

“TO BE” AND

“SER/ESTAR”: PREDICATE / ARGUMENTS

**Predicate/arguments theory. Analysis and exercises of instances of the verbs “to be” and
“ser/estar” in English and Spanish**

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**TRABAJO FINAL DE ADSCRIPCIÓN: GRAMÁTICA CONTRASTIVA- SECCIÓN
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“TO BE” AND

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Introduction

After my two years assisting the Chair, I have observed that one of the topics that presents more difficulties for students is the theory and the practice related to predicates and arguments. More specifically, students find it difficult to identify when the verbs “to be” and “ser/estar” function as predicator and select for arguments in English and Spanish, respectively. I have decided to research this topic and provide more exercises because I think it is essential for students to understand this in order to better comprehend the topics that follow in the subject’s syllabus. Within the scope of this theory, some important concepts as regards the theory on predicates and arguments are described and then instances of the verbs “to be” and “ser/estar” as predicators or containers, respectively, are analyzed. Finally, exercises to identify and classify predicators with their respective arguments are included.

This work is divided into three sections. In the first section, the theory on predicates and arguments is presented. The main points of the theory are described and key definitions of essential terms are provided, such as “predicate”, “predicator”, “referring expressions” and “arguments”. All the concepts and information presented herein are based on authors such as Lyons (1977a, 1977b), Saeed (2009), Ágel & Fischer (2015), and Hurford, Heasley & Smith (2007) in the English section, and Di Tullio (2014), Real Academia Española (2010), and Pinuer Rodríguez (1994) in the Spanish section.

In the second section, the peculiarities of sentences containing the verbs “to be” and “ser/estar” are analyzed from the perspective of predicates and arguments theory. Before identifying the verbs “to be” and “ser/estar” as predicators, it is important to know the distinctions between equative sentences and ascriptive sentences. Different mechanisms to identify each of the sentences are described in order to establish when the verbs “to be” and “ser/estar” are considered predicates functioning as predicators. Additional exercises are included for students to consolidate the theory through practice; that is, exercises are

presented to identify key concepts, classify structures such as equative and ascriptive sentences, point out the predicate functioning as predicator and the elements required to form grammatically correct sentences. Finally, the exercises provided aim at both distinguishing between equative and ascriptive sentences and identifying predicates and arguments.

In the third section, the pedagogical framework is presented. The design of the exercises is in line with the pedagogical approach followed by the Chair: consciousness-raising (Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1981, 1988). Before the exercises, the theory on consciousness-raising is presented taking into account authors such as Rutherford (1987), Ellis (2002, 2008) and Willis & Willis (1996). The exercises go first from more teacher-monitored exercises testing theory to recognition exercises and finally to production exercises.

With this proposal, I hope to provide more theoretical background and practice on a topic which is the basis for the development of the subsequent topics of this course. Also, I hope this work helps students who have difficulties understanding and applying the theory to their assignments and exams. All the exercises presented herein are thought of as additional practice that can be evaluated by the professors and added to the existing material that is part of the Chair.

Predicate and arguments theory: Authors and definitions

Ágel and Fischer (2015) retrieved an idea presented by Leiss (2002) who indicated that human languages construe messages from a predicate and arguments perspective: events are seen as comprising things and relationships among those things. Lyons (1977a) proposes the usage of the “propositional calculus” and “predicate calculus” for the description of aspects of meaning in language (Lyons, p. 141). The author presents the predicate calculus as the system that allows for the analysis of internal structures of simple propositions (p. 147). That is to say, by means of this calculus, the analysis and classification of components in propositions can be performed. According to Lyons, the importance of the introduction of this

calculus for Semantics is that we can identify a relationship between sentences of language and events in the external world. He establishes that propositions are made up of the following terms: names and predicates. By means of this calculus, we can link the meaning of constituents to external entities in the world. Lyons (1977a) defines predicate as a term used in conjunction with names so as to give information and attribute properties about that name. According to his presentation, predicates are the categories that select for certain names. Depending on the number of names selected, the predicates can be “zero-place”, “one-place”, “two-place” or “three-place” (p. 149).

The authors Ágel and Fischer (2015) identify Lucien Tesnière, a French philosopher, as the one who developed the theory on predicates and arguments, also known as valency theory. They explain that the basic sentence does not spring from the traditional partition subject (NP) / predicate (VP), but from the principle of endocentric verb centrality. The authors state that in the context of this theory, endocentricity refers to the verb as being the key element for sentences to have a structure and that sentences spring from the lexical verb (p. 226). For example, Ágel and Fischer (2015) indicate that, according to Tesnière, the structure of the sentence *Peter reads very good books* is the following:

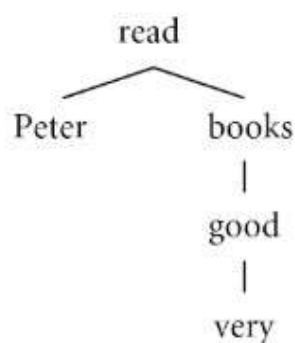


Figure 1. Tree diagram (*stemma*). (Ágel & Fischer, p. 226)

