Verbs in English and their Spanish counterparts

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ABSTRACT
Peculiarities of verbs in English are a great challenge for teachers of ESL/EFL, for Spanish students, for those interested in contrastive linguistics. Indeed, globalisation has furthered the interest in acquiring languages and studying their intricacies. Nevertheless, of all the lexical categories, verbs have been the least favoured as to the collection of linguistic data and information, at least until recently. Therefore, in this article, I will attempt to describe an overview of some of the aspects of syntax, semantics and morphology of verbs under the light of contrastive linguistics. Hopefully, it will also throw light upon the cognitive effort demanded from students of English to acquire and use verbs in English, their didactic implications. Conclusions might be drawn from any said comparison when teaching/ learning English. Likewise, teachers and students' awareness should help in a betterment of the active knowledge and use of verbs. Several examples will be provided to illustrate the points under discussion.

Key words: Contrastive linguistics, cognitive effort, syntax, semantics and morphology of verbs, didactic, verbs in English.

Los verbos en inglés y sus homólogos españoles

RESUMEN
Las peculiaridades de los verbos en inglés son un reto para los profesores de inglés como segunda lengua o como lengua extranjera, para los estudiantes españoles y para quienes están interesados en la lingüística contrastiva. Sin embargo, de todas las categorías léxicas, los verbos han sido los menos estudiados, o al menos, ha sido así hasta hace poco tiempo atrás. Por lo tanto, en este artículo, trataré de dar una visión general de algunos aspectos sintácticos, semánticos y morfológicos de los verbos desde la lingüística contrastiva. Es de esperar que este enfoque resaltará también el esfuerzo cognitivo que deben hacer los estudiantes no nativos de inglés para aprender y saber usar los verbos en inglés, sus implicaciones didácticas. Podrán sacarse conclusiones de la comparación lingüística en la enseñanza/aprendizaje del idioma inglés. De igual modo, el que los profesores y estudiantes se den cuenta de ciertos aspectos de ambos idiomas debería ayudar a mejorar

en el uso y conocimiento activo de los verbos en inglés. Se darán varios ejemplos a modo de ilustración de los puntos aquí expuestos.

Palabras clave: Lingüística contrastiva, esfuerzo cognitivo, sintaxis, semántica y morfología de los verbos, didáctica, verbos en inglés.

Les verbes en anglais et ses homologues espagnols

RÉSUMÉ
L'enseignement de certains verbes en anglais, particuliers, représente un vrai défi pour les professeurs d'anglais LV2 ou d'anglais pour étudiants espagnols, ou même pour les intéressés de linguistique comparée. Parmi toutes les catégories léxicales, ce sont les verbes qui ont été les moins étudiés jusqu'à présent. C'est pourquoi dans cet article, j'essayerai de donner une vision générale de certains aspects sintaxiques, sémantiques et morphologiques des verbes à travers la linguistique comparée. Nous espérons, qu'à partir de ces points de vue, puisse ètre mis en relief l'effort cognitif que doivent faire les étudiants non natifs pour apprendre et savoir bien utiliser les verbes an anglais ainsi que leurs implications didactiques. Nous emmettront ensuite des conclusions de cette comparaison linguistique dans l'enseignement /apprentissage de la langue anglaise. De même, le fait que les professeurs et les étudiants se rendent compte de certaines particularités des deux langues devrait les aider a améliorer leur usage et leur connaîssance active des verbes en anglais. Nous donnerons plusieurs exemples pour illustrer ces points.

Mots-clés: linguistique comparée, effort cognitif, sintaxe, sémantique et morphologie des verbes, didactique, verbes en anglais.

SUMARIO: 1. Introduction. 2. Syntax: Verbs of displacement in English and Spanish. 3. Semantics: How Movement and Manner blend in English but not in Spanish. 4. Semantics and Syntax: Fulfilment or partial achievement? 5. Morphology of Verbs in English. 6. Syntax of Verbs in English. 7. Syntax and Semantics of Verbs in English. 8. Conclusions. 9. References.

1. INTRODUCTION

Much research has lately been done on verbs in English (Casado, 2005; Croft, 1990, 1991; Faber & Mairal, 1999; Garrudo, 1991, 1996; Levin 1993a & b, 2002, 2004; Levin & Rappaport, 1999; Morimoto, 2001, Talmy, 1975, 1988, 2000) but an overview of verbs in English in comparison with their Spanish translation may prove very useful for most professionals interested in languages. The objective of this article is to highlight some characteristics of verbs in English, while offering their Spanish translation; thus, the term "peculiarities" will be used. There is a two-fold purpose in drawing the comparison between both languages: a) to put together

in a nutshell some of the most remarkable aspects of syntax, semantics and morphology of verbs in English, and b) to point out their contrastive features in translation. The reason seems apparent: when teaching English to Spanish students, there are linguistic barriers that do not conceptually allow a one to one translation. Then, the use of verbs in English is not facilitated by the knowledge of Spanish, which justifies the cognitive effort demanded from Spanish students, not only in their receptive acquisition of verbs, but mostly in their active use. However, when analysed together, the issue becomes at least theoretically resolved. Therefore, the methodology employed in this article will be to expose some theoretical constructs enlightened by a series of examples of sentences in English, focusing upon the verbs. Immediately following, the corresponding translation will be shown.

