

¿Cabe decir algo más? An Inquiry into the Historical Development of a Modal and Discursive Verbal Periphrasis in Spanish*

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Abstract

The main objective of this article is to reassess the pivotal role of semantic change within the framework of grammaticalisation and its intricate relationship with both textual and sentence syntax. To analyse the interaction between semantics and syntax in processes of grammaticalisation, we will study the evolution of the verbal construction *caber* + INF, which in contemporary Spanish specialises in (i) expressing modal senses, lying midway between dynamic and deontic values, and (ii) a procedural value that limits the speaker's commitment to what they affirm.

Keywords: verbal periphrases; grammaticalisation; Spanish; semantics; syntax

Resum. ¿Cabe decir algo más? *Una investigació sobre el desenvolupament històric d'una perífrasi verbal modal i discursiva en espanyol*

El principal objectiu d'aquest article és reconsiderar el paper del canvi semàntic en els processos de gramaticalització i analitzar la seva relació amb la sintaxi textual i oracional. Per a analitzar la interacció entre semàntica i sintaxi en els processos de gramaticalització, estudiarem l'evolució de la construcció verbal *caber* + INF, que en l'espanyol contemporani està especialitzada a expressar (i) sentits modals, dinàmics i deòntics, i (ii) un valor procedimental que limita el compromís del parlant amb el que afirma.

Paraules clau: perífrasis verbals; gramaticalització; llengua espanyola; semàntica; sintaxi

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1. Introduction

The main objective of this article is to reassess the pivotal role of semantic change within the framework of grammaticalisation and its intricate relationship with both textual and sentence syntax. Semantics has been a central topic of interest for explaining grammaticalisation processes from a cognitive perspective. It has been suggested that semantic shifts trigger syntactic changes (García & van Putte 1995). Indeed, the formal aspect of grammaticalisation has often been overlooked due to insufficient emphasis on the syntactic entrenchment involved in these processes. Traditionally, the analysis of formal changes within grammaticalised structures tends to gravitate towards reanalysis – i.e. the reconfiguration of constituent hierarchies within grammaticalised constructions (Langacker 1977). However, scant attention has been paid to the role of other formal elements present in the syntactic structure in which the grammaticalised structure appears, even though they can sometimes play a key role in evolution. In response to this situation, some authors have argued from the perspective of constructionalisation the importance of effectively addressing both the formal and semantic aspects of grammatical change (Traugott 2015). Another overlooked issue in grammaticalisation studies is the lack of explanation on how the argument structure in which grammaticalised constructions are integrated, evolves throughout the grammaticalisation process. This is because there is an exclusive focus on explaining the structure that is undergoing grammaticalisation. Furthermore, the influence exerted by various constructions upon the development of specific grammatical structures remains a frequently overlooked topic. It is pertinent to clarify that this does not only entail to examine *supporting constructions* (De Smet & Fischer 2017), but rather, involves substantiating the notion that the evolution of a given construction may stem from the convergence – or influence – of multiple constructions, thereby shaping its semantic and grammatical evolution (cf. Octavio de Toledo & Garachana 2024).

In this article, we take a theoretical perspective which asserts that in processes of grammaticalisation, semantic change and syntactic change are interdependent and mutually influential (Traugott 2015). The semantic change that accompanies grammaticalisation cannot be divorced from its context, as some instances of grammaticalisation would not have been possible if the words undergoing grammatical change did not appear within a specific communicative context or were not accompanied by words and expressions guiding the inferences that determine the shift in meaning.

To analyse the interaction between semantics and syntax in processes of grammaticalisation, we will study the evolution of the verbal construction *caber* + INF, which in contemporary Spanish specialises in expressing modal senses, lying midway between dynamic and deontic values. Depending on the context, *caber* + INF can be interpreted in a more clearly deontic sense (1a) – *cabía emprender* meaning ‘had to be undertaken’ – or dynamic sense (1b) – *cabía elegir* meaning ‘you can only choose’. However, distinguishing one meaning from the other can be challenging in many contexts. In (1c), *cabe suponer* can be glossed as ‘it is to

be supposed,’ with a deontic value. However, the deductive nature of the passage also allows for the dynamic interpretation ‘it can be supposed’.¹

- (1) a. Acabábase la cruzada de Oriente; pero *cabía emprender* con más fruto la de Occidente. (Emilia Pardo Bazán, *San Francisco de Asís*. Siglo XIII, 1903)
 ‘The crusade in the East was over, but the crusade in the West *had to be* more fruitfully undertaken.’
- b. ¿qué hacer, si sólo *cabía elegir* entre Aristóteles y Platón (...)?
 ‘what to do, if you *can* only *choose* between Aristotle and Plato?’
- c. (...) los insectos (...) comen las temibles lecheruelas y umbelíferas muy sospechosas, sin experimentar alteración (...). Más bien *cabe suponer* que los principios que imponen, aun á los más voraces de estos seres, el respeto á determinadas especies sean muy diferentes de los que hacen temibles ciertas plantas para nosotros. (Blas Lázaro Ibiza, *Discurso leído en su recepción pública ante la Real Academia de Ciencias Exactas, Físicas y Naturales*, 1900)
 ‘(...) insects (...) eat the dreaded milkweeds and umbellifers, which are very suspicious, without experiencing any alteration (...). *It is rather to be supposed/Rather it can be supposed* that the principles which impose, even on the most voracious of these beings, respect for certain species are very different from those which make certain plants frightening for us.’

Regardless of whether the reading is deontic or dynamic, in contemporary language, *caber* + INF tends to be positioned in the left periphery of the sentence. When *caber* + INF appears in the left periphery, it reduces the argumentative force of the utterance. Thus, *caber* + INF expresses a procedural value limiting the assertion that follows. The construction *caber* + INF is commonly used in formal language to express a lack of complete commitment to the truthfulness of the statement being made (cf. Fuentes 2019 for a study on the construction *en lo que cabe* ‘to the extent possible’, where the verb *caber* is also involved).

The semantic evolution of *caber* + INF has been explained as the result of an evolution from the meaning of ‘to contain’ to that of ‘to be possible’ (García Fernández & Bravo 2013). However, this article proposes an alternative explanation

1. This verbal construction is not unique to Spanish; it is also found in other Ibero-Romance languages such as Galician (*Cabe dicir* o mesmo no que respecta ás eleccións das administracións locais; <<https://gl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexislatura>>), Portuguese (*Cabe assinalar* que 80.36% das unidades de cuidado intensivo, em onde trabalham os profissionais de enfermagem, privilegia as intervenções orientadas a satisfazer necessidades fisiológicas; <<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5011685>>), Asturian (El primer movimientu de Putin *cabe dicir* que, como asocede a vegaes colos valores bursátiles, yá taba escontao pola mayor parte de los intevinientes direutos ya indireutos; <<https://mas.lne.es/cartasdeloslectores/carta/49457/respuesta-finlandia.html>>), and Aragonese (*Cabe suposar* que o municipio naixese con a reforma territorial de 1833; <[https://an.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bergua_\(municipio\)](https://an.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bergua_(municipio))>). On the contrary, it is not found in the Gallo-Romance languages or in Catalan.

based on a usage-based approach to linguistic change. The evolutionary process may have stemmed from another meaning of the verb *caber*, specifically ‘to correspond’. When combined with an infinitive, this meaning allows for the inference of a modal notion that is eventually consolidated. The etymological syntactic structure played a fundamental role in this process of change. The fact that the verb *caber* meaning ‘to correspond’ was conjugated in the third person singular and invariably appeared alongside inanimate subjects favoured, on one hand, the analogical use of an infinitive (instead of a noun) in this syntactic position, and on the other hand, the reinterpretation of the construction *caber* + INF as an impersonal structure. In turn, the impersonal value of *caber* + INF must have also been decisive in the development of the attenuative value of the construction, as also occurs with the Spanish impersonal deontic periphrasis *haber que* + INF (Garachana Camarero 2016). Therefore, the syntactic structure of the *caber* + INF construction is as relevant in its evolution as the semantics of the etymological structure. Our assertions are based on a detailed analysis of 2,345 examples extracted from the CORDE corpus and 671 from the CDH corpus.

This article is organized into five sections. Following this brief introduction, section 2 provides historical data that allows to see how the syntax of constructions undergoing grammaticalisation can help explain semantic changes. Section 3 will provide a concise state-of-the-art of the studies conducted on *caber* + INF while section 4 will elucidate the evolution of this construction over time. The article concludes with section 5, which contains the conclusions.

