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Constructions with subject *vs.* object experiencers in Spanish and Italian

A corpus-based approach

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This study analyzes Spanish and Italian clauses that denote processes or states of feeling or emotion involving two participants, an experiencer and a stimulus. Some of these clauses construe the experiencer as Subject and the stimulus as Object, while others have experiencers coded as dative or accusative Objects and stimuli as Subjects.

Using corpus data, we track the frequency and distribution of a number of discourse-related properties of the arguments, such as animacy, person, and syntactic category, in order to gain insight into how both constructions are really used and conceived of by speakers. The results point to a non-random distribution of these properties when comparing the ‘Experiencer-as-Subject’ with the ‘Experiencer-as-Object’ constructions, and reveal striking differences in their frequency across textual genres.

1. The constructions: Experiencer as Subject (ESC) *vs.* Experiencer as Object (EOC)*

1.1 The constructions

We analyze Spanish and Italian clauses that denote processes or states of feeling or emotion involving two participants, an experiencer and a stimulus.

The examples in (1) show a syntactic-semantic pattern different from the pattern exemplified in the examples in (2). In (1), the clauses encode the experiencer

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as a subject – ‘I’ in Spanish and ‘he’ in Italian – and the stimulus as a direct object – ‘haughty men’ (Sp.) and ‘society’ (It.) –, whereas in (2) the experiencer – ‘He’ (Sp. and It.) – is cast as an indirect object and the stimulus – ‘long and noisy parties’ (Sp.), ‘grandiose schemes’ (It.) – as the syntactic subject that triggers verb agreement:

- (1) a. Yo detestaba a los hombres altaneros
 I.NOM.1SG detest.PST.1SG to the.M.PL man.PL haughty.M.PL
 ‘I detested haughty men’ (CRÓN: 35, 6)
- b. Egli detestava la società (della sua epoca)
 He.NOM.1SG detest.PST.3SG the.F.SG society.SG (of his time)
 ‘He detested the society of his time’ (LaRep, 03.17.92, ‘Cultura’)
- (2) a. Le gustaban las fiestas ruidosas y largas
 3SG.OBJ=like.PST.3PL the.F.PL parties.F.PL noisy.F.PL & long.F.PL
 ‘He liked long and noisy parties’ (CRÓN: 32, 20)
- b. Gli piacevano [...] i grandi disegni
 3SG.M.DAT=like.PST.3PL the.M.PL schemes.M.PL grandiose.PL
 ‘He liked grandiose schemes’ (LaRep, 02.12.92, ‘Affari & Finanza’)

Similar contrasts have been described in a number of languages that have both an ‘Experiencer as Subject’ construction (henceforth called ESC) and an ‘Experiencer as Object’ construction (henceforth called EOC), both historically and synchronically, including English.¹ The study of these alternative patterns has mostly focused on the formal properties of the constructions and on their semantic motivation, particularly the meanings behind the various valency options like state *vs.* action, differences in causation, control, and volition, among others. However, little attention has hitherto been paid to the real frequencies of these patterns in running texts and little is known about their function in discourse.

Well-known articles on so-called psych-verbs² tend to concentrate on the structure of constructions with non-nominative experiencers, especially those written in the generative paradigm (Belletti & Rizzi, 1988; Masullo, 1993). They continue the tradition of research started in the sixties and seventies by Fillmore, Lakoff and Postal (Fillmore, 1968; Lakoff, 1970; Postal, 1971). These authors attribute the same semantic role of experiencer both to the subject of a transitive construction (such as the *Yo*, ‘I-NOM’ in 1a above), as to the object of an ‘inverse construction’ (such as the *le* ‘he-DAT’ in 2a above) and argue that the semantic structure of the clause is the same. Their efforts are mostly aimed at ascertaining whether the experiencer has

1. The bibliography on this subject is very extensive, for a number of languages including English, Icelandic, Italian, and Spanish see, among others, Lightfoot (1981), Fischer and Van der Leek (1983), Allen (1986), Sigurðsson (1989), Whitley (1998), Shibatani (1999), Haspelmath (2001), Barðdal & Eyþórsson (2003, 2009), Bentley (2006), Gutiérrez Bravo (2006), Melis & Flores (2007).

2. Psych verbs are verbs expressing mental processes, as the ones analyzed in this paper.

all the necessary features of a subject. Instead of using corpus data, however, they use constructed examples. This allows the researchers to control for specific factors that would otherwise invalidate the tests used to establish whether the experiencer behaves indeed as a syntactic subject. Moreover, they do not evaluate the frequency of use of the different structures, or their communicative value.³

1.2 Case marking and pronominal syncretism in ESCs and EOCs

Cross-linguistically, experiential predicates tend to be cast as EOCs⁴ rather than ESCs more frequently than with other verb types (Bossong, 1998; Shibatani, 1999; Bauer, 2000; Haspelmath, 2001). The constructions we analyze in this paper fall into this semantic class. The present study explores the supposed identity between dative experiencers of verbs such as *gustar* (Sp.)/*piacere* (It.) ‘to like’, and the nominative experiencers of verbs such as *amar/amare* ‘to love’, using data from actual usage. EOCs are found to be very lively in both Romance languages, and they are especially productive in Spanish.

Because of considerable syncretism between the dative and accusative forms of the experiencer pronouns, as well as the frequent dative-accusative pronominal alternations found in Spanish (see below), we propose to classify all of the non-nominative experiencers as ‘objects’ in one category, hence the use of ‘EOC,’ i.e. ‘experiencer as object’ construction. This point requires the discussion of some examples and previous literature to justify the data treatment in this study.

Sentences (3)–(5) below are examples of ESC clauses in the Spanish corpus, and (6)–(8) are their equivalent Italian constructions:

- (3) Pero no *aguanto* sus ideas, su falta de fe en
 but not stand.PRS.1SG her/his ideas his/her lack of faith in
 un mundo nuevo
 a world new
 ‘But I can’t stand his/her ideas, his/her lack of faith in a new world’
 (CAR:156.21)

- (4) todos los jugadores le *temen* al árbitro único
 all the players 3SG.DAT=fear.PRS.3PL to.the referee only
 del encuentro
 of-the game
 ‘All the players are afraid of the only referee for the game’ (IVO:010-1.2-57)

3. See for instance Belletti & Rizzi, 1988; Sigurðsson, 1989; Masullo, 1993; Gutiérrez Bravo, 2006. A discussion of subjecthood tests for Icelandic and their value can also be found in Barðdahl, 2001, which otherwise advocates for a CxG analysis of quirky subjects in Icelandic.

4. EOCs are also called *inverse* or *reverse* constructions, and the experiencer is often referred to as an *oblique* or *quirky* subject. ESCs may be referred to simply as transitive constructions.

- (5) El sí *amaba* esa ciudad
 he yes love.PST.3SG that town
 'He did love that town' (MIRADA: 93, 32)

These are all constructions that have their equivalent in Italian too and are frequently used in common speech:

- (6) Non *sopporto* i miei coetanei
 not stand.PRS.1SG the my contemporaries
 'I can't stand my contemporaries' (LaRep, 09.07.91, 'Extra')
- (7) Gli altri politici [...] *temono* le reazioni delle femministe
 the other politicians fear.PRS.3PL the reactions of.the feminists
 'The other politicians are afraid of the feminists' reactions'
 (LaRep, 03.24.91, 'Cronaca')
- (8) Cendrars *amava* il cinema di un amore non ricambiato.
 Cendrars love.PST.3SG the cinema of a love not required
 'Cendrars loved cinema with unrequited love'
 (LaRep, 06.24.89, 'Mercurio-Scaffale')

The examples below, on the other hand, depict EOC constructions both in Spanish and in Italian, where objects can be marked both in dative (9a, 13a and 13b, 15a and 15b), accusative (9b, 12a and 14b), or an ambiguous syncretic form that could be either (10a and 10b, 11a and 11b, 14a) in order to show the similarity between the two languages, as well as the existing syncretism:⁵

- (9) a. hacer música les *entretiene* mucho más que jugar
 make.INF music 3PL.DAT=amuse.PRS.3SG much more than play
 al fútbol
 to.the soccer
 'Playing music amuses them much more than playing soccer'
 (2VO:072-2.2-09)
- b. Chiacchierare di politica li *diverte*
 talk.INF of politics 3PL.M.ACC=amuse.PRS.3SG
 'Talking about politics amuses them' (LaRep, 03.22.92, 'Extra')
- (10) a. francamente la televisión a mí me *aburre*
 frankly the television to me 1SG.OBJ=bore.PRS.3SG
 'Frankly television bores me' (SEV:094.08)

5. Moreover, Spanish allows for dative-accusative alternations with the same verb (see Vázquez Rozas, 2006b; Miglio et al. 2013), such that (9a) and (12a) would be grammatical in Spanish also as *hacer música los(ACC) entretiene mucho más que jugar al fútbol* and *la música de Los Bandidos le(DAT) entristecía* with no substantial change in meaning.