To this purpose I will very briefly start by establishing a comparison between nouns and verbs in English. Delving into verbs, some syntactic, semantic and morphological aspects will be analysed, being aware that trying to isolate any of these may prove quite unnatural. Most aspects dealt with interrelate with each other.

Among the syntactic aspects, the first step in these reflections will be to describe the idiosyncrasies of verbs of displacement or translocation in English when compared to their Spanish counterparts. This analysis will show how EFL as well as ESL learners should approach them from different angles. The second step will touch upon a semantic aspect: how movement and manner conflate in English verbs, whereas they do not in their Spanish translation. The third step will throw light upon combined issues of semantics and syntax, such as how verbs express fulfilment or partial achievement through different structures. The fourth step will analyse the morphology of verbs in English, how nouns do not change to achieve verbhood and vice versa. The fifth aspect treats of syntax, focusing on the verb's position in the sentence, peculiarities of intransitive verbs, how some transitive verbs may become intransitive and finally, some syntactic and semantic issues having to do with semantic roles, how semantic relations do not coincide with the grammatical ones, how transitivity may be far away from prototypicality, especially in connection with semantic roles. Within the syntactic and semantic issues discussed, polysemy realised through different prepositions following the verb, has been included. Some phrasal verbs instantiations help further illustrate polysemy and the struggle involved in learning them.

A preliminary step can then be to compare the noun to the verb. To state that verbs are far more arduous to grasp than nouns is no commonplace. To state that EFL as well as ESL students hardly ever achieve lexical variety when using English verbs is no commonplace either. Nouns, by their very nature, are easier to learn than verbs. Nouns by definition (Croft, 1991, 261) name people, objects, and places. The external world gives objects credit for what they are: autonomous entities which can stand alone. Nouns can, as a result, be grouped without much appeal to a cognitive effort. The objects they denote are there and can easily be

apprehended. Categorisation is a natural outcome. Contrary to nouns in this sense are verbs. The very fact that there are several definitions of verbs shows that their concept is either more elaborate or elusive. Some authors (Frawley, 1992,141) define verbs as "a word that encodes *events*", (Hopper & Thompson, 1984, 707; Faber & Mairal, 1999, 234) denoting rapid changes, codified in terms of concrete, kinetic, visible, effective actions or events, carried out by, and involving participants, (Van Valin, 2001, 6) "action words", (Levin, 2002) "the engines of language", etc. They represent not a categorisation of objects but of events. Consequently, verbs do not express what can be individuated in either space or time. The individuation of events implies for Croft (1991, 261) "isolating a fragment of the causal chain", where there is a much greater cognitive effort involved.[1]

2. SYNTAX: VERBS OF DISPLACEMENT IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH

English and Spanish verbs of translocation structure displacement in unlike ways. Their internal semantics is dissimilar, as is proved by the following instantiations:

(1) The bottle floated **into** the cave. (Talmy's very well-known example)
*La botella **entró** a la cueva flotando*

(2) The bird flew **out of** the cage.
*El pájaro **salió** de la jaula volando*

(3) Mary jumped **into** the hole.
*Mary **entró** al agujero de un salto*

(4) Peter walked **out of** the classroom.
*Peter **salió** del aula caminando*

The semantics of the English prepositions **into, out of -** or the prepositional phrases **into/out of a place -** translate into Spanish as verbs of movement: ***entró/salió.*** **Into/out of** show a "moving directionality" manifested as verbs of

[1] Cultural differences aggravate the situation. Agar, M. (1994, 60) introduces the term ´languaculture´ to point out the need to grasp the role that the linguistic-cultural attributes of a discourse community plays in verbal communication. The prescribed grammatical rules quite often fail between a second language user and a native speaker because of their different cultural models.

displacement or translocation in Spanish: ***entró/salió.*** Nevertheless, **into/out of** as well as ***entró/salió*** point to a definite type of translocation, namely, an explicit change of the Figure (namely, object/animal/person in movement) from the point of origin (so called Landmark) to the point of destination (Landmark, Ground). (Talmy, 1985; Langacker, 1987).

