

Subjectification and conativity

Origins and development of the verbal construction *tratar de*+ infinitive

Álvaro S. Octavio de Toledo y Huerta and

Mar Garachana Camarero

Spanish National Research Council (CSIC-ILLA) | Universitat de Barcelona

Conative constructions have enjoyed considerable attention over the past decade from a typological perspective. However, the historical development of conativity in individual languages has been largely neglected to date. In this paper, we put forth an exhaustive diachronic analysis of the Spanish verbal construction *tratar de* + INF (currently ‘to attempt to INF’, whereby *tratar* originally means ‘handle’). We show that, unlike many periphrases, *tratar de* + INF does not originate in a single construction, but emerges via the conflation of separate members in a constructional network whose meanings slowly converged (in the manner of mutually supporting constructions) around a volitional meaning to generate a conative structure. The discussion sheds light on likely constructionalization paths for the development of conative meaning and highlights the role of non-periphrastic constructions as a principal means of conveying certain core modal contents in particular languages.

Keywords: conative constructions, historical linguistics (Spanish), verbal periphrases, supporting constructions

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to study the evolution of the Spanish conative construction *tratar de* + inf. By ‘conative construction’ we are not referring to the conative function as described by Jakobson (1963) or Isačenko (1964), i.e. we are not interested in the study of the linguistic function concerned with influencing the behavior of the addressee. Instead, we employ *conation* in the etymological sense of the term (cf. Latin *conari* ‘attempt’). Therefore, in assigning *tratar de* + inf a conative

value, we claim this structure expresses an attempt to carry out an action or the predisposition to undertake it, without stating whether it is effectively achieved or not (see, for example, Grano, 2011, 2017; Vincent, 2013; or Voinov, 2013). Other related terms include *frustrative* (Coupe, 2007, 2018), *attemptive* (Strauss, 2002), *irresultative* (Tamm, 2012) and *avertive* (Hagège, 2010). Along these lines, scholars also mention *attemptive modality* (Anderson, 2004, p. 31), *conative modality* (Foley, 1986, p. 152), and *incomplete modality* (Bybee et al., 1994).

Thus, in a statement such as *Los investigadores tratan de encontrar una vacuna contra el SARS-COV-2* ‘Researchers are trying to find a vaccine against sars-cov-2’, the only assertion present is that the researchers are undertaking actions towards a specific goal, namely, the development of a vaccine, but the outcome is unknown – whether the vaccine will be found is neither asserted nor denied. The addition of the adverb *infructuosamente* (‘in vain’) to the construction is permitted without affecting its grammaticality: *Los investigadores tratan de encontrar, infructuosamente, una vacuna contra el SARS-COV-2* ‘researchers are trying to find, in vain, a vaccine against sars-cov-2’.

This construction’s conative modal meaning emerged as a result of a formal reanalysis that brought about the syntactic restructuring (Cinque, 2001) of *tratar de* + inf, likening this construction to a verbal periphrasis. At the same time, there was a semantic shift from the apparently intersubjective value of *tratar* in its senses of negotiation or interaction between at least two individuals (1a–b; cf. the English verb *deal*), professional endeavor (1c), or an articulate discussion about something (1d), to a subjective value, with the focus placed on the perspective of the speaker (1e).¹

- (l) a. con codicia desordenada [...] *ha tratabdo e trata* de cada día [...] con los moros nuestros vezinos en queles dara vna parte deste rregno syle quisieren ayudar ² (Cortes de Segovia, 1386, *apud* CORDE)
 ‘With unruly ambition [...] he has *dealt and deals* every day [...] with the Moors, our neighbors, promising he would give them a portion of this realm if they helped him’
- b. van contra este mandamiento quien besa a la muger o la *tracta* en otra manera non honestamente (Pedro de Cuéllar, *Catecismo*, 1325)
 ‘in breach of this order shall be anyone who kisses the woman or *treats* her in an indecent manner’

1. For more information on the notion of ‘intersubjectivity’ see Cornillie (2008); Nuyts (2012); Thegel and Lindgren (2020), concerning ‘subjectivity’, see Traugott (2010).

2. Unless otherwise stated, all of the examples appearing in this article have been taken from the CORDE Diachronic Corpus of Spanish cited in the bibliography.

- c. si el personero *tracta* el pleyto fielmente como deue, [...] el que lo metió [...] non lo deue ende toller & meter otro, ca tuerto sería que aquel que fielmente se trabaya perdiessse el precio de su trabajo
(*Fuero juzgo*, ms. HSA/B2567, h. 1260–1300)
‘If the official duly *handles* the dispute as he should, [...] he who hired him [...] should not sack him and hire another, because it would be a grievance that he who has duly worked shall lose the fruit of his labor’
- d. Desí metremos la sortija en el colgadero. Et *tractaremos* desí de las maneras de las obras que se fazen con ella
(Maestro Bernaldo, *Libro de la açafeha*, 1277)
‘We will thereafter place the ring on the hanger. And now we shall *talk about* the kind of things we can do with it’
- e. Y si *tratas* de buscar padre para tus hijos, no trates del que es temporal y terreno, sino de aquél que es espiritual y eterno
(Luis de Granada, *Libro de la oración y meditación*, 1554)
‘And if you *try to* look for a father for your children, do not search for one who is temporary and of this earth, but one who is spiritual and eternal’

In (1a), *tratar* refers to a negotiation between an individual and the Moors; in (1b), to the conduct of men towards women; in (1c), *tratar* relates to the undertaking of a professional activity, and in (1d) it refers to a conversation with several participants (which may be asymmetrical, that is, an individual talking to many). However, in (1e) *tratar* becomes a part of a complex construction with an infinitive (*tratas de buscar* ‘[you] try to look for’) to indicate that the subject attempts to find a father for his children. This last meaning can only be activated in Spanish by combining *tratar* with an infinitive (provided the subjects of both predicates coincide) or with a *that*-clause (if the subjects are different: *tratas de que camine* ‘(you) try that (she) walks’ “You try to get her to walk”).

This particular sequence with a specific meaning associated to it emerged through a formal pattern involving the combination of a main verb and a *that*-clause or an infinitival clause (in what follows, *tratar de* + inf) linked by the preposition *de*. This description of the emergence of *tratar de* + inf fully falls within the concept of grammatical *construction* as it is understood in the field of Construction Grammar, i.e., as a conventional association of complex formal patterns to meaning (Goldberg, 1995, 2006, 2019). It also satisfies the more general, framework-free definition of construction by Haspelmath (2023, p. 1): “a conventional schema for creating or motivating well-formed expressions in which there is at least one open slot that can be filled by one of several expressions that belong to the same form-class.”

The grammatical value of the construction lies halfway between aspectuality and modality, as *tratar de* + inf describes actions that proceed toward attainment

without completion (aspectual sense) and, at the same time, involves a subject that intends to achieve a goal or objective (modal value). This meaning across aspect and mode is associated with a combination or sequence of verbs that is otherwise typical of verbal periphrases. In Spanish, verbal periphrases also adopt the general form of an inflected verb (sometimes followed by a linking particle: *a, de, que*) and a non-finite form (infinitive/gerund/past participle). Now, *tratar de* + inf cannot be considered a central member of the verbal periphrasis category. While it meets most of the criteria for periphrasticity, it exhibits specificities that position it as a marginal member within this category. In other words, it is more closely related to a para-periphrastic construction than a full representative of verbal periphrases. Indeed, *tratar de* + inf is not studied in the literature on Spanish verbal periphrases (a.o. García Fernández et al., 2006; Fernández de Castro, 1999; Morera, 1991; rae-asale, 2009; Olbertz, 1998; Yllera, 1980).

As verbal periphrases, *tratar de* + inf, formally, admits clitic climbing, and it is not compatible with the passive. However, only in a few cases can it include in the position of the inf a meteorological verb, above all in Latin American varieties of Spanish (“en la tarde *trató de llover* pero gracias a Dios el clima nos ayudó”, ‘in the afternoon, *it tried to rain*, but thanks to God, the weather helped us’); and we have not attested examples in which an existential verb occupies the non-finite verb slot. Furthermore, as stated, unlike the prototypical verbal periphrases, *tratar* can be followed by a *that*-clause, and the whole construction has a conative meaning, similar to that expressed by *tratar de* + inf. The possibility of replacing part of the construction is a feature that does not define verbal periphrases and prevents the inclusion of *tratar de* + inf in the central area of the category.

In any case, whether or not *tratar de* + inf should be classified as a periphrasis falls outside the scope of this paper. Instead, we are interested in determining how this well-established Spanish grammatical construction was formed and developed over time. Since, as we will show, this path cannot be accounted for in terms of grammaticalization processes (see Traugott & Hopper, 2003 [1993]; Bybee et al., 1994; Heine et al., 1991; Narrog & Heine, 2011), we are compelled to look for an explanation that goes beyond the evolution from lexical to grammatical meaning or from an already grammatical(ized) to a new grammatical meaning (cf. Traugott & Hopper, 2003). In so doing, the role of analogical pressure exerted by other constructions will be shown to be crucial in the development of *tratar de* + inf.

To the best of our knowledge, no other study has been conducted on this subject from either a synchronic or diachronic perspective. Here, we adopt an empirical diachronic perspective based on actual usage. Accordingly, we have manually extracted all instances of this construction from the largest available

online diachronic corpus of Spanish (CORDE, 2000). From a theoretical standpoint, we will adopt a diachronic Construction Grammar perspective.