2. The Semantics and Syntax of Grammatical Change

Modern semantic studies, like linguistics in general, come from historical analyses. Following a period in which semantic inquiries followed an underground path (Ullman 1964: 18), at the end of the 19th century Bréal (1897) laid the groundwork for semantic studies, which should concern themselves with the history of words and the evolutionary laws that guided them. These laws of semantic change have always been an object of interest for grammatical change researchers, although for decades research had revolved around historical, linguistic, psychological, and social motivations too vague to be systematized. The second half of the twentieth century marked a significant shift for historical semantic studies, this is reflected in the work of Stephen Ullmann (1964), who, in the chapter dedicated to semantic change, established four explanatory mechanisms: metaphor, metonymy, folk etymology, and ellipsis. By the end of the century, historical semantics received a definitive boost with the emergence of Cognitive Semantics. The historical works developed within this theoretical framework laid the groundwork that allowed to demonstrate that even though semantic evolution might display some kind of heterogeneity, it was possible to grasp a regularity that transcended the limits of an individual language: semantic change was anchored in cognitive mechanisms shared by speakers of typologically distant languages (Sweetser 1991; Traugott & Dasher 2002). Therefore, the change in meaning was not a random phenomenon but conditioned by cognitive patterns. The existence of these regularities

would even allow to make predictions about the channels through which change occurs, thus making semantic reconstruction feasible, particularly in studies on grammaticalisation.

The evidence is substantial that the process of semantic change outlined for the semantics of grammaticalization belongs to a larger set of crosslinguistic processes of semantic change that are in general quite regular. Indeed, they are so regular that it is possible to develop predictive hypotheses that can be tested against historical data. They are sufficiently predictive that one can take synchronic polysemies from any period in any language and project change back into the past. In other words, one can do internal semantic-pragmatic reconstruction. (Traugott 1989: 31)

In the field of grammaticalisation, the importance of semantics is crucial, whether one considers the formal changes of the construction or if they remain in the background. Since the earliest monographs, it has been emphasized that the change in meaning that accompanies expressions undergoing grammaticalisation often occurs in “a highly specific context” (Hopper & Traugott 1993/2003: 11). Likewise, it has been noted that part of this linguistic context may become part of the new grammaticalised form, so that from early studies, it was already pointed out that not only independent forms are grammaticalised, but also constructions involving several words. The most frequently cited case has been that of the future grammaticalised in different languages from the combination of a verb with an adlative meaning and an infinitive (e.g., Sp. *ir a* + INF, Fr. *aller* + INF, Engl. *to be going to* + INF). However, rarely has attention been paid to the influence that the syntactic context had on the evolution of this periphrasis. That is, attention to the form of the grammaticalising construction is usually limited to the study of the reanalysis of the constituent structure. In most cases, the influence that the syntactic construction may have had on the evolution of meaning is overshadowed.

The evolution of the periphrastic future in Spanish, French, and English has been explained in cognitive terms as a type of change rooted in metaphorical reasoning. These periphrases are formed from the verbs *ir* ‘go’, *aller* ‘go’, and *be going to*, respectively. The existence of constructions such as *Te va a gustar esa película* ‘you are going to like this film’, *Tu vas aimer ce film* ‘you are going to like this film’, or *You are going to like this film* has been justified by conceiving time progression from spatial advancement. This metaphor had a cognitive basis in the path image schema and allowed for a cognitive justification of the fact that in different languages, an adlative verb like *ir* ‘to go’ consistently originated constructions expressing future time (Johnson 1987). It is important to note, however, that not all languages grammaticalise the verb *go* as a future auxiliary, but rather as a past one. This is exemplified in the Catalan periphrasis *anar* + INF (Pérez Saldanya & Hualde 2003; Nagy 2004, 2019; Senti 2015), which is the most frequently used form for expressing past tense in this language.

- (2) *Ahir vam anar a teatre.*
‘Yesterday we went to the theater.’

The existence of constructions such as (2), where *anar* ‘go’ is used as an auxiliary for the past tense, was justified by arguing that the path schema not only entails an individual’s progression through space (as time progresses), but can also conceptualize time approaching the individual, in a way that what lies ahead can be understood as past. Expressions such as *La semana que viene* ‘next week’ (lit. the week coming), which imply that future time is approaching the speaker, would corroborate this hypothesis. Now, in Spanish, the construction *ir a* + INF is also used to express senses linked to the completion of a series of actions (3a) or counterexpectativity (3b) (Bravo Martín 2014; Garachana Camarero 2019).

- (3) a. Tanto nadar para *ir a morir* a la orilla.
 ‘So much swimming to go to the shore to die.’
 b. *Fue a llover* el día de mi boda.
 ‘Unfortunately, it rained on my wedding day.’

These examples suppose an issue to simply admit the hypothesis of a metaphorical evolution that leads from an adlative verb to a future auxiliary, since the same construction can be used to express future time and aspectual values linked to the notion of an action that concludes after a series of previous actions (3a) – in this sense, the path schema still underlies – and modal meanings related to expressing an undesired surprise by the speaker (3b). Yllera (1980), in a study on the evolution of verbal periphrases in Spanish, explained the evolution of *ir a* + INF by paying special attention to the syntax of the construction. Thus, she could describe both the emergence of the future meanings of *ir a* + INF and the terminative values (the counterexpectative ones are an evolution of the terminative meanings). According to Yllera (1980: 172), the starting point for both the future periphrasis and the terminative would be in the etymological meanings of the movement of the verb *ir*: in contexts where the spatial meaning of *ir* becomes blurred, it would not highlight “the movement itself, but the action to which it led” (Yllera 1980: 172). That is, the verb *ir*, which in its more properly spatial uses helps outline the destination of a movement; however, when accompanied by an infinitive, it outlines the event expressed by the infinitive, from which a temporal or aspectual meaning can be inferred. Depending on the type of verb that appears in the infinitive and the tense in which *ir* ‘go’ is conjugated, either a future periphrasis or a terminative periphrasis will be formed (Melis 2006; Garachana Camarero 2019).

This explanation, that is grounded in the syntactical properties of the construction in which *ir* is inserted, allows us to bypass the problems posed by the metaphorical evolution hypothesis and focuses its attention on the meaning of *ir* and the syntactic construction in which it is embedded. This is precisely the proposal that we want to defend in this article: semantic evolution can depend on the context in which the grammaticalising construction appears. This is by no means a novel proposal. Recent studies have discussed the “contextual enrichment” of the initial meaning (Baranzini & Ricci 2015) and how new meanings can emerge when explicit contextual information is not available, because, by suppressing certain

lexical elements, inferences that were previously only hinted at can be consolidated. There have also been discussions on how processes of ellipsis could mean that a single part of the expression acquires the meaning of the whole. One of the most cited cases is negation in French (Hopper & Traugott 1993/2003: 65–66). Our goal is, therefore, to delve deeper into this research proposal in which semantic change becomes closely dependent on syntactic structure.

3. *Caber* + INF. State of the art

Caber + INF, commonly used in formal language (Fuentes 2019), has received little attention from researchers. The only comprehensive study on this verbal construction is that of García Fernández & Bravo (2013), who described *caber* as a modal verb expressing dynamic and deontic modality. Their objective was to define the construction and determine whether it consists of a verbal periphrasis or if it is a different type of construction.

According to García Fernández & Bravo (2013), *caber* is a modal verb expressing circumstantial or opportunistic dynamic modality; *caber* + INF indicates that, according to the circumstances presented, an event is possible (García Fernández & Bravo 2013: 215). Thus, these authors reject that *caber* + INF expresses epistemic values. These meanings are only expressed by *caber* when followed by a clause. Therefore, for these authors, *caber* expresses dynamic modality in (4a), and epistemic modality in (4b).

- (4) a. *Cabe hacer* algunas declaraciones más.
 ‘Some further statements can be made.’ → The circumstances allow the speaker to make some further statements (García Fernández & Bravo 2013: 220)
- b. *Cabe que el presidente haga* algunas declaraciones más.
 ‘It is possible for the president to make some further statements.’ → ‘According to my knowledge, it is possible for the situation where the president makes some further statements to occur’ (García Fernández & Bravo 2013: 220)

Therefore, *caber* expresses two different modal senses depending on the type of construction it appears in: *caber* + INF (4a) and *caber* + *that*-clause (4b). The impersonal nature of the first construction makes *caber* to appear in the 3 singular person, without agreement with the surrounding nominal elements. However, García Fernández & Bravo (2013) provide examples where *caber* agrees with the noun phrase following the infinitive (5), what proves that *caber* + INF has become a routinized verbal construction, close to verbal periphrases.

