"PERSPECTIVISING" THE STATE OF AFFAIRS

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RESUMEN

La Teoría de la Gramática Funcional (S.Dik, 1989) utiliza la noción de "asignación de sujeto" para explicar la diferencia entre construcciones activas y pasivas. Una misma predicación puede ser presentada por el hablante desde perspectivas diferentes al asignarse la función de sujeto a distintos argumentos dentro de esa predicación. Las diversas posibilidades de asignación de sujeto vienen determinadas por la jerarquía de la función semántica así como por otras jerarquías de prioridad que son relevantes a la hora de establecer que términos dentro de una predicación son más accesibles de aparecer con asignación de sujeto. De este modo, estudiaremos como la jerarquía de la función semántica y las jerarquías de prioridad influyen en las lenguas inglesa y española en cuanto a la accesibilidad a la función de sujeto.

ABSTRACT

The Theory of Functional Grammar (S. Dik, 1989) accounts for the difference between active and passive constructions by using the notion of Subject assignment. The same predication may be presented by the speaker from various perspectives by assigning the function of Subject to different arguments within the same predication. The differerent Subject assignment possibilities are determined by the Semantic Func-

tion Hierarchy as well as by other priority hierarchies which are relevant in order to establish which terms within a predication are more accessible to be assigned the function of Subject. Thus, I shall briefly attempt to study the influence of the Semantic Function Hierarchy and other priority hierarchies on the accesibility to Subject assignment for both the Spanish and the English languages.

INTRODUCTION

The English and the Spanish languages, among many other languages in the world, offer the possibility of presenting the same State of Affairs from different viewpoints by means of alternative grammatical structures which have traditionally been called *active* and *passive* sentences. Nevertheless, this study will present a small theoretical contribution to the widely discussed topic of active versus passive sentences from the perspective of Functional Grammar (Dik, 1989) with special reference to the notion of *Subject assingment* and the concept of *hierarchies.*

SUBJECT ASSIGNMENT: CODING AND BEHAVIOURAL PROPERTIES

Both the English and the Spanish languages offer the possibility of presenting the same State of Affairs (henceforth SoA) from different viewpoints or 'perspectives' by assigning the function of Subject to different terms within the predication. Functional Grammar uses the concept of *Subject assignment* to account for the differences between different grammatical structures which describe the same SoA. A practical example will illustrate what is meant by Subject assignment. Take the following predicate frame in which the predicate *hit* establishes a two-place relation between two entities represented by two terms (arguments) which have the semantic roles of Agent (*a man*) and Goal (*the dog*):

(1) Past e_i: [hit $_V$ (i1x_1: man$_N$ (x_1))$_{Ag}$ (d1x_2: dog $_N$ (x_2))$_{Go}$]

The SoA described in (1) may be represented by two possible and different linguistic expressions which present the same SoA from different 'perspectives': (2a) presents the SoA from the point of view of the Agent whereas (2b) presents the same situation from the perspective of the Goal.

(2) a. A man hit the dog.
b. The dog was hit by a man.

As for the Spanish language, the same SoA may be also described by means of alternative linguistic expressions. (3b) presents the SoA described in (3a) from the point of view of *el policía* whereas (3c) presents it from the perspective of *el detenido*.

(3) a. Past e_i: [interrogar$_V$ (d1x_1: policía$_N$ (x_1))$_{Ag}$ (d1x_2: detenido$_N$ (x_2))$_{Go}$]
b. El policía interrogó al detenido.
c. El detenido fue interrogado por el policía.

Thus, and in Dik's words, "Subj assignment allows for alternative specifications of the 'perspective', the 'vantage point' from which the SoA is to be presented" (1989:213). The election on the part of a speaker of a particular perspective may be due to a number of factors which may be summarized as follows[1]:

The factor of *empathy*[2] influences the speaker's choice of a particular perpective; that is, the speaker may empathise with, identify with or feel closer to the entity referred to by the second argument, and, as a result, decide to present the SoA from that point of view (postponing the first argument to a later position). The difference between the following pair of sentences may be explained according to the factor of empathy:

a. The group of teenagers in the park insulted the elderly couple.
b. The elderly couple was insulted by the group of teenagers in the park.

