

## **Le: from pronoun to intensifier\***

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### *Abstract*

*This paper shows a synchronic use of le in Mexican Spanish that is different from its object pronoun function. Intensifier le is a verbal affix that emphasizes the “doing” of the action indicated by the verbal base, where an erstwhile participant has become a locus for the realization of the action. Diachronically, this use results from two bleaching processes: weakening of argument status, through the decline of direct object uses (leísmo), and weakening of pronominal status, through the rise of dative duplication. The development of intensive uses represents, at least in part, a case of extension of new meanings in old contexts, rather than the more common mechanism of generalization via frequency increases to new contexts.*

Grammatical items with multiple functions can be puzzling without a diachronic perspective. This is a study of variation and changes in the uses of *le*, etymologically the third person singular dative pronoun, in Mexican Spanish. While Castilian Spanish *leísmo*, or use of *le* in accusative contexts, has been documented and analyzed from numerous perspectives, innovative uses in Mexican Spanish varieties are just beginning to receive serious attention from linguists.

The motivation for this study is the use of *le* as a verbal intensifier; for example,

(1) (UNAM 1976:452)

Trae unos “Raleigh”. ¡Córrele!

run-IMP *le*-CL.DAT.3SG

‘Bring some “Raleighs” [cigarettes]. Go on, run!’

With imperatives, as in *córrele* above, the intensive *le* construction is a hortative, where the speaker is inciting the hearer to action — in this case, “go on, run,” or “get going with the running.” The meaning

contributed by *le* in this intensive construction is the actual doing — or realization — of the action indicated by the verbal stem.

I will look at synchronic variation in the uses of *le* from the perspective of grammaticization. Grammaticization is viewed here as the emergence of grammatical resources from frequent patterns of language use (cf. Hopper 1987, 1998). Changes in distribution patterns will be measured by comparing the relative frequency of the contexts of occurrence of *le* over time. I propose that a crucial change is the decline of Castilian-type *leísmo* with a concomitant increase in the relative frequency of nonargumental dative uses. Coupled with this is the “semantic flexibilization” and depronominization of *le*, with an increase in nonhuman referents and nonagreement with apparently coreferential nouns (Company, forthcoming).

The development of *le* into a verbal intensifier can be understood in the framework of a diachronic process of semantic bleaching. Bleaching or semantic reduction is the loss of features of meaning associated with a form (Bybee et al. 1994: 19). Bleaching of *le* culminates in loss of its argument and pronominal status. As *le*’s argument and pronominal status is eroded, it functions less as an active participant and more as the location in which the event occurs. In intensifier usage, *le* no longer refers to a participant in the event. Instead, it is a verbal affix, somewhere between derivation and inflexion.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 1, I propose an analysis of intensifier *le* and demarcate it from middle-voice phenomena (e.g. *le corrió* [DAT] versus *se corrió* [REFL]). In sections 2 and 3, I review two sets of changes in the distribution of *le* that paved the way for its evolution into an intensifying affix: weakening of *le*’s argument status with the erosion of *leísmo* and weakening of its pronominal status with the rise of dative duplication and loss of agreement. Section 4 considers “new meanings in old contexts” as a mechanism of linguistic change.

## 1. The intensive *le* construction in varieties of Mexican Spanish

### 1.1. *A productive morpheme*

The form *ádale* ‘get going’ is registered by the late nineteenth century in Ramos y Duarte’s *Diccionario de mejicanismos* (1895: 43) and in *Modismos, locuciones y términos mexicanos* (1992 [1892]: 27) by José Sánchez Samoano, a Peninsular (Asturian) visitor to Mexico, who wrote, “Para animar allí a alguno ... para decidirle pronto le dicen: ádale, amigo” [To animate someone over there ... to get him going quickly,

they say: *ánde*le my friend].<sup>1</sup> In his *American-Spanish Syntax*, Kany (1951: 127–129) includes a section on what he calls “neuter *le*,” said to be “exceedingly common” in Mexico and equivalent to the expression *no más* (*ande no más* = *ánde*le, *pase no más* = *páse*le), though it is not clear what precisely that meaning is.

It is true that this *le* seems omnipresent in Mexican Spanish, especially in vernacular varieties, and that it is most easily recognizable in imperatives, where it occurs enclitically.<sup>2</sup> A typical example is (2), from Carlos Santana’s *Supernatural* album: right as the master guitarist begins to play his guitar, the lead vocalist says,

- (2) *Échale* mi Carlitos  
 throw-IMP *le*-CL.DAT.3SG  
 ‘Go on, play (do it)’  
 (Maná–Santana, “Corazón espinado”, *Supernatural* [09] 2:01, Arista Records 1999)

It is important, though, that intensifier *le* is a productive morpheme. As the following examples show, it is not limited to imperatives or enclitic position. Sources of data cited in this article are listed following the References.<sup>3</sup>

- (3) (In a parked car, Rodolfo rolls up the window)  
 Pa qué *le* cierra don Rodolfo,  
     *le* shut-PRES.2SG  
 no *le* cierre, y luego nos da mucho calor,  
     *le* shut-IMP.2SG  
 ‘Why *le* are you rolling up, don’t *le* roll up, we’ll get hot’  
 (“Expected” in Standard Spanish: ACC *lo* or 0)
- (4) (A two-year old girl has just discovered how to manipulate a toy so that it produces a sound. Her mother exclaims:)  
 Ya *le* sabe  
     *le* know-PRES.3SG  
 ‘She knows how to do it, she has figured it out’  
 (“Expected” in Standard Spanish: ACC *lo* or 0)

In (3) and (4), *le* has no nominal referent. In example (3), if any participant referent is to be pinpointed, it would have to be an oblique, inside a prepositional phrase: *cierra AL vidrio*, literally, ‘close TO the window’, something like, ‘DO the closing to the window’. ‘Window’ in this construction is not a patient but rather the locus of the action of closing. On the other hand, in example (4), not even an oblique referent can be salvaged. If *le* refers to anything it is to a verbal action: *sabe*

*COMO hacer eso* ‘she knows HOW to do it’. The toy is the locus of knowing how, not the object of knowing.

Here the speakers de-emphasize the erstwhile patient (accusative *lo*) to emphasize “doing” the verbal action. “Erstwhile” is meant here synchronically, in the sense that intensifier *le* alternates with a transitive (accusative) construction. In choosing the *le* variant as opposed to an accusative, speakers express intensive meaning. By omitting a potential patient the verbal action itself is emphasized.

### 1.2. *Intensifer le vs. middle se*

It is useful to compare intensifier *le* with middle-voice *se*, since both concern transitivity and aspect. How is *le sabe* (DAT) different from *se sabe* (REFL)? *Se sabe* is an example of what Maldonado (1999: 217ff.) calls complete-exploitation constructions (*construcciones de explotación total*). Prototypically these constructions involve verbs of consumption, such as *comerse* ‘eat’, *fumarse* ‘smoke’, *tomarse* ‘drink’, but they also occur with mental processes like *conocer* and *saber* ‘know’. The following example illustrates (from Maldonado 1999: 221):

- (5) Tengo allí un primo que se lo conoce todo: teatros, cabarets ...  
 ¡Se sabe cada sitio!  
 ‘I have a cousin there who knows everything: theatres, cabarets ...  
 He knows (thoroughly) every place!’

In Maldonado’s analysis, though the direct object with these mental-activity verbs does not suffer any physical changes,

la actividad mental presupone un rastreo exhaustivo del objeto en cuestión y [...] una capacidad de control que nos permite escudriñar, analizarlo, reconceptualizarlo e imponerle otros procesos mentales de mayor intensidad y control que la que habría en la construcción sin *se* (Maldonado 1999: 222).

‘the mental activity involves an exhaustive sweep of the object in question and [...] an ability to control that allows us to scrutinize it, analyze it, re-conceptualize it and submit it to other mental processes of greater intensity and control than there would be in the construction without *se*’ (my translation).

Since the exploitation of the subject is exhaustive, this middle-voice construction is telic:

- (6) *Se corrió* la maratón de la ciudad de México  
 ‘He ran (himself) the whole marathon’

As Maldonado points out, complete-exploitation constructions occur precisely with highly definite, individuated objects. These middle constructions transitivize monovalent movement verbs like *correr*. Example (6) means that the runner ran the entire marathon.<sup>4</sup>

Now compare these *se* constructions with the intensifier *le* examples. *Córrele* (example [1]) is not transitive or telic. There is no direct object, much less a definite, individuated one. *Córrele* means ‘do the running’, that is, it is an intensification of the verbal action. *Le sabe* (example [4]) is parallel to *córrele*. *Le sabe* is not about complete knowledge or domination of some specific object, as *se sabe* is (example [5]). Rather, it is the activity of knowing itself that is intensified: not knowing “something,” but knowing “how.”

