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ADJECTIVAL COMPLEMENTS OF TRANSITIVE VERBS IN SPANISH

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates verb-adjective constructions in Spanish in which the adjective appears in the complement position of a transitive verb: beber tinto, tocar Cubano, producir harto. It is shown that this construction is also possible in the case of strong transitive verbs (i.e. if the verb cannot appear without a complement). Based on Bartra – Suñer (1997), I argue that it is their semantic contribution that licenses these adjectives in this function. Furthermore, I also show that some adjectives are reanalyzed as an NP, or appear with an elliptical NP layer in syntax, whereas others fill the complement role directly as APs.

KEYWORDS

invariable adjectives; complement; transitive verbs; strong and weak transitivity

1. Introduction

Spanish, like most Romance languages, morphologically distinguishes between adjectives and adverbs: the latter are derived from the feminine form of the former with the suffix *-mente*:

(1) *rápido* ‘quick’ – *rápidamente* ‘quickly’

The morphological distinction is reflected by their syntactic behaviour as well: although both function usually as modifiers, adjectives tend to modify nominals (2), with which they show agreement in number and gender, whereas adverbs are supposed to modify all the other categories (mostly verbs), and stay invariable (3).

- (2) *Los coches son rápidos.*
the cars are fast.ADJ.PL
'The cars are fast.'
- (3) *El chico corre rápidamente.*
the boy runs fast.ADV

As is well known, adjectives (without an adverbial ending) can also modify verbs:

- (4) *Los chicos corren rápido.*
the boys run fast.ADJ

Firstly, from a morphological point of view, adjectives modifying categories other than nominals have generally been referred to as *short adverbs* by grammars, but also as *bare adjectives* (BARTRA – SUÑER 1997), *invariable adjectives* (ABEILLÉ – GODARD 2005, ABEILLÉ – MOURET 2010), *adverbial adjectives* (NOAILLY 1994), *adverbial adjectives* (COMPANY 2014), *adverbialized adjectives* (HUMMEL 2000, 2014), or *adjective adverbs* (HUMMEL – GAZDIK 2014). As can be seen from these labels, the categorization of these elements as either adjectives or adverbs is unclear for the following two reasons. Morphologically, they correspond to the masculine singular form of the given adjective, but, unlike adjectives, they are (usually) invariable, which is, in turn, one of the defining formal properties of adverbs. Syntactically, they modify a category usually modified by adverbs.

Indeed, these adjectives are often equivalent to or even interchangeable with a *-mente* adverb (however, see KOVACCI 1999, BOSQUE 1989 or DI TULLIO – SUÑER 2011 for more discussion on the differences between invariable adjectives and *-mente* adverbs).

Secondly, when it comes to syntax, in this paper, I concentrate on cases in which an invariable adjective appears in the complement position of a transitive verb, like in (5) and (6)¹ and argue that due to their semantic contribution, they can indeed adopt this function.

- (5) *Le lanzo otro cabezazo, pero me fallan las fuerzas, me mareo, veo **blanco**.*
at him throw other header, but me miss the strength, feel sick, see white.ADJ
'I try to give him another blow on the head, but I'm short of strength, I feel sick, and I see white.' (Marías, *Invasor*, 2004)
- (6) *Alguien bueno para el campo produce **harto y bonito**.*
someone good for the country produces plenty.ADJ and beautiful.ADJ
'Someone useful for the country produces a lot and beautiful things.'
(Chambeaux, *El circo, el loco y lo demás*, 2001)

1 The examples come from the CORPES corpus (<http://www.rae.es/recursos/banco-de-datos/corpes-xxi>)

2. Verb-adjective constructions

The nature of verb-adjective constructions depends both on the verb and on the adjective. Most of the verbs admitting adjectival modification are intransitive (7), whereas transitive verbs both admit adjectival modifiers (8) and, as I will argue, complements (6). In order to see this difference more clearly, we take a closer look at transitive verbs.

- (7) *El niño duerme tranquilo.*
 the child sleeps calm.ADJ
 ‘The child sleeps calm(ly).’
- (8) *Juan está comiendo tranquilo.*
 Juan is eating calm.ADJ
 ‘Juan is eating calmly.’

2.1 Transitive verbs

Concerning transitive verbs, two types have to be distinguished. The difference lies in the obligatoriness of their complement. As is well-known, most transitive verbs have an intransitive use in which they can appear without their complement (like *comer* in (9)). This is often referred to as the *absolute use*. In the case of other verbs, the complement is obligatory, *i.e.* it cannot be left out (like *arriesgar* in (10)). The obligatory vs. optional syntactic presence is thus not a reliable distinctive factor between complements and adjuncts, respectively, since complements can also be left out.