The speaker will normally prefer to present the SoA by means of a definite argument, which very often presents known information (Given Topic), and place the indefinite argument, which usually introduces new information (New Topic), in a later position. According to this reason, example (2b) above would be preferable to example (2a).

The speaker will present the SoA from the perspective of the second argument in those cases in which the first argument is unknown or unimportant, as well as in those other cases in which the speaker intentionally decides not to mention it.

He's been mugged [by ??].
Bananas are grown in the Canary Islands.
I've been told you stole the document.

Another reason for assigning the function of Subject to the second argument of a predication is related to politeness conventions which avoid a direct address of the hearer. In these cases, the passive construction of imperatives is presented as a neutral alternative.

This option is to be considered (by you).

All these factors influence the speaker's decision to present the SoA from a particular perspective. However, the term which is raised to Subject position should have some grammatical features which Dik calls *coding and behavioural properties* (1989:219ff). The *coding properties* establish that the term that has been assigned the function of Subject must come in Subject position, without prepositonal marking, in nominative case in the event that it were a personal pronoun, and be concordant with the finite verb in person and number. As for the *behavioural properties*, we will only mention those relevant for either the English or the Spanish languages[3]:

One of the properties related to the behaviour of Subjects states that the Subject is the only function which can control reflexive pronouns, and that Subjects themselves cannot be reflexive.

a. The man looked at himself.
b. *The man reconciled the boy$_i$ with himself$_i$.
c. *Himself was looked at by Peter.

The Subjects of infinitival complements are the only ones which may not be directly specified in the sentence.

a. John$_i$ wanted to 0$_i$ kiss Mary.
b. *John$_i$ wanted Mary to kiss 0$_i$.
c. John$_i$ wanted to 0$_i$ be kissed by Mary.

As regards participial constructions, they need a Subject around to be well formed.

a. 0_i seeing nobody, $John_i$ left the hotel.
b. *Nobody seeing 0_i, $John_i$ left the hotel.
c. 0_i seen by nobody, $John_i$ left the hotel.

Only the Subject of a subordinate clause can be raised.

(12) a. John believed Peter to have seen the show.
b. *John believed the show Peter to have seen.
c. John believed the show to have been seen by Peter.

THE CONCEPT OF HIERARCHY

The terms which fill in the slots of a given predication are characterised by a number of properties which determine which terms are more accessible than others to occur with Subject assignment. These properties may be grouped and arranged in the form of hierarchies.

Dik's definition of hierarchy states that a hierarchy is "a sequence of properties, claimed to be of absolute or statistical validity, such that a preceding property can occur without the following properties, but not the other way around" (Dik, 1989:28). Some of the properties which constitute a hierarchy are said to be more central than others and this fact is represented within the hierarchy by means of the symbol >, which is used to show that the property preceding the symbol > is more central than the property which follows it. There are, however, some other features which must be present in any hierarchy which is to be applied to the grammatical analysis of natural languages:

Hierarchies predict which linguistic systems are possible and which are not (*possible language systems*). Take the hierarchy of colour terms across languages: black/white > red > green/yellow > blue > brown > purple/pink /orange/grey. According to the characteristic of *possible language systems*, it could be claimed that there might be a language in the world with the colour terms *black, white, red, green and yellow*, and some other language with still a

more extensive number of colour terms: *black, white, red, green, yellow, blue* and *brown*. In the same way, it can be also claimed that there are no languages which have the colour term *blue* but do not have the term *red*[4]; if a language has the colour term *blue* it must also have the colour term *red*, but not the other way around: having the colour term *blue* does not necessarily imply that that language must also have the colour term *brown*.

The feature of *continuity* establishes that given a particular hierarchy, it will be easy to predict which elements form an initial subsequence of properties from the presence of later properties in the hierarchy. For example, the existence of the colour term *blue* in a language allows us to predict the presence of the colour terms *black, white, red, green and yellow*.

The *cut-off point* in a hierarchy indicates the point up to which a particular language operates. Thus, if the presence of colour terms for a language extends up to *blue*, it will be easy to characterise that language by stating that the cut-off point for that particular language is placed between the colour terms *blue* and *brown*.