- (5) Pero sí *caben hacer* algunas apreciaciones. (García Fernández & Bravo 2013: 212)
 ‘But some observations can be made.’

García Fernández & Bravo (2013) also noted that there is an expanding deontic sense, linked to expressing permission. Still, they consider it preferable to define *caber* as a dynamic modal, as admitting deontic readings complicates explaining “how physical capacity can evolve to express permission” (García Fernández & Bravo 2013: 218).

These authors argue that *caber* is only conjugated in present, imperfect past, and future and conditional tenses. They note that *caber* is never conjugated in compound tenses or in the past tense (however, we found some examples, cf. Table 2 in § 4.2). García Fernández & Bravo (2013) also note that the infinitives appearing in the infinitive slot “must have a human subject outside the construction” (García Fernández & Bravo 2013: 223). These infinitives “belong predominantly to the paradigm of cognitive verbs or *verba dicenda*” (García Fernández & Bravo 2013: 224). Thus, these authors conclude that “[t]he constructions with ‘*caber*’ are, therefore, halfway between free syntax and fossilized expressions” (García Fernández & Bravo 2013: 224). The formulaic nature that these authors defend for the construction would prevent it from being considered a periphrasis, but they indicate that this is not “the only construction with periphrastic structure in which the class of the main verb is determined to some extent by the auxiliary verb. This happens with several inchoative constructions such as *romper a* + infinitive or *echar a* + infinitive” (García Fernández & Bravo 2013: 224). Thus, García Fernández & Bravo (2013) consider it possible to analyse whether *caber* + INF can be considered a verbal periphrasis. To do this, they verify if it meets the criteria that are usually considered basic for this purpose and conclude that, although it fails to meet most of them, it is possible to admit that *caber* functions as a modal auxiliary, as most of the restrictions shown by *caber* + INF in relation to the criteria of periphrasis can be explained by its meaning.

4. The evolution of *caber* + INF

The evolution of *caber* + INF has not yet been studied. Only García Fernández & Bravo (2013) make some remarks about this issue. Specifically, they consider that the modal meaning of *caber* + INF originated from the meaning of ‘to contain, to fit’ that *caber* has in its lexical uses:

La razón por la que *caber* se usa en las construcciones de significado modal que hemos estudiado es, a nuestro juicio, clara: la capacidad, el primer significado de *caber*, es un concepto intrínsecamente modal. Si en un barreño caben diez litros de agua quiere decir que tiene la capacidad de albergar ese volumen. (García Fernández & Bravo 2013: 237)

‘The reason why *caber* ‘to fit’ is used in the modal constructions that we have studied is, in our opinion, clear: capacity, the primary meaning of *caber*, is an inherently modal concept. If ten liters of water fit in a bucket, it means it has the capacity to hold that volume.’ (García Fernández & Bravo 2013: 237, our translation)

Our hypothesis differs from that of García Fernández & Bravo (2013), as we believe that *caber* + INF arises from the verb *caber*’s meaning ‘to correspond’ and only secondarily does *caber* + INF relate to the value of capacity. Additionally, the

evolution of *caber* + INF consists of a change from above, since it is a construction that originated in written text and has persisted to the present day.

As indicated in the introduction, to carry out this study, all examples in which *caber* is followed by an infinitive within up to five words were downloaded from the CORDE corpus. This allows the analysis not only of the structure *caber* + INF but also of numerous structures in which *caber* functions as a lexical verb. Simultaneously, to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the various meanings of *caber* during the Middle Ages, all instances of the verb between 1200 and 1400 were downloaded from the CDH corpus. The objective is to approach the study of the history of *caber* + INF based on the lexical uses of *caber* before it became an auxiliary verb. These downloads have yielded 24,030 examples from the CORDE corpus and 671 from the CDH. The examples from CDH have been exhaustively analysed. In contrast, due to the high number of constructions obtained from the CORDE corpus, a random percentage reduction was performed, and the corpus was simplified to 2,345 examples. For the search, the formal variants of the verb *caber* have been considered. Thus, the forms *cab**, *cup**, *cop**, *cav**, and *cau** have been searched. Only the data obtained from CORDE has been taken into account for the statistics.

4.1. *Caber*, from Latin to Old Spanish

The Spanish verb *caber* derives from the Latin *capere* ‘to take, to grasp, to choose, to appropriate, to obtain, to receive, to contain’. Additionally, in Late Latin the impersonal form *capit* was used with meanings such as ‘it is admitted, it is allowed, it is possible’ (Gaffiot 1934/2008: s.v. *capio*). According to Gaffiot, the expression *intellegi capi* ‘it can be understood’ is documented (Tert. Marc. 3, 6, 9). In medieval Spanish, the meanings attributed to the verb *caber* trace back to their Latin heritage, except for the dynamic value, which is only documented later in the construction *caber* + INF.

In medieval Spanish, *caber* is used with meanings such as ‘to be able to contain one thing within another’ (6a), ‘to have space or entry’ (6b), ‘to belong to or pertain to something’ (6c), ‘to have a part in something or participate in it’ (6d), ‘to take, to have capacity’ (6e), ‘to admit’ (6f), ‘to comprehend, to understand’ (6g), ‘to accept, to approve, to deem good’ (6h) (see DPCAX: s.v. *caber*).

- (6) a. si algun buen sabio lo quiesiese esplanar; non *cabria* en .viii. uolumes grandes. (Alfonso X, *Judizios de las Estrellas*, 1254, DPCAX)
‘If any wise sage were to attempt to explain it, it would not *fit* into 8 large volumes.’
- b. quando la metieron en la uilla non pudo *caber* por la puerta et ouieron a tirar las puertas & a ensanchar la entrada. (Alfonso X, *Estoria de España II*, 1270-1284, DPCAX)
‘When they tried to bring it into the city, it couldn’t *fit* through the gate, so they had to tear down the doors and widen the entrance.’

- c. asi lo que a vos en vuestra parte *cabe* e pertenesçe. (Anónimo, *Compromiso de pago [Documentos del convento de San Bartolomé de San Sebastián]*, 1400, CORDE)
‘Thus what *corresponds* to you and *belongs* to you.’
- d. Tod omme de brihuega que cogiere fiadura de mancomun. et cada uno por todo: tornes a cada uno de los fiadores por quantol *cabe* en la debda. (Anónimo, *Fuero de Brihuega*, c1242, CORDE)
‘Every person from Brihuega who provides surety through joint liability. And each one for all: let each one of the guarantors pay according to *their share* of the debt.’
- e. E andados dozientos años del diluvio vío Noé cómo crecién sos fijos en compañías e amuchiguavan mucho (...) e los non *cabié* aquella tierra. (Alfonso X, *General Estoria. Primera parte*, c. 1275, CORDE)
‘Two hundred years after the flood, Noah saw how his sons multiplied in numbers and formed many communities (...) and those who did not *fit* on that land.’
- f. quando los obispos de la prouincia se acertaren en su concilio. deuen lo echar ende & no deue seer *cabudo* en sus fablas. (Alfonso X, *Primera partida*, 1256?-1300?, DPCAX)
‘When the bishops of the province come to an agreement in their council, they should proceed with it, and *there should be no room* for dissent in their speeches.’
- g. et la uertud que a es esta. que el que la traxiere consigo sera amado & bien reçebudo delos omnes. & es *cabida* su razon en todo logar que la diga. (Alfonso X, *Lapidario*, 1250?-1279?, DPCAX)
‘And the virtue that is here is this: that whoever brings it with them will be loved and well received by people. And his reasoning is *understood* wherever he expresses it.’
- h. elo que ellos todos tres mandaren, ho ellos dos dellos, elas partes deuemos lo *caber* & cumplir. (Anónimo, *Carta de litigio [Colección Diplomática del Monasterio de Carrizo]*, 1268, CORDE)
‘What all three of them, or two of them, may command, we should accept and fulfil the parts.’