- b. Il teatro, sono sincera, mi *annoia*
 the theater be.PRS.1SG sincere.F 1SG.OBJ=bore.PRS.3SG
 ‘I admit it: theater bores me’ (LaRep, 02.06.92, ‘Spettacoli’)
- (11) a. A mí me *asusta*, me *desagrada*
 to me 1SG.OBJ=scare.PRS.3SG 1SG.OBJ=disgust.PRS.3SG
 este Madrid ruidoso
 this Madrid noisy
 ‘The noise of Madrid scares and disgusts me’ (MAD:103.17)
- b. Non mi *spaventa*, ma non lo ritengo corretto
 not 1SG.OBJ=scare.PRS.3SG but not it consider.PRS.1SG fair
 ‘[It] does not scare me, but I do not think it’s fair’
 (LaRep, 03.01.92, ‘Extra’)
- (12) a. La música de Los bandidos lo *entristecía*
 the music of Los Bandidos 3SG.M.ACC=sadden.PST.3SG
 ‘The music of Los Bandidos made him feel sad’ (HIS:055.03)
- b. questo è il sospetto che *ratristava* l’umore
 this be.PRS.3SG the suspicion that sadden.PST.3SG the-mood
 del presidente
 of.the president
 ‘this was the suspicion that saddened the president’s mood’
 (LaRep, 06.15.91, ‘Extra’)
- (13) a. lo que le *interesa* al Ayuntamiento
 it which 3SG.DAT=interest.PRS.3SG to.the Council
 de Vigo es poder seguir otorgando licencias.
 of Vigo is can.INF keep.INF issuing licenses
 ‘What the Council of Vigo is interested in is being able to keep on issuing licenses’
 (IVO:026-4.1-11)
- b. quello che gli *interessa*⁶ è una Padania unita
 that which 3SG.M.DAT=interest.PRS.3SG is a Padania unified
 attorno a Milano
 around to Milan
 ‘what interests him is a Padania region unified around Milan’
 (LaRep, 03.26.92, ‘Commenti’)
- (14) a. La suavidad de la manita *conmueve* al viejo
 the softness of the small hand move.PRS.3SG to.the old man
 ‘The softness of the small hand moves the old man’ (SON:235.16)

6. *Interessare* in Italian is problematic, because it can be constructed as a EOC with the meaning of ‘to interest’, but also as a ESC with the meaning of ‘to affect’, and this latter is typical of formal or journalistic style, hence common in the *La Repubblica* database.

- b. *lo commuove* con la perfezione della bellezza
 3SG.M.ACC=move.PRS.3SG with the perfection of.the beauty
 ‘it moves it [the audience] with the perfection of beauty’
 (LaRep, 11.24.91, ‘Spettacoli’)
- (15) a. *Le gustaban* las fiestas ruidosas y largas
 3SG.DAT=like.PST.3PL the.F.PL parties.F.PL noisy.F.PL & long.F.PL
 ‘He liked long and noisy parties’ (CRÓN: 32, 20)
- b. *E non piace* invece ai reazionari, agli
 and not like.PRS.3SG conversely to.the reactionaries to.the
 incolti, ai provinciali
 uncultivated to.the country bumpkins
 ‘Reactionaries, uncultivated people, and country bumpkins, on the other
 hand, do not like it’ (LaRep, 03.26.92, ‘Politica Estera’)

Syntactic descriptions of Spanish and Italian usually distinguish two types of objects, direct and indirect. Direct objects are often represented by non-prepositional constituents (*sus ideas*, *su falta de fe en un mundo nuevo* in 3, *i miei coetanei* in 6) or accusative clitics (Sp. *lo* in 12a; It. *lo* in 14b). Only in Spanish, however, they are quite frequently introduced by the preposition *a* ‘to’, particularly if they are animate and definite (*a los hombres altaneros* in 1). Indirect objects, which are mainly animate and definite, are invariably marked by the preposition *a* if represented by a NP both in Spanish (see Example 16 below) and in Italian (*ai reazionari*, *agli incolti*, *ai provinciali* in 15b):

- (16) *Se rumorea* que el negocio interesa *asimismo*
 REFL RUMOR.PRS.3SG that the business interest.PRS.3SG also
a los ejecutivos de una poderosa multinacional
 to the executives of a powerful multinational
 ‘It is rumored that the business also interests the executives of a powerful
 multinational’ (PAI:113.20)

The prepositional phrase introduced by *a* is frequently found in combination with a co-referent dative clitic in Spanish⁷ (*le* in 13a), or the dative clitic can otherwise stand on its own (*le* in 2a for Sp., *gli* in 13b for It.).

In addition to the use of the same preposition for both indirect objects and some direct objects, other factors contribute to blur the contrast between these two functions especially in Spanish. In some Spanish varieties the dative clitics *le*, *les* are also used as direct objects (“leísmo”), mainly, but not exclusively,

7. Clitic doubling is ungrammatical in standard Italian and would not be found in formal written texts, although there are examples of non-standard reduplication in the oral BADIP corpus.

with masculine human referents as in (4), while accusative clitics *lo, la, los, las*, also represent indirect objects in a few dialects (the “laísta” and “loísta” varieties⁸). More relevant still is that there is no formal distinction between direct and indirect object for first and second person clitics, which are syncretic forms (Examples 10 and 11), both in Spanish and Italian, and this should be considered also in the light of usage data.⁹

The tendency of Spanish direct and indirect objects to conflate into one category is noticeable precisely in EOC clauses, as their object usually refers to animate and definite participants, which is typical for the semantic role of the experiencer.¹⁰ This is true also for the examples we analyzed for Italian, although an exact parallel with the Spanish data cannot be drawn because we did not have a comparable database to ADESSE for Italian. From Examples (9)–(16) above, it is clear that the syncretism between direct and indirect object forms may have been resolved in favor of direct object constructions in Italian, since among those examples only *interessare* – with the meaning of ‘to be interesting to’ – and *piacere* are constructed with dative objects.

In Italian, the tendency towards EOCs with direct objects may be a historical evolution, confirmed by some archaic forms found for instance in the 1612 *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*:¹¹ here we find examples such as *Ciascuno gl’ infastidisce, e fugge* ‘Everyone annoys him-DAT and he runs away’, where *infastidire* is constructed as an EOC with dative object, whereas in contemporary standard Italian it can only participate in an EOC construction with a direct object.

High animacy and definiteness of the objects in EOC are not the only features that result in similar coding properties of direct and indirect objects in these constructions. The aforementioned syncretism of first and second person clitic objects is prominent in EOC clauses, when compared to the general frequency data of the objects in two-argument clauses with the same Subject-Object syntactic pattern. Figures in Table 1 below show that 62.47% of the EOC clauses in the corpus ARTHUS do not make any coding distinction between two types of object.

8. NGLÉ (2009:2591ff, 2655ff.).

9. Note that 3rd person non-doubled lexical objects can be seen as syncretic too (compare 14a and 16 above).

10. In ARTHUS 95,6% of the objects in EOCs are animate and 97,7% are definite.

11. Available online at: <http://vocabolario.signum.sns.it/>. The corresponding Spanish verb, *molestar* ‘to annoy’, is constructed with an EOC that can take both dative and accusative object, depending on the semantic interpretation and dialect.

Table 1. Syncretic object clitics in EOC and all Subject-Object constructions in Spanish

Construction	EOC	Subject-Object
Total number	2953	65103
1st person object clitics	1495 (50.62%)	4151 (6.37%)
2nd person object clitics	350 (11.85%)	1459 (2.24%)
Sum of syncretic clitic forms	1845 (62.47%)	5610 (8.62%)

Usage data support, therefore, the combination of all the Experiencers of EOCs into a single category of Object, without distinguishing between direct or indirect objects, at least in a broad analysis of the data. This does not preclude the usefulness of a more fine-grained distinction for a more specific analysis. By conflating the two types of object, our proposal is based on a more realistic and unbiased empirical evidence and overcomes the aforementioned drawbacks caused by the existence of syncretic forms.

The structure of the paper is as follows: in Section 1.3 below we discuss relevant previous literature on the relation between case marking of the experiencers and verb types participating in the EOC/ESC ‘alternation’; in Section 2 we lay out the methodology and the corpora used for this study; the results of the study are to be found in Section 3, including discourse properties of experiencers and stimuli and their interactions with genre; the discussion of results is in Section 4 and our conclusions in Section 5.

1.3 The object experiencer in Di Tullio (2004) and Melis (1999)

Since the issue of the accusative *vs.* dative status of the object experiencer with verbs of feeling has been exhaustively discussed in the literature, it should be further assessed here by addressing two important contributions to the topic. We will first consider the formal approach taken in Di Tullio (2004) and then comment on the corpus-based analysis presented by Melis (1999).

Di Tullio (2004) adopts Belletti and Rizzi’s (1988) tripartite analysis of psych-verbs. The first type (*temer* ‘fear’, *respetar* ‘respect’) chooses to cast the experiencer as a subject. The other two types choose to cast the experiencer as an object, which is assigned accusative case by the second one (*preocupar* ‘worry’, *asustar* ‘frighten’) and dative case by the third one (It. *piacere*, Sp. *gustar* ‘like’). However, Di Tullio, who takes a lexicalist approach, observes that ‘in Spanish the boundaries between the second and the third group are blurry’ (*en español los límites entre segundo [grupo] y tercero se desdibujan*, p. 23).