Up to this point there is no apparent differentiating issue with current research. Verbs like ***entrar*** and ***salir*** are of inherent directionality, using Slobin's terminology (1996). Nonetheless, I would like to qualify the concept of directionality as regards the above mentioned lexical items, replacing it by "enclosure", that is, the notion of "container" at either end of the displacement. Origin/destination point to a special area somehow enclosed; otherwise, there would be no justification in using **into/out of**. Moreover, just as the above English prepositions are 'neutral' in the sense that they do not reflect the manner in which the movement is performed, so are the Spanish verbs ***entró/salió***. The manner in which the displacement took place in the above examples is revealed by the English verbs of movement **floated**[2]**/flew** as well as the Spanish gerunds ***flotando/volando***, the former English pair synthesising movement and manner of movement conflated in one lexical item, whereas the latter Spanish gerunds focus mainly on manner. The reader will find more examples below:

(5) The baseball player slid **into** third base.
El jugador de baseball se deslizó (a propósito) y ***llegó*** *a tercera base (literally* ***entró****)*

(6) They darted **into** their homes.
Se ***metieron*** *en sus casas* ***como una flecha***

(7) She dashed **into** the building.
Entró *al edificio* ***disparada***

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[2] The verb **float** offers a double difficulty in translation due to a conceptual bipolarity, which is also valid in Spanish. (Gómez Torrego, March 2007 email query). It can point to: a. be afloat; stay on a liquid surface; not sink, and b. move lightly, as if suspended. (http://www.onelook.com/?w=float&ls=a). Therefore, I believe scholars who translate: the duck **floats past** the tree only as *el pato pasa el árbol flotando* (Saeed 1997, 246, 247; Gentner & Boroditsky, 2001, 245, 246) fall short of the other possibility: *El pato está flotando/flota* ***más allá del*** *árbol*, where the verb **float** indicates no displacement (http://buscon.rae.es/draeI/SrvltConsulta?TIPO_BUS=3&LEMA=flotar), simply a static activity, and **past** obeys to the description of where the duck is in relation to the tree.

Owing to the fact that prepositional phrases like **out of a place/into a place** are not taken as part of the verb and that the change of location is achieved through them, the verbs that collocate with them are called satellites. Therefore, English is considered a satellite-framed language, whereas Spanish, French, etc. are considered verb-framed. Their change of location is mainly achieved through a verb.

3. SEMANTICS: HOW MOVEMENT AND MANNER BLEND IN ENGLISH BUT NOT IN SPANISH

The above observations should be qualified. There are other serious aspects to be taken into account to delve into English verbs. They are nuances of meaning which trigger off complications for students who should not only understand them but also acquire enough practice to dominate them. For instance, some English verbs of movement are typical instantiations of how movement and manner blend, whereas Spanish verbs are illustrative of movement alone in so far as manner becomes clearly expressed through other lexical items such as prepositional phrases, adjectival phrases, adverbs, etc.

(1) Ants **scurry** here and there[3]. (Movement + manner in the same verb)
*Las hormigas **van** de aquí para allá **temerosas y con prisa*** (Movement in the verb; manner in the adjective and prepositional phrase)

(2) The children **scurried** to the door. (Movement + manner in the same verb)
*Los niños **corrieron** a la puerta **temerosos y con prisa.*** (Movement in the verb: manner in the adverb and adverbial phrase)

(3) He **waddled** along the street. (Movement + manner in the same verb)
*El **caminó** por la calle **como un pato*** (Movement in the verb: manner in the adverbial phrase)

The dissimilarities between English and Spanish verbs shown above call for some mental effort to assimilate them, and that involves special skills. Furthermore, just as students are unaware of this situation, so are many teachers of English. Unawareness would justify the generalised lexical poverty of EFL compositions. Students fall back on what they know without digging into new lexical items as new resources to draw from. And they do not look up new verbs for they do not know how to use them. Synonymity is no great help unless we enter into the field

[3] Scurry (Casado 2005, 373).

of collocations- the most arduous to tackle. Teachers surely find themselves at a loss: translation, monolingual dictionaries or thesauruses have proved insufficient to bring forth the lexical structuring of verbs.

4. SEMANTICS AND SYNTAX: FULFILMENT OR PARTIAL ACHIEVEMENT?

Other peculiarities to be taken into account are displayed by verbs whose semantic components vary, although they belong to the same morphosyntactic group. Some linguists (Croft, 1991; Garrudo, 1991, 1996; Levin, 2003, 2004) provide quite illustrative examples:

(1) The gardener **sprinkled seeds on the lawn** (partial coverage).
El jardinero ***esparció semillas en el césped***

(2) Jack **sprayed paint on the wall** (partial coverage).
Jack ***roció pintura en la pared***

(3) Bees **are swarming in the garden** (partial saturation).
Las abejas ***enjambran en el jardín***

The above examples do not refer to completion. On the contrary, it is expected that the lawn will not be fully covered by seeds, or the wall fully painted, or the garden full of bees. The ensuing instantiations show otherwise.

(4) The gardener **sprinkled the lawn with seeds** (completion).
El jardinero ***cubrió el césped con semillas***

(5) Jack **sprayed the wall with paint** (completion).
Jack ***roció la pared con pintura***

(6) The garden **is swarming with bees** (saturation).
El jardín ***está plagado de abejas***

It should be noticed that in (1), (3), (4) and (6) the Spanish counterparts offer more difficulties than (2) and (5) since a change of lexical item is required in translation.

