context of discussion about the verbs

(6) *Astăzi [...] verbul a se <distra> a ajuns un cuvînt-cheie al publicității [...].*

‘Today [...] the verb to enjoy oneself has become a keyword of publications [...].’



3 Data

3.1 General impressions

■ General view

- variability in voice, word order, argument types and prepositions
- no clear-cut distinctions, but tendencies

■ Catalan

- clear division and balance between active voice and pronominal construction
- almost no passives

■ Portuguese

- largest variation in voice

■ Romanian

- largest variation in prepositions of non-experiencer argument PPs

3.2 Cross-linguistic correlations in verb behaviour

Cross-linguistically similar behaviour of semantically similar verbs

- morphosyntactic and distributional behaviour of the verbs is not arbitrary
- verbs of different languages, but with similar meanings, behave similar in the data
 - behavioral similarity is clearly higher between verbs denoting similar meanings than between verbs of the same language
 - behaviour is better predicted by semantics than by language
- semantics of an OE verb is more than emotion quality
 - agentivity, affectedness, ...
 - causativity, eventivity, ...
 - emotion intensity
- interaction with language-specific parameters

3.2 Cross-linguistic correlations in verb behaviour

ANGER – ,disturb‘

- frequently active (+ eventive passive in PT)
 - few pronominal constructions in CT/PT
- frequently animate (>abstract) non-experiencer argument
- RO *enerva* deviates from CT/BP *molestar*
 - *molestar* is closer to agent-patient verbs (even with non-psych ,sexually harass‘ uses excluded from the analysis)

3.2 Cross-linguistic correlations in verb behaviour

FEAR – ‚worry‘

- large proportion of pronominal constructions
 - still considerable number of actives
- clear preference for non-experiencer realization
 - PP in non-active voices
- non-experiencer arguments from all semantic types
 - preference for abstract Ns
- Romanian *îngrijora* deviates
 - less pronominal constructions, more passives

3.2 Cross-linguistic correlations in verb behaviour

HAPPINESS – ,amuse‘

- clear majority (>80%) pronominal constructions
 - rest: active
- non-experiencer PPs dispreferred in non-active voices
- non-experiencer arguments of all semantic types (when realized!)
 - eventualities (events/states) dispreferred
 - animates tend to appear in the active voice
- CT/BP *divertir* and RO *distra* do not deviate significantly

3.2 Cross-linguistic correlations in verb behaviour

SADNESS – ‚depress‘

- frequently pronominal in CT/RO, stative passive in BP
 - strong dispreference against non-experiencer PPs in non-active voices
- frequent active uses
 - with non-experiencer realized
- strong preference for abstract non-experiencer arguments (when realized)
- deviation not by CT *entristir* vs. BP *deprimir*, RO *deprima* – rather (slightly) by BP

3.3 Cross-linguistic correlations in parameters

General view & Word order

- different perspective
- exemplary subset of our annotation parameters

- Word order
 - initially counted in as important parameter
 - few significant differences between verbs & languages
 - Fábregas et al. (2017)'s hypothesis (unmarked word order EVN) cannot be confirmed
 - too few cases with potential for variation - amount of data not sufficient for presentable results

3.3 Cross-linguistic correlations in parameters

Voice

■ [active]

- 'disturb' > 'depress' >
'worry' > 'amuse'

■ [pronominal]

- CT/BP: disturb' < 'depress'
< 'worry' < 'amuse'
- RO: depress' < 'worry' <
'disturb' < 'amuse'

■ [passive-st]

- frequent with 'worry' and
'depress' in BP and RO –
but not CT

Verb	active	passive -ev	passive -st	prono- minal	labile- intr
Catalan					
molestar	109	2	0	13	0
preocupar	55	0	4	66	0
divertir	28	0	0	96	1
entristar	71	0	0	53	1
Portuguese					
molestar	76	46	1	2	0
preocupar	16	0	15	94	0
divertir	15	0	0	110	0
deprimir	18	17	83	6	1
Romanian					
enerva	63	0	0	62	0
îngrijora	33	17	50	25	0
distra	18	2	3	102	0
deprima	48	8	53	16	0

3.3 Cross-linguistic correlations in parameters

N_PP

- non-active voices: PP realization of non-experiencer argument...
 - preferred with ‚worry‘
 - neutrally optional with ‚disturb‘ in CT/PT (dispreferred in RO)
 - dispreferred with ‚amuse‘ and ‚depress‘
- non-experiencer argument realization in total
 - ‚disturb‘ > ‚worry‘ > ‚depress‘ > ‚amuse‘
- variation in prepositions
 - RO: no *de la* in the data
 - BP: variation beyond *com*

