Epistemic Modality and Semantic Change: The Story of Galician Adverb *seguramente*

Abstract

This paper examines the diachronic evolution of Galician modal adverb *seguramente*. Corpus data is used to show that the adverb displays opposite semantic values in the Middle Ages and the modern period. To explain the semantic shift, an account is made in terms of pragmatic principles.

1 Introduction

Modality is a semantic category which situates a proposition in a non-factual (or modal) world (Declerck, 2011; Narrog, 2005). Epistemic modality is concerned with the degree of compatibility between the modal world in which the situation actualises and the factual world. In other words, it is an estimation of the likelihood of occurrence of a state of affairs as made by the speaker (Nuyts, 2001).

The historical study of modality involves many complications as a result of the wide range of formal devices that express modal categories (see Traugott, 2006). In the adverbial domain, morphosyntactic sources for epistemic modal markers are very varied, including different types of adverbials and parentheticals. Semantically, no regular historical paths have been recognised which lead from sentential adverbs to modal ones.

This paper deals with the evolution of *seguramente* (lit. 'surely') from manner adverbial to epistemic modaliser, and its semanticisation as weak epistemic marker. This development involves a striking semantic shift from 'I am sure' to 'I am not totally sure'. A similar case is that of another Galician particle, *seica* –'I know' > 'I really don't know' (Cidrás, 2015), which will be taken as supporting evidence.

Corpus data is used as the main piece of evidence. Two corpora were consulted: one corresponding to the late medieval ages (TMILG), and another one to the modern period (TILG).

Theoretical analysis of data is based on the Invited Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change (IITSC, Traugott & Dasher, 2002) and its constructional implementation (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013).

2 *Seguramente* in the Middle Ages

In Latin, an adjective modifying the noun *mens*, *mentis* 'mind, mood' in the ablative form was used to convey manner of action. In romance languages, *mente* led to fully-fledged derivative suffixes which create adverbs out of adjectives in their feminine form. This mechanism was fully operative in the medieval period of the Galician language (see Ferreiro, 2001, pp. 206–7). Thus, *seguramente* derives from the feminine form of the adjective *seguro*, which had three main semantic values at the time, according to data from TMILG:

  i. 'safe', used to describe lands or roads, namely;
  ii. 'calm, confident', applied to people who feel safe; and
  iii. 'certain', a strong epistemic modal value.

The diachronic relation between the different meanings can be explained in terms of metonymy, resulting from processes of semantic inferencing (see Vázquez Rozas, 2010).

Seguramente is the adverbialisation of senses (ii) and (iii) of the adjective. In (1), the adverb has scope over the verb phrase and describes how the action must be carried out –'confidently, not fearing danger':

(1) Sal ja da arca *seguramẽte* tu et tua moller et teus fillos et suas molleres contigo, et todaslas anymalias que convosco forõ ẽna arca; (1300-1330, Xeral Historia, II/8, TMILG)
'Now get out of the ark *safely* you and your wife and your sons and their wives with you, and every animal that was with you in the ark'

In (2), the adverb has scope over the whole proposition and expresses the certainty of the imminent death –which is the prelude for the miracle to take place:

(2) e avia tan gran fever, que quena viya enton dizia: "*Seguramente*, desta non escapará" (1264-1284, Cantigas de Santa María, 256/26, TMILG) 'and she had such a big fever, that those who saw her at that moment said: «*Certainly*, she will not get out of this»'

Although for the modern reader the weak epistemic meaning is available in (2), it is very unlikely that this were the case for ancient speakers/writers. First, the context does not allow for a shadow of doubt: the death must be certain for the Mother of God to perform the miracle. Second, the coexistence of the manner adverbial reading and the epistemic modal meaning constitutes a case of polysemy very hard to maintain.[1] Therefore, this situation must correspond to the initial stage of development of the modal function, in which the tension between both meanings was not solved yet. This fact points toward 'certainty' as the medieval modal meaning of *seguramente*, since there exists a suitable diachronic semantic path leading from *seguro* to 'certainly' ('safe' > 'confident' > 'certain').

Hence, *seguramente* functioned in the Middle Ages both as a manner adverb and as a strong epistemic modal marker.

