

# Changes in Psych-verbs: A reanalysis of little v

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## Abstract

The present paper examines *psych*-verbs in the history of English. As is well-known, object experiencers are reanalyzed as subject experiencers in many of the modern European languages. I discuss one such change in detail, namely the change in the verb *fear* from meaning ‘to frighten, cause to fear’ to meaning ‘to fear’. The reason for the change may be the loss of the morphologically overt causative and a change in the set of light verbs. Object experiencers are constantly lost but I show there is also a continual renewal through external borrowing and internal change from physical to mental impact. A last change I discuss is the one where Subject Experiencers are reanalyzed as Agents in a V(oice)P.

**Keywords:** *psych*-verb; experiencer; agent; causative; reanalysis; little v.

## Resum. *Canvis en els verbs psicològics: una reanàlisi de v*

Aquest article estudia els verbs psicològics en la història de l’anglès. Com és ben sabut, moltes de les llengües modernes reanalitzen els objectes experimentadors com a subjectes experimentadors. Analitzo un d’aquests canvis en detall: el canvi en el verb *fear* des del seu significat original d’‘espantar, fer por’ al de ‘témer’. El motiu del canvi podria ser la desaparició de la marca morfològica del causatiu i un canvi en el conjunt dels verbs lleugers. Encara que els objectes experimentadors es perden de manera constant, mostro que alhora hi ha una renovació incessant a través dels manlleus i mitjançant canvis interns des de sentits d’impacte físic a sentits d’impacte mental. Finalment, analitzo un canvi en què els subjectes experimentadors es reanalitzen com a agents en un Sintagma Veu.

**Mots clau:** verb psicològic; experimentador; agent; causatiu; reanàlisi, v.

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## 1. Introduction

*Psych*-verbs express mental states and involve the inclusion of an experiencer argument. *Frighten* and *fear* are *psych*-verbs because they need an experiencer argument. In the case of *frighten*, this experiencer is an object, as shown in (1a), and in the case of *fear*, it is a subject, shown in (1b)

- (1) a. That alien frightens **him**.                    him=object experiencer  
       b. **He** fears that alien.                        he=subject experiencer

Alternations such as in (1) have been very influential for theories and formulations of theta-marking. How can verbs such as *frighten* have experiencer theta-roles that function as grammatical objects in (1a) whereas verbs such as *fear* have experiencers that function as grammatical subjects in (1b)? According to the UTAH, formulated in (2), identical thematic relations should have similar structural positions.

- (2) *Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis* (UTAH)  
 Identical thematic relationships between items are represented by identical structural relationships between those items at the level of D-Structure. (from Baker 1988: 46)

Belletti and Rizzi (1988) and Pesetsky (1995), to name but a few, have proposed (generative) accounts whereby the alternation in (1) obeys the UTAH in (2). Pesetsky, in particular, has argued that *that alien* is a cause in (1a) but subject matter (or theme) in (1b). If we then formulate a Thematic Hierarchy, as in (3) from Pesetsky (1995), experiencers are higher than subject matter but lower than cause.

- (3) Thematic Hierarchy  
 Agent > Cause > Experiencer > Theme/Subject Matter

The higher an argument is on the Thematic Hierarchy, the higher it is in the tree and the earlier it is pronounced. This then accounts for the order of arguments in (1).

An analysis using the notion of cause in (1a) makes sense in the light of Croft (1993) who shows that, in many languages (e.g. Lakhota and Classical Nahuatl), experiencer object verbs are marked with a causative affix. In this paper, I follow Arad (1998), Folli and Harley (2005), Pytkänen (2008) and others who have suggested that little *v* can have different flavors, e.g. cause or state. I chronicle what happens to little *v* diachronically where *psych*-verbs are concerned. Arad's (1998) proposal, based on Ruwet (1972) and Bouchard (1995), has perhaps been the most influential for the *psych*-verbs. Bouchard and Arad argue that any argument can be an experiencer and that the differences in types of *psych*-verbs are due to aspectual properties. I will use *v* and *V* heads for aspectual information.

There are many verbs with experiencer arguments, e.g. verbs of perception and cognition (see Bossong 1998, Haspelmath 2001, Verhoeven 2007 for a typo-

logical perspective). One of the tendencies is for languages to change towards expressing the experiencer as subject rather than as object, something we'll see in this paper as well. Object experiencers, such as in (1a), are reanalyzed as subject experiencers, such as in (1b). This change is well-known from the Old English verb *lician* 'please' (Lightfoot 1979 and Allen 1995) which starts to be used in its modern meaning of *like*. Haspelmath (2001) shows that many languages spoken in Europe (his Standard Average European) use the subject experiencer strategy and the *Atlas and Survey of Pidgin and Creole Linguistic Structure* (Michaelis et al. 2013: 264-271) confirms that with verbs *like* and *fear* the subject experiencer is the most frequent pattern.

In this paper, I add (a) more detail on the changes in the reanalysis of the verb *fear* as a subject experiencer (sections 2 and 3), (b) a discussion of the constant renewal of object experiencers through external borrowing and internal change (section 4), and (c) data on the reanalysis of subject experiencers as agents (section 5). Thus, one aim is to show that the direction of change is from object to subject experiencer and that object experiencer verbs continue to be renewed. I also provide a framework for understanding changes in argument structure in terms of changes in the vP-shell and suggest a preliminary 'explanation'.

## 2. Experiencer verbs in Old English: the reanalysis of object experiencers

In this section, I first provide a partial list of the first attested use of certain *psych*-verbs. How they first appear provides us insight into the changes they undergo. I then review the reanalysis of object experiencers as argued by van der Gaaf (1904), Jespersen (1909-1949), Lightfoot (1979), Fischer and van der Leek (1980), and Allen (1995).

### 2.1. *Psych*-verbs

Table 1 provides a partial list of Modern English *psych*-verbs as well as their first occurrence with the meaning they currently have, as gleaned from the OED. I am only including verbs with two DP arguments, not with clausal ones.

The reason for providing the list is that it shows several important developments in the history of English. (a) Many of the verbs that are now *psych*-verbs have become so recently. This indicates a lot of change. (b) A few subject experiencer verbs have remained stable, namely *dread*, *hate*, and *love*. (c) Some of the object experiencers have been reanalyzed as subject experiencers, e.g. *like*, *fear*, and *loathe* (see Table 2), but not the other way round. (d) Some of the renewals in the object experiencer verbs show causative markers (*fright-en*, *in-furiate*, *em-bitter*, and *terr-ify*). (e) Verbs that alternate, such as *grieve* and *delight*, have the object experiencer use as the earlier use and there may be an additional preposition or auxiliary for subject experiencers. This all shows a reanalysis from object experiencer to subject experiencer verb.

