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Agentivity and subjectivity with Spanish *prometer* ‘to promise’ and *amenazar* ‘to threaten’. A study of constructional and diatopical variation

Introduction

This paper* presents corpus data to investigate the degree of grammaticalization and subjectification of the Spanish verbs *prometer* ‘to promise’ and *amenazar* ‘to threaten’. These full verbs are commonly used to express a promise (1) or a threat (2), but when they have an auxiliary status they can also yield a more subjective reading, as shown in (3) and (4). This subjective reading is oriented towards a positive, respectively a negative, evaluation of the likelihood attached to the eventual realization of the event expressed by the infinitive.

- (1) *Los vecinos recorrieron todas las calles del barrio con gran alboroto, hasta que se presentaron autoridades del Partido Comunista, que **prometieron hallar** una solución a la grave crisis.* (Cuba:CubaNet:Junio 11, 1998)
‘The neighbors went through all the streets of the district with much racket, till officials of the Communist Party appeared [and] promised to find a solution for the serious crisis’
- (2) *El MBL [Movimiento Bolivia Libre] vuelve a **amenazar con dejar** la coalición* (Notic: Bolivia:ERBOL:06/13/96)
‘The MBL once again threatens to leave the coalition’
- (3) *Este invierno **promete ser** llovedor. -Llovedor, patrón, **promete ser** este invierno. -Se ve mucha chicharra en el monte. Y es la señal.* (Barrios, Eduardo. *Gran señor y rajadiablos*)
‘This winter promises to be rainy. Rainy, boss, this winter promises to be. One notices lots of crickets in the mountains. And this is the signal’
- (4) *El importante encuentro **amenaza ser** ensombrecido por medidas de presión de varios sectores, por lo que el gobierno dispuso la intervención de las Fuerzas Armadas.* (Notic: Bolivia:ERBOL:04/15/96)
‘The important meeting threatens to be overshadowed by pressure measures from several sectors, as a consequence, the government ordered the intervention of the Armed Forces’

So far, little attention has been paid to subjective *amenazar* and *prometer* in Spanish. In her chapter on the infinitive in the *Gramática Descriptiva de la Lengua española*, Hernanz (1999) briefly tackles the question of subject raising in the non-lexical reading of *amenazar* and *prometer*, partially applying Ruwet’s (1972) formal analysis of French

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menacer ‘to threaten’, and puts them in the same paradigm of evidential *parecer* ‘to seem’. Vázquez Laslop (2001) is a welcome contribution to the study of “epistemic” *prometer* but does not deal with *amenazar*. In previous work I have shown that these two verbs syntactically and conceptually differ from a truly epistemic modal such as *poder* ‘may’, and are also different from truly evidential verbs such as *parecer* or *resultar* ‘to turn out’ (cf. Cornillie 2003). I have also argued that *amenazar* stands for a lower likelihood reading than *prometer* and combines with different types of infinitives (cf. Cornillie 2004a,b).¹

I use the term “subjective” for the readings of the grammaticalized forms of *prometer* (3) and *amenazar* (4) in line with previous subjectification accounts of *to promise* and *to threaten*. In Traugott’s words, subjectification runs parallel to grammaticalization and denotes “the historical pragmatic-semantic process whereby meanings become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective belief state, or attitude toward what is said” (Traugott 1997: 185). Langacker (2000:315), by contrast, considers the subjectification of a verb like *to promise* in terms of its transparency, i.e. the attenuation of objective characteristics associated with the most common reading: “[the subjective construction] merely expresses the speaker’s assessment based on an overall appreciation of the current situation, hence there are no restrictions on the subject”.

This paper takes into account grammaticalization from a synchronic point of view, that is, focusing on the distribution of the constructions that lead to a subjective reading of *amenazar* and *prometer*. Below I investigate the narrow relationship between the most common lexical, i.e. “objective”, reading and the less frequent “subjective” reading, which are not “accidental homonyms” (Verhagen 1996: 801). Rather than emphasizing the semantic-pragmatic evolution of the verbs, I will analyze the attenuation of agentivity. I will argue that the agentivity of *prometer* is downplayed in the subjective reading in a different way than the agentivity of *amenazar*. I will test three **hypotheses**. The first hypothesis is that subjective *amenazar* and *prometer* do not stand for the same degree of grammaticalization, which results in a different distribution of subjective construction types. The second hypothesis is that, unlike what Langacker (2000) argues, the attenuation of the agentive role of objective *prometer*’s animate subject is not complete, and still goes accompanied by selection restrictions on the subject. The less prominent subject in lexical *amenazar*, by contrast, is expected to impose fewer restrictions on subjective constructions. The third hypothesis concerns the different stage of grammaticalization of *amenazar* and *prometer* in different parts of the Spanish-speaking world. It is expected that the dynamic process of grammaticalization and subjectification is not equally frequent in all countries. The three hypotheses will be tested empirically by means of the 20th-century section of the *Corpus del español*, which contains 20 million words and includes three types of discourse: 1) fiction, 2) non-fiction and 3) spoken language.² In this corpus, I have found 741 examples of *amenazar* and 985 examples of *prometer*.

¹ The subjective quasi-modal verbs *to promise* and *to threaten* have received the label “epistemic” in Traugott (1989, 1997) for English, in Verhagen (1995, 1996, 2000) for Dutch, in Rooryck (2000) for French and in Vliegen (2001) for Dutch and German.

² The corpus is compiled by Mark Davies (Brigham Young University) and can be consulted at the following website: <http://www.corpusdelespanol.org>. The major advantage of this corpus is the very fast and powerful search engine. The frequency and use of all verbal forms are available for more than 20000 words, among them *amenazar* and *prometer*. The main problem of using the *Corpus del español* for research purposes is the limited access to the context of the forms requested and the fact that the extraction has to be done manually.

The paper is organized in the following way. The first section tests the first hypothesis by giving a survey of the complements of subjective *prometer* and *amenazar*. In the second section, I analyze the lexical semantics of these verbs and I present the corpus data on their subjects. In the third section, I give a cognitive-linguistic explanation of the attenuation of the subject control in the subjective readings. In the fourth and last section, I discuss the diatopical distribution of subjective and lexical *amenazar* and *prometer* in the corpus.

1. Grammaticalization and the distribution of lexical and subjective readings

1.1. Corpus data on *amenazar* and *prometer*

As shown in Table 1, the subjective readings of *amenazar* appear to be more than twice as frequent than those of *prometer*, which, I argue, points to a different degree of grammaticalization.

	<i>Amenazar</i>		<i>Prometer</i>	
		%		%
Lexical	600	80.97	904	91.78
Subjective	141	19.03	81	8.22
Total	741	100	985	100

Table 1. Lexical and subjective readings.

Table 2 shows that the overwhelming majority of subjective *prometer* and *amenazar* appear in written discourse, although it should be noticed that in oral discourse subjective *prometer* is three times as frequent as subjective *amenazar*.³

Subjective	Fiction	Non-fiction	Oral	Total
<i>Amenazar</i>	87	42	12	141
%	61.70	29.79	8.51	100
<i>Prometer</i>	34	24	23	81
%	41.98	29.63	28.40	100

Table 2. Registers and subjective readings.

³ The dialogues from the literary examples were counted as oral speech.

Since it is commonly assumed that grammaticalization takes place in spoken communication, the observation that the majority of the subjective readings occur in written language and the different frequency of *amenazar* and *prometer* in spoken language require some further explanation. These data do not contradict the link between grammaticalization and spoken language, since one can argue that it is in conversation where “layering” or strong competition between lexical and subjective readings is most frequent. Then, the presence of the subjective readings in written texts testifies to their high degree of grammaticalization. These data also suggest that subjective *amenazar* is more grammaticalized, i.e. faces less direct competition with objective readings, than subjective *prometer*, which appears more often in spoken discourse than *amenazar*. Another topic related to the grammaticalization, is the distribution of the construction type that allows for a subjective reading, which will be dealt with in the next section.