The following example is nice because both middle *se* and intensifier *le* appear with the same verbal base:

(7) (UNAM 1976:422)

Apurar*LE* vs. apurar*SE*

Y pa al mosaico le apurábamos, que duro y duro y duro, y nos arriaban los albañiles: “Apúren*se*, mosaiqueros, que no les vayamos a ganar.” Uhm ... duramos —¿qué?— un año ... [ ] ... ya teníamos hartos apilos de allá a acá ... [ ] ... “Apúren*le*, que ahora sí ya vamos a pegar mosaicos.”

‘And with the mosaic we were *le* hurrying up [= really hurrying], real hard, and the construction workers would prod us “Hurry up *se*, mosaic layers, we’re going to beat you.” Uhm ... we spent what? — a year. We already had lots of piles (of tiles) all over the place ... “Hurry up *le* [= get on with it], now we’re going to start putting up tile.’’

What is the difference between *apúrenSE* and *apúrenLE*? *Apúrense* is a middle construction, where the subject is also an affected participant and the distinguishability between agent and patient is blurred (Kemmer 1993). It is important that *se* refers to a participant: YOU, hurry (yourself) up. *Le*, on the other hand, does not refer to a human participant. *Apúrenle* indicates a hurrying up, not specifically of the mosaic people, but a hurrying up with the work. The *le* here — if it is anaphoric to anything — refers to a prepositional phrase such as “with the work,” *apúrenle AL mosaico*, *apúrenle CON el trabajo*. Thus, middle *se* refers to a participant while intensifier *le* modifies the action. Support for this analysis is that *apúrenSE* is followed by a challenge to the workers, *que no LES vayamos a ganar* ‘we’re going to beat YOU’, but *apúrenLE* is followed by talk of another action, *ahora sí ya vamos a pegar mosaicos* ‘now we’re going to start putting up tile’.

1.3. *Le as locus*

Unlike middle-voice constructions, neither the subject's participation nor benefaction is intensified. The intensification is of the action itself, not of any of the verb's arguments. What *le* reinforces is the idea of "doing it." This is why the intensive construction is favored in imperatives and in discourse-pragmatic contexts where the idea conveyed is that of achievement, doing something well, as in *échele mi Carlitos* (example [2]) or *ya le sabe* (example [5]).

A routinized expression is *¿cómo le hace(s)?*, meaning 'how do you do it' or 'how do you manage'.

- (8) *cómo + le + hacer (para ..., con ...)* = how does the subject do/manage (to, with)
- a. (UNAM 1976:30)  
*¿Y cómo le hace? Explique.*  
 'And how do you do it? Explain.'
- b. (UNAM 1976: 381)  
 "No, pus a ver *cómo le hago.*"  
 'Well, let's see how I'll manage.'

Examples like the following indicate that *le* here is not referring to a nominal participant but to a prepositional phrase, with *para* '(in order) to' or *con* 'with'.

- (9) (UNAM 1976:300)  
 Enc. –Pero *¿cómo le hace para venirse?*  
           how *le* do-PRES.2SG in order to  
 Inf. A. –Pus ... yo donde vivo, hay terminal.  
 'Interviewer: But how do you get home?'  
 'Informant A: Well ... where I live there is a (bus) terminal.'

In fact, in the corpus from which these examples are taken (MexPop), 38% (6/16) of *cómo + le + hacer* tokens co-occur with a *para* phrase.<sup>5</sup>

Further support for the view that the intensive *le* construction does indeed intensify the action is provided by the fact that verbs appearing in it are rich or specific lexically, as opposed to verbs with a very general or "bleached" meaning. Thus, while the construction is very productive with motion verbs, for example, *correr* 'run', *caminar* 'walk', *subir* 'go up (a street)', it is not used with the most frequent verb of motion, *ir* 'go', nor with highly frequent *venir* 'come'. Instead, when these verbs are to appear in an intensive *le* construction, the form *ándale* is used as an auxiliary:

- (10) a. (UNAM 1976:417)  
 Vete a trabajar, ándale, vete  
 ‘Go to work, go on, go’  
 b. (UNAM 1976:263)  
 ¡Ándale, vámonos!  
 ‘Go on, let’s go!’

The lack of intensifier *le* with *ir* is consistent with our analysis: such a general activity as “going” cannot really be done in a more or less intense way.

We have seen that this *le* does not indicate a patient that directly receives the action. Assuming that form is important to meaning (Haiman 1980; Langacker 1991, among many others), the question is what is *le* doing if it is not referring to a participant? I propose that in the intensifier construction *le* functions as a deictic locative: the erstwhile patient becomes the locus of the activity.

Support for this analysis comes from distribution facts. First, depro-nominalized intensifier *le* tends to co-occur with deictic locatives *aquí*, *allí* ‘here, there’. Let us look at some examples. The following all took place in the context of the tape-recorder being used to record the data. The apparatus is not referred to by a direct object pronoun. Instead, *le* is used to indicate an action RELATED TO the tape-recorder. The tape-recorder is thus a locus rather than a patient.

- (11) a. (UNAM 1976:325)  
 Inf. A. –Apáguete ya, para que oiga [interrupción].  
 ‘Informant A: Turn *le* off, to hear [interruption]’  
 b. (Chih ’97#23)  
 [As we completed an interview]  
 Bueno vamos a apagarle *ahí* ya, Grecia.  
 ‘Ok let’s turn *le* off *there* now, Grecia.’  
 c. (UNAM 1976:213)  
 Enc. –Súbele más *aquí*, para que agarre la voz de los dos.  
 ¡Eso es!  
 ‘Interviewer: Turn up *le here*, so it gets both your voices.  
 That’s right!’  
 d. (UNAM 1976:232)  
 Inf. B. –¿Le pregunto?  
 Enc. –Pregúntale tú, pues. Nada más no *le* pises *aquí*.  
 ‘Informant B: Can/should I ask him?’  
 ‘Interviewer: Ok, you ask him. Just don’t step on *le here*.’

Locative deictics co-occur in three of these four examples. In a random

sample of 100 tokens of intensifier *le*, 10% co-occurred with *aquí*, *allí*, *ahí* (Torres Cacoullós and Hernández 1999: 87).<sup>6</sup>

A second distribution fact in support of intensifier *le* as locus is its common occurrence with intransitive motion verbs. In Kany's (1951: 128–129) examples from early twentieth-century Mexican literature, six of eleven verb types are motion verbs (*andar* 'go around', *caminar* 'walk', *correr* 'run', *entrar* 'enter', *pasar* 'enter', *seguir* 'follow'). Use with motion verbs represents the retention of elements of the dative's original locative goal meaning (Company, forthcoming: 37), a point I return to at the end.

#### 1.4. *A derivational-inflectional continuum*

We have seen that intensifier *le* is productive, and it seems likely that it will continue to extend to more verbal bases.<sup>7</sup> As Bybee (1985: 81ff.) has shown, the distinction between derivational and inflectional morphemes is gradient rather than discrete. Since intensifier *le* is a fairly recent development, it is even more difficult to assign it to a fixed position on the derivational-inflectional continuum. On the one hand, there are often lexical restrictions on derivational processes, even productive ones. This would argue in favor of placing intensifier *le* closer to derivation. On the other hand, for speakers who use it, intensifier *le* may be (becoming) obligatory in the sense of García and Van Putte (1989). For these speakers the presence of *le* as an intensifier is required and its absence is meaningful. By this criterion it is closer to inflectional morphology.

The meaning of intensifier *le* seems more inflectional in some cases and more derivational in others. In *córrele* (example [1]), its meaning as a hortative is very general and redundant in context, like an inflection. After all, it is often referred to as superfluous or "neuter." In contrast, in *échale* (example [2]) it is more like derivation, which often adds nonpredictable meaning to different lexical items (Bybee 1985: 99). The following examples with *entrar* 'enter' are also closer to the derivational pole. Notice that in construction with intensifier *le*, *entrar* ceases to be a physical-motion verb and takes on a general 'do, join in on' meaning.

(12) a. (UNAM 1976:417)

Trabajaba yo en una pulquería, de pulquero [ ] ... No *le entraba* yo. Me dijeron los patrones: "Vas a despacher el pulque; al fin que tú no *le entras*."

'I worked in a pulque bar, serving pulque [ ] ... I didn't *get into it* [= *do it*, drink]. The owners told me: "You're going to serve the pulque, since you don't *get into it* [= *do it*, drink]'



## b. (UNAM 1976:329)

Mucho gusto. ¡Éntrele a la plática!

'Pleased to meet you. *Join in* on the conversation!'

