
Syntax

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Introduction

As you can well imagine, comparing the whole syntax of English, Spanish and Catalan is a daunting (if not impossible) task. Bear in mind that Quirk et al.'s *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985) is 1,779 pages long, the Real Academia de la Lengua Española's *Nueva gramática de la lengua española* (2009), 3,885, and the *Gramàtica de la llengua catalana* published in 2017 by the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1,439.

Hence, we had to make a choice. We selected the two basic constituents of sentences, namely the noun phrase (NP) and the verb phrase (VP). We deal extensively with the former, but not with the latter, for reasons of space: we focus on constructions.

In the Section «The noun phrase», we provide a comprehensive but not exhaustive description of noun phrases in English, Spanish and Catalan. You will find a detailed account of the head, pre-modifiers and post-modifiers, followed by a visual representation of the overall structure of NPs in the three languages. This first section finishes with a list of the most important differences between English and Spanish/Catalan.

For the contrastive analysis of verb phrases (Section «Major Constructions») we follow the framework proposed in Construction Grammar. We also consider the subject of the sentence and, thus, the description of the VP is at sentence level. We present, describe and compare only some of the most important constructions in both directions, from English to the equivalent Spanish and Catalan constructions, and from Spanish and Catalan constructions to English. We have grouped them according to their form and meaning, from more general constructions to more specific ones.

Nonetheless, here is a list of other topics which would also be interesting when contrasting English with Spanish and Catalan syntax:

- The subject, compulsory in English but not in the Romance languages.
- The structure of the other phrases: adjective phrase, adverb phrase and prepositional phrase.
- Tense, aspect and modality.
- The simple, complex and compound sentence.
- Word order.
- Verb subcategorization patterns and other constructions.

Objectives

After studying this unit, students should be able to:

1. Identify and explain the general structure of the noun phrase in English, Spanish and Catalan.
2. Explain the different uses of the definite and indefinite articles in English, Spanish and Catalan.
3. Formulate the differences and similarities between English and Spanish/Catalan in this area, and illustrate with original examples.
4. Analyze a sentence following the principles of Construction Grammar.
5. Analyze and understand the most important constructions in English, Spanish and Catalan.
6. Compare constructions in the three languages.

1. The noun phrase

A noun phrase (NP) is a sentence constituent that typically has a **noun** as its head and may have elements preceding and following it. The general structure would be:

Table 1. General structure of NPs

Pre-modifiers	Head	Post-modifiers
my best	friend	
el	coche	de mi abuela
aquella	noia	morena

1.1. The head

We have already said that NPs have a head, which is most usually a noun. There are a few cases where the noun seems to be missing but we can still talk about an NP.

The poor have more difficulties than the rich.

In this example, a very frequent noun seems to have been omitted: *people*. This is not a usual type of phrase in English; it is possible only with a small set of adjectives, such as *the poor*, *the unknown*.

* The short are more comfortable when travelling by plane.

Notice that when these NPs refer to people, they appear with a plural verb (*The poor need more help*), and when they refer to abstract notions, they appear with a singular verb (*The unknown is frightening*).

In Spanish and Catalan, the situation is different. Basically, all adjectives can appear as heads of an NP when referring to people, but then they are considered nouns. It is possible to have adjectives both in masculine and in feminine.

Las embarazadas tienen preferencia a la hora de embarcar.

Les embarassades tenen preferència a l'hora d'embarcar.

Los obesos suelen tener muchos problemas de próstata.

Els obesos solen tenir molts problemes de pròstata.

As for abstract notions expressed with adjectives, in Spanish they are usually introduced by the neuter article *lo*, with almost no restriction as to the adjectives that allow it.

Lo importante es que llames mañana sin falta.

In Catalan, the picture is more complex. While it is possible to use the masculine article *el*, with abstract nouns, often other alternatives are preferred: *allò, la cosa, l'aspecte*.

L'important és que truquis demà sens falta.

Allò desconegut fa por.

NPs can also be headed by pronouns, but this is an issue that we will not deal with in this unit, since here we are concerned with the structure of the NP as a whole.

1.2. Pre-modifiers

Pre-modifiers are those elements that **precede** the head noun in an NP. In English, these elements can be determiners, adjectives and nouns, and also the genitive. In Spanish and Catalan, we can find determiners and some adjectives.

1.2.1. Determiners

They are the elements that are found first in the NP, and they specify the noun very closely. There are different kinds of determiners in the three languages.

Articles

Articles are function words that determine the degree of specificity of the NP in which they appear. There are two types:

- Definite: *the; el; el*
- Indefinite: *a; un; un*

In English, articles are phonologically variable: *a/an* /ə, ən/ (before vowels and consonants respectively); *the* /ðə, ði/ (same contexts). *The* can be used with plural and singular nouns, whereas *a* only with singular ones.

In Spanish and Catalan, articles inflect for gender and number, to agree with the head noun: *el, la, los, las; el, la, els, les; un, una, unos, unas; un, una, uns, unes*. In Spanish there is also a neuter article, *lo*, which was mentioned in the Section «The head».

1) The definite article

Further reading

For more information about this issue in Spanish, see:
Real Academia Española y Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española (2009) *Nueva gramática de la lengua española. Morfología y sintaxis*. Vol I. Madrid: Espasa (p. 1073-1082).

Further reading

For more information about this issue in Catalan, see:
Institut d'Estudis Catalans (2016) *Gramàtica de la llengua catalana*. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans (p. 587-593).

The definite article is used in all three languages when the speaker has a specific referent in mind, which is identifiable also for the addressee, thanks to the context (immediate or wider, linguistic or extralinguistic).

Now we are going to see the most frequent uses of the definite article in English, Spanish and Catalan. First, we will deal with the similarities, and then with the differences.

a) Similarities

- **Deictic use:** the referent of the NP can be identified from the extralinguistic context, be it immediate or wide.

The window is open.

La ventana está abierta.

La finestra està oberta.

The president will talk tomorrow.

El presidente hablará mañana.

El president parlarà demà.

- **Anaphoric use:** the NP can refer back to the context for its identification. The anaphoric use can be direct, when the whole of the NP is repeated, or indirect, and then what is mentioned is a part of the previous NP.

– Direct anaphoric use

This morning I bought apples and pears, without realizing that **the pears** are too ripe.

Esta mañana he comprado manzanas y peras, sin darme cuenta de que **las peras** están demasiado maduras.

Aquest matí he comprat pomes i peres, sense adonar-me que **les peres** són massa madures.

– Indirect anaphoric use

Have you seen Paul Auster's last book? **The cover** is hideous.

¿Has visto el último libro de Paul Auster? **La portada** es horrible.

Has vist l'últim llibre de Paul Auster? **La portada** és horrible.

- **Cataphoric use:** the noun is specified by what follows it in the text, not by what precedes it.

She likes the film **that she saw yesterday**.

Le gusta la película **que vio ayer**.

Li agrada la pel·lícula **que va veure ahir**.

- The definite article is used when there is a **superlative** adjective in the NP. Notice that in English the preposition that follows the head noun is *in*, whereas in Spanish/Catalan it is *de*.

The tallest building in the world is in Dubai.

El edificio más alto del mundo está en Dubai.

L'edifici més alt del món és a Dubai.

- Some **geographical names** are always preceded by the definite article (not necessarily the same in the three languages).

The Hague; La Haya; La Haia

Cairo; El Cairo; El Caire

Morocco; Marruecos; El Marroc

b) Differences

Probably, the biggest difference between English and Spanish/Catalan regarding the definite article is its **generic use**, since it is much more frequent in the latter than in the former. We will be dealing with this issue below under the heading Generic reference, where it will be considered as a whole, taking into account not only the definite article but also the indefinite one and the absence of article altogether (zero article).

- **Body parts.** In general, in English we refer to body parts with possessives, whereas in Spanish/Catalan we use the definite article.

I broke **my** arm.

Me he roto el brazo.

M'he trencat el braç.

However, in English, the definite article can be used, provided the following two conditions are met: first, the 'possessor' is the direct object of the verb and is referred to by a personal pronoun; and second, the body part is the complement of a preposition: *I don't like it when people pat me on the back.*

- **Personal names.**
 - In English, personal names never co-occur with the definite article, whether or not they are preceded by the title of the person referred to.

I talked to Peter / *the Peter.

Queen Victoria / *the Queen Victoria reigned for 64 years.