1.2. The complements of *prometer* and *amenazar*

1.2.1. General distribution

Subjective *prometer* and *amenazar* can be followed by a sentential complement, by a non-sentential one, or by no complement at all. The sentential complements come in three types: an infinitive, an infinitive introduced by a preposition or a subclause. Among the non-sentential complements, the nominal object alternates with pronominal and adjectival forms. As shown in Table 3, the global distribution of the subjective readings of the two verbs differs considerably.

Subjective	I. Sentential			II. Non-sentential				III. Zero	Total
	1. infinitive	2. <i>con</i> + inf	3. <i>con</i> + subclause	1. noun	2. prep.	3. adjective	4. pronoun		
<i>Amenazar</i>	51	73	1	4	5	0	0	7	141
%	36.17	51.77	0.71	2.84	3.55	-	-	4.96	100
<i>Prometer</i>	34	0	0	20	0	13	3	11	81
%	41.98	-	-	24.69	-	16.05	3.70	13.58	100

Table 3. Complements of subjective constructions.

The most striking difference is that subjective *amenazar* takes an infinitive in more than 87% of the cases (in the majority with the preposition *con*), while subjective *prometer* does so only in 42%. Indeed, subjective *prometer* combines with an infinitive less often than that it combines with nominal and adjectival complements or shows up without complement. In other words, the preference for subjective infinitive constructions corroborates that *amenazar* is more grammaticalized than *prometer* (cf. Givón 1993). Table 4 further highlights that almost half of the *amenazar* examples with an infinitive render a subjective reading, while only 10% of the infinitival *prometer* constructions do so. Proportionally speaking, the subjective readings of *amenazar* + infinitive are more than four times as frequent as the ones of *prometer* + infinitive.

	<i>Amenazar</i> + infinitive		<i>Prometer</i> + infinitive	
		%		%
Lexical	137	52.49	311	90.14
Subjective	124	47.51	34	9.86
Total	261	100	346	100

Table 4. Infinitival complements with *amenazar* and *prometer*.

In the following subsections, I discuss the prepositional complements of *amenazar* (1.2.2.), the non-prepositional complements of *amenazar* (1.2.3.) and *prometer* (1.2.4.). Finally, I address the constructions without complement (1.2.5.).

1.2.2. *Amenazar con/en* + infinitive/noun

In more than half of the constructions, a preposition is inserted between subjective *amenazar* and its complement, which is most often an infinitive, as in (5).⁴

- (5) *Los neumáticos se enterraban en el fango, pero Santana se las agenciaba para sacarlas y seguir. Los arbustos espinosos amenazaban con detener su guagua, pero que va: Santana era un chofer de mucha experiencia.* (de la Paz, Jorge Luis. *La guagua*)
 ‘The tires sank in the mud, but Santana managed to pull them out and to go on. The prickly bushes **threatened** to stop his car, but not so. Santana was a very experienced driver’

In (6) and (7), *amenazar* combines with prepositional complements that have a noun as nucleus.

- (6) *El Museo Arqueológico de Almería cerró sus puertas en 1991 al detectarse fallos en la estructura del edificio que amenazaban con el desplome de varias salas, informa Martín Navarrete.* (Notic:España:ABC)
 ‘The Archeological Museum of Almería closed its doors in 1991 when there were found errors in the structure of the building that **threatened** to [cause] the falling down of several rooms, informs Martin Navarrete’
- (7) *...es un reacomodo de fuerzas hacia dentro del poder político, con miras, primero a la sucesión presidencial que se vislumbra dura, competitiva, y que amenaza incluso en fractura dentro del PRI* (Entrevista (PAN), Calderon Hinojosa - 1998)
 ‘... it is a reshuffle of forces toward the inner circle of the political power, in consideration of the presidential succession which appears to be hard and competitive, and which even threatens to [end up] in a crack within the PRI’

⁴ The subordinate clause turns out to be the most marginal complement type of *amenazar*. In (i), it appears as a rhetoric means to emphasize the delay of the solution one is waiting for. Notice that in this example, subjective *amenazar* comes without overt grammatical subject.

- (i) *Esa es la realidad, se ha avanzado; pero veo que otros temas, otros problemas estarán ocupando la mente de ellos, y amenaza con que la solución se dilate injustificable y hasta quizás indefinidamente.* (Fidel Castro 14/12/99)
 ‘This is the reality, it has improved, but I observe that other topics, other problems are filling their heads, and [lit.:] it threatens [to be the case] that the solution will be inacceptably delayed, perhaps, without a limit.’

The prepositional complements of *amenazar* can be either introduced by *con* ‘with’ or by *en* ‘in’. The ones found in the corpus belong all to the deverbal type: *desplome* ‘falling down’ (6) and *fractura* ‘split up’ (7), or *devaluación* ‘devaluation’, *desestabilización* ‘destabilization’ and *degradación* ‘degradation’. These nouns are derived from change-of-state verbs and express a further elaboration of the subject and the state of affairs evoked in the context preceding *amenazar*.

In Cornillie (2004b:355-370), I have shown that the construction with *con* is a further grammaticalization of the construction without *con*, the latter being more frequent in 16th and 17th-century Spanish than in contemporary Spanish (see Section 4 for a diatopical description). The next subsection deals with the constructions without *con*.

1.2.3. *Amenazar* + infinitive/noun

In almost 40% of the subjective constructions, *amenazar* directly combines with an infinitive (8) or a noun (9), i.e. without inserting a preposition.

- (8) *En la obscuridad blanquean las camisas de los trabajadores y en el aire hay algo tenso que amenaza romperse de un momento a otro. Nada llegó a romperse, sin embargo.* (Rojas, Manuel. *Hijo de ladrón*)
 ‘In the darkness the workers’ shirts appeared white and in the air there is something tense that **threatens** to break down from one moment to another. Nothing happened to break down, however’
- (9) *Por extraño que pareciera, en aquel momento en el que la lluvia se había apoderado de la situación y la tormenta amenazaba un día desastroso, lo único que quería era poner punto y final a mi pasado y darme una nueva oportunidad.* (Morón Sosa, Francisco José. *Un descuido mortal*)
 ‘How strange it may seem, at the moment when the rain took possession of the situation and when the storm **threatened** [to start] a terrible day, the only thing that I wanted to do was finally leave my past behind and give myself a new chance.’

In (9), the nominal complement denotes the temporal range announced by the event expressed in the subject, i.e. *la tormenta* ‘the storm’. Besides *un día desastroso* ‘a terrible day’, the other nominal complements in the corpus are *tormenta* (2x) and *ruina*. The fact that none of them belongs in the deverbal type, corroborates the preference of *amenazar con* for deverbal nouns. The latter nouns then constitute a higher specification of a set of processes, which points to the advanced grammaticalization of *amenazar con*.

1.2.4. *Prometer* + infinitive/noun/adjective

Subjective *prometer* is most frequently followed by an infinitival complement (10) or a nominal complement (11), but, unlike *amenazar*, also combines with adjectives (12, 13) and pronouns (14).

- (10) *Este invierno promete ser llovedor. -Llovedor, patrón, promete ser este invierno. -Se ve mucha chicharra en el monte. Y es la señal.* (Barrios, Eduardo. *Gran señor y rajadiablos*)
 ‘This winter **promises** to be rainy. Rainy, boss, this winter **promises** to be. One observes lots of crickets in the mountains. And this is the signal.’

In less than 50 % of the cases, the infinitive combines with an infinitival complement and in near a quarter, *prometer* shows up with nominal complements. In (11), *prometer* anticipates on settings and states of affairs, relegating them to the future. The indefinite

nominal complements show that the speaker does not have any specific instance of these types in mind.

- (11) *Cada grupo está marcado por la diferencia. Los une el eco del agua que promete puertos, detenciones, exilios, el migrar constante en busca de lo que siempre se piensa que está en otra parte.* (Karlik, Sara. *Nocturno para errantes eternos*)
 ‘Each group is defined by difference[s]. What brings them together is the echo of the water that promises ports, arrests, exiles, continuous migration looking for what is always thought to be elsewhere.’

Subjective *prometer* combines with adjectival complements in more than 15% of the cases. Constructions with qualifying adjectives such as *apasionante* ‘fascinating’ in (12) require the middle *se*.