Although we have not found in the CORDE and CDH searches the verb *caber* expressing dynamic modality throughout the medieval period, some of the instances of *caber* in the sense of ‘to correspond’ already approach dynamic readings. This can be seen in the following example, where the subject of *quepa* (subj. pres. *caber* ‘to correspond’) is an abstract noun. In (7), *quepa justicia de muerte o de lission* means ‘corresponds, there is room, there is a place for death penalty or corporal punishment’; a meaning from which we can infer a dynamic sense ‘if it is carried out in lawsuits where the death penalty or corporal punishment can be applied’. The

conditional value of the clause in which *caber* + INF appears plays an important role in inferring the dynamic meaning.

- (7) Et ssi la ffaze ssobre pleito que *quepa* justícia de muerte o de lission deue rreçebir tal pena en ssu cuerpo. (Anónimo, Espéculo de Alfonso X, a1260)
 ‘if it is carried out in lawsuits where the death penalty or corporal punishment can be applied, he/she must receive this penalty in his/her body.’

The meaning of ‘to correspond’, which is at the origin of *caber* + INF, is the result of a metonymic inference that originates from the meaning of ‘to grasp, to seize’, which is the prototype of the Latin verb *CAPIO* and the Spanish verb *caber*. The physical control characterizing the meanings of ‘to grasp, to seize’ allows us to infer that the held elements can become belongings. This is a recurrent evolutionary process in Spanish (and in other languages) whereby physical control is understood in terms of possessive control (cf. Garachana 1997a/b). Thus, the contact implied by ‘to grasp, to seize an object’ is projected into the realm of possessions, and *caber* begins to be used in the sense of access to ownership (‘something corresponds to someone’, something becomes someone’s, something belongs to someone). In other words, the Latin verb *CAPIO* means ‘to grasp, seize’; then it implies coming in contact with an object that can later be controlled with the hands. Furthermore, *CAPIO* can be used to indicate that a person can gain access to an object that will later belong to them ‘to appropriate, to obtain, to receive’. Indeed, the meanings ‘to grasp, seize’ allow to trace a trajectory from the moment when the object was out of control to the moment when it falls under the control of the person holding it. This trajectory is metonymically depicted in the sense of ‘to correspond’, documented in Old Spanish at least since the mid-thirteenth century: ownership of a material or immaterial item will transfer to an individual. Thus, in (8a), it is indicated that each soldier received five silver marcs, and in (8b), some tithes correspond to the speaker that will give them to another person. As can be seen, the idea of ownership shows the persistence of the etymological meaning of *caber* (< *CAPERE*). With *caber*, possession is not expressed, but rather access to possession (similarly, with the meanings of ‘to grasp, to seize’, control is not only expressed, but also access to control derived from the apprehension of an object).

- (8) a. Et dize la estoria que tan grant auer y fue fallado que *copo* al peon .v. marcos de plata. (Alfonso X el sabio, *Estoria de España II*, 1270-1284, CORDE)
 ‘And the story goes that such great wealth was found there that the laborer was allotted five silver marks.’
 b. e nós dámosle en ayda la meatad del diezmo que nos *copiere* enna ecclesia de San Miguel de Goçón. (6/septiembre/1243, CODEA + 2022)
 ‘And we give him in assistance half of the tithe that corresponds to us in the church of San Miguel de Gozón.’

4.2. From *caber* + NP to *caber* + INF

The argument structure of the intransitive verb *caber* ‘to correspond’, that is, the number of arguments the verb takes, contains two elements, namely a subject and a dative (9). The subject refers to the possessed entity (represented by an NP whose head is a noun), and the dative takes the thematic role of the experiencer. Thus, we are facing a sentence structure with a non-prototypical subject, characterized by being [-animate, -agentive, -volitional, -human].

- (9) [subject] [_{VP} CABER [_{PP-DATIVE} a ‘to’ + personal pronoun]]

The abstract nature of nouns that function as subjects and do not refer to objects that can be possessed, undoubtedly enables the introduction of an infinitival clause in the position occupied by the NP. For instance, in (10) where what corresponds to the experiencer are all the rights (*todo el derecho*).

- (10) todo cuanto heredamiento nós avemos e con todo el derecho que nos copo del heredamiento que nos fue dado. (CODEA+, 27/abril/1301)
 ‘All the inheritance that we have, and with all the rights that accrued to us from the inheritance that was given to us.’

Structures like the previous one not only favour the presence of infinitives in the subject position (11) but also of *that*-clauses (12).

- (11) a la dicha villa de Mondragon *cabia pagar*. (Anónimo, Acta de testimonio, 1480)
 ‘To the city of Mondragon, it is incumbent to pay.’
- (12) sy en guisa me copiese que yo ouiese de fazer aquesto, non querria ningund omne por amigo mas que a uos. (Anónimo, *Historia troyana en prosa y verso*, c. 1279, CORDE)
 ‘If it were to happen that I had to do this somehow, I wouldn’t want any man as a friend except you.’

Thus, in texts from the 13th century, we already have documented the verb *caber* in the sense of ‘to correspond’ in three different structures:

- (13) a. *Caber* + NOUN (cf. examples 8 y 10)
 b. *Caber* + INFINITIVO (cf. example 11)
 c. *Caber* + *that*-clause (cf. example 12)

In this paper we will focus on the construction *caber* + INF, which we consider to be the result of an analogical copy of the construction *caber* + abstract noun (the pattern of change leading from structures where abstract nouns are documented first, and then they are replaced by infinitives is recurrent in Spanish;

see Rosemeyer & Garachana 2019; Octavio de Toledo y Huerta & Garachana Camarero 2024). The *caber* + INF construction in (11) preserves the argument structure of the etymological sentence, formed by the verb *caber*, its subject (now, an infinitive instead an abstract noun) and a dative (cf. 14). The verb *caber* is always conjugated in the third person singular, and the infinitive is always placed after *caber*, which determines that both verbs are closely linked syntactically and favours the reanalysis of *caber* as a modal verb, since, as Bolinger points out, “[t]he moment a verb is given an infinitive complement, that verb starts down the road to auxiliarieness” (Bolinger 1980: 297).

- (14) [_{PV} [_{DAT} a ‘to’+ stressed pronoun/a + PN/unstressed pronoun] [_VCABER ‘correspond’]] [_{SUBJ} INFINITIVE]

When the subject of *caber* is an infinitive (11), a process of semantic change is activated, as the meaning of *caber* is no longer a matter of objects that may correspond to a person, but rather of events that must or can be carried out. Thus, from the moment the subject of *caber* is an infinitive, *caber* ceases to mean ‘to correspond’ and comes to express the sense of ‘to be incumbent upon, to concern, to have the ability or obligation to perform an action’. This would be an evolution rooted in metonymy in which semantics and sentence syntax interact. According to this evolution, the sense of ‘to correspond, to pertain in part’ would not be viewed from the rights one has over an entity that will be possessed by the experiencer (the dative), but rather the obligations or abilities one has in relation to the event expressed by the infinitive would be highlighted. The first example documented in our corpus links the construction to dynamic modality. Indeed, in example (15), *non cabe caçar* is glossed as ‘they are not entitled to hunt, they cannot hunt’. This example dates back to the 13th century but is preserved in a 14th-century copy of the original manuscript.

- (15) Et a las otras a quien non *cabe caçar* derecha mjente por natura por que lo ffazen ascondidamente & como A mjedo. sson estas los bueytres & los ffran-nehuessos. (Anónimo, *Espéculo de Alfonso X*, a1260)
 ‘And to the others, for whom *it is not possible to/who cannot* hunt them directly by nature because they do so secretly and cautiously. These include vultures and francolins.’

A century later, more examples of *caber* + INF began to be documented, mostly related to the idea of settling debts (16). In the examples from the 14th century, the syntactic structure is slightly different from that of (15), as in those of the 14th the verb *caber* has an abstract subject that is not the infinitive. In the case of (16a) the subject is the relative pronoun *que* ‘that’ which refers to the neuter demonstrative *aquello* ‘that’ and in (16b), the subject is *lo que* ‘what’ which designates an amount of money. Additionally, *caber* selects a prepositional phrase consisting of the preposition *a* ‘to’ or *de* ‘of’ followed by the infinitive *pagar* ‘to pay’ or *pechar* ‘to pay taxes’. *Caber a/de pagar/pechar* can be glossed as ‘they

pay what corresponds to them to pay' (in the case of *caber* + *a* + *pagar*) or as 'they pay from what corresponds to them to pay' (in the case of *caber* + *de* + *pagar*). A deontic meaning can be inferred from examples in (16a/b), 'they pay what they have to pay.' That is, the introduction of the prepositional phrase with a purpose or indicating the origin of the debt allows the modal sense inferred from some uses of *caber* to be highlighted.