Sentences (4), (5) and (6) show that the actions were fully achieved. The lawn was totally covered by seeds, the wall was fully painted, and the garden was full with bees. The same pattern is true in Spanish.

Whether the same verbs are followed by either noun phrases or prepositional phrases has great bearing upon semantics, either to show fulfilment or partial achievement. Here follow some noun phrases, a way of expressing fulfilment or completion:

(7) The hunter **shot the bird.**
*El cazador **mató al pájaro***

(8) He **hit his opponent.**
Golpeó a su oponente

(9) The cat **scratched the door.**
*El gato **arañó la puerta***

(10) He **kicked the tin.**
Pateó la lata

(11) He saw the chickens **picking corn.**
*Vio a las gallinas **picotear el maíz***

(12) He **pushed the door.**
Empujó la puerta

Here follow some prepositional phrases which express unknown results:

(1) The hunter **shot at the bird**. (possible completion) He might have killed it. Unless specified, the outcome is unknown.
*El cazador **disparó al pájaro***

(2) He **hit at his opponent** but missed.
***Intentó golpearlo** pero falló*

(3) The cat **scratched at the door.**
*El gato **llamó a la puerta repetidamente** (para entrar o salir)*

(4) He **kicked at the tin.**
Dio patadas a la lata

(5) He saw the chickens **picking at the corn.**
*Vio a las gallinas **picotear el maíz en pequeñas cantidades, sin apetito***

(6) He **pushed at the door.**
Empujó la puerta repetidamente *(por ejemplo tratando de ver si estaba abierta)*

Fulfilment can also be achieved through resultative constructions (Goldberg, 1995), with patterns such as Verb+Recipient+Adjective denoting final result. Resultative constructions have no like pattern in Spanish.

(1) I **shouted** myself **hoarse.**
Me quedé afónico de tanto gritar
Grité hasta quedarme afónico

(2) The dog **picked** the bone **clean.**
El perro royó el hueso hasta dejarlo limpio

(3) He **pushed** the door **open.**
Abrió la puerta de un empujón

(4) The thief **wiggled** himself **loose**.
El ladrón se movió (contorneándose) de tal manera que logró soltarse

(5) We **ran** ourselves **exhausted**.
Corrimos hasta que quedamos agotados
Quedamos agotados de tanto correr

5. MORPHOLOGY OF VERBS IN ENGLISH

The morphology of English verbs can be rather odd when compared to Spanish. Nouns change into verbs without undergoing any special inflections to achieve verbhood (Hopper & Thompson, 1984, 745). Compare animal verbs, so called by Clark & Clark (1979), which follow this rule[4], with their Spanish equivalents.

(1) People **squirreled away** some money for an emergency. (People hid the money and stored it for future use like a squirrel with its nuts).
*La gente **ocultó** el dinero **y** lo **guardó** para una emergencia*

(2) He **chickened out of** a fight last night. His opponent was rather tall.

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[4] *Rabbit: run like a rabbit (now outdated). Current use: hunt rabbits or hares.*

Dejó la pelea comportándose ***como una gallina***

(3) He **snaked** through the cars.
Se desplazó ***como una serpiente*** *en medio de los coches*

(4) He **hared** down the road.
Corrió ***como una liebre*** *por el camino*

(5) The thief **moused** along the park side.
*El ladrón se desplazó a hurtadillas (****como un ratón****) por el costado del parque*

Likewise, dance terms, or waltz verbs (Clark & Clark, 1979; Levin, 1993), follow the previous rule: the noun suffers no changes to turn into a verb. This is also inexistent in Spanish and has an important didactic impact in the teaching/learning process.

(1) She was **boogying** in her sequined costume. (Boogie: an instrumental version of the blues, especially for piano)
Bailaba al ritmo de boggie *con su vestido de lentejuelas*
Bailaba boogie *con ...*

(2) We **bopped** till we dropped. (Bop: an early form of modern jazz originating around 1940)
Bailamos al ritmo del bop *hasta que no resistimos más*
Bailamos bop *hasta que no…*

(3) They **congaed** the whole night. (Conga: a Latin American dance of 3 steps and a kick by people in single file)
Bailaron conga *toda la noche*

(6) They **waltzed** together on the deck.
Bailaron *juntos* ***el vals*** *en la cubierta del barco*

(7) She **tangoed** in the moonlight.
Bailó tango *a la luz de la luna*

Clark (1979) and Levin (1993) also talk about vehicle verbs - verbs of motion using a vehicle - , evidently derived from vehicle nouns. There are instrument verbs as well, that is, elements which help with translocation - sail, wing -. See some instantiations below. Examples (6) and (8) represent instrument verbs.