- (12) *[Estaba] esperando el segundo compromiso. El encuentro se prometía apasionante, máxime cuando el Mallorca no había dado una buena imagen.* (España Oral: EDEP007A)
 ‘S/he was waiting the second date. The encounter *promised* [to be] fascinating, the more because Mallorca hadn’t left a good impression.’

As (12’a) shows, without middle *se* the adjectival construction is infelicitous. Example (12’b) indicates that when *se* is replaced by *ser* ‘to be’, the adjectival complement of *prometer* is an equivalent of an attributive relation.

- (12’) a. **El encuentro prometía apasionante.*
 ‘This meeting promised fascinating’
 b. *El encuentro prometía ser apasionante.*
 ‘The meeting promised to be fascinating’

This is not the case with adjectives of quantity such as *bastante* ‘enough’, in (13a), or *mucho* ‘a lot’ and *demasiado* ‘too much’. These constructions do not admit the middle *se*, nor can they be made to convey an attributive relation (13b).

- (13) a. *El encuentro [*se] prometía bastante.*
 ‘The meeting promised a lot’
 b. *El encuentro prometía [*ser] bastante.*
 ‘This meeting promised to [be/the start of/cause] a lot’

Finally, a construction with an indefinite pronoun such as *algo* ‘something’ or *nada* ‘nothing’, as in (14), evaluates an entity or an event that is already part of the state of affairs. The relation between pronoun and subject is not attributive but resultative, as shown in (14’).

- (14) *...el otro alto y moreno, con dos rendijas en la cara, una nariz aplastada, y un refulgente objeto en la diestra que no promete nada bueno.* (García-Candás, José Manuel. *Encuentro en la Ciudad del Olvido*)
 ‘... the other [was] tall and tanned, with two grooves in his face, a crushed nose, and a glittering object in the right hand which does not promise anything good.’
- (14’) *Un objeto que no promete [??ser/aportar/resultar en] nada bueno.*
 ‘The object that promises to [be/bring/result in] nothing good’

The great variety of adjectival and nominal complements contrasts with the low percentage of infinitival complements and suggests that the grammaticalization of *prometer* has not yet reached the most advanced stage.

1.2.4. Zero complements

With both *amenazar* and *prometer*, imminent future can also be phrased with a zero complement, i.e. without complement at all, as in (15) and (16). Notice that the absolute construction is more frequent with subjective *prometer* (13.5%) than with subjective *amenazar* (5%).

- (15) *[La organización] fue suscrita por los dirigentes políticos para asegurar la unidad del movimiento luterano en un periodo en el que **amenazaban** nuevas guerras religiosas.* (Enciclopedia Encarta: Luteranismo)
'[The organization] was supported by the political leaders in order to assure the unity of the Lutheran movement in a period in which new religion wars loomed ahead.'
- (16) *Otro [proyecto] más reciente, cuyo potencial de vergüenza ajena es aún insondable pero **promete**, se le ha intitulado "Interpretación Auténtica de la Constitución". Hay gente que sin proponérselo presta un gran servicio a la orientación.* (Notic:Perú:Caretas:1429)
'Another more recent [project], whose potential of shame is fathomless but promising, has been given the title "Authentic Interpretation of the Constitution". There are people who without being asked render a real service to the orientation.'

As for *amenazar*, example (15) is different from the preceding ones in that what is expected to happen here is the event expressed by the subject. Importantly, the corpus data illustrate that in such an *amenazar* construction the subject is indefinite. A definite subject of *amenazar* without complement would go against the uncertain evolution typical of this reading. Since the final shape of the event expressed has yet to materialize, the subject cannot be a definite entity or process that is anaphorically referred to. With *prometer*, by contrast, a definite subject is not excluded. The subject entity is often an instantiated thing or process which gives an indication of a potential situation in the future. An adjective of quantity such as *mucho* 'a lot' or a pronominal complement can easily be added to this construction. The possible insertion of modifiers with subjective *prometer* once again shows that *prometer* is less grammaticalized than *amenazar*.

1.3. Summary

My corpus data illustrate that subjective *amenazar* is more grammaticalized than subjective *prometer*. (i) Subjective *amenazar* is more frequent than subjective *prometer* and (ii) combines more often with an infinitival complement. Moreover, (iii) *prometer* is more frequent in the spoken corpus than *amenazar*, which testifies to the ongoing grammaticalization of the former. While the subject of *amenazar* stands for an entity which is part of an ongoing process, the adjectives of quantity, pronouns and absolute constructions with *prometer* suggest that its subject is not embedded in any state of affairs. It remains to be seen whether this means that there are no restrictions on subjective *amenazar*. In the next section, I will go into greater detail about the subject of lexical and subjective *amenazar* and *prometer* constructions with an infinitive.

2. The subject of lexical and subjective *amenazar* and *prometer*

In this section I first deal with the lexical semantics of *prometer* and *amenazar* (2.1.) and then focus on how it affects the subject in subjective constructions (2.2.).

2.1. Lexical semantics

The agentive pattern present in the lexical readings, e.g. (1) and (2), is absent from the constructions with subjective *amenazar* and *prometer*, e.g. (3) and (4). In a subjective reading, subjects such as *invierno* ‘winter’, in (3), and *encuentro* ‘meeting’, in (4), do not bear any commitment to the event expressed in the infinitive, while in the lexical reading *autoridades del Partido Comunista* ‘officials of the Communist Party’ and *Movimiento Bolivia Libre* ‘Free Bolivia Movement’ obviously have a commitment relation with the event expressed in the infinitive.

Yet the relation between the subject and the event denoted by the infinitival complement is different in *prometer* and *amenazar*. The subject of lexical *prometer* is a central, exclusively human or human-like entity, which usually assumes responsibility for the accomplishment of the promised event, and present it to a *promisee*.⁵ The subject or *addresser* of lexical *amenazar*, by contrast, behaves in a different way. A subject such as the political party *Movimiento Bolivia Libre* ‘Free Bolivia Movement’ in (2) is not as committed as the one of lexical *prometer*. The verb *amenazar* usually introduces an action which is not undertaken for its own sake, but attempts to achieve something else. For example, in (2), the MBL party puts pressure on other coalition partners in order to make that its political claims come true. The *addresser* only proceeds to the realization of the threat when the requirements expressed, e.g. to vote the budget, are not fulfilled. When the threat is not materialized, the outcome is usually positive for the *addressee*. Furthermore, unlike *prometer*, there are many examples of *amenazar* in which the *addressee* is not overtly encoded or even completely lacking, which entails lower agentivity.

2.2. The subject of subjective *prometer* and *amenazar*

In this section I analyze to what extent the above presented lexical patterns impose restrictions on the subject of subjective *prometer* and *amenazar*. Concretely, I want to determine which characteristics of the subject prevent *amenazar* and *prometer* from yielding a subjective reading. This section is organized as follows. I first present the working hypothesis and comment on the methodology (2.2.1.). I then give a general overview of the subjects attested with *amenazar* and *prometer* (2.2.2.). After this general presentation, the subjects of subjective *amenazar* (2.2.3.) and those of subjective *prometer* (2.2.4.) are discussed.

⁵ The commitment of the subject does not necessarily mean that there is a 100% guarantee that this realization ultimately takes place. The *promisor* can lie with malice aforethought or change his/her ideas about the promised action. For example, the communist officials in (1) may promise something hoping that the political storm calms down. Notwithstanding this possibility, one expects that a human being ideally tends to hold his/her promise. When one knows (s)he is not in a position to comply with the promise, it is socially preferred that no promise is made. Hence, when a promise is not held, the would-be *promisor* displays socially unacceptable behavior, while the *promisee* feels cheated. Starting from the assumption that communication is originally and intentionally positive for the community, a promise is, thus, by default expected to be accomplished by a committed subject.