This article contains 4 Sections, including this introduction (§ 1). In Section 2, we describe in detail the diachronic evolution of the verb *tratar* when combined with an infinitive, examining the semantic and syntactic transformations of this construction and trying to establish the period in which they took place. Section 3 presents the results of the analysis and sets them against the backdrop of a broader theoretical perspective, exploring the models and concepts of linguistic change that may fully account for these transformations, thereby identifying diachronic constructionalization as the process that, in our opinion, best fits this case. The final Section (§ 4) briefly summarizes our conclusions.

2. *Tratar de + inf* in the history of the Spanish language

Latin *tractāre*, a frequentative form of the verb *trahĕre* ‘to drag, to draw’, originally referred to controlled iterative activities involving the use of the hands (cf. Lewis & Short (1879) and *OLD*, s.v. *tracto*). It could thus mean ‘touch’, as opposed to other sensory activities such as ‘taste’ or ‘smell’ (2a); and it could mean ‘handle, manage, manipulate’, both in a material (2b) and an abstract sense (2c). Extended to the act of speaking, *tractare* denoted some form of deliberate discourse management by the speaker and conveyed the meaning of either ‘to discuss, to elaborate on something’ (2d: hence *tractatus* ‘treaty’, an elaborate or articulate discussion on a particular matter) or ‘to deal, to negotiate’ (2e). It is an evolution from the latter meaning, passed on to most Romance varieties, that will occupy us henceforth.

- (2) a. Ut ea, quae gustemus, olfaciamus, *tractemus*, audiamus, in ea ipsa, ubi
sentimus, parte versentur (Cicero, *Tusculans*, 5, 38)
‘In the same way the things we taste, smell, *touch*, and hear are restricted
to the very organ through which we feel...’
- b. ausa ... / ... fortis et asperas / *tractare* serpentis (Horace, *Odes*, 1, 37, 25–28)
‘she ventured to *handle* the powerful and foul snakes’
- c. servus meus, qui meam bibliothecen multorum numorum *tractavit*
(Cicero, *Letters*, 13, 77, 3)
‘a servant of mine, who *took care* of my very costly library...’
- d. copiosissime a Cicerone *tractatur*
(Quintilian, *Institutes of oratory*, 2, 4, 24)
‘it has been *discussed* extensively by Cicero’

- e. Nec durare valuit quin de condicionibus continuo *tractaret*
 (Suetonius, *Twelve Caesars*, 5, 26, 3)
 ‘Neither was he able to refrain from *negotiating* one marriage after the other’

Whereas discourse management in contexts such as (2d) focuses on the elaboration of speech content, i.e. on the subject matter (as emphasized by the adverb *copiosissime*), in (2e) it instead stresses the speech act’s illocutionary force, signaling the fact that the activity is directed toward a second participant whose attitude or opinion the speaker seeks to influence. As a verb of negotiation, *tractāre* (> OSp *tratar*) therefore implies (a) a speech act directed toward and shared with (b) a responding addressee who (c) presents or may present an obstacle to the achievement of a goal. The producer thus strives for *foreign consciousness alignment*, defined by Abraham (2012, p. 51) as “the appeal to a common ground (CG) to be reached between speaker and hearer”. Furthermore, in a negotiation participant A negotiates with participant B as much (and inasmuch) as B negotiates with A, both (ideally) tending toward an agreement. Hence, *tratar* (in its ‘negotiation’ meaning) comes quite close to the prototypical requirements of reciprocal predicates (Evans et al., 2004, p. 26): “the reciprocating sub-events are *simultaneous*”, “there are just *two participants*” and “there is *reciprocity saturation*” (what A does to B, B does to A) (cf. Bosque, 1985; Kulikov, 2011, pp. 384–385; Siloni, 2012; De Benito, 2022). In (Late) Latin or Old Spanish, *tractāre* / *tratar* may present both participants as co-involved in the negotiation, as any lexically reciprocal predicate (3a).³ However, OSp often resorts to the so-called *discontinuous construction*, in which the participant selected as syntactic subject is presented as the instigator of the event, while the second participant is coded by means of a comitative oblique complement and informationally backgrounded (2b; cf. Nedjalkov, 2007, p. 11). This yields a *partially symmetric interactive predicate* (Dowty, 1991, pp. 583–586), since only the subject is a volitional participant and therefore a canonical agent, whilst the co-participant assumes the subordinate role of a *partner* (cf. Rákosi, 2008, pp. 422–425).

3. In their ‘negotiation’ meaning, *tractare* / *tratar* correspond to the semantic group of reciprocals describing relations between people, and particularly *verbal intercourse*, “denoting verbal interchange of views, achievement of an agreement as a result of discussion, collective verbal acts such as dispute or quarrel” (Knjazev, 2007, p. 134). Note that *inter*, present in (2a), is the canonical Latin preposition to indicate reciprocal relations (cf. Guentchéva & Rivière, 2007, p. 602).

- (3) a. inter M[artinum] Oxomensem episcopum, ex una parte, et P[etrum] abbatem Sancti Petri de Arlançia ex alia, q[uestio] traretur super decimis hereditatum
 (Agreement between the abbot of Arlanza and the bishop of Osma, Alba Archive, June 1224)
 ‘The differences concerning the tithes of the estates *will be settled* by the bishop of Osma, on one hand, and the abbot of San Pedro de Arlanza, on the other’
- b. de ssolos ricos ombres fizo un grant conçeio / compeço a *tractar con ellos* su conseio (Alexandre, ms. O [early 14th century], 894cd [941cd], fol. 57v)
 ‘He created an exclusive council of noblemen / and started *consulting* his course of action with them’

However, as a verb of negotiation, *tratar* was fairly unusual in the earliest Castilian texts (13th–14th centuries). It seems to have been a little more common towards the East, in the Aragonese territories (4a). Example (4a) finely instances how the *partially symmetric* relation between the participants is still symmetric, i.e. it can be reversed: participant A (*nos* ‘we’) is profiled at first as agent, with B demoted to the partner role (*con ell* ‘with him’), then B is promoted as agentive subject and A is demoted (*con nós* ‘with us’). In any case, by the end of the 14th century and following the 15th century we first attest the syntactic schema where the ‘theme’ or subject matter of the deal is construed as a sentence (either functioning as a direct object, 4b, or as a complement introduced by a preposition meaning ‘on, about’, such as *de* or *en* in 4c). The construction with the infinitive (4d–4e) is a variant of this schema allowed whenever the subjects of the main and the subordinate clause coincide, a general condition governing the licensing of infinitival object sentences in Spanish throughout history.

- (4) a. viemos aquel cavallero [...] e nos queriendo *tractar con ell* sobrel feyto dalbarrazin dixo nos que non havia ningun poder de part vostra que podiesse *tractar con nos* sobre aquello
 (Agreements between King Jaume II of Aragon and Juan Núñez, 1298)
 ‘We met your envoy [...] and, as we sought to *negotiate with him* on Albaracín, he replied he had no power on your behalf to *deal with us* about that matter’
- b. yo sé bien que [...] Anthenor e Eneas entienden de *tratar que* los griegos nos maten (Fernández de Heredia, *Historia troyana*, 1376–1395)
 ‘I know for sure that ... Antenor and Aeneas intend to *settle* with the Greeks *that* they kill us all’

- c. este duque de Alencastre [...] *ha tratabdo e trata* de cada dia con el rey de Granada e conlos moros nuestros vezinos *en queles* dara vna parte deste regno sy le quisieren ayudar aello (Cortes de Segovia, 1386)

‘The duke of Lancaster *deals* every day with the king of Granada and the Moors, our neighbors, and has *settled* with them that he will give them a portion of the realm if they help him’

- d. Cómo Munitor e Rómulus e Remus, sus nietos, *tratavan de matar* al rey Emilius e cómo lo mataron, e regnó Munitor

(López de Ayala, *Décadas*, I, 9)

‘How Munitor, Romulus and Remus, his grandsons, *settled to kill* king Emilius, and how they killed him and Munitor took the crown’

- e. E Dido, veyendo que se non podié defender luengamente [...], *trató de fablar* con Jarba sobre seguro (Villena, *Eneida*, I, 15, gloss 255)

‘So Dido, seeing she couldn’t defend herself any much longer, *agreed to talk* with Jarba on his word of safety’

As in the formation of many periphrases (e.g., perfects emerging out of resultative constructions: cf. Bybee et al., 1994), subject alignment between the main clause and the reduced clause (here in the form of an infinitival argumental complement) provides the relevant context for a metonymic change via inference in the interpretation of the construction. Since the profiled negotiating agent is likewise the agent/controller of the event (potentially) leading to the intended goal, a particular implication of the volitional subject with the achievement of the goal follows. The agents are now seen as not only fostering a negotiation of which they are the principal instigator, but also as undertaking direct action in order to attain their purpose, be it only because it is made explicit that the agent sees potential obstacles standing between themselves and their intended goal.