Using this schema, the authors describe that there is a *regent*—word governing another word (Ágel & Fischer, p. 227)—“read” that creates a structure with *dependents*. Therefore, the sentence is about the act of reading and, in that act, there are two dependents involved: an individual that reads, functioning as subject, and an object that is read, functioning as direct object. The verb determines not only the number of slots to be filled in, but also the thematic role that that entity must have. Following the example *Peter reads very good books*, there are two slots to be filled in, one agent and the other, theme (theta roles, i.e. roles that speakers assign to entities). If we look at different examples, we can see that this reasoning applies in all cases. With the *regent* “give”, there will be three slots to be filled in: subject (agent), direct object (instrument), indirect object (patient). However, with “work” as a *regent*, there is only one slot required by this verb, the subject (agent). It can be concluded that the regent not only determines the type of category but also the theta role assigned to that category.

After analyzing information from two different sources—Lyons (1977a, 1977b) and Ágel and Fischer (2015)—, it can be seen that *regent* and *predicate* are the terms used to refer to the word selecting for arguments that perform a specific syntactic function and have a specific theta role, respectively. Taking into consideration all the authors cited and consulted and in order to be in line with the authors the Chair already follows, the information related to referring expressions, predicate, predicator and arguments is taken from Hurford, Heasley and Smith (2007). It is important and relevant to include here the definitions of key terms within this theory: referring expression, predicate, predicator and arguments. These definitions are useful for students to understand the analysis of predicates and arguments and the basis of this analysis. After the students acquire this knowledge, they are able to understand and identify the cases in which the verbs “to be” and “ser/estar” can function as the predicate acting as predicator.

Hurford et al. (2007) propose the following definitions for the terms mentioned above. A referring expression is “any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or someone (or a clearly delimited collection of things or people), i.e. used with a particular referent in mind” (p. 37). When speakers use referring expressions, they resort to expressions that relate to a specific entity, either abstract or concrete, in the universe of discourse. In the example *I saw a small dog near my house*, a small dog is working as a referring expression because, at the level of discourse, it points to a specific entity in the real world. However, in the case of *A small dog is excellent for apartments*, a small dog is not a referring expression because it has generic, non-specific reference and therefore, it has generic interpretation. Therefore, the same indefinite noun phrase can point to a specific entity outside discourse or not. From this example, it can be concluded that the same noun phrase can be a referring expression or not depending on the context of use. This happens normally with indefinite noun phrases. However, Hurford et al. (2007) explain that definite noun phrases, such as proper nouns, personal pronouns and longer descriptive expressions are normally the ones used as referring expressions.

In the sentence *Kevin is with her mother now*, Kevin is identified as a proper noun and also as a referring expression. In a sentence like *He is with the man who is wearing a green sweater*, the personal pronoun he and the descriptive expression the man who is wearing a green sweater both work as referring expressions because both expressions refer to entities in the external world.

Hurford et al. (2007) define predicate as “any word (or sequence of words) which (in a given single sense) can function as the predicator of a sentence.” (p. 48). That is to say, we can have predicates such as verbs, nouns, adjectives and prepositions that can work as predicators of a sentence. According to the mentioned authors, a predicator of a simple declarative sentence is:

the word (sometimes a (partial) group of words) which does not belong to any of the referring expressions and which makes the most specific contribution to the meaning of the sentence. Intuitively speaking, the predicator describes the state or process in which the referring expressions are involved. (Hurford, Heasley and Smith, 2007, p. 47.)

A simple sentence will only contain ONE predicator and that predicator will select for arguments. As mentioned before, verbs, nouns, adjectives and prepositions can work as predicators of a sentence.

So far, information as regards English sentences was presented. In Spanish, coincidences can be found. Di Tullio (2007), in her book *Manual de Gramática en español*, states that from the syntactic point of view, a sentence is the partition between subject (*sujeto*) and predicate (*predicado*) (p. 92). She also explains that from the semantic point of view, a sentence contains a predicator (*predicado semántico*) and arguments (*argumentos*) selected for by the predicate functioning as predicator. As Di Tullio (2007) clearly states, if we adopt the partition subject / predicate, in most cases, we will identify the verb as the nucleus of the predicate. However, from the semantic point of view, we can identify other categories as predicates functioning as predicators and selecting for arguments: nouns, adjectives or even prepositions.

If we consult RAE, we can also find the distinction between two definitions of predicate (*predicado*). The first definition refers to the content attributed to a subject, similar to the partition subject / predicate described by Di Tullio. The second definition conceives the predicate (*predicado*) as a category indicating states, actions, properties or processes and thus, requiring other participants to complete its meaning. Those participants are called arguments (*argumentos*).

