Challenging traditional assumptions on the Conative Alternation

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In the conative alternation [CA], like in other transitivity alternations, the change in argument structure realization coincides with a shift in meaning and aspectual entailments. Even if the alternation—generally attested with verbs whose meaning includes MOVEMENT **AND** CONTACT (Guerssel et al., 1985; Goldberg 1995, Levin &Rappaport[LR] 2015, Leek 1996)—is fully productive across several languages, like English, Danish, German; it is commonly claimed to be unavailable in Romance (but see Míguez 2016 on Galician). (1) illustrates the alleged restriction.

(1) a. *Juan **comió la manzana**.*   b. **Juan **comió** *en/*a*   *la manzana*   (Spanish)
     Juan ate the apple   Juan ate $^?$on/^{ok}at the apple   (English)

Here, based on corpus data from Old Spanish [OSp] (12th-17th c., from Sánchez-Marco *et al.* 2009 [SM] and *Corpus del Español* [CES]) we show that CA **is not only possible, but also fully productive** in Romance grammars. Three empirically and theoretically relevant facts are noted:

➤ OSp shows the hallmarks of prototypical (e.g. English) CA, affecting similar verb classes, like cutting (*cortar* 'cut', *morder* 'bite') (2), contact (*dar* 'hit', *disparar* 'shoot')(3), and consumption verbs (*beber* 'drink',*comer* 'eat')(4); and showing the same (telic-to-atelic) shift in aspect along with the (e.g. missed contact) entailments that define CA (cf. the inceptive, atelic predicate, its lack of culminative reading, and the missed contact entailment in in (5)a.)

➤ CA is actually **more productive** in OSp, as it allows CA in verbs commonly believed unable to produce CA like **change-of-state/location** (COSL) verbs (5) (*matar* 'kill', *destrozar* 'shatter', *destruir* 'destroy', *derribar* 'knock down', *ferir* 'hurt', *romper* 'break') as well as **pure contact verbs** (6) like *tocar* 'touch' (cf. English *Janet broke/touched *at the vase*, Levin 1993, Beavers 2011). This is theoretically crucial, as it indicates that MOTION+CONTACT denotation may render a sufficient condition for CA but not a necessary one, as generally assumed.

➤ OSp instantiates the possibility that certain verbs (cf. *break),* may enter **both** the causative alternation **and** CA, a pattern so far assumed not to occur in natural languages (Levin 2017 *i.a.*).

(2) a. *Y comienço a cenar y **morder en** mis tripas y pan*   (16th c., SM)
     and start.1p to dine and bite in my guts and bread
     'And [I] start to dine and bite at my intestines and bread'

     b. *Pues tiene vuestra alteza primero que **cortar en** mi cabeza.*   (17th c., CES)
     then have your highness first that cut in my head
     'Then your highness has to cut at my head first'

(3) *Y ordenó el Emperador que **disparasen en** los enemigos <u>para que se apartasen</u>.* (16th c SM)
     and ordered el Emperor that shoot.SBJ.3P in the enemies for that se move-away
     'And the Emperor ordered them to shoot #(at) the enemies so that they would move away'

(4) *Asento se sobre el canto et el buitre cesso **de comer** en la molleja*   (15th c., CES)
     seated se over the pebble and the vulture ceased of eat in the gizzard
     'He sat on the pebble and the vulture stopped eating at the gizzard'

(5) a. *Luego fueron contra ellos y començaron **a matar en** ellos y aprehenderlos.*   (13th c., SM)
     then went against them and started to kill in them and capture-them
     'Then [they] advanced towards them and started to kill at and capture them'

     b. *Arrebatadamente **destroçan en** los griegos por duros.*   (15th c., SM)
     violently shatter.3P in the Greeks for hard
     'They violently shatter <u>at</u> the Greeks because they are strong'

     c. *Aquel emperador yendo **destruyendo en** aquella yent.*   (13th c., SM)
     that emperor going destroying in that people
     'That emperor was destroying <u>at</u> that people'

    d. *suares fue **derribando** en ellos fasta en la meatad de la puente.* (14th c., SM)
        Suares went knocking-down in them until in the middle of the bridge
        'Suarez advanced knocking down <u>at</u> them up to the middle of the bridge'
    e. *No se atrevió a **romper** en ellos, porque los vio fuertes.* (16th c., SM)
        no SE dared to break in them because ACC.3M.PL saw strong
        'He didn't dare to break <u>at</u> them apart, since he saw they were strong'

(6) *El rey de Portugal prohibio que __tocassen__ en las rayzes.* (16th c., SM)
    the king of Portugal forbade that touch-SBJ-3P in the roots
    'The King of Portugal forbade them to touch <u>at</u> the roots.'