- In Spanish and Catalan, the definite article is required when the name is preceded by the title.

La reina Victoria / *reina Victoria reinó durante 64 años.

La reina Victòria / *reina Victòria va regnar durant 64 anys.

Further reading

For more details (including dialectal variation) regarding the use of the definite article in Catalan, see:

J. Solà i altres (dir.) (2002). *Gramàtica del Català Contemporani. Vol. 2: Sintaxi (1-16)* (p. 1477-1479). Barcelona: Empúries.

- In Catalan, but not in Spanish, the definite article also precedes names without titles in most dialects.

Marta / *la Marta vive en París.

La Marta / *Marta viu a París.

- **Expressions of temporal location.** The three languages behave differently in the various time expressions: the definite article may be compulsory, impossible or optional.

Table 2. The definite article in temporal expressions in English, Spanish and Catalan

	English	Spanish	Catalan
Hour	no	yes	yes
Day number	yes	yes	yes
Day name	no	yes	optional
Month	no	no	yes
Season	optional	optional	yes
Year	no	no	optional

We'll arrive at two. / Llegaremos a las dos. / Arribarem a les dues.

We'll arrive on the fifth. / Llegaremos el (día) cinco. / Arribarem el (dia) cinc.

We'll arrive on Monday. / Llegaremos el lunes. / Arribarem (el) dilluns.

We'll arrive in July. / Llegaremos en julio. / Arribarem al juliol.

We'll arrive in (the) spring. / Llegaremos en (la) primavera. / Arribarem a la primavera.

We'll arrive in 2018. / Llegaremos en 2018. / Arribarem al 2018.

c) Generic reference

NPs have **generic reference** when they are used to designate a class as a whole, and not a specific member of that class.

In English, NPs with generic reference can contain a definite or indefinite article (singular), or a zero article (plural count nouns and mass nouns). The last option is the most frequent, by far (Quirk *et al.*, 1985).

A tiger is a very dangerous animal.

The tiger is a very dangerous animal.

Tigers are very dangerous animals.

However, these three options are not in free variation (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 281).

Further reading

Real Academia Española y Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española (2009). *Nueva gramática de la lengua española. Morfología y sintaxis. Vol I.* Madrid: Espasa (p. 1066-1073)

J. Solà i altres (dir.) (2002). *Gramàtica del Català Contemporani. Vol. 2: Sintaxi (1-16)* (p. 1481-1483). Barcelona: Empúries.

When the **indefinite article** is used with generic reference (with a singular noun), it selects one member of the class as representative of all of it. It can typically be replaced by the indefinite determiner *any*.

A bad job is better than being on the dole.

As for the **definite article**, it can only be used with generic reference with **singular count nouns**, except with nationality nouns and adjectives referring to a group of people (see the Section «The head»).

The potato appeared in Europe in the 16th century.

The Japanese are said to be disciplined.

With **plural count nouns** and **mass nouns**, generic reference is expressed with the **zero article**, as we can see in the following examples:

Elephants are my favourite animals. / *The elephants are my favourite animals.

Water boils at 100°C. / *The water boils at 100°C.

A mass noun refers to entities regarded as continuous, with no natural bounds, uncountable.

In Spanish and Catalan, the **definite article** is used with generic reference with **singular** and **plural count nouns** and **mass nouns**:

El roble vive más años que la encina.

El roure viu més anys que l'alzina.

Los osos polares están desapareciendo.

Els ossos polars estan desapareixent.

El chocolate es más espeso que el agua.

La xocolata és més espessa que l'aigua.

In both languages, the indefinite article (in the singular) can also be used with generic reference, but only in certain contexts, especially when the noun occurs with some lexical element that reinforces the generic reading.

Una **auténtica** víctima estaría destrozada.

Un nadó **normal** ja estaria plorlant.

Una persona **en su sano juicio** no haría tal cosa.

En un país **com cal** aquestes coses no passen.

Table 3. Articles with generic reference

	English	Spanish	Catalan
singular count nouns	the/a	el/un ¹	el/un ¹

⁽¹⁾See specific contexts above.

⁽²⁾Except with nationality names and some adjectives, which appear with *the*.

	English	Spanish	Catalan
plural count nouns	zero ²	els	els
mass nouns	zero	el	el

2) The indefinite article

Here we will see the non-generic uses of the indefinite article.

- The indefinite article is used, in the three languages, when the noun refers to an element that **cannot be identified** by the listener.

That doctor is talking to a patient.

Aquel médico está hablando con un paciente.

Aquell metge estava parlant amb un pacient.

- The indefinite article also has a non-referring, **descriptive** use, frequently in copular sentences. In English, it is possible with unmodified nouns (typically with nouns designating jobs), whereas in Spanish and Catalan, the noun needs to be qualified.

Maria is a teacher.

María es profesora. / *María es una profesora.

La María és professora. / *La Maria és una professora.

Maria is an **excellent** teacher.

María es una profesora **excelente**.

La Maria és una professora **excel·lent**.

- In Spanish and Catalan, the indefinite article can be used for **indirect anaphora** (see the anaphoric use of the definite article), when there is more than one element in the whole referred to.

Marina se cayó y se rompió un diente.

La Marina va caure i es va trencar una dent.

- The indefinite article has an **emphatic** and **evaluative** use in both Spanish and Catalan.

Fue una reunión muy tensa.

Va ser una operació llarguíssima.

Mi hermana tiene un pelo...

Aquell noi té unes dents...

Possessives

Possessives indicate the possessor of the referent of the head noun.

In English, possessives do not agree in number with the head noun, and, logically, neither in gender, since gender is not grammatical in English: *my, your*³, *her, his, its, our, their*.

⁽³⁾In English, there is no difference between second person singular or plural, except in the reflexive pronouns (*yourself* vs. *yourselves*).

In Spanish, all possessives inflect for number (*mis, tus, sus*⁴, *nuestros, vuestros*), and in first and second person plural they also inflect for gender (*nuestra, nuestras, vuestra, vuestras*).

⁽⁴⁾In Spanish there is no difference between 3rd person plural and singular: the form is always *su*.

In Catalan, the picture is more complex. For starters, there is a difference between stressed and unstressed possessives: *meu, teu, seu*⁵, *nostre, vostre; mon, ton, son*.

⁽⁵⁾In Catalan, there is no difference between 3rd person plural and singular: the form is always *seu* or *son*.

All **stressed** possessives inflect for number (*meus, teus, seus, nostres, vostres*) and for gender (*meva, teva, seva, nostra, vostra*). In the plural, there is no difference between masculine and feminine in the first and second person plural: *meus-meves, teus-teves, seus-seves; nostres, vostres*. Besides, they are preceded by the definite article, which agrees in gender and number with the possessive: *el meu, la meva, els meus, les meves*, etc.

Unstressed possessives do not have first and second person plural forms. Their present-day use is quite residual, restricted basically to their singular forms (*mon, ma, ton, ta, son, sa*) and to nouns denoting family relationships.

Son pare viu a Anglaterra.

*Son cotxe és al garatge.

On the whole, except for body parts (see the uses of the definite article), the uses of the possessive determiners are very similar in the three languages.

Demonstratives

Demonstratives express the degree of distance between the speaker and the referent of the head noun.

In English, there are two degrees of distance: close to the speaker, *this*, and everywhere else, *that*. They inflect for number (but not for gender): *this, these; that, those*.

In Spanish, there are three degrees: close to the speaker, *este*, close to the listener, *ese*, and elsewhere, *aquel*. All inflect for gender and number: *este, esta, estos, estas; ese, esa, esos, esas; aquel, aquella, aquellos, aquellas*.

In Catalan, as in English, there are two degrees, *aquest, aquell*, which inflect for gender and number: *aquest, aquesta, aquests, aquestes; aquell, aquella, aquells, aquelles*.

Demonstratives, in the three languages, have two main uses: deictic and anaphoric:

- In their **deictic** use, demonstratives show the relative **distance** (spatial or temporal) between the speaker or listener and the referent of the noun they pre-modify.

This book is mine. / That book is mine.

Este libro es mío. / Aquel libro es mío.

Aquest llibre és meu. / Aquell llibre és meu.

- In their **anaphoric** use, they refer to something mentioned earlier in the text. They can be used with direct or indirect anaphora.

My grandmother wanted to be a doctor, but **those days** it wasn't allowed.