- (16) a. Pagan aquello que les *cabe* *apagar* en los seiscientos maravedis que dan por yantar los de aguilar a don tello. (Anónimo, *Becerro de las behetrías de Castilla*, 1352, CORDE)
'They pay what they owe from the six hundred maravedís given for food by the people of Aguilar to Don Tello.'
- b. e los cogedores que non peyndren a cada vno, ssaluo por lo quel *cupiere* *de pechar* ssegun ffuere enpadronado. (Anónimo, *Cortes de Valladolid*, 1322, CORDE)
'And to the gatherers, [I command] that they do not pay taxes, except for what they are required to pay as registered.'

For the purposes of this article, we will not consider the importance of the use of the preposition (*a* or *de*) in the grammaticalisation process of *caber* + INF. However, as noted by Artigas & Cabré (2024), Garachana (2024) and Montserrat (n.d.), the choice of one preposition over another in the early stages of the grammaticalisation of a verbal periphrasis cannot be considered random.

Until the mid-15th century, all cases in which *caber* is accompanied by an infinitive correspond to the construction *les cabe a/de pagar/pechar*, except for the example in (15). From the middle of the 15th century onwards, new structures emerged, while maintaining the etymological meaning of *caber* 'to correspond' in most examples (17a/b). The infinitive *pagar* is again documented in the slot of the infinitive verb, but with a slight change in structure, since it is documented both with and without a preposition in front of the infinitive: in the same fragment, the variants *cabía a pagar* and *cabía pagar* appear (17b). The absence of the preposition *a* 'to', which may be due to syntactic phonetics (since the verb *cabía*, ends in /a/), emphasizes the fixation of the construction with a sense of obligation and favours the reanalysis of *caber* and the infinitive as a grammatical construction. The deontic sense is very visible in (17b), where *cabía pagar* ('he had to pay') is coordinated with other deontic periphrases (*debían ser pagados* 'they should be paid', *le debían contentar* 'they should please him'). The construction *cabe dezir* ('it must be said') is also documented in the 15th century (17c). *Cabe dezir* carries an intensifying nuance, halfway between the expression of deontic and dynamic modality ('nothing must be said about the wealth of Málaga - nothing can be said about the wealth of Málaga').

- (17) a. pretendemos ser como quasi de linage diuino: y de sangre celestial. y nos *cabe tener entrada*: priuança / y conuersacion enla corte diuina. (Gonzalo

García de Santa María, Traducción de la *Corónica de Aragón de fray Gauberto Fabricio de Vagad*, 1499)

‘We aim to be as if of divine lineage and of celestial blood, and it is incumbent upon us to have access, privilege, and communion in the divine court.’

- b. segund lo que *cabia a pagar* a la dicha villa de Mondragon (...) la dicha paga de todos los maravedis que a la dicha villa de Mondragon *cabia pagar* e devian ser pagados e le devian contentar de todo ello. (Anónimo, *Acta de testimonio*, 1480)

‘according to what was due to be paid to the said town of Mondragon (...) the said payment of all the maravedís that corresponded to the aforementioned town of Mondragón were to be paid and he was to be satisfied for all of it.’

- c. En estos nueve dias non fazía otra cosa si non mirar la çibdat de Málaga, la qual me paresció mucho bien, ansi en el asiento donde ella está, aunque no tiene puerto, como en la tierra, aunque estrecha para pan, pero buena eso que es; de huertas é frutas non *cabe dezir*. (Pero Tafur, *Andanças e viajes*, 1457)

‘For these nine days, I did nothing but look at the city of Málaga, which seemed very good to me, both in its location, though it lacks a harbour, and in its terrain, though scarce for bread, but good in what it is; of orchards and fruit there is not much to be (I cannot/must not say anything).’

The example in (17c) allows to observe not only a significant progress in the meaning of *caber* + INF, but also in its syntax. In (17c), there is no longer a dative or a subject, unless one considers that the infinitive fulfils this last function. However, given the fixation and routinization of the structure *caber* + INF, we can argue that, whatever the syntactic function of the infinitive, the construction begins to be conventionalized as a grammatical routine specialized in expressing values ranging from deontic to dynamic modality. Depending on the communicative context (and the meaning of the verb occupying the infinitive position), one sense or another is activated. Sometimes, as in example (17c), it is difficult to distinguish between the two meanings, because the construction has been specialized in expressing vague values. Thus, since the 15th century, it can be argued that the syntax of the original construction has been modified at the same time as the meaning has changed. Thus, *caber* + INF begins its historical journey in a structure where the verb *caber* ‘to correspond’ selects a subject (often an infinitive) and a dative, and over time *caber* and the infinitive end up forming a specialized formal unit in the expression of modal values (deontic or dynamic). This new construction is impersonal, and there are no traces of the dative that appeared in the etymological construction. The development is depicted in (18).

- (18) [_{VP} [_{DATIVE} a ‘to’+ stressed pronoun/a + NP/unstressed pronoun] [_v CABER ‘correspond’]] [_{SUBJ.} INFINITIVE] > [_{GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTION} CABER + INFINITIVE]

The fact that these values begin to multiply from the 15th century onwards, when the Latinate influence on the Spanish language and literature was very strong, cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is also appropriate to consider that the Latin construction to which we referred in section 4.1 (*intellegi capi* ‘it can be understood’) could play a relevant role in the grammaticalisation of *caber* + INF. If so, then, the emergence of *caber* + INF in Spanish may have multiple causes.

In the 16th century, the use of *caber* + INF with the meaning of ‘to correspond to do something’ (19) is maintained. Furthermore, the modal senses of *caber* + INF are consolidated, as documented in constructions such as (20a), which can only be interpreted in terms of obligation (‘the phlebotomy must be done before and after for various reasons’), as well as in constructions that may seem to be justified by the substitution of the verb *poder* by *caber* (‘to be able’) (20b), which would reinforce the hypothesis that the construction was consolidating as an expression of dynamic modality (‘who could love her’). Lastly, the example in (20c) is halfway in between the dynamic and the deontic interpretation (‘it couldn’t be the same / it shouldn’t be the same’).

(19) A mí *cabe proponer*, muy poderosa señora, y seré breve. (Anónimo, *Traducción del Laberinto de amor de Juan Boccaccio*, 1546)

‘It falls upon me to propose, very powerful lady, and I shall be brief.’

(20) a. En la primer especie en alguna manera *cabe hazerse* la flobotomia antes y despues de la cura, por algunas causas assi como se vno fuesse mancebo, o sanguino o tuuiere mixtion descabie o muchedumbre de botores o otros semejantes accidentes. (Ruy Díaz de Isla, *Tratado llamado Fruto de todos los autos contra el mal serpentino*, 1542)

‘In the first scenario, it is somehow necessary to perform phlebotomy before and after the treatment, due to reasons such as if one were young, sanguine, or had an improper mixture or a multitude of boils or similar accidents.’

b. ¿quién la *cabrá estimar*? (Manuel Denis, Traducción de “De la pintura antigua” de Francisco de Holanda, 1563)

‘Who *could* love her?’

c. Ni en la crianza *cabia Ser* igual. (Lorenzo de Sepúlveda, *Romances, en Romances nuevamente sacados de historias antiguas de la crónica de España*, 1580)

‘Nor could one be equal in upbringing / ‘Nor was it necessary to be equal in upbringing’.

The development of modal values in the construction *caber* + INF was certainly favoured by the fact that in the 16th century, the range of constructions in which the combination of *caber* + INF is used was extended, as probably it led to the consolidation of the modal values of *caber*. These constructions include examples such as (21), where the verb *caber* is used in the sense of ‘to contain, to have room, to fit’,

accompanied by a prepositional phrase representing the container. This container is of an abstract locative nature, as the place referred to is the mind or reason. The subject of *caber* is an infinitive. These examples can be glossed as ‘as if there were room in my mind to be deceived, as if deception had room in my mind’. The interest of this type of construction lies in the inference of a dynamic sense: if deception has no place in my mind, it means that one cannot be deceived. This inference must have favoured the consolidation of the modal values of *caber* + INF.

