Following the lead: contextual generalization of continuative constructions in Modern Spanish

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There are several options for expressing continuative aspect in Modern Spanish, including motion verbs in construction with a gerund, and temporal adverbials, as seen in (1).

(1) Si esta señorita -repuso la Bruja mirando a Enriqueta- no sigue despreciando mis consejos, puede aún salvar su honor y evitar su desgracia. (CORDE, La Bruja, 1850)
‘If this Young lady –replied the Witch looking at Enriqueta– does not keep ignoring my advice, she can still save her honour and avoid her disgrace.’

While the development of Spanish progressive constructions estar + GER and andar + GER has enjoyed some attention among variationists (Torres Cacoullos 2000, 2001), the development of the continuative constructions seguir ‘follow’ + GER and continuar ‘continue’+ GER, in variation with temporal adverbials such as todavía ‘still’ and aún ‘still’ with an unmarked Present, has yet to be addressed at length, quantitatively or otherwise.

Using diachronic data from the Corpus Diacrónico del Español (CORDE) and Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual (CREA), this study examines variation patterns among these periphrastic (Gómez Torrego 1988) or semi-auxiliary (Olbertz 1998) constructions in Iberian Spanish, at two moments in time: first, between 1760 and 1860, when seguir + GER began to occur with appreciable frequency; second, between 1950 and 2006. The encroachment of seguir + GER into the territory of continuar + GER is traced using GoldVarb X, with 623 tokens in the first data set and 964 in the second. In the 18th century, singular subjects, especially first person, favored seguir + GER, while both constructions exhibited similar constraint hierarchies in variation with adverbials, with Verb class and Clitic presence significant.

Polarity, Syntactic position, and Sentence type, not significant, also line up. In the 20th century, these two constructions have undergone specialization, losing the neat parallelism evident in earlier stages of grammaticization.

References
CORDE = Corpus Diacrónico del Español. Real Academia Española.
   <http://corpus.rae.es/cordenet.html>
CREA = Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual. Real Academia Española.
   <http://corpus.rae.es/creanet.html>