Her analysis focuses on the second type of verbs, ‘verbs of emotional reaction’ (*verbos de reacción emotiva*), characterized by the possibility of alternating accusative object structures with dative object structures.¹² Di Tullio attributes a different aspectual meaning to each construction: the accusative one depicts an event while the dative one depicts a state. Di Tullio adduces constructed clauses like (1b) and (28b) below as instances of the -eventive- accusative pattern, and examples like (2a) and (29b) below as instances of the -stative- dative one [we keep her numbering in the examples below]:

(17) Di Tullio’s examples:

(1b) Los problemas de seguridad intimidan a los turistas
the problems of safety intimidate.PRS.3PL to the tourists
‘Safety problems intimidate tourists’

(28b) El cine italiano lo aburre a Juan, pero
the cinema Italian 3SG.M.ACC=bore.PRS.3SG to Juan but
últimamente no.¹³
lately not
‘Italian cinema bores Juan, but lately not [so much]’

(2a) A los turistas *(les) intimidan los problemas de seguridad
to the tourists *(3PL.DAT)=intimidate the problems of safety
‘Tourists are intimidated by safety problems’

(29b) A Luis le aburre / fascina / interesa
to Luis 3SG.DAT=bore.PRS.3SG / fascinate.PRS.3SG / interest.PRS.3SG
el cine italiano
the cinema Italian
‘Luis is bored by / fascinated by / interested in Italian cinema’

Di Tullio claims that the constructions with dative objects (2a) and (29b) denote a ‘derived state’ as opposed to the ‘inherent states’ denoted by the first type (*temer*) and third type – with dative object too – (*gustar*), but the tests she adduces do not confirm this distinction empirically (the progressive with *estar* + GERUND, the interpretation of the simple present, among other tests, produce ambiguous

12. This alternation is not possible in Italian, where EOC constructions have arguments either cast in the accusative or the dative depending on verb choice.

13. We wish to thank a reviewer for pointing out that the clitic doubling of a direct object is typical of and widely accepted in Argentinian Spanish, in light of which we can make better sense of the acceptability of Di Tullio’s example, which at first seemed odd to us.

results; cf. *ibid.*: 34).¹⁴ Therefore, there are no convincing grammatical arguments that support a distinction between clauses like (29b) *A Luis le aburre/ fascina / interesa el cine italiano*, and clauses with third type verbs like *A Luis le gusta / encanta el cine italiano*. The consequence for our corpus analysis is that we find justifiable to combine ‘dative object’ patterns of second type verbs in the same category (EOCs) in Di Tullio’s proposal with patterns of the third type in her classification.

The possibility of distinguishing two subtypes of structures for the second type verbs – accusative marked experiencer object plus eventive reading as in Di Tullio’s (1b) and (28b) *vs.* dative marked experiencer object plus stative reading as in her (2a) and (29b) also warrants some discussion. As stated above, because of the frequent syncretism, in these clauses the coding properties alone seem too weak to justify a clear-cut distinction between the direct and the indirect object. To overcome this difficulty, the contrast between the two functions has been based on some behavioral properties of the constructions such as passive alternation (passivization), the substitution of the lexical objects by clitics (pronominalization), or the preposing of the lexical object to check if it entails either accusative or dative clitic doubling (thematization). But these tests are not really useful: the sequences are manipulated by the analyst and most of the resulting expressions can hardly be interpreted unambiguously (cf. Di Tullio *passim*, main text and footnotes). Furthermore, the difficulties in making a distinction between direct and indirect objects through behavioral criteria are even greater in the case of the 1st and 2nd person clitics. Despite these shortcomings, Di Tullio also draws interesting conclusions about the semantic make-up of the structures she analyzes.

Melis (1999), on the other hand, carries out a thorough empirically-based analysis of the syntax and semantics of causative emotional verbs (*causativos emocionales*). She defines this verb class by stipulating that the verbs can be used in all the three following constructions [we keep her numbering in the examples below]:

(18) Melis’s examples:

(i) the ‘basic transitive’ construction, with a preverbal subject and a direct object:

- (1a) Pedro la había desilusionado
 Pedro 3SG.F.ACC=disappoint.PST.PRF.3SG
 ‘Pedro had disappointed her’;

14. We also have reservations about the use of this type of tests as heuristic tools in analyzing real linguistic data.

(ii) the ‘inverse voice’ construction,¹⁵ with an ‘initial’ direct or indirect object and a postverbal subject:¹⁶

(2a) lo irritaban varias cosas de su agenda
 3SG.M.ACC=annoy.PST.3PL various things of his schedule
 ‘Various things about his schedule annoyed him’

(2b) le desesperaba el tránsito de la Ciudad de México;
 3SG.DAT=infuriate.PST.3SG the traffic of the City of Mexico
 ‘The traffic in Mexico City infuriated him’

(iii) the middle voice construction, which takes pronominal *se* and a prepositional phrase:

(3a) qué tal si se horrorizaba con la sangre.
 What if REFL freak.PST.3SG with the blood
 ‘what would happen if s/he freaked out at the sight of blood?’

(cf. Melis, 1999: 50)

The distinction between classes (i) and (ii) poses problems partly similar to those we have seen in Di Tullio’s account. Besides, particular criticisms can be raised against the mixing of two different parameters in the classification: the sequential order of subject and object relative to the verb, and the presence of a direct object in (i) versus a direct or indirect object in (ii). Even if it were possible to discriminate between direct and indirect objects in all cases – which is not the case when the forms are syncretic –, one wonders which of the two constructions is represented by a clause like (19) below: it has a preverbal subject, as (i) constructions are expected to have, but also has an indirect object, as required in (ii) constructions.

(19) El texto que acaba de redactar no le satisface
 the text that finish.PRS.3SG of write.INF not 3SG.DAT=satisfy.PRS.3SG
 en absoluto
 at all
 ‘The text s/he has just written doesn’t satisfy her/him at all’ (PAI:181.10)

15. “The inverse construction is formally distinguished from the transitive construction in the order of its arguments: the object-experiencer appears in preverbal position, whereas the subject-stimulus moves to a post-verbal position” (ibid.: 51) (or *La construcción inversa se diferencia formalmente de la transitiva en el orden de colocación de los argumentos: el experimentante-objeto aparece en posición preverbal, mientras que el estímulo-sujeto se desplaza hacia el lugar posverbal* (ibid.)).

16. The clauses Melis gives as examples are actually not good illustrations of the ‘initial’ position of the object, as they are clitics, and their position is therefore obligatorily proclitic to the verb form.

An additional consequence of the criteria proposed for distinguishing the 'basic transitive' construction from the 'inverse' construction is shown through Examples (20) and (21) below, which will be classified differently – (20) as basic transitive (i), and (21) as inverse (ii) –, though there is no apparent syntactic or semantic difference between them. The difference in the sequential order of subject and verb, it could be argued, affects the information-structural level, but not the grammar:

- (20) *la actitud de mi amigo* me sorprendió y
 the attitude of my friend 1SG.OBJ=surprise.PST.3SG and
 me entristeció
 1SG.OBJ=sadden.PST.3SG
 'My friend's attitude surprised and saddened me' (HIS:132.09)
- (21) Me ha sorprendido *la negación y la pasividad de un*
 1SG.OBJ=surprise.PRF.3SG the denial and the passiveness of a
pequeño sector
 small sector
 'The denial and passiveness of a small sector has surprised me' (JOV:144.16)

Then, as far as the direct *vs.* indirect object distinction is concerned, the analysis of Melis (1999) does not provide operational criteria to maintain the two categories separate.

As convincing evidence for establishing separate functions is lacking, the figures corresponding to EOCs in this paper were calculated on the basis of a single object category – combining direct objects and indirect objects in an all-encompassing object function.

The study by Melis (1999) is based on a sample of 839 clauses from a corpus of Mexican Spanish texts from the 1980s and 1990s, from which she elaborates a penetrating analysis of the semantics and syntax of causative emotional verbs. She does, however, not include ESCs in her paper.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Melis (1999) provides interesting data and remarks to further understand the relationships between the syntactic form and the semantic and discourse-functional meanings of the constructions we are studying.

Melis examines the 'inverse voice' clauses (ii) as compared to middle voice clauses (iii), focusing her attention on two factors associated with the stimulus – its form, NP *vs.* clause, and its cataphoric persistence (Givón, 1983) – and a third factor associated with the affectedness of the experiencer. Melis claims that the object experiencers of (ii) are affected while the subject experiencers of (iii) are not. Such a semantic difference is related to the person of the participant. Melis

17. Nor the non-causative EOC verbs, such as *gustar*, or other verbs that do not enter in all three above-mentioned constructions; cf. her footnote on p. 50.

bases this relationship on the notion of ‘empathy’ (Kuno and Kaburaki, 1977) and assumes that the speaker tends to identify or empathize more easily with entities more similar to him/herself. In this particular case,

The concept of empathy allows us to understand why it is easier for a speaker to evaluate the state of affectedness of the experiencers cast in first and second person, as they are much closer to him than those in the third person¹⁸

(Melis, 1999: 56)

The data provided by Melis (1999: 58) show a greater number of 1st and 2nd person experiencers in inverse voice constructions as compared to the experiencers in middle voice constructions, which are mostly 3rd person participants.¹⁹ The relationship between affectedness and empathy suggested by Melis is certainly useful for us to analyze the contrast between EOCs and ESCs.

The use of textual corpora for this study provided relevant data to fill the gap in the analyses of EOCs that take actual usage into account. We used the ARTHUS corpus and BDS/ADESSE database for Spanish and the BADIP, C-ORAL (Cresti & Moneglia, 2005), and *La Repubblica* corpora for Italian, to track the frequency and distribution of a number of discourse-related properties of the arguments, such as animacy, person, and syntactic category. Ultimately, this study provides some insight into how both ESC and EOC constructions are used and conceived of by speakers in actual discourse. Our analysis of these constructions is couched in Construction Grammar terms, because CxG offers the ideal framework to integrate semantic (such as animacy of participants or level of agentivity of the clause), syntactic (speakers’ choice of EOC or ESC constructions), and discourse properties (such as topic continuity or salience) in the study of grammar.

