

Evidential *al parecer*: Between the physical and the cognitive meaning in Spanish scientific prose of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries



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Abstract

Some of the evidential particles and adverbs in Spanish are believed to have developed during the 18th and 19th centuries. This also coincides with the consolidation of scientific writing in Spanish, a genre that holds a special relation with the expression of sources of information. Against this background, the aim of this paper is to study the evolution of the Spanish evidential discourse particle *al parecer* ('seemingly, apparently') in scientific texts of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. Our analysis shows that in the period under review the occurrences of the evidential particle *al parecer* were dominant, but they were not the only uses of this construction. It coexisted with two other constructions: a two-member construction *al parecer x, pero en realidad y* ('it appears to be x, but in reality is y') with inferential interpretation and with a construction *al parecer* with physical meaning (*es al parecer rómbico*; 'it looks rhombic'). Our data suggests that only the occurrences of the grammaticalized discourse particle *al parecer* were purely evidential. Furthermore, it shows that the evidential meaning of the particle developed toward more indirect evidentiality during the process of fixation. In the context of the genre analyzed, all three constructions of *al parecer* reflect the changes in the scientific writing practices: from basing the evidences on personal observation to relying on the experiment and reporting from the common knowledge.

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1. Introduction

Spanish is considered as one of the non-evidential languages, according to the narrow definition of evidentiality (Aikhenvald, 2004, 2007). Although it does not have evidential morphemes in the grammar system, evidentiality can be expressed by different language categories including lexical resources, uses of some verbal tenses, modal verbs, etc. Therefore, evidentiality in Spanish can be best described in terms of a semantic-functional domain (Diewald and Smirnova, 2010) putting function before form. This definition of evidentiality allows for regarding as "evidential strategies" (Aikhenvald, 2007) elements from different formal categories in non-evidential languages like Spanish. While evidentiality as a secondary meaning of the evidential strategies is activated only in specific contexts,¹ it often becomes the core meaning of other elements, such as fixed constructions and discourse particles (DPs²). The development of evidential

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¹ For example, some uses of Imperfect and Future verb forms (Reyes, 1994; Bermúdez, 2005), modal verbs (Cornillie, 2007), etc.

² The acronym DP is used for "discourse particle", defined as a linguistic element with procedural, rather than conceptual, meaning (Briz et al., 2008 – *Dictionary of Discourse Particles in Spanish, DPDE*). In this paper we follow the DPDE in considering *al parecer* a discourse particle from the synchronic perspective.

units through processes of grammaticalization has been considered, among others, by Anderson (1986), Aikhenvald (2007), and Diewald and Smirnova (2010). Garcés Gómez (2013) defines the grammaticalization of Spanish evidential adverbs and particles (*aparentemente*, *en apariencia*, *al parecer*, *por lo visto*, *dizque*) as a process that leads to codification of discursive meanings in the grammar (Garcés Gómez, 2013:309). This broad definition of grammaticalization allows for the inclusion of phenomena that evolve at the discourse level. Elements that undergo this process gain greater syntactic autonomy, become invariable, can occupy a peripheral position, etc. Moreover, through grammaticalization, evidential DPs (*dizque*, *por lo visto*, *se ve*, *al parecer*) develop procedural, rather than conceptual, meaning and they function in the discourse as indicators of the source of information for the proposition.³ In Spanish, these DPs coexist with less fixed constructions of similar structure such as *por lo visto* + complement (*por lo visto ayer*, ‘as seen yesterday’), *se ve que* (‘it can be seen that’) or *al parecer de ellos* (‘in their opinion’), that preserve the compositional meaning. The coexistence of such more and less fixed constructions in the language can be explained by layering (Hopper, 1991) and it does not invalidate the fixed status of the aforementioned discourse particles. As we argue in this paper, it can be fruitful to compare the syntactic properties and the type of (non-) evidential meaning of these constructions. In fact, we consider that it helps to discover the patterns of formalization of evidentiality as the core meaning in fixed constructions.

In order to test the ideas presented above, in this paper we analyze the evolution of the Spanish evidential DP *al parecer* during the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. We describe syntactic patterns in which *al parecer* can be found in a corpus of scientific texts and how these patterns correlate with different physical/cognitive and evidential meanings. We also focus on the relationship between the degree of fixation of the construction and the type of evidentiality it conveys. The study was conducted within a corpus of scientific texts because we believe that the expression of the sources of information is crucial in this genre and this makes it a relevant context for the evolution of evidential practices.

2. *Parecer* as a verb of perception

Verbs of appearance such as the English *seem* or *appear* and Spanish *parecer* are object-oriented perception verbs by which “speakers make an assessment concerning the state of the object of perception,” and they commonly express evidential meanings (Whitt, 2010:252). Perception verbs are often polysemous – for example, vision verbs express not only physical vision but also meanings related to mental activity, exploiting two basic metaphors: (1) physical sight – knowledge, intellection; and (2) physical vision – mental “vision” (Sweetser, 1990:33). Similarly, polysemous *parecer* can refer to physically perceptible external appearance (*La casa parece vacía*, ‘The house looks/appears/seems empty’) but it can also express cognitive meaning of evaluation and opinion⁴ (*Me parece que estás equivocado*, ‘I believe that you are wrong’).

The polysemy of perception verbs also affects their behavior in the domain of evidentiality. A perception verb does not function as evidential when it simply transmits the literal meaning of perceiving something through vision – e.g., *I see the house* (Whitt, 2010:255). However, under certain circumstances, the same verb can also express different evidential meanings. Verbs of appearance, for instance, “are evidential in that they indicate the evidential source for the proposition” that is the appearance of something (Gisborne and Holmes, 2007:4). The sentence *Richard looks ill* offers the interpretation that “Richard’s appearance is the reason for inferring that he is ill” (Gisborne and Holmes, 2007:4). In this example, the inference is based on the visual prompts available to the speaker.

According to Whitt (2010), the polysemy of vision verbs can lead to yet another “constructional polysemy” where “even within a single construction type, different types of evidence may be expressed,” although some evidential meanings may be restricted to specific constructions (Whitt, 2010:255). Wiemer (2010:105) shows that parenthetical elements derived from verbs of appearance in many European languages commonly express some general indirect evidentiality. These elements, however, have a more salient or “highlighted” evidential interpretation (perceptual, inferred or hearsay/reportative) depending on their syntactic status. As Wiemer (2010) suggests, the hearsay meaning in these elements is closely related to them gaining structural independence in the host sentence.

Throughout Europe, the form of the 3rd person singular present indicative of SEEM/APPEAR-verbs extends into evidentiality, but a hearsay function becomes more salient only when this form, by losing its argument structure, starts being used as a particle (or parenthetical) i.e. without any complementizer. This allows for a careful hypothesis saying that reportative meanings correlate with the least possible integration of paradigmatically isolated verb forms into clausal syntax, whereas inferential functions of the same units are available if the respective unit still functions as a predicate with a sentential argument in a syntactically definable dependency relation (Wiemer, 2010:114–115).

³ For more specific functioning of each of these particles see González Ramos (2005) and Marcos Sánchez (2005) for *por lo visto*; Albelda (in press) for *se ve*; and Albelda (2008), González Ramos (2005), and Kotwica (2013) for *al parecer*.

⁴ According to the Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy online: <http://www.rae.es/>.

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