A growing body of studies shows how synchronic variation reflects stages in diachronic grammaticization processes (e.g. Schwenter 1994; Poplack and Tagliamonte 1999). In the next two sections I describe two sets of changes in *le* distribution patterns. The first set of changes results in weakening of *le*'s status as an argument, through the erosion of its use as the single object in two-participant situations and a concomitant increase in the relative frequency of its occurrence as the second object in three-participant situations. A second set of changes results in weakening of the pronominal status of *le* — extension to inanimate referents, dative doubling, and loss of agreement. Weakening argument and pronominal status converge to convert *le* into a locus for the realization of the verbal action. As *le* becomes less associated with an argument participant, it becomes more relevant to the verb itself, as a verbal intensifier.

## 2. Diachronic changes in the distribution and uses of *le*: weakening argument status

Evidence that *le* has become less argumental is presented in two parts. First, I propose that crucial to the evolution of *le* in Mexican Spanish is the decline of *leísmo*. That is, there has been a diachronic decrease in the occurrence of *le* as the sole object in two-participant situations (e.g. *LE conoció* 'he knew or recognized HIM' (DLNE 81, 34). The decline of *leísmo* means that *le* is used less as an NP argument and more as an oblique: concomitant with the decline of *le* in two-participant situations is an increase in its co-occurrence with an NP argument in three-participant situations (e.g. *LE llevaba su comida* 'he was bringing his food TO HIM' (DLNE 95, 122:24). Second, the argument status of *le* is further eroded with its use with verbs that are usually either transitive (e.g. *LE leyó el libro* 'she read the book TO HIM') or intransitive (e.g. *LE salía sangre*, literally, blood came out FROM HIM, i.e. 'he bled').

### 2.1. The decline of *leísmo* in Mexican Spanish

*Leísmo* is the use of dative *le(s)* < Latin *illi(s)* as direct object. In the following example, from testimony at an early seventeenth-century trial

in the state of Oaxaca, *le* is used as the object of two-participant verbs *conocer* ‘know, recognize’, *matar*, ‘kill’, and *hallar* ‘find’.

## (13) (DLNE 81, 34–35)

Y despues que truxeron luz *le conosio* más bien, y save *le mató* el dicho Gregorio Basques porque *le halló* con su muger en su aposento.

‘And after when they brought light he *recognized him* for sure, and he knows that said Gregorio Basques *killed him* because he *found him* with his wife in her (his?) room.’

*Leísmo* has been shown to be conditioned by lexical properties of the referent, especially gender, animacy, and countability, as well as by semantic-discourse factors, in particular transitivity and relative degrees of activity, prominence, and affectedness of the referent (García 1975, 1986; Klein-Andreu 1981, 1992, 1996, 1999; Flores 1997).

*Leísmo* is often viewed as an innovation or a change, a characterization that we can attribute at least in part to a prescriptive etymological viewpoint. Nevertheless, it is important that human masculine *leísmo* is already frequent in the earliest available Castilian texts. *Le* is used for human, masculine, singular direct objects on average 42% in the *Cantar de mio Cid* (1140/1207), 90% in Alfonso X’s *General estoria* (1272–1280), and 94% in the *Celestina* (1499) (Flores 1997: 36). In late eighteenth-century Castilian texts, *leísmo* is at 99% (Flores, forthcoming). For some present-day peninsular varieties, *leísmo* frequencies range from 90% to 100% (Fernández Ordóñez 1993: 92). Thus, human masculine singular *leísmo* has been the norm in Castilian Spanish since the first documentation.

The question is whether Mexican Spanish has or ever had *leísmo*. To answer this, I examined the occurrences of *le* in the *Documentos Lingüísticos de la Nueva España* (Company 1994), a corpus of letters, reports, inventory lists, notes, petitions, testimonies, and denouncements dating from 1525 to 1816.<sup>8</sup> The corpus comprises approximately 260,000 running words of text. I refer to this corpus as DLNE for short; in citing examples, the first is the document number, the second is the folio and line number. The following examples show that dative *le* and accusative masculine *lo* appear in the same context, even in the same text.<sup>9</sup>

*Le/lo* variation in same text, same context:

## (14) (DLNE 95, 122v:1–9)

Y dando muchas voces mandó a un offisial del dicho su marido, vestido de mescla azul escuro, y a sus negros que no dejasen pasar al dicho negro, y que si quisiere pasar *lo matasen a palos*. Y asi mesmo llamó a su yerno, Benavente, que bive muy serca en otra

tienda, al qual le dijo que él y sus negros tanvien ynpidiesen el pasaje al dicho esclavo; que *le matasen a palos*.

‘... beat *him* to death’

- (15) a. (DLNE 176, 80:21–24)

Y refiriendo el casso dise que habrá tiempo de seis años, poco más o menos, que viendose en pobresa llamó al demonio para que le favoreciese y socorriese. Y con efecto se le aparecio, y *le vido en forma* de un mono.

- b. (DLNE 176, 80v:1–4)

Item declara que en el tiempo referido de los ocho meses referidos, solisitó al dicho demonio para tener actos carnales con él, y con efecto se le aparesio, y *lo vido en forma* de un hombre soltero a quien esta declarante tenia afision.

‘... saw *him* in the form ...’

2.1.1. *Coding.* To track the frequency of *leísmo* across time, I coded tokens in six periods, beginning with the second half of the sixteenth century and ending with the first two decades of the nineteenth century. I followed the editor’s division of the corpus into roughly fifty-year periods. I limited the coding to occurrences of *le* in one genre, the testimonies, to maximize comparability across periods.<sup>10</sup> These *testimonios* contain the closest approximation we can hope for to vernacular speech, especially in trials for murder, witchcraft, blasphemy, insults, dispossessions, in short, what Company (1994: 5) in her introductory essay to the volume calls “causas un tanto ‘populacheras.’”

The tokens of *le* were coded as follows: first, I counted separately all verbs of communication, most frequently *decir* ‘say, tell’, *preguntar* ‘ask’, and *responder* ‘reply’. *Le* occurs most frequently with this class, making up about one-third of all the data; indeed, *decir* is the single-most-frequent predicate occurring with *le* in the entire DLNE corpus. With communication verbs, *le* is the experiencer or receiver, and the theme or “patient” is a constitutive part of the verb’s meaning (Maldonado 1999: 194).

- (16) Communication verbs occurring with *le* in DLNE corpus:

aconsejar, asegurar, advertir, avisar, comunicar, contar, decir, declarar, expresar, hablar, instar, intimar, mandar, manifestar, ordenar, pedir, preguntar, proponer, reconvenir, referir, replicar, responder, rogar, suplicar, etc.

Second, also counted separately were all occurrences of the verb *dar* ‘give’, including predicates meaning ‘beat’ or ‘deal blows’.<sup>11</sup> With this verb *le* is a benefactive indirect object (Givón 1984: 114). *Dar* makes up

about 10% of the data, on average. A third class is “*gustar*-type” verbs where the object is experiencer and invariably *le(s)* not *lo(s)*: *gustar* ‘please’, *constar* ‘be evident’, *pasar* ‘happen’, *parecer* ‘seem’, *tocar* ‘be the turn of’. These add up to 5–10% of all tokens. Coding tokens into one of these three classes was quite straightforward.

Coding for *leísmo*, in contrast, is not as straightforward as might appear, since it depends on how we view argument structure. Thompson and Hopper (2001) argue for what they call a probabilistic usage-based view of argument structure based on frequency in actual language use, as opposed to the notion of “argument structure” as inherent “valence.” These authors suggest that for English at least, transitivity is often indeterminate; there are many instances in real discourse where it is arbitrary whether we call a verb a one-participant or two-participant predicate. Spanish data also provide problematic examples:

(17) Object deletion?

(UNAM 1976:53)

Yo estuve quince días ahí, en el Hospital Juárez. No *comía*. Porque no tenía trastes, no me daban de comer.

‘I was there fifteen days, in Juárez Hospital. I didn’t *eat*. Because I didn’t have dishes, they didn’t bring me food.’

(18) Verb–object compound?

(UNAM 1976:326)

No le *tengo miedo*

‘I’m not afraid of him/her/it’ [literally: have fear].

(UNAM 1976:258)

no le *tiene fe* al seguro

‘He doesn’t trust the medical system’ [literally: have faith].

(UNAM 1976:262)

le *tienen mucha confianza* a la mamá

‘They are very comfortable with their mother’ [literally: have self-assurance].

In (17) one could argue that *comer* ‘eat’ is intransitive, or that it semantically requires an object that is omitted here. In the examples in (18), *miedo*, *fe*, *confianza* ‘fear, faith, self-assurance/familiarity’ might be taken to be objects of *tener* ‘have’, or they could be viewed as units of a verb–object compound.