The increase in a speaker’s commitment toward the achievement of the event expressed by their proposition can probably be seen as an instance of subjectification under Traugott’s classical definition, though this is not paramount here. Traugott sees subjectification as “the mechanism whereby meanings come over time to encode or externalize Sp[earer]/W[riter]’s perspectives and attitudes as constrained by the communicative world of the speech event” (Traugott, 2003, p. 126), i.e. the historical process whereby meanings are “recruited by the speaker to encode and regulate attitudes and beliefs” (Traugott, 2010, p. 35). Subjectification is a metonymic type of semantic change (cf. Beijering, 2012, p. 69). Our understanding of metonymy and metonymic changes is in line with the views expressed in Koch (2001, 2004).

The presence of the infinitival complement in (4d/e) invites a new interpretation of an inherently intersubjective event (a negotiation where a mutual align-

ment of perspective is sought by all sides) as one outlining a volitional subject and their efforts to achieve a goal. Undoubtedly, thus, the meaning of the utterance has become more centered on the speaker, since shared (intersubjective) intentionality has been displaced in focus by the speaker's individual will. Importantly, the term *intersubjective* here has little (if any) relation to Traugott's notion of *intersubjectivity*. Rather, we employ it just to underline the fact that the events expressed by reciprocals imply proactive interaction by all participants involved. Because they are intersubjective in nature, reciprocals are possibly prone to develop meanings related to subjectivity: "[It] is a mistake to see [subjectivity] as grounded in any one area of grammar [...]. It does seem to be the case, however, that there is a certain set of functionally interrelated grammatical categories which play a leading role in this respect. These are the ones which are indexically grounded in the speech situation, *presupposing the roles of speaker and addressee, and shifting in their reference and predication value according to who is doing the talking and who is the addressee*" (Rumsey, 2003, p. 184, cit. in Abraham, 2012 p. 50; our emphasis). A further participant, however, is still necessary: in (4d), a purely symmetrical construction, all three participants are portrayed as co-involved in the negotiation and equally committed to achieving their goal personally (which they eventually do); in (4e), a partially symmetrical, discontinuous construction, the partner of both the negotiation and the pursued event (since *to talk* is also a reciprocal) is encoded, as usual, by the comitative complement *con Jarba* 'with Jarba'.

The infinitival construction is very rare in Castilian until the second half of the 15th century, with only a handful of examples before 1450 in the large CORDE corpus, against many instances of the other schemas with *tratar* exemplified in (2–3). Thus, for instance, the historical works of Pero López de Ayala (the author in 4d) offer a dozen examples of the (4b–4c) type and more than thirty other instances of *tratar* as a negotiation verb, of which just four subcategorize an infinitive. On the other hand, the writings of the Aragonese historian Juan Fernández de Heredia (cf. 4a) show no less than twenty examples of *tratar de* + inf, again suggesting an earlier development eastwards (consider also that the earliest Castilian examples are found in authors familiar with the Eastern varieties, such as López de Ayala, Enrique de Villena (cf. 4e) or Alfonso Martínez de Toledo). The search in CORDE was conducted under the lemmata *trat* de / tract* de*, through which any sequence with a form of *tra(c)tar* immediate to a preposition *de* can be recovered. We were able to retrieve 14 Castilian examples of *tratar de* + inf prior to 1450 and 27 from 1451 to 1500. Considering that the corpus contains around 1.4 more words for the first half of the 15th century than for the second, a rough calculation suggests that the overall frequency of the infinitival construction grew about 3 times in the second half of the 15th century, remaining stable during the first third of the 16th century and increasing again by roughly 3 to 4

times toward the central decades of the 16th century (12 cases in 1501–1530 and 54 in 1531–1550, both periods with a similar textual volume in the corpus).

In principle, once the combination with the infinitive is possible, it opens the door for the schema to become a full-fledged volitional construction, where the second participant and the negotiation context are bleached out. In Castilian, however, the infinitival construction was heavily restricted up to 1530, with *tratar* allowing mostly infinitives that inherently denote some form of negotiation or deal (such as *arrange*, *meet* [to talk], *buy* / *sell* / *exchange*, *surrender* [a city], *marry*, *join forces* or *make peace*: group I in Table 1) or refer to events that can be undertaken collectively—i.e. as a joint effort or as the result of a consensual decision—by a plural or generic agent, such as *accept* / *reject*, *appoint*, *capture*, *conquer*, *construct*, *kill*, *punish* / *reward*, *send* [an envoy], *serve* [a lord], *transport*, *win time* / *delay*, etc.: group II in Table 1): both groups represent almost 80% of the attestations in this early period. Similar transitive verbs with individual subjects (i.e. either singular, or plural with a strongly favored distributive interpretation, as in *many citizens have decided to pay their taxes quite early this year*, where each participant is most likely to have made the decision on his own: group III in Table 1) are scarce (9%) and always have a factive reading (5a), thus conveying the idea that the subject is the instigator of an action executed by others, which in turn implies a previous agreement between instigator and executors. Intransitive verbs are only found after 1520, and even then, only unaccusative verbs indicating movement (*come* / *go*, *enter*, *sail away*, etc.) and mostly with a plural subject, thus favoring the interpretation of the subject as the collective undergoer of a displacement agreed upon by a group of people (*they decided to go to the zoo*: group IV, with figures in brackets indicating occurrences with plural subjects). Transpersonal events (intrinsically asymmetric and intentionally oriented by individual agents to animated receivers so as to modify their mental, intellectual or material status)⁴ are marginal (5b), and events directed to the self,⁵ simply non-existent. Thus, early

4. These include asymmetrical verbs of speech and speech act verbs (*address*, *complain*, *convince*, *counsel*, *explain*, *instruct*, *insult*, *promise*, etc.), benefactives (*help*, *favor*, *please*, *praise*, *be kind* / *loyal to*, etc.) and other predicates implying the speaker's will to modify the addressee's state of mind (*attract*, *compel*, *deceive*, *entertain*, *provoke*, *soothe*, *teach*, etc.). They are summed up under group V in Table 1.

5. These include verbs of grooming (*dress*, *bathe*, *put on makeup*, etc.) and of physical maintenance (*drink*, *eat*, *do exercise*, *(go to) sleep*, etc.), verbs of knowledge and intellectual activity (*ascertain*, *consider*, *know*, *learn*, *resolve*, *understand*, etc.), verbs of self-defense and avoidance (*deviate*, *resist*, *free oneself*, etc.), most intransitive verbs (both 'middle-voice' and unergative: *die* / *live*, *heal*, *lament*, etc.) and predicates indicating the existence or inception of a state concerning the subject (*enjoy*, *be honest*, *become a teacher*, *fall in love*, *get lucky* / *involved*, *quit*, etc.) or a change of state concerning the inner self (*behave*, *change* / *make up one's mind*, *convert*,

attestations of *tratar de* + inf still stick to the ‘negotiation/discussion/agreement’ semantics, with almost no space for a volitional reading. Once again, Eastern varieties appear to have preceded Castilian in admitting verbs from group IV with individual subjects and from group V, where the volitional interpretation becomes more evident.

- (5) a. sabiendo quel dicho sacratissimo enperador [...] avia *tratado* de helegir en su vida a su Alteza por Rey de Romanos (*Cortes of Valladolid*, 1523)
 ‘being certain that the abovementioned Holy Emperor ... *had maneuvered* to get His Highness elected as Holy Roman Emperor during his lifetime’
 b. que no *trató* de injuriarlos (*Documents concerning Juan Cervantes*, 1524)
 ‘... that he didn’t *take action* to insult them’

Table 1. Total and relative frequencies (as % for each time period) of *tratar de* + INF in different syntactic environments and with different associated meanings

<i>Period</i>	I. Deal (<i>marry</i>)	II. Collective (Generic) subjects	III. Individual Subjects in transitives	IV. Move (Plural subjects)	V. Oriented to other	VI. Oriented to self
ad 1530	24 (8) 45%	18 (4) 34%	5 9%	4 (3) 8%	2 4%	0 0%
1531–1556	17 (6) 13%	47 (16) 37%	15 12%	10 (4) 8%	21 17%	17 13%
1601–1616	92 (41) 16%	168 (81) 30%	112 20%	57 (17) 10%	53 9%	84 15%
1660–1722	30 (8) 8%	101 (37) 27%	82 21.5%	67 (22) 18%	37 10%	59 15.5%
1761–1805	10 (3) 5%	75 35%	52 24.5%	14 (2) 6.5%	31 15%	29 14%
1806–1824	9 (3) 2%	144 (66) 31%	100 22%	19 (2) 4%	130 28%	58 13%
Total	182	553	366	171	274	247
(<i>N</i> = 1793)	10%	31%	20.5%	9.5%	15%	14%

Examples of the construction with an individual subject and a predicate indicating a mental process appear by the mid-16th century (they become common

repent, *imitate* [= ‘try to be like someone else’], etc.). They are summed up under group VI in Table 1.

by the 1530's with an object NP, particularly in religious texts discussing morals). They probably emerge from meanings of *tratar* other than 'to negotiate', such as 'to exercise an activity' (cf. sup. 1c and Eng. *He deals in leather*) or 'to discuss extensively' (cf. sup. 1d), both also present from the first Castilian texts. Combined with an infinitival complement that refers to the subject's thoughts, the former meaning drifts from professional dedication to mental occupation (6a), whereas the latter comes to indicate an inner debate with oneself (6b). Inasmuch as the event introduced by the infinitive can be conceived of as potentially beneficial for the subject, i.e. as a desirable goal (e.g., attaining heavenly bliss in 6a), the inference is easily derived that the subject devoting time to ponder the event is personally interested in its achievement, hence willing to take active part in bringing it forth (6c). A 'strong determination' reading arises which converges with that derivable from the 'negotiation' meaning whenever the construction focuses on the purposes of an individual agent (cf. 5). Transpersonal uses of *tratar* (group V: cf. 5b) also experience a very significant increase between 1531 and 1556 (from 4% in the previous period to 17%), so that groups V–VI in Table 1 above come to represent 30% of all instances of *tratar de* + inf. Since individual subjects now appear with displacement unaccusative verbs (4 of 10 examples or 40%: see Figure 1 for the constant historical recess of plural subjects with these group IV predicates) and also start yielding mostly non-factitive examples in group III (6d), the total number of instances where a singular person is directly and exclusively involved and interested in the ultimate execution of the event increases dramatically, from 13% in the former period to roughly 45% in the mid-16th century. Meanwhile, the association of the infinitival construction with negotiation verbs shrinks in inverse proportion, from 45% to just 13% of the tokens. Thus, the volitional interpretation of the *tratar de* + inf construction can be assumed to make its breakthrough precisely at this time through a convergence of semantic extensions from distinct—though of course not entirely unrelated—previous meanings of *tratar*.