- (21) a. como si en mi pensamiento *cupiera dejarse engañar* con apariencia de otra cosa. (Jorge de Montemayor, *Los siete libros de La Diana*, 1559)
 ‘As if there was room in my mind to be deceived with the appearance of something else.’
- b. ¿en qué razón *cabe decir* que él tenga providencia de cosas tan bajas, y desprecie las altas, como son los hombres a los cuales llama hijos por la semejanza que tienen con él? (Fray Luis de León, *Introducción del símbolo de la fe*, 1583)
 ‘On what grounds [lit. in which mind] can one say that he has providence for such lowly things, and he despises the high ones, such as the men he calls sons because of their resemblance to him?’

The relationship between the structures can be seen in the following example, where the verb *caber* is first used in the sense of ‘being able to contain one thing within another’ and then in a modal sense, as *caben decir* should be interpreted as ‘eight times four can be said.’ The fact that the verb *caber* agrees with *ocho* ‘eight’ suggests that *caber* + INF already forms a syntactic unit; as a result, the object accompanying the construction begins to be reinterpreted as the subject of the whole construction. This is a matter that has been pointed out by normative grammar for contemporary Spanish (cf. <<https://www.fundeu.es/recomendacion/caber-seguido-de-infinitivo-se-usa-en-singular-342/>>).

- (22) (...) quien quiere saber (...) qué año es, ha de mirar cuantas veces cuatro *caben* en el mismo número: y hallará que *caben decir* ocho veces cuatro, que son setenta y dos y como para setenta y cinco, son tres, dirá que el año de setenta y cinco es año tercero. (Juan de Escalante de Mendoza, *Itinerario de navegación de los mares y tierras occidentales*, 1575)
 ‘Whoever wants to know what year it is must look at how many times four fit into the same number: and they will find that eight times four can be said, which is seventy-two and since there are three left for seventy-five, they will say that the year seventy-five is the third year.’

In the 17th century, the etymological sense of ‘to correspond’ remains predominant, while constructions in which *caber*, combined with an infinitive, expresses modal values (deontic or dynamic) or maintains its sense of ‘to contain’ progress. The 18th century marks a significant change in construction, as a result of the

generalization of its modal senses. Looking at Table 1, it can be seen that until the 17th century, *caber* + INF was mainly used in the sense of ‘to correspond’. From the 18th century onwards, this meaning becomes increasingly limited (9% in the 18th century and 2.18% in the 19th century and 0.7% in the 20th century), while the modal values become predominant (practically reaching 100% of the uses of *caber* + INF (86.39% in the 18th century, 97.34% in the 19th century and 99.3% in the 20th century).

The 18th century not only marks the consolidation of the modal values expressed by *caber* + INF, but also marks the beginning of an increase in the frequency of use, which had been very low until then. In the 18th century, it reaches a frequency of 1.31 occurrences per million words, and in the 19th century, it reaches 9.4. This frequency evidences *caber* + INF became a grammatical strategy with a prominent use within Spanish, which is consolidated in the language of the 20th century, when the frequency of use reaches is 30 occurrences per million words. (cf. Figure 1).

Table 1. Meanings of *caber* + INF through Spanish history

	13 th	14 th	15 th	16 th	17 th	18 th	19 th	20 th
To be able of	0%	0%	30%	0%	2.18%	0%	0%	0%
To correspond	100%	100%	50%	57.14%	63.04%	9.06%	2.18%	0.7%
Modal meanings (dynamic/deontic)	0%	0%	20%	26.54%	13.04%	86.39%	97.34%	99.3%
To contain	0%	0%	0%	16.32%	21.74%	4.55%	0.48%	0%

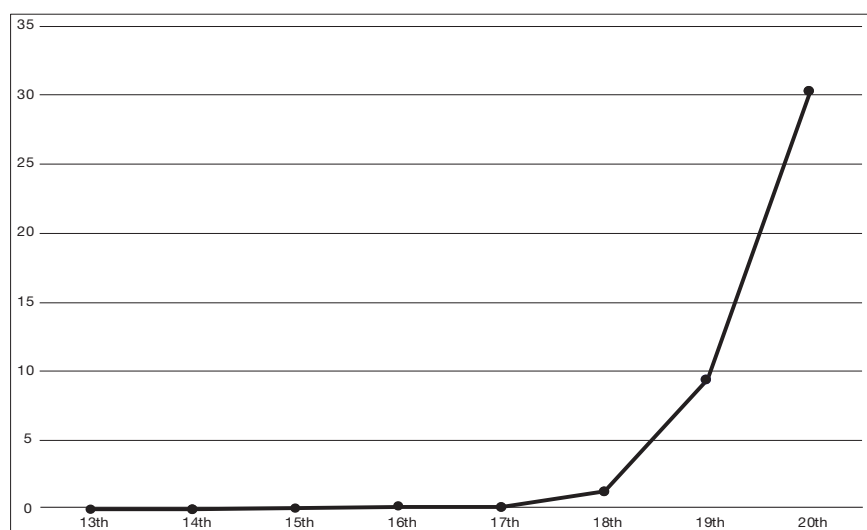


Figure 1. Frequency per million words of the modal construction *caber* + INF.

In the 19th century, the construction is consolidated, both in terms of frequency of use and in terms of the establishment of modal meanings, that have clearly moved away from the etymological ones. Thus, in (23), *no cabía decir que el abogado hubiese sido verdugo de su mujer* can be glossed as ‘it could not be said that the lawyer had been his wife’s executioner’.

- (23) No *cabía decir* que el abogado hubiese sido verdugo de su mujer, y con todo, bien adivinaba Segundo el lento martirio de aquella fina organización nerviosa, y veía siempre, en horas negras, el ataúd mísero en que habían encerrado á la difunta, no sin elegir antes, para amortajarla, la sábana más usada de cuantas encontraron. (Emilia Pardo Bazán, *El cisne de Vilamorta*, 1885)
 ‘It could not be said that the lawyer had been his wife’s executioner, and yet he was well aware of the slow martyrdom of that fine nervous organisation, and he always saw, in the dark hours, the miserable coffin in which the deceased had been placed, not without first choosing, to shroud her, the most worn sheet of all that could be found.’

The use of *caber* + INF with modal value is noted in passages where the circumstances lead to a certain conclusion. In the previous case, the available evidence did not allow the lawyer to be accused of murdering his wife. In these cases, the reading is dynamic. In other cases, however, a deontic interpretation is extracted. Thus, as can be seen in (24), *cabe escoger* must be understood in the sense of ‘it is necessary to choose some form of happiness’.

- (24) como la felicidad completa no es posible, *cabe escoger* entre los diferentes géneros de felicidad.
 ‘as complete happiness is not possible, one must choose among different types of happiness.’

The dynamic and deontic senses are linked by the fact that they always depend on the circumstances presented in the immediate context. In the case of (23), it is the knowledge of the situation between the married couple that leads to the conclusion that the husband cannot be accused of murder, and in (24), it is likewise the knowledge that complete happiness does not exist that forces one to choose some type of incomplete happiness. Probably, it is this deductive character of both readings that causes the fact that, in most cases, it is difficult to lean towards the deontic or dynamic interpretation, because what is observed is a semantic vagueness that oscillates between the two interpretations. This is the case in example (25), which can be read as ‘one can congratulate oneself’ or ‘one must congratulate oneself,’ without it being possible to precisely delineate both values.

- (25) Pero dada hoy por hoy la imposibilidad de suprimirla, *cabe felicitarse* de los progresos en ella obtenidos, cuando, como ahora acontece, no son resultado de aumento de imprevisión en las masas, sino de una administración más discreta

y mejor entendida. (Laureano Figuerola, Memoria relativa al estado general de la Hacienda, presentada a las Cortes Constituyentes, 1870)

‘But given the current impossibility of eliminating it, one can/must congratulate oneself on the progress achieved in it, when, as is happening now, they are not the result of increased recklessness in the masses, but of a more discreet and better understood administration.’

This mixture of values is particularly evident in legal texts:

- (26) No *cabe aplicar* este precepto si se trata de las testamentarias de ambos cónyuges, y sobreseyendo en la de uno no habría términos legales para practicar la de otro. (Anónimo, *Ley de enjuiciamiento civil*, 1881).