In face of this kind of problem, I operationalized the number of participants according to the presence of a noun phrase. If *le* co-occurred with another NP, I coded the occurrence as a “three-participant situation,” but if it appeared as the lone object, I coded it as a “two-participant situation” (*leísmo*). There were a few cases that I coded as a

“three-participant construction” in the absence of a co-occurring NP. These were cases where the meaning of the verb changes with an accusative or where the same verb appears elsewhere in a three-participant situation. For example, since *manosearle* ‘touch’ appeared twice with an NP, as in *le manoseara las partes ocultas* ‘that he touch his private parts’ (DLNE, doc.174), when it appeared without an NP in *permitio que le manosease* ‘permitted that he touch him/his private parts’ (DLNE, doc.174) it was coded as a three-participant construction. Such cases, though, added up to less than 3% of the data. Examples of a three-participant situation, a two-participant situation, and a three-participant construction appear below.

(19) Coding of *le* tokens

- a. two-participant situation (*leísmo*) (DLNE 103, 44:9–10):  
*es berdad que le sacaron con fuerça y violencia del dicho hospital*  
 ‘it is true that they *removed him* through force and violence from said hospital’
- b. three-participant situation (DLNE 222, 137v:13):  
*le quitaron dicho cuchillo*  
 ‘they *took* said knife *from him*’
- c. three-participant construction (DLNE 103, 44v:7–11):  
*le [sic] dexaron en él enserrado con llave, quedandose dentro con este declarante el dicho administrador, y serrandole por de fuera con la dicha llave un criado del dicho administrador*  
 ‘they left him in it locked with a key, while the said administrator remained inside with this declarant, and a servant of said administrator *shut him in* from outside with the said key’

Finally, other classes coded separately were two-participant situations with an infinitive (for example, *le dejase pasar* ‘let him pass’, DLNE 94), causatives (*le hize poner la señal* ‘made him put the mark’, DLNE 234), and intransitive-locatives, as in (20). Together these add up to less than 5% of the data.

(20) Intransitive-locative (DLNE 245, 219v:4):

- sangre que le salía*  
 ‘blood that *came out from him*’

2.1.2. *Frequency and diffusion of leísmo.* The distribution of *le* across six periods appears in Table 1. The relative frequency of communication verbs and of *dar* ‘give’ remains fairly steady over time, with averages of 33% and 11%, respectively (shown in the last column). What changes

Table 1. *Relative frequencies of contexts of occurrence of le in DLNE corpus (16th–10th c.)*

Corpus <sup>a</sup>	16th b.	17th a.	17th b.	18th a.	18th b.	19th a.	Totals	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	N	%
Two-participant situations <sup>b,c</sup>	19	27	> 9	7	4	5	154	12
Two participant + Infinitive	2	4	1	1	1	<1	21	2
Communication verbs	34	32	34	23	39	41	418	33
<i>Dar</i> ‘give’	17	8	16	9	10	10	142	11
Three-participant situations	15	15	29	37	30	30	340	26
Three-participant construction	2	3	3	2	1	5	37	3
<i>Gustar</i> -type	5	9	5	18 <sup>d</sup>	2	2	108	8
Intransitive-locative	3	<1	3	1	7	2	29	2
Causative			<1		3	<1	6	
Other	3	1	<1	<1	2	3	20	2
Total N	104	268	230	337	142	203	1284	

- a. DLNE document number: 16th (1576–1577): 53–63, 66, 67; 17th a. (1618–1634): 81–83, 86, 93–95, 102–105, 110–112, 115, 116, 121; 17th b. (1681–1694): 131, 136, 151, 152, 156, 157, 161, 169–173; 18th a. (1731–1748): 180–184, 187–192, 199–201, 204–207, 215, 217, 221–227, 229; 18th b. (1750–1799): 234, 239, 240, 245, 267, 270, 272, 275–277; 19th a. (1800–1816): 287–320.
- b. Proportion of two-participant *le* is higher in 16th and first half of 17th than in later data ( $p < 0.01$  in all cases).
- c. Five most frequent two-participant verbs: *conocer* ‘know’, *dejar* ‘leave’, *hallar* ‘find’, *matar* ‘kill’, *ver* ‘see’.
- d. Apparently high *gustar*-type percentage in 18th a. drops to 8% if 15 tokens of the phrase “*no le tocan generales*” and 18 tokens of *le consta* concentrated in four documents (180, 181, 206, 207) are removed.

over time is the relative frequency of two-participant *leista* situations (shown in the first row). These show a statistically significant drop between the first and second half of the seventeenth century, from 27% to 9% of all tokens, and an overall decrease from around 25% in the earliest third of the corpus to about 5% in the latest.

Two additional measures provide evidence for the early presence and eventual decline of *leísmo* in Mexican Spanish. One is its shrinking spread, measured as the proportion of documents in the DLNE corpus with occurrences of *leísmo*. This is shown in Table 2. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, about two-thirds of all documents have at least one occurrence of *leísmo* (66%–88%). That proportion drops to less than one-fifth by the first two decades of the nineteenth century (16%). Another, social, measure is the distribution of *leista* documents by the origin or ethnicity of the declaring author. This generally coincides with the distribution of the corpus overall by speaker characteristics, as shown in Table 3. The proportional distribution across speaker groups (defined

Table 2. Diffusion of *leísmo* in DLNE (16th–19th c.): proportion documents with at least one occurrence

	16th b.	17th a.	17th b.	18th a.	18th b.	19th a.
Total documents <sup>a</sup>	13	17	12	28	10	43
<i>Leísta</i> documents <sup>b</sup>	9	15	8	13	2	7
%	69	88	66	46	20	16

a. Documents listed in Table 1.

b. 54, 56–61, 63, 66, 81–83, 86, 93–95, 103–105, 110–112, 115–116, 131, 136, 156, 169–173, 187, 188, 190–192, 205, 215, 221, 222, 225–227, 229, 270, 275, 281, 282, 285, 290, 315, 318, 319.

Table 3. Diffusion of *leísmo* in DLNE (16th–19th c.): origin or ethnicity of declaring speaker in %

Documents N =	Total <sup>a</sup> 123	<i>Leísta</i> <sup>a</sup> 54
Criollos	20	24
Espanoles	3	4
Indios	22	26
Mestizos	6	4
Mulatos	2	4
Naturales de México sin especificar	5	4
Negros	2	2
Sin indicación alguna	41	33

a. Same as Table 2.

by origin/ethnicity) is another measure of the early diffusion of *leísmo*. However, by the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the distribution of *leísta* tokens is markedly skewed: I found that 50% occurred in just two documents (282, 285), both letters of denunciation by priests. In present-day Mexican Spanish, *leísmo* appears to be sociolinguistically restricted to upper-class speakers and certain registers (cf. Cantero 1979).

2.1.3. *Leísmo in present-day Mexican Spanish?* A simple and straightforward measure of the status of *leísmo* is to compare the use of *le* (DAT) versus *lo* (ACC) in two-participant situations for singular masculine human referents with individual verb types. For this comparison, the entire DLNE corpus (not only the testimonies) and a corpus of present-day Mexican Spanish were searched. Figures for present-day Mexican Spanish are from the *Habla popular de la Ciudad de México* (UNAM

1976), a corpus of about 173,000 running words of text.<sup>12</sup> I will refer to this corpus as MexPop for short; examples are cited by page number.

The following pairs illustrate the presence versus absence of *leísmo* in two *dejar* ‘leave, let’ constructions, the first with a predicative adjective, the second with an infinitive.

- (21) a. (DLNE 103; cf. Ex. 19)  
*DEJAR* ‘leave’ + ADJECTIVE  
*le dexaron ... enserrado con llave*  
 ‘they left him ... locked up’

vs.

- (21) b. (UNAM 1976:395)  
*lo dejan ahí atarantao a uno*  
 ‘they leave one there stunned’

- (22) a. (DLNE 94, 120v:20)  
*DEJAR* ‘allow’ + INFINITIVE  
*mandandoles que matasen al dicho negro y no le dejasen pasar*  
 ‘... not let him pass’

vs.

- (22) b. (UNAM 1976:123)  
 Y resulta de que el americano, al bajarnos ahí, en Pino Suárez, se bajó y dijo que le habían sacado su cartera. Y entonces otro señor adentro, en el Metro, lo jalaba y lo jalaba, y no lo dejaba bajar. Entonces ... este ... él, como era un señor muy alto ... y luego otro lo jaló, y al otro le dio un aventón, y él salió.  
 ‘not let him get off (the metro)’

Only unequivocally two-participant situations where the object is a singular masculine human were counted. The following occurrence with *ver* ‘see’, for example, was not included, since the context makes clear that *no le vi* is a three-participant construction, where *le* means inalienable possession, ‘his hands’ (cf. Maldonado 1999: 131), or ‘his injury, the injury on his hands’. The speaker obviously did see her husband when she brought him his lunch but did not see his hands, *como usa guantes* ‘since he wears gloves’ at work.<sup>13</sup>

- (23) (UNAM 1976:439–440)  
 Le llevé ... Como le llevo de desayunar y de comer ... No, pus como usa guantes, *no le vi*; hasta que ... en la tarde, que vino, ¿verdá?