2.2.1. Hypothesis and methodology

Ruwet (1983) shows that for “raising” verbs to yield a subjective reading, their subjects often undergo selection restrictions. The hypothesis is that subjective *amenazar* and *prometer* are restricted, but that, due to the lexical semantics, the subject of subjective *prometer* is submitted to more restrictions than that of subjective *amenazar*. If this hypothesis is true, it refines Langacker’s claim concerning full attenuation. The semantic description of the subject carried out in the next section is based on Delbecque’s (2003:383) classification of the subject and the oblique entity in passives, differentiating between 9 semantic categories, here reprinted in Table 5.

1. Individual or person [ind].	<i>O. Paz, presidente</i> ‘president’
2. Concrete object [obj]	<i>cedro</i> ‘cedar’, <i>dinero</i> ‘money’
3. Event, action, process [proc]	<i>crimen</i> ‘crime’, <i>reparto</i> ‘distribution’, <i>guerra</i> ‘war’, <i>intento</i> ‘intention’
4. State of affairs [soa]	<i>bienestar</i> ‘welfare’, <i>hecho</i> ‘fact’, <i>situación</i> ‘situation’, <i>coyuntura</i> ‘economic climate’
5. Concept, notion, idea [not]	<i>tema</i> ‘theme’, <i>condición</i> ‘condition’
6. Place, spatial entity [loc]	<i>Buenos Aires</i> , <i>Occidente</i> ‘Occident’, <i>celda</i> ‘cell’, <i>isla</i> ‘island’, <i>puerto</i> ‘port’
7. Semiotic entity [sem]	<i>texto</i> ‘text’, <i>libro</i> ‘book’, <i>debate</i> ‘debate’, <i>código</i> ‘code’, <i>película</i> ‘film’
8. Collective entity [col]	<i>Institución</i> ‘institution’, <i>grupo</i> ‘group’, <i>comunidad</i> ‘community’, <i>Nación</i> ‘Nation’
9. State of mind [mind]	<i>emoción</i> ‘emotion’, <i>nostalgia</i> ‘nostalgia’, <i>certeza</i> ‘certainty’, <i>esperanza</i> ‘hope’

Table 5. Classification of the subject

I have applied this classification to the corpus data of *amenazar* and *prometer*. For the sake of completeness, I have added the “zero” subject type, which corresponds to constructions without an explicit subject.

2.2.2. General distribution

The figures presented in Table 6 confirm that the most common subject of *prometer* is a person or an animate individual (54%). Since the group of “zero” subjects (31.27%) mostly refer to individuals, the amount of animate individuals may still be higher. By contrast, the percentage of human subjects with *amenazar* is lower: almost 30% of *amenazar*’s subjects are animate, and 24% of the subjects remain implicit. Moreover, unlike *prometer*, concrete objects, collective nouns, states of affairs and processes together constitute about 40% of all subjects with lexical *amenazar*.

Subjects	<i>amenazar</i>	%	<i>prometer</i>	%
1. Individual	218	29.38	534	54.21
2. Concrete object	84	11.32	27	2.74
3. Process	68	9.16	25	2.54
4. State of affairs	81	10.92	11	1.12
5. Notion	10	1.35	6	0.61
6. Location	19	2.56	6	0.61
7. Semiotic	14	1.89	15	1.52
8. Collective	6	0.81	16	1.62
9. Mind	10	1.35	1	0.10
Zero ⁶	181	24.39	308	31.27
	741	100	985	100

Table 6. Semantic classification of the subject

In the subsections below, I will connect this information to the analysis of the subjects of the subjective constructions. Since agentive patterns in the subject can be activated by agentive infinitives, I deal with the subjects in combination with the types of infinitive that follow subjective *amenazar* and *prometer*.⁷

2.2.3. Subjects of subjective *amenazar*

All types of subjects are possible with subjective *amenazar*, as shown in Table 7. The table most clearly confirms that processes, states of affairs and objects occupy the most prominent position among the subjects of subjective *amenazar*. However, although individuals and collective entities are not frequent at all, they are by no means excluded.

Subject	action	change of state	attri- bution	aspect	Total	%
1. Individual	3				3	2.42
2. Object	22	16		1	39	31.45
3. Process	18	14	1	1	34	27.42
4. State of affairs	7	17	1		25	20.16
5. Notion	2			1	3	2.42
6. Location		3	1		4	3.23
7. Semiotic	1	2		1	4	3.23
8. Collective	3	1	1		5	4.03
9. Mind	3				3	2.42
Zero	2	2			4	3.23
					124	100

Table 7. Subjects of subjective *amenazar*

⁶ The label “Zero” refers to those subjects which remain implicit, i.e. are limited to the person marking expressed in the verbal morphology.

⁷ In Cornillie (2004a:19-23) I have subdivided the infinitival complements of *prometer* and *amenazar* into the four semantic groups: action verbs (with an agent), aspectual verbs, attributive verbs and change-of-state verbs (without an agent).

2.2.3.1. Non-human subjects

The figures presented in Table 7 bring to the fore that with subjective *amenazar* action or change-of-state infinitives have most frequently subjects expressing a concrete object (17), a process (18), or a state of affairs (19). Such subjects do not activate agentivity in the construction.

- (17) *Los neumáticos se enterraban en el fango, pero Santana se las agenciaba para sacarlas y seguir. Los arbustos espinosos **amenazaban con detener** su guagua, pero que va: Santana era un chofer de mucha experiencia.* (de la Paz, Jorge Luis. *La guagua*)
‘The tires sank in the mud, but Santana managed to pull them out and to go on. The prickly bushes **threatened** to stop his car, but not so. Santana was a very experienced driver’
- (18) *El importante encuentro **amenaza ser** ensombrecido por medidas de presión de varios sectores, por lo que el gobierno dispuso la intervención de las Fuerzas Armadas.* (Notic: Bolivia:ERBOL:04/15/96)
‘The important meeting **threatens** to be overshadowed by pressure measures from several sectors, as a consequence, the government ordered the intervention of the Armed Forces’
- (19) *Eso, unido a la escasez crónica del fluido eléctrico y a las esporádicas interrupciones en el suministro de agua, **amenazan con acabar** con la paciencia de los ciudadanos.* (Notic:Col:Semana:820)
‘This, together with the chronic scarcity of electric power and with the sporadic interruptions in the water supply, **threaten** to consume the patience of the citizens’

In (19), the lack of agentive pattern in state-of-affairs subjects such as *escasez* ‘scarcity’ and *interrupciones* ‘interruptions’ annuls any potential agentive relation between the subject and the infinitival complement *acabar con* ‘to make an end to’.

2.2.3.2. Human subjects

The group of human and humanate subjects ranges from individuals to less individual entities. I first discuss the subjects denoting individual persons. In (20), the subject *niños indisciplinados* ‘undisciplined children’ does not include intentional commitment to the change of state complement *convertirse en delincuentes* ‘becoming delinquents’, which is not agentive at all.

- (20) *El director tiende a ver en aquéllos a un grupo de niños indisciplinados que **amenazan convertirse** en delincuentes juveniles.* (Notic:Arg:Cronista:645_LA)
‘The director tends to see them as a group of undisciplined children that **threaten** to become young delinquents’

In other words, subjective *amenazar* does not conflict with possible intentionality. In (21), for example, *aquellos* ‘those people’ refer to the mighty, who do not physically threaten to annihilate the world, but only do so in the subjective interpretation of the speaker. Although the powerful people certainly can annihilate the world, one does not expect that they have any interest in doing so.

- (21) ... *tenemos frente a ese colosal imperio y la infinita fuerza que poseen aquellos que están haciendo retroceder al mundo y **amenazan con** llevarlo al exterminio, cuyas ideas, cuyos conceptos y cuyas mentiras hay que destruir.* (Fidel Castro. 03/07/98)
'... we have in front of us a gigantic empire and the infinite force in the hand of those who are deteriorating the world and **threaten** to bring it to an end, whose ideas, whose concepts and whose lies should be destroyed'

The same happens in (22), where the speaker or the central figure is involved in a human mass. Although it is formed by human beings, the mass itself is not viewed as an intentional entity undertaking any action.