(1) We **boated** down the Manzanares river.
Fuimos en bote *por el río Manzanares*

(2) They **trucked** us to Germany.
Nos ***llevaron en camión*** *hasta Alemania*

(3) We **cycled** through your town yesterday.
Anduvimos en moto/o en bicicleta *por tu pueblo ayer*

(4) After a heavy snowfall, we have to **snowshoe** to school.
Después de una fuerte tormenta de nieve tenemos que ***ir*** *al colegio* ***con raquetas de nieve***

(5) We **kayaked** down the river.
Viajamos en kayac *(=una pequeña canoa) por el río*

(6) We **winged** through a mountain pass. Then the plane …
Volamos *a través de un desfiladero o puerto de montaña. Luego el avión …*

(7) She **motors** to school every morning. (Travel or be transported in a vehicle)
Ella va al colegio conduciendo todas las mañanas

(8) They **paddled** until they were in the middle of the ocean.
Remaron *hasta que llegaron al medio del océano* (Spanish and English coincide)

The previous classification is by no means exhaustive. It simply represents a sample of what peculiarities verbs have to offer and how they are realised in Spanish.

6. SYNTAX OF VERBS IN ENGLISH

The syntactic aspects of verbs should not be undermined. The unique position a verb occupies is in itself quite demanding in the sense that it imposes a certain word order onto the other linguistic elements in the surroundings.

Firstly, a verb's proximity in an English sentence, unless it is in the imperative mood, demands an overt subject so that by its mere presence a subject is coerced (Casado, 2005, 158).

(1) **It** is raining (dummy subject in weather verbs, Van Valin, 2001, 93).
Llueve o está lloviendo

(2) **It** costs $49.
Cuesta $49

(3) **They** are here.
Están aquí

The verb's proximity imprints force on its neighbouring elements: the closer a lexical item is to the verb the stronger its meaning. Accordingly, such sentences as:

(1) She gave **me** a book to read.
Me *dio un libro para leer*

(2) She gave a book **to me** to read.
Ella dio un libro ***a mí*** *para leer* (awkward)

In sentence (1) **me** is more forceful than ***to me*** in (2). In fact both passivise differently:

(3) **I** was given a book to read.
(Yo) *recibí un libro para leer*

(4) A book was given **to me** to read.
Me *dieron un libro para leer*

Therefore, the above Spanish translations - (1), (2), (3) and (4) - cannot be compared to their English counterparts. Moreover, Van Valin (2001 b, 9) illustrates how a verb's proximity affects the sentence meaning.

(1) She taught **the students** English.
Enseñó ***a los estudiantes*** *inglés* (awkward)

(2) She taught English **to the students**.
Enseñó inglés ***a los estudiantes***

As in the previous examples, the above Spanish sentences cannot be compared to their English counterparts. In (1) **the students** were taught and actually learned, whereas in (2) **to the students** they most likely did not learn.

In addition, some verbs may follow only some of the regularities of the syntactic features of the group they are part of, so that at times the same syntactic behaviour may create dichotomies. Some of the verbs which command this bipolar behaviour are intransitive; these can be intransitive unaccusative and unergative. This division, however, is not clear-cut, and the relative clarification comes from the syntax semantics interface.

The ensuing examples quoted by (Perlmutter, 1978, 163 ref Lupsa, 2005) show both unaccusative, unergative, and a combination of both:

(1) The wheels **slid** on the ice (unaccusative: a passive participant - subject- and a non volitional action).
*Las ruedas **se deslizaron** sobre el hielo*

(2) Joe **slid into** third base (unergative: an active participant - subject - expressing a willed action).
*Joe **se deslizó** a propósito y **llegó** a tercera base*

(3) Joe **slid** on the ice (unaccusative/ unergative: it can be an active participant willingly sliding on ice or a passive participant sliding accidentally on it).
*¿Joe **se deslizó voluntariamente** o **se resbaló** sobre el hielo?*

Likewise, as Saeed remarks (1997), intransitive verbs having one single argument can be either unaccusative or unergative, like **grow** (*crecer*) or **drown** (*ahogarse*), - unvoluntary actions - whose argument is essentially a Patient (unaccusative), and **sit** (*sentarse*) and **stand** (*estar de pie*), - voluntary actions - whose argument is an Agent (unergative).

Some other verbs that imprint curious syntactic features to their group are transitive. Transitive verbs, analysed by Levin (1999), are necessarily two-argument verbs because they have subject and object. Nevertheless, iteration may change this premise. Semelfactive verbs - verbs that can describe instantaneous events - may bear one or two arguments. **Wink** may be a one argument verb, whereas **hit** is a two-argument one.

(1) He **hit** her (two argument verb: an agent **he** and an object **her**; transitive).
*La **golpeó***

(2) He **winked** a lot (one argument verb: an agent **he**; intransitive; semelfactive).
***Parpadeó** mucho*

(3) He **winked** at me (two argument verb: an agent **he** and an object **at me**; transitive).
*Me **guiñó** el ojo*

Dictionaries do not seem to come to terms on **wink**[5]. Once more these examples reveal the complexity verbs show.