'I took (to) him ... I always take him breakfast and lunch ... No, since he uses gloves, *I didn't see him* [= *his hands*, the injury]; until ... the afternoon, when he got home, right?'

Table 4 compares the use of *le* versus *lo* in two-participant situations for singular masculine human referents with twelve frequent verbs: *acompañar* 'accompany', *aguardar* 'await', *conocer* 'know, recognize', *dejar* 'leave, let', *encontrar* 'find', *esperar* 'wait for', *hallar* 'find', *llevar* 'take', *maltratar* 'mistreat', *matar* 'kill', *seguir* 'follow', and *ver* 'see' (Appendix 1). The average frequency of *leísmo* shows a decline between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from 66% to 24%, and then another decline between early nineteenth-century texts and the MexPop corpus, from 18% to 2%. For example, highly transitive *matar* 'kill' appears 50%–62% of the time with *le* in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, but there are no occurrences in the present-day corpus. With *ver* 'see', the percentage of *le* reaches 40%–59% in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, but drops to 1% in MexPop.

In summary, Tables 1–4 converge on the same conclusion. The data indicate that in earlier varieties *le* was used as the single object in two-participant situations but that such usage has declined to the point that there is virtually no *leísmo* in present-day popular Mexican Spanish.

Table 4. *Singular masculine human referents in two-participant situations, le vs. lo*

Corpus:	16th c.		17th c.		18th c.		Early 19th c.		MexPop	
	% <i>le</i>	N	% <i>le</i>	N	% <i>le</i>	N	% <i>le</i>	N	% <i>le</i>	N
acompañar	0	1	100	3	50	4	0	2	0	4
aguardar			100	2	0	1	100	1		–
conocer	44	9	50	10	75	4	50	2	4	27
dejar	57	7	75	12	0	1	0	3	4	28
encontrar			50	2	50	2	0	1	0	11
esperar			–	–	20	5	100	1	0	3
hallar	67	3	91	11	0	4	0	2		–
llevar	0	4	57	14	0	7	0	4	0	13
maltratar	100	5	67	3	0	1		–	0	1
matar	50	4	62	13	33	3		–	0	6
seguir	100	2	86	7	0	3		–	0	1
ver	40	10	59	46	30	10	0	1	3	31
Average % (N) <sup>a</sup>	51 (23/45)		66 (81/123)		24 (11/45)		18 (3/17)		2 (3/125)	

a. Average *leísmo* frequency is higher in 16th and 17th than subsequent centuries ( $p < 0.01$ ) and in early 19th century than MexPop (Chi-square = 8.596651,  $p = 0.0034$ ). No other differences are statistically significant.

2.1.4. *A usage-based view of ayudarle.* One verb that is often cited to make a case for *leísmo* in Mexican Spanish is *ayudar* ‘help’ (e.g. Company 1994: 16). In the MexPop corpus, ‘help someone’ is indeed most frequently expressed with dative *le(s)*, with 84% of 31 *ayudar + le(s)* or *lo(s)/la(s)* tokens. Accusative *lo/a(s)* occurs with *ayudar* less than one-fifth of the time (16%). (Location of tokens: UNAM 1976: 56(2), 62, 75, 102(2), 108, 117, 176(2), 314(4), 318, 325, 349, 358, 367, 368, 402, 404, 408, 409, 410, 429(4), 430(2).)

The data indicate, however, that *ayudar* may be categorized not as a two-participant verb but as part of a construction with a third element. The examples in (24) illustrate.

- (24) a. (UNAM 1976:56)  
 le ayudaba *a* cuidar a la niña  
 ‘I helped her (*to*) take care of her daughter’  
 b. (UNAM 1976:430)  
 le ayudo *a* hacer la comida  
 ‘I help her (*to*) prepare the meal’

The third element is most often an *a* + infinitive complement-like phrase. Table 5 shows that these complement-like elements co-occur with 23% of all *ayudar* + object clitic tokens in the MexPop corpus. Considering *ayudar + le* separately, 32% have such a third element. That is, in actual usage, one-third of *ayudarle* occurrences have a complement-like element. In contrast, the few tokens of *ayudar + lo/la* lack a third element. In a usage-based approach (Thompson and Hopper 2001) *ayudar* is not a good example of a two-participant verb and *le* is less like an accusative and more like a true dative.

## 2.2. Further erosion of *le* argument status: an argument continuum

The decline of *leísmo* I have just reviewed means use of *le* less as an argument and more as an oblique. Table 1 (section 2.1.2) showed that

Table 5. *Distribution of ayudar ‘help someone’ in MexPop: co-occurring third elements*

	%	Total N
<i>ayudar</i> + object clitic <sup>a</sup> + <i>a</i> Infinitive, <i>con/en</i> NP, <i>para que</i>	23	74
<i>ayudar</i> + <i>le</i> + <i>a</i> Infinitive, <i>con/en</i> NP, <i>para que</i>	32	19
<i>ayudar</i> + <i>lo/la</i> + <i>a</i> Infinitive, <i>con/en</i> NP, <i>para que</i>	0	3

a. Object clitic = *me, nos, te, le(s), lo(s), la(s), se.*

concomitant with the decline of the use of *le* in two-participant situations is a rise in its co-occurrence with an NP argument in three-participant situations. The proportion of *le* tokens co-occurring with an NP object doubles from 15% to 30% between the documents of the first half of the seventeenth century and the second two-thirds of the DLNE corpus (Table 1, Three-participant situations row).

Now, these three-participant situations are not all equal. There is a continuum of argument status, where *le* may be more or less argumental. In other words, in some cases *le* appears with verbs that prototypically (= most frequently) do appear with three participants. In these cases it is a true indirect object, as in example (25) with *traer* ‘bring’, a verb of physical exchange with a prototypical recipient (Maldonado 1999: 130, Givón 1984: 88). In other cases, though, *le* functions as an applicative, that is, it appears with verbs that most frequently are (mono)transitive or even intransitive (cf. Maldonado 1999: 198). This is the case in (26), with *cerrar* ‘close’. *Cerrar* most frequently appears with one or no object, as indicated by the distribution of 24 tokens in the MexPop corpus: 46% occur with an object (*cerraron las fábricas* ‘they closed the factories’), another 37% have no object (*cerramos temprano* ‘we close early’), and the remaining 17% are unaccusatives (*ya cerró* ‘it closed’, referring to a lesion).

- (25) Three-participant continuum: from more to less argumental
- a. Trivalent predicates (*traer* ‘bring’) (DLNE 173, 147v:13)  
diciendo *le truxeran* a dicho cacique  
‘demanding that they *bring him* that cacique’
  - b. Applicative constructions (*cerrar* ‘close’) (Garibay, “Ingredientes de arte”):  
*Ai nos vemos, master, le cierro* para que no lo molesten.  
‘See you later, I’ll *shut* (the door) *for you* so you’re not interrupted.’

In affected dative (*dativo de afectación*) constructions, *le* refers to a participant in the event who is not part of the verb’s argument structure, but rather the location, concrete or abstract, in which the event occurs (Maldonado 1999: 252ff.). The following examples illustrate.

- (26) (DLNE 290, 129:13)  
*se le murio* el borrico  
‘the donkey *le* died’  
(= the person referred to by *le* is affected because it was his possession or he had some other relationship to the donkey)

(27) (UNAM 1976:337)

Pero ella no quiere que *se le maltrate* su comedor. Y como el mío ya ‘stá más viejo, entonces por eso todos comemos allá, en mi comedor.

‘But she doesn’t want her dining room to *le* ruin. And since mine is already older, that’s why we all eat there, in mine’

(= possession is reinforced by *le*, or the person referred to by *le* is affected in some additional way, e.g. she has to polish and maintain the dining table)

The difference between true indirect object and less argumental uses shows up nicely in the next example from the short story “Ingredientes de arte,” by Ricardo Garibay, where a movie producer is giving instructions to his scriptwriter (see also example [25b] above).

(28) Ni modo que yo *le escriba*, maese, porque ya sólo eso me falta  
‘Don’t expect me to *write for you*, my man, that’s all I need’

The simplest English translation of *escribirLE* here is ‘write FOR YOU’. This is quite different from *escribirLE* ‘write TO YOU’. Clearly the *le* of (28) is less argumental than in prototypical indirect object constructions.

