

Gerhalter, Katharina (2021): "*El silencio no es precisamente una de sus virtudes... Diachronie und Pragmatik der Konstruktion [Negation + Exaktheits-Fokusadverb + X] im Französischen, Portugiesischen und Spanischen*". In: Anja Hennemann & Hans-Jörg Döhla, *Konstruktionsgrammatische Zugänge zu romanischen Sprachen*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 171-214.

This chapter deals with the semi-schematic construction [negation + focus adverb of the exactness-domain + X], which shows a similar form and equivalent functions in French, Portuguese, and Spanish. For example, Fr. *pas précisément propres*, Pt. *não exatamente limpo* and Sp. *no precisamente limpia* ('not exactly clean') are semantically ambiguous regarding the degree of the intended interpretation '(more or less) dirty'. This vagueness is intentional and leads to a wide range of possible contextual inferences. Consequently, the constructions Fr. [(ne) *pas précisément/exactement X*], Pt. [*não precisamente/exatamente X*] and Sp. [*no precisamente/exactamente X*] have different pragmatic functions: e.g., *no precisamente limpia* may be used for mitigation ('not really clean'), or as an ironic understatement (hence, intensification and inversion: 'very dirty'). The analyzed construction is a specific sub-type (or *meso-construction*) of the stylistic-rhetorical device *litotes*; the above-mentioned pragmatic functions have been observed for *litotes* in general.

This chapter analyses the diachrony of the construction [negation + focus adverb of the exactness-domain + X] in Spanish, French and Portuguese based on large corpus samples and shows how these pragmatic functions develop as contextual inferences. First precursors of the construction are found in the 17th century: contrastive negations with an explicitly mentioned alternative. The first examples of *litotes*, i.e., which lack an explicit alternative and therefore evoke contextual inferences, are found in the 18th century. The evolution is parallel in the three languages, being Sp./Pt. *precisamente* and Fr. *précisément* the precursors of Sp. *exactamente*, Pt. *exatamente*, and Fr. *exactement*. The first pragmatic function is mitigation, whereas the ironical understatement (inversion, intensification) is documented later, in the 19th century. Therefore, the evolution leads from a more obvious and accessible pragmatic inference to a cognitively more complex, less transparent, and less compositional one.

The chapter investigates if adding an adverb of the exactness-domain contributes to an easier interpretation of *litotes*, which are *per se* vague. The analysis shows that this is not the case: *litotes* with adverbs of the exactness-domain are as ambiguous as without them. Their function is either mitigation or intensification, but the adverb does not give a cue to which one is the intended interpretation (except for Spanish *precisamente*). The constructions including an adverb nevertheless have a stable and indispensable function: it evokes a scale of alternatives to the negated element X, and one of the implicit alternatives corresponds to the indirectly intended interpretation of the *litotes*. The main result of this chapter is that the analyzed construction increases the productivity of *litotes* because it permits non-scalar elements to enter the slot X, and, by doing so, to acquire an *ad-hoc* scalarity which is purely subjective and context-dependent. Therefore, within this construction, any element in X can be mitigated or intensified as if it was a scalar adjective (such as *clean*). For example, proper names and non-scalar nouns or prepositional phrases can appear in the slot X: Sp. *Quizás Ana no fuera exactamente Serena*, Pt. *Ele não é exatamente meu amigo*, and Fr. *j'étais pas exactement aux gâteaux*. These sentences would not be interpreted as *litotes* without the exactness-adverbs. In some cases, the analyzed sentences would not even be semantically possible.

On the one hand, the analyzed construction inherits its pragmatic functions from the *litotes*. Already in Latin, *litotes* had both functions: mitigation and ironic understatement (intensification, ironic inversion). On the other hand, the construction expands the applicability of *litotes* regarding the slot X ("host class expansion"), and therefore increases the productivity of this stylistic-rhetorical device. It makes *litotes* possible with linguistic elements which outside this construction could not be interpreted as such.