Cuando terminé el bachillerato, mis padres me regalaron una Olivetti. **Aquella máquina de escribir** fue mi salvación durante la carrera.

Ahir, quan vaig veure el llibre, vaig pensar que **aquella portada** em sonava.

Other determiners

In the three languages, there are other kinds of determiners, such as numerals (cardinals and ordinals), multipliers, fractions, quantifiers, indefinite determiners. We will not deal with them here, for reasons of space. You can find more information about all of them in the three reference grammars that we have been mentioning in this unit.

1.2.2. Adjectives

In English, the default position of adjectives is before the noun, whereas in Spanish and Catalan it is after it.

a red book

un libro rojo

un llibre vermell

Further reading

For a detailed explanation of the three-degree system in Spanish, see:

Real Academia Española y Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española (2009). *Manual de la nueva gramática de la lengua española*. Madrid: Espasa (p. 330-333)

When there is more than one adjective preceding the noun, the adjectives occur in a certain order. When there are two adjectives of the same kind, the conjunction *and* is placed between them. When there are three or more, we have commas, and then *and*.

In the following table, you can see the relative order of adjectives. Bear in mind, though, that there are exceptions to this rule:

Table 4. Order of pre-modifying adjectives in English

	Opinion/ Quality	Size	Shape	Age	Colour	Origin	Material	Purpose	Head noun
				old	red	Spanish		riding	boots
a	funny				brown	German	wooden	serving	spoon
a	terrible	little							boy
	nice			new					clothes
my	awesome		round		pink and purple				purse

1.2.3. Nouns

Nouns can also be preceded by other nouns, one or more, which further specify the head noun. When there is more than one, each noun modifies the one that immediately follows it. As a general rule, the modifying noun appears in the singular.

the candidate list (the list of candidates) / *the candidates list

a health care plan form

1.2.4. The genitive

In English, nouns can be preceded by another noun in the genitive form (also known as *Saxon genitive*).

John's son

my eldest brother's son

The genitive can have one of these two functions, determinative or modifier:

- When the genitive is used as a **determinative**, it is incompatible with articles, possessives and demonstratives.

John's book / *the John's book

However, the genitive noun can have its own determiner, and even be preceded by adjectives or other nouns. We could say, then, that the

genitive marker 's is actually attached to the noun phrase which contains the noun in the genitive, and not only to the noun.

her son's girlfriend

the American government's view

the Labour Party's internal fights

- When the genitive functions as a **modifier**, it has the same classifying role as noun and adjective modifiers, and it can be preceded by determiners. In these cases, the determiner does not pre-modify the noun in the genitive, but the head noun.

a) those children's clothes

b) a girls' school

In a) we are talking about a specific kind of clothes, for children, and in

b) about a specific kind of school, attended only by girls.

1.3. Post-modifiers

1.3.1. Adjectives

In English, the adjective can occur in post-nominal position only in two environments:

- When the adjective itself is post-modified.

a popular singer / *a singer popular

a singer popular in the 1970s / *a popular singer in the 1970s

- In some specific fixed phrases.

the heir apparent

the president elect

the body politic

In Catalan and Spanish, adjectives typically occur after the head noun; this is their unmarked position.

el libro rojo / *el rojo libro

una finestra oberta / *una oberta finestra

When they occur before the noun, several things can happen:

- In **definite** NPs, with adjectives expressing an **extreme quality** or having a high affective content, it does not make any difference whether the adjective appears before or after the head noun.

mis hijos queridos / mis queridos hijos

el crim espantós / l'espantós crim

- With **descriptive** adjectives, there is a difference. When occurring before the noun, they are traditionally called epithets, and they tend to highlight a quality of the noun which is already known.

los azules ojos de Paul Newman

el preciós somriure de la nena

- A small group of adjectives change their meaning depending on whether they appear before or after the noun.

amigo viejo / viejo amigo

home pobre / pobre home

- In Spanish only, adjectives pre-modified with a degree adverb can also be pre-posed.

tan insignes personas

1.3.2. Prepositional phrases

In English, prepositional phrases are very common as post-modifiers of nouns. There are no syntactic restrictions whatsoever.

that novel about orphans

a book for them

the woman in a red dress

a few candles on the shelf

In Catalan and Spanish, prepositional phrases can also be used as post-modifiers. In principle, all prepositions are possible, but the most frequent, by far, is *de*.

el perro de mi abuela

els cabells de la Maria

el miedo a morir

un xarop contra el mareig

1.3.3. Finite clauses

Both **relative clauses** and **appositive clauses** can function as post-modifiers of the noun in the NP, in the three languages. In this unit, we will not deal with the characteristics of these clauses, because it is a topic that belongs rather to subordination. We will just provide examples:

- Relative clauses

I don't like the proposal **that the boss made yesterday**.

Prefiero el libro **que trajiste tú**.

Vull anar a veure l'obra **que em vas recomanar**.

- Appositive clauses

The rumour **that Maria has quit her job** is false.

El rumor **de que María ha dejado el trabajo** es falso.

El rumor **que la Maria ha deixat la feina** és fals.

In Spanish, the appositive clause can be preceded by the preposition *de*, whereas in English and Catalan it is not preceded by any preposition.

1.3.4. Non-finite clauses

Non-finite clauses contain a non-finite form of the verb, i.e., infinitive, present participle or past participle.

Clauses with non-finite verbs may also function as post-modifiers of the head noun in a noun phrase. In the three languages, the most frequent are **infinitive clauses**.

She has three parcels **to send**.

Esta es la ropa **para lavar**.

Agafa les cartes **per enviar**?

Past participle clauses are also possible as post-modifiers in the three languages.

The car **repaired by John** had an accident yesterday.

La decisión **tomada por Pedro** es muy discutible.

El menjar **cuinat per la meva mare** és boníssim.

In English, **present participle clauses** can also be NP post-modifiers, whereas in Spanish/Catalan they are extremely rare.

The woman **holding a candle** is my aunt.

1.3.5. Appositions

An **apposition** is an element that appears adjacent to the head noun, and gives more information about it. There are different kinds of apposition.

- **Restrictive** appositions are essential to identify the referent of the NP. In the three languages they can be NPs or PPs. They are never separated from the head noun by a comma.

my niece **Sally**

su amigo **Andrés**

la doctora **Busquets**

the city of **Rome**

el problema de los **desahucios**

la notícia de la seva **dimissió**

- **Non-restrictive** appositions provide more information about the head noun, but they are not essential for its identification. In all three languages they are NPs, and are written between commas.

Helen, **the new teacher**, is from Newcastle.

La primera novela de García Márquez, **La hojarasca**, fue publicada en 1955.

El cotxe més venut als anys 60, **el sis-cents**, consumia molta benzina.

- **Emphatic** appositions exist in Spanish and Catalan, but not in English, and they are always PPs headed by *de*.

la pesada **de Tere**

el graciós **d'en Pere**

1.4. General structure

In the following tables, we present the general structure of NPs in English, Spanish and Catalan:

Table 5. General structure of NP in English

pre-modifiers				Head noun	post-modifiers								
					word classes		phrases		clauses				
					noun	(adjective)	PP	NP (apposition)	finite		non-finite		
det.	genitive	Adj P	noun		noun	(adjective)	PP	NP (apposition)	relative	appositive	infinitive	present pple	past pple
<i>my</i>		<i>very best</i>		<i>friend</i>					<i>, who lives in Ireland,</i>				
<i>three</i>			<i>plastic</i>	<i>bottles</i>			<i>on the table</i>				<i>to be recycled</i>		
<i>the</i>				<i>fact</i>						<i>that he didn't come</i>			
<i>those two</i>				<i>books</i>								<i>lying on the desk</i>	
<i>many</i>		<i>lovely</i>		<i>presents</i>									<i>given to me</i>
<i>our</i>		<i>favourite</i>		<i>nephew</i>	<i>Peter</i>								
				<i>John</i>				<i>, my nephew,</i>					
	<i>my son's</i>	<i>new</i>	<i>toy</i>	<i>car</i>			<i>with red wheels</i>					<i>sitting on that table</i>	
<i>the</i>				<i>president</i>		<i>elect</i>							