- (6) a. Pues el christiano que no *tracta* de considerar el imperio romano ni *de acrecentarlo*, sino *de ganar* el reyno de los cielos, cuánto más digno de reprehensión es que olvidado desto *tracte* de texer telas de arañas y entienda en las cosas perecederas
 (Luis Saravia de la Calle, *Instrucción de mercaderes*, 1544)
 '(In the case of) the Christian, then, *whose business is not* to consider or augment the Roman Empire, but to attain the heavenly kingdom, is it not far more reprehensible that he, forgetting his goal, might *dedicate himself* to weaving phantasies in his mind and thinking of mortal things?'
- b. Ya que estaba graduado de maestro, *trató* de entrar en la Compañía de Jesús
 (Teresa de Jesús, *Fundaciones*, 1573–1582)
 'Once he had obtained a master's degree, he *thought of* joining the Jesuits'

- c. porque ellos *tratan de ser ricos* absolutamente
(Juan Arce de Otálora, *Coloquios de Palatino y Pinciano*, ca. 1550)
‘for they *are busy with getting rich* by all means possible’
- d. lo primero que el demonio *trata* de destruir es esto
(Felipe de Meneses, *Luz del alma cristiana*, 1554)
‘This is the first thing that the devil *longs* to destroy’

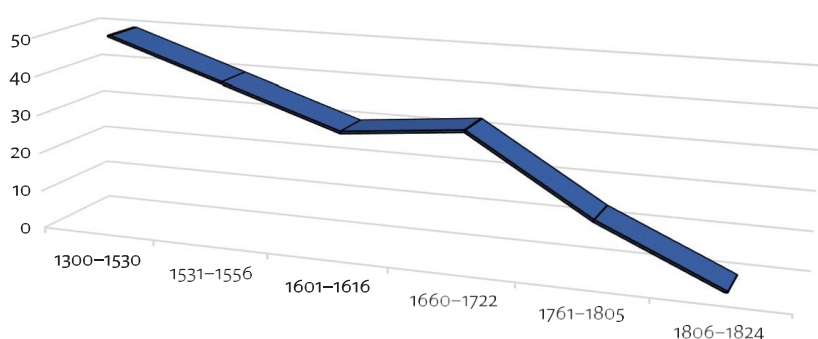


Figure 1. Plural subjects with movement verbs (in % per period)

By the end of the 16th century and early 17th century, *tratar de* + inf had clearly turned into a dominantly volitional construction (51% of individual subjects in groups III through VI, with a particularly significant advance in group III, previously less prone to taking individual subjects), thus signaling the spread of the ‘strong determination’ interpretation (similarly, the volitional interpretation extends now to that-completives, i.e. to contexts where the subject of the main sentence is different from that of the embedded sentence. In such cases, of course, it is usually a factitive interpretation that is at stake). *Tratar* thus joined a group of verbs expressing willingness and strong resolution that can take on an infinitival complement, such as *determinar* ‘determine, resolve’ (7a) or *deliberar* ‘examine in order to make a decision, make one’s mind’ (7b): both are attested with an infinitival complement (hence within a construction implying a particular involvement of the subject in the event) in Castile since the mid-15th century, that is, at approximately the same time that *tratar* first appeared with an infinitive, and the increasing frequency of these predicates throughout the 16th century might very well have fueled *tratar de* + inf’s turn to more clearly volitional values (see De Smet & Fischer, 2017 for the role of ‘supporting constructions’ in the convergence and diffusion of syntactic patterns).

- (7) a. *determinó de dexar el mundo e poner=se en un monesterio*
(Alonso Martínez de Toledo, *Life of saint Isidoro*, before 1444)
‘He resolved to abandon the world and enter a monastery’

- b. e porque ante de todas cosas sepas quién fue Bías [...], *deliberé de escrevir*
quién aya sydo e de dónde (Santillana, *Bías contra fortuna*, 1448–1453)

‘and so you might know, first of all things, who Bias was, I *decided* to write
down here who he was and whence he came’

Also *determinar* (*de*) + INF and *deliberar* (*de*) + INF are attested first (by the end of the 14th century) in Aragón, and their adoption in Castilian is similarly associated with learned individuals familiar with the Eastern territories and linguistic varieties, such as the Archpriest of Talavera (7a) and the Marquis of Santillana (7b). Albeit similar, these verbs are not synonymous. *Determinar*, like eng. *resolve*, tends to display a high degree of control by the subject, its use therefore typically implying that the event effectively comes into being as the subject wishes, and is thus associated with perlocutive effects (cf. *the king resolved to ban the knight from court*). *Deliberar*, in turn, focuses on the mental process of making a decision, bearing no additional information as to the outcome of the event. As for *tratar*, its root semantics (‘deal’) is both intrinsically goal-oriented (the deal is made to achieve an event), unlike *deliberar*, and implies low control (the hearer’s agreement is necessary to complete the event), unlike *determinar*. A volitional construction with *tratar* therefore activates a conative invited inference: the strong determination to do something goes, when possible, beyond the purely mental stage and leads to an actual attempt to achieve the event, although the agent’s attempt does not guarantee success, since they do not fully control the event. From the last third of the 16th century, examples emerge where *tratar de* + inf is explicitly linked to the outcome of the event, which can be felicitous (8a) or, more often, infelicitous (8b). However, examples can be found throughout the 17th century and early 18th century where the conative interpretation is highly unlikely or plainly impossible to obtain (9), proving that conative content was still not systematically encoded as part of the construction’s meaning.

- (8) a. *traté de enterrar* en la playa los muertos y puse una cruz a cada uno
(Alonso de Contreras, *Vida*, 1630–1633)

‘I *decided* to bury the dead in the beach and put a cross on each one of
them’

- b. vínome al pensamiento [...] de meterme en religion [...]; *traté primero de*
meterme en Madrid en San Jerónimo, y como son tan morosos, traje-
ronme no sé qué dilaciones (Martín de Ayala, *Discurso de la vida*, 1566)

‘I thought of entering a religious house ...; I first *decided/trying* to join the
Hieronymites in Madrid, but since they’re so precautions, they came with
God knows how many conditions’

- c. Luego *traté de confesarme* a menudo, reformando mi vida, limpiando mi conciencia [...]. Mas era de carne (Alemán, *Guzmán de Alfarache* 2, 1604)
 ‘I subsequently *decided/tried* to confess often, reforming my life and cleansing my conscience – but I was made of flesh’
- (9) a. Mas *tratad de apercebir* / la espada
 (Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, *El desdichado en fingir*, c1613–1615)
 ‘But (sir,) *get ready* to draw the sword’
- b. D. Juan de Góngora [...] queda ya degradado de la Presidencia de Hacienda tan de repente, que antes se supo que estaba ya sin ella que *tratase de estarlo*
 (Noticias de la Corte, 1659–1664)
 ‘Mr. Juan de Góngora has been so suddenly dismissed from the Exchequer that it became known he was out of office even before he *could wish* he were’
- c. le escribió su padrino que se viniese a vivir a Cádiz, que él *trataba de retirarse*
 (Raimundo de Lantery, *Memorias*, 1705)
 ‘His godfather wrote him to come and live in Cádiz, for he *was considering* retirement’

Throughout the 17th century and early 18th century, the proportion of individual subjects with predicates from groups III–VI increases steadily (almost 60% in 1660–1722), undoubtedly showing the constant spread of the volitional use of *tratar de* + inf. Collective subjects, on the contrary, are on the wane (see Figure 2 below), and group I predicates with intrinsic ‘deal’ semantics are down to a mere 8% by the end of the period. These figures do not change significantly during the 18th century, but in its second half no examples of the kind illustrated in (9) can be found. This means that *all* examples in that period can potentially be read as conative constructions. From this point onwards, there is no reason to think that the conative meaning has not been entrenched as part of the procedural content of *tratar de* + inf.

