

Light Verbs and Grammaticalization. Evidence From the Catalan Light Verb *Agafar**

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Abstract

Determining the linguistic nature of light verbs – whether they are lexical or grammatical units – is still an open question. Light verbs are often characterised as delexicalized. Thus, grammaticalization would be the process by which a lexical verb (lexical unit) assumes the value of a light verb (grammatical unit). However, it has also been argued that light verbs are just regular verbs, albeit ones with little semantic specification. If they are, there can be no grammaticalization, at least in principle. Nevertheless, even if light verbs are considered lexical verbs, the way they evolve invite to relate them to grammaticalization processes. In this paper I contribute to the debate by providing evidence on the historical evolution of the Catalan verb *agafar* ‘to take, to catch, to pick, to get’. The conclusion is not firm, but suggests that the description of light verbs can benefit from the framework of grammaticalization.

Keywords: aspect; Catalan; grammaticalization; language change; light verbs; syntax

Resum. *Verbs lleugers i gramaticalització. Evidències del verb lleuger català agafar*

Determinar la naturalesa lingüística dels verbs lleugers —si són unitats lèxiques o gramaticals— és una qüestió encara no tancada. Els verbs lleugers solen caracteritzar-se com a verbs deslexicalitzats. Així, la gramaticalització seria el procés pel qual un verb lèxic (unitat lèxica) assumeix el valor d’un verb lleuger (unitat gramatical). Tot i això, també s’ha argumentat que els verbs lleugers no són sinó verbs regulars, encara que amb poca especificació semàntica. Si és així, no hi pot haver gramaticalització, almenys en teoria. No obstant això, fins i tot si sostenim que els verbs lleugers són verbs lèxics, certs trets de la seva evolució conviden a relacionar-los amb processos de gramaticalització. En aquest treball aportem dades sobre l’evolució històrica del verb català *agafar* que poden contribuir al debat. La conclusió no és ferma, però fa veure que la descripció de l’evolució dels verbs lleugers pot beneficiar-se del marc conceptual de la gramaticalització.

Paraules clau: aspecte; català; gramaticalització; canvi lingüístic; verbs lleugers; sintaxi

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1. Introduction

Determining the linguistic nature of light or support verbs – whether they are lexical or grammatical units – is still an open question. They are often characterized as delexicalized verbs which, implicitly or explicitly, means that they are also grammaticalized (they are delexicalized in order to become grammaticalized). In contrast to lexical verbs, light verbs have also been called *functional verbs*, precisely to emphasize their value as a grammatical unit (Polenz 1963; Helbig 1983-1984; Masullo 1996: 175). Along the same lines, and in response to proposals by Hale & Keyser (1993), some theoretical approaches within Generative Grammar claim that the categorial representation of light verbs and lexical verbs is different: the former are one of the explicit instantiations of a functional node called “small *v*” (without lexical content), while the latter are vocabulary items (see, among others, Dung 2002; Acedo-Matellán 2010; Cuervo 2010; Acedo-Matellán & Mateu 2015; Alvarez-Morera 2023).

However, it has also been argued that light verbs are just regular verbs, albeit ones with little semantic specification. Bruening (2016) considers that we only need two things to account for light verbs, and these are independently needed: Object NPs can be eventive and the logical “arguments” of the Objects can be controlled. From this viewpoint, light verbs are nothing more than members of a subcategory of obligatory control verbs. In favour of this claim, it has also been said that light verbs (unlike auxiliary verbs) are always formally the same as regular verbs (Butt & Geuder 2001; Butt 2010), that the inventory of light verbs is constant throughout the history of a language (Butt 2010; Brinton 2011) and that the argument and event structure of a LV is identical to those of his lexical counterpart (Ramchand 2014).¹

It might be obvious that the label *grammaticalization* can only be considered fully operational in relation to light verbs if it is accepted that these verbs are grammatical units. In this framework, then, grammaticalization would be the process by which a lexical verb (lexical unit) assumes the value of a light verb (grammatical unit). But if we claim that all verbs are lexical, there can be no grammaticalization between verbs, at least in principle. However, even if we accept that light verbs are lexical verbs, we also have to accept that light verbs have been shown to present certain features, which invite us to consider whether they have any relation to the processes of grammaticalization.

