

Spanish Verbs of Perception and the dative

Stanford QP Fest 2006 Abstract

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March 30, 2006

Cross-linguistically, verbs of perception are known to be able to select for either an event or an individual as their non-experiencer argument (Felser 199, Higgenbotham 2000). In a cross-dialectal corpus based study, I show how this flexibility in argument type selection bears on object case marking possibilities in Spanish.

Specifically, this study reports on the use of object clitics referencing human, masculine non-experiencer arguments in the class of perception verbs across several Spanish dialects, focussing on two verbs: *oír* 'to hear', and *ver* 'to see'. Building on an earlier study of Roegeist (2003) which dealt with the same verbs for dialects within Iberian Spanish, it is found that both the dative clitic *le* and the accusative clitic *lo* are possible for referencing masculine human non-experiencer arguments of *ver* and *oír*. Clitic choice is not in free variation however: for the three main dialects analysed, Paraguayan, Iberian and Chilean Spanish, the dative is far more prevalent with *oír* than it is with *ver* (Table 1). This holds, moreover, across both perception verbs in simple clauses, and those taking infinitival complements.

The dialects under consideration are representative of both *leísmo* (Iberian Spanish, Paraguayan) and non-*leísmo* (Chilean) varieties of Spanish, and, in light of this, the corpus results are surprising. *Leísmo*, which refers to the phenomenon of the use of the dative *le* instead of the expected accusative *lo* to reference the direct object, is traditionally understood to be conditioned by inherent nominal properties associated with the object, for example masculine gender, or animacy (Echenique 1980, Lopez Bobo 1990, Sanchis Calvo 1992, Ramirez 1964, Lapesa 1968). In the present perception verb study, both the cross-dialectal consistency and the differing frequencies across verbs suggest some underlying systematicity to the variation, but one that cannot be accounted for by nominal properties alone, because both gender and animacy were controlled for.

I argue instead that the differential case marking exhibited by this verb class reflects a particular semantic property of this verb class, namely the ability of perception verbs to select for either an event or an individual as their non-experiencer argument. The use of the accusative is correlated with an individual argument interpretation, whereby the accusative participant functions as a direct sensory object. A typical example is (1), in which the accusative participant functions as a direct sensory object of sight.

- (1) **Lo vi** claramente: el cuerpo delgado, encorvado de perfil, las piernas sin pies, la cabeza erguida...
I saw him clearly: the delicate body, curved in profile, the feet without shoes, the raised head...

A dative marked participant, by contrast, functions as an actor within the directly subcategorised perceived event. (2) is representative. What the wife hears is not her husband, but rather the communicative event in which her husband is acting.

- (2) En vano trataba el marido de explicar a su mujer el estado general de sus negocios; ella se obstinaba en no **oírle**
In the vain the husband was trying to explain to his wife the general state of his business; she was being obstinate in not hearing him.

The morphosyntactic effects of this semantic distinction make immediate sense of the different frequencies of the dative with *oír* and with *ver*: while human objects frequently function as direct sensory objects of visual perception,

they are generally not direct sensory objects of auditory perception, but rather act to produce noise/communicative content, the entire event of which is directly perceived.

This basic distinction concerning argument type selection holds across both simple clauses and infinitival complement constructions, accounting for the similar case distribution pattern across both construction types. It also has a striking analogue with periphrastic causative constructions in Spanish, which, significantly, exhibit the same phenomenon of differential case marking. The morphosyntactic effects of this semantic distinction can, moreover, be detected beyond Spanish for this verb class, underscoring the typological relevance of this contrast.

In addition to uncovering an important correlation between argument type selection and morphosyntactic expression, this study also feeds together with broader cross linguistic studies of the dative, such as that of Blume (1998, 2000), which suggest that objective dative marking of bivalent verbs is correlated with the implication of agency on the part of the dative participant.

	oír		ver	
	acc	dat	acc	dat
Iberian	1 (10%)	10 (90%)	4 (33.3%)	8 (66.6%)
Paraguayan	8 (47.1%)	9 (52.9%)	96 (83.6%)	19 (16.4%)
Chilean	0 (0%)	7 (100%)	10 (83.3%)	2 (16.7%)

Table 1: Frequencies of accusative/dative clitics referencing human objects with *oír* and *ver* in simple clauses (Iberian, Chilean and Paraguayan Spanish dialects)

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