- (22) *Me dispuse a satisfacer su pedido, mientras luchaba -con mayor o menor éxito- contra la marea humana que **amenazaba aplastarme** (mi finalidad no era de ningún modo morir por asfixia, como en los terribles ómnibus alemanes de exterminio).* (González Real, Osvaldo. *Anticipación y reflexión*)
'I was ready to meet his request, while I was struggling --more or less successfully-- against the human sea that **threatened** to crush me (my objective was by no means to die from suffocation, as in the terrible German extermination coaches)'

Finally, there are also institutions with a humanate component, e.g. (23), where the subject implies an agent running the complex management of these institutions. Although these agents can display intentional commitment to the accomplishment of the infinitival process, they do not automatically render a lexical reading of *amenazar*.

- (23) *El retraso agita más todavía el pugilato político entre las diversas instituciones que componen el Consorcio Madrid Capital Cultural, y que **amenazan con quebrar** la celebración. Los ciudadanos serán, como siempre, al final, los únicos perjudicados.* (Bravo, Julio. *Abc*)
'The delay increases even more the political fight between the different institutions that form the Madrid Capital Cultural Consortium, and that **threaten** to crack the celebration. In the end the citizens will, like always, be the only victims'

There are two possible readings of *amenazan con quebrar* in (23). On the one hand, the subject of the *amenazar* construction can be understood as emitting a real threat. In this case, the delay leads those responsible for the institutions to seriously consider annulling the celebration. The combination of the humanate collective entity *instituciones* and the highly agentive action verb *quebrar la celebración* 'to crack the celebration' makes the lexical reading possible. On the other hand, the focus on the delay and the subsequent political problems entail that the behavior of the different institutions may disturb the celebration. This implies that the celebration itself will take place. In other words, a subjective reading is not excluded.

Note that this double reading might be favored by the specific position of *amenazar* in the relative clause which is preceded by the conjunction *y* 'and'. By contrast, in (24a) the finite form of *amenazar* in the main clause almost directly boils down to imposing a lexical reading to the institutions' threat.

- (24) a. *Las diversas instituciones que componen el Consorcio Madrid Capital Cultural **amenazan con quebrar** la celebración.*
'The different institutions that form the Madrid Capital Cultural Consortium threaten to crack the celebration'

b. *El retraso y el pugilato político entre las diversas instituciones que componen el Consorcio Madrid Capital Cultural amenazan con quebrar la celebración.*

‘The delay and the political fight between the different institutions that form the Madrid Capital Cultural consortium threaten to crack the celebration’

The non-humanate subjects *el retraso* ‘the delay’ and *el pugilato político* ‘the political fight’ do not block a subjective reading in the main clause in (24b).⁸

2.2.3.3. Summary

The low agentivity of lexical *amenazar* makes that a subject of a subjective construction only faces few restrictions. However, the interpretive vacillation between a lexical and a subjective reading in certain cases shows that *amenazar* prefers subjects that denote concrete objects, states of affairs and processes to human individuals. Thus, the most common subjects do not enhance potential agentivity. This does not mean, however, that *amenazar* precludes human subjects, but illustrates that the intentions of the subjects experience attenuation from the lexical reading to the subjective one (See section 3). Let us now look at the subjects of subjective *prometer*.

2.2.4. Subjects of *prometer*

The corpus data in Table 8 show that subjective *prometer*, in contrast to *amenazar*, does not have subjects that denote individuals (nor locations), while collective subjects are possible, though not frequent.

	Subject of <i>prometer</i>	action	change of state	attribution	aspect	Total	%
1.	Individual					0	0.00
2.	Object	1	3	4	1	9	26.47
3.	Process	4		6		10	29.41
4.	State of affairs			2		2	5.88
5.	Notion	2		4	1	7	20.59
6.	Location					0	0.00
7.	Semiotic	1		1		2	5.88
8.	Collective	1	1			2	5.88
9.	Mind				1	1	2.94
	None		1			1	2.94
						34	100

Table 8. Subjects of subjective *prometer*

Table 8 indicates that the bulk of the subjects with *prometer* refer to processes, objects and notions (day, month and season), as *invierno* ‘winter’. Furthermore, this table shows that action verbs prefer processes to individuals, objects or collective nouns. The attributive predicates, which do not involve any action at all, combine with all kinds of subject types. This distribution emphasizes that the combination with specific infinitives downplays the

⁸ Vliegen (2001) states that with Dutch and German *dreigen/drohen* ‘to threaten’ the typically weak commitment of the subject in the lexical reading explains why the majority of the subjects in evidential readings are animate. My analysis does not confirm this observation for Spanish. Although the commitment and agentivity of *amenazar*’s subjects is certainly reduced, the animate subjects of *amenazar* bearing potential agentivity are not at all frequent.

potential agentivity of the subject. These corpus data seem to corroborate the hypothesis that agentive subjects do not favor a subjective reading of *prometer*. In the following sections I detail this distribution.

2.2.4.1. Collective nouns

Although human individuals do not figure among the subjects of subjective *prometer*, the corpus contains a couple of collective nouns in which human beings are involved such as *operadores de larga distancia* ‘long distance operators’. In (25), the operators will become the biggest advertising investors on the market; yet, they do not make any promise themselves.

- (25) *Los operadores de larga distancia **prometen convertirse** en los mayores inversionistas publicitarios pues el ejemplo de otros países contempla una inversión entre 15 y 30 por ciento.* (Notic:Col:Semana:840)
 ‘The long distance operators **promise** to become the biggest advertising investors because the example of other countries points to an inversion between 15 and 30 %’

In (26), the subject *ronda* ‘round/turn’ refers to a kind of temporal and physical organization with a specific aim, e.g. delivering services or security; *ronda* can thus be understood as a group of persons and may convey intentional commitment to avoid major problems. Since no agentivity emanates from the *rondas* in the present example, *prometer* can render a subjective reading.

- (26) *En enero de 1994, 76 familias regresaron a Purus. Aquí han reconstruido su comunidad y se han organizado en rondas que **prometen mantener** alejados a los terroristas de su pueblo.* (Notic:Perú:Caretas:1433)
 ‘In January 1994, 76 families returned to Purus. Here they reconstructed their community and they have organized themselves in rounds which **promise** to keep at distance the terrorists of their village’

Other subjects are more clearly a product of human beings. *El remake* in (27), for example, obviously needs a producer, mentioned here: Umberto Polar. It is, thus, to be determined whether the act of *recuperar la armonía* ‘to recover the harmony’ reflects an intention of the producer or a mere by-product of the remake perceived by the speaker. Given the descriptive subclause at the end of the example, the reading tends to be subjective. However, more information about Umberto Polar’s plans could alter this tendency and yield a lexical “promise” reading, instead.

- (27) *Se grabó en Buenos Aires pero se urdió desde Lima. El remake producido por Umberto Polar para el 5, **promete recuperar** la armonía de ese barrio protagónico que fue el primero en figurar en un melodrama.* (Notic:Perú:Caretas: 1431)
 ‘It was recorded in Buenos Aires but it was planned from Lima. The remake produced by Umberto Polar for the 5, **promises** to recover the harmony of this prominent barrio which was the first to be used in a melodrama’

In contrast to the lack of knowledge about the agent’s plans in (27), in (28) it is explicitly mentioned that the infinitival process will probably be realized *a través de los últimos avances tecnológicos* ‘through the latest technological advances’. The means are thus specified. Moreover, the subject *cinetismo* refers to an artistic movement, which is

naturally constituted by producers. However, since it is hard to pin down the responsibility of this movement to a couple of agents, *prometer* does not directly entail an agentive lexical reading.

- (28) *Otros artistas de nuestro continente muestran que el cinetismo no ha agotado aún todas sus posibilidades y promete a través de los últimos avances tecnológicos llevar todavía más lejos sus originales propuestas visuales.* (González Real, Osvaldo. *Anticipación y reflexión*)
'Other artists from our continent show that the "cinetismo" movement has not yet exploited all its possibilities and promises to further develop its original visual proposals through the latest technological advances'

The example (28) shows that knowledge about the plans of the artistic movement does directly lead to a lexical reading. In other words, the combination of responsibility and agentivity appears to be the most central element of the lexical reading. It is important to stress that, since agentivity itself is not sufficient, the two dimensions have to be combined, as shown in (29). In the example below, the agentive infinitive *repetir* 'to repeat' is the subject. Interestingly, the subjective reading is still possible since there is no intention attached to the act of repeating the allusions.