2. Methods

We analyzed the features of EOCs and ESCs in two Romance languages, Italian and Spanish, where the usage and vitality of non-nominative subjects showed certain parallels. In order to work with naturalistic data, we used corpora comprising both written and spoken usage for both languages.

18. “El concepto de empatía nos permite entender por qué le resulta más fácil al hablante valorar el estado de afectación de los experimentantes de primera y segunda persona que le son mucho más próximos que los de tercera.”

19. Notice though that Melis’s ‘inverse construction’ is not strictly comparable to our EOC, because her ‘basic transitive’ construction (i) (e.g., *Pedro la había desilusionado*) sets the class apart from the ‘inverse voice’ construction (ii), whereas our EOC is a broader class that includes all the constructions with object experiencers, therefore our EOCs subsume (i) and (ii).

The analysis of the Spanish data is based on the ARTHUS corpus, which comprises American and Peninsular samples for a variety of genres. ARTHUS is not simply a corpus of ‘raw data.’ Syntactic and semantic features for each clause, numbering 159,000, are recorded in a complex database (BDS/ADESSE) for further detailed syntactic and semantic studies of Spanish (García Miguel, 2005; Vaamonde et al., 2010). The database allows for general searches and counts of clausal schemata and subschemata, as well as for automatic counts of syntactic and semantic features including verbal semantic classification. Each clause in the corpus was annotated for syntactic functions of the arguments (subject, direct object, etc.), syntactic categories (NP, pronoun, etc.), semantic roles, verb semantic class, etc. With the ADESSE/BDS database, it is also possible to have forms tallied by textual genres. Its drawbacks are however, that it is mostly comprised of written language texts (only about 20% of its contents are oral), and that contents are limited in size to 1,449,005 words. Table 2 below, shows the distribution of the number of words in the ADESSE database across textual genres and broad dialectal areas for Spanish.

Table 2. Number of words in the ARTHUS corpus according to text types and regions

# of words	Spanish (totals)	Spain	Latin America ²⁰
Fiction	538,906 (37.19%)	385,661	153,245
Press	166,804 (11.51%)	166,804	0
Theater	212,507 (14.66%)	212,507	0
Essay	257,718 (17.78%)	168,511	89,207
Oral	273,070 (18.85%)	207,948	65,122
Total	1,449,005	1,141,431	307,574

The situation is more problematic for Italian, since there are no publicly available, automatically searchable, tagged corpora. We therefore had to compound the contents of the following databases: BADIP, C-ORAL, and an excerpt from *La Repubblica*. BADIP²¹ is a database that contains the totality of the Spoken Italian Lexical Frequency Corpus (LIP). The corpus is made up of different oral text types: informal conversations (face to face or on the phone), transcripts from meetings, oral exams, interviews, conferences, classes (K-12 to university level), homilies, TV programs not based on a written screenplay (De Mauro et al. 1993). The LIP corpus contains 490,000 words. The second corpus used was the Italian

20. <http://adesse.uvigo.es/data/corpus.php>.

21. <http://badip.uni-graz.at>.

section of the C-ORAL-ROM²² corpus (approximately 300,000 words), which comprises spontaneous conversation from unscripted sources including informal conversations in private and in public, formal speeches in natural contexts (political speeches and debates, preaching, conferences), formal spoken discourse in the media (talk shows, interviews, political debate), and formal and informal telephone calls.

Finally, for the press section of the analysis, we used an excerpt of about 500,000 words from the *La Repubblica* newspaper archives to make the comparison between the two languages numerically more balanced. The texts analyzed from *La Repubblica* were taken from two randomly chosen weeks in 1991 and 1992 to make the language comparable to that gathered in the other corpora, which are also from the beginning of the 1990s, except for the LABLITA corpus (part of C-ORAL-ROM), which spans 1965–2000. It was only possible to distinguish between oral vs. press textual genres in the Italian corpora, and the number of searches was limited by the fact that they had to be performed manually. Table 3 below shows the distribution of the number of words in the Italian databases across textual genres. Dialectal areas were not recoverable for Italian, although the sources are from different regions.²³

Table 3. Number of words used for the Italian analysis according to text types and corpus

# of words	Italian (totals)	Corpus
Press	500,000 (38.8%)	500,000 – La Repubblica
Oral	790,000 (61.2%)	300,000 – C-Oral 490,000 – BAdIP
Total	1,290,000	

Because we were forced to conduct manual searches of non-tagged corpora for Italian, the analysis of those data is more limited and less sophisticated than the detailed analysis of the ARTHUS corpus data. We can, however, point to similar tendencies between the two languages, even if EOCs – especially those with dative experiencers – seem to be more productive in Spanish than in Italian.

22. <http://www.elda.org/en/proj/coralrom.html>

23. LABLITA is multidialectal, but many of the speakers are not classified by provenance (<http://lablita.dit.unifi.it/corpora/descriptions/lablita/>), BAdIP is made up of texts from Florence, Naples, Rome and Milan, and the texts in *La Repubblica* have no clear dialectal bias, since they are mostly written in formal standard Italian.

2.1 Data selection

Previous studies on experiential predicates, such as those mentioned in Section 1, underline that non-nominative subjects tend to be found in constructions with verbs expressing mental processes and feelings in a variety of languages. Mental processes and feelings can however also be expressed through regular transitive constructions: these verbs thus offer a good testing ground for the distribution of EOC and ESC constructions. Corpus analysis provides a solid empirical foundation to identify the differences between ESCs and EOCs with verbs of feeling at the discourse level and to determine if the relative distribution of the two constructions in usage is random or not. To address the issue, we have carried out a quantitative analysis of the following features of the experiencer and stimulus: animacy, syntactic class, and grammatical person in both ESCs and EOCs. We have also examined the frequency of the constructions according to textual genre.

Data from the Spanish ARTHUS corpus were restricted to clauses (and their verbs) that met the following conditions, and the same was done in the choice of constructions for Italian:

- a. Verbs must belong to the semantic class of ‘feeling’ (Sp. *sensación* in ADESE), except the ‘volition’ subclass, which is always encoded by ESC without alternate EOC pattern.

In ADESE, clauses are categorized into six main types according to their conceptual meaning: mental, relational, material, verbal, existential and directive.²⁴ In this study we focus on the mental process category, which involves two basic participants, the experiencer and the phenomenon causing the mental process (stimulus). Mental processes represent a 23.67% of the clauses in the corpus (37,636 items) and comprise four classes: feeling, perception, cognition and choice. Feeling and cognition classes are in turn divided into two subclasses: ‘volition’ is a subdivision of ‘feeling,’ while ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief’ are subsets of the cognition category.

As the paper analyzes the distribution of ESC vs. EOC, only subclasses that display both types of constructions can be taken into account. Therefore, perception (e.g., *ver* ‘see’, *mostrar* ‘show’), choice (e.g. *decidir* ‘decide’, *elegir* ‘choose’), the cognition general class (e.g. *pensar* ‘think’, *entender* ‘understand’), and the volition subclass of feeling (e.g. *querer* ‘want’)²⁵ were excluded from our sample, since all

24. Some clauses are ascribed to more than one class. The reader is referred to <http://adesse.uvigo.es/data/classes.php> for further information. See also Albertuz (2007), Vaamonde et al. (2010). The ADESE typology of verbal processes goes back to the one proposed by Halliday (1985).

25. It is worth noticing that the verb *querer* belongs to the volition subclass when it has the sense of “to wish for something, to want something, or to want something to happen” (ADESE),

the clauses in these categories are ESCs. The ‘belief’ and ‘knowledge’ subclasses were also excluded from the study. These subclasses display very unbalanced distributions of the two constructions examined: EOC represent just a 0.8% of the total of clauses in the knowledge subclass (46 vs. 5599 of ESC),²⁶ and a mere 16.5% in the belief subclass (483 vs. 2436 of ESC).²⁷ In contrast, the general class of feeling provides us with a more balanced number of occurrences of both constructions and a wider range of verb lexemes.

b. Clauses must have just two arguments that fill either ESC or EOC conditions.

Table 4. Criteria for data searches in *ADESSE*

	Argument 1	Argument 2
ESC	Experiencer = Subject	Stimulus = Object
EOC	Experiencer = Object	Stimulus = Subject

c. Clauses must be in the active voice. Passive and middle (reflexive) constructions were avoided in this study; as a consequence, expressions like *interesarse por algo/ interessarsi di qualcosa* ‘be interested in something’, *asustarse con algo/ spaventarsi per/di qualcosa* ‘be afraid of something’ etc., were not included in the counts.

The total number of verb forms analyzed for Spanish was 4,114. Similar criteria were followed for Italian, but only six lemmas were analyzed, three participating in ESC constructions and three in EOC constructions, for a total of 689 forms. Despite the disparity in size, the Italian forms analyzed offer a comparable picture to that of the Spanish verbs, corroborated by statistical analysis provided by the classification and regression tree in Section 3. The Italian verb forms were chosen with the same selection criteria as the Spanish ones, so as to parallel some of the most common verbal lemmas in the ARTHUS corpus participating in the EOC/ESC alternation; we made sure that the chosen verbal forms for Italian were also used frequently both in the oral and written genre, in both EOC and ESC constructions (see results below).

which is by and large its most frequent meaning in the corpus (1040 clauses); ex.: *Erni, ¿quieres apagar las luces?* (CIN:063,12) ‘Erni, do you want to turn off the lights?’. In other contexts (183 clauses), *querer* means “to feel or show affection towards someone” (ibid.), so it is not a volition verb, but a verb of the general feelings class, and as such it is included in the analysis.