1. See also Elenbaas (2013). In any case, it should be pointed out that the discussion on the grammatical or lexical nature of light verbs is not a debate between theoretical schools, i.e., between Functionalists and Cognitivists on the one hand, and Generativists on the other. Among Generativists, for example, there are advocates of both positions.

In this paper, I contribute to this debate providing some data on the historical evolution of the Catalan verb *agafar* ‘to take, to catch, to pick, to get’. The conclusion I reach is not firm, but it suggests that more evidence and analysis is still necessary. In any case, it seems that there are reasons to claim that light verbs description can benefit from the framework of grammaticalization.

In the second section I describe the historical development of the Catalan verb *agafar*, an evolution that shows the transition from a lexical verb to a light verb. As far as I know, this is the first time that such a historical evolution has been studied in Catalan linguistics. The third section discusses the implication of the data provided in the second section. The fourth section makes a more detailed analysis of the verb *agafar* and shows the inceptive aspect it possesses as a light verb (and, of course, aspect is an area that can be considered fully grammatical). The fifth section looks at one of the specific structural realizations of the light verb *agafar*, which, in my opinion, provides elements that suggest that the perspective of grammaticalization can assist in understanding and describing the phenomena studied. The last section presents some conclusions.²

2. The verb *agafar*. General description

The verb *agafar* ‘to take, to catch, to pick, to get’ is a lexical verb that selects an agent subject and a patient or theme as a direct object. It was first documented in Catalan in the 14th century (in the form *gafar*), with the sense of the physical action of subjecting a person:

- (1) con yo li agí presa l’aguyade él va·m afarar e abrasar e anam-ne abdosos en tera, e vèñch en Bernat Sabater, quyat del dit Bernat, e *van-me* aquí *gafar abdosos*. (*Cort* [xiv century]: 253; CICA)³
 ‘When I took the goad from him, he grabbed me and hugged me, and we both fell to the ground, and Bernat Sabater, brother-in-law of the said Bernat, came and *they both grabbed me*.’

Although it was not a frequently occurring verb, it was found again in the 16th and 17th centuries, now with a somewhat narrower meaning and largely used to indicate situations in which someone is seized by force (usually by authority):

- (2) a. ý com era estat Ell, per lo contrari, imprudent e ignorant envers los prínceps ý fariseus, qui en tal manera *lo feren* pendre ý *agafar*. (*Contemplació* [xvi century]: 49; CTILC)
 ‘And because He had been, on the contrary, reckless and ignorant towards the princes and Pharisees, *they ordered him to be grabbed* and arrested.’

2. I will not deal, however, with another aspect that makes predicates with light verbs a phenomenon of great interest: their possible relationship with phraseology and collocations, a field in which LV have often been analyzed (see, among many others, *Corpas Pastor* 1996; *Alonso Ramos* 2004; *Ginebra* 2017).
3. Catalan texts prior to the 19th century, unless otherwise indicated, have been obtained from the CICA. The period of each text is given but not the specific work to which it belongs.

- b. Ý divendres, a 3 de juny, se n'yxqué dit Tora a la vesprada ý l'agafaren en lo carrer de Quart ý-l posaren en la Torre. (Porcar, *Dietari* [XVII century]: 386r; CICA)
'And on Friday, 3rd June, the said Tora left in the evening and *they caught him* in Quart Street and put him in the tower.'
- c. Ý axí vist ell, dit testimoni, que *no-l pogué agafar* ni atényer, ell ni-ls demés de sa camarada, prengué la capa. (*Albalat I* [XVII century]: 69; CICA)
'And when he, the witness, saw that *he could* neither reach him *nor catch him*, neither he nor the others in the group, he took the cloak.'
- d. *Agafà-l* [Joan Bueso] micer Lleó en lo Puig. (Porcar, *Dietari* [XVII century]: 117v; CICA)
'Lord Lleó *caught him* [Joan Bueso] in the Puig.'