Having defined all the key terms to identify predicates and arguments in both languages, it is pertinent to see examples of predicates working as predicators, of arguments and of referring expressions. In the sentence “*Grace loves her dress*” we can identify two referring expressions, which are Grace and her dress. Therefore, we can say that the predicate love functions as predicator in this case, and therefore, it opens two slots to be filled in. In this example, the predicator love is the word that is not a referring expression and the one that contributes the most to the meaning of the sentence, following Hurford et al.’s (2007) definition.

In the sentence *Joseph is giving his son a present*, Joseph, his son and a present are referring expressions and give is the predicate functioning as predicator. Three slots are opened up to be filled in. In the sentence *Mary is beautiful*, Mary is a referring expression but, from the perspective of predicates and arguments, and considering the definitions previously laid out, it is not correct to identify the verb to be as the one contributing the most meaning to the sentence or as the one selecting for arguments. Rather, beautiful is the predicate working as predicator, and thus, selects for arguments, one in this case.

Predicates/arguments theory: When the verb “to be” is considered a predicator

As it is defined in RAE, “los verbos copulativos se denominan así porque ligan o vinculan el predicado con el sujeto” (p. 701). RAE (2010) specifies that the copulative verb is a grammatical element that has only one function: carrying information as regards tense, mood and aspect (p. 702). In sentences like *John is behind the fence*, the predicate functioning as predicator is behind opening up two slots to be filled in, thus, selecting for two arguments: John and the fence. The function of the verb to be here is that of a container. In Lyons’ (1977b) words, the verb to be is present so as to turn a predicate into a predicator (p. 471). If we go back to the definition of what a predicator is provided by Hurford et al. (2007), they refer to the predicator as the word contributing the most meaning to the sentence. Taking

into account the example (*John is behind the fence*) and the information presented so far, it can be concluded that the verb to be is not the one providing the most meaning to the sentence, but rather behind is. In this example, behind opens up two slots to be filled in: a subject and a place. The verb “to be” is not providing specific information as to the state / process in which the referring expressions are involved. Rather, it provides the grammatical information related to tense, aspect, mood.

When can the verbs “to be” and “ser/estar” be identified as predicators selecting for arguments? According to Spanish grammarians, such as Gutierrez Ordóñez (1968) and Pinuer Rodríguez (1999), and English grammarians, such as Lyons (1977a, 1977b) and Hurford, et al. (2007), first, two different constructions containing the verb “to be” have to be distinguished: equative sentences and ascriptive sentences (*oraciones ecuativas* and *oraciones adscriptivas* in Spanish). For Hurford, et al. (2007), an equative sentence is “one which is used to assert the identity of the referents of two referring expressions, i.e. to assert that two referring expressions have the same referent.” (p. 42). For example, in the sentence *Tony Blair is the Prime Minister*, we have two referring expressions (Tony Blair and Prime Minister) that have the same referent. Therefore, here we can state that the verb to be is working as predicator. This is, then, an equative sentence. Lyons (1977b) defines ascriptive sentences as “structures used to ascribe to the referent of the subject-expression a certain property” (p. 472). So, a sentence like *Mary is beautiful* is considered an ascriptive sentence and, thus, the predicator selecting for arguments is not the verb to be, but rather the non-verbal predicate beautiful. It can be stated that in the example *Mary is beautiful*, the speaker is attributing a characteristic or quality (beauty) to an entity, Mary in this case. This differs completely from the example *Tony Blair is the Prime Minister*. The Prime Minister is not a quality to be attributed to an entity.

Pinuer Rodríguez (1999) explains, in his work *Adscripción y ecuatividad en español*, the difference between these two constructions. He establishes that one of the features equative sentences have is interchangeability. As Pinuer Rodríguez (1999) explains, “El equilibrio semántico que se da entre sujeto y atributo en las oraciones ecuativas provoca una clara permutabilidad (intercambio de posición) y reversibilidad funcional (intercambio de función) en el nivel sintáctico” (p. 175). He makes an interesting distinction. In an equative sentence, the position of referring expressions can be altered and the result will not be a marked structure. An example is added hereinbelow to clarify this point.

- (1) Ella es María.
- (2) María es inteligente.

If we follow Pinuer Rodríguez’s (1999) reasoning, the order of the referring expressions in the previous sentences can be altered and the structures will still be unmarked. This feature of interchangeability is proved in example 1a. By contrast, if the position of the referring expression in sentence 2 is changed, it turns the sentence into a marked structure as seen in example 2a.

- (1a) María es ella.
- (2a) Inteligente es María.

Therefore, sentence 1 is an equative sentence and sentence 2 is an ascriptive sentence. At the same time, it can be seen that when the order in ascriptive sentences is altered, the referring expressions maintain their original syntactic function, i.e. María is the syntactic subject and inteligente is the subject complement (*complemento predicativo subjetivo obligatorio*).

