

Studying epistemic adverbs in Galician

Overview and preliminary results

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The Galician language

- Romance language spoken in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula
- Closely related to Portuguese
- Official in Galicia (together with Spanish)
- Language shift has accelerated over the last decades



Overview of the study

Four epistemic adverbs

certamente > *seguramente* > *probablemente* > *posiblemente*

Three written genres

- Narrative
- Essayistic
- Journalistic

200 instances per adverb per genre extracted from CORGA (~ 36 million words)

No spoken data

Spoken corpora for Galician are too small (for now)

The analysis

Data is coded for

- Genre
- Semantics
- Position in the clause
- Verb properties
 - ▶ Grammatical mood
 - ▶ Time reference
 - ▶ Type of State of Affairs
 - ▶ Polarity

The analysis

Main research questions are

1 Genre

- ▶ Do adverbs prefer any genre(s) over other(s)?
- ▶ Do meanings prefer any genre(s) over other(s)?

2 Grammatical mood

- ▶ **Is subjunctive more frequent with weaker epistemic adverbs?**
- ▶ Do negation, non-past time reference, and other (relevant) factors favor the use of subjunctive?

3 Semantics

- ▶ **Are stronger epistemic adverbs less centrally epistemic?**
- ▶ Do adverbs differ in terms of time reference?

The mood alternation

- Romance languages are experiencing a loss of subjunctive temporal forms (Harris, 1974)
- However, the use of subjunctive with epistemic adverbs seems to be increasing (at least for Spanish: Houle and Martínez Gómez 2011; Woehr 1972)

Examples

(1) a. Indicative

Probablemente esta **será** a última vez que visite esta cidade. (NARR-585)

‘This will probably be the last time I will visit this city.’

b. Subjunctive

Mañá probablemente **sexan** só tres os que estean traballando tralo mostrador.
(NARR-54)

‘Tomorrow there will probably be only three people working behind the counter.’

Mood across epistemic adverbs

Do weaker epistemic adverbs favor subjunctive?

	Ind	Subj	n
<i>posiblemente</i>	58,62	41,38	58
<i>probablemente</i>	69,35	30,65	62
<i>seguramente</i>	98,44	1,56	64
<i>certamente</i>	100,00	0,00	47

Table 1: Share of grammatical mood by adverb in Galician narrative prose

- *Posiblemente* has a stronger preference for Subj than *probablemente*
- *Seguramente* rarely appears with Subj
- *Certamente* does not (and cannot) appear with Subj
- Other works did not find significant differences between *posiblemente* and *probablemente* (DeMello, 1995)

Semantics

Overview of the semantic categories

	<i>certamente</i>	<i>seguramente</i>	<i>probablemente</i>	<i>posiblemente</i>
epistemic	+	+	+	+
strategic	+	+	+	+
manner	+	+	-	-
dynamic	-	-	-	+
scalar	?	-	-	-
corrective	?	-	-	-
pragmatic	-	?	-	-

Table 2: Semantic categories and epistemic adverbs

The semantics of certainty items

Epistemic modality

“a speaker’s evaluation of the likelihood of a state of affairs, as expressed in language”
(Nuyts, 2001, 1)

(2) Foi esta indeterminación o que o induciu a non dicir nada á policía. Esto e os reberetes fantásticos do sucedido, que certamente farían pensar á policía nunha historia de drogas ou alcohol. (NARR-284)

‘It was that indeterminacy what induced him not to tell anything to the police. That and the fantastic details of what had happened, that would certainly lead the police to think of a story of drugs and alcohol.’

The semantics of certainty items

The strengthening use

The adverb is used to “reinforce an assessment of some kind of a state of affairs, such as a moral, epistemic, aesthetic or quality judgment, expressed in the same or a preceding utterance” (Byloo et al., 2007, 47)

- (3) Suso constatou que certamente os xeranios son xenerosos regalando primores florais, pero piden coidados. (NARR-385)
'Suso confirmed that certainly geraniums are generous in gifting floral delicacies, but require attention.'

The semantics of certainty items

The scalar use

The adverb is used to “situate an ‘element’ on a scale or in a range of related ‘elements’ given or implied in the context” (Byloo et al., 2007, 44)

- (4) a. Volgens de Oostenrijkse TV zijn zeker tien inzittenden zwaargewond geraakt.
'According to Austrian TV at least ten passengers were seriously injured.'
- b. Since nineteen eighty nine of course, rateable values disappeared. When the wonderful new system the poll tax came in. And so all new houses built since that date, have had no rateable value assessment. And so you can't use that system. So all new houses, certainly in Severn Trent region, since that date have had water meters. (Byloo et al., 2007)

The semantics of certainty items

The corrective use

The adverb “signals that what follows is a stronger argument than what precedes, with respect to the speaker’s rhetorical purpose at that point in the discourse”

(Schwenter and Traugott, 2000, 12)

- (5) a. though these statements may provide useful, in fact, compelling evidence for such a theory. (Schwenter and Traugott, 2000)
- b. Sendo intimista, Truffaut podía ser tenro e, certamente, ¿que director máis tenro deu a historia do cine? (XORN-7)
- ‘Being intimist, Truffaut could be tender and, in fact/?certainly, what more tender director has the history of cinema produced?’

The semantics of *certamente*

Are stronger epistemic adverbs less centrally epistemic?

	<i>certamente</i>
	n = 100
	min (max)
epistemic	13 (22)
strengthening	78 (87)
scalar	0 (0)
corrective	0 (0)

Table 3: Share of meanings/uses in *certamente*

*min = unambiguous cases; max = ambiguous cases

- Ambiguity amounts to 9% of cases
- The epistemic meaning is very vulnerable to ambiguity and less frequent than could be expected
- The strengthening use is dominant and less vulnerable to ambiguity
- Scalar and corrective uses are not present in narrative prose

Two conclusions... and a few questions

- 1 There seems to be a correlation between epistemic strength and use of subjunctive mood
 - ▶ Is subjunctive (becoming) related to weak epistemic modality?
 - ▶ Or can its use be accounted for in terms of non-past time reference (\sim non-factuality)?
- 2 Stronger epistemic adverbs are marginally epistemic
 - ▶ Was the epistemic meaning more central in previous stages of the language?
 - ▶ Are epistemic and strengthening uses diachronically related?
 - ▶ If so, which one was first?

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CORGA = Centro Ramón Piñeiro para a Investigación en Humanidades. (2018). *Corpus de Referencia do Galego Actual 3.0*. Retrieved from <http://corpus.cirp.gal/corga/>.