Table 2 summarizes the most obvious changes from object experiencer to subject experiencer. The table also shows there is overlap between the uses and I will

**Table 1.** Alternating *psych*-verbs (this choice is based on Croft 1993: 56; Levin 1993: 188-93; Pesetsky 1995: 18; Talmy 2001: 99)

| ObjExp     | first occurrence | SubExp              | first occurrence      |
|------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| anger      | 1200             | be angry            | 1360                  |
| vex        | 1423             | detest              | 1533                  |
| annoy      | 1300             | fume about          | 1522                  |
| disturb    | 1230             | pity                | 1475                  |
| trouble    | 1230             | regret              | 1450                  |
| hurt       | 1526             |                     |                       |
| displease  | 1377             | dislike             | 1593 (briefly ObjExp) |
| distress   | 1400             | despise             | 1297                  |
| irritate   | 1531             | hate                | OE                    |
| infuriate  | 1667             | be furious about/at | 1855                  |
| amuse      | 1600             | love                | OE                    |
| astonish   | 1600             | marvel              | 1380 (earlier ObjExp) |
| surprise   | 1474             | be surprised        | 1485                  |
| please     | 1350             | like                | 1200 (earlier ObjExp) |
| delight    | 1225             | delight in          | 1450                  |
| overjoy    | 1382             | adore               | 1300                  |
| embitter   | 1603             | resent              | 1595                  |
| cheer      | 1430             | rejoice             | 1390                  |
| exhilarate | 1540             | admire              | 1500                  |
| worry      | 1807             | worry with          | 1671                  |
| grieve     | 1300             | grieve (over)       | 1640                  |
| bore       | 1768             | be bored            | 1768                  |
| frighten   | 1666             | fear                | 1393 (earlier ObjExp) |
| scare      | 1200             | be afraid           | 1475                  |
| terrify    | 1536             | dread               | OE                    |
| thrill     | 1800             | relish              | 1580 (earlier ObjExp) |
| vex        | 1487             | loathe              | 1200                  |

**Table 2.** Reanalysis of object experiencer as subject experiencer verbs

|         | ObjExp    | SuExp        |
|---------|-----------|--------------|
| fear:   | OE-1480   | 1400-present |
| like:   | OE-1800   | 1200-present |
| relish: | 1567-1794 | 1580-present |
| marvel: | 1380-1500 | 1380-present |
| loathe: | OE-1600   | 1200-present |

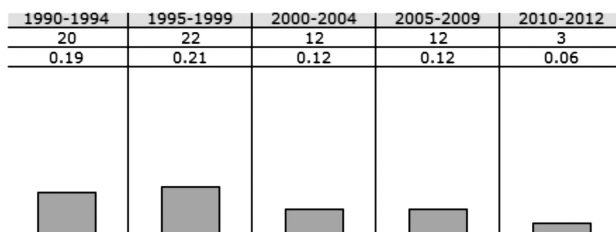


Figure 1. Decrease of *pleases* in COCA, absolute and per million.

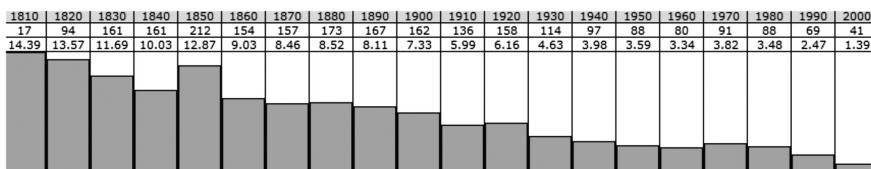


Figure 2. Decrease in use of *pleases* in COHA, absolute and per million.

show in section 3 that, in certain transitional texts, a verb may be used with an experiencer subject or experiencer object, as argued in Fischer and van der Leek (1980).

Another point of interest is that (object experiencer) verbs sometimes disappear. Table 1 shows that *please* is introduced in 1350 as an object experiencer verb. We might expect it to become a subject experiencer but that has not happened<sup>1</sup>. At the moment, however, there is a loss of this verb, as Figure 1 shows for the last 20 years of instances of the verb *pleases* in the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) and Figure 2 for the last 200 years in *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA). What these figures show is that, in the period between 1990 and 1999, there are 42 instances of ‘X pleases Y’ but that the number decreases to 24 in the decade that follows. The same tendency is confirmed by looking at COHA which gives data for a 200 year period. The number provided under the absolute number is the occurrence per million words and here too the decline is obvious, from 14 per million in the period between 1810 and 1820 to a little more than 1 per million in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This loss of the use of certain object experiencer verbs may be due to the same reason as the reanalysis, namely that object experiencers are hard to acquire. I discuss this point more at the end of section 3.5.

1. Although *please* can be found with subject experiencers, as in (i), this use is rare.  
(i) I please upon the creature which I... (EBO, George Abbot 1651)

Having provided some data to show that *psych*-verbs, in particular object experiencer ones, are quite unstable, in 2.2, I elaborate on some earlier thoughts on the reanalysis of object experiencer verbs. In the last section, I provide some reasons for their instability.

## 2.2. From object to subject experiencer

*Psych*-verbs, as earlier mentioned, express psychological states and involve an experiencer thematic role rather than an agent. This experiencer may act like the grammatical subject of the sentence but need not. In the latter case, the sentence may lack a referential subject and we use the term impersonal (Malchukov and Siewierska 2011). Impersonal verbs, *psych*-verbs included, have been the subject of discussion in much historical work, e.g. van der Gaaf (1904), Jespersen (1909-1949), Lightfoot (1979), Fischer and van der Leek (1980), Allen (1995), and Möhlig-Falke (2012) to name but a few.

Many have argued that the demise of impersonal verbs occurred due to case syncretism. However, Fischer and van der Leek (1980) argue that this cannot be so due to texts that have verbs with both meanings and Allen (1995) shows that the use of Experiencer objects continues well after the time that case was lost and that some verbs were introduced with an Experiencer Subject showing the construction was alive. The same continuation is obvious from work by Miura (2011) and others. The division in experiencer verbs that Allen (1995) adopts for Old English is the three-fold one of Elmer (1981). In that system, constructions, as in (4), with a dative experiencer and nominative theme or causer are labeled I, those, as in (5), with a nominative experiencer and genitive theme are referred to as II, and those with dative or accusative experiencer and genitive theme N. An example of the latter is given in (6).