Table 6. The general structure of the NP in Spanish

pre-modifiers		Head noun	word classes	post-modifiers				
				phrases			clauses	
det.	(Adj P)		noun	Adj P	PP	NP (apposition)	relative	appositive
<i>su</i>	<i>última</i>	<i>película</i>			<i>de miedo</i>			
<i>vuestros</i>		<i>amigos</i>		<i>polacos</i>			<i>, que llegaron ayer,</i>	
<i>el</i>		<i>rumor</i>						<i>de que han echado a Miguel de la empresa</i>
<i>la</i>		<i>insensata</i>				<i>de Josefa</i>		
<i>tu</i>		<i>abuela</i>	<i>Margarita</i>					

Table 7. The general structure of the NP in Catalan

pre-modifiers		Head noun	word classes	post-modifiers				
				phrases			clauses	
det.	(Adj P)		noun	Adj P	PP	NP (apposition)	relative	appositive
<i>un</i>		<i>president</i>		<i>popular</i>				
<i>el nostre</i>	<i>millor</i>	<i>producte</i>			<i>per a nens</i>	<i>, el Tubitur,</i>		
<i>el</i>		<i>fet</i>						<i>que vinguessis</i>
<i>el seu</i>		<i>amic</i>	<i>Pere</i>				<i>, que treballa a IBM,</i>	

1.5. Main differences between English and Spanish/Catalan

The main differences between English and Spanish/Catalan regarding the NP are the following:

- In English, the Saxon genitive is a pre-modifier, whereas in Spanish and Catalan, this same meaning is expressed by a post-posed PP headed by *de*.

the professor's book

el libro del profesor

el llibre del professor

- The default position of the adjective phrase in relation to the head noun is before the noun in English and after it in Spanish and Catalan.

the **Brazilian** actor

el actor **brasileño**

l'actor **brasiler**

- A noun can be a pre-modifier in English, but not in Spanish and Catalan. The meaning of this noun is expressed in Spanish/Catalan by a post-posed PP headed by *de* or by an also post-posed adjective.

the **car** door

la puerta **del** coche

la porta **del** cotxe

the **meat** industry

la industria **cárnica**

indústria **càrnia**

- In English, there are fewer (if any) restrictions for PPs as post-modifiers, whereas in Spanish and Catalan, the same meaning can be expressed by a PP headed by *de* or by a relative clause.

the man in a red shirt

el hombre de la camisa roja

l'home de la camisa vermella

the window below the balcony

la ventana que queda debajo del balcón

la finestra que hi ha sota del balcó

- In English, present participle non-finite clauses can be post-modifiers. In Spanish and Catalan, this is not possible, and in most cases, the same meaning is conveyed by a post-posed relative clause

the tourists travelling by plane

los turistas que viajan en avión

els turistes que viatgen en avió

2. Major constructions

In this section, we will describe and contrast languages at sentence level, taking into consideration the participants and the semantic roles they play in the events being described. As you will see, we call each configuration (or combination of participants, in terms of number and meaning) a **construction**, following the theoretical framework called **Construction Grammar** (CG) (Fillmore 1968, Fillmore 1982, Goldberg 1995). In CG, everything a speaker needs to know to be able to use language (i.e. words, syntactic patterns, prefixes, suffixes, idioms, pronunciation, etc.) can be recast as knowledge about constructions (Hilpert 2014).

Thus, the model of linguistic analysis based on the dichotomy between the lexical and the grammatical components has long been revised. Along other proposals put forward from cognitive and functional linguistics, CG covers a whole family of theories of grammar based on the idea that grammatical constructions are the basic units of grammar (Hilpert 2014).

In this framework, grammatical elements are conceived as pairs of form and meaning. For example, a sentence is a formal structure (what is visible) that conveys a specific meaning (what is transmitted). Each construction has a name that covers the description of both form and meaning.

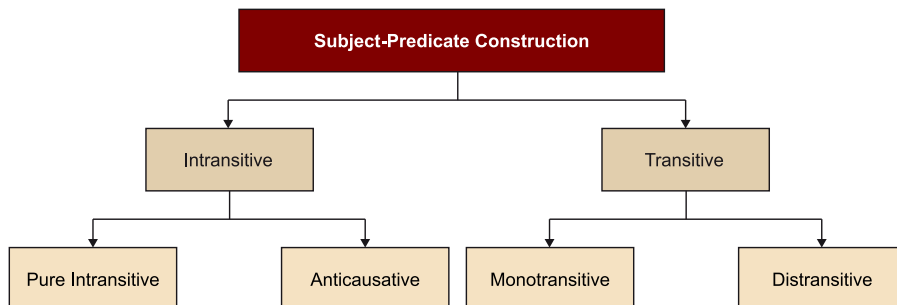
Constructions at argument structure level are organized as a hierarchy that goes from very general grammatical constructions, to express very basic fundamental conceptual scenes, to more complex types (Goldberg 1995). Basic sentence types express «universal» event types that can be considered fundamental to human experience, such as events describing a change of state or a situation in which there is a cause and an effect.

In this view of constructions as a hierarchy at argument-structure level, the most basic construction is the **subject-predicate construction**. This construction only establishes the existence of a relationship between the subject and the predicate, the verb with or without objects.

At a second level of general constructions, and only taking into consideration the number of participants in a clause, we can distinguish between **transitive** and **intransitive constructions**. Within the transitive level we have **monotransitive constructions** and **ditransitive constructions**, and so on.

From here, more complex and specific constructions are described: the **resultative construction** or the **dative construction**, among many others. Thus, a resultative construction is a type of transitive construction which is, in its turn, a type of subject-predicate construction. In figure below we present a graphical representation of the hierarchy.

Figure 1. Partial representation of the hierarchy of constructions



To conclude, we will review and analyze, from a contrastive point of view, a few of the most common configurations at sentence level in English and Spanish/Catalan paying special attention to the differences between the languages.

2.1. Intransitive Constructions

Intransitive constructions are a group of constructions that have in common the fact that only one participant takes part in the event, namely the syntactic subject (NP). From the semantic point of view, it can be associated to different meanings. Let's briefly review some of the most common intransitive constructions.

2.1.1. (Pure) Intransitive Construction

What is known as a **pure intransitive construction**, or ergative in some frameworks, is a one-participant structure in which the **subject** plays an active role in the action. There are no objects, although, they can also be used transitively (a) or with some non-argumental participants (b):

a) **Mary** sang (a song). / **María** cantó (una canción). / **La María** va cantar (una cançó).

b) **The boys** are playing (now). / **Los chicos** están jugando (ahora). / **El nois** (ara) estan jugant.

Intransitive sentences have the canonical form [NP V]. In Spanish and Catalan, this NP (subject) can precede or follow the verb quite freely, but this is not the case in English, where word order is quite fixed.

Also, in English constructions with a particle: [NP VP particle] are classified as intransitive constructions. This type of constructions do not exist in either Spanish or Catalan, since usually the meaning contributed by the particle is either expressed by the main verb in the sentence (a) or lost (b):

a) She **passed away** (last month). / **Murió** (el mes pasado). / **Va morir** (el mes passat).

b) They have just **walked by**. / Acaban de **pasar**. / Acaben de **passar**.

In general, this construction does not pose any particular problems. Since it is mirrored in both Spanish and Catalan in formal terms [SN V], nevertheless we could find minor divergences in the subcategorization, in the sense that a verb that is intransitive in one of the languages (e.g. *acceder/accedir*) can be used transitively in the other:

Through this entrance, one can **access** all the exhibition areas.

A través de esta entrada, se puede **acceder** a todas las zonas de la exposición.

A través d'aquesta entrada, es pot **accedir** a totes les àrees de l'exposició.

However, not all the relations between languages, in this family of constructions, are so straightforward. We can also find other meanings expressed by this form in English, which need a different structure in Spanish and Catalan, a pronominal construction, for example. This would be the case of the two constructions we describe below: the anticausative construction and the middle construction, among others.

2.1.2. Anticausative Constructions

Anticausative constructions (Levin & Rappaport, 1995) are sentences that are intransitive in form but describe an event that affects the syntactic subject.

The window broke.

La ventana se rompió.

La finestra es va trencar.

In other words, the syntactic subject of this kind of construction is the patient of the action, unlike the case of pure intransitive constructions, in which the participant in this position is marked as the agent or cause.

In this construction, the participant causing the event to happen is not expressed, or if it is, it occupies a marginal syntactic position (Levin & Rappaport 1995).

As we can see, in English the anticausative construction is formally an intransitive construction (*The door closed*). This is not always the case in Spanish or Catalan (*La puerta se cerró. / La porta es va tancar*). As you can see, in these two languages, anticausative meaning is usually expressed by means of a pronominal construction.