‘This provision cannot/must not be applied if it concerns the wills of both spouses, and the rejection of one would leave no legal basis for the other.’

This is not the only verbal periphrasis that makes it difficult to determine a single meaning. We have other examples in constructions such as *¿Pues qué voy a hacer yo más que ayudarle?* which means that the speaker has no choice but to offer his/her help and can be glossed in a dynamic sense (“What can I do?”), in a deontic sense (“What do I have to do?”), or as a future tense (“What will I do?”).

The 20th century represents the consolidation of *caber* + INF as a modal grammatical construction. This consolidation has its basis in the 18th century and especially in the 19th century, and it is manifested not only in the increased frequency of the construction (cf. Figure 1) but also in its morphological, syntactic, and semantic properties. In this paper, we will not reflect on whether *caber* + INF is a verbal periphrasis. Since it is a grammaticalised structure, we consider that, once grammaticalised, it becomes a grammatical construction as it is understood in the field of Construction Grammar, i.e., as a conventional pairing of a form and a meaning (Goldberg 1995, 2006). In any case, *caber* + INF can also be described as a non-prototypical periphrasis, according to the analysis of García Fernández & Bravo (2013).

If we look at the morphological properties of *caber* + INF, we observe that, as pointed out by García Fernández & Bravo (2013), unlike fully grammaticalised verbal periphrases, *caber* + INF is not conjugated in all tenses of the conjugation: we have only collected examples in the present indicative, present subjunctive, imperfect indicative, imperfect subjunctive, simple past, future indicative, and conditional indicative. As can be seen in Table 2, until the 18th century, *caber* + INF was mainly conjugated in the imperfect indicative and to a lesser extent in the present indicative. The 18th century shows a drastic reduction in the use of the imperfect indicative and an increase in the use of the present indicative, which reaches a usage percentage of almost 95%. Moreover, from this moment on, other tenses begin to gain some importance: the present subjunctive, the imperfect subjunctive (which was more common in the 17th century), the future and the conditional. The specialization of *caber* + INF in the present indicative is related to its specialization as an argumentative operator aimed to weaken the argumentative force of the

Table 2. Verb tenses in which the verb *caber* is conjugated

	15 th	16 th	17 th	18 th	19 th	20 th
Present indicative	100%	69.23%	16.7%	94.7%	87.49%	85.77%
Present subjunctive		0%	0%	0%	2.7%	2.64%
Imperfect indicative		15.37%	33.3%	51.35%	7.37%	7.26%
Imperfect subjunctive		0%	33.3%	0%	0%	0.84%
Simple past		7.7%	16.7%	0%	0%	0%
Future indicative		7.7%	0%	0%	0.98%	0%
Conditional		0%	0%	0%	1.46%	0.84%

statement introduced. Therefore, the fact that *caber* + INF is not conjugated in other verb tenses cannot be taken as an objection to the affirmation that *caber* + INF is a grammaticalised structure.

The verbs in the infinitive slot also confirm the grammaticalisation of the construction. The number of verbal forms that can appear in the infinitive position increases significantly, not only in terms of tokens but also in terms of types. This expansion is particularly noticeable during the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, as well as from the nineteenth to the twentieth (cf. Table 3).

There was a significant leap in the use of *caber* + INF in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century and from the 19th to the 20th century. When comparing the number of types to the total number of words in the corresponding corpus for each century, both tokens and types increased.

The 18th century CORDE corpus contains 14,466,748 words with 16 different verbal types documented in the infinitive slot. With 42,726,881 words in the CORDE corpus for the 19th century, it would be expected that there would be 47 types if the construction had not changed throughout this century. However, as shown in Table 3, 186 different types were collected in the 19th century. The same applies to the number of tokens, which was 19 in the 18th century and should have proportionally been 56 different tokens in a corpus of 42,726,881 words (the number of words in the 19th-century corpus). However, Table 3 shows that the number of tokens collected in the 19th century is much higher (402). These data confirm the consolidation of the construction *caber* + INF in the 19th century. The transition from the 19th to the 20th century shows a similar trend. The 19th century CORDE corpus contains 42,726,881 words with 186 different verbal types documented in the infinitive slot. With 58,686,214 words in the CORDE corpus for the 20th century, it would be expected that there would be 255 types if the construction had

Table 3. Types and tokens in the infinitive slot

	15 th	16 th	17 th	18 th	19 th	20 th
tokens	2	17	7	19	402	1008
types	2	15	4	16	186	324

not changed throughout this century. However, as shown in Table 3, 324 different types were collected in the 20th century. The same applies to the number of tokens, which was 402 in the 19th century and should have proportionally been 552 different tokens in a corpus of 58,686,214 words (the number of words in the 20th-century corpus). However, Table 3 shows that the number of tokens collected in the 20th century is almost double that figure (1008). These data confirm the consolidation of the construction *caber* + INF in the 20th century.

The consolidation of *caber* + INF as a grammaticalised form is also confirmed when considering the semantics of the verbal forms in the infinitive slot. The explanation below is based on the semantic classification of Spanish verbs in ADESSE. The verbal forms that mainly occupy the infinitive slot are cognition and *verba dicendi* verbs, as noted by García Fernández & Bravo (2013: 216). However, since the 18th century, there has been a greater variety than the one proposed by these authors. Thus, in the 18th century, verbs meaning communication (*add*, *say*, *express*) and beliefs (*doubt*) can appear in the infinitive position, but also those meaning attribution (*be*), change (*work*), creation (*make*), displacement (*lift*), phase (*wait*), location (*occupy*), measurement (*measure*), perception (*distinguish*), permission (*allow*), relation (*compare*), transfer (*give*), and evaluation (*applaud*). In the 19th century, additional semantic types were introduced, including verbs meaning acceptance (*deny*, *admit*), activity (such as *work*, *perform*, *execute*), acquisition (*obtain*, *adopt*, *achieve*), cognition (*consider*, *think*), knowledge (such as *confuse*, *infer*, *forget*), consumption (*drink up*), control (*repress*, *sustain*), destruction (*liquidate*, *annul*), choice (*choose*, *select*), disposition (*desist*), choice (*choose*, *select*), sound emission (*sing*), existence (*arouse*, *lack*), induction (*promote*), ingestion (*ingest*), modification (such as *vary*, *ventilate*, *alter*, *expand*), obligation (*impose*, *compel*), request (such as *resort*, *demand*, *ask*), possession (*have*), posture-position (such as *widen*, *extend*, *tend*), property (*seat*), sensation (*appreciate*, *entertain*, *fear*, *get tired*), union (*divide*, *separate*, *complete*), use (*use*), and volition (*want*). In the 20th century, additional semantic types were introduced, including verbs that indicate a change in state (*convert*), competition (*defend*, *score*), behaviour (*disengage*), affective contact (*caress*), denomination (*repute*, *label*), orientation (*orient*, *mislead*), substitution (*substitute*), support verbs (*exercise*), and life (*save*, *live*, *be born*).

Therefore, the infinitive slot in the *caber* + INF construction can accommodate 48 of the 63 different types in the ADESSE classification. This indicates that *caber* + INF is more productive than existing studies suggest. Certainly, some types are more prevalent than others. Verbal types referring to communication and cognition include a greater number of verbal forms and are more frequently used than other semantic types. However, the presence of verbs that signify not only oral expression or thought in the infinitive slot accounts for the progressive consolidation of *caber* + INF in the language as a strategy characteristic among cultivated registers to modulate discourse. The consolidation of this process began in the 19th century, coinciding with the greatest expansion of semantic types that would occupy the infinitive slot. The expansion continued throughout the 20th century indicating that *caber* + INF is not a prefab or routinized expression in use, but rather a structure in

Table 4. Clause position of *caber* + INF

	15 th	16 th	17 th	18 th	19 th	20 th
clause-initially “left periphery”	0	0	0	21%	40%	50%
No clause-initially	100%	100%	100%	79%	60%	40%

the process of expansion. The 20th century still documents numerous hapaxes (182 hapaxes out of a total of 1008 tokens), suggesting the same.

Therefore, the evolution of the *caber* + INF construction during the 19th and 20th centuries indicates that it has grammaticalised to express dynamic and deontic modal values. Nonetheless, the evolution did not stop there. Since the 19th century, a change in syntax suggests a new grammaticalisation of *caber* + INF as an attenuation discourse construction. Table 4 shows a progressive tendency to place *caber* + INF to the left sentence periphery. In the 15th-17th centuries, this construction always appeared within the sentence. However, in the 18th century, it began to head a syntactic period in 21% of instances. This percentage increased to almost half of the uses of *caber* + INF in the 19th century and significantly exceeded it in the 20th (50%).