Some additional evidence points to the final consolidation of the conative construction by the early 19th century. The proportion of individual subjects increases once again (67% in 1806–1824), but this time the increase is principally related to a much greater number of transpersonal (group V) cases (15% at the end of the 18th century, 28% over the first quarter of the 19th century). Transpersonal situations usually portray an agent doing his best to bring about a particular psychological reaction in the hearer. This requires more than just a volitional mental process, typically a speech act, and implies a risk of failure irrespective of the agent’s effort or ability (since it is ultimately up to the hearer to react in the desired way). Group V verbs are, thus, typically attempts, more so than any other group

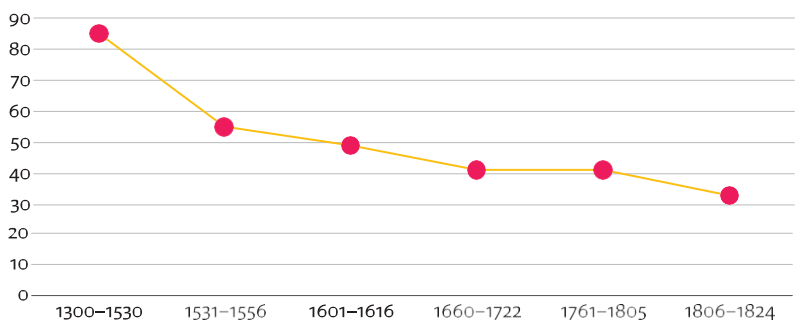


Figure 2. Collective subjects (in % per period)

in Table 1, and their abrupt increase in the early decades of the 19th century is evidence that the conative interpretation of *tratar de* +inf was rapidly expanding. Qualitative evidence further supports this idea: in this period, inanimate subjects referring to man-made devices, such as laws, start appearing. Such entities do not have wishes or strong intentions, being inanimate, but they can have aims, as they might be instrumental to achieving a particular goal: examples with this kind of subject must be read as conative, not volitional (10).

- (10) lo único que se infiere y puede inferirse de este principio es que deba variarse la legislación civil que *trata de proteger* la religion
(Fray Francisco Alvarado, *Cartas críticas del Filósofo Rancio* 2, 1811–1813)
‘The sole thing that infers or can be inferred from this principle is that those civil laws that *aim at protecting* religion should be changed’

By the early 1800’s, then, *tratar de* + inf had completed its evolution from a more compositional combination meaning ‘to negotiate or cooperate in X’ (X being the event denoted by the infinitive) through a volitional construction and into a conative structure. Throughout its history, the sequence *tratar de* + inf, initially a rather residual possibility, has become more and more common (cf. Table 2). Figure 3 shows the progress of the sequence by dividing the frequency for each period by that of the first period (the result is labelled *increment* in Table 2): significantly, major accelerations in frequency seem to accompany the emergence of each new value, i.e. around the middle of the 16th century, when the volitional construction emerged, and around the late 18th century and early 19th century, as the conative value became established. Thus, the diffusion of *tratar de* + inf seems to mirror its transition to more speaker-centered meanings and to more abstract (or procedural) content.

Table 2. *Tratar de + inf*: Frequencies per million words in each period and increment with regard to the initial period

Period	Size of subcorpus (word number)	Number of tokens	Freq per million words	Increase
1300–1530	40,081,763	53	1.3	1
1531–1556	16,549,578	127	7.7	6
1601–1616	16,456,131	566	34.4	26.5
1660–1722	5,985,366	376	62.8	48
1806–1824	3,466,619	460	132.7	102

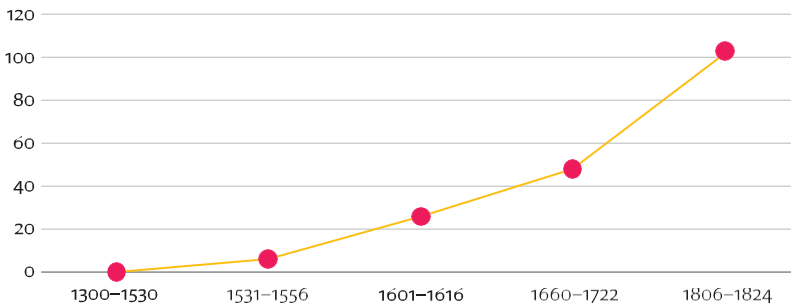


Figure 3. Incremental frequency of *tratar de + inf* (data from Table 2, fourth column)

3. Summary and discussion

As mentioned in the introduction, the evolution of *tratar de + inf* described in the previous Section is closer to a process of constructionalization, as described by, among others, Traugott and Trousdale (2013), than to one of grammaticalization. The rise of *tratar de + inf* does not show the syntactic reanalysis of an original construction, as is typical in grammaticalization paths. Rather, its emergence appears to be the consequence of the confluence of three different constructions into a volitional one, whereby a new construction with a different meaning emerges. Subsequently, that volitional construction develops into a conative construction which again manifests a new meaning-form association. In this complex evolution, modifications concerning how the components of *tratar de + inf* (subjects and types of verbs in the infinitive) could combine were decisive in the appearance of the conative value the construction expresses today.

Two of the constructions leading to the conative *tratar de + inf* are characterized by their meaning of negotiation (‘negotiate with someone/something’

or ‘discuss something with someone’); the other denotes a professional endeavor (as in Eng. ‘to handle’). These three meanings involve the participation of more than one person and are related, albeit in different ways, to the notion of strong determination. Negotiating, taking care of an affair, and discussing a matter imply a desire to reach a goal, and, therefore, these meanings are all connected to a volitional meaning. The syntactic structure tied to the original meaning (‘deal’) is altered to favor volitional interpretations (via subjects that are increasingly individualized and lexical verbs occupying the slot of the infinitive that accommodate less and less to the idea of negotiation). Moreover, when instances of *tratar de* + inf carrying the sense of strong determination appear, a displacement from intersubjectivity to subjectivity takes place where the subject of the event expressed by *tratar de* + inf becomes the main element upon which the volitional sense depends. There is no longer any negotiation or discussion; instead, the subject of the predicate wants to undertake an activity. This evolution evidences that over time a new meaning is being connected to a new form. Let’s probe this in greater detail.

The initial structure ties the verb *tratar* ‘negotiate, be in talks with’ to another participant (expressed as the complement of a comitative PP with *con* ‘with’) and another PP with a preposition expressing ‘aboutness’ governing a NP or complement clause. Thus, the starting point is not the combination of *tratar* with another verb, but with two PPs, as shown in Figure 4, which shows *tratar* ‘negotiate’ as part of a schema that can be represented as V + [_{pp} Comitative participant] + [_{pp} Thematic or Purpose complement clause/np].⁶

The construction represented in Figure 4 shows that the starting point for the emergence of *tratar de* + inf involves a prior clausal constructionalization, already consolidated in Old Spanish (13th–14th centuries). The abstract nature of the issue under negotiation makes it possible for a clause to take the object position. This point of contact between multiverb constructions and nominal constructions is not uncommon in the emergence of verbal grammatical constructions: thus, the consolidation of *lograr* + inf (‘attain + inf’) in Spanish following the structure *lograr* + np has become entrenched in the language in the very same manner (Rosemeyer & Garachana, 2019).

6. We follow Traugott & Trousdale's (2013) proposal in distinguishing the following set of constructional levels to describe the constructional change: schemas, subschemas, and micro-constructions. Schemas are characterized by a high level of schematicity. Subschemas still contain a high degree of schematicity, but some of their slots are filled (in our case: [Subj. TRATAR + [_{pp} COMITATIVE] + [_{pp} *sobre/en/de* [NP/COMPLETIVE CLAUSE]]). Finally, micro-constructions are maximally saturated constructions. Empirically attested micro-constructions are called *constructs*. For more detail, cf. Traugott and Trousdale (2013, pp. 16–17).

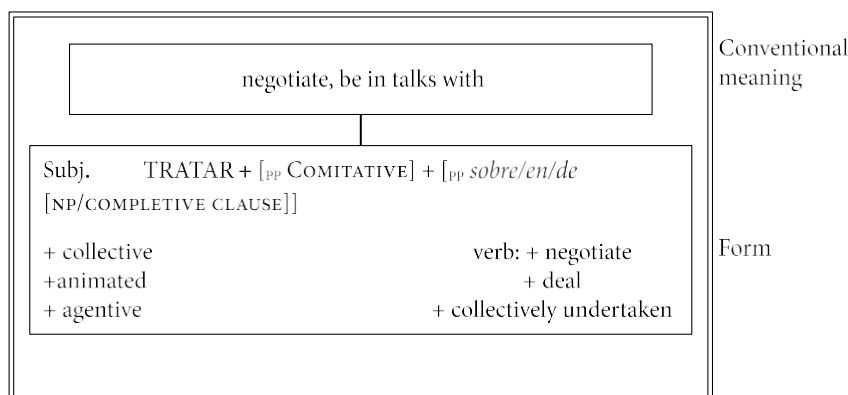


Figure 4. Initial construction with *tratar* and two PP complements

Figure 5 represents the next stage, where the comitative complement is no longer compulsory and the selected preposition for the ‘aboutness’ complement is now solely *de*, precisely the most common link between the auxiliary and the non-finite form in prototypical Spanish periphrases. Semantic changes at this stage affect the participants: the subject becomes more prominently profiled (a metonymical change) as exerting influence on other persons to achieve a common goal. Furthermore, subjects can be individual, steering the construction away from the ‘shared negotiation’ intersubjective meaning into the subjective sphere of the individual’s will to achieve a goal in spite of the potential obstacle represented by other participants. The subcategorized verbs change accordingly: at first they denote only negotiations, deals or collectively undertaken events (cf. Figure 4), but now a wider semantic array of subordinate verbs is possible. This marks the birth of a new grammatical construction (*tratar de* + clause), that inherits the properties of a more schematic construction, namely, *v* + [governing preposition *de* + clause] (Figure 5).