Another feature that distinguishes “equative” from “ascriptive” sentences (Lyons, 1977b) and that it is useful for students to know is the type of constituent that can be part of each sentence. The first feature described by Lyons (1977b) is that in equative sentences “the expression-class that occurs on third position is not co-extensive with the expression-class

that occurs on third position in ascriptive sentences” (p. 471). The author establishes that in equative sentences, personal pronouns, proper nouns, definite noun phrases can be found on third position in a sentence, while, in ascriptive sentences, the employment of common, indefinite nouns, adjectives or equivalents is prevalent. Here are some examples of the two types of sentences:

Equative sentence: Barack Obama was the 44th President of the United States

(Proper noun)

(definite noun phrase)

Ascriptive sentence: The neighbour’s daughter is funny and talkative.

(common noun)

(adjectives)

The second feature described by Lyons (1977b) is that in equative sentences the subject and the complement are permutable. An adjective is not permutable with a noun phrase. Lyons explains that the fact that an equative sentence contains a noun phrase subject and a noun phrase complement reflects the main function of this type of sentences:

“identifying an entity referred to by means of an expression with an entity referred to by another expression” (Lyons, 1997b, p. 473).

Regarding Spanish, Pinuer Rodríguez (1999) also adds that ascriptive sentences can be formed either with “ser” or “estar”, but equative sentences only admit the verb “ser”. Another mechanism Pinuer Rodríguez (1999) presents to separate equative from ascriptive sentences is that of the expansion of the non-verbal predicate in ascriptive sentences by means of a phrase introduced by “como”. So, sentences such as the following ones can be possible if the sentence is ascriptive.

3a) María es inteligente (ascriptive sentence)

3b) María es inteligente, como Patricio.

4a) María es ella.

4b) *María es ella, como Patricio.

Lyons (1977b) as well as Pinuer Rodríguez (1999) point that the use of interrogative questions can also be a useful mechanism to identify ascriptive and equative sentences. The use of questions headed by “Cómo” and “How” are used to identify ascriptive sentences, while questions headed by “Cuál” and “Which” are used to identify equative sentences. Therefore, we can make use of this mechanism in the following way.

5) ¿Cómo es María? = María es inteligente (ascriptive sentence).

6) ¿Cuál es María? = María es ella (equative sentence).

Pedagogical framework for the exercise section

In the following section, I include activities designed to be used in face-to-face classes. I consider it is also important to point out that this work was written during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, all these exercises can be modified and adapted to be used in the Chair’s virtual classroom. It is my intention that these resources contribute to the already existing materials by providing teachers and students in this course with meaningful tasks that can help students comprehend and better apply this theory on predicates and arguments.

The approach used for the design of the exercises is the same used by the Chair in the development of exercises for the Handout: Grammatical consciousness-raising (C-R) (Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1981,1988). Before presenting the exercises on the use of the verbs “to be” and “ser/estar”, it is important to introduce the approach by Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (1981,1988).

Rutherford & Sharwood Smith (1981,1988) indicate that by the term ‘consciousness raising’ they mean “the deliberate attempt to draw the learner’s attention specifically to the formal properties of the target language” (p. 274). Rutherford (1987) establishes that C-R is different from the traditional grammar teaching because C-R is a means to attain grammar

competence, while, in traditional grammar, teaching aims at instilling that competence. Thus, in C-R the learner contributes, interacts with the knowledge in order to construct it.

Rutherford (1987) rejects the idea of ‘accumulated entities’ model of language learning that believes that by highlighting features of grammar in isolation, at the end, those features will become intake knowledge.

The key assumption behind consciousness-raising is that in order to learn a second language, target forms have to be salient for learners to notice them. There are various features of C-R which are important to develop. The first characteristic is that this approach conceives that learning will be more effective if learners, by themselves, are led to discover how a language works.

Rutherford (1987) explains that when learners start learning a new and second language, they do not ignore what is related to language and what we use it for. Learners bring knowledge to their learning process to make connections with and build upon familiar structures.

According to Ellis (2002), unlike grammar practice that aims at creating implicit knowledge, consciousness-raising aims at creating explicit knowledge. Sharwood Smith quotes Bialystok to define explicit and implicit knowledge as follows: “Explicit knowledge (...) denotes a conscious analytic awareness of the formal properties of the target language whereas implicit knowledge means an intuitive feeling for what is correct and acceptable” (Bialystok, 1978, as cited in Smith, 1981, p. 159). Implicit knowledge is the one needed to use structures effortlessly for communication purposes, whereas explicit knowledge is knowledge we gather about a topic. Following Ellis (2002), explicit knowledge is not much use in communication; thus, we need implicit knowledge. Consciousness-raising does not create implicit knowledge *per se*, but it is a facilitator in the acquisition of grammar needed for communication because, as stated, explicit knowledge is knowledge about a subject, not

the type of knowledge needed to use grammar effortlessly for communicative purposes.

Robinson, Mackey, Gass & Schmidt (2012) clarify in *Attention and awareness in second language acquisition*:

learners rely on implicit knowledge for both comprehension and production, and explicit knowledge is used only for monitoring the accuracy of this output. Explicit instruction and the explicit knowledge gained through it are useful when responding to discrete items on tests, but play no real role when language is being used for real communication. (p. 10).