The shift towards the left sentence periphery is typical of words and constructions with connective and modal functions and corresponds to a feature of the construction that is increasingly prominent in modern language: the tendency to be used to mitigate the speaker’s commitment to the assertion being made. Thus, since the 19th century, a new semantic change has been observed in the construction (which was hinted at faintly in the 18th century). Until then, it had only expressed modal values (dynamic or deontic). However, from this point on, it also serves as a mechanism of mitigation, whereby *caber* + INF adds discursive meanings to its modal ones. Consequently, *caber* + INF develops values similar to pragmatic operators, a characteristic it shares with the expression *en lo que cabe* ‘to the extent possible’, studied in Fuentes (2019).

When *caber* + INF is in the left sentence periphery, it can be the first element in the sentence (27a), or it can also be preceded by a discourse marker (27b). At times, *caber* + INF heads a subordinate clause (27c) or is placed at the beginning of a parenthesis (27d). In all cases, *caber* + INF serves a pragmatic function aimed at mitigating the force of the assertion of the utterance. In (27a), it is suggested that the students may carry out the work, rather than asserting it. Similarly, in (27b), the author does not fully commit to the possibility that the vezzoes were inspired by representations of bulls. Additionally, in (27c), it is not emphatically stated that colleges and priestly castes held little importance. In (27d), the entire parenthesis serves as a strategy to diminish the illocutionary force of the assertion that ‘the move worked out perfectly’.

- (27) a. *Cabría confiar tales trabajos a estudiantes.* (Esteban Terradas, Neologismos, arcaísmos y sinónimos en plática de ingenieros, 1946, CORDE)
‘One could entrust such tasks to students.’

- b. Así pues, *cabe pensar* que los vettones se inspiraron para concebirlas en las representaciones de toros, esfinges, etc., propias de los pueblos del Sur. (Julio Caro Baroja, *Los pueblos de España*, 1946, CORDE)
‘Therefore, one *could think* that the Vettones were influenced by the depictions of bulls, sphinxes, and other similar figures commonly found among the Southern peoples.’
- c. La religión de los celtíberos nos es poco conocida, aunque *cabe afirmar* que entre ellos jamás los colegios y castas sacerdotales (...) adquirieron demasiada importancia. (Julio Caro Baroja, *Los pueblos de España*, 1946, CORDE)
‘The religion of the Celtiberians is little known to us, although it *can be asserted* that among them, colleges and priestly castes never acquired too much importance.’
- d. la jugada le salió, si *cabe decirlo*, demasiado redonda. (Elena Quiroga, *La careta*, 1955, CORDE)
‘the move, if one may say so, turned out exceedingly well.’

The shift from expressing dynamic (and deontic) modality to conveying mitigating senses may have been facilitated by the impersonal nature of the construction. As there is no subject, *caber* + INF often occupied the initial position in the sentences in which it appeared. Furthermore, the modal meaning expressed by *caber* + INF is that of dynamic or attenuated obligation, resulting from deduction or previously exposed facts. This modal meaning has also facilitated the evolution of *caber* + INF as a verbal periphrasis close to an attenuation discourse operator, as neither dynamic modality nor attenuated obligations allow for a strong commitment to the truth of what is said. Therefore, the semantics and syntax of *caber* + INF would have once again favoured the third evolutionary step of this construction.

Based on the discussion, *caber* + INF would have undergone a process of grammaticalisation. This process began in structures where *caber* selected a dative and an infinitive that functioned as its subject. The construction as a whole conveyed the idea of assigning someone to do something (Stage 1). This meaning allows for the inference of deontic or ability meanings: if someone is assigned to carry out an action, it implies that they can or should effectively perform it. The verb *caber* and the infinitive begin to be reanalysed as a single verbal unit that will eventually integrate as a non-prototypical member of verbal periphrases specialized in expressing meanings of dynamic or deontic modality (Stage 2). Finally, the periphrasis tends to shift towards the left sentence periphery, with the dynamic and deontic meanings serving to attenuate the speaker’s commitment to the truth of the utterance (Stage 3).

STAGE 1. PROPOSITIONAL LEVEL (*caber* = ‘to correspond to something to someone’)

STAGE 2. MODAL LEVEL (dynamic and deontic meanings)

STAGE 3. PRAGMATIC LEVEL (mitigating meaning)

The evolution from Stage 1 to Stage 3 entails a process of subjectivisation, as defined by Traugott. According to Traugott, subjectivisation is a process of change that means that the “meaning tends to become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective belief state/attitude toward the proposition” (Traugott 1989: 52).

5. Conclusions

This study analyses the evolution of the verbal construction *caber* + INF, which is a non-prototypical verbal periphrasis specialized in expressing meanings related to dynamic and deontic modality. These modal meanings are found in passages where both dynamic or deontic modality result from what is asserted or inferred from the previous context. Therefore, utterances containing *caber* + INF do not express categorical affirmations, but rather deductions that can allow for dynamic or deontic readings. In many contexts, it is not possible to establish a clear distinction between values. Since the 19th century, there has been a shift in the placement of this construction towards the left sentence periphery. This shift has been significant in the use of the construction to mitigate the speaker’s commitment to the truth of the statement.

The construction’s history suggests a possible polygenetic origin. The analysis of the texts reveals an evolution from one of the meanings of the verb *caber*, specifically ‘to correspond’. Starting from the 13th century, *caber* is combined with an infinitive, allowing for meanings of ability, and from the 14th century onwards, obligation. At first, the syntactic structure is the same as in constructions where *caber* is used as a lexical verb. The verb *caber* selects an abstract subject and a dative. The abstract nature of the subject allows for an infinitive to be used as the subject of *caber* by analogy. From the 15th century onwards, *caber* + INF is documented without a dative. This allows for the grammaticalisation of *caber* + INF as a grammatical construction. It was consolidated in the following centuries, first as a modal periphrasis and later as a periphrasis specialized in expressing the degree of commitment of the speaker to the expressed statement.

Secondly, the grammaticalisation of *caber* + INF was facilitated by structures in which *caber*, meaning ‘to contain’, is combined with an infinitive and a prepositional phrase referring to a container that almost always referred to the head, mind, or reasoning. These constructions meant ‘in which head does it fit to say something or to do something’ and allowed for the inference of a dynamic meaning ‘how something can be said/done’. This structure reinforced the use of modal periphrasis *caber* + INF.

Finally, it is important to consider the possible influence of Late Latin. In Late Latin, the verb *capio* could combine with an infinitive with dynamic values. It is worth noting that the frequency of use of *caber* + INF intensifies in the 15th century, when Latinate influence on Spanish was very strong. Therefore, the evolution of *caber* + INF began in a specific grammatical construction (dative + *caber* ‘to correspond’ + INF). However, its grammaticalisation was likely activated by the existence of another construction in which the same verb *caber* was used with a different meaning (*caber* ‘to contain’ + PP + INF). Additionally, the Latin model

may have had a significant influence on the establishment of this construction in the language.

This type of grammaticalisation, with a polygenetic origin, is not uncommon in the evolution of Spanish verbal periphrases (Octavio de Toledo y Huerta & Garachana Camarero 2024). Furthermore, we have demonstrated that in the evolution of *caber* + INF, the formal properties of the construction played a decisive role. The fact that *caber* had abstract subjects allowed for the analogical use of an infinitive as its subject. Additionally, the combination of *caber* with the infinitive presented itself as a defective verbal form, conjugated exclusively in the third person singular. This allowed for the evolution of the construction as an impersonal structure. The impersonal value, in turn, allowed the periphrasis *caber* + INF to be used with modal values that are not linked to the formulation of strong assertions. Conclusions can be drawn from the communicative context, but like any inference, there is room for error. This attenuating character of the periphrasis, combined with a progressive tendency to place it in the left sentence periphery, favoured its use as a specialized mechanism in attenuating the assertion that follows. This new value is added to the existing values of the deontic and dynamic periphrasis. In summary, the evolution of *caber* + INF is the result of various influences. This highlights the significance of not limiting the study of grammaticalisation to the construction being grammaticalised.

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