3 *Seguramente* today

The reference dictionary for Galician (DRAG, s.v.) contains only one meaning for the adverb *seguramente*: 'with a high degree of probability'. This means that in the modern period *seguramente* has shifted from strong to weak epistemic marker and this is its only lexicalised meaning. Corpus data confirm this claim: among the 100 most recent instances of the adverb in the TILG corpus (correspondeing to the period 2005-2012), the adverb has propositional scope in 99 cases and functions as a weak epistemic marker, as in (3):

(3) *Seguramente* nesta biblioteca atoparía unha información moi valiosa para levar a cabo as súas investigacións (2006, PNSARC2006, 47, TILG) 'In this library you would *probably* find very valuable information to carry out your research.'

In 71 cases, the unit modified by the adverb is a sentence or a clause, whereas in 28 cases it is

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1 Given the syntactic freedom of modal adverbs, cases of ambiguity must have been common, e.g.: *Desejand'eu vos, mia senhor, seguramente morrerei* (1220-1240, Lírica Profana, I, 007/513, TMILG) 'Longing for you, my lady, I will certainly/confidently die'.

a different type of syntactic unit or the adverb is the only constituent of the utterance.

Interestingly, *seguramente* can be followed by verbs in many different tense forms, most of them from the indicative mood (61/71), but also some from the subjunctive (4/71) and non-finite forms (6/71). Among the indicative tenses, the present and the *pospretérito* or hypothetical future are the most frequent, with 20/61 occurrences each.

There is only one occurrence of *seguramente* as a manner adverb:

(4) Mais, polo que toca á súa preocupación polo modo no que poden estar seguros do seu estado de salvación e de graza, será máis *seguramente* obtido dos nosos libros ca dos escribáns ingleses (2006, WBRETN006, 166, TILG). 'But, regarding your concern about the way you can be sure of your state of salvation and grace, it will be more *surely* obtained from our books than from English scribes.'

Cases like (4) are very rare, but prove that the manner meaning is still accessible for contemporary speakers/writers. Since the suffix -*mente* is a fully productive mechanism to create adverbs in Modern Galician, *seguramente* can be used as the manner adverb for *seguro*, despite the fact that this meaning is not lexicalised.

The first registers of *seguramente* in TILG date back to 1886. At this point, the weak epistemic meaning was already present:

(5) Máis o conto é que naide lle fai caso, e que a pesar de centos e centos de memoriás que *seguramente* nin sequera se leron, o tal Adiministrador aporbou ese reparto (…) (1886, GAL113886, 2, TILG). 'But the thing is that nobody minds him, and that despite the hundreds and hundreds of requests that *most probably* were not even read, the Administrator approved the distribution.'

Over the whole modern period, *seguramente* has '(most) probably' as its core meaning. As a consequence, it specialised in hypothetical contexts in which a conjecture is made. Crucially, these semantics entail uncertainty.

4 Semantic Change of *seguramente*

As seen above, *seguramente* displays opposite semantic values in the medieval period and the modern days. In the past, the meaning was that

of certainty –i.e. strong epistemic modality, which corresponds to an expectable diachronic stage, given the derivational origin of the adverb. At present, *seguramente* conveys (high) probability, which implies uncertainty – i.e. weak epistemic modality. At some point between the 15th and the 19th centuries, a shift from the former to the latter took place.

Unfortunately, Galician texts from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries are scarce, and none of them contains a single occurrence of *seguramente*. The only way to deal with these limitations is to assume them and try to compensate them by means of a reconstruction based on what we know about linguistic change in general and the history of Galician in particular.

4.1 Semantic Change

Semantic change is driven by communication –i.e. it is pragmatically motivated (Traugott & Dasher, 2002). According to the IITSC, semantic change originates from innovative uses of linguistic units in particular pragmatic contexts. The speaker/writer exploits a conversational implicature –i.e. an invited inference, IIN– innovatively, generating an utterance-token meaning. If the IIN succeeds, it undergoes pragmatic strengthening and spreads across similar contexts. At this point, the IIN conventionalises and becomes a Generalised Invited Inference (GIIN), producing an utterance-type meaning –bound to a set of pragmatic contexts. These contexts are often critical contexts (Diewald, 2002), which lead to the emergence of a new coded meaning –i.e. semanticisation, that is part of a new construction. Constructionalisation has taken place, and its output is a new form-meaning pair –i.e. a new node in the language network (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013).