The second construction that participates in the creation of conative *tratar de* + clause ties the sense of ‘occupy oneself ably in a trade or profession, handle skillfully’ to *tratar* + np.

The form of this construction inherits that of a verb subcategorizing a PP. Nevertheless, the abstract nature of the noun expressing the object matter of the occupation or trade once again enables the introduction of an infinitival clause in the position occupied by the np. The adoption of a complement clause is likely to have been influenced by the second-stage construction with *tratar* ‘negotiate, pursue a goal’ (Figure 5), hence the adoption of the governing preposition *de*, but interestingly, only the infinitive is available here, since the event takes place under the control of the same subject. This permits a semantic change, with the structure

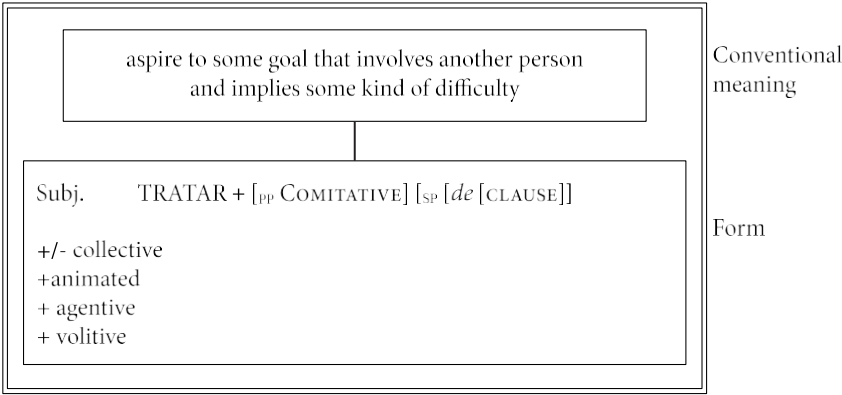


Figure 5. Second stage: *tratar* + [pp *de* + CLAUSE]

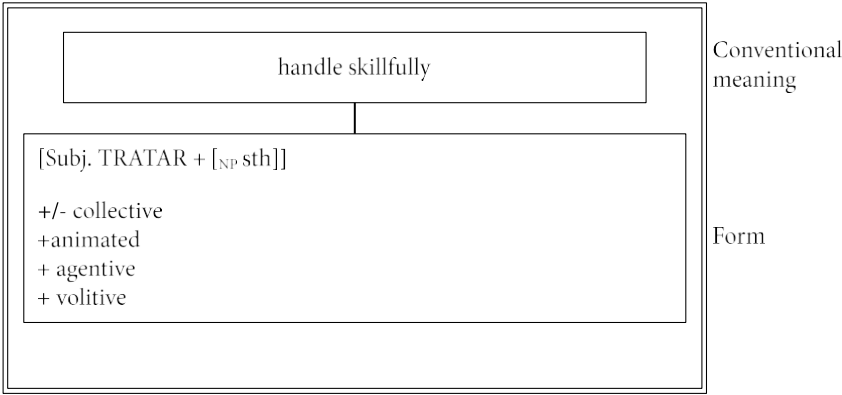


Figure 6. The construction *tratar* ‘handle skillfully’ + NP

no longer referring to a professional occupation, but rather to one that takes place subject-internally, i.e. mentally (*tratar de considerar*: cf. 6a). At this juncture, the idea of *tratar de* + INF as a structure associated with several persons participating in an undertaking has been replaced by that of a single person involved in a mental occupation.

Lastly, the construction where *tratar* means ‘discuss a matter thoroughly, provide an articulate account on a given matter’ (the *tractatus*-related meaning: cf. 1d), initially once again that of a V + (*en/de* ‘about’) + NP, takes an infinitive governed by *de* as its complement (Figure 8) under the formal influence of the constructions in Figures 5 and 7 and the semantic affinity to the ‘mental activity’ meaning (Figure 7), further contributing to the volitional and subjective reading of *tratar de* + INF.

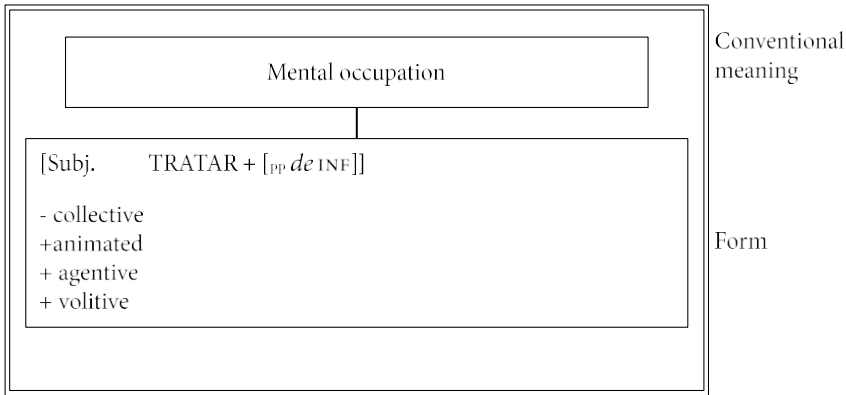


Figure 7. The construction with *tratar* 'occupy oneself thoroughly, ponder' + INF

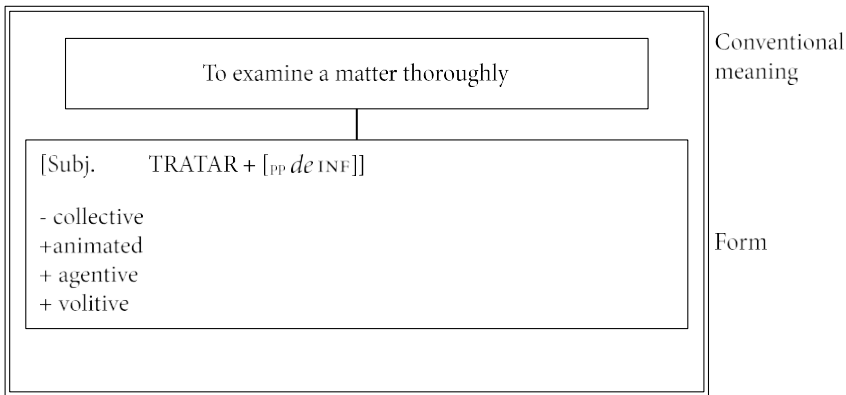


Figure 8. The construction with *tratar* 'examine' + INF

An increasingly subjective reading of this latter construction gives rise to a further constructive stage where *tratar* + INF denotes 'debate with oneself internally, ponder' (Figure 9), thus eventually conflating with the construction in Figure 7.

Hence, the conative construction with *tratar* has its roots in three different developments from a polysemic lexical verb, *tratar*, expressing meanings such as 'to negotiate something with others', 'to deal skillfully with an object' and 'to discuss a matter thoroughly'. Initially, only the former of these meanings could subcategorize a clause, forming a construction that over time supported the other two in adopting an infinitive whenever they denoted a subject-centered mental occupation (cf. Figures 7 and 9). In turn, these structures influenced the original 'negotiation' construction with an infinitive, which increasingly modified its nature by inhibiting subject features suggesting the participation of more than one person

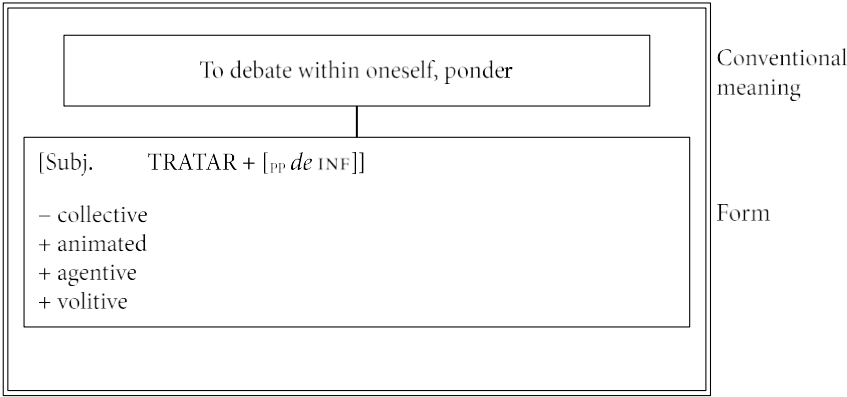


Figure 9. The construction with *tratar* ‘examine thoroughly in one’s head, ponder’ + INF

in the event and diversifying the semantics of the governed predicates: the proportion of infinitives expressing any type of negotiation underwent a significant decrease. Thus, all three constructions with the infinitive converged, like several streams coming together to form a river, into a further one with a strong volitional meaning inferable from the structures in which *tratar de* + inf denotes inner deliberation, which imply the subject’s desire to reach a goal (Figure 10, corresponding to *tratar de destruir* ‘to long to destroy’ in 6d). This process is the result of a complex interplay of syntactic changes that enable the volitional sense of *tratar* to come to the fore, in turn deactivating the syntactic restrictions of the source construction, and in the end extending the volitional semantics to clauses taking not just an infinitive (the construction where the volitional meaning emerged), but also a *that*-clause, thus inducing a change within the constructional network whereby the syntactic possibilities of the source construction are exploited with a new semantic value. We employ the expression “constructional network” in the sense of Langacker (2008, p. 222), that is, as an inventory of structured and interrelated conventional linguistic units.