- (9) a. *Es importante comer frutas y verduras.*
 is important to eat fruits and vegetables
 ‘It is important to eat fruits and vegetables.’
- b. *Es importante comer en familia.*
 is important to eat in family
 ‘It is important to eat with the family.’
- (10) a. *Juan arriesga su vida para salvar a su perro.*
 Juan risks his life to save ACC his dog
 ‘Juan risks his life to save his dog.’
- b. **Juan arriesga.*
 ‘Juan risks.’

In what follows, I will refer to transitive verbs that can appear without their complement(s) as *weak transitive verbs*, whereas to those that cannot as *strong transitive verbs*.

2.2 Adjectival modification

Invariable adjectives functioning as complements of transitive verbs in Spanish have been dealt with by BARTRA – SUÑER (1997), DI TULLIO – SUÑER (2011) and SUÑER (to appear). Based on the classification posited in BOSQUE – MASULLO (1998), according to which quantifiers can relate to verbs in four ways, the authors claim that adjectives can modify verbs in the same four ways, which are the following:

1. Inherent modification: In this case, an invariable dimensional or degree adjective modifies the extent or the manner of the event denoted by the verb. The verb is either intransitive (11), or weak transitive, with (12a) or without (12b) a complement.

- (11) *Juan trabaja duro.*
 Juan works hard.ADJ
- (12) a. *Juan golpea fuerte/flojo.*
 Juan hits strong.ADJ/soft.ADJ
 ‘Juan hits hard/softly.’
- b. *Juan golpeó a Pedro fuerte.*
 Juan hit ACC Pedro strong.ADJ
 ‘Juan hit Pedro hard.’

2. Eventive modification: In this case, the adjective expresses the frequency of the event denoted by the verb, which can, again, be intransitive (13), or weak transitive, with (14a) or without (14b) a complement.

- (13) *Juan viaja seguido.*
 Juan travels continuous.ADJ
 ‘Juan travels continuously.’
- (14) a. *Juegan a cartas seguido.*
 play cards continuous.ADJ
 ‘They play cards continuously.’
- b. *Juan come seguido.*
 Juan eats continuous.ADJ
 ‘Juan eats continuously.’

3. Temporal/durative modification: In this case, the adjective expresses the duration of the event. Again, the verb can be intransitive (15), or weak transitive, with (16a) or without (16b) a complement.

- (15) *Hablaron largo y tendido.*
 talk_{3PL.PAST} long and broad
 ‘They talked at length.’

- (16) a. *La miró largo.*
 her watch_{3SG.PAST} long
 ‘(S)he looked at her long.’
 b. *Comieron largo.*
 eat_{3SG.PAST} long
 ‘They were eating for long.’

4. Argumental modification: In this case, the adjective is of the classifying type, and modifies the implicit object of the verb, as in (17a). Importantly, the verb is always transitive, but its object is implicit, its co-occurrence with the adjective on the syntactic level leads to ungrammaticality, like in (17b). Semantically, the object has a generic, or a conventionalized meaning.

- (17) a. *lo único que se tiene que hacer es [...] comer **saludable***
 the unique that REFL has to do is eat healthy._{ADJ}
 ‘The only thing one has to do is to eat healthily.’ (Altamirano, *Luciendo tus uñas*, 2001)
 b. **comer **saludable** un bocadillo*
 to eat healthy._{ADJ} a sandwich

DI TULLIO – SUÑER (2011) follow JONES (1988), MITTWOCH (1998) and PERELTSVAIG (1999) in assuming that the implicit object of these verbs is in fact a *cognate object*, which repeats the content of the verb (*to eat something eatable*, *to play something playable*), or a hyponym of it (*to play a song*). The adjective can only co-occur with the object if it is realized either as a neutral, generic pronoun (18a), or a hyponym of the cognate object (18b). In the second case, the adjective shows agreement with the object.

- (18) a. *comer algo sano*
 to eat something healthy
 b. *comer una ensalada sana*
 to eat a salad healthy._{ADJ.FEM}
 ‘to eat a healthy salad’

Note that the adjectives listed above all modify intransitive, or weak transitive verbs, *i.e.* transitive verbs that have an absolute use. The authors observe that invariable adjectives have a clear preference for intransitive verbs, which they modify with a manner, frequentative or durative adverbial interpretation. The question is now if invariable adjectives can also appear in the complement position of strong transitive verbs in Spanish, *i.e.* of verbs that always require a direct object and do not have an absolute use. Examples, such as (5) and (6) above, and (19) and (20)

below suggest that this is indeed possible, although this has not yet been explicitly treated in the literature on Spanish.