Nevertheless, there are also some verbs in these two languages that express anticausativity by means of an intransitive construction:

His life changed.

Su vida cambió.

La seva vida va canviar.

2.1.3. Middle Construction

From the point of view of semantics, a **middle construction** is a stative construction in which an intrinsic property of the entity, occupying the subject position (NP), is expressed (Levin 1993), and usually information about manner is also specified. This construction is sometimes also known as a mediopassive.

This glass breaks easily.

Este cristal se rompe con facilidad.

Aquest vidre es trenca amb facilitat.

As was the case with anticausative constructions, in the Romance languages, this kind of meaning is usually conveyed by means of a pronominal structure. Occasionally, however, we can also find intransitive verbs, only in Spanish:

This material dries easily.

Esta tela (se) seca rápido.

Aquesta roba s'eixuga ràpidament.

The use of a pronominal construction is the only difference observed here between the languages under consideration. In spite of all the attention this construction has received in the last decades, its use in real language is very marginal (Fernández y Vázquez, 2017).

2.2. Monotransitive Construction

Generally, and formally speaking, transitive structures imply the existence of 2 NPs participating in one single event. The canonical form of a monotransitive constructions is usually [NP1 VP NP2] NP1 is the syntactic subject, which can perform a variety of semantic functions: agent, cause, experiencer, etc. NP2 is, syntactically speaking, the direct object (DO).

John is reading **a book**.

John está leyendo **un libro**.

En John està llegint **un llibre**.

The storm destroyed **the barn**.

La tormenta destruyó **el granero**.

La tormenta va destrossar **el graner**.

Monotransitive constructions do not pose any major problems from the point of view of contrastive analysis. Probably, the main difference is that in Spanish when the NP2 is a human object the preposition *a* is required, and in Catalan this is optional in some contexts.

I saw Ana the other night.

Vi **a** Ana la otra noche.

Vaig sorprendre (a) l'Ana l'altra nit.

We need to mention that not all the sequences [NP1 VP NP2] involve necessarily a monotransitive construction. Thus, a sentence such as the one in the example below is in fact an intransitive construction, with a time adjunct that has the form of an NP. This holds true for the three languages under study:

Pere left **last week**.

Pere se fue **la semana pasada**.

En Pere va marxar **la setmana passada**.

Finally, we can find another mismatch when NP2 is not prototypically a direct object (i.e., affected by the action of the verb), and it requires an NP in one of the languages but a PP in the others. Nevertheless, independently of the type of phrase, the number constituents and meaning conveyed is the same:

He entered **the bedroom**. (NP)

Entró **en la habitación**. (PP)

Va entrar **a l'habitació**. (PP)

In addition to monotransitive constructions, we also have **complex-transitive constructions** [NP1 VP NP2 AdjP], as in the sentence below:

Everybody considers Mary intelligent.

Todo el mundo considera a María inteligente.

Tothom considera la María intel·ligent.

As you can see, the main difference, once again, is related to general rules of the language more than to specificities of the construction, the obligatory presence of the preposition *a* in Spanish.

Further reading

You will find more information about the use of *a* before a DO in Catalan in:

Institut d'Estudis Catalans (2016). *Gramàtica de la llengua catalana*. Barcelona: IEC (p. 730-732).

2.3. Ditransitive Constructions

Ditransitive constructions are very similar to transitive structures, but they subcategorize one NP and one PP (although, counting the subject, there are two NPs in the construction): [NP1 VP NP2 PP]. The first NP functions as subject, the second NP is the direct object, and the PP is the indirect object. In all three languages we find ditransitive constructions.

He sent the letter to his aunt.

Mandó la carta a su tía.

Va enviar el llibre a la seva tia.

The only remarkable issue would be related to word order: in Spanish and Catalan the pronominal IO appears before the verb. Besides, as you can see in the example above, the subject has been elided in both Catalan and Spanish (as is quite often the case in these languages when it is a pronoun and, therefore, it is not informative).

The **dative construction** (Goldberg 1995) is a specific construction of English in which the IO is moved right after the verb before the DO when it is a pronoun losing the preposition *to*.

He gave **me** a present.

He gave **his father** a present.

When the IO is a pronoun, this is the preferred construction (over the ditransitive one). The fact that we have the DO or IO directly after the verb is related to the informative structure.

In Spanish or Catalan, the dative construction is not possible. In these languages, when we want to place the IO in a more prominent position (shared knowledge), we have a different construction, **IO duplication**:

A **Ariana** **le** trajo mi hermana un regalo.

Mi hermana **le** trajo un regalo.

A l'**Ariana**, la meva germana **li** va portar un regal.

La meva germana **li** va portar un regal.

In these languages, as you can see, if we move the IO to the most prominent position (the first position) we have to duplicate the IO using a pronoun.

In English, if we want to place the IO in the first position, that of the discursive theme, we need to use a passive construction in which the IO has been promoted to subject position:

Note

Notice that in Catalan and Spanish the IO in the last example we have seen is also expressed through the pronoun (*li* and *le*, respectively,) and the PP *a la seva tia*. In Catalan, the expression of this pronoun is optional, whereas in Spanish it is usually compulsory.

See also

See the Section «Passive Construction».

Peter was granted the special award.

A Peter le dieron el premio especial.

Al Peter li van donar el premi especial.

Note

This duplication of the object could also happen if we place the DO in initial (prominent) position, even though DO duplication has more restrictions.

2.4. Resultative Construction

The **resultative construction** has the canonical form *NP V (NP) RP (Resultative Phrase)* (a). It can be transitive (a & b) or intransitive (c), and the RP can be an adjective phrase (a & c) or a prepositional phrase (b).

Even though it is formally similar to other constructions, the meaning is radically different. What gives this construction its name is the fact that the resultative phrase expresses the (resulting) state of the object after the event has happened.

a) Pat kicked the door open.

Pat abrió la puerta de una patada.

La Pat va obrir la porta d'una coça.

b) They tried to stab her to death.

Intentaron matarla a puñaladas.

Van intentar matar-la a punyalades.

c) The pond froze solid.

El estanque se congeló.

L'estany es va congelar.

As can be seen in (a), the resulting state (that of being open) of the object receiving the action, the door, is expressed as an obligatory complement.

This construction is not common in Spanish or Catalan. Occasionally it is possible to find it in these languages but it is restricted to events describing a way of dying, usually with violence.

Acuchilla hasta la muerte a su mujer en el hospital.

2.5. Passive Construction

The **periphrastic passive construction** can be found in all three languages. It is formed in English with the auxiliary verb *be* + the past participle. It is called *periphrastic* in Spanish and Catalan to distinguish it from the reflexive *passive* or *pronominal passive*. From now on, in this section we will refer to it as the passive construction.

He was last seen Friday night.

Fue visto por última vez el viernes por la noche.

Va ser vist per última vegada el divendres a la nit.

The passive voice is used when we are not interested in talking about who did something, i.e. the doer of the action, either because it is irrelevant (shared knowledge) or unknown.

Even though the use of the passive voice is possible in all the languages under discussion, it has to be said it is much more frequent in English than in the Romance languages. This is probably due to the fact that in Catalan and Spanish there is another linguistic mechanism which allows the speaker to place the object in the topical position of sentences.

See also

See the Section «Constructions with the pronoun *se*».

2.5.1. Differences between the passive voice in English and Spanish/Catalan

First of all, in Spanish/Catalan we have 2 possible auxiliary verbs that can be used to form the periphrastic passive construction, *ser* and *estar*:

In that situation the employee was fired.

En aquella situación el empleado fue despedido.

En aquella situació l'empleat va ser acomiadat.

The city is destroyed.

La ciudad está destruida.

La ciutat està destruïda.

The main difference between these 2 types of constructions is that the passive construction with *ser* expresses an action that implies a patient subject, whereas passive constructions with *estar* express the resulting state. Also, the auxiliary *ser* is used for more permanent situations whereas *estar* is used for temporal situations.

In English, these nuances do not exist. The only auxiliary verb used in English to form the passive is the verb *be*.

Another important difference is the fact that in English it is possible to have a passive construction in which the IO becomes the grammatical subject. Thus, a ditransitive construction in English (They awarded him a gold medal.) can be transformed in 2 ways:

- One in which the DO is found in subject position: A gold medal was awarded to him.
- Another in which the IO appears in subject position: He was awarded a gold medal.