In the emergence of the volitional construction, the analogical pressure exerted by other semantically similar, preexisting verbal constructions may have been crucial. Namely, *deliberar (de)* + inf and *determinar (de)* + inf, both expressing willingness and strong resolution and selecting only an infinitival clause complement, probably attracted and reinforced the new construction with *tratar de* + inf. As volitional meaning arises, *tratar de* + inf becomes a subschema (see, note 23) at the same level of abstraction that other infinitive constructions that express willingness and strong resolution, such as *determinar de* + inf or *deliberar de* + inf.

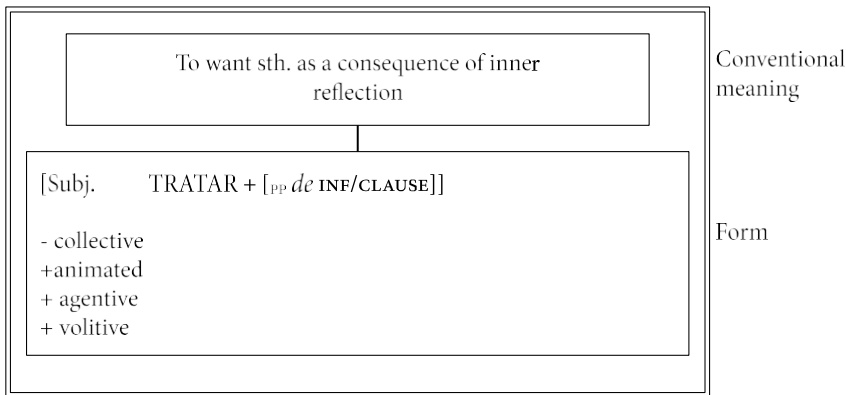


Figure 10. The volitional construction with *tratar de* INF

The new volitional construction was the source for the conative one. The semantic evolution is settled in a metonymic change whereby the ‘mental’ component is relegated to a second plane, while a formerly secondary performative content (engaging in an actual event to satisfy the subject’s desire) is focused (Figure 11). Thus, starting in the 19th century, inanimate subjects make their appearance in the construction, which can be interpreted as a drift away from the volitional sense accompanied by a greater emphasis on the aim (the inanimate subject typically encodes an event conducive to a goal, e.g., an initiative, strategy, etc.). Also, the governed verbs are now largely unrelated to the initial ‘negotiation’ meaning: instead, there is an increase in interlocutor-oriented verbs that, when combined with single subjects, favor the entrenchment of the conative value (as corresponding to an individual action with a performative impact on another participant).

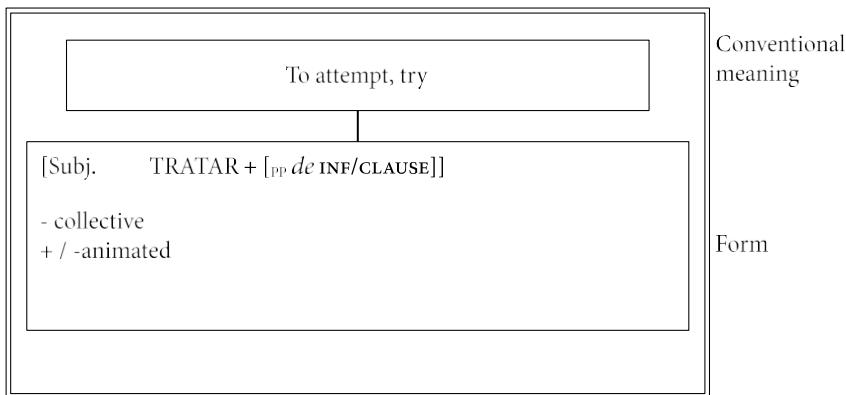


Figure 11. The conative construction with *tratar*

In sum, the emergence of *tratar de* + inf in Spanish can be described as the result of a selective process involving several constructions structured in the form of a radial category in the sense of Lakoff (1987, chapter 6) and eventually converging on the structure examined in this study. This is shown in Figure 12.

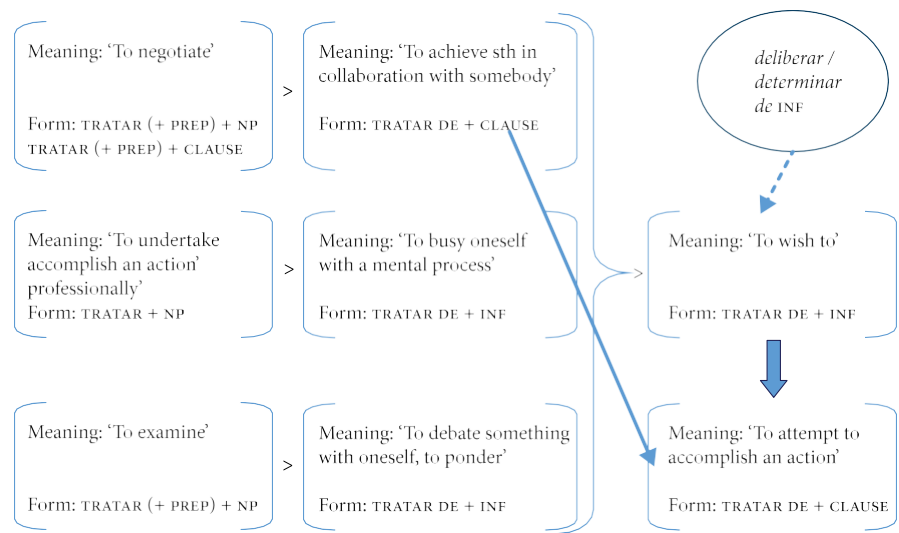


Figure 12. The constructional network in the evolution of *tratar de* + inf/clause

4. Conclusion

In this diachronic study we have followed the evolution of the Spanish schema *tratar de* + inf, specific instances of which are historically found in various coexisting subschemas that end up giving rise to the conative construction. The relations in both meaning and form among them suggest a radial category *tratar de* + inf, which eventually (by the 16th century) allowed for three subschemas: negotiation (*tratar de matar* 'to be in talks to kill someone'), professional occupation (*tratar de escribir* 'to dedicate oneself to writing'), and thorough examination (*tratar de mostrar* 'to engage in demonstration'). Over time, the latter two subschemas became quite similar to one another, possibly owing to (a) mutual formal attraction, (b) semantic similarity around the notion of personal engagement, which eventually yielded the profiling of a volitional meaning, and (c) the influence of preexisting, formally and semantically similar constructions with an infinitive (*deliberar* + inf, *determinar* + inf). The volitional meaning prevailed as the core meaning of the construction by the early 17th century, and further developed a metonymical change that yielded the conative meaning (entrenched by the

18th century). Since the source construction could take a NP, an infinitive or a *that*-clause as its complement, the same range of syntactic possibilities is finally activated (in the 19th century) for the conative construction.

This description of the evolution of the conative construction *tratar de* + inf in Spanish represents the first diachronic study of this monopredicative structure while contributing to the general knowledge on the possible diachronic sources of conative constructions. Additionally, this study draws potentially relevant theoretical conclusions about some forms of syntactic change. The emergence in Spanish of conative *tratar de* + inf does not conform well to the types of conceptual and formal changes instantiated by grammaticalization. In effect, the evolution of *tratar de* + inf involves a diachronic restructuring of a group of constructions similar to each other in form and meaning, as a result of which a new construction (form-meaning pairing) is created. Contrary to (classical) grammaticalization, in this case there is no single source structure that has undergone changes in form and meaning. Rather, the development of *tratar de* + inf implies successive linkages of the same basic formal sequence to new meanings that interrelate within a constructional network, in consonance with the tenets of Construction Grammar. Within that network, the pattern of alternation [v + np] ~ [v + inf] was instrumental in bringing about new constructions with particular meanings that in turn interacted with the source construction, modifying its meaning. This type of change does not seem to involve formal reanalysis, but the emergence of different constructions (until, finally, the creation of a conative schema) through successive analogies guided by similarities in either meaning or form. Our study could thus serve as a model to broaden the theoretical scope of diachronic Construction Grammar.

Conative constructions have not been a frequent object of historical studies. Our work could thus also contribute to identify possible sources for the diachronic development of these constructions. One such source is e.g., visual perception, identified as productive in languages from several widely different families (cf. Voinov, 2013); this source of conative constructions is also observable in (at least) one Western Romance language, Catalan, where *mirar de* + inf, lit. ‘to look to + inf’ is used in the same conative sense as Spanish *tratar de* + inf. This example suffices to show that the identification of the different strategies that encode conativity and of the varieties that manifest them is far from closed: the present study is just a modest contribution to that greater endeavour.

Funding

This research was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation as part of the project *Marginalia en el centro de la investigación diacrónica. Verbos en serie y perifrasis en cadena* (PID2022–137964NB-I00).

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to Joe Hilferty for a careful reading of a first draft of the manuscript. Any remaining errors are of course our own.

