

Diachronic Changes in the Position of Frequency Adverbials: Linguistic Variation in Peninsular and Latin American Spanish

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1. Problem

Spanish frequency adverbials may occur before or after the verb with no change in meaning:

- (1) Frecuentemente Juan (frecuentemente) estudia (frecuentemente) en casa (frecuentemente)
Frequently Juan (frequently) study.3.Sg (frequently) in house (frequently)
'Juan often studies at home'

The syntactic distribution in (1) cannot be accommodated by syntactic approaches that assume different meanings for preverbal and postverbal positions (Cinque 1999, Kovacci 1999). We adopt a multifactorial variationist analysis to investigate the relationship between adverbial position and the following factors: *gender*, *country* and *century*. Our results indicate that diachronic change and sociolinguistic factors influence adverbial position.

2. Methodology

We coded a sample of 1600 sentences from the corpus CREA. CREA is a non-annotated corpus of Modern Spanish. For the diachronic comparison, we incorporated an additional 411 sentences from the corpus CORDE covering a period that ranges from the 16th to the 18th centuries. The dependent variable was the *position of adverbials* (preverbal, postverbal), and the independent variables were *gender* (male, female), *country* (Spain, Latin America) and *century* (16th - 21st). We applied cross-tabulations and the χ^2 test to determine the significance of each independent variable. A regression analysis ensures the fitness of the model. The use of computational tools partially automated the annotation process.

3. Results

The factors *gender* and *country* are annotated for Modern Spanish only. Table 1 indicates that Latin American women prefer postverbal positions, unlike men ($p=.000$). In contrast, table 2 demonstrates that *gender* is not significant in Spain ($p=.088$). Both Spanish men and women prefer postverbal positions, similarly to Latin American women. Our analysis thus restates the sociolinguistic relevance of gender (Silva-Corvalán 2001, Chambers et al. 2002, Coulmas 1997, Cameron 2005). The diachronic comparison shows that Old Spanish has a preference for postverbal adverbials (56.9%). Therefore, Latin American men introduce an innovative preference for preverbal positions in Modern Spanish (66% preverbal vs. 34% postverbal; $p=0.000$). To a lesser extent, Spanish men show a similar tendency, although it is not statistically significant ($p=0.088$).

4. Conclusion

Our research shows that *gender*, *country* and *century* influence the position of adverbials in Spanish, independently of the underlying syntactic structure assumed. The *position of frequency adverbials* functions as an indicator of diachronic change and sociolinguistic differences within different varieties of Spanish. These factors point to gender as a predictor of tendencies in language evolution.

Table 1: Distribution by Gender in Latin America			Gender		Total
			Female	Male	
Position of Adverbials	Postverbal	Count	104	50	154
		% column	62.3%	34.0%	49.0%
	Preverbal	Count	63	97	160
		% column	37.7%	66.0%	51.0%
Total		Count	167	147	314
			Value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
Pearson Chi Square			24.988 ^b	1	.000

Table 2: Distribution by Gender in Spain			Gender		Total
			Female	Male	
Position of Adverbials	Postverbal	Count	91	106	197
		% column	62.8%	53.5%	57.4%
	Preverbal	count	54	92	146
		% column	37.2%	46.5%	42.6%
Total		Count	145	198	343
			Value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
Pearson Chi Square			2.913 ^b	1	.088

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