We may summarize *le* variation — from more to less to nonargumental uses — by juxtaposing the examples with *cerrar* we have seen up to now, repeated below. In (29a) *le* refers to a participant who is part of the verbal action, in (29b) the referent is not part of, but is affected by, the verbal action, and in (29c) *le* is a locus for the realization of the action (do the closing there, at the window).

(29) *Le*: Argument > less argumental > nonargument

a. *serrandole* por de fuera con la dicha llave

‘close *him* in’ (example [19c]) >

b. *le cierra* para que no lo molesten

‘close *for you*’ (example [25b]) >

c. pa qué *le cierra*

‘do the closing’ (example [3])

Now, *le* is a pronoun with a human referent in both (29a) and (29b). Semantic bleaching in (29c) lies not only in the erosion of *le*’s argument status, but also in the erosion of its pronominal status. The next section will review three changes that converge toward the depronominization of *le*.

### 3. Weakening pronominal status

The changes — extension to inanimate referents, dative duplication, and loss of agreement — have been extensively described in studies of the

Spanish dative. In particular, Company (forthcoming, 2001: 23–25) argues convincingly that this set of changes results in depronominization of *le*. I briefly revisit these changes, placing them in a slightly different perspective, to make a case for bleaching in the evolution of *le*.

### 3.1. *Loss of human-referent requirement*

The Spanish dative, like datives cross-linguistically, is associated with human referents (Keniston 1937: 56–60; García 1975: chapter 7; Silva-Corvalán 1984: 555). However, this association shows a weakening over time, with the increasing use of *le* with inanimate referents. Erosion of the human-referent feature of meaning is already apparent in Old Spanish, as shown in Table 6, from Flores (1997: 37). More generally, there is evidence for “semantic flexibilization” of the Spanish dative (Company, forthcoming) from figures in Table 7.<sup>14</sup> The following examples illustrate use of *le* with inanimate referents, *la ropa* ‘clothes’ in (30) and *el recibo* ‘the receipt’ in (31).

(30) (UNAM 1976:62)

Toda la ropa que traje, luego luego mi hermana, la mayor, dice:  
 “¡No! ¡Quema todo eso!” *Le* echó petróleo, y la quemó toda.  
 ‘All the clothes I brought, right away my sister, the oldest, says:  
 “No! Burn all that up!” She threw gas *on it*, and burnt it all.’

Table 6. *Proportion of le with singular masculine inanimate referents in direct object function*<sup>a</sup>

Source	Date	<i>lo</i>	<i>le</i>	% <i>le</i>
Cid	12th–13th c.	26	1	4
General Estoria	13th c.	24	22	48
Celestina	15th c.	22	45	67

a. Table taken from Flores (1997: 37).

Table 7. *Indirect objects with nonhuman referent (from Company forthcoming: Cuadro 5)*

Date	– HUMAN	
	%	N/N
13th c.	6	62/1094
16th c.	5	60/1236
19th c.	16	196/1197

- (31) (UNAM 1976:341)  
 Señora, ¿cómo *le* pongo *al recibo* para pagarle a usted?  
 ‘Ma’am, how should I put it *on the receipt* so you get paid?’

### 3.2. *Le-IO duplication and loss of agreement*

The spectacular increase in dative duplication, or the co-occurrence of a “redundant” dative pronoun with a co-referent NP, is well documented in Spanish (e.g. Rini 1991). The following pairs contrast sixteenth-century, (31a) and (32a), and present-day examples, (31b) and (32b).

- (31) a. (DLNE 55:23)  
 ella *dixo* al dicho Tomé Núñez, su marido  
 ‘she 0 *told* said Tomé Núñez, her husband’  
 b. (UNAM 1976:112)  
 él *le dijo* a su secretario  
 ‘he *le told* his secretary’
- (32) a. (DLNE 56:24–25)  
 ya él *avia pedido* al dicho soldado los dichos tres pesos  
 ‘already he 0 *had asked* the said soldier for the said three pesos’  
 b. (UNAM 1976:92)  
 Antes, en las escuelas no *le pedían* a usted esto, no *le pedían* a usted cota (cuota) de esto otro; y ahora todo *le piden* a usted.  
 ‘Before in the schools they didn’t *le ask* you for this, they didn’t *le ask* you for a fee for that; and now they *le ask* you for everything.’

Figures for Peninsular and Latin American learned texts show that dative duplication jumps from a mere 10% in the sixteenth century to 83% in the twentieth century (Table 8; Company, forthcoming). Dative

Table 8. *Dative duplication (from Company forthcoming: Cuadro 6)<sup>a</sup>*

Date	+ DUPLICATION	
	%	N/N
13th c.	6	22/343
16th c.	10	34/336
18th c.	40	172/430
20th c.	83	104/609

a. Data from Peninsular and Latin American texts, including pronominal and nominal indirect objects.

duplication is near-categorical in Mexican varieties, at between 90% and 96% (Company 2001: 23).

Redundant use of *le* may be taken as an indication of the conventionalization (grammaticization) of dative duplication (cf. Bybee et al. 1994: 8). In the following example, *le* appears with both the auxiliary and the main verb in the periphrastic construction. Although not frequent, such examples of what we may call “double redundancy” are consistent with depronominization.

(33) (UNAM 447:12)

*Le* quería decir*le* a mi cuate que si ...

‘I wanted (to him) to ask (him) my buddy if ...’

It is important that dative duplication is increasingly realized with *le*, even when the indirect object is plural. In the examples in (34), *le* appears to be coreferential with *a muchos* ‘to many’ and *a los tacos* ‘on the tacos’. This kind of lack of agreement is more frequent with inanimate objects, as *los tacos*, at 82% (42/51), than with human referents, at 52% (147/282) in a written Mexican corpus (Huerta, cited in Company, forthcoming).

(34) a. (DLNE 171, 97:11)

como vio *le* sucedio a *muchos*.

‘as he *le* saw happened to *many*’

b. (UNAM 1976:89)

qué *le* pone a *los tacos*

‘what do you *le* put on the *tacos*’

The term “duplication” no longer seems appropriate for examples like those in (34), since it is not apparent that *le* and the *a* phrase are coreferential. Several scholars have proposed that duplication and lack of agreement indicate the development of *le* into an object–verb agreement marker (e.g. Bogard 1992, 1999). The proposal that *le* has developed into an agreement marker on the verb fits well with cross-linguistic diachronic paths of evolution. Givón (1976, 1984: 361ff.) and others have shown the diachronic connection between pronouns and agreement, along the following cline:

independent pronoun > unstressed pronoun > clitic pronoun > verb agreement (Givón 1984: 353)

### 3.3. *Depronominization*

Company (2001: 25), accurately I believe, characterizes these developments as manifestations of the depronominization of *le*. That is, with

increasing frequency, *le* is not functioning as an anaphoric pronoun. What is *le* doing then? This scholar proposes that

La duplicación tiene como efecto que una entidad marginal a la estructura oracional se vuelva central mediante la incorporación en la frase verbal de un clítico correferencial (Company, forthcoming).

'The effect of duplication is that an entity that is marginal to the sentence structure becomes central via the incorporation into the verb phrase of a coreferential clitic' (my translation).

Let us consider this example:

- (35) (UNAM 1976:425)  
*le* entraron mucho al ... *al aguardientito* ...  
*le*-CL.DAT.3SG enter-PRET.3PL to the *aguardientito*  
 'they got into drinking *aguardientito* a lot'

We can view this *le* ... *a* construction from the perspective of the *a* phrase:

un adjunto circunstancial locativo se vuelve argumental vía la copresencia de un clítico correferencial, de manera que el nominal estrecha su relación con el verbo, y ambos, la entidad nominal y el verbo, experimentan una transformación semántica, pues debilitan su significado de locación y desplazamiento físicos (Company, forthcoming).

'a locative adverbial adjunct becomes argumental via the co-occurrence of a coreferential clitic, so that the nominal has a closer relation with the verb and both the nominal entity and the verb undergo a semantic transformation, as their meanings of physical location and motion are weakened' (my translation).

An alternative view of the same example is from the perspective of *le* rather than the *a* phrase. While the co-occurrence of *le* may be making *aguardientito* more argumental, its effect on *le* is to make it less of an argument itself. That is, *le*'s increased co-occurrence with nonargument *a* phrases, as with erstwhile motion verbs, leads to its increased association with less argumental elements. As *le* becomes less associated with an argument participant, it becomes more relevant to the verb itself, whose meaning is changed. At the outset of this paper, I placed intensifier *le* on a derivation to inflection continuum: with *entrar* 'enter' it is more derivational, as the verb's meaning changes (see also examples in [12]); with *correr* 'run' it is more inflectional, as an intensifier.

In summary, the two dimensions along which semantic bleaching of *le* occurs are depicted in (36).<sup>15</sup> The points along these dimensions represent both diachronic steps and synchronic uses.