Politeness and face-saving (see Brown & Levinson, 1987) are important drivers of semantic change. By virtue of these factors, speakers try to avoid excessive assertivenes, which involves a risk of damaging the public image of the hearer –i.e. of committing a Face Threatening Act (FTA). The emergence of particle *seica* was decisively influenced by politeness and face-saving strategies (Cidrás, 2015).

4.2 From Strong to Weak Epistemic Modality

The input modal meaning of *seguramente* derived from a feeling of confidence experienced by the speaker –see above the relation between the different meanings of *seguro*. The assertion of self-assurance is an obvious case of FTA, since it proclaims the epistemic superiority of the speaker. A usual way to avoid impoliteness in a case like this is not presenting the modalised content as a categorical assertion. In the case of *seica*, this was accomplished by using the new unit to introduce exclamatory questions instead of declarative sentences (Cidrás, 2015).

Given the nature of epistemic modality (see section 1), it would be difficult to use *seguramente* to introduce anything different from a declarative sentence. Thus, the mitigation of the FTA must have taken place in a different context. Heterosymy –i.e. "the diachronic association of two meanings" (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 60)– usually leads to stages of ambiguity, in which both meanings can be retrieved. This is a typical situation for semantic change to take place, and that is what we find in (6):

(6) Et mays te digo; nõ era Troylos vilão que fose asi rroubado nẽ perdido nẽ prendido de nẽgũ ca ben sey que ẽno mũdo nõ ha mellor caualeyro que el et seguramẽte que el querra seer ben entregado d'esta prenda (1350-1399, Historia Troiana, 199/192, TMILG).
'And I tell you more: Troilus was not a peasant who could be easily stolen nor lost nor captured by anyone, because I well know that there is no better knight in the world than him and that he will *surely/very probably* want to be satisfied like this.'

The future tense provides an ideal base for inferences of uncertainty to arise, given its factual openness (see Declerck, 2009). However, the context does not always allow for these implicatures to emerge, as seen in (2). In (6), though, the target of epistemic evaluation is a hypothetical mental state of desire of another human toward an intended action as foreseen by the speaker. In such a context, deduction is a lowly reliable piece of evidence, which would readily cast a shadow of doubt over any expression of confidence. Crucially, the subjective meaning of the adverb contributes in this context to mitigate the

assertion, transforming its content into a conjecture coming from the speaker that can or cannot be accepted by the hearer, rather than a categorical statement. This is how we get from 'I am sure of X' to 'I am not totally sure of X (but it is very likely)'.

There is no record of the evolution of this untypical context and its IIN, but everything points that they gradually generalised over the course of the three centuries separating the primary coded meaning from the new one. Thereby, *seguramente* specialised in highly speculative contexts, where the unwanted effects –i.e. the risk of FTA– of subjective certainty were suspended –and subjectivity could be exploited politely. Thus, the IIN that emerged from those contexts increased in frequency, conventionalising and developing into a GIIN.

4.3 Constructional Stabilisation

Once the GIIN emerged, everything was set for semanticisation to take place. Nevertheless, the semantic change in progress was not supported by formal differentiation. The abundance of meanings of *seguramente* during the changing phase –manner adverb, strong epistemic modality, and weak epistemic modality, could not be handled by the linguistic unit, because of the closeness between the different meanings and the serious risks of ambiguity. This fact constituted a form-meaning mismatch, which is a sign of constructional change –a change preceding constructionalisation (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013).

An unstable situation like the one above has to be rebalanced either by implementing a formal change that leads to the emergence of a new construction, or by losing enough semantic load so formal alteration is not necessary any more. The former happened in the case of *seica* (*sei que* 'I know that' > *seica*), resulting in a new epistemic modal adverb. *Seguramente* is an example of the latter.

A first conflict to solve was the potential confusion between the verbal modifier function and the modal function –see above section 2, especially note 1. The former was already being assumed by the adjective *seguro*, which in the late Middle Ages could already function as secondary predicator. Examples from series (7) unambiguously show the functional equivalence between the adverb (7a) and the adjective (7b) as manner complements of the verb.

(7) a. Et mandoos que laurassem et criassem *seguramente* et que llj dessem seu peyto, segũdo que o dauã a seu rrey (1295-1312, Crónica Xeral e Crónica de Castela, 346/512, TMILG).
'And he ordered them to work and breed *safely* and to pay him a tax, as they did with their king.'