- (19) *Esta gorda es la mujer perfecta: [...] cobra barato y sabe dar placer.*
 this fat is the woman perfect: cashes cheap.ADJ and knows give pleasure
 ‘This fat one is the perfect woman: she asks for little money and knows how to please.’ (Bayly, *La mujer de mi hermano*, 2002)
- (20) *El pianista [...], tocando cubano, mientras [...] que cenamos bajo su música.*
 the pianist, playing Cuban, while that dine1PL.PAST under his music
 ‘The pianist was playing Cuban music, while we were having dinner accompanied by his music.’ (Alfaro, *Los espacios de la sazón*, 2004)

3. Adjectives as direct complements: the data

As for French, another Romance language, invariable adjectives have been discussed by NOAILLY (1994, 1999), and their relation to transitive verbs in particular by NOAILLY (1997, 1998a,b), ABEILLÉ – GODARD (2005) and ABEILLÉ – MOURET (2010). As ABEILLÉ – MOURET (2010) argue, French strong transitive verbs can take invariable adjectives as complements.

As the authors argue, although this use does not put into question the transitivity of these verbs, the transitivity involving adjectival complements is atypical compared to nominal complements. For instance, the typical transitivity tests, such as pronominalization with the help of *le*, *la*, *les*, passivization, or questioning with *que* or *qu'est-ce que* (‘what’) do not lead to grammatical results with adjectival complements. However, in a fourth test, namely the realization of the first argument of the verb as a prepositional phrase headed by *à* in a causative structure, they pattern with transitive verbs. In Spanish, adjectives also fail the first three transitivity tests. However, they pattern with nominal objects when it comes to causativization (21e–22e) and *se*-passivization (21f–22f) (not available in French).

- (21) a. *La mujer cobra mucho dinero.*
 the woman cashes much money
- b. *La mujer lo cobra.*
 the woman it cashes
 ‘The woman cashes it.’
- c. *?Mucho dinero es cobrado por la*
 much money is cashed by the woman
 ‘A lot of money is cashed by the woman.’
- d. *¿Qué cobra la mujer? - Mucho dinero.*
 what cashes the woman much money

- ‘What does the woman cash? - Much money.’
 e. *Juan le hace cobrar mucho dinero a la mujer.*
 John her makes cash much money ACC the woman
 ‘John makes the woman cash a lot of money.’
 f. *En esta empresa se cobra mucho dinero.*
 In this company REFL cashes much money
 ‘There is a lot of money cashed in this company.’

- (22) a. *La mujer cobra barato.*
 the woman cashes cheap.ADJ
 b. **La mujer lo cobra.*
 the woman it cashes
 c. ***Barato** es cobrado (por la mujer).
 cheap.ADJ is cashed (by the woman)
 d. *¿Qué cobra la mujer? *- Barato.*
 what cashes the woman cheap.ADJ
 e. % *Juan le hace cobrar barato a la mujer.*
 Juan her makes cash cheap ACC the woman
 ‘Juan makes the woman cash little money.’
 f. *En esta empresa se cobra barato.*
 In this company REFL cashes cheap.ADJ
 ‘There is little money cashed in this company.’

Another interesting aspect is the cumulability of the adjectives.² As (23) and (24) show, only adjectives that make different semantic contributions can be cumulated after a single verb:

- (23) *Pablo habla francés lento.*
 Pablo speaks French slow.ADJ
 ‘Pablo speaks French slowly.’
 (24) a. **Pedro bebe tinto frío.*
 Pedro drinks red.ADJ cold.ADJ
 b. *Pedro bebe un tinto frío.*
 Pedro drinks a cold.ADJ red.ADJ
 ‘Pedro drinks a cold red wine.’

In (23), one of the adjectives (*francés*) is of the classifying type, whereas the other (*lento*) functions as a manner adverb. The two are thus compatible with each other, one referring to the complement, the other is an example of inherent event modification. (24a) illustrates that the cumulation of two classifying adjectives leads

² I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for calling my attention to this aspect.

to ungrammaticality, supporting the assumption that these adjectives indeed function as complements, since complements of the same type cannot be cumulated either. The sentence can be saved (24b) if one of the adjectives is reanalyzed as a noun, which is then modified by the other adjective.