The second type of construction is not possible in either Spanish or Catalan.

Further reading

You will find more information about the passive with *estar* in Catalan in:

J. Solà i altres (dir.) (2002). *Gramàtica del Català Contemporani. Vol. 2: Sintaxi (1-16)*. Barcelona: Empúries (p. 2144-2147).

From the point of view of discourse, the fact that the IO is placed first is again a matter of topicalization. In Spanish and Catalan, there is another construction that serves the same purpose:

(Alguien) le concedió una medalla.

(A él) se le concedió una medalla.

(Algú) li va concedir una medalla.

(A ell) se li va concedir una medalla.

As you can see, this construction is similar to the English passive construction just discussed (with the IO of the transitive as the passive subject), in that it serves the same discursive function. Spanish and Catalan resort to the construction called IO duplication for topicalization and to pronominalization for impersonalization of the transitive subject.

In the examples above, the IO is moved to the initial position for emphasis (*a él / a ell*), the agent is left unexpressed and covered by the use of the pronoun *se* and the unstressed pronoun fulfilling the IO function is placed between the pronoun *se* and the verb. This modification in the order of the participants is not possible in English.

2.6. Constructions with the pronoun *se*

This family of constructions presents **one form** and **several related meanings**. This pronominal structure does not exist in English and, therefore, its translation into this language is covered by several other structures such as the periphrastic passive or the intransitive construction.

The syntactic function and grammatical category performed by the pronoun *se* varies depending on each construction. Thus, we will determine the function and category of the pronoun for each construction independently.

In this section we present a summary of the most important **pronominal constructions**. This section is further subdivided according to the semantics of each construction. The first group of pronominal constructions is defined from a discursive point of view: the pronominal construction is used when we want to change the discursive focus of the sentence (within this group we will review three types: the reflexive passive, and the anticausative and middle constructions). We present these constructions under the label *Group I*.

In addition, in another family of constructions, the pronoun is used to replace one of the participants in the sentence, and in this case we talk about coindexation of arguments. Within this group, we have mainly two kinds of constructions: the reciprocal and reflexive constructions, which are presented in *Group II*.

See also

See the Sections «Ditransitive Constructions» and «Constructions with the pronoun *se*», respectively.

Further reading

For a more comprehensive review see Fernández & Vázquez (2017).

Finally, we have those sentences in which the pronoun *se* is used to add some kind of emphasis by incorporating a non-argumental participant (*Group III*).

2.6.1. Group I

All the constructions in this group have in common that the agent, the active doer of the action, is moved away from the discursive focus of the sentence. That is, the object of the transitive structure becomes the grammatical subject and the meaning is about the change it has undergone (a), the pronominal passive construction (Section «Pronominal Passive Constructions»), or a property it has (b), the middle construction (Section «Middle Construction»). This kind of mechanism is known as *detopicalization of the logical subject* (Givón 1981), and usually the logical subject, the agent, is not expressed.

a) La mesa se ha pintado de rojo.

La taula s'ha pintat de vermell.

b) Esta pintura se seca rápidamente.

Aquesta pintura s'asseca ràpidament.

The typical subcategorization structure is [NP *se* verb] or [*se* verb NP]. They do not have an equivalent (literal or direct) translation into English, since equivalent pronouns in English are only found in the reciprocal and reflexive constructions. Below we will see how these constructions can be translated into English.

The Pronominal Passive (or Reflexive Passive) Construction

This construction is used to express **semantic impersonality**. The actual agent is not mentioned, usually because it is a group, or it is unknown or irrelevant. The object, or patient of the transitive equivalent construction, becomes the syntactic subject. The pronoun *se* is invariable and, as a tendency, we can say that the subject can be placed before or after the verb, depending on the type of determiner (Mendikoetxea 1999):

Undetermined (after the verb):

Workers are needed for the summer season.

Se necesitan trabajadores para la temporada de verano.

Es necessiten treballadors per a la temporada d'estiu.

Determined (usually, before the verb):

The result will be known in the next few hours.

El resultado se conocerá / Se conocerá el resultado en las próximas horas.

El resultat es coneixerà / Es coneixerà el resultat en les properes hores.

As can be observed in the examples above, the most common equivalent construction in English is the periphrastic passive construction. This is to be expected, since in both constructions, the periphrastic and pronominal passives, the underlying semantics is very similar.

In both Spanish and Catalan, the pronominal passive is preferred over the periphrastic one.

Finally, the pronominal passive is rather similar to another construction known as *pronominal impersonal* (which does not exist in Catalan). The main difference is that in the latter there is no subject because there is no NP (a) in the sentence or, if there is one, it does not agree with the verb (b):

a) Se sabe.

Se sap.

It is known.

b) Se llevó a los heridos al hospital.

*Es va emportar als ferits a l'hospital.

The injured were taken to hospital.

The Anticausative Pronominal Construction

We have already discussed the semantic properties of this construction in English (Section «Anticausative Constructions»). The semantic properties are the same for all three languages, but the structure (form) used to convey the meaning changes (Levin 1993, Moreno Cabrera 1991).

As we mentioned in the Section «Anticausative Constructions», in Spanish and Catalan the most productive way to express an anticausative event is the pronominal form; occasionally, however, we can also find verbs used intransitively:

Pronominal form

Peter se preocupó mucho.

En Peter es va preocupar molt.

Peter worried a lot.

Las cosas cambian.

Les coses canvien.

Things change.

Unlike pronominal passives, the pronoun in anticausative constructions agrees with the subject so it changes accordingly:

Yo **me** preocupo mucho. / Tú **te** preocupas mucho.

Jo **em** preocupo molt. / Tu **et** preocupes molt.

As can be seen, the pronoun is never translated into English since it is part of the verb (*preocuparse*). Thus, the pronoun does not play a specific syntactic function or role in Spanish/Catalan. In English, the verb can function as an intransitive verb without the pronominalization mechanism used in Spanish/Catalan and the information about number and gender is provided by the syntactic subject.

The Middle Pronominal Construction

In this section we describe those constructions, equivalent to the English middle construction (Section «Middle Construction»), that require a *se* pronominal expression to convey the meaning. As a reminder, this is a stative construction in which a property about an entity (and usually the manner under which this property holds true) are stated (Givón 1993, Mendikoetxea 1999b).

In Spanish and Catalan, we usually need a pronominal construction. As was the case with the anticausative construction, the pronoun *se* does not fulfil any syntactic function.

Este vestido *se* plancha con facilidad.

Aquest vestit *es* planxa amb facilitat.

This dress irons easily.

In addition, as was noted above (Section «Middle Construction») very few verbs in Spanish, and none in Catalan, can be used without the pronoun *se*:

Este jersey *seca* bien.

This jumper dries well.

2.6.2. Group II

In this group we have included the reflexive and reciprocal constructions. Contrarily to the constructions seen in Group I, the pronoun in these constructions acts as a real pronoun and replaces a noun, which is co-indexed with the other NP in the sentence. In English, as we will see below, these constructions also require a pronoun.

The Reflexive Pronominal Construction

When reflexivity is expressed syntactically, a pronominal construction is required in Spanish and Catalan. The pronoun in these constructions agrees with the syntactic subject, as it does in English.

Crucé la calle y **me** presenté.

Vaig travessar el carrer i **em** vaig presentar.

I crossed the street and introduced **myself**.

Sometimes the reflexive pronoun is not required in English whereas in Spanish and Catalan it is:

Cada mañana **se** mira en el espejo y piensa...

Cada matí **es** mira al mirall i pensa...

Every morning he takes a look at the mirror and thinks...

In Spanish and Catalan we can also use an emphatic reflexive expression such as *a si mismo*, *a si mateix*, which contributes emphasis to the reflexive interpretation:

Jordan **se** rió de si mismo en un texto de felicitación.

En Jordan **va riure's** de sí mateix en un text de felicitació.

Jordan made fun of himself in a congratulatory text.

Reciprocal Pronominal Construction

In all three languages, a **reciprocal construction** is a complex event in which subjects and objects are crossed.

Nos dimos un beso de despedida.

Ens vam fer un petó de comiat.

We kissed **each other** goodbye.

Los jugadores **se** saludaron antes de empezar el partido.

Els jugadors **es** van saludar abans de començar el partit.

The players greeted **one another** before the match.