26. Tally carried out on Dec. 8, 2012.

27. These figures represent the clauses that fulfill condition b: all of them are constructions with two participants, experiencer and stimulus, cast respectively as subject and object in ESCs, and *vice versa* in EOCs.

3. Results

In BDS/ADESSE there are 1161 ESC clauses that fulfill criteria a–c above. The more frequent verbs in this construction are those included in Table 5 below, along with their figures:

Table 5. Verb lemmas participating in ESC constructions and their quantity in the Spanish corpus used

Verb	Quantity	Verb	Quantity
<i>querer</i> 2* 'love'	165	<i>adorar</i> 'adore'	28
<i>temer</i> 'fear'	113	<i>experimentar</i> 2 'feel'	20
<i>vivir</i> 2 'live'	103	<i>despreciar</i> 'despise' 'scorn'	20
<i>sufrir</i> 'suffer'	101	<i>desdeñar</i> 'scorn'	19
<i>amar</i> 'love'	73	<i>gozar</i> 'enjoy'	16
<i>sentir</i> 2 'feel'	68	<i>apreciar</i> 1 'be fond of'	15
<i>odiar</i> 'hate'	67	<i>paladear</i> 'relish'	14
<i>respetar</i> 'respect'	51	<i>detestar</i> 'detest'	12
<i>admirar</i> 'admire'	40	<i>extrañar</i> 'miss'	12
<i>aguantar</i> 'stand'	39	<i>añorar</i> 'long or yearn for'	12
<i>padecer</i> 'suffer'	38	<i>acusar</i> 2 'show signs of'	10
<i>lamentar</i> 'regret'	34	<i>compadecer</i> 'feel sorry for'	8
<i>celebrar</i> 2	28	Other	55
		Total**	1161

* Numbers next to the verbs mark the specific verb meaning in the construction (cf. ADESSE).

** There are 43 different verb lexemes in ESCs in our sample.

As for EOCs, the more frequent Spanish verbs in our corpus are listed in Table 6.

These verbs all have common equivalents in Italian, which can be rendered by EOC constructions, sometimes they are periphrases with verbs such as *dare* 'to give', or *fare* 'to do/make': *gustar* – *piacere* 'like', *importar* – *importare* 'matter', *interesar* – *interessare* 'interest', *sorprender* – *sorprendere* 'surprise', *encantar* – *affascinare* 'like a lot, charm', *doler* – *far(e) male* 'hurt', *atraer* – *attrarre* 'attract', *extrañar* – *sorprendere* 'surprise',²⁸ *molestar* – *dar(e) fastidio* 'bother', *asustar* – *spaventare/far(e) paura* 'frighten', *divertir* – *divertire* 'amuse', *calmar* – *calmare* 'calm', *alegrar* – *far(e) piacere* 'to be happy'. *Apetecer* 'feel like' in Italian can be translated by an equivalent EOC construction *far(e) gola*, but it is most commonly translated by an ESC construction: *aver(e) voglia (di qualcosa)*.

28. The relevant meaning of *extrañar* here is 'to surprise' as in *ya son las ocho, me extraña que no haya llegado* 'it's already 8 o'clock, I am surprised that s/he hasn't arrived yet,' which is constructed as an EOC, not *extrañar* as in 'to miss (someone),' which is constructed as an ESC.

Table 6. Verb lemmas participating in EOC constructions and their quantity in the Spanish corpus used

Verb	Nr	Verb	Nr
<i>gustar</i> 'like'	1219	<i>impresionar</i> 'strike'	29
<i>interesar</i> 1 'interest'	167	<i>tranquilizar</i> 'calm down'	25
<i>importar</i> 1 'matter'	153	<i>calmar</i> 'calm'	23
<i>encantar</i> 'love'	98	<i>animar</i> 1 'cheer up'	23
<i>sorprender</i> 1 'surprise'	77	<i>conmover</i> 1 'move'	22
<i>doler</i> 'hurt'	54	<i>ofender</i> 'offend / be offended'	22
<i>molestar</i> 1 'bother'	54	<i>asombrar</i> 'amaze / be amazed'	22
<i>atraer</i> 2 'attract'	45	<i>entusiasmar</i> 'to be enthusiastic'	21
<i>apetecer</i> 'feel like'	44	<i>divertir</i> 'amuse'	20
<i>extrañar</i> 'surprise'	43	<i>fascinar</i> 'love / be mad about'	19
<i>asustar</i> 'frighten'	37	<i>alegrar</i> 'to be happy'	17
<i>satisfacer</i> 'satisfy'	36	<i>irritar</i> 'annoy / get annoyed'	16
<i>preocupar</i> 'worry'	32	Other*	635
		Total	2953

* Our whole Spanish corpus includes 174 verbs in EOC clauses.

The Italian equivalent verbs could not all be included in our study, but all of the verbs in Tables 5 and 6 were analyzed for Spanish, while the manual searches for all verbal forms in Italian limited the number of lemmas we could analyze for the present study to the six mentioned in Table 7 below. The same criteria, however, were followed in the Italian searches as those used in the automatic searches for the Spanish corpus through ADESSE; but in practice, only 689 Italian forms were analyzed, comprising 6 verb types corresponding to frequent Spanish verbs found in ADESSE, covering similar semantic fields and paired in ESC-EOC constructions: *amare* 'to love' vs. *piacere* 'to like', *avere paura* 'to be afraid' vs. *fare paura* 'to scare', *ammirare* 'to admire' vs. *affascinare* 'to fascinate', as laid out in Table 7. Nevertheless, we trust that the frequency of use of these forms in Italian across genres (oral vs. press) and the sizable Italian sample make the comparison between Italian and Spanish EOCs and ESCs still viable.

Table 7. Verb lemmas participating in ESC&EOC constructions and their quantity in the Italian corpus used

ESC verbs	Quantity	EOC verbs	Quantity
<i>amare</i> 'to love'	104	<i>piacere</i> 'to like'	408
<i>avere paura</i> 'to be afraid'	10	<i>fare paura</i> 'to scare'	70
<i>ammirare</i> 'to admire'	74	<i>affascinare</i> 'to fascinate'	23

The EOC type of construction is very productive in Spanish, especially with dative pronominal marking, as attested by non-standard expressions such as EOC *molar* ‘to like’, *latir* ‘to surmise’ that are very typical of non-standard, oral, youth Spanish, both in Spain and in Latin America. As can be gleaned from the equivalent forms in Italian in the examples above, EOCs are also commonly found in this other Romance language, even if the objects tend not to be marked with dative as often and as productively as in Spanish.

3.1 Discourse-related and semantic features of EOCs and ESCs

In this section we lay out quantitative results concerning some semantic and discourse-related properties of the constructions under examination. The data analysis is aimed at getting a better understanding of the EOCs’ and ESCs’ communicative function.

3.1.1 *Properties of the experiencer*

To begin with, if we compare the animate character of the experiencer in both constructions, a clear (and expected) semantic parallel between the subject of ESC and the object of EOC appears, i.e. the fact that they are predominantly animate in both languages:

Table 8. Experiencer’s Animacy in ESCs and EOCs in Spanish and Italian

		ESC		EOC	
		N.	%	N.	%
Spanish	Experiencer + Animate	1110	95.6%	2802	94.8%
	Total	1161		2953	
Italian	Experiencer + Animate	223	99%	454	98%
	Total	225		464	

However some differences appear when we examine the syntactic categories that codify the experiencer in each construction (subject *vs.* object) (see Table 9).

The object experiencer (EOC) is represented by a clitic or a personal pronoun in 82.78% of the cases, while the subject experiencer (ESC) is expressed by verbal agreement alone or personal pronouns 76.64% of the times. These differences are slight, but present both in Spanish and Italian (see Table 10 below), and they could be related to the fact that, in discourse, the object experiencer is more accessible or more continuous as a topic than the subject experiencer. About topic continuity, the literature generally agrees that there is a relation between speakers’ accessibility to a referent and the linguistic encoding it requires (cf. Givón, 1983, 1992; Ariel,

Table 9. Experiencer's syntactic categories in ESCs and EOCs in Spanish

	ESC		EOC	
	N.	%	N.	%
Stressed personal pronoun	95	8.37%	305	10.32%
Verbal agreement alone (ESC) / clitic alone (EOC)	776	68.37%	2140	72.46%
Other (NPs, relative prons.)	264	23.36%	508	17.20%
Total*	1135		2953	

* As generic infinitives and gerunds were excluded from the figures pertaining to the ESC, the total of ESC cases is lower than in Table 5. The slight discrepancies in the ADESSE figures – if queried now – result from corrections operated on the database in the last year since we carried out our analysis.

1990). In fact, if a referent is *more accessible*, it will typically be expressed by *less* semantic and phonetic content (Vázquez & García, 2012).

However, the similarities in frequency of occurrence of the experiencer in each construction point to the fact that an experiencer in general is usually highly salient, recoverable, and does not need to be mentioned again by a fully fledged noun phrase.