Ellis (2002) explains that for the creation of implicit knowledge, the one needed for communication, there are processes that have to take place: noticing, comparing and integrating. As Ellis states, noticing occurs when the learner becomes conscious of a particular linguistic feature in the input. Comparing occurs when the learner compares the feature noticed in the input with their own mental grammar, and integrating occurs when the learner incorporates that new linguistic feature into their grammar. Consciousness-raising is important and contributes in these processes. As Ellis (2002) points out, consciousness-raising contributes to the first two processes —noticing and comparing— and prepares the ground for integration to occur. This is why the author claims that consciousness-raising indirectly affects the generation of explicit knowledge. C-R contributes to the first two processes and when the learners is “developmentally ready”, integration can take place and explicit knowledge can occur.

According to Ellis (2002), the main characteristics of consciousness-raising activities are the following:

1. There is an attempt to isolate a specific linguistic feature for focused attention.

2. The learners are provided with data which illustrate the targeted feature and they may also be supplied with an explicit rule describing or explaining the feature.
3. The learners are expected to utilise intellectual effort to understand the targeted feature.
4. Misunderstanding or incomplete understanding of the grammatical structure by the learners leads to clarification in the form of further data and description or explanation.
5. Learners may be required (although this is not obligatory) to articulate the rule describing the grammatical structure. (p. 711)

The incorporation of the pedagogical framework is important in this work because the exercises provided must be in line with what the Chair already does and how the Chair approaches the different topics.

Unlike some other theories, consciousness-raising approach helps students become aware of the mechanisms the language employs at the surface level. That is to say, this approach helps students to be conscious of the functioning of two languages, in the case of these students who will become professionals that will work with two languages.

Exercises

The following exercises were designed in relation to the information previously presented in this work. The exercises should be done after analyzing the authors and the information presented as regards the topic.

Objectives:

By the end of these exercises, students will be able to:

- understand the instances in which the verbs “to be” and “ser/estar” can function as predicate functioning as predicator and selecting for arguments by means of activities such as true and false statements, and sentence production;
- comprehend the difference between equative and ascriptive sentences in English and Spanish by means of sentence identification and classification;
- improve their ability to perform a comparative-contrastive analysis by means of error detection exercises and paragraph writing;
- develop and broaden their analytical skills needed to produce better translations and productions;
- generate their own sentences and contrastive analyses in paragraph form following theoretical guidelines by means of guided exercises.

Practice 1: After reading the theoretical sources, determine if the following statements are TRUE or FALSE. Justify your choice in the case of the statements which are FALSE.

- a) The theory on predicates and arguments establishes that the predicator is the one that provides the structure of a sentence, establishing the number of slots to be filled in.

TRUE

b) The predicator selects for a number of arguments with a specific theta role. *TRUE*

b) The verb “to be” can never be the predicator selecting for arguments. *FALSE. The verb “to be” can sometimes be the predicator selecting for arguments. There are instances in which the verb “to be” can be the predicator selecting for arguments, such as in the equative sentence: Tony Blare was the Prime Minister.*

d) In a sentence like “Mary is tall”, the verb “to be” functions as the container of the nonverbal predicator, i.e., tall. *TRUE*

e) The number of arguments selected for by the predicate does not determine its degree. *FALSE. The number of arguments selected for by the predicate determines its degree. The degree of predicate (zero-place, one-place, two-place, three-place predicate functioning as predicator) is determined by the number of arguments selected.*

f) The predicate functioning as predicator can only be a verb. *FALSE. The predicate functioning as predicator can be a verb, a noun, an adjective or a preposition. In ascriptive sentences like “The keys are on the table”, the predicator is the preposition “on”, a nonverbal predicator.*

g) In Spanish, we speak of “predicado semántico” as a counterpart for the English term predicator. *TRUE*

h) The verb “to be” is the predicator in ascriptive sentences like “María is beautiful”. *FALSE. The verb “to be” is not the predicator in ascriptive sentences like “María is beautiful”. The verb “to be” here acts as container of the non-verbal predicator.*

Practice 2: After reading the theory on equative and ascriptive sentences, fill in the chart with the corresponding features under each heading.

Ascriptive sentence/ <i>Oración ascriptiva</i>	Equative sentence/ <i>Oración ecuativa</i>
-The sentence ascribes a property to the referent.	-Both referring expressions in the sentence have the same referent.
-If we alter the order of constituents, we have a marked structure.	-If we alter the order of the constituents, the structure is still unmarked.
-Structures found: common, indefinite nouns, adjectives.	-Structures found: personal pronouns, proper nouns, definite noun phrases.
-The predicate acting as predicator is a non-verbal predicate.	-The predicate acting as predicator is a verbal predicate.
-The verb acts as container.	