In Spanish and Catalan, the syntactic reciprocal construction usually requires a pronominal construction with one of the plural forms of the pronoun, which will vary depending on the person: first, second or third. Contrarily, in English the pronouns distinguish only the number of people involved: two (*each other*) or more than two participants (*one another*).

In Spanish and Catalan there are some marks that can be used in this construction to emphasize its reciprocal nature, such as *el uno al otro*, *mútuament*, etc. Nevertheless, real use shows that they are not that common (Fernández & Vázquez, 2017).

Se sostienen y respaldan **mutuamente**.

Se sostenen i es donen suport **mútuament**.

They **mutually** support and sustain **each other**.

Se complementan **el uno al otro**.

Es complementen l'un a l'altre.

They complement **each other** / **one another**.

2.6.3. Group III

The Dative of Interest Construction

In this section, we will only present some of the cases that are traditionally considered under in this construction, since it is used in a broader sense in the Spanish and Catalan literature. We are especially interested in those cases that are more relevant from the point of view of contrastive analysis. In this vein, we will present two types of constructions in which there is a possession relation (body parts or personal belongings), and those in which there is a kind of personal implication with the action but there is no possession.

In general, in this construction a pronoun occupies the function of an indirect object. It is not compulsory (that is, argumental) and its function is that of showing some sort of interest or special relation between the subject and the direct object.

Possession relation

Se **le** estropeó el coche.

Se **li** va espatllar el cotxe.

His car broke down.

Se **le** murió el perro.

Se **li** va morir el gos.

His dog died.

As you can see, the Spanish/Catalan IO (dative of interest) is incorporated in English in the NP as a possessive determiner, so all the meaning components are in fact expressed in the three languages, but the subcategorization pattern is different. In Spanish and Catalan we have [se + IO + verb + subject], whereas in English we only have one participant (the subject in this case).

When this structure is used in Spanish and Catalan to express regret or apology, or some kind of personal implication of the subject in the event since there is not a real possession implied, then in English the pronoun does not appear.

Personal implication

I dropped the glass.

Se **me** cayó el vaso.

Em va caure el got.

In this section, we have reviewed some of the most important constructions in English, Spanish and Catalan at sentence level. There are more, but we have chosen the most important ones and described them from a contrastive perspective.

Probably the most remarkable differences are found in the pronominal constructions in Spanish and Catalan used to, first, detopicalize the logical subject and, second, add emphasis or show the implication of the speaker with the action; and in the English resultative construction.

Summary

In this unit we have discussed some of the most relevant aspects related to phrase and sentence structure. For obvious reasons of space and with the aim of providing a reasonable amount of information, we decided to deal with just some of the several topics that could be described from a syntactic perspective.

In the Section «The noun phrase», we reviewed important topics related to the noun phrase (NP), such as the word classes that can act as head of the NP (Section «The head»). In addition, we revised the categories that can pre-modify the head (determiners, adjectives, nouns and the genitive) and how to order all these elements when more than one category appears (Section «Pre-modifiers»). We contrasted this ordering of elements in the three languages under discussion. The last subsection in this part of the unit presented the categories that can appear as post-modifiers of the head of a NP (adjectives, prepositional phrases, finite and non-finite clauses, and appositions) (Section «Post-modifiers»). Again, we presented all these elements from a contrastive perspective.

In the Section «Major constructions» we need to start by mentioning that we included the subject to the study of verb phrases and, therefore, we widened the scope of analysis to account for the whole sentence. In addition, we adopted a theoretical perspective known as Construction Grammar.

Thus, taking into account the above, we reviewed some very basic constructions in the three languages (subject-predicate, intransitive, transitive, monotransitive and ditransitive constructions), and more language-specific constructions such as the resultative or the (periphrastic) passive constructions for English and the family of pronominal constructions for Spanish and Catalan.

Self-evaluation

1) Why are NPs in bold type ungrammatical in English?

- a) *I'll come on **the Monday**.
- b) *Paul wants to be **doctor** when he grows up.
- c) ***The president Trump** is very unpredictable.
- d) *Why did you buy **this yellow ugly skirt**?
- e) ***Her mother Sally Higgins** is a truck driver.
- f) ***The coffee** is good for migraines.
- g) *Sally broke **the leg**.
- h) *I need **the students list** as soon as possible.
- i) *This is **the John's favourite film**.
- j) *I prefer **music live**.

2) What are the uses of the determiners in bold type in the following sentences?

- a) Can you see **that** person over there?
- b) In **a** big family there tend to be many problems.
- c) There is somebody at **the** door.
- d) Peter will make **a** wonderful teacher.
- e) Audrey knows that **the** students in her class found the exam very difficult.
- f) El chimpancé está en peligro de extinción.
- g) Me pica **la** nariz.
- h) **Un** chico joven no reaccionaría de esta manera.
- i) **Aquel** edificio está a punto de derrumbarse.
- j) Su coche es un poco raro. **El** volante es rojo y **las** ruedas verdes.
- k) Em vaig trobar una bicicleta amb **una** roda punxada.
- l) Tinc **un** mal de cap!
- m) Passa'm **la** sal, sisplau.
- n) Ahir vaig veure **un** cotxe de carreres.
- o) Els metges tenen molt de prestigi social.

3) Are the following statements true or false?

- a) The definite article can never be used for generic reference in English.
- b) There are geographical names preceded by the definite article in English, Spanish and Catalan.
- c) The position of the adjective relative to the noun in the NP is freer in Spanish and Catalan than in English.
- d) No determiners inflect for number in English.
- e) The indefinite article can never have a descriptive use in Spanish or Catalan.
- f) Non-restrictive appositions do not exist in English.
- g) In English, there are adjectives whose meaning changes depending on whether they occur before or after the noun.
- h) Non-finite clauses can be post-modifiers in the NP in English, Spanish and Catalan.
- i) The definite article can be used for indirect anaphora in Spanish and Catalan, but not in English.

4) Which meanings are expressed by the pre-modifying adjectives in the following sentences?

- a) I love that small old yellow motorcycle that we saw yesterday in Oxford.
- b) My niece has a gorgeous huge black and white Siamese cat.
- c) My mother was given a horrendous Swiss wooden clock.
- d) I need a big round pink box.
- e) That's the ugliest olive green woolen sweater I've ever seen.

5) Determine whether the following pairs of sentences are equivalent in meaning in both languages and describe the differences in form.

- a) He kicked the door open → Abrió la puerta a patadas (de una patada) / Va obrir la porta a cops de peu (d'una coça).
- b) Peter was asked a lot of questions → (A Pedro se) le hicieron muchas preguntas / (A en Pere se) li van fer moltes preguntes.
- c) The gardener watered the tulips flat → El jardinero regó demasiado los tulipanes / El jardiner va regar massa les tulipes.
- d) How are you? Fine, thanks. And you? → ¿Qué tal estás? Bien, gracias. ¿Y tú? / Què tal estàs? Bé, gràcies. I tu?
- e) Was it ever attacked? → ¿La atacaron alguna vez? / La van atacar alguna vegada?
- f) I was wondering if you could do me a favor → Me preguntaba si me podrías hacer un favor / Em preguntava si em podries fer un favor.

6) Identify the construction type of each of the following sentences. Where there is more than one construction, the relevant one is in bold type.

- a) That sense of normalcy was shattered on Wednesday, however.
- b) Wipe it off the top of the rails using a damp tissue after it has dried
- c) Be careful! **This material breaks easily.**
- d) He **wiped the window clean** and hung up the curtains.
- e) Los medicamentos de este tipo se llaman agentes neuroprotectores.
- f) Les dues noies es van mirar mútuament uns instants.

7) Determine the kind of construction represented by each of the following sentences. Where there is more than one construction, the relevant one is in bold type.

- a) ¿Qué debe hacer el hombre para **que no se lo coman a través de la selección natural**?
- b) **Mi hermano se arregló** y se fue, continúa María José.
- c) Pero la gran «piedra de toque» la planteará ERC tras el verano, cuando **se abra la negociación de los presupuestos del 2005.**
- d) Los terroristas subieron al coche y huyeron por la citada calle, desde **la que se accedía con facilidad a la autopista.**
- e) Han inventado un envoltorio **que se abre fácilmente.**
- f) Pocs dies després es va dissenyar el primer logotip de l'empresa.
- g) Es van trucar a primera hora del matí.
- h) Mentre en Joan es pentinava va sonar el telèfon.
- i) A Barcelona es menja molt bé ultimament.
- j) Se m'ha espatllat la rentadora i només fa un mes que la vaig comprar.