In fact, in the most complete Catalan dictionary of the time, the *Gazophylacium catalano-latinum* (1696), by Joan Lacavalleria, the meaning corresponding to this usage is the first to be exemplified:

- (3) *AGAFAR alguna cosa*. ['to catch something'] Aliquid prehendere, apprehendere, comprehendere. *Agafar a un criminós o a un enemich*. ['to catch a criminal or an enemy'] Reum aut hostem prehendere, comprehendere, capere, apprehendere (apud Montalat 2020: 394).

However, in the same dictionary there are two examples with a complement referring to non-human entities: an animal (*agafar aucells ab vesch* 'to catch birds with mistletoe') and an object (*Si jo agafo un bastó* 'If I take a stick'). Although it has not been possible to access specific data, in the 18th century the verb *agafar* must have considerably widened its semantic scope. At the beginning of the 19th century, the *Diccionario catalan-castellano-latino* [Catalan-Spanish-Latin dictionary] by Joaquim Esteve, Josep Bellvitges and Antoni Juglà (1803-1805), although it continues to give lexicographical priority to the meaning "péndrer á un reo, ó á algú qye futg" 'to arrest/catch a convict or a runaway' (s. v. *agafar*), includes other meanings, among which the following are worth mentioning:

- (4) a. «AGAFAR, alguna malaltia, contagi, &c» 'to catch a disease, an infection'
- b. «AGAFAR, experimentar en sí de nou èls efectes d'alguna cosa; com AGAFAR fret, son, &c».
'to catch, to experience in oneself again the effects of something like to catch cold [to get cold], sleep, etc.'

In the first decades of the 19th century, the new semantic values of the verb *agafar* were consolidated. Leaving aside other semantics of the verb (other "lexical" values), some constructions with *agafar* can be defined as belonging to the type of structures called *complex predicates*: the verb has little or no semantic content (it

is a light verb), and the complement provides the main semantic and predicative load of the phrase. The typology of these constructions is as follows (in type 3, for expository simplicity, the main semantic and predicative load is attributed to the subject – we will return to this point later –, the first two types are labelled LV1 because the experiencer is realized as the subject, while the third type is labelled LV2, with the experiencer realized as a dative):

1. Subject (experiencer) + verb + DO (DetP) (pathology) LV1
2. Subject (experiencer) + verb + DO (N) (psychological experience) LV1
3. Subject (psychological experience) + verb + IO (experiencer) LV2

In the first place, some sentences have an experiencer subject and an object with a determiner that designates the pathology or illness suffered by the experiencer (*agafar el còlera* ‘to catch cholera’):

- (5) Pot afirmar-se que'l perill d'*agafar*'l *còlera* en circumstàncies favorables es molt petit (Batista Foix, *Instruccions generals* [1834]; CTILC).⁴
‘It can be stated that the risk of *contracting cholera* under favourable circumstances is very small.’

Secondly, some structures are parallel to the ones above, with the particularity that the object contains a psychological bare noun (*agafar mania* ‘to catch animosity → to come to not tolerate someone’):

- (6) ¿Ho creuria que desde aquell dia, ó mes ben dit, desde aquell moment, *vaig agafar mania* á n'aquell home? (*La Xinxà* [1869]; CTILC).
‘Would you believe that, since that day or, rather, since that moment, *I came to not tolerate* that man?’