Practice 3: Indicate if the following sentences are ascriptive or equative. (Sentences taken from Sartori, H. (18/12/2019).

- 1) El niño rey del tablero es argentino. ascriptive
- 2) Ilan es el campeón sudamericano y panamericano de su categoría. equative
- 3) Nadie es un bicho raro. ascriptive
- 4) Lo de este nene es realmente impresionante. ascriptive
- 5) Eso es lo que más destaco de él. ascriptive
- 6) Cynthia Aziz es la directora de la Primaria donde Ilan es, básicamente, un alumno más.
equative

Practice 4: Read sentences a-g and write sentences according to the instructions given in each case.

- a) Write a sentence with a three-place predicate functioning as predicator.

My brother gave my mother a beautiful present.

- b) Write a sentence using “my younger brother” as a referring expression.

My younger brother runs 2 hours everyday

- c) Write a sentence containing a non-verbal predicate functioning as predicator.

My grandmother is behind the fence.

- d) Write a sentence in which there is an argument with the thematic role of experiencer.

My brother loves animals and, more specifically, cats.

- e) Write a sentence using a one-place predicate functioning as predicator.

Annie’s grandmother doesn’t work anymore

- f) Write a sentence with the verb “to be” working as the container of the non-verbal predicator.

The neighbor’s dog is outside the house

- g) Write a sentence with the verb “to be” acting as predicator.

Alberto Fernandez is the new President

Practice 5: Write a contrastive analysis of sentence E. You had to produce the sentence in English and now provide a translation into Spanish. Include, in your paragraph, referring expressions, number of arguments, predicate functioning as predicator, degree, thematic role of arguments, type of sentence and correspondence. Time yourself. The estimated time to do

this activity is 20 minutes.

Practice 6: Read both excerpts from “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” and analyze the instances of the verbs “to be” and “ser/estar” in both languages.

“Yes, Harry,” said Lupin with painful restraint, “and a great number of Death Eaters witnessed that happening! Forgive me, but it was a very unusual move then, under imminent threat of death. Repeating it tonight in front of Death Eaters who either witnessed or heard about the first occasion was close to suicidal!”

“So you think I should have killed Stan Shunpike?” said Harry angrily.

“Of course not,” said Lupin, “but the Death Eaters — frankly, most people! — would have expected you to attack back! Expelliarmus is a useful spell, Harry, but the Death Eaters seem to think it is your signature move, and I urge you not to let it become so!”

Lupin was making Harry feel idiotic, and yet there was still a grain of defiance inside him.

“I won’t blast people out of my way just because they’re there,” said Harry. “That’s Voldemort’s job.”

Lupin’s retort was lost: Finally succeeding in squeezing through the door, Hagrid staggered to a chair and sat down; it collapsed beneath him. Ignoring his mingled oaths and apologies, Harry addressed Lupin again.

“Will George be okay?”

All Lupin’s frustration with Harry seemed to drain away at the question.

“I think so, although there’s no chance of replacing his ear, not when it’s been cursed off —”

There was a scuffling from outside. Lupin dived for the back door; Harry leapt over Hagrid’s legs and sprinted into the yard.

-Si, Harry, -dijo Lupin con dolorosa contención-. ¡y un gran número de mortifagos vieron como ocurrió! Perdóname, pero fue un movimiento muy poco habitual entonces, bajo la inminente amenaza de muerte. ¡Repetirlo esta noche delante de mortifagos que presenciaron u oyeron hablar de la primera ocasión fue casi un suicidio!

-¿Así que crees que debería haber matado a Stan Shunpike? -dijo Harry furiosamente.

-¡Por supuesto que no, -dijo Lupin- pero los mortifagos... ¡francamente, la mayoría de la gente!... habrían esperado que respondieras al ataque! ¡Expelliarmus es un hechizo útil, Harry, pero los mortifagos parecen creer que es tu firma personal, y te urjo a no dejar que eso ocurra!

Lupin estaba haciendo sentir a Harry como un idiota, y aún así todavía había un grado de desafío en su interior.

-No voy a sacar a la fuerza la gente fuera de mi camino solo porque estén ahí, -dijo Harry-. Eso es cosa de Voldemort.

La réplica de Lupin se perdió. Consiguiendo finalmente atravesar la puerta, Hagrid fue hasta una silla y se sentó; esta se derrumbó bajo él. Ignorando su mezcla de disculpas y juramentos, Harry se dirigió de nuevo a Lupin.

-¿George se recuperará?

Toda la frustración de Lupin con Harry pareció desaparecer ante la pregunta.

-Eso creo, aunque no hay forma de reemplazar su oreja, no cuando ha sido arrancada por un maldición.

Se oyeron unos roces fuera. Lupin se lanzó a la puerta trasera, Harry saltó sobre las piernas de Hagrid y entró corriendo en el patio.

A) Identify all the sentences in both languages that are either ascriptive or equative.

*It was a very unusual move then - Fue un movimiento muy poco habitual entonces.