(7) b. Et punhade de laurar et de criar *seguros*, ca eu tenho bẽ castigadas mjnas gentes que uos nõ façã noio nẽ pesar, nẽ [en]trẽ en uosa vila vender nẽ conprar (1295-1312, Crónica Xeral e Crónica de Castela, 378/548, TMILG).
'And strive to work and breed *safely*, because I have warned my people against disturbing you and entering your village to sell and buy.'

Examples from series (7) are taken from the same literary work. Hence, they clearly illustrate the existence of an alternation in the use of the adverb and the adjective for the same function. Gradually, this alternation led to a prevalence of the adjective, parallel to the entrenchment of the modal function as the sole function of the adverb.

A second conflict that had to be settled was the competence between the modal meanings of the adverb. The input meaning ('certainty') provided the basis for the new meaning ('probability') to arise in the form of an IIN, and later in the form of a GIIN. At this stage, the new meaning was only retrievable in a set of relevant contexts –i.e. it was an utterance-type meaning. This was an unstable situation, since the two meanings were only distinguished by the degree of certainty they convey.

As stated above, politeness must have played a major role in the success of the weaker epistemic modal meaning, which could easily avoid FTA risks. However, another factor was key in the process: the emergence of a new adverb expressing epistemic certainty.

In the Middle Ages, *certamente* (lit. 'certainly') functioned exclusively as a manner adverb meaning 'really' or 'truthfully', as in (8):

(8) Ca doutra [ma]neyra nõ poderia *certamente* rresponder el demãda[do] nẽ o juiz dar sua sentenza (1325-1375, Terceira Partida, II, 26/38, TMILG).
'Since otherwise the defendant could not respond *truthfully* nor could the judge deliver his sentence.'

Nowadays, *certamente* became an epistemic modal marker of certainty, taking over the original role of *seguramente*.

(9) Certamente, o tratamento que Aristóteles aplica á traxedia e á epopea revela unha profunda afinidade entre ambas (1999, GMUPOE999, 41, TILG).
'Certainly, the way Aristotle treats tragedy and epic poetry reveals a deep affinity between them.'

The consolidation of the former as an adverbial certainty marker allowed for the loss of the certainty meaning of the latter. This transition was favoured by the different features of the adverbs regarding politeness. Both of them derive from adjectives, but different in nature. On the one hand, *certo* 'exact, true, reliable' qualifies the object of evaluation ("something is true"). On the other hand, *seguro* 'sure, confident' qualifies the subject of evaluation ("someone is sure"). Thus, the epistemic certainty of *certamente* does not entail FTA risk, because it is objective –coming from the object of qualification, whereas that of *seguramente* entails high risk of FTA, as seen above, because of its subjective component –it is bound to the subject.

Thus, while *certamente* developed as an epistemic marker, *seguramente* abandoned its original contexts, setting up a new, more pragmatically viable function. Finally, the new meaning underwent semanticisation, and the loss of the primary meanings allowed for a new form-meaning pair to arise, completing constructionalisation.

This evolutionary path that weakens the assertive character of the adverb is nowadays fully grammaticalised, as evidenced by the high frequency of hypothetical future forms. Furthermore, the uses of the subjunctive mood, although scarce, show that *seguramente* is now part of the epistemic subsystem of uncertainty, since the indicative/subjunctive alternation is typical of modal adverbs expressing both probability (e.g. *probabelmente* 'probably') and possibility (e.g. *posibelmente* 'possibly', *quizais* 'maybe').

5   Final Remarks

This contribution has dealt with the history of Galician adverb *seguramente*. It originated from the adjective *seguro*, and functioned in the Middle Ages both as a manner adverb and epistemic modal marker of certainty. Today, it has weak epistemic modality as its only lexicalised meaning. A semantic evolution has been proposed based on pragmatic principles, particularly politeness and the IITSC. In this way I tried to account for the striking semantic shift leading from 'I am sure' to 'I am not totally sure'.

Historical pragmatics proves itself very useful to explain cases in which an abrupt semantic change took place, such as those of *seguramente* and *seica*. Moreover, the serious lack of Galician documents from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries compels us to draw upon well established data to illuminate the darkest areas in the history of the language.

This study suggests new research directions concerning adjectives, adverbs, and their history. Knowing the individual stories of particular epistemic modal items would be very helpful to get a more precise picture of how epistemic modality works and evolves.

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