- (4) *Ða bodan us færdon* Type I  
 the messengers us frightened  
 NOM-Theme DAT-Exp  
 ‘The messengers frightened us.’ (OED, *Ælfric Deut* i. 28)
- (5) *He him ondreæt his deað-es* Type II  
 he REFL fears his death-GEN  
 NOM-Exp GEN-Theme  
 ‘He fears his death.’ (*Ælfric Hom Skeat* i, 12, 87)
- (6) *oððæt him wlatode þære gewilnunge* Type N  
 until him nauseated that desire  
 DAT/ACC-Exp GEN-Theme  
 ‘until he was nauseated of the desire.’ (from Allen 1995: 70, *Ælfric Homilies* 21.89)

A list of the three types of verbs can be found in Table 3. Of these, *ail*, *like*, *loathe*, *yearn*, *long*, and *shame* are still in use but *like* and *loathe* have changed from

**Table 3.** The three types of impersonal verbs, based on Elmer (1981: 69; 72) and Allen (1995: 71; 75) and additional sources

| I<br>DAT Exp              | N<br>DAT/AC Exp                    | II<br>NOM Exp                 |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| eglian 'ail'              | langian 'long for'                 | sceamian <sup>1</sup> 'shame' |
| (ge/of)hreowan 'distress' | lystan 'desire'                    | hreowan 'pity'                |
| (ge)lician 'please'       | ofhreowan 'pity'                   | reccan 'care'                 |
| lapan 'loathe'            | ofpyncan 'regret'                  | giernan 'yearn'               |
| losian 'lose'             | sceamian 'cause/feel shame'        | wilnian 'desire'              |
| mislician 'displease'     | (ge)spowan 'cause/feel success at' | behofian 'need'               |
| oflician 'displease'      | tweonian 'cause/feel doubt at'     |                               |
| ofpyncan 'displease'      | byncan 'seem, think'               |                               |
| byncan 'seem, think'      | wlatian 'nauseate/be nauseated'    |                               |

1. Tony Kim Dewey (p.c.) has evidence that Old English *sceamian* and *hreowan* are also of Type I but this is not important for my argument.

class I to II and *long* from N to II. *Shame* is now only used in passive participle form. *Hate* is not listed in this set but it is of type II, as (7) shows.

- (7) *Doð þæm wel þe eow ær hatedon.*  
do those well that you earlier hated  
'Do well to those who formerly hated you.'  
(OED, c897 Ælfred *Pastoral Care* xxxiii. 222)

Note that types I and N overlap but are not similar. Type N is experiencer initial (Allen 1995: 104) and never has a dummy *hit*. This suggests the experiencer is a subject. Type I has the experiencer first when it is a pronoun but overall experiencers are "more likely to follow ... the Theme" (Allen 1995: 109).

In the next section, my focus will be on one verb and the various changes that affect it. I agree with Allen and others that the loss of case was not the reason behind this change because these verbs continue to be used long after the case was lost. Instead, I attribute it to a change in the set of light verbs due to a loss of the morphological causative.

### 3. The verb *færan/fear*

In this section, I provide data that show the change that the verb *fear* undergoes from Old to Middle to Modern English. I then look at some interesting characteristics of both the disappearing object experiencer construction and of the innovative subject experiencer one.

### 3.1. From 'frighten' to 'fear'

From Old English until the late 14th century, the verb *færan* means 'to frighten'; see (8).

- (8) *þa bodan us færdon* =ExpObj  
 the messengers us frightened  
 'The messengers frightened us.' (OED, *Ælfric Deut* i. 28)

In the *Middle English Dictionary*, the entry for *feren* has both meanings 'to frighten' and 'to fear (respect)'. I provide all instances of these two meanings from the MED in (9) and (10) respectively. The second meaning is not attested before the end of the 14th century.

- (9) a. *He wile himm færenn 3iff he ma33.*  
 'He wants to frighten him if he can.' (MED, c1200 Orm. Jun 1 675)
- b. *Alle these fereden* vs [WB(2): *maden* vs *aferd*].  
 'all these frightened us.' (MED, a1382 WBible(1) Dc 369(1) 2 Esd.6.9)
- c. *þe lordes..bere whippes in hir hondes and so fered þe cherles, and droof hem away.*  
 '... and so frightened the churls and drove them away.'  
 (MED, a1387 Trev. Higd.(StJ-C H.1) 1.139)
- d. *Leue son, why hastou fered vs?*  
 'Dear son why have you frightened us?' (MED, a1400 CursorTrin.12622)
- e. *þe fend moveþ þes debletis to fere Cristene [men] fro treuþe.*  
 'The enemy moves these devils to frighten Christian men from the truth.'  
 (MED, a1425 Wycl.Serm. Bod 788 2.328)
- f. *Thus he shal yow with his wordes fere.*  
 'Thus, he'll frighten you with his words.' (MED, Chaucer TC 4.1483)
- g. *Many tymes haue I feryd þe wyth gret tempestys of wyndys.*  
 'Many times have I frightened you with great wind storms.'  
 (MED, a1438 MKempe A (Add 61823) 51/24)
- h. *and þat þei feere hym fro vicis.*  
 'and that they frightened him from vice.' (MED, c1443 Pecoock Rule 320)
- i. *For to feare hym sir Dynadan seyde hit was sir Launcelot.*  
 'Because, to frighten him, Sir Dynadan said it was Sir Lancelot.'  
 (MED, a1470 Malory Wks.Win-C 587/11)
- j. *In her hondys thei bare yrone speyruse, The fereful soule to feyre and enchase.*  
 'In their hands, they had iron ... to frighten the fearful soul and to chase it.'  
 (MED, a1475 VPhilibert Brog 2.1 p.33)



- (10) a. *And that schold every wys man fere.*  
 ‘And that should every wise man fear.’  
 (MED, a1393 Gower CA Frf 3 2.578)
- b. *Men feeren hem in al the toun Welmore than thei don of thonder.*  
 ‘Men fear them in the entire town of Welmore (more) than they do thunder.’ (MED, a1393 Gower CA Frf 3 3.454)
- c. *Fele ferde for þe freke(z), lest felle hym þe worre.*  
 ‘Many feared for the man lest the worst happened to him.’  
 (MED, c1390 Gawain Nero A.10 1588)
- d. *Dou schalt nat fere For to be kyng of this regioun.*  
 ‘You shall not be afraid to be king of this region.’  
 (MED, c1425 Lydg. TB Aug A.4 1.502)
- e. *Dan Vlixes..of his lyf feerd.*  
 ‘Then Ulysses feared for his life.’  
 (MED, c1540/a1400 Destr.Troy Htrn 388 13842)
- f. *Alle that company fere I ryth nouth.*  
 ‘All that group I fear not at all.’  
 (MED, a1475 Ludus C.Vsp D.8 369/394)
- g. *I fere me þat I shuld stond in drede.*  
 ‘I fear that I shall stand in dread.’  
 (MED, a1500 Play Sacr. Dub 652 218)

A few points are worth noting: (a) the causative paraphrase in another version of (9b) and this is not unusual, (b) the mention of a result in (9c), (9e), and (9h) and an instrument in (9f) and (9g), and (c) the use of a reflexive in (10b) and (10g). I’ll discuss all three of these details now, starting with the causative.