8) Group together the sentences below according to the kind of construction they exemplify.

- a) We still have to sweep the tiles.
- b) Sally baked her sister a cake.
- c) John ran his feet sore.
- d) The doors trundled open.
- e) Mary considered him a fool.
- f) He sneezed the foam off his cappuccino.
- g) She stomped up the stairs.
- h) The plumber mailed me another invoice.
- i) The reviewer rejected the paper.
- j) The banks refused him a loan.
- k) They named their baby Ottis.
- l) Peter smoked a fat cigar.
- m) The president vetoed the law.
- n) She pulled a handkerchief out of her pocket.
- o) John was given a large data set for the analysis.
- p) His sister bought a book for him.
- q) The wagon was loaded with hay.
- r) John was granted permission.
- s) Audrey is sleeping.
- t) She tiptoed out of the room.

Answer key

Self-evaluation

1. a) The days of the week appear without article: *I'll come on Monday.*
- b) An indefinite article is needed in this descriptive use: *Paul wants to be a doctor when he grows up.*
- c) Personal names are never preceded by an article: *President Trump is very unpredictable.*
- d) The order of the adjectives should be opinion-quality-colour: *Why did you buy this ugly yellow skirt?*
- e) It's not possible to have a restrictive apposition in this sentence, since people only have one mother: *Her mother, Sally Higgins, is a truck driver.*
- f) Mass nouns (with or without generic reference) appear without article: *Coffee is good for migraines.*
- g) To refer to body parts in sentences such as this one, the possessive is used: *Sally broke her leg.*
- h) Premodifying nouns tend to appear in the singular: *I need the student list as soon as possible.*
- i) In its determinative use, the genitive cannot be preceded by a determiner: *This is Jolm's favourite film.*
- j) *Live* is an adjective which can only appear before the noun: *I prefer live music.*

2. a) Deictic
- b) Generic
- c) Deictic
- d) Descriptive
- e) Cataphoric
- f) Generic
- g) Body part
- h) Generic
- i) Deictic
- j) Indirect anaphora
- k) Indirect anaphora
- l) Emphatic
- m) Deictic
- n) Non-specific element
- o) Generic

3. a) False
- b) True
- c) True
- d) False
- e) False
- f) False
- g) False
- h) True
- i) True

4. a) [size - age - colour]
- b) [opinion/quality - size - colour]
- c) [opinion/quality - origin - material]
- d) [size - shape - colour]
- e) opinion/quality - colour - material]

5. a) They are almost equivalent. In English, it is a resultative construction. In Spanish and Catalan, it is an active transitive sentence where the meaning conveyed in English by the verb to *kick* is expressed in an adjunct (*a patadas / de una patada; a cops de peu / d'una coça*). The resulting state of the door after being kicked open is expressed in the main verb in the Spanish and Catalan sentences.
- b) Almost equivalent. In English it is a passive construction and the indirect object of the transitive has been placed as the subject of the passive for discursive reasons (topicalization). In Spanish and Catalan, we have an active construction, and the discursive relevance of the IO is expressed by moving the IO to the first position, right before the unstressed pronoun (IO duplication).
- c) They are similar, but not equivalent. In English, the resulting state of the DO after the event has happened is expressed as an adjective. In this case, the information about the resulting state is not expressed in Catalan or Spanish. It would not sound natural.
- d) In this example the translations are equivalent in all the languages. The only major formal difference is the elision of the subject in Spanish and Catalan.

e) Equivalent. We see here again how a passive construction is translated into Spanish and Catalan by an active equivalent construction. Formal differences relate to grammatical rules (how to formulate a question in English, i. e. inversion of the auxiliary).

f) Once again, from the point of view of meaning we have equivalent sentences. From the point of view of form, we would like to point out the differences in the use of verb tenses (past continuous in English versus imperfective past), and the use of a pronominal verb in Spanish and Catalan: *preguntarse* / *preguntar-se*. Also, the order of the pronoun with IO function (*me; me; em*) is different: in English it is placed after the verb (*do*), and in Spanish and Catalan before it (*hacer; fer*).

- 6. a) Passive
- b) Resultative
- c) Middle
- d) Resultative and transitive
- e) Pronominal passive
- f) Recíproca

- 7. a) Impersonal construction
- b) Reflexive
- c) Pronominal passive
- d) Pronominal impersonal
- e) Middle
- f) Pronominal passive
- g) Recíproca
- h) Reflexiva
- i) Impersonal
- j) Dative of interest

- 8. Intransitive: g), s), t)
- Transitive: a), i), l), m), n)
- Ditransitive: p)
- Dative: b), h), j)
- Resultative: c) transitive, d) intransitive, f) transitive
- Complex Transitive: e), k)
- Passive: o), q)
- Passive (Indirect object): r)

Glossary

anaphora The process by which a given element in a text gets its interpretation through something that has been mentioned earlier in the same text.

anticausative construction A construction in which the only argument, the syntactic subject, is the patient of the event and it undergoes a change of state. The cause is not expressed.

apposition A noun phrase that occurs right after another one with the same reference, providing more information about the referent.

appositive clause A clause appearing after the head noun in noun phrases, introduced by a conjunction, whose content expands the meaning of the head noun. Appositive clauses appear after nouns such as *news*, *fact* or *rumour*.

cataphora The process by which the referent of a noun is identified by some element that occurs after it in the text.

clause A syntactic structure typically made up of a subject and a predicate, which can be part of a higher structure, a sentence.

complex-transitive construction Construction in which the adjective phrase subcategorized by the verb describes a property of the object.

construction The basic unit of linguistic analysis in the framework known as Construction Grammar. It is understood as a pair of form and meaning. It can be found at several levels, from phonemes to discourse. In this unit we have dealt with the sentence level.

Construction Grammar Theoretical framework that proposes the analysis of language as a network of constructions.

count noun Noun treated by the language as a separable entity.

dative construction Construction specific to English in which the IO is placed before the DO, right after the verb.

definite article Article used to refer to a specific, identifiable entity.

determiner Function word placed at the beginning of a noun phrase, contributing a variety of meanings, such as quantity or distance.

direct anaphora Anaphora that refers back to the whole entity denoted by the noun phrase.

ditransitive construction Construction with a verb that subcategorizes two objects, an NP and a PP.

finite clause Clause that contains a form of a verb conjugated including information such person, number, tense, mood, aspect.

generic reference Denotation of an entity as a representative of the whole class to which it belongs.

head The central element in a phrase.

indefinite article Article used to refer to an unidentifiable entity.

indirect anaphora Anaphora that refers back to a part of the entity denoted by the noun phrase.

intransitive construction Construction with a verb that does not require a direct object. Constructions with prepositional phrases in object position are also considered intransitive.

IO duplication Spanish and Catalan construction that allows for the duplication of the IO as a PP and as a pronoun.

mass noun Noun considered by the language as a continuous entity, with no natural bounds.

middle construction (mediopassive) Stative construction which can be formally considered active in form and passive in meaning. It describes how a property of an entity can be modified.

monotransitive construction Construction with a verb that subcategorizes one object.

non-finite clause Clause that contains a non-finite form of a verb, i.e., infinitive, present participle or past participle.

non-restrictive Modification which provides information not necessary to identify the referent of the noun.

periphrastic passive construction Typical passive construction in which we use an auxiliary verb (*ser, to be*).

phrase Constituent of a clause which consists of a head and optional modifiers.

post-modifier Modifier that occurs after the head.

pre-modifier Modifier that occurs before the head.

pronominal construction Spanish and Catalan construction that requires the pronoun *se*.

reciprocal construction Construction defining a complex event in which the participants of both subevents are crossed.

reflexive pronominal construction Construction in which the pronoun replaces an argument, a person, which is coindexed with the subject.

relative clause Post-modifying clause in noun phrase structure, introduced by a relative pronoun.

restrictive Modification which provides information necessary to identify the referent of the noun.

resultative construction Construction in which the adjective or prepositional phrase expresses the resulting state of the object or subject after the event has happened.

sentence A syntactic structure consisting of one or more clauses.

subject-predicate construction The most basic construction that establishes the relationship between a subject and the predicate.

transitive construction Very basic construction in which the verb subcategorizes an (or more) object(s).

zero article Absence of article.

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