Ascriptive

*Repeating it tonight in front of Death Eaters who either witnessed or heard about the first occasion was close to suicidal - ¡Repetirlo esta noche delante de mortifagos que presenciaron u oyeron hablar de la primera ocasión fue casi un suicidio! *Ascriptive*

*Expelliarmus is a useful spell - Expelliarmus es un hechizo útil. *Equative*

*...but the Death Eaters seem to think it is your signature move. - Pero los mortifagos parecen creer que es tu firma personal. *Ascriptive*

B) Now, choose a pair and write a comparative-contrastive analysis.

Expelliarmus is a useful spell - Expelliarmus es un hechizo útil

This is an instance of an equative sentence in both languages. These are equative sentences because both referring expressions in the sentence have the same referent. The referent is a common noun, Expelliarmus. As it is an equative sentence, if the order of constituents is changed, the result is an unmarked sentence: A useful spell is Expelliarmus. As regards syntax, in both languages, “Expelliarmus” functions as the subject and “a useful spell/un hechizo útil” is the subject complement. As regards predicates and arguments, the predicate acting as predicator and selecting for arguments is the verbal predicate “to be/ser”, selecting for two arguments “Expelliarmus” and “useful spell/un hechizo útil” in both languages. This is a twoplace predicate / “predicado diádico”. The constituents selected by the predicate are Expelliarmus, the subject, that has the thematic role of Topic and “useful spell/un hechizo útil”, subject complement, that has the thematic role of theme. This is an instance of correspondence because we see the use of the same construction, an equative sentence, and of a verbal predicate selecting for arguments.

Practice 7: Now, read the following extract from “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” and provide a translation.

Two figures had appeared in the yard, and as Harry ran toward them he realized they were Hermione, now returning to her normal appearance, and Kingsley, both clutching a bent coat hanger. Hermione flung herself into Harry’s arms, but Kingsley showed no pleasure at the sight of any of them. Over Hermione’s shoulder Harry saw him raise his wand and point it at Lupin’s chest.

“The last words Albus Dumbledore spoke to the pair of us?”

“Harry is the best hope we have. Trust him,” said Lupin calmly.

Kingsley turned his wand on Harry, but Lupin said, “It’s him, I’ve checked!”

Translation guide

Dos figuras habían aparecido en el patio, y mientras Harry corría hacia ellas comprendió que eran Hermione, ahora de vuelta a su apariencia normal, y Kingsley, ambos aferrados a una percha doblada. Hermione se lanzó a los brazos de Harry, pero Kingsley no mostró ningún placer ante la visión de ninguno de ellos. Sobre el hombro de Hermione Harry le vio alzar su varita y apuntar al pecho de Lupin.

-¡Las últimas palabras que Albus Dumbledore nos dirigió a los dos!

-Harry es la mejor esperanza que tenemos. Confíad en él, -dijo Lupin tranquilamente.

Kingsley giró su varita hacia Harry, pero Lupin dijo,

-¡Es él, lo he comprobado!

Now, provide a comparative-contrastive analysis of the sentence “Harry is the best hope we have” and your corresponding translation.

This is an instance of a declarative, equative sentence. In an equative sentence we find two referring expressions pointing out to the same entity in discourse. Syntactically speaking, in both languages, “Harry” is the syntactic subject” and “the best hope we have/la mejor esperanza que tenemos” functions as subject complement. In this example, “Harry” and “the best hope we have” refer to the same entity in discourse. The principle of permutability can be applied in this example and we would still have an unmarked sentence even though there is a change in the order of constituents: The best hope we have is Harry. We can see that, unlike in ascriptive sentences, the syntactic function of the constituents changes if the order is altered. The constituents in these examples are the proper noun “Harry” and a definite noun phrase “the best hope we have”/ “la mejor esperanza que tenemos”. These type of constituents are normally found in this type of sentences. In these examples, the predicate acting as predicator and selecting for arguments is the verbal predicate “is”/”es”. The verbal predicate here selects for two arguments. This is a two-place predicate/”predicado diádico”. The constituents selected by the predicate are Harry, the subject, that has the thematic role of Experiencer and “the best hope we have”/ “la mejor esperanza que tenemos”, subject complement, that has the thematic role

of theme. This is an instance of correspondence because we see the use of the same construction, an equative sentence, and of a verbal predicate selecting for arguments.

Practice 8: You will find an example of a prompt and of a production. Read them both in order to spot the mistakes.

Prompt given: Write a contrastive analysis capitalizing on the theory of predicates and arguments. Remember to include information about referring expressions, number of arguments, predicate functioning as predicator, degree, thematic role of arguments, type of sentence and correspondence. Write one paragraph only.

a) There was a mysterious person in my garden last night.

b) Había una persona misteriosa en mi jardín anoche.

Example production: The theory on predicates and arguments highlights the concept that the predicator, that can be verbal or non-verbal, is the one selecting for arguments and the one that gives way to have a grammatically correct sentence.