### 3.2. Object experiencers are causatives

In section 1, it was mentioned that object experiencers involve causatives structures and that they are marked with an overt causative morpheme in some languages. In this section, I show that this is true in Old English too.

A verb with the meaning ‘to frighten’ has an inherent causative meaning. According to the OED, the Old English verb *fēran* ‘fear’ has its origin in a causative form *\*fēran*, a weak verb ‘to terrify’ that derives from the noun *fēar*. Garcia Garcia’s (2012) list of more or less productive causatives in Old English includes several *psych*-verbs and they are all object experiencer verbs: *a-hwænan* ‘vex, afflict’, *gremman* ‘enrage’, *a-byrgan* ‘anger’, *swencan* ‘harrass’, *a-þrytan* ‘weary’, *wægan* ‘vex’, and *wyrdan* ‘annoy’.

Older Germanic languages and Old English have verbalizing *-j/-i* affixes that add a causer to the argument set. In Gothic, these are clearly visible, as shown in Table 4. Note that the *-an* suffix adds the infinitive ending, not important for the present paper.

**Table 4.** Causatives in Gothic (based on van Hamel 1931: 186-187; Prokosch 1939: 153; and Ottosson 2009: 35)

| Verb                           | > | Verb                                    |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>urrisan</i> 'arise'         |   | <i>urrais-j-an</i> 'to make arise'      |
| <i>sliupan</i> 'walk silently' |   | <i>afslaup-j-an</i> 'to make slip away' |
| <i>brinnan</i> 'burn' intr.    |   | <i>gabran-j-an</i> 'to burn something'  |
| <i>sitan</i> 'sit'             |   | <i>sat-j-an</i> 'to put'                |
| <i>drigkan</i> 'drink'         |   | <i>drak-j-an</i> 'make drink'           |
| <i>ligan</i> 'lie'             |   | <i>lag-j-an</i> 'lay'                   |
| <i>-redan</i> 'prepare'        |   | <i>rod-j-an</i> 'make think'            |
| Noun                           | > | Verb                                    |
| <i>stains</i> 'stone'          |   | <i>stain-j-an</i> 'to stone'            |
| <i>doms</i> 'judgment'         |   | <i>dom-j-an</i> 'to judge'              |
| <i>wens</i> 'hope'             |   | <i>wen-j-an</i> 'to hope'               |
| Adjective                      | > | Verb                                    |
| c. <i>laus</i> 'loose'         |   | <i>laus-j-an</i> 'to loosen'            |
| <i>hails</i> 'whole'           |   | <i>hail-j-an</i> 'to heal'              |
| <i>blinds</i> 'blind'          |   | <i>gabliand-j-an</i> 'to blind'         |

**Table 5.** Causatives in Old English, from Ottosson (2009)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>drēopan</i> 'drop'                      | <i>drȳpan</i> 'moisten',                    |
| <i>belgan</i> 'be/become angry'            | <i>ābielgan</i> 'irritate',                 |
| <i>hweorfan</i> 'turn/go/die'              | <i>hwierfan</i> 'turn/destroy',             |
| <i>meltan</i> 'melt, burn up, be digested' | <i>mieltan</i> 'melt/purge',                |
| <i>sincan</i> 'sink'                       | <i>sencan</i> 'sink, submerge/drown',       |
| <i>springan</i> 'jump/burst forth/spread'  | <i>sprengan</i> 'scatter/burst',            |
| <i>nesan</i> 'escape from/be saved'        | <i>nerian</i> 'save/protect',               |
| <i>sīgan</i> 'sink/fall/move'              | <i>sæægan</i> 'cause to sink/fell/destroy', |
| <i>scrincan</i> 'shrink/wither'            | <i>screncan</i> 'cause to shrink',          |
| <i>feallan</i> 'fall/flow/die'             | <i>fiellan</i> 'fell/defeat/destroy'.       |

By the time of Old English, phonological processes have made the affix mostly invisible, as shown in Table 5, and all that's left is an effect on the stem vowel (as is still the case in Modern English intransitive *fall*, *sit*, and *lie* and causative *fell*, *set*, and *lay*).

Lass (1994: 166) writes that, by Old English, the function of *-i* as causativizer is visible only in a small group of verbs, in line with Visser (1963) and Bosworth and Toller (1898). I agree with Ottosson (2009: 51), who concludes that even though the *j*-causatives were less transparent in Old English, this formation may still have been somewhat productive. After the evidence is lost more and more, verbs become increasingly labile in English (from 80 in Old English to 800 in Modern English; see McMillion 2006 and van Gelderen 2011).

Thus, by the end of Old English, the causative morphology is no longer transparent and analytic forms get to be used, e.g. the light verb *do*, as in (11). This use is present in Old English already.

- (11) a. *Ʒe barn sco **dide drinc** o Ʒat wel.*  
 the child she made drink of that well  
 ‘She made the child drink from the well.’ (Cursor Mundi, Cotton 3071)
- b. She **dud** Ʒe childe drynke of Ʒe welle (idem, Trinity)
- c. *Ʒis deuel ... **doð** men hungren & hauen ðrist.*  
 ‘This devil ... makes men hunger and have thirst.’  
 (MED, a1250 Bestiary (Arun 292) 428)

As the causative suffix disappears, there are a number of replacements, e.g. the *-en* suffix in Middle English (12) on verbs like *durken* ‘darken’, the zero morpheme on verbs like *blak* ‘blacken’ in (12), the late Middle English causative *en-* prefix (13a-c), and the early Modern suffixes *-ify*, as in *beautify* and *neatify*, *-ize*, as in *advertize*, and *-ate*, as in *accumulate*.