These semantic changes can be explained in terms of metaphorical changes, in line with the recent advances in Cognitive Linguistics (Croft & Cruse 2004).⁵ Thus, informally, pathologies or psychological experiences are semantically recategorized as physical objects, so that they can “be caught”. The change of state is interpreted as a physical action: as a change in the position in which a person or a physical object is located. We can even speculate with the idea that one of the semantic components of this metaphorization is negativity/evil. It has been indicated above that, since the 16th century, *agafar* has been used above all to describe situations in which someone is caught or arrested by force (usually by authority):

4. The 19th century texts have been obtained from the CTILC. As in the case of the CICA, I indicate the year of the text, but I do not provide data on the work and the author.
5. In Catalan linguistics, the Cognitive Linguistics framework that explains semantic and syntactic changes in verbs throughout the history of the language is already well established. See, among others, Montserrat (2007), Martines & Montserrat (2014), Sentí (2013), Antolí (2015, 2016, 2017, 2019) and Pons (2018). For light verbs, Montserrat (2014). I am also indebted to all these works in the paragraphs below.

a criminal, an enemy, a fugitive, a deserter. People who are *agafades* ‘caught’ are bad people or people in a negative/bad situation. Likewise, pathologies and diseases are bad things, as are the psychological experiences that we find in these first constructions with *agafar*: sleep, cold, fear, animosity. Thus, the semantic change occurs on the basis of the (simplified) metaphor TO CATCH A DISEASE / A NEGATIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE IS TO CATCH A BAD PERSON.⁶

In a second stage, when the possibility that the referent of the complement is a pathology or – what interests us most – a negative psychological experience (that is, a state or a property of the referent of the subject) has been consolidated, a new change occurs. The possibilities of the complement extend to other psychological states or experiences that are not necessarily negative (like *agafar força* ‘gather strength, gain strength’):

- (7) Alsant lo bras ab tota la forsa de sa ira [...], doná un pas enderrera lo Comte, com pera *agafar forsa* (Bofarull, *La orfaneta de Menargues* [1862]; CTILC). ‘Raising his arm with all the force of his anger, the count stepped back as if to *gather strength*.’⁷

In the third structure, unlike the two previous ones, there is a change of diathesis: the noun designating the psychological experience takes the place of the subject, and the experiencer the place of the indirect object (dative). It must be stressed that the psychological experience is also negative/bad:

- (8) a. Me ha agafat un tremolor (Robrenyo, *El padre Carnot en Guimerà* [1835]; CTILC).
‘A tremor has taken me → I have got a tremor’
b. Valgam Jesus! quina mandra m’ha agafat! (D. R. M., *La caida de Morella* [1842]; CTILC).
‘Oh my God! What a laziness has seized me! → How lazy I have become.’

In this case the semantic shift is more abrupt. The metaphor that facilitates the recategorization of meaning must be grounded in another perspective, perhaps in the perception of the person who is “caught”. Although, as already indicated, *agafar* is traditionally used primarily to describe situations in which someone is taken by force (usually by authority), it is also possible that this “someone” is not seen as a criminal, enemy, fugitive or deserter, but as a “victim”, so that badness/negativity is a feature to be attributed to the agent performing the action that subjects the victim. Thus, a negative psychological experience is categorized as a “bad person”, and the cognitive metaphor on which the change is based could be informally formulated as

6. Nevertheless, there is another change that is unexplained, and that requires analysis, which is the transition from an agent subject to an experiencing subject. I leave this point for further research.
7. Although, even in this case, as a reviewer suggests, insofar as the sentence could be interpreted as ‘to gather strength with difficulty / even though it was not expected’, the verb would still contain remains of the negative feature: something we don’t want to catch or do not expect to catch.

follows: TO BE CAUGHT BY A NEGATIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE IS TO BE CAUGHT BY A BAD PERSON / BY A PERSON WHO WANTS EVIL FOR US.

3. First (working) conclusion

The issue raised in this paper is whether the semantic and syntactic changes described for the verb *agafar* authorize to speak of grammaticalization. That is, given that sentences like *Ell agafa por* ‘He takes fear → He becomes afraid’ or *Ell agafa fred* ‘He takes cold → He becomes cold’, on the one hand, and sentences like *A ell li agafa por* ‘Fear takes to him → He becomes afraid’ or *A ell li agafa fred* ‘Cold takes him → He becomes cold’, on the other, are complex predicates with light verbs and psych nouns, grammaticalization can be said to have taken place in the transfer from the lexical verb *agafar* (an action verb that selects an agent subject and patient object) to the light verb *agafar*. As stated in the introduction, the answer depends partly on the theoretical claims being made. If it is assumed that light verbs are grammatical or functional units, the described shift from *agafar* (a verb with lexical content) to the light verb *agafar* (a verb with grammatical function) can be associated with the well-known cline (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 7):