In the English sentence, we have the predicate “to be” in the simple past working as the predicator and selecting for three arguments: a mysterious person, in my garden, last night. So, this is a three-place verbal predicator.

In the Spanish version, we have the predicate “haber” conjugated in third person singular, simple past tense, working as the predicator selecting for three arguments: una persona misteriosa, en mi jardín, anoche. So, this is a three-place verbal predicator.

This is an instance of correspondence between both languages.

In order to identify all the mistakes, read the guiding questions below in order to analyze the production included.

- Compliance with the prompt. Does the paragraph contain all the information required by the prompt?
- Language. Is the student able to express their ideas cohesively and coherently? Is the student able to comprise their ideas? Are there language and grammar mistakes?
- Content. Is the information included relevant to the content required by the prompt?

- Metalanguage. Is the student able to use the correct metalanguage or do they use more general words?

a) What mistakes have you found in the previous piece of writing?

1) FORMAT. The student doesn't comply with the prompt (one paragraph).

2) CONCEPT. The student introduces the definition of what a predicator is. Considering we have a limited word count, it is not advisable to do so.

3) CONCEPT. The student wrongly classifies the verb “to be” in the English version.

4) CONCEPT. There is information missing. The student didn't identify the thematic roles, the syntactic function of the elements that make up the sentence. The student did not identify the type of sentence.

5) CONCEPT. The student classifies this as an instance of correspondence and this is not the case.

b) How can you improve the previous piece of writing? Rewrite.

As regards syntax, in the English version, we can identify the subject “a mysterious person”, the prepositional phrase “in the garden” acting as adverbial of place, a locative, and the noun phrase “last night” acting as adverbial of time. The subject was displaced from its canonical position, and it is located postverbally. In this case, we can hypothesize that the movement of the subject can be accounted for by the type of verb the construction has, i.e. “to be”, and by the presence an expletive pronoun “there”. The already classified linking verb has little informational content and by using this kind of structure, we can bring the existence of an entity to the attention of the hearer. In Spanish, this is an instance of a “oración impersonal”, in which we see the transitive verb, “verbo impersonal transitivo” following RAE (2010) and the direct object “una persona misteriosa”. “En mi jardín”, prepositional phrase and “anoche”, adverb, are both acting as adverbials. We can see that the verb “haber” does not select for a subject, but only a direct object. Therefore, according to the information presented by Di Tullio (2010), we can postulate the existence of a null category that explains the verbal morphology adopted by the verb (3rd person singular) “terciopersonal”. In the English version, this is an instance of a presentational sentence. The expletive pronoun in English is needed in order to

fill in the subject slot in preverbal position. As regards argument structure, in English, the predicate acting as predicator is a non-verbal predicator “in” (preposition) selecting for two arguments: a mysterious person with the thematic role of experiencer and my garden with the thematic role of location. So, this is a two-place prepositional predicate. The verb “to be” here acts as the container of the non-verbal predicate. This container provides grammatical information such as tense, aspect and mood. In the Spanish version, this is an instance of a declarative, presentational sentence. This is a “oración impersonal” with the verb “haber” conjugated in the third person singular. In this example, the predicate acting as predicator is a verbal one: haber. This verbal predicator selects for one argument: “Una persona misteriosa” that has the thematic role of theme. So, this is a one-place verbal predicate. Thus, this is an instance of non-correspondance in syntax and in argument structure. When analyzing syntax, we can see the presence of an expletive in the canonical preverbal position, which is required in declarative sentences in order to have grammatically correct sentences in English. As regards argument structure, in Spanish we find a one-place predicate, verbal predicate, acting as predicator while in English, we find a two-place predicate, non-verbal predicate, acting as predicator.

Conclusion

From my personal experience as a teacher-in-training, I identify difficulties as regards the students’ understanding of predicates and arguments theory and, more precisely, as regards the identification of the verb “to be” and “ser/estar” as predicates selecting for arguments.

Throughout this paper, I have included definitions on some important terms regarding the theory on predicates and arguments in order to frame this work. Providing this information was necessary in order to introduce the information about the topic chosen: when the verb “to be” and “ser/estar” is considered a predicator and selects for arguments. The information related to the theory on predicates and arguments was based on authors such as Lyons (1977a, 1977b), Saeed (2009), and Hurford, Heasley & Smith (2007) in the English

section, and Di Tullio (2014), Real Academia Española (2010), in the Spanish section. The information for exemplifying instances of the verb “to be” and “ser/estar” as predicator was taken from Lyons (1977a, 1977b), Pinuer Rodríguez (1999) and Gutiérrez Ordóñez (1968).

The pedagogical framework is of importance because it builds upon the idea of consciousness-raising, which implies the active participation of students in the learning process. This approach highlights the need for students to notice and recognize structures in their languages of study, English and Spanish in this case. It is also useful because students can identify different aspects of grammar in both languages when in use instead of focusing on learning a grammatical rule in isolation.

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