Table 10. Experiencer's syntactic categories in ESC and EOC in Italian

	ESC		EOC	
	N.	%	N.	%
Stressed personal pronoun	24	10.66%	64	13.85%
Verbal agreement alone (ESC) / clitic alone (EOC)	130	57.77%	322	69.39%
Other (NPs, relative prons.)	71	31.55%	78	16.88%
Total	225		464	

Incidentally, the low ratio of full-fledged experiencers in usage should be noticed: these are less than a third in both ESCs and EOCs (the sum of stressed pronouns and “other”) in Spanish and 42% in ESCs and 30% in EOCs respectively in Italian. However, the order of constituents has often been employed in literature as a means for supporting functional distinctions in EOC constructions (Melis, 1999: 50–51; Di Tullio, 2004: 33; Gutiérrez-Bravo, 2006), but this should be reconsidered in view of the actual usage of such constructions. The experiencer, in fact, is often expressed by agreement only or by a clitic, whose position is obligatorily determined. Thus, the low frequency of lexical experiencers undermines the criterion of the pre- or post-verbal ‘experiencer position’ to classify the constructions.

As for the person and number of the experiencer, Table 11 below shows a remarkable contrast between ESCs and EOCs: object experiencers (EOCs) are mostly 1st person sg. participants (47%), while subject experiencers (ESCs) are represented by 3rd person in 38.6% of the cases, and only 29.7% are 1st pers. sg.

Table 11. Person/number distribution of the experiencer in ESC and EOC clauses in Spanish

Experiencer's person & number	ESC	%	EOC	%
1 ^a sg	345	29.7	1389	47
2 ^a sg	83	7.1	333	11.3
3 ^a sg	449	38.6	597	20.2
Vd sg	10	0.8	71	2.4
1 ^a pl	83	7.1	106	3.6
2 ^a pl	8	0.6	17	0.6
3 ^a pl	154	13.2	114	3.9
Vd pl	3	0.2	3	0.1
Generic inference / No clitic*	26	2.2	323	10.9
Total	1161		2953	

* EOC data are classified by the person and number of the clitic experiencer. The 323 units marked as 'no clitic' in EOCs with verbs of feeling correspond to 3rd person object experiencer with no clitic-doubling, as in Example (14a) above. Since ADESSÉ does not allow to distinguish between singular and plural in this case, we opted to consider them as an independent set, even if they belong with the third person (sg. or pl. as the case may be).

This is paralleled in Italian too, as can be seen in Table 12 below:

Table 12. Person/number distribution of the experiencer in ESC and EOC clauses in Italian

Experiencer's person & number	ESC	%	EOC	%
1 ^a sg	49	26.63	198	42.67
2 ^a sg	4	2.17	53	11.42
3 ^a sg	74	40.20	137	29.52
Vd sg	2	1.08	7	1.50
1 ^a pl	13	7.06	19	4.09
2 ^a pl	11	5.97	6	1.29
3 ^a pl	31	16.84	44	9.48
Vd pl	0		0	
Total personal forms	184		464	

The relationship between mental process clauses and the person of the experiencer has captivated the attention of (discourse-functional) linguists since at least 1958 with the seminal work of Benveniste (cf. also Lyons, 1994; Bentivoglio & Weber, 1999; Scheibman, 2001, 2002; Travis, 2006). These studies pointed out the tendency of the clauses of mental process – and especially those of the cognition subclass – to be associated with a first person singular subject. Benveniste called attention to the function of mental process verbs (“propositional attitude verbs”

in particular) in the first person and the present tense, since with first person subjects, these verbs do not describe mental states or processes as they do with third person subjects (*she believes that ...; he supposes that ...*), but they express instead the epistemic attitude of the speaker towards the proposition that follows (*I believe that ...; I suppose that ...*), which makes them ‘markers of subjectivity’ (cf. Benveniste, 1958: 185).

The recurrent use of this function in discourse has provoked the formal freezing of elements such as (*yo*) *creo / creo yo* ‘I believe, I think’, *me parece* ‘it seems to me’, *supongo* ‘I suppose’, etc., and the consequent weakening of their argument structure as they little by little lost their event-codifying function as a result of their progression towards becoming subjective experience markers (cf. Weber & Bentivoglio, 1991; Bentivoglio & Weber, 1999; Vázquez Rozas, 2006a; Travis, 2006).

If we return to Tables 11 and 12, we see that corpus data show the preference of EOC for 1st person experiencer in both Spanish and Italian, as in Examples (10a–b) and (11a) (repeated here):

- (10) a. *francamente la televisión a mí me aburre*
 frankly the television to me 1SG.OBJ=bore.PRS.3SG
 ‘Frankly television bores me’ (SEV:094.08)
- b. *Il teatro, sono sincera, mi annoia*
 the theater be.PRS.1SG sincere.F 1SG.OBJ=bore.PRS.3SG
 ‘I admit it: theater bores me’ (LaRep, 02.06.92, ‘Spettacoli’)
- (11) a. *A mí me asusta, me desagrada este*
 to me 1SG.OBJ=scare.PRS.3SG 1SG.OBJ=disgust.PRS.3SG this
 Madrid ruidoso
 Madrid noisy
 ‘The noise of Madrid scares and disgusts me’ (MAD:103.17)

As for ESC, third person experiencers outnumber first person experiencers, so the more frequent uses can be illustrated through examples like (5) for Sp. and (8) for It. above, repeated here:

- (5) *Él sí amaba esa ciudad*
 he yes love.PST.3SG that town
 ‘He did love that town’ (MIRADA: 93, 32)
- (8) *Cendrars amava il cinema di un amore non ricambiato.*
 Cendrars love.PST.3SG the cinema of a love not requited
 ‘Cendrars loved cinema with unrequited love’
 (LaRep, 06.24.89, ‘Mercurio-Scaffale’)

pronoun and is defined in Silverstein (1976) as a scale of “likelihood of functioning as transitive agents” (*apud* Dixon, 1979: 85).

According to the hierarchy, the speaker occupies the position of highest agentivity, as Dixon maintains (1994: 84):

[...] a speaker will think in terms of doing things to other people to a much greater extent than in terms of things being done to him. In the speaker’s view of the world, as it impinges on him and as he describes it in language, he will be the quintessential agent.

The clauses with verbs of feeling analyzed here suggest, however, a different interpretation: it is the 3rd person that is conceptualized more frequently as an agent, since it is more often cast as a syntactic subject than the 1st person, which prefers the function of object, and whose role is, as a consequence, less active.

Several researchers have maintained that agentivity does not justify the position of first person discourse participants in the upper level of the animacy hierarchy compared to 3rd person (cf. DeLancey, 1981; van der Auwera, 1981: 94 ff.; Myhill, 1992: 224 and 278, in a footnote)²⁹ and it has been pointed out that 1st and 2nd persons are also high in the hierarchy because of their features of empathy and topicality. These notions are found in the original formulation of the hierarchy by Hawkinson & Hyman (1974), and are also part of the proposals by Givón (1976), Kuno & Kaburaki (1977), Langacker (1991: 306–307) and Lehmann *et al.* (2000: 6 & ff.), among others.

In the constructions analyzed here, what is most surprising is that the most empathetic experimenters, 1st person experimenters, are not preeminently associated with the subject function (which happens instead in other verbal classes both in Spanish and other European languages, cf. Lehmann *et al.*, 2000), but rather with the object, whereas 3rd person experimenters, the less empathetic ones, do indeed associate with subject function.

3.1.2 *Properties of the stimulus*

The stimulus participant also displays different syntactic and semantic properties in ESC and EOC constructions.

In ESC and EOC, as reported in Table 13 and 14 below, the stimulus, which is cast as the object in ESC and as subject in EOC, is predominantly inanimate.

29. “Silverstein motivates his animacy hierarchy by claiming that it reflects the likelihood of different NP types serving as agents. However, as pointed out in work such as DeLancey, 1981, topicality, viewpoint, or empathy is a more likely motivation, as it is clear why these parameters would rank first and second person pronouns higher than third person pronouns, but it is not clear why first and second person pronouns should be more likely than third person pronouns to serve as agents.” (Myhill, 1992: 278 in a footnote).

However, there is a considerable incidence of animate stimuli in ESC constructions. This corresponds to the referents in the construction having a more ‘visible side’ (public, external, objective), which is consistent with the representational (descriptive, referential) function of ESCs analyzed in the previous section.

Figures in Tables 13 and 14 show remarkable differences related to the animacy of the stimulus:

Table 13. Stimulus’s animacy in Spanish

	ESC (object) %	EOC (subject) %	% ESC	% EOC		
Animate	385	33.16	495	16.76		
Inanimate Concrete	163	14.03	567	19.20	51.41	55.36
Abstract	434	37.38	1068	36.16		
Propositional	179	15.41	823	27.86		
Total	1161		2953			

These figures are also confirmed by the Italian data, which report similar percentages for animate stimuli in ESC and EOC:

Table 14. Stimulus’s animacy in Italian

	ESC (object) %	EOC (subject) %	% ESC	% EOC		
Animate	70	38.25	51	11.61		
Inanimate Concrete	29	15.84	175	39.86	36.61	71.52
Abstract	38	20.76	139	31.66		
Propositional	46	25.13	74	16.85		
Total	183		439			

The large proportion of animate (mostly human) objects as stimuli is worthy of further research. This rate of animate participants in object function in Spanish, for instance, is notably higher than the percentage of animates in the total of Subject-Object clauses in ARTHUS (22.5%).

The stimulus in EOC – cast as subject – displays a lower percentage of animate referents and a higher proportion of propositional referents.