- (12) *Ʒe aier gun **durken** and to **blak**.*  
 ‘The air began to darken and to blacken.’ (OED, Cursor Mundi, Vesp. 24414)
- (13) a. [These things] doe ... exceedingly possesse and **englad** our hearts.  
 (OED, 1604 Supplic. Certaine Masse-priests §1)
- b. That Vaiano Which **engoldens and empurples** in the grounds there of my Redi. (OED 1825 Hunt Redi’s Bacchus in Poet.Wks. (1860) 386)
- c. *A womans looke his hart **enfeares**.*  
 ‘A woman’s look makes his heart fearful.’ (OED, 1608 T. Hudson tr. G. de S. Du Bartas Ivdithv. 70 in J. Sylvester Deuine Weekes & Wks.)

The prefix *en-* is extremely popular for a while but many die out, e.g. *enfear* in (13c) but also *enwiden*, *enweaken*, *ensoak*, *enstuff*, and *enquicken* (s.v. *en-* in the OED).

In 3.2, I have discussed the demise of the morphological causative in Old English and the renewal of the causative through light verbs and prefixes borrowed from French. I’ll come back to these changes in 3.5.

### 3.3. *The result and instrument*

Now let's turn to the goal or instrument being very frequent in (9) above. Other such examples are (14), and also occur with particles, as in (15).

(14) *Hou anticrist & his clerkis feren trewe prestis fro prechyng of cristis gospel.*  
 'How the antichrist and his clerks frighten true priests from preaching Christ's gospel.' (OEDc1380 Wyclif Works Speculum de Anti~christo)

- (15) a. *Fere away the euyll bestes.*  
 'Frighten the evil animals away.'  
 (OED, 1504 Atkinson tr. Ful Treat. Imytacyon Cryste (Pynson) iii. xxvii)
- b. If there were nothing else to **feare** them **away** from this play. (OED, 1577 Northbrooke Spiritus est Vicarius Christi: Treat. Dicing 93)

Having a goal or instrument accompany a causative, such as *fear*, reinforces the change of state typical of a causative. I will come back to this point in my analysis in 3.5.

### 3.4. *Reflexives causing ambiguity*

There are early cases with ambiguity, as in (16), depending on whether the postverbal pronoun is seen as a reflexive or not. Thus, it is not clear whether (16a) means 'I frighten myself that ...' or 'I fear that ...' These ambiguous sentences occur mainly when the cause/subject matter is clausal and sentence-final, as in (16), but also without these, as in (17).

- (16) a. *I fere me ye haue made a rodde for your self.*  
 'I fear/frightened myself you have made a rod for yourself.'  
 (OED s.v. rod1485 Malory's Morte Darthur (Caxton) v. ii. sig. hviii<sup>v</sup>)
- b. I **feared me** alwayes that it wolde be so.  
 (OED, 1530 Palsgrave, Lesclarcissement 547/2)
- c. I **feare me** he is slaine. (OED, a1593 Marlowe Edward II (1594) sig. E3v)
- (17) a. All to son, my brother, I **feare me**, for yow.  
 (Helsinki Corpus, Mankind, 162)
- b. "A, dowtyr," seydw owyr Lord, "**feare þe** nowt, I take non hede what a man hath ben, but take hede what he wyl ben".  
 (Helsinki Corpus, Margery Kempe, chap 21)
- c. '**feare you** not,' quoth these stout wemen.  
 (Helsinki Corpus, Thomas Harman, 71)

The same text may have a causative with object experiencer as well as a reflexive with subject experiencer, as (18a) and (18b) show respectively.

- (18) a. Thou wenyste that the syght of tho honged knyghtes shulde **feare me**?  
 ‘You thought that the sight of those hanged knights should frighten me?’  
 (MED, a1470 Malory Wks.Win-C 322/17)
- b. Sir Palomydes was the more wayker and sorer was hurte and more he loste of his blood than sir Lame roke..’Sir,’ seyde sir Dynadan ... ‘I **feare me** that sir Palomydes may nat yett travayle.’  
 (MED, a1470 Malory Wks.Win-C 606/17)

By the end of the 16th century, the experiencer object with *fear* is lost, as in (19).

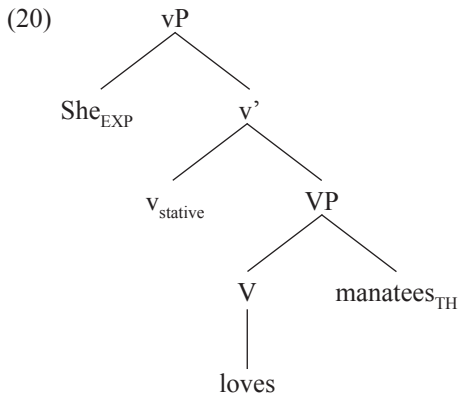
- (19) He that but **feares** the thing hee would not know, Hath ... knowledge from others eies, That what he **feard** is chanced. (1600 Shakespeare Henry IV.2 i. i. 87)

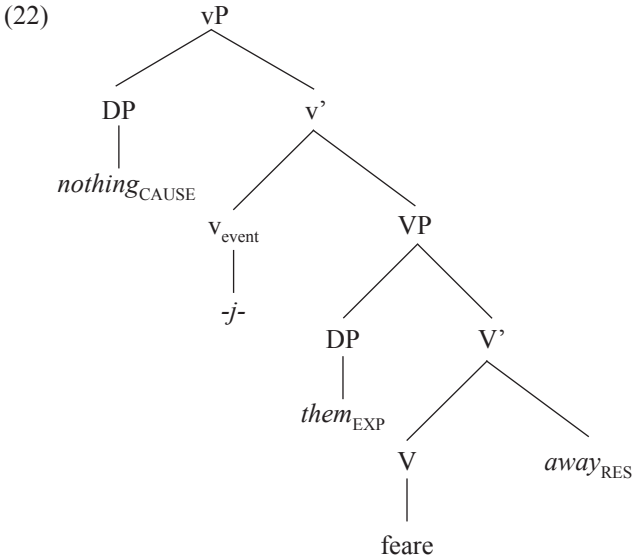
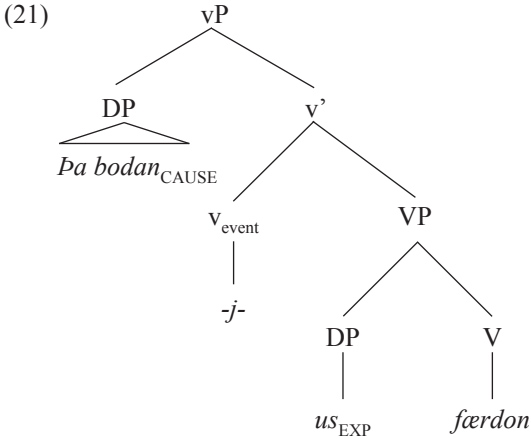
I’ll now turn to a possible account for the loss of the experiencer object.