Based on the above observations, I conclude that adjectives can appear in the complement position of transitive verbs in Spanish. In the following, I argue that the group of adjectival complements in Spanish is far from being homogenous.

4. Towards an analysis of adjectival complements in Spanish

The above data lead to the following observations. First of all, the adjectives that can complement (strong) transitive verbs are typically intersective, or of the classifying type (colours, nationalities, etc.), *i.e.* they define a property, just like common nouns, although some of them are gradable. Thus, it is their semantic contribution that licenses adjectives in the object function, in that they identify sets of entities that can serve as arguments to the predicate function.

On the semantic level, I assume (following SUÑER (to appear)) that the above mentioned adjectives can combine with a cognate object (МИТТВОСН 1998), which repeats the content of the verb and is entailed by the verb. The exact nature of this combination depends largely on the type of the adjective, more precisely whether the adjective is intersective or gradable.

On the syntactic level, the question is, if the verb takes an AP complement, where there is no nominal layer present, or the complement is indeed an NP, where the N head is modified by an AP, but the NP is empty, *i.e.* the modification of the assumed cognate object takes place only at the level of semantics, but has no direct syntactic consequence. In what follows, I will argue that the AP-only and the NP analyses are both possible, but each in a particular case.

4.1 Semantic classification of adjectival complements

4.1.1 Intersective adjective

In the simplest case, the adjective is intersective, and the meaning of the object is constructed from the intersection of the set defined by the cognate object of the verb (SUÑER (to appear)) (music) and that of the adjective:

- (25) *El pianista [...], tocando cubano, mientras [...] que cenamos bajo su música.*
 the pianist, playing Cuban, while that dined under his music
 ‘The pianist was playing Cuban music, while we were having dinner accompanied by his music.’ (Alfaro, *Los espacios de la sazón*, 2004)

$\lambda x.\text{music}(x) \wedge \lambda x.\text{Cuban}(x)$

4.1.2 *Intersective adjective with contextually restricted interpretation*

In the second case, the adjective is intersective, but the object it refers to is clearly identifiable: the verb-adjective construction is used in one particular context. To put it differently, the intersection of the sets denoted by the cognate object and the adjective is contextually restricted to one single element:

- (26) *El atleta [...] dio **positivo** a sustancia prohibida en un control antidopaje.*
 the athlete gave positive to substance forbidden in a control anti-doping
 ‘The athlete’s test on forbidden substance was positive during a doping control.’
 (Gaceta China, *El Carabobeño*, 2008)
positive result.x = ‘result’ \wedge $\lambda x.\text{positive}(x)$

Other examples include: *dar negativo* ‘to give a negative result’, *tener libre* ‘to have a free day’, *beber tinto* ‘to drink red (wine)’, *votar Republicano* ‘to vote Republican’, *estudiar francés* ‘to study French’.

It is therefore no surprise that exactly these adjectives are often used as nouns: for instance, they can take an article, or appear in the plural form, unlike other examples:

- (27) *Hablan muy bien el francés.*
 they speak very well the French
 ‘They speak French very well.’
- (28) *El artículo fue traducido del francés.*
 the article was translated from the French
 ‘The article was translated from French.’
- (29) *El positivo que dio en el control chocó todo el mundo.*
 the positive that he gave in the control shocked everyone
 ‘His positive result at the test shocked everyone.’
- (30) *Es un tinto muy especial.*
 is a red very special
 ‘It is a very special red wine.’
- (31) a. *Yo sólo bebo tintos.*
 I only drink red.PL
 ‘I only drink red wine.’
 b. **Yo sólo bailaba lentos.*
 I only danced slow.PL
 Intended: ‘I only danced slow dances.’

4.1.3 Intersective adjective with idiosyncratic meaning

In this third group, we find intersective adjectives that form frozen expressions with the given verb.

- (32) *Le lanzo otro cabezazo, pero me fallan las fuerzas, me mareo, veo blanco.*
 at him throw other header, but me miss the strength, feel sick, see white
 'I try to give him another blow on the head, but I'm short of strength, I feel sick, and I see white.' (Marías, *Invasor*, 2004)

There is no cognate object the adjective can possibly refer to, and the adjective cannot function as a nominal: it cannot be preceded by an article, or appear in the plural form.

- (33) **el blanco que veo*
 the white that see.1SG
 (34) **veo blancos*
 see.1SG white.PL

The meaning of the adjective is thus represented as: $x.\text{white}(x)$.