(36) Dimensions in the bleaching of *le*:

Object pronoun (*LE dije*) >

- weakening of argument status
  - a. decline of *leísmo* (*le* = DO, e.g., *LE mató*, example [13])
  - b. increased occurrence outside verbal valence; affective dative uses (*LE cierro*, example [25b]; *se LE murió*, example [26])
- weakening of pronoun status
  - a. loss of human referent requirement (*LE echó petróleo (a la ropa)*, example [31b])
  - b. dative duplication (*LE dijo a su secretario*, example [31b])
  - c. loss of number concordance (*LE pone a los tacos*, example [34b])

> Intensifier (*córreLE*)

#### 4. New meanings in old contexts

The development of intensifier *le* seems to be, at least in part, a case of “old forms for new concepts” (Company 1993). More specifically, it seems to be a case of new meanings in old contexts rather than the more common mechanism of semantic generalization via frequency increases to new contexts.

Frequency has been shown to be a driving force in the emergence and conventionalization of grammatical structures (Haiman 1994; Bybee and Thompson 2000; Barlow and Kemmer 2000; Bybee and Hopper 2001, among others). We would expect semantic generalization of *le* to be accompanied by increased frequency over time. The present data, however, do not provide straightforward evidence for a general increase in either token or type frequency.

Token frequency is a count of the number of occurrences in running text. Table 9 indicates lower token frequencies in the sixteenth century, where the average occurrence of *le* per 10,000 words is 73. We can attribute this in part to the sparseness of dative duplication (see Table 8).<sup>16</sup> But from the seventeenth century onward, token frequency appears to remain fairly steady, at about 130 occurrences per 10,000 words. Averages range between a low of 103 in the early nineteenth century to a high of 148 in the eighteenth century, with MexPop in between at 130.

It is possible, though, that unequal corpus size may distort token frequency comparisons — the early nineteenth-century corpus is about four times smaller than the other DLNE corpora. Also, since the oral

Table 9. *Le* token frequencies

Period	Corpus	Word Count	N <sup>a</sup>	Frequency (10,000 words)
1525–1585	DLNE 1–78	83,372	609	73
1609–1697	DLNE 79–176	85,321	1172	137
1731–1799	DLNE 177–277	71,687	1062	148
1800–1816	DLNE 287–320	19,767	203	103
1970s	MexPop	172,699	2247	130

a. N is the raw count; Frequency is normed per 10,000 words.

MexPop corpus includes interactive discourse, the comparison is clouded by genre differences.

Type frequency, the number of different items with which a construction is used, is a measure of generality and productivity (Bybee 1995, 1998). In this case, type frequency is a count of the different verbs in construction with *le*. Token/type ratios provide a measure of the generalization of *le* to new contexts: the lower the ratio, the greater the spread of *le* to different types. Table 10 depicts token/type ratios for the DLNE and MexPop. While we have the appearance of a neat diachronic decrease in ratios from the seventeenth (5.8) to the eighteenth (4.7) to the nineteenth (2.5) centuries, MexPop exhibits the highest ratio (10.5) — not a tidy result at all.

Comparisons, though, are hampered again by corpus size. Token/type ratios will appear higher when the number of tokens is relatively greater, since after a certain threshold the same types are more likely to be repeated. However, combining the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for a token count closer to MexPop (2247) improves but does not clear up the matter: with 110 shared types, the ratio becomes 7 (2234/319), still lower than MexPop. Yet comparisons are also hampered by genre differences. If one or two types have very high token frequencies, this would inflate the token/type ratio. *Decir* ‘say, tell’ alone makes up 35% of the MexPop data, with 780 tokens. Its token frequency is about half in the DLNE, at 18% (216/1172) in the seventeenth century and 14.5% (154/1062) in the eighteenth century. Yet subtracting *decir* tokens does

Table 10. *Type frequency (verbs with le) and type/token ratio*

Corpus	17th c.	18th c.	19th c.	MexPop
Tokens	1172	1062	203	2247
Types	203	226	80	214
Type/token ratio	5.8	4.7	2.5	10.5

not satisfactorily settle things either: the combined seventeenth and eighteenth centuries show a ratio of 5.9 (1864/318), still lower than MexPop's adjusted 6.9 (1467/213).

In summary, the present data fail to provide evidence for frequency increases. While corpora that are bigger and — more importantly — comparable by genre may well yield clear evidence for general frequency effects, the solution lies at least in part elsewhere. We have seen evidence for shifts in the distribution of *le*, or changes in the RELATIVE FREQUENCY of contexts of occurrence of *le*. It is these CHANGES IN DISTRIBUTION PATTERNS that result in semantic bleaching.

What appears to have happened, at least in part, is not an expansion of *le* to more predicates, but rather a change in the uses of *le* with the same predicates: new meanings in old contexts. Once *leísmo* was gone as a productive pattern for *le*, *le* constructions with some of the same verbs took on a different meaning. Put in other words, once *le* was freed up from use as a direct object pronoun, it took on other functions. The intensifying function probably originates with *ándale*, then extends to other intransitive motion verbs (*correr* 'run') and from there to other intransitive and transitive verbs (*cerrar* 'close'). It is least likely in prototypical dative contexts like *decir* 'say' or highly transitive accusative contexts like *matar* 'kill'.

An illustration of "new meanings in old contexts" is provided by *seguir*. This verb appears in *leísta* constructions in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century documents (Table 4). The meaning of *seguir* + *le* was 'follow someone or something', that is, *le* was the direct object. For example,

(37) (DLNE 95, 122v:27–30)

le dieron muchos palos en todo el cuerpo y cava, *siguiendole* por el agua hasta los portales de la yglesia mayor

'they gave him many blows over all his body and head, *following him* along the water until the entrance to the main church'

In the popular Mexico City (MexPop) corpus, the 'following' meaning of *seguir* is expressed with accusative *lo* or *la*, not *le*. The distribution of *seguir* + object clitic is shown in Table 11.

In this corpus, *seguir* + *le* means 'continue', not 'follow', as in (38):

(38) *seguir* + *le* = 'manage to continue, do the continuing'

a. (UNAM 1976:368)

Me casé, y seguimos. Y hasta la fecha. Y hasta la fecha *le seguimos* aquí.

'I got married, and we continued. To this date. To this date *we le continue* here (= we're still here together)'

Table 11. *Seguir constructions in MexPop (N = 26)<sup>a</sup>*

Form	Meaning	N	%
<i>Seguir + 0</i> :	'continue, go on'	5	19
<i>Seguir + le</i> :	'continue, go on'	12	46
<i>Seguir + lo(s), la(s)</i> :	'follow' <sup>b</sup>	9	35

- a. Location of tokens: *seguir + 0*: 96, 102(2), 121, 346; *seguir + le*: 93, 230, 233, 311, 317, 322, 368, 392, 418, 419(2), 428; *seguir + lo*: 14, 104, 216(2), 218, 240 (*eso*), 305, 312, 325.
- b. Follow physically or figuratively, e.g. support someone; be next in order.

b. (UNAM 1976:322)

Inf. A. –¿Sobre qué quieren hablar? ¿Qué tema?

Inf. B. –Pos sí: ¿Qué tema? Para *poderle seguir*.

'Informant A: What do you want to talk about? What topic?'

'Informant B: Yeah, what topic? So we can *le continue* (= keep on talking)'

c. (UNAM 1976:93)

Inf. –Todo eso es lo que muchas veces uno no opina ... uno más tarde tampoco lo puede uno decir.

Enc. –Sí, ¡*sígale!*

'Informant: All this is what many times you don't give your opinion about ... not even later you can't say it.'

'Interviewer: Yes, *continue le!* (= go on)'

The construction is intensive in that the action itself, continuing, is emphasized. The meaning is 'doing the continuing', 'managing to continue'. As with *entrar* (examples [12] and [35]), an erstwhile motion verb changes meaning. The new construction evidences bleaching along the dimensions we have seen: here *le* is not a pronominal argument or an agreement marker, it is not referential at all. It is a verbal morpheme, somewhere between derivation and inflection, as I have tried to show.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper we have seen a synchronic use of *le* that is different from its object pronoun function. Intensifier *le* is a derivational-inflectional affix that emphasizes the "doing" of the action indicated by the verbal base. In this construction, an erstwhile patient is the locus for the realization of the action. Diachronically, the development of this use results from the decline of direct object use of *le* (*leísmo*) and concomitant increases in less argumental uses, on the one hand, and on the other,

from the erosion of *le*'s pronominal and referential status. This development represents, at least in part, a case of new meanings in old contexts, rather than an extension to new contexts.

One question arising from this study is whether datives in other languages besides Spanish depronominize and develop similar intensifier uses.<sup>17</sup> Object-demotion constructions, which are associated with imperfective aspect or incomplete effect on the object (Harris and Campbell 1995: 246), might show some parallels.