- (23) yo me gusta que los chiquillos sepan por lo menos
 I 1SG.OBJ=like.PRS.3SG that the kids know at least
nociones de música
 notions of music
 ‘As for me, I like the kids to have at least some notions about music’

(MADRID: 210, 20)

This is possible in Italian too, see Example (24) below, and Italian also has a high proportion of clausal stimuli in ESC, as exemplified in both clauses below. The structure

found in (25) reflects a common use of the verb 'to love' in Italian,³⁰ i.e. 'to like a lot' as in the generic English usage of 'to love (to do) something'; it should be noticed that Spanish differs from Italian (or English) in this usage of the verb 'to love', as Sp. *amar* would not be used for the same construction with a clausal stimulus.

- (24) Cossiga ha premesso che non gli piace
 Cossiga have.PRS.3SG opened.PPT that not 3SG.DAT=like.PRS.3SG
 'tracciare identikit'
 draw.INF profiling
 'Cossiga opened by saying that he does not like to 'do any profiling'
 (LaRep, 03.29.92, 'Extra')

- (25) [Tiri da tre] 'Entrambe le squadre amano farne'
 [threepointers] both the teams love.PRS.3PL make.INF=3SG.OBJ
 '[Threepointers] Both teams love to shoot them' (LaRep., 05.16.91, 'Sport')

Clauses, as 'third order entities', are not conceived of as individuals, which can be acting on other individuals,³¹ so the sentences of which they are a part (those with cognitive predicates, such as 'I think', 'I believe', 'I suppose' etc., and with evaluative predicates, such as 'I like', 'I hope', etc.), are not primarily directed at representing "objective" events. On the contrary, such sentences tend to refer to subjective (private, internal) states of affairs and to have an evaluative function.

Di Tullio (2004) also analyzes interpretive differences related to subject features, and observes that a 'causal subject' (which in this case could also be defined as a 'clausal' subject, unlike an actual agentive one) activates a psychological reading of predicates that also admit a physical reading (in which the subject would be an agent). She maintains, thus, that the psychological reading of the verb depends on the 'clausal' reading of the subject: 'it is not the category of the subject – noun

30. A sample from the *La Repubblica* corpus reveals that they account for about 30% of the occurrence of this verb in this corpus.

31. Melis (1999: 53): 'the medio-passive voice is used more often with clausal stimuli, which can hardly be seen as 'participants' in the event' ("[...] la media se utiliza más con los estímulos oracionales que con dificultad se ven como "participantes" del evento [...]"). Also: 'However, even when they exhibit referential or functional affinities, nouns and clauses do not behave identically in syntax (Lehmann, 1991: 203–204). According to Lehmann (1991: 205), this is due to the fact that clauses, unlike nouns, cannot refer to an entity that can 'participate' in the described event and that can be characterized as having less 'prominence' and 'cognitive independence' than nouns' ("Sin embargo, aun cuando presentan afinidades referenciales y funcionales, se sabe que los nombres y las oraciones no se comportan de manera idéntica en la sintaxis (Lehmann, 1991: 203–204). Esto se debe, en la opinión de Lehmann (1991: 205), a que las oraciones se distinguen de los nombres en que no sugieren al igual la figura de un ente que 'participa' en el evento descrito y que se caracterizan, frente a las entidades nominales, por tener un menor grado de 'prominencia' e 'independencia cognoscitiva'") (ibid.: 57).

phrase or clause – that activates the psychological meaning, but rather the possibility of a clausal interpretation (i.e. of a ‘propositional thematic role’).³² (28) – Di Tullio in fact concludes that the basic form of the subject (stimulus) in these verbs is the expression of an event, whose canonical structure is an infinitival clause or nominalization. Verbs of feeling, she maintains, select mostly clausal subjects, and only indirectly agentive ones (ibid.: 28–29).

However, although clausal stimuli do appear in considerable numbers in our data, the majority of stimuli are represented by fully-fledged NPs. This is in clear opposition to what was mentioned above for the experiencer in both ESC and EOC constructions, and points to a lower salience of the stimulus in discourse.

Table 15. Syntactic class of stimulus in Spanish

	ESC	%	EOC	%
Stressed pers. pron.	12	1.03	18	0.60
Subject Agreement / Object Clitic alone	370	31.86	820	27.76
NP	660	56.84	1524	51.60
Clause	119	10.24	564	19.09
Adverbial			1	0.03
Generic infinitives			26	0.88
Total	1161		2953	

The Italian data show that there are similar tendencies in the frequency of NPs to represent stimuli (see Table XVI below), although Spanish ESCs are more inclined to represent their object by a NP than Italian ones, and conversely Italian EOCs are fonder of NP stimuli than Spanish ones:

Table 16. Syntactic class of stimulus in Italian

	ESC	%	EOC	%
Stressed pers. pron.	1	0.53	1	0.22
Subject Agreement / Object Clitic alone	54	28.72	113	24.88
NP	87	46.27	267	58.81
Clause	46	24.46	73	16.07
Adverbial	0		0	
Total*	188		454	

* Minor discrepancies in numbers of stimuli/experiencers and total number of clauses analyzed in Italian is due to either experiencer or stimulus being omitted or only partially recoverable from the limited context offered by the database.

32. “No es la categoría del sujeto – sintagma nominal u oración – lo decisivo para activar el significado psicológico sino la viabilidad de una interpretación oracional (en otros términos, de un ‘Papel Temático Proposicional.’)”

3.2 ESCs, EOCs and text type (genre)

Last but not least, we examined the incidence of cross-genre variation in the frequency and distribution of the constructions examined.

The figures in Tables 17 and 18 clearly show the tendency of EOCs to correlate with oral discourse, although this tendency is more marked in Spanish than in Italian (where, however, admittedly the analyzed sample is much more restricted).

Table 17. Distribution of ESC and EOC according to text type in Spanish

	ESC		EOC		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Novel	579	34.15	1116	65.85	1695
Press	75	58.14	54	41.86	129
Theater	254	33.82	497	66.18	751
Essay	152	41.87	211	58.13	363
Oral	101	8.59	1075	91.41	1176
Total	1161	28.2	2953	71.8	4114

The Table 18 represents the Italian results according to genre:

Table 18. Distribution of ESC and EOC according to text type in Italian

	ESC	%	EOC	%	Total
Press	103	45.37	124	54.62	227
Oral	122	26.40	340	73.59	462
Total	225		464		689

If the distinction is not clearer for the Italian press (represented by *La Repubblica*), this may be due to interviews and reports of direct speech, where EOCs would mimic oral usage and frequencies. Nevertheless, it is to be expected that in talking about feelings, emotions, likes and dislikes, in short where the speaker offers subjective evaluations, EOCs would be preferred and that these would correlate with oral texts, rather than with the printed word. ESC constructions, which correlate with event descriptions and objectivity, are more frequently found in the detached, descriptive style of the press as would be expected, and this is indeed what happens in Spanish. Italian, however differs from Spanish in this respect, by having more EOCs even in the press section. This may be a genuine distinction between the two Romance languages or it may be the effect of a high amount of oral interviews in our random sample of Italian texts analyzed.

While percentages may give us a hint about tendencies, only statistical analysis may confirm the accuracy of conclusions based on raw data. A classification and

regression tree³³ was fitted to the target variables (construction types EOCs and ESCs) using different predictors (see Figure 1).

Predictors used in the model were animacy of the stimulus (with two levels: yes/no), person of the experiencer (with three levels: 1st, 2nd, 3rd), number of the experiencer (with two levels: sg., pl.), and genre (with 5 levels: novel, press, theater, essay, oral). The model had a high classification accuracy of 87.9%, compared to a baseline of 58.9%.

As we surmised, genre is clearly a factor in the choice of construction, where a clear distinction can be found between oral, on the one hand, and the written word on the other (subsuming essay, novel, press, and theater). Person and number of the experiencer are also significant, as well as animacy of the stimulus. Moreover some language differences are also significant.

4. Discussion

As mentioned above, there is a clear distinction between oral and written texts. If a text is oral, there is a further highly significant difference between singular and plural experiencers. If the experiencer is plural or is not recoverable from the context or is just a generic entity, there is a distinction between Italian and Spanish (node 8). In Italian, if the experiencer is generic or non-recoverable, ESCs are prevalent; whereas if the experiencer is plural, EOCs are predicted to be a little over 50%, and ESCs a little more than 40%. In Spanish on the other hand, in either case EOCs are predominant.

If the experiencer is singular (node 2 > 3) in an oral genre, there is also a distinction between Italian and Spanish: in Spanish with singular number we find all EOCs, whereas in Italian it is all EOCs with first and second person, whereas we find some ESCs with third person singular. This is the same tendency discussed above (end of Section 3.3.1) that finds some of the less empathetic experiencers (3rd person experiencers) tied to the subject function of ESCs.

