

The Subject Position in Spanish Nominalized Infinitives

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0. While much recent work has focused on various nominal and verbal properties of syntactic nominalizations, relatively little work has investigated how their internal structure is derived. Many authors adopt a ‘mixed projection’ hierarchy in which verbal projections appear interpolated into an otherwise nominal hierarchy. The resulting combination of projections accounts for the concomitant nominal and verbal properties of the construction. However, once these projections are proposed, many authors assume the derivation to follow straightforwardly, which is not necessarily true. I address this problem by providing an analysis of these ‘mixed’ constructions in Spanish.

1.1 Some authors identify two distinct NI constructions (Plann 1981, Alexiadou et al. 2011) and others identify three (Yoon & Bonet-Farran 1991, Ramírez 2003). Regardless of this categorization, these authors all provide evidence and arguments regarding which syntactic projections should appear in each construction, although less emphasis is placed on the position of the subject. I investigate the (generally agreed upon) most verbal of these constructions, what I (following Ramírez 2003) term the “Sentential” NI. I pay special attention to the low (1) vs. high (2) position of the subject *ella*.

The Sentential NI is characterized by several verbal properties, including (I) internal adverbial modification, (II) a subject bearing nominative case (increasingly nominal NIs have subjects marked with *de*), (III) allowing only the masculine singular determiner *el* to head the phrase (increasingly nominal NIs allow other determiners), and (IV) the ability to take a direct object (certain nominal NIs cannot). In addition to accounting for these phenomena, my analysis accounts for the nominal property of the entire construction, evidenced by its necessarily appearing in a case-marked position.

1.2 Crucially, I also consider an often overlooked variation that occurs in Caribbean Spanish, in which a pronominal subject can occur in an even higher position preceding the infinitive (3). I, like other authors (e.g. Alexiadou et al. 2011 and references therein) also appeal to a ‘mixed projection’ hierarchy. The more verbal properties a construction has, the more verbal projections appear in its representation. The analysis accounts for the discrete subject positions illustrated in (1-3). I propose that the difference between (1a) and (1b) is an aspectual difference denoted by *haber*, which Alexiadou et al. (2011) claim bears perfective aspect. (4) shows a derivation for a construction without perfective *haber*, while (5) includes the AspP that *haber* introduces, which creates a site for optional VP fronting (in angled brackets), which is only available for constructions which include perfective *haber*. The possible subject sites are parenthesized in (4-5), with the Spec TP site indicating the site used by Caribbean Spanish.

2. I also argue that, in the Sentential NI, D and T do not project all their possible features, and are in fact defective, i.e. devoid of (and hence failing to project) their agreement and case features respectively. The defectiveness of Spanish T is shown by the infinitive being [-tense, -phi-features]. The defective nature of D follows from its failure to value genitive case, as well as the Sentential NI’s ability to be introduced only by the masculine singular determiner *el*, indicating D’s lack of agreement features. This leaves the Case of the subject yet to be accounted for. This can be done by appealing to default case. It has been noted that default case applies under restricted conditions when case cannot be assigned or valued by any other means (see Schütze 2001). The usual case-valuing heads (T and D) have been shown to be defective. Thus, the only other means for the subjects to get case without the derivation crashing is by default. Schütze shows that the Spanish default case is nominative, which comports with the data.

3. This analysis shows how the internal structure of syntactic nominalizations in varieties of one language falls out from a ‘mixed projection’ hierarchy. Further cross-linguistic study will determine the precise (in)variant properties of such constructions, and their derivations in other languages.

Examples

- 1a. [El escribir novelas ella] explica su fama.
the write-INF novels she explains her fame
'Her writing novels explains her fame.'
- 1b. [El haber escrito novelas ella] explica su fama.
the have-INF write-PTCP novels she explains her fame
'Her having written novels explains her fame.'
- 2a. [El escribir ella novelas] explica su fama.
the write-INF she novels explains her fame
'Her writing novels explains her fame.'
2. [El haber ella hecho estudios en Cuba] le ayudó a mejorar su español.
the have-INF she make-PTCP studies in Cuba to.her helped to better her Spanish
'Her having done studies in Cuba helped her to better her Spanish.'
3. [El ella ganar poco dinero] le entristece. (Caribbean Spanish)
the she earn-INF little money to.her saddens
'Her making little money makes her sad.'
4. [_{DP} El [_{TP} (ella) [_T escribir_i [_{VoiceP} (ella)[_{VP} [_{VP} t_i novelas (ella)]]]]]]]
5. [_{DP} El [_{TP} (ella) [_T haber [_{Aspp} <hecho estudios> [_{VoiceP} (ella)[_{VP} [_{VP} hecho estudios (ella)]]]]]]]]]



Selected References

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