In taking on this verbal-intensifier function, *le* evidences three principles of grammaticization, divergence, decategorialization, and retention, as defined in Hopper's (1991) oft-cited paper. Divergence, the grammaticization of a form or etymologically related forms in one context but not in others, shows up in synchronic variation in the uses of *le*: with *decir* 'say, tell' it remains a pronoun referring to a human, while with *correr* 'run' it is an intensifying affix. Decategorialization, the loss of optional markers of categoriality and discourse autonomy, shows up in depronominization: *le* loses number agreement and no longer refers to nominal participants. Retention, the persistence of features of meaning from the original source construction, shows up in the use of *le* as a deictic locus of the verbal activity, most clearly with motion verbs (cf. Company, forthcoming). In sum, intensifier *le* is not puzzling, once we adopt a grammaticization perspective.

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### **Appendix 1. Location of tokens for Table 4**

Citations show DLNE document number, UNAM 1976 page number; italics indicate occurrence of *le*.

*Acompañar* 'accompany': DLNE 4; 82, 103, 143; 241, 242, 261(2); 314, 315; UNAM 1976: 19(2), 290, 291.

*Aguardar* 'await, wait for': DNLE 87, 105, 261, 285.

*Conocer* 'recognize, know': DLNE 1(2), 28, 56, 58, 59(2), 60, 61, 80, 81, 82, 97, 101, 116, 162(3), 170; 230, 259, 267, 273; 282, 304; UNAM 1976: 57, 60(3), 86(3), 111, 118, 126(2), 258, 259(2), 279, 329, 330, 332, 367(2), 435, 448, 452(3), 455(2).

*Dejar* 'allow to (+ Infinitive), leave (+ adjective, locative, or 0)': 1(3), 45, 55, 58, 60; 82, 87, 92, 94(5), 95, 104, 162, 163; 192; 313, 316, 318; UNAM 1976: 52, 107, 110, 114, 123(2), 140, 270, 286, 302, 323, 330(2), 344, 353, 375, 395, 399(2), 400, 404(2), 432(4), 443(2).

- Encontrar* 'find': DLNE 106, 155, 192, 222, 318; UNAM 1976: 22(2), 48(2), 49, 112, 174(4), 199.
- Esperar* 'await, wait for': DLNE 265(4), 270, 315. UNAM 1976: 283, 417, 418.
- Hallar* 'find': DLNE 7(2), 17, 81, 82(3), 86, 103, 104, 105(2), 162, 169; 222(2), 223(2); 289, 318.
- Llevar* 'take': 1, 4, 25, 74, 82, 103(2), 104, 105, 109, 128(2), 169(2), 170, 171(2), 173; 222(2), 224, 229, 241, 270(2); 280, 281, 285, 316; UNAM 1976: 72, 118(2), 188, 223(2), 344(2), 347, 450(2), 451(2).
- Maltratar* 'maltreat': 1, 17, 59(3); 92, 93, 95; 239; UNAM 1976: 339.
- Matar* 'kill': DLNE 7, 56, 58(2); 81, 82(3), 92(2), 93(3), 94, 95(3); 182(2), 222; UNAM 1976: 23, 174(2), 188(2), 395.
- Seguir* 'follow': DLNE 7(2); 79, 92, 93, 94, 95, 101, 126; 187, 189; UNAM 1976: 104.
- Ver* 'see': 1, 7(2), 43(2), 45(2), 56, 59, 78, 80(4), 82, 86(4), 101, 107, 111, 115(4), 116, 133, 134, 136, 138(2), 139(2), 152, 155, 160, 162(6), 164, 165(2), 169(3), 170, 171, 172, 173, 176(3); 192, 208, 215(2), 242, 249, 250, 261, 273(2); UNAM 1976: 14, 34, 47, 48, 57, 60, 104, 175, 178(5), 204, 205, 272, 305, 326(4), 331, 344, 346, 350(2), 375, 404, 413, 433, 434.

## Notes

- \* Versions of this paper were presented at the 30th Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages, University of Florida, February 2000 and at the XIII Deutscher Hispanistentag, Universität Leipzig, March, 2001. I would like to thank Concepción Company for much illumination on problematic datives in Spanish, as well as the students in the "Cambios diacrónicos y variación" seminar at the University of New Mexico (Spring 2001) for stimulating discussion. Correspondence address: Department of Spanish and Portuguese, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque NM 87131-1146, USA. E-mail: rcacoull@unm.edu.
- Thus, intensifier *le* dates at least to the 19th century; pre-20th-century literary examples, however, are scarce. I found no *ándale* in the DLNE corpus, though there were examples of *anda* as a hortative, as in (i) and (ii):
    - (DLNE 55, 3v:1)  
Anda, calla
    - (DLNE 115, 224v:4)  
"anda y pidele al sacristan occultamente una hostia o dos. Por amor de Dios no lo sepa el padre prior"
  - The frequency and productivity of intensifier *le* are socially stratified and carry social meaning — but this must be left for another study.
  - Examples (3) and (4) are from recordings I made in the state of Chihuahua in 1997.
  - In examples like (6), the benefaction of the subject results from the complete exploitation of the object.
  - Cómo + le + hacer* tokens: UNAM 1976, pp. 15, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 97, 145, 146, 147, 227, 251, 285, 300, 381.
  - Of course, to evaluate if 10% co-occurrence really shows an association with deictic locatives we would have to know more about their rates of occurrence in other verbal

constructions. A comparison of different *subir* constructions in the MexPop corpus provides preliminary support: *subir* + 0 'go up, rise': 27 tokens, 1 co-occurring deictic; *subir* + REFL *me, te, se, nos* 'get on, into': 24 tokens, 0 deictics; *subir* + NP or ACC *lo/a(s)* 'raise': 11 tokens, 0 deictics; however, the one token of *subir* + intensifier *le* co-occurred with *aquí* (example [11]).

7. *Le* extends to nonverbal bases, as in *órale* 'ok'. See Torres Cacoullós and Hernández (1999: 90–92).
8. I thank Concepción Company for kindly providing me with a computerized version of the DLNE.
9. The DLNE also has *laismo* (Company 1994: 16).
10. Since there were fewer *testimonios* in the sixteenth century, I also included some *denuncias*.
11. Also counted with *dar* 'give' were a few tokens of predicates based on *dar*, e.g. *dar a entender* 'give to understand'.
12. I thank J. Halvor Clegg for a computerized version of this corpus, and Jens Clegg for patient help in running the Wordcruncher concordance program.
13. The fuller text for example (23):
  - (i) Inf. B. –Cuatro puntadas.  
 Enc. –¿Cómo fue que se ...?  
 Inf. A. –Es que llevaba yo un rollo de varilla ... [...] se me atoró; se me enganchó en esto de aquí, así, y me abrió. Y pus luego tenía miedo de que se me fuera a rasgar la vena. –Pero no, bendito sea Dios!  
 Enc. –¡Qué bueno! Le señora se asustó mucho, ¿no?  
 Inf. A. –No. Pus no; ¡Ni sabía!  
 Inf. B. –Yo ni sabía. Le llevé ... Como le llevo de desayunar y de comer ... No, pus como usa guantes, *no le vi*; hasta que ... en la tarde, que vino, ¿verdá? (UNAM 1976: 439–440)  
 'Informant B: Four stitches.'  
 'Interviewer: ¿How did it happen ...?'  
 'Informant A: I was taking a roll of rods ... [...] it got stuck; it got caught on this here, like this, and cut me. I was afraid a vein would get punctured. But no, thank God!  
 'Interviewer: That's good! The wife was very frightened right?'  
 'Informant A: No. No, she didn't even know!  
 'Informant B: I didn't even know. I took him ... I always take him breakfast and lunch ... No, since he uses gloves, *I didn't see him*; until ... the afternoon, when he got home, right?'
14. Table 6 shows inanimate *le* referents in direct object function only. A better measure of loss of the human-referent requirement would count all tokens of *le* in these texts. In Table 7, if separate counts were available, we would predict higher percentages of inanimate referents with singular (than plural) and duplicated (than nonduplicated) indirect objects, since it is the form *le* that is innovating.
15. More detailed data analysis is required to pinpoint the exact chronological ordering of the steps in (36). See Company (forthcoming) for some proposals.
16. A count of dative duplication in the specific corpus rather than general figures for the period would be necessary to estimate its impact on token frequency.
17. Modern Greek *dino* 'give' + *tu* CL.DAT.3SG may also be a case of an intensifying dative. For example, in imperative expressions like *dine tu* 'leave right away' (literally, 'give to him'), *tu* is not referential.

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UNAM 1976 = MexPop (see above).