- (29) *Al fin, risueño a su turno, interrogó: -¿Alguna picardía murmuraba esta mala lengua? Como repetir las alusiones prometiera remover el escándalo, Felipe Toledo intervino: -Basta, que no viene.* (Barrios, Eduardo. *Gran señor y rajadiablos*)
'Finally, smiling at his turn, he interrogated: some slyness mumbled this gossip? As if repeating these allusions *promised* to take away the row, Felipe Toledo, intervened: -It is alright, he will not come'

The above-mentioned differences have shown a complex interplay of different elements that co-determine whether *prometer* yields a subjective or a lexical reading. For the humanate subjects, intention, agentivity and responsibility are the most important ones. The analysis is in line with the observation that the shift from lexical to subjective readings in *promise*-like verbs is blocked when the verb combines with a humanate subject that is directly associated with agentivity and responsibility. Intention has proved to be less important than the former two qualifications.

2.2.4.2. Human subjects

In this subsection, I address the impact of human subjects on the readings of *prometer*. Vliegen (2001) assumes that an "epistemic" construction with *promise/beloven/versprechen* is blocked when its subject is "capable of intentional action". Even if the subject is not a concrete agent, strong intention, Vliegen (2001) argues, makes a subjective reading of *prometer* impossible. In this context, Vliegen mentions that in German and Dutch a *prometer* construction invoking an experiencer is "practically excluded in the epistemic reading". I reprint his examples in (30).

- (30) a. *Eva verspricht den Tag zu geniessen.* (from Vliegen 2001)
b. *Eva belooft van de dag te genieten.* (from Vliegen 2001)
'Eva *promises* to enjoy the day'

Although such subjects are absent in the corpus, I argue for a more gradual shift from lexical to subjective readings in Spanish. The subject of subjective *prometer* does not

seem to follow the same restrictions of *versprechen/beloven*. In the Internet example (31), an animate subject, i.e. the girl Ana, with *aprovechar* ‘to enjoy/exploit’, i.e. an infinitive equivalent to the Dutch and German ones in (30), does not block a subjective reading. The girl Ana will probably go to Buenos Aires to have a tango course and does not necessarily promise herself to enjoy the opportunities of Buenos Aires.

- (31) *Alguien le pregunta a Ana si baila tango. Mientras contesta que “solo un poco”, se va poniendo de pie: baila. Baila con gracia, erguida, con estampa, atenta, con el codo derecho un poco levantado y tratando de no mover la cabeza como en la salsa. Promete aprovechar la oportunidad que brinda Buenos Aires de aprender a bailar tango.*
[\(http://protagonistas.terra.com.co/protagonistas2/dia_a_dia/22-07-2003/nota98653.html\)](http://protagonistas.terra.com.co/protagonistas2/dia_a_dia/22-07-2003/nota98653.html)
 ‘Someone asks Ana if she dances tango. While she answers “only a little”, she stands up: she can dance. She dances elegantly, upright, with rhythm, attentive, with the right elbow a little bit in the air and trying not to move the head as in salsa. She *promises* to make the most of the opportunity that Buenos Aires gives [her] to learn dancing tango’

Yet, in (31), the volition or agentivity of the human individual may simply be less prominent due to the fact that the subject *Ana* is not explicitly mentioned in the utterance (Gergel p.c.). This means that lexically elaborate animate subjects are expected to appear less often in subjective readings of *prometer* with a human subject and an agentive infinitive. When the explicit subject *Ana* is added, e.g. (32), the subjective reading indeed becomes less acceptable. The intention of taking the opportunity to learn tango strengthens the tendency towards a lexical reading.

- (32) *Baila con gracia, erguida, con estampa, atenta, con el codo derecho un poco levantado y tratando de no mover la cabeza como en la salsa. Ana promete aprovechar la oportunidad que brinda Buenos Aires de aprender a bailar tango.*
 ‘She dances elegantly, upright, with rhythm, attentive, with the right elbow a little bit in the air and trying not to move the head as in salsa. Ana *promises* to make the most of the opportunity that Buenos Aires gives [her] to learn dancing tango’

Interestingly, the infinitival complement *aprovechar la oportunidad* ‘make the most of the opportunity’ can only be associated with a human being. Nevertheless, without explicit subject, *prometer* can yield a subjective reading when it combines with this complement. This is rather surprising, since the subjective reading of *prometer* is usually absent in constructions with an agentive infinitive which lack an overt subject, as shown for *salir enseguida* ‘to leave/come out immediately’ in (33). In (33a), there is no indication that a subjective reading of the person’s leaving might correspond to the intention of the speaker, while in (33b) the *prometer* construction referring to the release of the book can only be subjective.

- (33) a. [**Promete/amenaza con**] *salir enseguida*.
 ‘(s)he *promises/threatens* to leave immediately’
 b. *El libro promete salir enseguida*.
 ‘The book *promises* to come out immediately’

As shown before, *prometer* can most easily background the agentivity of the human subject when the infinitive does not stand for an action or a change of state. This is clearly the case in sentences like (34), in which *prometer* combines with a copular complement.

- (34) *Emilio Antonio es un talento musical que **promete ser** un gran artista en el futuro.*
'Emilio Antonio is a musical talent who **promises** to be a great artist in the future'

Emilio Antonio is not susceptible of interfering in the *prometer* construction, although logically speaking, he certainly could. Although Emilio Antonio will no doubt have the intention to become a great artist, in this kind of utterances, the future dimension does not lead to a lexical reading. An infinitive like *debatir* 'to debate', e.g. (35), by contrast, cannot readily yield a subjective reading.

- (35) *En sesión adelantada por el 9 de Julio, los ediles **prometen debatir** esta tarde un dictamen elaborado por las comisiones de Planeamiento Urbano, Ecología y Vivienda.*
(Notic:Arg:Cronista:669_ELCO)
'In the advanced session instead of July 9th, the councillors **promise** to debate this afternoon a proposal worked-out by the Urban Planning, Ecology and Housing commissions.'

The construction with *los ediles* 'the councillors' is generally considered agentive and, hence, does not lead to a subjective reading. However, the temporal marker *en sesión adelantada por el 9 de Julio* 'in the advanced session instead of July 9th' establishes a positive horizon of expectations regarding the accomplishment of the infinitive that pave the way for a subjective reading. In such a construction, the induced evidence of probable realization of the event expressed can background the impact of the animate subject, which is a basis for a future subjective reading.

2.2.3.3. Summary

The hypothesis proposed at the beginning of this section is confirmed for *prometer* to a large extent. The agentive patterns of the lexical reading have an impact on the subjective reading of constructions with human or humanate subjects. However, I have shown that the "intention of commitment" is sometimes less constraining than argued by Vliegen (2001). This may illustrate that subjective *prometer* is undergoing further subjectification.

2.3. Conclusions

The lexical semantics of *prometer* and *amenazar* differ to the extent that the subject of the former verb implies commitment whereas the subject of the latter one refers the commitment to the explicit or the implicit addressee. Since in the lexical reading it is exclusively human individuals that can be committed to a promise, the subjective reading of *prometer* does not often accept animate subjects. By contrast, *amenazar* turns out to be less influenced by agentive patterns. Illustrative of this is the possibility of having a subjective reading with a human subject and an agentive infinitive. One can thus conclude that, as far as the attenuation of agentivity is concerned, *amenazar* is more advanced than *prometer*. In the next section, I further underpin this attenuation theoretically.

3. Attenuation and subjectification

In this section, I apply Langacker's concept of subjectification to subjective *amenazar* and *prometer*. In (3.1.), I discuss the link between attenuation and subjectification. Then, I propose a different attenuation account for *amenazar* and *prometer* (3.2.).