Content item > grammatical word > clitic > inflectional affix

Therefore, this is a clear case of a process of grammaticalization, even though it is in the first two steps of the cline. Despite the fact that the number of light verbs in a language remains essentially constant over time, as has been said above, this is a proof that new light verbs can be created.⁸

However, for other scholars, it is not at all clear that this is the best description. In his discussion of old Catalan structures formed by the verb *venir* ‘to come’ and a PP introducing a stative noun (*venir a mort* ‘to come to death → to die’, *venir a flaquea* ‘to come to weakness’ → to become weak’), Manuel Pérez-Saldanya follows Functional Grammar – which claims that semantic change, if it is not accompanied by morphosyntactic change, does not imply grammaticalization – and states that “in these cases we can hardly speak of grammaticalization, because the verb *venir* continues to be a semantically full main verb, just with a more abstract and subjective meaning [my translation from Catalan]” (Pérez-Saldanya 2007: 26).

In the two sections below, however, I provide data that aim to show that the problem of light verbs cannot be neatly separated from the phenomenon of grammaticalization, and that even researchers who consider these types of verbs to be ordinary verbs should consider whether adopting a *grammaticalizationist* perspective, even if only partially, could be helpful in advancing the description. My analysis has some similarities with that of Marion Elenbaas (2013) on the diachronic

8. It could also be seen a case of reanalysis, since the change in the structure of the expression does not involve any immediate or intrinsic modification of its surface structure. I will not attempt to elaborate on this point. On the state of the art of the relationship between grammaticalization and reanalysis, see Garachana (2015).

development of English light verbs. But Elenbass concludes that, although light verbs appear to straddle the boundary between lexical and functional categories, English light verbs are synchronic variants of full verbs. My conclusion, in contrast, is more undetermined and rather goes in a different direction.

4. Light verb and aspectual category

At this point it is worth noting another issue: the psych constructions with the light verb *agafar* have inceptive aspectual meaning.⁹ Thus, the difference between *La Marta té por* ‘Marta has fear → Marta is afraid’ and *La Marta agafa por* ‘Marta takes fear → Marta gets afraid’ is that the first sentence describes Marta’s psychological state and the second indicates that Marta “is entering” this psychological state (that she is starting to be afraid). In contemporary Catalan, with psych predicates *agafar* works as a light verb with inceptive aspectual meaning. And, when we deal with aspectual features, we are already in the grammatical domain.¹⁰

There is no need for a lengthy discussion here, so I will illustrate the phenomenon by analyzing a single psych noun, *por* ‘fear’. In Old Catalan, the resources for constructing psych complex predicates with *por* (and its variants *paor/pahor/temor*) with an inceptive meaning rarely include light verbs. On the one hand (and this is the most common), the inceptive reading can be derived simply from the context, with no explicit markers of inceptivity being added to the basic stative structure with *haver/tenir* ‘to have’. This can be seen in (9):

- (9) Què us en diria? Que entre aquell jorn, e la nuyt e l’endemà a hora de tèr-cia, ells foren en vista de Barchinona; et con aquells de la ciutat los veeren, *aguere[n gran pahor]* de les ·XI· galeas que no fossen perdudes. (Muntaner, *Crònica* [XIV century]: 77bv; CICA)
 ‘What would I tell you? That between that day, and the night, and the next day at the third hour, they came in sight of Barcelona; and when the inhabitants of the city saw them, *they were so afraid* that the eleven galleys should be lost.’