References

- Abraham, W. (2012). (Inter)subjectification of foreign consciousness / Other's mind alignment as synchronic and diachronic concepts of change? In W. Abraham & E. Leiss (Eds.), *Covert patterns of modality* (pp. 24–78). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Anderson, G. (2004). *Auxiliary verb constructions in Altai-Sayan Turkic*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Beijering, K. (2012). Expressions of epistemic modality in mainland Scandinavian. A study into the lexicalization-grammaticalization-pragmaticalization interface. Zutphen: Wöhrmann Print Service (Groningen dissertations in linguistics 106). [Available online: <http://irs.ub.rug.nl/ppn/345722167> (accessed 16 January 2019)]
- Bosque, I. (1985). Sobre las oraciones recíprocas en español. *Revista Española de Lingüística*, 15, 59–96.
- Bybee, J., Perkins, R., & Pagliuca, W. (1994). *The evolution of grammar: Tense, aspect, and modality in the languages of the world*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
-  Cinque, G. (2001). Restructuring and the order of aspectual and root modal heads. In G. Cinque & G. Salvi (Eds.), *Current studies in Italian syntax. Essays offered to Lorenzo Renzi* (pp. 137–155). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- CORDE. Real Academia Española. (2000). *Corpus diacrónico del español*. [Available online: <http://corpus.rae.es/cordenet.html> (accessed August–October 2018)]
-  Cornillie, B. (2008). On the grammaticalization and (inter)subjectivity of Spanish evidential (semi-)auxiliaries. In E. Seoane & M. J. López Couso (Eds.), *Theoretical and empirical issues in grammaticalization* (pp. 55–76). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
-  Coupe, A. (2007). *A grammar of Mongsen Ao*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
-  Coupe, A. (2018). Grammaticalization processes in the languages of South Asia. In B. Heine & H. Narrog (Eds.), *Grammaticalization from a typological perspective* (pp. 189–218). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
-  De Benito Moreno, C. (2022). *The middle voice and connected constructions in Ibero-Romance: A variationist and dialectal account*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
-  De Smet, H., & Fischer, O. (2017). The role of analogy in language change: Supporting constructions. In M. Hundt, S. Pfenninger & S. Mollin (Eds.), *The changing English language: Psycholinguistic perspectives* (pp. 240–68). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- doi Dowty, D. (1991). Thematic proto-roles and argument selection. *Language*, 67, 547–619.
- Evans, N., Levinson, S., Enfield, N., Gaby, A., & Majid, A. (2004). Reciprocal constructions and situation type. In Asifa Majid (Ed.), *Field manual Volume 9* (pp. 25–30). Nijmegen: Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics.
- Fernández de Castro, F. (1999). *Las perífrasis verbales en el español actual*. Madrid: Gredos.
- Foley, W. (1986). *The Papuan languages of New Guinea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- García Fernández, L., Carrasco, Á., Camus, B., Martínez-Atienza, M., & García, M.Á.. (2006). *Diccionario de perífrasis verbales*. Madrid: Gredos.
- Goldberg, A. (1995). *Constructions: A construction grammar approach to argument structure*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Goldberg, A. (2006). *Constructions at work: The nature of generalization in language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goldberg, A. (2019). *Explain me this*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- doi Grano, Th. (2011). Mental action and event structure in the semantics of try. *Proceedings of SALT*, 21, 426–443.
- doi Grano, Th. (2017). Control, temporal orientation, and the cross-linguistic grammar of trying. *Glossa*, 2(94), 1–21.
- doi Guentchéva, Z., & Rivière, N. (2007). Reciprocal and reflexive constructions in French. In V. Nedjalkov (Ed.), *Reciprocal constructions* (pp. 561–607). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- doi Hagège, C. (2010). *Adpositions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Haspelmath, M. (2023). On what a construction is. [Online draft, <https://lingbuzz.net/lingbuzz/007200>].
- Heine, B., Claudi, U., & Hünemeyer, F. (1991). *Grammaticalization. A conceptual framework*. Chicago: The Chicago University Press.
- Isačenko, A. (1964). On the connative function of language. In J. Vachek (Ed.), *A Prague school reader in linguistics* (pp. 88–97). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jakobson, R. (1963). *Essais de linguistique générale*. Paris: Minuit.
- doi Knjazez, J. (2007). Lexical reciprocals as a means of expressing reciprocal situations. In V. Nedjalkov (Ed.), *Reciprocal constructions* (pp. 115–146). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- doi Koch, P. (2001). Metonymy: Unity in diversity. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, 2, 201–244.
- Koch, P. (2004). Metonymy between pragmatics, reference and diachrony. *Metaphorik.de*, 7, 6–54.
- Kulikov, L. (2011). Voice typology. In J.J. Song (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of linguistic typology* (pp. 368–398). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- doi Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- doi Langacker, R. (2008). *Cognitive grammar. A basic introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, C. T., & Short, Ch. (1879). *A Latin dictionary*. New York & Oxford: Harper & Brothers Publishers/Clarendon Press [Available online: <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059> (accessed August–October 2018)]

- Morera, M. (1991). *Diccionario crítico de las perífrasis verbales del español*. Fuerteventura: Cabildo Insular de Fuerteventura.
- Narrog, H., & Heine, B. (2011). *The Oxford handbook of grammaticalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
-  Nedjalkov, V. (2007). Overview of the research. Definitions of terms, framework, and related issues. In V. Nedjalkov (Ed.), *Reciprocal constructions* (pp. 3–114). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Nuyts, J. (2012). Notions of (inter)subjectivity. In L. Brems, L. Ghesquière & F. Van de Velde (Eds.), *Intersections of intersubjectivity* (pp. 53–76). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
-  Olbertz, H. (1998). *Verbal periphrases in a functional grammar of Spanish*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter.
- RAE / ASALE. Real Academia Española / Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española. (2009). *Nueva gramática de la lengua española*. Madrid: Espasa.
-  Rákosi, G. (2008). The inherent reflexive and the inherent reciprocal predicate in Hungarian: Each to their own argument structure. In E. König & V. Gast (Eds.), *Reciprocals and reflexives: Cross-linguistic and theoretical explorations* (pp. 411–450). Boston & Berlin: De Gruyter.
-  Rosemeyer, M., & Garachana, M. (2019). De la consecución a la contraexpectación: la construccionización de *lograr/conseguir* + infinitivo *Studies in Hispanic and Lusophone Linguistics*, 12(2), 383–422.
-  Rumsey, A. (2003). Language, desire, and the ontogenesis of intersubjectivity. *Language & Communication*, 23, 169–187.
-  Siloni, T. (2012). Reciprocal verbs and symmetry. *Natural language and linguistic theory*, 30(1), 261–320.
-  Strauss, S. (2002). Distinctions in completives: The relevance of resistance in Korean V-a/e *pelita* and V-ko *malta* and Japanese V-te *shimau*. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34(2), 143–166.
-  Tamm, A. (2012). *Scalar verb classes: scalarity, thematic roles, and arguments in the Estonian aspectual lexicon*. Firenze: Firenze University Press.
-  Thegel, M., & Lindgren, J. (2020). Subjective and intersubjective modality: a quantitative approach to Spanish modal verbs. *Studia Neophilologica*, 92(1), 124–148.
-  Traugott, E. C. (2003). Constructions in grammaticalization. In B. Joseph & R. Janda (Eds.), *The handbook of historical linguistics* (pp. 624–647). Oxford: Blackwell.
-  Traugott, E. C. (2010). (Inter)subjectivity and (inter)subjectification: A reassessment. In K. Davidse, L. Vandelandotte & H. Cuyckens (eds.), *Subjectification, intersubjectification and grammaticalization* (pp. 29–74). Berlin & New York: De Gruyter.
- Traugott, E. C., & Hopper, P. (2003 [1993]). *Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
-  Traugott, E. C., & Trousdale, G. (2013). *Constructionalization and constructional changes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
-  Vincent, N. (2013). Conative. *Linguistic Typology*, 17(2), 269–289.
-  Voinov, V. (2013). ‘Seeing’ is ‘Trying’: The relation of visual perception to attemptive modality in the world’s languages. *Language and Cognition*, 5, 61–80.

Yllera, A. (1980). *Sintaxis histórica del verbo español: las perífrasis medievales*. Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza.



Zeisler, B. (2004). *Relative tense and aspectual values in Tibetan languages: A comparative study*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter.

Address for correspondence

Mar Garachana Camarero
Universitat de Barcelona
2.58 Facultat de Filologia
Spain
margarachana@ub.edu

Biographical notes

Álvaro S. Octavio de Toledo y Huerta is senior researcher at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC-ILLA). His work focuses on Spanish historical morphosyntax and dialectology, with a particular interest in grammaticalization and related notions, the evolution of information structure, the history of verbal forms and periphrases, the development of quantifier systems, and dialect contact in the Iberian Peninsula from the 13th to the 18th centuries.

Mar Garachana Camarero is Professor of Spanish Historical Linguistics at the University of Barcelona. She has published widely in the field of cognitive semantics, grammaticalization and constructionalization. Her current research focuses on the evolution of verbal periphrases, linguistic marginalia and on Spanish-Catalan linguistic contact.

Publication history

Date received: 9 May 2023

Date accepted: 21 September 2023

Published online: 27 February 2024