### 3.5. *The loss of the causative and a reanalysis of little v*

I will now turn to the analysis of experiencer verbs and the reason for the change from object to subject experiencer. In short, the loss of the morphological causative, as outlined in 3.2, makes the construction less transparent and, in accordance with work by Schein (1993) and Kratzer (1996), I argue that Themes are parts of the lexical entry of the verb and that this makes experiencer objects difficult to process and that the thematic hierarchy is in conflict with an animacy hierarchy.

First, I’ll provide an analysis of the changes. Much work in recent years (e.g. Ramchand 2008), assumes three layers in the traditional VP-area, a high little v that can be aspectually marked as an eventive by an initiator bringing about a change of state (either intentionally or not) or as a stative by an experiencer, as in (20); the middle layer which houses the measured or affected argument, as in (21); and the lowest layer with a result or goal argument, as in (22).

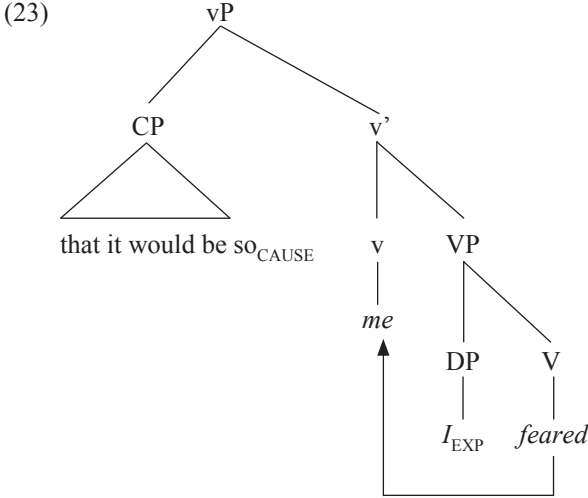




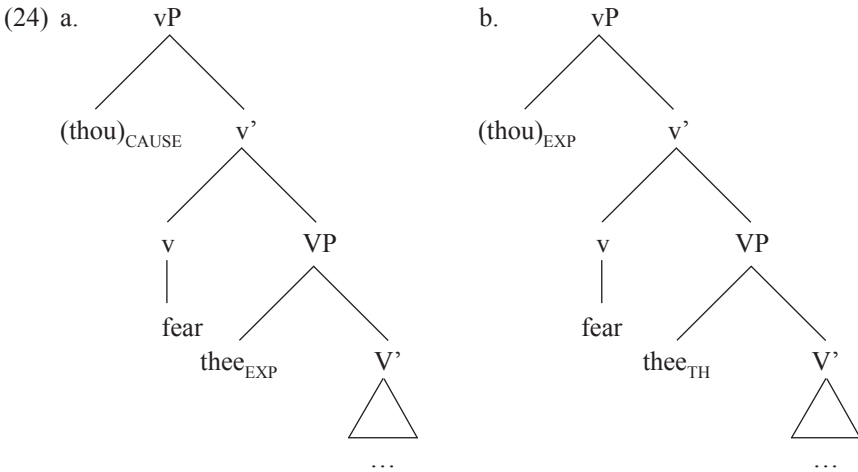
After the morphological causative weakens during Old English, other light verbs occupy that space, e.g. *do*, *make*, *put*, *-ify*, *-ate*, *-en*, and *en-*, as shown in (11), (12), and (13). There is also an increased use of the instrument in (14) and result in (15) that helps to emphasize the change of state typical of the causative that is losing its marking. The light verbs, however, are highly various as well, as e.g. Clancy (2010) has shown. Thus, *do* could mean ‘give, make, let, put’ in one early Middle English text. This multi-functionality points to a situation where the contents of *v* are unclear and reanalysis can occur.

Cross-linguistically, reflexives are often affixed to the verb and bring about changes in valency and aspect. For instance, in Romance, reflexives mark incho-

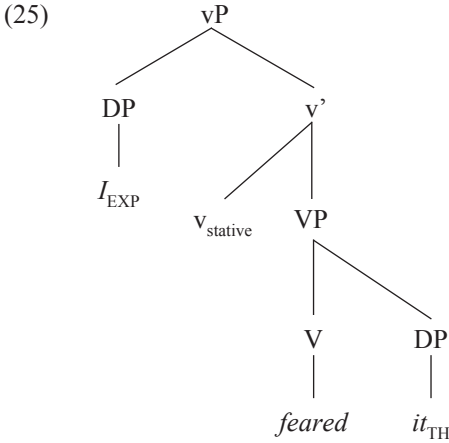
ativity and what were earlier reflexives in Scandinavian are now used as passives. I will therefore argue that reflexives are ambiguous between phrase- and head-status. The reflexive experiencer in (16b) can be analyzed as in (23) where *feared* moves to little v, now occupied by the reflexive. The v is ambiguous between stative and eventive aspect, and the new meaning triggered is the former.



Sentences, such as (17b), have a similarly ambiguous tree, as shown in (24).



The latter stage enables a reanalysis from the causal ‘frighten’ to ‘fear’, with a structure as in (25).



Having described the changes in the argument structure, possibly started by the loss of the causative, the question arises why this happens. I will suggest two reasons.

First, Ryan (2012) shows that the Theme theta-role appears in data from first language acquisition, that is before the Agent or any other theta-role. This fits with Schein (1993) and Kratzer (1996) who argue that the Theme cannot be introduced via a light verb but is relevant to the meaning of the lexical verb. This makes Themes into natural grammatical objects and Experiencer objects possibly hard to learn. This then might cause their reanalysis as subject Experiencers.

Secondly, the reason for the renewal by certain causative verbs is possibly pre-linguistic in Jackendoff's (2002: 245) sense. When animacy hierarchies are incongruous with thematic hierarchies, the child will try to reconcile the two. Thus, with causatives whose highest argument is an inanimate and whose lowest argument is an animate, e.g. 'a ball stunned me', the Theme is 'upgraded' to an Experiencer. If we assume an animacy hierarchy is important pre-linguistically, semantically, and pragmatically, the thematic hierarchy of (2) is the grammaticalization of this, i.e. an exaptation of the semantic animacy hierarchy to syntax<sup>2</sup>. Once in a while, there is conflict between the two and then the latter may prevail.