3.1. Attenuation

According to Langacker (2000:301), attenuation of a linguistic expression can be observed with respect to at least the following four parameters: (1) change of status (actual or potential), (2) change of focus (particular elements as focus of attention, profile), (3) shift in *domain* (physical interaction > social or experiential one), (4) change in *locus of activity* or *potency* (from a focused onstage participant to an offstage one, the addressee). Since the paper mainly deals with agentivity, I only discuss the change of focus (1) and the *locus of potency* (4) of the “objective” and “subjective” readings of *prometer* and *amenazar* below.⁹

Langacker clearly establishes a correlation between the attenuation of the subject control, the raising construction and the transparency of the verb. By doing so, the attenuation of the thematic structure goes in the direction of certain generative accounts of the link between raising and non-lexical readings (see Rooryck 2000:44-47).¹⁰ However, the nominal, adjectival and pronominal complements of *prometer* discussed in Section (2.) indicate that the grammaticalization chain contains a series of other constructions which refine the necessary correspondence between epistemic values and syntactic verb raising (cf. Traugott 1997:191).

Attenuation is to be seen as a dimension of the subjectification that *prometer* and *amenazar* undergo. Langacker (1995,2000) mentions *promise* and *threaten* in the same context and thereby seems to suggest that one can give the same account for both verbs. However, since I have stressed the differences between *amenazar* and *prometer* throughout this paper, it is to be expected that the attenuation and subjectification also differ. Below I show that the Spanish verbs need a different account.

3.2. Subjectification of *amenazar* and *prometer*

The subjectification of *amenazar* and *prometer* boils down to the shift from an objective construal of the scene to a subjective construal of the relation expressed by these verbs. An analysis of *prometer* within Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar framework goes as follows: the act of promising expressed in lexical *prometer* functions as a trajector, and the accomplishment of this promise is the landmark. The intention of the subject is seen as potency directed toward realizing the event expressed in the infinitive. The conceptualizer traces a mental path from the trajector to the landmark, which situates the promised infinitival process “downstream in the flow of time relative to some reference point” (Langacker 2000:302).

Importantly, in Langacker’s view the trajector of subjective *prometer* does not change with respect to that of objective *prometer*. What is different from the objective scene is the *profile* and the *locus of potency* associated with this trajector. With subjective *prometer*, the trajector has a diminished role in the profiled relationship, since the landmark event, i.e. the infinitival process, is profiled. Moreover, attenuation involves a realignment of the *locus of potency* from the finite verb’s subject to the speaker. This process is the subjectification of the objective construal.

⁹ In this section, I use “objective” and “subjective” in a Langackerian way, i.e. referring to an objective scene or construing the normally objective path subjectively.

¹⁰ “Verbs which ‘lose’ their canonical thematic structure to function as raising verbs receive a meaning which combines temporal properties with epistemic modality”. (Rooryck 2000:45)

This version of subjectification in terms of gradual attenuation does not conflict with diachronic evidence on the *prometer* constructions with personification in the 15th and the 16th century (cf. Cornillie 2004b, chap 10). I give a few diachronic examples below.

- (36) ... pues si con igual hazañaqual sin dubda todo ombre podra fazer sacudiendo de si malas aficiones: & pensamientos torpes que al principio **prometen** dulçura & ala fin paren tristeza & difamia. (Fernando del Pulgar. *Claros varones de Castilla*. 1500)
'... well if with such a heroic deed without doubt everyone will be able to shake out vices and awkward thoughts that at first **promise** sweetness but in the end seem like sadness and a bad name'

The relation between the subjects *malas aficiones* 'vices' and *pensamientos* 'thoughts' and the finite verb in (36) is already attenuated, since the subjects do not involve intention or volition but indicate that they present themselves as sweet or nice. The experiencer is diffuse: the subject of the preceding clause *todo ombre* 'everyone' can but need not be the experiencer. However, in a construction such as in (36), there is still some potency in the trajector/subject and, hence, the landmark does not receive the exclusive profile. With the infinitival construction in (37), by contrast, the locus of potency is realigned from the subject to the speaker. The infinitival landmark process is profiled and receives all attention.

- (37) *La muestra, que promete ser apasionante, empieza en el XIX, con el alemán Leibl o el norteamericano Eakins, Maillol, Ensor, Munch, Khnopff y otros simbolistas.* (Notic:España:ABC)
'The exposition, that **promises** to be fascinating, begins in the 19th century, with the German Leibl or the North-American Eakins, Maillol, Ensor, Munch, Khnopff and other symbolists'

Importantly, the realignment of the locus of potency from the subject to the speaker is not an easy step to make for a verb like *prometer* which most often combines with potency-driven human subjects involved in speaker - hearer communication.

As for *amenazar*, although the process of attenuation certainly holds, the trajector - landmark relation may be different. As said in Section 2., the intention (the trajector) of *amenazar* + infinitive is directed at change in the addressee/participant. Thus, the realization of the infinitival process is not the final landmark, but a focus of attention between the trajector and the landmark of *amenazar*, as opposed to the direct trajector - landmark relation with *prometer*. The real landmark of *amenazar* is then the process intended with the threat.

In constructions in which *amenazar*'s addressee is not present, the complement can become the landmark. The lack of interlocutor makes that in such a construction the potency of the subject is less crucial and becomes more 'diffuse'. Moreover, since such a subject is less profiled, a construction without addressee paves the way for a more subjective reading. In the first occurrences of subjective *amenazar* the absence of the interlocutor/participant reduces the potency of the subject, as with *crisis* in (38).

- (38) ... & la crisis siempre sospecharas que siempre **amenaza** de recayda. (Bernardo de Gordonio. Anonymous translation. *Prognostica. Las pronósticas*. 1495)
'... and the crisis you will always suspect that it always **threatens** with regression'

In the infinitival construction in (39), *el diente* 'the tooth' is not the locus of potency since

it does not stand for any threat. However, the locus of potency cannot unambiguously be linked with the speaker either, but is more ‘diffuse’.

- (39) ... *desçeca & consume los humores podridos que corrompen las rayzes de los dientes & las enzias. refirma el diente que se anda & amenaza de se caer.* (*Propiedades de las cosas*. Toulouse. 1494)
 ‘dissect and deplete the rotten pieces that corrupt the roots of the teeth and molars. Repair the tooth that moves and *threatens* to fall’

Just like in the case of *prometer*, the attenuation of the potency makes that the infinitival process is the most profiled element of the construction. Importantly, the diffuseness of the potency with *amenazar* makes the shift to a subjective reading more easy.

3.4. Summary

In the subjective construal of *prometer*, the locus of potency should be associated with the speaker at its extreme point, while with *amenazar* the potency need not be fully associated with the speaker but becomes more diffuse. Hence, although *amenazar* does not witness full attenuation, the verb easily renders a subjective construal. With *prometer*, by contrast, the locus of potency cannot remain in the construction, in that it would coincide with the control of the subject. The attenuation of *prometer* is slower, since the shift to the speaker is conditioned by agentive patterns.

4. Diatopical variation

Although the *Corpus del español* is not the most appropriate tool for an in-depth investigation into the diatopical variation of subjective *amenazar* and *prometer*, I will attempt to sketch some general tendencies of the use of these constructions in the Spanish-speaking world.¹¹ The hypothesis is that the frequency of subjective readings differs from one region to another. Table 9 first gives us an idea of the origin of the data used in this paper.

<i>amenazar</i>	Subjective	%	Lexical	%
Spain	37	26.24	180	30
Paraguay	48	34.04	120	20
Bolivia	4	2.84	68	11.33
Argentina	9	6.38	51	8.50
Cuba	8	5.67	41	6.83
Mexico	10	7.09	37	6.17
Chile	9	6.38	29	4.83
Others ¹²	16	11.35	74	12.33
	141	100	600	100

Table 9: *Amenazar* in the Corpus del español

¹¹ Although many texts of the extensive corpus offer hyperlinks to author pages with bibliographical information or mention the country source --as in the case of the spoken and journalistic data--, there is no reference to the extension of subcorpora such as *Noticias*, for example. Since the only figure we have at our disposal is the general size of the three types of discourse, an exact calculation of the distribution in terms of regional differences remains impossible.