In addition, a verb has been labelled differently in modern linguistics. The varied terminology makes it hard for the reader to elucidate the concepts. Take Dik (1997, 117) for instance, he and other linguists speak about verbal, nominal and adjectival predicates in connection with verbs, nouns and adjectives. However, other linguists such as Croft (1991) and Van Valin (2001) refer to arguments and predicates as syntactic functions performed by nouns and verbs respectively.

Another aspect to remark about verbs is syntactic prototypicality. Prototypical verbs exhibit similarities in their structure, namely, syntactic properties that may characterise them and set them apart from less prototypical members. Langacker (1987, 371) highlights the idea that: "a prototype is a typical instance of a category, and that other elements are assimilated to the category based on their perceived resemblance to the prototype; there are degrees of membership based on degrees of similarity." Prototypicality has thus been assumed to provide the guidelines for any member to be "within a group", permitting a wide range of discrepancies between them - the so called more prototypical to the more marginal members - This concept applies to lexical categories among which are the verbs. Syntactic prototypicality can be fully appreciated through some instantiations proposed by Taylor (1995, 206):

(1) The child **kicked** the ball.
*El niño **pateó** la pelota*

(2) John **moved** the table.
*John **movió** la mesa*

(3) Mary **killed** the intruder.
Mary mató al intruso

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[5] Encarta® World English Dictionary, North American Edition. **Wink**: transitive and intransitive.Compact Oxford English Dictionary. **Wink**: undefined. Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 10th Edition; Cambridge International Dictionary of English: **Wink**: intransitive for the definitions that Encarta gives for both transitive and intransitive.

Analysing these sentences, the formula NP1 V TRANS NP2 (NP1 and NP2 stand for the subject and direct object, respectively, and V TRANS is a transitive verb) embodies their prototypical syntactic properties.

Taylor (1989, 211) draws the reader's attention to the possibility of converting an intransitive verb into a transitive one, the latter being among the transitive verb members that are more marginal. By deleting a path preposition (**across**) from a prepositional phrase following an intransitive verb of motion (**swam**) a transitive construction is obtained:

(1) He **swam across** the Channel.
Cruzó *el Canal* ***a nado***

(2) He **swam** the Channel.
Cruzó *el Canal* ***a nado***

In (1) the verb **swam** is intransitive. Swimming is an activity involving only one participant, namely the swimmer, with the prepositional phrase indicating the path the swimmer follows - across the Channel -. In (2) the path has been incorporated into the verb. **Swam** here means "**swam across**", with the consequence that the event is now encoded by a transitive sentence. That **the Channel** is now the direct object of **swam** is confirmed by the existence of a passive formation. (The Channel has been swum). Notice that ***nadar*** - its Spanish counterpart - does not behave like **swim** at all.

Other verbs behave in a similar way to **swim**, e.g.:

(3) He regularly **flies across** the Atlantic.
Sobrevuela con regularidad el Atlántico

(4) He regularly **flies** the Atlantic.
Sobrevuela con regularidad el Atlántico

7. SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS OF VERBS IN ENGLISH

Considering Van Valin's definition (2001, 23) that from the point of view of syntax the number of arguments a predicate has is part of its syntax, then its grammatical relations can be expressed through subject, direct object, etc. independent of its semantic relations. In addition, the semantic relations are not on a one to one basis with syntax. They can be explained via the semantic roles of agent (doer), patient (recipient), etc., but many of them are hard to tackle, as will be

seen later on. Some data will be proposed to throw light upon semantic roles and the problems this characterisation may bring about, especially vis à vis transitivity and polysemy.

Whenever the arguments of a verb are analysed in their semantic roles, the information thus obtained depicts the verb's argument structure. The fact is that although there are few grammatical relations - subject, direct and indirect object, and complements - there are many semantic roles. The very basic notions can be illustrated through passive voice.

(1) **Susan** bought **a book.**
Susana *compró* ***un libro***

(2) **The book** was bought **by Susan.**
El libro *fue comprado* ***por Susana***

The grammatical subjects **Susan** in (1) and **the book** in (2) do not coincide with the semantic subjects or doers of the action: **Susan** in (1) and **by Susan** in (2). Likewise, **a book** is the direct object in (1) and **the book** is the patient in (2).

The different meanings acquired by the arguments depend on the semantics of the predicate. Cases like:

(1) He **killed** his brother by accident.
Mató *a su hermano por accidente*

(2) He **murdered** his brother.
Asesinó *a su hermano*

point to an animate intentional or unintentional agent **he** in sentence (1), determined by the verb **killed,** and an intentional agent **he** in sentence (2), coerced by the verb **murdered**. (It can be observed there are no differences between English and Spanish in the above examples).