Verb	yes	no	0
Catalan			
molestar	6	9	110
preocupar	47	22	56
divertir	17	77	31
entristir	12	41	72
Portuguese			
molestar	26	24	75
preocupar	79	30	16
divertir	34	86	15
deprimir	18	88	19
Romanian			
enerva	4	58	63
îngrijora	53	38	34
distra	3	104	18
deprima	15	62	48

3.3 Cross-linguistic correlations in parameters

N_Semantic_Type

- [animate]
 - 'disturb' > 'worry'/'amuse' > 'depress'
- deviates from voice hierarchy
 - only 'disturb' really strikes out – rest similar
- agentivity?
 - all verbs allow animates
 - agentives with 'disturb' and 'amuse', marginally with 'depress', not with 'worry'
- [abstract]
 - abstracts worry and depress

Verb	ani-mate	con-crete	ab-stract	event	state	0
Catalan						
molestar	48	14	33	15	7	8
preocupar	11	5	65	13	11	20
divertir	12	2	24	20	0	67
entristar	10	4	58	12	6	35
Portuguese						
molestar	67	13	14	5	2	24
preocupar	10	10	35	33	8	29
divertir	9	15	10	3	1	86
deprimir	2	5	10	12	7	89
Romanian						
enerva	25	7	25	0	1	67
îngrijora	13	7	40	2	25	38
distra	10	1	6	0	2	106
deprima	4	10	39	1	7	64



4 Analysis of the results

4.1 Explaining the variation at the syntax-semantics interface

The data aren't pure coincidence, are they?

- hierarchies arising from annotation parameters have significant parallels
- preference of overt argument realization with some verbs
- correlation between voice frequencies and causativity? (cf. Wiskandt 2020; Kaluweit & Wiskandt 2021)
- correlation between voice and semantic type of non-experiencer argument? (cf. Wiskandt 2020)
 - higher frequency of pronominal construction => less animates, more eventualities
 - lower frequency of pronominal construction => more animates
 - observable particularly for arguments in the active voice
- goes conform with hypotheses about causativity, but does not prove them

4.2 Cross-linguistic contextualization

Benefit of cross-linguistic studies proven!

- Cross-Romance comparison
- Points of comparison beyond Romance
 - German (frequency of pronominal construction <=> agentivity: Verhoeven 2017; frequency vs. acceptability of the pronominal construction: cf. Wiskandt 2021)
 - Dutch (cf. Pijpops & Speelman 2017)
 - Tswana < Bantu < Atlantic-Congo (Wiskandt in prep.)
- Correlations arguably not language-specific
 - Active involvement of participants and causation scenarios are not of linguistic but of factual nature
 - Representation in cognitive category possible

4.3 Learnings and tasks for future studies

Challenges

- Challenges of parallel studies for several languages
 - Comparability of data
 - Annotation by different annotators
 - Annotation criteria & values
- Meaningful analysis of word order patterns was not possible
 - Small amount of data treated in this pilot study was sufficient for pointing out tendencies for some parameters – but not for word order
 - Choice of voice order arguably more arbitrary
 - Set of possible values significantly larger than for other parameters

4.3 Learnings and tasks for future studies

Tasks for continuation

- Extension of the sample
 - Verb sample
 - Language sample
 - Amount of data
- Adaptation of annotation parameters
 - e.g. word order: split parameter to reduce number of values per parameter
- Measures to ensure comparability of the data
 - Choice of corpora
 - Restrictions on data retrieval



5 Conclusion

What did we do?

- problem at the syntax-semantics interface of object-experiencer verbs in Romance languages
- sample of 3 languages (Catalan, Brazilian Portuguese, Romanian), and 4 verbs per language
- corpus study, with 1,500 tokens making it into the analysis
- search for correlations among the parameters of voice, word order, semantic type of arguments, and argument PPs in non-active voices.
- cross-linguistic correlations between semantics of verbs and arguments and frequency of voices

Outcomes

- What did we find out?
 1. OE verbs with similar meanings behave similarly in corpus data.
 2. There is evidence for interaction between those parameters.
 3. Those results fit into a broader cross-linguistic pattern.
- Which questions remain open for future research?
 1. Can the claim be upheld when investigated against a larger sample of languages and verbs?
 2. Can we prove the interaction between parameters in statistic models, and carve out semantic features that explain differences among OE verbs?
 3. Can we set up a language-independent model for the syntax-semantics interface of OE verbs?

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