¹² S: Subjective/L: Lexical: Peru S:0/L:36; Colombia S:12/L:16, Venezuela S:1/L:9, Dominican Republic S:0/L:5, Puerto Rico S:1/L:2, Guatemala S:2/L:3, Uruguay: S:0/L:2.

From a comparison of the figures in Table 9 we learn that in European Spanish lexical *amenazar* (30%) is proportionally more frequent than its subjective counterpart (26.2%). Interestingly, subjective *amenazar* is far more frequent in Paraguayan Spanish (S:34%/L:20%), while it is less frequent in Bolivian Spanish (S:2.8%/L:11.3). Table 10 shows that there are less diatopical differences between subjective and lexical *prometer* constructions.

<i>Prometer</i>	Subjective	%	Lexical	%
Paraguay	20	24.69	240	26.55
Spain	18	22.22	210	23.23
Argentina	8	9.88	122	13.50
Chile	9	11.11	69	7.63
Mexico	7	8.64	51	5.64
Others ¹³	19	23.46	212	23.45
	81	100	904	100

Table 10: *Prometer* in Corpus del español

Since this study is concerned with the ongoing process of subjectification, Tables 11 and 12 give an overview of the lexical and the subjective readings with infinitival complements. Table 11 shows that three fourths of the Colombian examples and more than 60 % of the Paraguayan examples of *amenazar* are subjective, while the readings of peninsular Spanish, Mexican, Chilean, Argentinian and Cuban examples are subjective in around 50 % of the cases. Moreover, the quasi-absence of subjective *amenazar* in Bolivian and Peruvian examples is striking.

<i>Amenazar</i> with infinitive	Lexical readings			Subjective readings			Total	%
	Lit	Oral	text	lit	Oral	text		
Paraguay	29			47			76	29.12
Spain	1	10	20	8	2	16	57	21.84
Bolivia			29			4	33	12.64
Mexico	10	2		9			21	8.05
Chile	7	1		9			17	6.51
Argentina	4	2		3	2	4	15	5.75
Colombia	2		1	5		5	13	4.98
Cuba		1	6	1	4	1	13	4.98
Peru	6		3				9	3.45
							-	-
							261	100

Table 11. *Amenazar* with infinitival complement

Table 12 shows that for *prometer* the picture is rather different. Subjective readings in Paraguayan and peninsular Spanish texts make up some 10 % of the lexical readings. In countries such as Argentina and Mexico the direct shift from lexical to subjective

¹³ S: Subjective/L: Lexical: Peru S:8/L:40; Colombia S:7/L:39, Bolivia S:1/L:42, Cuba S:1/L:31, Venezuela S:1/L:11, Dominican Republic S:0/L:11, Uruguay S:0/L:10, United States S:1/L:6, unknown S:0/L:6, Puerto Rico S:0/L:6, Guatemala S:0/L:4, Costa Rica S:0/L:3, Panama S:0/L:3.

prometer seems to be very infrequent. Interestingly, for Bolivia, we do not have any example of subjective *prometer*.

<i>prometer</i> with infinitive	Lexical readings			Subjective readings				total	%
	lit	oral	Text	lit	oral	text			
Paraguay	94	1		8	2		105	30.43	
Spain	11	25	24		1	5	66	19.13	
Argentina	19	8	5	1			33	9.57	
Chile	23	5		4	1		33	9.57	
Colombia	17		2			4	23	6.67	
Mexico	16	4		2			22	6.38	
Peru	9		7			4	20	5.80	
Bolivia	1	1	17				19	5.51	
							-	-	
							345	100	

Table 12: *Prometer* with infinitival complement

Furthermore, geographically labelled corpus data also facilitate the study of specific linguistic alternations such as the presence/absence of the preposition *con* ‘with’, e.g. the *amenazar* example in (2) and (4). As shown in Table 13, forty percent of the subjective readings are rendered by constructions without *con*, whereas of all lexical readings with an infinitive, only 10 percent have no preposition.

Amenazar	Subjective		Lexical	
		%		%
con	73	58.87	121	88.32
en	-	-	2	1.46
zero	51	41.13	14	10.22
Total	124	100	137	100

Table 13. *Amenazar* with or without preposition.

The corpus data presented in Table 14 highlight diatopical differences in the distribution of *amenazar* without preposition. For example, although peninsular Spanish *amenazar* is well represented in the corpus only 5% of its subjective readings appear in constructions without *con*. By contrast, *amenazar* without *con* is much more frequent in Latin American Spanish.

Country	Subjective	Lexical	Total
Paraguay	30	6	76
Spain	3		57
Bolivia	2	3	33
Chile	8	1	17
Argentina	4	1	15
Cuba	2		13
Peru		2	9

Table 14: *Amenazar* without *con*

Table 14 shows that constructions without *con* are frequent in countries like Paraguay (47 %), Chile (53 %) and Argentina (33 %). Interestingly, in these South American countries *amenazar* + infinitive yields more often a subjective than a lexical reading (cf. Table 11). Furthermore, Table 14 illustrates that lexical readings are not excluded in constructions of *amenazar* without the preposition *con* ‘with’, e.g. examples from Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru. In this context, note that Mexico and Colombia do not have any example without *con* in the corpus.

In sum, the foregoing analysis of the geographical origin of the corpus data corroborates the hypothesis of diatopical differences in the grammaticalization and subjectification that *amenazar* and *prometer* undergo. The corpus data highlight two types of contrast. There is a striking contrast between the high amount of subjective readings of *amenazar* encountered in Paraguayan and Colombian corpus data vs. the low amount of subjective readings in Bolivian and Peruvian corpus examples. It would seem that, as far as *amenazar* and *prometer* are concerned, the latter variants of Spanish experience less grammaticalization. A further contrast concerns *amenazar* without *con*: peninsular Spanish contrasts with Latin American Spanish in that in the former (1) only a few subjective examples appear in a construction without *con*, and (2) lexical readings in constructions without *con* are completely absent. With respect to the preposition *con*, the Spanish variant witnesses the highest degree of grammaticalization.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, the subjective readings of *prometer* and *amenazar* have been analyzed against the background of their lexical origins. The paper has dealt with the ongoing grammaticalization and subjectification of the two verbs in terms of the distribution of the construction types (Section 1.), the restrictions on the subject (Section 2.), the realignment of the locus of potency (Section 3.) and the diatopical distribution of the subjective readings (Section 4.).

The constructional variation was first discussed on the level of the complements. In Section 1, my corpus data have shown that subjective *amenazar* combines more often with an infinitival complement than subjective *prometer*. This points to a higher degree of grammaticalization with *amenazar* than with *prometer*. This is also reflected in the frequent *prometer* constructions with adjectival and pronominal complements, while these complements do not combine with *amenazar*.

In Section 2, the different status of the subject’s commitment with *prometer* and *amenazar* has been highlighted. It was expected that the commitment associated with human agents by default would block subjective readings of *prometer*, while subjective *amenazar* would show up with animate subjects more easily. The hypothesis is only corroborated for the first assumption. In contrast to the results of previous studies of Dutch and German *threaten*-like verbs, subjective *amenazar* does not often appear with animate subjects. On the other hand, it has been argued that the incompatibility of subjective *prometer* with animate subjects is not as straightforward as it might look like. Since subjective *prometer* readings are possible with covertly expressed animate subjects, gradual attenuation is at stake. This was theoretically underpinned in Section 3.

Section 4 has shown different proportions of subjective and lexical readings from one country to another. It has been shown that subjective readings of *amenazar* + infinitive are

more frequent than lexical ones in South American corpus data from Paraguay, Argentina, Chile, whereas Bolivian and Peruvian data are characterized by the almost complete absence of subjective readings. Furthermore, I have discussed the diatopical variation of *amenazar* with an infinitival complement. The most striking result is that only in a few peninsular Spanish examples subjective *amenazar* appears without *con*, while Latin American examples frequently lack *con*. In some countries, e.g. Bolivia and Peru, even lexical *amenazar* can show up without *con*. The conclusion is that the verbs examined in this paper have undergone more grammaticalization and subjectification in Spain than in Bolivia and Peru.

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