#### 4. Renewal of experiencer object verbs

Interestingly, it turns out that many of the current Object Experiencer verbs are loans, e.g. *anger* is a loan from Old Norse. Another source for renewal is through internal change and, in some cases, this use is quite recent, e.g. *worry* has the meaning of 'kill' in Old English and only appears with the meaning of 'to vex' in the 19th century. This use remains in British English where 'dogs can worry sheep' by biting their throats. Table 6 provides a few of the sources of renewal. I will focus on internal change.

2. This possibility is briefly suggested in van Gelderen (2013: 82).



**Table 6.** Some examples of renewal of object experiencer verbs

|              |      |                 |
|--------------|------|-----------------|
| anger, scare | 1200 | Old Norse       |
| astonish     | 1375 | unclear         |
| frighten     | 1666 | internal change |
| grieve       | 1330 | French          |
| please       | 1350 | Anglo-Norman    |
| irritate     | 1531 | Latin           |
| stun         | 1700 | internal change |
| worry        | 1807 | internal change |

Haspelmath (2001), based partly on Cole et al (1980), suggests two changes: in the Experiencer Object and changes in verbal meaning. (a) Experiencer Objects first acquire subject behavior. (b) Verbs change from concrete to abstract, e.g. *fascinate* and *stun* originally mean ‘to bewitch’ and ‘to deprive of consciousness or of power of motion by a blow’, respectively. I’ll focus on (b).

In the pre-Experiencer Object meaning, these verbs have Agent or Causer subjects, as (26) and (27) show, but they have developed experiential meanings, as shown in (28) and (29). The argument structure of the two verbs has changed from Agent (or Causer) and Theme to Theme (or Cause) and Experiencer.

- (26) a. They kill it [a fish] by first **stunning** it with a knock with a mallet. (OED 1662 J. Davies tr. A. Olearius *Voy & Trav. Ambassadors* 165)
- b. The ball, which had been nearly spent before it struck him, had **stunned** instead of killing him. (OED, 1837 Irving Capt. Bonneville I. 271)
- (27) Why doe Witches and old women, **fascinate** and bewitch children? (OED 1621 R. Burton *Anat Melancholy* i. ii. iii. ii. 127)
- (28) a. You shall sometimes see him gather a Crowd round him ... and **stun** the People with a senseless Story of an Injury that is done him. (OED, 1714 E. Budgell tr. Theophrastus *Moral Characters* vi. 22)
- b. I thought I knew a lot about entomophagy around the world, but this book **stunned** me. (<http://www.menzelphoto.com/books/meb.php>)
- (29) Purple eggs ... **fascinated** her (<http://live.psu.edu/story/52214>)

Other such verbs are *worry*, *thrill*, *astonish*, and *grieve*. The verb *worry* meant ‘to kill by strangling/compressing the throat’ in Old and Middle English, as in (30), with an Agent and Theme and is reanalyzed as a verb with an Agent and an object experiencer. The verb *thrill* meant ‘to pierce’, as in (31), and is similarly later changed into an object experiencer.

- (30) *Haral ... threwe hym to the grounde and had **wyried** hym with his hondes,*  
 ‘Harald threw him to the ground and strangled him with his handes.’  
 (OED, 1387 Trevisa tr. R. Higden Polychron. VII. 534)
- (31) *& scharp lance þat **thrilled** Ihesu side.*  
 ‘and the sharp lance that pierced Jesus’ side.’  
 (OED, c1330 Mannyng Chron. 1810: 30)

The verb *astonish* has an earlier variant *aston(i)e*, as in (32a), of which the OED says “perhaps the ending is due to Old French past participle *estonné*” but which Morris (1866: 286) says is from Old English *stunian* ‘to strike’ and (32b) seems to confirm that. There are early instances that are already ambiguous, as given in (32c).

- (32) a. *Hou it ssolde ous ssende and **astonie**.*  
 ‘How it should destroy and stun us’ (OED, 1340, Ayenbite (1866) 126)
- b. *The one smote the king upon the head, the other **astonished** his shoulder.*  
 ‘The one struck the kong on the head; the other struck his shoulder.’  
 (OED, 1600, Holland tr. Livy Rom. Hist. xlii. xv. 1124)
- c. *Des wordis **astonyeden** hem.*  
 ‘These words astonished them.’  
 (OED, c1375, Wycliffite Serm. in Sel. Wks. 1871: II. 113)

The verb *grieve* was borrowed from French with the meaning of ‘to burden, harass’, as (33) shows, and as an experiencer object use appears in (34).

- (33) a. *Clerkes ... he **greuede** manion.*  
 ‘Clergymen... he harassed many a one.’  
 (OED, 1297 Gloucester’s Chron. 11815)
- b. *Moche thei **grieved** the hethen peple with alle their power.*  
 ‘Much they harassed the heathens with all their power.’  
 (OED, a1500 Merlin (1899) xii. 186)
- (34) *Our fredom that day for euer toke þe leue, For Harald it went away, his falshed **did** vs **greue**.*  
 ‘That day, our freedom forever took leave, because of Harald it went away. His falsehood grieved us.’  
 (OED, c1330 Mannyng Chron. (1810) 71)

The changes are very gradual. For instance, uses of *worry* and *grieve* with the meanings of ‘strangle’ and ‘do bodily harm’, respectively, occur till the 19th century, as in (35) and (36), although figurative uses occur early on, e.g. (37).

- (35) She bit me ... She **worried** me like a tigress.  
(OED, 1847 Brontë Jane Eyre II v 124)
- (36) The graceful foliage storms may reave, The noble stem they cannot **grieve**.  
(OED, 1810 Scott Lady of Lake ii. 57)
- (37) *hou faste þe woluys of helle **wirien** cristen soulis.*  
'how firmly the wolves of hell worry Christian souls.'  
(OED, c1380 Wyclif Wks. 1880: 24)

In short, object experiencers are indeed reanalyzed as subject experiencers and new object experiencers arise through the reanalysis of the Theme as an Experiencer. This occurs because a physically affected object can be seen as mentally affected too, as explained in Ruwet (1972), Bouchard (1995), Arad (1998).

### 5. From experiencer to agent

The last change to look at is one that is currently attracting some attention, namely that from stative to non-stative and from subject experiencer to agent, as in (38) to (41).

- (38) the skiers **are loving** this -- about a foot of snow for you. (COCA Spoken 2009)
- (39) I **am liking** private life a lot right now. (COCA Spoken 2009)
- (40) I've been going around, and I **am liking** what I see in the classrooms (COCA Spoken 2002)
- (41) So how's he **liking** his new single status? (COCA Magazine 2012)

Anecdotally, this construction is blamed on a fast food add and on facebook where people are urged to 'like' certain stories, as in (42).

