

Religious influences in Spanish diachronic semantic change

Research has shown that language usage is shaped by religious practice (Crystal 1966; Darquennes and Vandebussche 2011; Omoniyi 2010; Omoniyi and Fishman 2006; Sawyer 2001; Sawyer and Simpson 2001; Spolsky 2003). Larger notions of language change have also been linked to religious factors: for example, the translation of sacred texts has been studied as a primary motivator of language standardization and revitalization (Zuloaga and Krajewska 2021), and religion has also been shown to influence language maintenance and language shift (Ding and Goh 2020). However, few research studies have advanced proposals regarding the role of religion, or other sociocultural factors, in diachronic linguistic change at the level of semantics (see Amaral 2021). The present study aims to fill this gap with a historical sociolinguistic analysis of the emergence of an indefinite pronoun ‘anyone’ reading of the Spanish generic noun *cristiano* ‘Christian’, within the [*no haber cristiano que V*] construction, exemplified below in (1).

- (1) *La sopa no había cristiano que la pasara de tanta sal como le echó aquella condenada.*
‘There wasn’t anybody who could eat the soup with all the salt that wretch had put in it.’
(1885-1887; Benito Pérez Galdós, *Fortunata y Jacinta*)

As shown in (1), when the generic noun *cristiano* is placed under the scope of a negated existential *haber* ‘to be’ and modified by a subordinate adjectival clause, an indefinite ‘anyone’ reading is permitted. The present paper argues that sociohistorical changes in the evolving Iberian Peninsula triggered changes at the semantic level of the noun *cristiano*. Using the CORDE database, all instances of [*no V cristiano*] (the sentential negative marker *no*, followed by a verb, followed by the noun *cristiano*) were extracted and analyzed for whether *cristiano* could be read as an indefinite ‘anyone’. The results indicate that the construction [*no V cristiano*] is attested since the 13th century, a time in which it was used in the legal register to make specific reference to Christians living in a managed coexistence with Jews and Muslims. The first indefinite ‘anyone’ reading of *cristiano* is found in the early 17th century, a point in time after Christian hegemony had decreed the forced conversion or expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain. Framing our linguistic analysis within previous approaches to diachronic pathways followed from generic nouns to indefinites and NPIs (Eckardt 2006; Haspelmath 1997), we defend that the generic noun *cristiano* placed under the scope of negation first invoked non-Christian religionist alternatives (i.e., Jews and Muslims). Later, following the end of the *Reconquista* and the forced conversion or expulsion of Jews and Muslims, the generic noun *cristiano* adopted new logically entailed alternatives to reflect a society in which any one person was necessarily assumed to be Christian. That is, instead of only invoking the contextually contingent alternatives of Jews and Muslims, the noun *cristiano* also came to invoke the alternatives entailed by any one person: if there aren’t any Christians, then there also aren’t any bakers, nor priests, nor farmers, etc. In this manner, the emergence of the indefinite ‘anyone’ reading of the noun *cristiano* under negation is due to a change in alternatives from non-Christians to anyone at all. We argue that this change in alternatives is caused by religious changes in the Iberian real world, and thus, this study shows how sociocultural changes have a concrete modulating effect on diachronic semantic change. The overall contribution of this work, then, is an addition to the scarce literature on the role of sociocultural factors in diachronic semantic change.

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