Secondly, on occasion, the inceptive reading is given by an inceptive periphrasis, that is, by means of the inceptive auxiliary verb *començar* ‘to start’, which is added to the light verb *haver* (10):

9. I use the term *inceptive* but I could have used *inchoative*. I am not completely sure which of the two expressions is the most suitable.
 10. This, however, is open to discussion. Although grammaticalization can lead to the creation of the auxiliary verbs involved in verbal periphrases – and, therefore, their different aspectual values – and has been one of the main objects of study in the work on grammaticalization, it could be argued that this work should not deal with all the expressions of aspect as a linguistic category, but only with its *grammatical* expression: verbal inflection and verbal periphrases. Therefore, the third way to express aspect, the meaning of the verb (in which the lexical aspect or modality of the action is encoded) is beyond the scope of the study of grammaticalization. On this point, however, there is no general agreement. For the constructionist approaches – or for most of them – aspect always has a structural expression and it would make little sense to leave out some instantiations of the category in the research on grammaticalization.

- (10) en la festa de Sent Pere él devia preïcar als clerges; e en aquela nuyt él esperava as aver la febra, així con solia, per què él *comensà as aver temor*, quant hom li ac comanat lo sermó (*Vides* [XIII century]: 440; CICA).
 ‘On the holiday of St. Peter he was to preach to the clergy, and on that night he waited to see if he had a fever, as he was wont to do, for when he was commissioned to preach *he began to be afraid*.’

And finally, also only on occasion, the inceptive meaning is made clear with the pronominal light verb *donar-se* ‘to give’ (11):

- (11) E Nostre Seyor li respòs: —O Pere, penses-te que eu t’aja deseparat? A la mia bontat fas enjúria si·t penses que eu te desepar. Ni·t *dóns temor*: sàpies que aparelat és sel qui ajudarà a la tua misèria. (*Vides* [XIII century]: 275; CICA)
 ‘And Our Lord answered him: “Oh, Peter, did you think that I have forsaken you? You do injury to my goodness if you think that I forsake you. *Do not be afraid*: you must know that the person who will help your misery is already prepared”.’

With *por/paor/temor*, the construction with prepositional motion verbs (*entrar* ‘to enter’, *venir* ‘to come’) is not found as it is with other psych nouns such as *gelosia* ‘jealousy’, for example (*entrar en gelosia* ‘to enter into jealousy → to get jealous’), or *alegria* ‘happiness’ (*venir en alegria* ‘to come into happiness → to get happy’):

- (12) a. per lo qual ella *entrà* sobtosament *en gelosia*, e dins son cor començà a cremar. (*Decameró* [xv century]: 236)
 ‘for this reason *she* suddenly *became jealous*, and [the jealousy] began to burn inside her heart.’
 b. Los enamorats passats, los quals desijaven de llur glòria deixar fama, ab gran fatigua treballaven per *venir en alegria*. (Martorell, *Tirant* [xv century]: 497; CICA)
 ‘Ancient lovers, who wished to make their glory famous, toiled with great fatigue to *come in joy*.’

But in contemporary Catalan neither the verb *donar-se* nor the prepositional motion verbs have survived as light verbs in inceptive constructions with psych nouns. On the other hand, the use of the simple predicate with *haver/tenir* to express inceptive meaning, which always depends on the context, has proved not to be very operative (at least with stative nouns).¹¹ All this may suggest that, in the course of

11. The historical change in the aspectual meaning of light verbs is a well-documented phenomenon. Brinton (2011: 560) discusses the progressive advance of dynamic *to have* in British English (*to have a bath*), which is slower in American English (which prefers *to take a bath*). In Catalan, the shift, if finally confirmed, is of a different type: loss of the dynamic (inceptive) meaning of *tenir*.

the modern history of the language, a part of the grammatical system relating to the expression of inceptivity – more specifically, the part relating to complex predicates with light verbs – has been reorganized. Therefore, in this process of reorganization, the verb *agafar* has been enabled as a verb with an inceptive meaning for the psych complex predicates that are expressed, in their stative alternant, with *tenir*. Strictly speaking, then, the verb *agafar* is not an auxiliary verb, but a light verb that incorporates an abstract morphological feature of inceptivity, which in other constructions is effectively expressed by means of an auxiliary (in terms of some formal analyses we could say that *agafar* is a unit that is generated in the node v' and moves to the node AUX).¹² Thus, the LV *agafar* would have just grammatical content (it embodies exclusively a stativity feature and an inceptivity feature). And, if this is so, there is no doubt that, if we are not in the domain of grammaticalization, we are in a domain that is very close to it.¹³

Nevertheless, it could be claimed that, in the sentence *La Marta agafa por*, the underlying metaphor still works, and that this is a sign of lexical meaning. In the next section, we will see that, with LV2 structures, this is not possible.