In the written language, first and second person (node 15 > 21) are further classified by animacy of the stimulus; however, if the experiencer is in the first person we find a majority of EOCs regardless of animacy of the stimulus (node 27, and node 22 > 23), once again establishing the importance of the association between 'private' verbs, first person experiencers and EOCs. This confirms Melis's conclusions and Mithun's intuition that "Speakers do not claim to feel what another individual is feeling" (Mithun, 1991; Melis, 1999: 58, and cf. Section 3.1.1

33. Our thanks to Stefan Th. Gries who ran the statistics for the classification and regression tree.

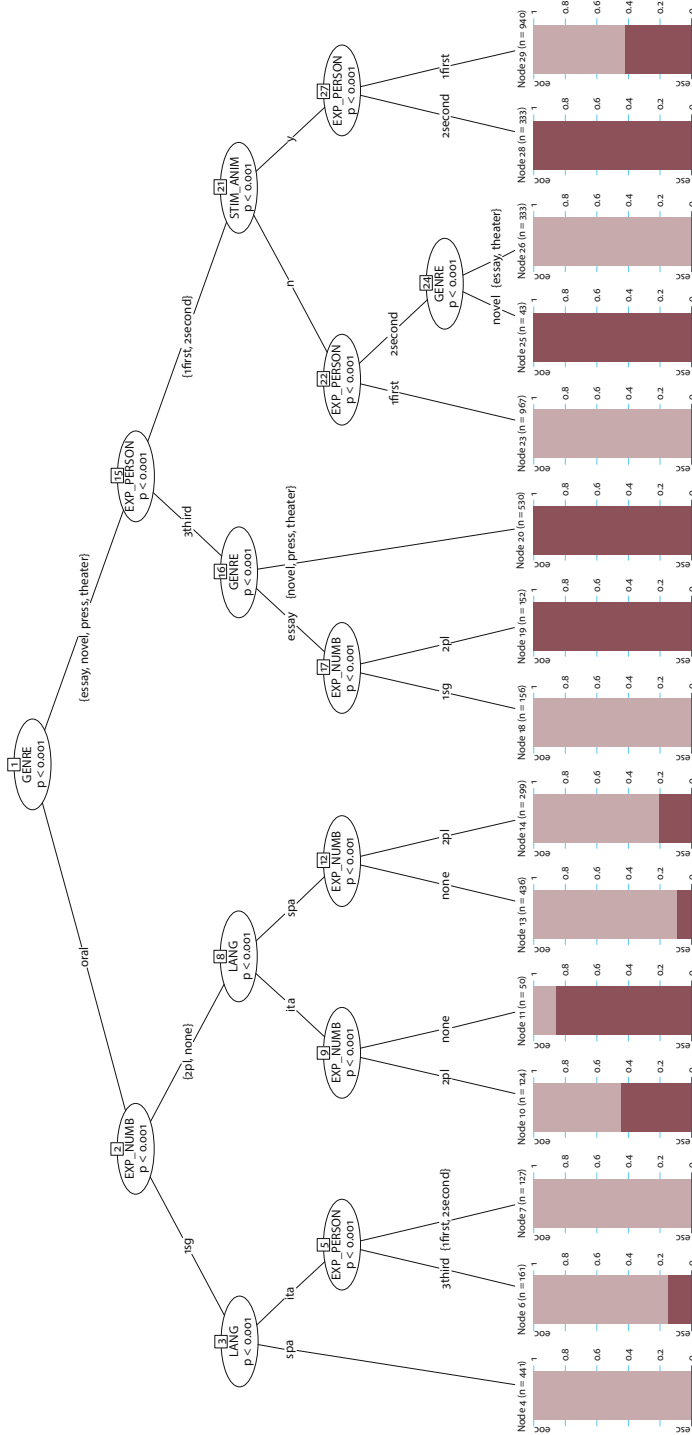


Figure 1. Classification and regression tree showing EOCs and ESCs as dependent variables and several predictors (person, number, animacy of stimulus) related to the semantic and discourse features of the constructions

above). By contrast, at least in the novel, press, and theater, if the experiencer is in the third person (node 16 > 20), the construction of choice is ESC.

We can therefore surmise that what characterizes the use of EOCs with the 1st person, then, is not their potential agency, but, as Melis, Mithun and others pointed out, it is the capability of witnessing his/her own inner mental state, as is sensed first-hand by the experiencer him/herself.

Empathy and agentivity function as alternating organizing principles within processes of feeling in Spanish and Italian. What isolates the speaker *vis à vis* other persons is his/her unique ability to perceive his/her mental state as a private and non-transferable experience. In fact, mental activity verbs have been referred to as ‘private verbs’ because ‘they refer to activities available for perception by the speaker only’ (Weber & Bentivoglio, 1991: 194, citing Palmer, 1965: 95ff.).

The fundamental difference between the first and other persons – in Melis’s words – is that ‘the speaker knows what he is feeling, but since he cannot avail himself of evidence as to what third parties feel, he chooses to represent them as not affected.’³⁴ (Melis, 1999: 58). The tendency to codify third persons as subjects in ESCs can be explained because their emotional states are not directly accessible to the speaker and therefore this is less amenable to empathy and to the understanding of others as affected experimenters.³⁵

On the other hand, the relative activity of the subject experiencer contributes to his/her visibility, and as a consequence, makes it easier to infer his/her feelings and other mental states. The speaker can have – indirect – access to the inner cognitive state of a 3rd person on the basis of his/her public behavior.

Östen Dahl (2000: 48) proposes a semantic scale “private-public” or “internal-external”³⁶ that can be applied to the constructions examined here: the propensity of the object experiencers to be in 1st person would be related to the ‘private’ content conventionally associated to EOCs; and the likely tendency of subject

34. “El hablante sabe lo que él siente, pero al no disponer de la misma evidencia respecto a terceros opta por representarlos como no afectados.”

35. The correlation between mental processes and persons in discourse can manifest itself also in combinatorial restrictions. In Japanese, for instance, certain predicates indicating ‘direct experience’ such as ‘to be cold’, ‘to feel lonely’ in the so-called *reportive style* can only be used in statements with a first person experiencer subject and in questions with a second person experiencer (cf. Kuroda, 1973; Tenny, 2006).

36. “That is, the propensity of a predicate to occur with egophoric subjects [and we would add “or objects”] depends primarily on the extent to which a judgment of the truth or falsity of the proposition in question involves private knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is directly accessible to one individual only.” (Dahl, 2000: 48).

experiencers to refer to 3rd person would be triggered by the more 'public' or visible character of the states conceptualized by means of ESC clauses.

The differences across genres highlight the importance of taking into account all the factors producing variation in linguistic usage. Cumulative data from a broad spectrum of sources often obscure the impact of context-dependent parameters on the frequency of use of linguistic constructions (text type is just a broad factor among others). It is therefore generally advisable to undertake a more fine-grained analysis of linguistic phenomena. This, in turn, leads to methodological consequences in the design of corpora that aim at being representative of language use as a whole, and of techniques to tag and query corpora in order to establish a better picture of discourse-influenced linguistic phenomena.

5. Conclusions

Our paper explored the importance that semantic and discourse-related factors have on syntax by analyzing what features may influence the speakers' choice of EOC or ESC constructions. We have stressed the importance of analyzing the frequency and distribution of grammatical properties with naturally occurring data pertaining to actual usage, to question the usefulness of categories provided by traditional grammar (as seen for instance in the syncretism of the direct and indirect objects in actual usage). In formal approaches, in fact, the argument structure of the clause has generally been studied by analyzing contextless strings that, in many cases, were created *ad hoc* by the researcher to illustrate theoretical structural possibilities.

Our findings support the fundamental principle of CxG that grammatical constructions are non-componential, complex symbolic units pairing form and meaning. The study pays particular attention to the discourse level, conceived of as a core part of the construction intimately intertwined with the syntactic form and the semantic structure of the clause. Thus, our paper broadens the range of syntactic constructions studied by means of a usage-based functional analysis. Moreover, by analyzing constructions in Spanish and Italian, it contributes to balance the strong focus of the CxG literature on typical English constructions (ditransitive, resultative, caused-motion constructions, cf. Goldberg, 1995, 2006; Sag, 2012).

We have shown the usefulness of studying the frequency of syntactic and semantic features to gain insight into the communicative function of these constructions. With verbs of feeling, for instance, it is expected that speakers have a tendency to talk about themselves rather than about a third party, and for the same reasons there are fewer examples of third persons: speakers do not feel entitled to talk about the feelings or impressions of others, since they usually have no access to them.

In turn the high frequency of the 1st person in EOC constructions has a modal effect similar to that described in Melis and Flores (2007), whereas the 3rd person of ESC is associated to the representation of events, which influences the distribution of the constructions according to genre.

We have also shown, in fact, that text type is a crucial factor behind the variation in the distribution and frequency of the constructions examined: there is clearly an association between genre and verb class, such as spoken discourse and mental processes. However, other variation parameters are also relevant to understand the use of the construction (clausal *vs.* NP stimuli, for instance), and more fine-grained accounts should be undertaken to avoid an overgeneralization on the basis of obtained results.

For a compelling analysis of a phenomenon, it is necessary therefore to research both its quantitative and qualitative aspects, which are complementary facets of the same issue. Contextualization is clearly necessary for a qualitative analysis, and corpora are indispensable for a quantitative analysis.

As for future developments, our paper points to various avenues worth exploring, for instance expanding the Italian data analyzed. The validity of our proposal, on the other hand, i.e. that the ESC/EOC “alternation” is triggered by discourse function, would make it interesting to ascertain whether it can be applied to the whole distribution of ESCs and EOCs (not just limited to the verb class of feelings as in this paper). Our analysis, moreover, points to similarities, but also to subtle differences between the two Romance languages analyzed, and raises the need for extending parallel empirical research to other languages with the ESC/EOC alternation.

Finally, the results of a discourse and usage-based analysis such as this one may well enable us to achieve a better understanding of the evolution of these constructions, another aspect of this phenomenon that needs to be investigated.

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