Likewise, there are cases where the predicate requires a patient, but the position of the patient can vary. It can be in either subject or direct object position. The transitivity alternation provides some examples:

(1) He broke **the window.**
Rompió ***la ventana***

(2) **The window** broke.
La ventana se *rompió*

The window is the patient in both sentences. The semantic relations, as mentioned earlier, do not coincide with the grammatical ones. In (1) and (2) **the window** is direct object and subject respectively, an intransitive subject, as Van Valin calls it (2001, 26). It is worth noticing that the Spanish verb acquires a reflex condition in (2) through the particle ***se***.

The nature of the arguments a predicate can take is as important as their number. The nature of the arguments is part of the semantics of the arguments themselves, and selection restrictions provide helpful information concerning their nature. In Functional Grammar information on their nature is part of the subcategorisation frame of each lexical item, as Faber & Mairal point out (1999, 53). For example, **sing** prototypically subcategorises two arguments. The first argument of **sing** is animate, - it can be a person or an animal -, whereas the second argument is inanimate, - opera, a song -. These selection restrictions prevent the first argument from being a plant, for instance, and the second argument from being an animal.

(1) **She** sings **opera** while cooking.
__Ella__ canta __ópera__ mientras cocina

Semantic roles are rather elusive at times. Transitivity exemplifies semantic oddities concerning semantic roles. Semantically, the transitive construction is rather difficult to characterise in a few words (Taylor 1989, 206-209; Levin 1999). Levin describes transitivity as 'agent act on and cause an effect on patient'. There are prototypical transitive verbs that she defines as 'core transitive verbs' (CTVs), such as **cut**, **destroy**, **kill**, **break**, **open**. Nevertheless, there are other verbs which are not that prototypical. For e.g.:

(1) The engineer **crossed** the bridge (path).
El ingeniero __cruzó__ el puente

(2) The engineer **reached** the bridge (goal).
El ingeniero __llegó__ al puente

(3) The engineer **left** the bridge (source).
El ingeniero __se fue__ del puente (reflex condition)

There are others in which the object plays semantic roles not even Levin knows what to label.

(4) The engineer **praised** the bridge.
El ingeniero __elogió__ el puente

(5) The engineer **followed** the architect.
*El ingeniero **siguió** al arquitecto*

Thus, transitivity with semantics alone cannot solve the queries non prototypical verbs exhibit. Spanish offers no better solution since Spanish verbs behave likewise.

Among some lexico-semantic relations, polysemy can be defined, following Taylor (1989, 100, 108, 122, 123), as the association of two or more connected senses with one linguistic form, e.g.:

(1) **He read a book.**
Leyó un libro

(2) **He read my thoughts.**
Me leyó el pensamiento

Verbs, as referred to by authors like Bowerman & Levinson (2001, 243), Sandiway (2004), etc., have multiple senses and are more polysemic than nouns. This suggests that verb meanings are more flexible or mutable. Polysemy can be observed in the same verb, followed by different prepositions, such as **to** or **at**, like in the ensuing examples.

(1) He **shouted to** me because there was a lot of noise.
Me hablaba a gritos porque había mucho ruido

(2) He **shouted at** me because he was angry.
Me chillaba, me gritaba porque estaba enojado

(3) He **pointed to** the antique table to show where it was.
Señaló la mesa antigua para mostrar dónde estaba

(4) The policeman **pointed** his gun **at** the thief.
El policía apuntó al ladrón con su revólver

(5) The policeman **pointed at** the thief
EL policía señaló al ladrón con el dedo, acusándolo

In addition, the most frequent verbs are also the most polysemic. Some examples are **have, be, run, make, set, go, take**. From a didactic point of view in L2 teaching/learning, out of my own experience and falling back on Bogaards (2001, 333), new but meaning-related senses of a polysemic word are easier to acquire

than new senses that do not have semantic relationships with already known senses. This would justify why Spanish students have serious problems in learning phrasal verbs. Let us consider some instantiations of the phrasal verb **make** a very polysemic lexical item:

(1) She **makes** her bed every day.
Hace *su cama todos lo días*

(2) She **makes up** a new short story every day.
Inventa *un nuevo cuento todos los días*

(3) She will **make up for** lost time.
Va a ***recuperar*** *el tiempo perdido*

(4) They finally **made up**.
Finalmente ***se reconciliaron***

(5) She **made up** her mind.
Tomó *una decision*

(6) She hardly ever **makes up**.
Rara vez ***se maquilla***

Or, the phrasal verb **break**, where **break off** is used, for example, for an engagement (***interrumpir*** *el compromiso de*), or **break up** is used for marriage or couples (***terminar*** *el matrimonio, terminar la relación*). Students should become aware of the fact that **break off** prevents completion in this context, in the understanding that an engagement usually leads to marriage. Thus, breaking off an engagement would signal an inconclusive process. On the contrary, breaking up a marriage, a couple breaking up, might imply causing to separate what was united before.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The rather complicated idiosyncratic elements constitutive of verbs -their morphological, syntactic and semantic aspects - with their basic dissimilarities between English and Spanish, the teaching of verbs ignoring certain basic theoretical constructs, and the lack of awareness of all of the above, have awarded them a low place in the scale of lexical items. Undoubtedly, it is not easy for EFL/ESL students to grasp their "compressed" differences.