4.1.4 Gradable adjective

If the adjective is gradable, like *harto*, it has to be interpreted according to some relevant standard. The property representing this standard must also come from the cognate object entailed by the verb.

- (35) *Alguien bueno para el campo produce harto y bonito.*
 someone good for the country produces plenty.ADJ and beautiful.ADJ
 'Someone useful for the country produces a lot and beautiful (things).'
 (Chambeaux, *El circo, el loco y lo demás*, 2001)

The meaning of the adjective is thus calculated with the help of the cognate object and that of the relevant property (P) (see also Dalrymple 2001 for further explanation): $\lambda x.\text{bonito}, P(x); P \approx \text{product}$.

4.2 Syntactic considerations

The most important question to answer is the syntactic status of the complement adjective; more precisely, if it surfaces as an AP or as an NP in syntax. The presence of a nominal is motivated on the semantic level in three cases out of four, but it still remains a puzzle, if the semantic reference to a cognate object also entails its presence in syntax in one way or another. Just like the case of weak transitive verbs, which do appear without their theme/patient, etc. argument realized as a syntactic

complement, one could also argue that the modification of the object is a purely semantic process: the verb brings in its (syntactically unrealized) second argument, which is then modified by the adjective. Although these issues still necessitate future research, I adopt the following assumptions:

There is direct evidence that some adjectives from the second group (*francés, tinto, positivo, negativo*) can indeed be reanalyzed as nouns. In these cases, they are to be represented as NPs:

- (36) *El habla muy bien [el francés]_{NP}.*
 he speaks very well the French
 ‘He speaks French very well.’

However, they also allow a syntactic representation with an elliptical NP layer, in which the adjective remains in the AP:

- (37) *Es [un [tinto]_{AP}]_{NP} de América Latina.*
 is a red from America Latin
 ‘It is a red wine from Latin America.’

On the other hand, I propose to analyze all the other cases as APs that in these case function as atypical complements to the verb:

- (38) *tocando [cubano]_{AP}*
 playing Cuban.ADJ
 ‘playing Cuban music’
 (39) *ver [blanco]_{AP}*
 see white.ADJ
 (40) *producir [harto]_{AP} y [bonito]_{AP}*
 produce a lot.ADJ and beautiful.ADJ
 ‘His positive result at the test shocked everyone.’

5. Formalization of the results

I propose to formalize the results so far obtained in the modular framework of Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG, BRESNAN – KAPLAN 1982, DALRYMPLE 2001, etc.), where the level of syntax is represented by two separate but interdependent structures: functional structure (an attribute-value matrix containing syntactic functions and predicate-argument relations), constituent structure (a syntactic tree). The two are related via correspondence functions. I restrict this sketch of analysis

to two functional structures, one containing an NP complement, and the other an AP complement and constituent structure:

- (41) *El pianista* [...], *tocando cubano*
 the pianist, playing Cuban

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PRED} \quad \text{'tocar } \langle (\uparrow \text{subj}), (\uparrow \text{obj}) \rangle \text{' } \\ \text{SUBJ} \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PRED} \quad \text{'el pianista'} \end{array} \right] \\ \text{OBJ} \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PRED} \quad \text{'cubano'} \end{array} \right] \\ \text{ASP} \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PROGR} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

- (42) *Él bebe un tinto.*
 he drinks a red (wine)

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PRED} \quad \text{'beber } \langle (\uparrow \text{subj}), (\uparrow \text{obj}) \rangle \text{' } \\ \text{SUBJ} \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PRED} \quad \text{'él'} \end{array} \right] \\ \text{OBJ} \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PRED} \quad \text{'wine'} \\ \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{DET} \quad \text{un} \\ \text{ADJ} \quad \text{tinto} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

The level of semantics is represented in a separate structure (semantic structure), where each component has a semantic description, but it is directly related to the functional structure via correspondence functions. The s-structure representation is compatible with various semantic theories (the one most widely used being *glue semantics*) and also with the more general representation used above.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that invariable adjectives can fill the role of direct complement of transitive verbs in Spanish, just like in French. The exact nature of this verb - adjective construction depends both on the verb (more precisely, whether it is weak or strong transitive) and on the adjective (whether it is interactive or gradable). As was shown, strong transitive verbs (those that obligatorily take a complement) can take intersective/classifying adjectives as complements, although gradable ones are sometimes also possible. Intersective adjectives define

a set (which can be reduced to one single element, though), which, on the level of semantics, combines with the cognate object of the verb (absent from syntax). Gradable adjectives are defined with respect to a property, which is also provided by the cognate object of the verb.

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