- (42) I don't know that an anti-Gingrich or Romney or Obama group on Facebook that has a lot of people **liking** it is going to have a big impact on the campaign, but this is how people organize themselves these days online. (COCA Spoken 2012)

The COCA corpus has 1157 instances of *liking* as a verb, with most instances in fiction. Many of these are complements to auxiliaries such as *keep on*, *stop*, and *end up*, as in (43), and are still stative.

- (43) she *ended up liking* it more than maybe she would have thought.  
(COCA Spoken 2012)

Looking at the auxiliary *be* followed by the verb *liking*, there is a steady set of such examples, e.g. six instances in 2011 in the spoken portion of COCA, namely those given in (44).

- (44) a. Exactly. I want -- I 'm liking Geoffrey Rush. (COCA NBC Today)  
 b. That's how much women of a certain age, like us, are liking it. So let's watch. (COCA NBC\_Today)  
 c. He's having some breakfast. RUSS-MITCHELL: Ah, he's liking that. (COCA CBS\_Early)  
 d. If the Democrats are liking Medi-scare and nine percent unemployment, one percent economic expansion, and huge debt ... (COCA Fox\_Baier).  
 e. WILLIAMS: I'm liking it. Thanks very much. (COCA NBC RockCenter).  
 f. I whip my hair back and forth. You know and so he's liking it (COCA CNN Morgan).

There are 13 similar examples of *be* with *loving*, given in (45).

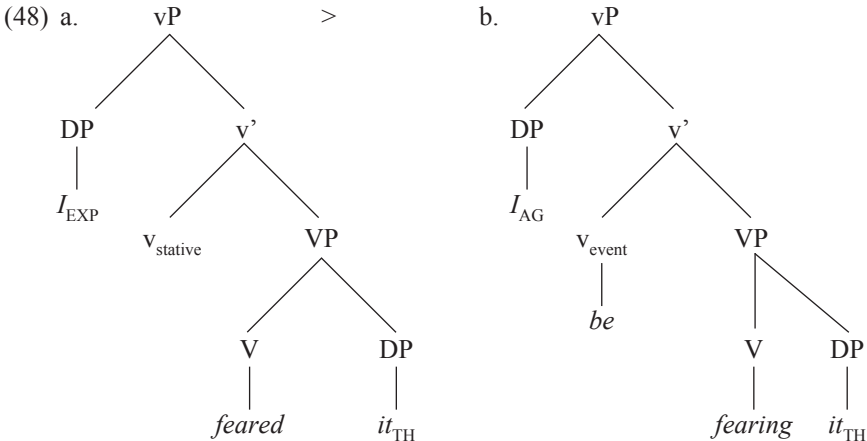
- (45) a. The Steelers are loving it. (COCA NBC Today)  
 b. So we recommend, lately we've been loving broccoli rabe, which is higher in iron and calcium than regular broccoli ... (COCA NBC Today)  
 c. Yes. I think we're loving it. I mean all eyes are on London at the moment and, you ... (COCA CBS Early)  
 d. Yeah. It's only in New Orleans. I'm loving it. With meals like this, it's hard to imagine anyone being able (COCA CBS Early)  
 e. Oh, I'm loving this. (LAUGHTER) (COCA STOSSEL)  
 f. I was loving it. I mean, I was sort of in a weird place in my ... (COCA ABC 20/20)  
 g. and asking them to wrestle, you know. They're loving this. (COCA CNN Behar)  
 h. - actually, we --this is our first week (unintelligible), and I'm loving every minute of it. (COCA NPR ATC)  
 i. No, I --but keep going, I'm loving it. CLARKSON: Oh. OK, it's coming up, the chorus, (COCA NBC Today)  
 j. Carolina, sunny sky, seventy-three with the light breeze. Oh, you're loving it. Why? High pressure here ... (COCA CBS Early)  
 k. I hope you like cranberry. Good. ... Yeah, I'm loving this right now. (COCA CBS Early)  
 l. Even now you're loving every second of that, aren't you? Be honest. (COCA CNN Morgan)  
 m. and just towards the end --it had gone very well and everyone was loving it. (COCA CNN Morgan)

Apart from *like* and *love*, are other subject experiencer verbs undergoing this change? *Fear* and *know* are, as (46) and (47) show.

- (46) a. I've been **fearing** the answers. (COCA Fiction 2007)  
 b. Wall Street is **fearing** a bloodbath (COCA Magazine 2007)

- (47) And so everybody in town **was knowing** that this was happening (COCA Spoken 2009).

Frequently used diagnostics to determine if arguments are Agents or Experiencers are the use of *deliberately* with Agents, *personally* with Experiencers, and *-er* with Agents. Neither *deliberately* nor the *-er* occur with *fear* yet which means the reanalysis isn't complete. Structurally, we could argue that when Experiencers are reanalyzed as Agents, the change from (48a) to (48b) happens. There is a 'promotion' of the Experiencer due to the loss of the stative character of *fear*.



The change discussed in this section, i.e. the introduction of sentences such as (38), involves a reanalysis of the light verb from stative to non-stative aspect. With animate specifiers of vP, such reanalysis is always possible.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have looked at some changes in the meaning and argument structure of verbs and have attributed those to changes in the repertoire of light verbs. In sections 2 and 3, I discuss the well-known reanalysis of object experiencers as subject experiencers. I focus on the changes of the verb *fearan*, which changes from meaning 'to frighten' (object experiencer) to 'to fear' (subject experiencer) and identify some factors that give us insight into the reasons behind the reanalysis, e.g. the frequent strengthening of the old meaning by a causative light verb and

the use of a reflexive with the new meaning. These additions provide evidence of a change in the light verb inventory.

In section 4, I examine the sources of renewal for object experiencers. Some are borrowed while others arise through a reanalysis of a class of verbs where the highest theta-role is ambiguous between agent and causer. The theme is seen as experiencer and a new object experiencer arises. A last change, discussed in section 5, is the change of subject experiencer *psych*-verb to regular transitive. I suggest that language-external reasons play a role.

I have described three major changes in the argument structure of verbs in terms of light verbs. In section 3, I have also accounted for why these changes might have taken place. There are two different reasons for this preference for reanalyzing experiencer objects as subjects. One is based on the special status of the Theme and a second is based on discrepancies regarding animacy that occur as a result of grammaticalization.

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