The syntactic dichotomy manifested through a verb plus prepositional phrases of direction are conceptually opposed to the two-verb combination in Spanish, expressing the same meaning. English and Spanish verbs of displacement show marked differences in their internal semantics: the prepositional phrase in English translates into a verb of inherent directionality in Spanish.

Likewise, synthetic semantic aspects such as conflation of movement and manner in English, which translates into "expanding" verbs and gerunds in Spanish, offer conceptual issues hard to tackle. In addition, in other contexts, manner and movement are conflated in English, whereas they are realised in an unlike structure in Spanish: a verb of movement and an adjective, or an adverbial or prepositional phrases (**waddle**: *caminar como un pato*).

How syntactic and semantic aspects blend in, for instance, when a preposition after a verb in English carries out a message that implies completion or unfulfilment; this is no easy job for students who have to express this same idea in a totally different way, using many more lexical items to get the same message across. Although in some cases, the verb does not change in Spanish, e.g. **spray** the wall with paint or paint on the wall (*rociar la pared con pintura o pintura en la pared*), when the verb does change, problems arise, e.g. **swarm** (*plagar, enjambrar*), **sprinkle** (*esparcir, cubrir*), etc. The fact that a noun phrase and a prepositional phrase show completion and partial achievement respectively is quite confusing for students. Not to mention resultative constructions, very synthetic English expressions, which expand into many more words in Spanish.

Morphological characteristics, such as the achievement of verbhood without any change in the nouns are quite a striking concept, just as much as the impossibility of a tacit subject. Animal verbs, dance verbs, vehicle verbs, are unheard of in Spanish.

Syntactically, a verb imposes a certain word order; if altered, the meaning and/or force of the message get weakened. Furthermore, bipolarity is common in some intransitive verbs. Some might be unaccusative (non-volitional) as well as unergative (volitional), e.g. **slide** (notice the different translations: *resbalarse, deslizarse*). Syntactic prototypicality is easily ignored by transitive verbs, for instance **swim, fly,** which can become intransitive by adding a prepositional phrase. This possibility is non-existent in Spanish.

Finally, the blending of syntactic and semantic features results in polysemy; this is realised through constructions where the change of preposition - **to**, **at** - seriously affects the derived meaning of the verb. Somebody can **shout to** you or can **shout at** you. Noise is the reason of the action in the first case; anger is the motivating factor in the second. Other constructions, like phrasal verbs, create confusion among students, besides being quite discouraging.

Because of the above, students are hardly ever recognised the cognitive effort demanded from them when learning a foreign language like English. This effort is huge mainly owing to teachers and students' lack of awareness. The synthetic trait

of English verbs when compared to Spanish is a corollary to be stressed. This would certainly make life easier for teachers and students alike.

I would like to give some didactic recommendations to ease the teaching/learning process of verbs in English. Naturally, these suggestions depend on the students' age. If they are young, their knowledge is acquired unconsciously, context-based; explanations of this sort for young learners are inappropriate. Nursery rhymes, tongue-twisters and songs are ideal to form in the children's minds the connection between, for example, movement and verb. When they are teenagers or older, their learning process wants reasoning.

Therefore, to help older students acquire conscious knowledge, first of all, they should become familiar with as many examples as possible, which the teacher might provide, of each of the above-mentioned cases. Experience shows that only after one verb has been mastered, another one can be introduced. This is especially true of phrasal verbs. Active knowledge is time consuming. It should be reinforced by the students' own work. They can look for more examples themselves, either in titles of short stories for children, which the teacher might suggest -which usually provide a great variety of verbs - or instantiations can be drawn from books they may be reading, films they may be watching, etc. Throughout the teaching/learning process, animations, animated gifs, videos, trailers, etc. are invaluable materials to count on.

Secondly, students can translate the examples in order to highlight the synthetic characteristic of verbs in English. Translation is not to be abused, just its necessary use, enough to show that a one-to-one translation distorts the real nature of verbs. To translate correctly, the theory behind verbs has to be understood. Furthermore, the frequent use of translation might prevent students from thinking in English.

Thirdly, students can prepare a group data base in English with paraphrasing.

Fourthly, and always context-based, the teacher can write paragraphs with gaps for them to fill in with the newly learnt lexical items.

Finally, they could be asked to use the verbs in context to acquire lexical variety, assimilate them and use them actively. They might practise them in sentences or even write a paragraph or short narrative using some of them.

To sum up, this article has simple dealt with a few aspects worth considering of verbs in English vis á vis their Spanish counterparts. There are many others towards which research can be oriented. The idea is to learn how peculiarities of one language translate in the other, to help Spanish students become more proficient in English.

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