5. Comments on *agafar* LV2

Finally, it is worth going back to one of the structures with *agafar* that has already been mentioned here. It is the following:

Subject (psychological experience) + verb + IO (experiencer) LV2

This first analysis basically identifies the structure, but, in fact, a psych predicate such as *A la Marta li agafa por* could be analyzed as an unaccusative construction, partly assimilable to Belletti & Rizzi's (1988) type III psych predicates (typically represented by the Italian verb *piacere*). Cuervo (2010) equates class III psych predicates with Spanish structures with the light verb *dar* 'to give' of the type *Al técnico le dan rabia las propuestas* 'The proposals give rage to the technician → The technician is angry about the proposals', and she claims that the dative argument *Al técnico* is merged outside the verbal phrase. Likewise, *A la Marta li agafa por* also expresses the experiencer (*a la Marta*) as a high dative and has a complex predicative unit *agafar por*.

There are, however, some differences. Firstly, both the Belletti-Rizzi type III psych verbs and the predicates studied by Cuervo are stative, whereas the construc-

12. In a framework accepting submorphemic structure like nanosyntax, where it is possible for spellout to target phrases, and therefore multiple functional heads can make up a single morph, *agafar* could be described as corresponding to the spellout of the two heads AUX and v (or ASP and v). I am grateful to one of the reviewers for making me think about this.
13. What I say can be related to Bosque's (2001) approach, although his work is not diachronically oriented. Bosque explains the "lightness" on purely grammatical grounds when he shows that some meaningful verbs share properties with LVs. He concludes that a number of good candidates for the class of light categories are not semantically light, but the grammar makes them part of that class abstracting away from their lexical idiosyncracies and picking up the basic (mostly aspectual) features of their meaning.

tion *A la Marta li agafa por* is not. Secondly, the construction with *agafar* LV2 is special because it is a psych predicate which does not allow the constituent which expresses the stimulus to be realized as an argument of the verb (**A la Marta li agafa por la tempesta*, which contrasts with the grammaticality, for example, of *A la Marta li fa por la tempesta*, which would be the parallel structure in Catalan to that of *Al técnico le dan rabia las propuestas* studied by Cuervo).

Moreover, the constituent that expresses the psych experience (the noun) – which we have so far categorized as a subject – has properties of an internal subject and properties of an object. As a subject (unintentional subject), it agrees with the verb: *A la Marta li agafen ganes de tornar*. As an object, it does not need a determiner. It thus departs from typical type III psych predicates, such as *Li agrada el futbol*, *Li dol la situació*, *Li sap greu el comentari*, which cannot be constructed with a bare NP: **Li agrada futbol*, **Li dol situació*, **Li sap greu comentari* (Royo 2017: 26). As an object, in addition, it pronominalizes as a partitive: *No me n'agafa, de por*.¹⁴

However *A la Marta li agafa por* is analyzed (whether, for example, the constituent *por* simultaneously occupies the position of internal subject and object, or just one of the two possible positions), the problem is one of structure, that is, of grammar (not of lexis). So, the idea of grammaticalization – understood in the broadest sense of the term – could help because in the shift from the structure represented by a sentence like *La policia va agafar el lladre que fugia* (with the verb *agafar* and an agent subject and patient object) to the structure represented by the sentence *Li va agafar por*, a grammatical historical process is evident (i.e. it is not just a metaphorical semantic process). This process entails the shift of the external argument to the internal subject position, with the corresponding loss of the agentive feature, and subsequently from internal subject to object, perhaps without the subject position having been entirely “dislodged” (which is what would prevent the verb from selecting both an object and an internal subject).