PROPOSAL

Consumption Verbs: OSp data crucially reflect a general premise: conatives are set apart by its lack of result entailment and noncompletive interpretation (Krifka1999) (see the constructions with *comenzar a* 'start to' with otherwise punctual predicates like *morder* and *matar*. Also here, oblique realization of the object correlates to an interpretive shift from telic to atelic, reflecting the usual distinction that relies on realization of the object in this alternation (LR 2005:212) (cf. (5)b vs. *He begun to kill them*). Importantly, all attested telic occurrences of ingestion verbs lack the preposition. Moreover, according to CES and SM data, conative variants combine with *cessar de* 'stop' (4) but not with *acavar de* 'finish', which is the prototypical pattern of atelic predicates.

COSL verbs: alternation between direct/oblique (PP) object expression in OSp also reflect alternation between telic/atelic uses. (7)a is natural as the conative only entails that an unspecified (nonquantized) amount of people was killed (cf. the DO variant *'he killed them #as much as he could'*). Causative/transitive counterparts entail total affectedness, hence telicity (cf. (7)b). In (7)a, the quantificational phrase introduces a boundary to the event that is otherwise missing, in contrast to (7)b. This is crucial, as it shows that even if the P used in OSp is different (not the standard target P *a* 'at', but the locative *en* 'in'), it still yields the event-type shift that sets CA apart (van Hout 1996 *i.a.*). Crucially, all the aspectually-sensitive selectional patterns attested in OSp reflect the expected consequences for the transitivity alternation yielded by CA. In contrast, Spanish variants with a 'at' (used by Acevedo 2011 to argue for the existence of CA in (Modern) Spanish [MSp]) render aspectually trivial, as they do not diverge from DO forms in the expected respects.

VERBS OF CONTACT: OSp alternation also yields a similar change in aspect. The generalization proposed for English (Vendler 1967; Dowty 1979) holds, as OSp conatives do not necessarily involve a result state ((3) allows for the entailment that contact did not obtain as a result. Unlike MSp prepositional variants (Acevedo 2011), they succeed in delivering the *missed contact* entailment ((≈He shot at them **so they moved away**) expected from hit-conatives (cf. MSp *golpeó a la puerta #pero no la tocó* 'He hit at the door but didn't touch it'), otherwise both (3) and (5)a would be conceptually odd. In turn, the productivity with pure contact verbs (6) shows that assumed general restrictions on CA (LR 2015i.a.) may actually be language-specific.

(7) a. ***mataua** en ellos quanto alcançaua.* (14[th]c SM)
        kill.PST.IMP.3S in them how-much sufficed
        'He killed at them as many as he could'
    b. *Los sieruos que **mataron** a sus señores.* (15[th]c SM)
        'The servants that killed their lords'

To account for previously unattested data (e.g. COSL CA), we propose that OSp verbs with productive causative **and** conative alternation allow a choice in the v° introducing the EXT(ERNAL)Argument, thus instantiating a Cause(r)|Agent opposition amenable to a distribution linked to distinct (EXT-argument-introducing) *v* heads in the literature. While v_{DO} requires an animate *agent* subject, the subject licensed by v_{CAUSE} only needs to be interpretable as probable cause (Folli & Harley 2005, 2007). We argue this structural alternative explains the possibility of CA in causative verbs like *matar*: whereas the EXTArgument in the causative only requires cause interpretation (***La ponçoña lo mato* 'Poison** killed him'(15[th]c SM)), the one with *matar* (null in (5)a|(7)a) in CA requires intentional, agentive reading in all attested cases. Thus, the proposed analysis (conative (8)a vs. causative (8)b) alternates would capture the distribution of restricted subject (*agent*) interpretation

in CA, vs. nonrestricted in causative-alternation forms of the same verbs. If correct, observed facts follow from the possibility that both derivational paths are available for these verbs at least in OSp. New data (Múgica&Mangialavori 2018) from Argentinian MSp support such possibility, as verbs derived via EAR show the hallmarks of a conative-structure-like derivation (result+telicity drop, missed contact entailment) with root-incorporated quantized targets yielding atelic verbs (*Cockteleamos por horas* (lit. *We cocktail-ed for hours*) ≈'We drank at cocktail for hours).

(8) a. $[_{vP} [DP_1 ,v' [v_{DO}, PP [_{TARGET} en DP_2]]]]$ b. $[_{vP} [DP_1 ,v' [v_{CAUSE}, SC [DP_2 , _{RES}\sqrt{}]]]]$