In other words: the shift from *agafar* (lexical verb) to *agafar* (LV2) cannot be only explained on the basis of the idea of a semantic change via metaphorization. The semantic change is linked to syntactic changes. In addition, these syntactic changes end up in a verb with no lexical meaning (a verb, like LV1, with just grammatical content).

Grammaticalization theory (Heine 2003) offers an account of how and why grammatical categories arise and develop. It is based on the assumption that the main motivation underlying grammaticalization is to communicate successfully. One salient human strategy consists in using linguistic forms for meanings that are concrete to also express more abstract meaning contents. To this end, lexical expressions are pressed into service for the expression of grammatical functions.

14. I should point out that when I speak of the possibility of considering the noun *por* as an “internal subject”, I am not referring to the old VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis but to a constituent that remains inside the predicate (for today’s Generative Grammar, a little *v'* specifier). Since a LVC is defined as a construction in which the predicative load is on the “nominal part”, it would not make sense to think of that predicative “nominal part” as occupying an external argument position.

Accordingly, grammaticalization is a process whereby lexical expressions become grammatical units. This process involves four interrelated mechanisms. The well-known Heine's (1993: 54) cline outlines the process:

1. Semantic shift (desemanticization)
2. Morphosyntactic shift (decategorialization)
3. Morphophonological shift (cliticization)
4. Phonetic shift (erosion)¹⁵

The conversion from *agafar* (lexical verb) to *agafar* (light verb) has gone through stage 1 (semantic shift) and through stage 2 (morphosyntactic shift). One of the claims that most favors the idea that light verbs are not substantially different from lexical verbs is that light verbs are not associated with syntactic structures that depart from those of the lexical verbs with which they are related (at least, different in the formal or surface level). We have seen that for *agafar* LV2 these syntactic structures are different.

Elenbaas (2011: 5, 6) makes an analogous claim for all English light verbs: "LVs are in the initial stages of grammaticalisation" (although she remarks that not all of them travel the same distance along the grammaticalization cline). My idea does not go that far. I argue that at least some light verbs are in this situation.¹⁶ However, it should be highlighted that, when I claim that LVCs (or some LVCs) can be in an intermediate stage of the grammaticalization cline, it does not mean that they are historically in the middle of a long journey that has to end in the land of auxiliaries or affixes. The issue is that the journey from lexical verbs to LVs, by the very nature of the category, ends at this station.

6. Conclusions

As mentioned above, the linguistic nature of light or support verbs – whether they are lexical or grammatical units – is a question that has yet to be closed. Consequently, it is not clear whether we can speak of grammaticalization when dealing with light verbs. The data and corresponding discussion in this article on the light Catalan verb *agafar* do not resolve the issue, but it does provide evidence that cast doubt on the idea that light verbs are simply ordinary or "regular" verbs. The data provided shows that the grammaticalization pattern of linguistic change (and the kind of approach and analysis it implies) seems to be useful for describing

15. I have used Heine's (1993) cline rather than Heine's (2003), a more complex one, because it is clearer to me for the purposes of this maximally reduced exposition. There is no rejection of the 2002 one. English *will*-future is a clear example of the developed process: "from a volitional verb serving as the main verb was grammaticalized to a future tense marker, with the erstwhile verbal complement assuming the role of the main verb; this process led to decategorialization (loss of verbal status) and erosion (reduction of form, loss of stress/accents; cf. English: *will* > *'ll*)." (Heine 2002: 586).

16. It should be noted, so as not to create confusion, that Elenbaas came to other conclusions in 2013. See the end of section 3.

the vicissitudes of this class of verbs (even though we ultimately just discover the boundaries beyond which the process of grammaticalization does not progress). The conclusion is certainly not firm, and further data, analysis and discussion are still required. Whatever the case may be, it does seem that there are reasons to argue – in line with positions such as that of Brinton (2011) – that the world of light verbs historical development has important points of contact with the world of grammaticalization.

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