A hierarchy may predict *language changes*. These diachronic linguistic changes only operate around the cut-off point either by moving it backwards (in our previous example by placing the cut-off point between the colours *green/yellow* and *blue*, and, as a result, losing the colour term *blue*) or by moving it forwards (between *brown* and *purple/pink/orange/grey*, and, as a result, acquiring a new colour term *brown*).

Since the cut-off point may move either backwards or forwards in a hierarchy, it is common to have some kind of *linguistic insecurity* around it. There may be different opinions among the speakers of a language as to the acceptability of the terms which follow or precede the cut-off point.

Because of the linguistic changes which may occur around the cut-off point, it is possible to have *dialectical differences* regarding the acceptability of particular constructions.

Finally, hierarchies give information about two types of *frequency of occurrence*. On the one hand, hierarchies inform about the frequency of occurrence within a language (*intra-linguistic frequency*), and, on the other,

they inform about the frequency of occurrence across all the languages (*typological frequency*)[5].

THE SEMANTIC FUNCTION HIERARCHY

In order to study the notion of Subject assignment, we need a number of hierarchies which will determine which terms are more accessible than others to be assigned the function of Subject within a given predication. One of these hierarchies is the Semantic Function Hierarchy (abbreviated to SFH) which shows the accessibility of semantic functions to Subject assignment (Dik, 1989:223ff).

	Ag > Go > Rec > Ben > Instr > Loc > Temp
Subject	+ > + > + > + > + > + > +

Let's illustrate how this hierarchy works by means of an example. The predication frame broadly represented in (13a) may be presented from the point of view of the Agent, which, according to the SFH, is the most accessible semantic function to Subject assignment (13b), i.e., Agents have preference over those terms with the semantic function of Goal, Recipient, Beneficiary, Instrument, Locative and Temporality to appear as Subjects.

a. Past e_i [$show_v$ (Mark)$_{Ag}$ (the driving licence)$_{Go}$ (the policeman)$_{Rec}$]
b. Mark (Ag) showed the driving licence to the policeman.

This SoA, however, may be presented from a perspective other than the Agent, and, so, the speaker may choose to present it from the point of view of the Goal, which, according to the SFH is more accessible than the Recipient to be assigned the function of Subject.

(14) a. The driving licence (Go) was shown to the policeman by Mark (Ag).
b. The policeman (Rec) was shown the driving licence by Mark (Ag).

Every time there is Subject assignment to a non-first argument, a special marker is required by the verb: the verbs *be* or *get* plus a past par-

ticiple for English, and the verbs *ser* or *estar* plus a past participle for the Spanish language. Notice that the more we move to the right of the hierarchy the more uncommon and the more marked that construction will be. In English the Subject assigment possibilities extend up to the Recipient; in Spanish, on the contrary, there are no examples of sentences in which the function of Subject has been assigned to the Recipient, which means that for this language the cut-off point in the SFH is placed just between the Goal and the Recipient, while in English it seems to be the case that the cut-off point is located between the Recipient and the Beneficiary[6]. Some other languages, like the Philippine languages, are more flexible as regards the different Subject assignment possiblities and, thus, for instance, in a language such as Cebuano, one could find examples of Subject assignment to Temporality, the semantic function which is placed at the very end of the hierarchy (Dik, 1989:230):

Igikan sa barko ang alas sayis
ins-leave by ship Subj clock six
(Six o'clock will be left by the ship)

The first position occupied by the Agent in the Semantic Function Hierarchy has raised some controversy due to the fact that the Agent is just one of the five semantic functions included within the first argument, represented as A^1 (Dik, 1989:233); we have considered that the high frequency of appearance of the Agent in Subject position should not exclude from our analysis the other semantic functions which also conform the A^1 : Positioner, Force, Processed, and Zero. For this reason, we have preferred to substitute the first element in Dik's SFH (Agent) by A^1:

	A^1 >	Go >	Rec >	Ben >	Instr >	Loc >	Temp
Subject	+ >	+ >	+ >	+ >	+ >	+ >	+

(16) El rocío (Force) los dañaba[7].
(17) He (Processed) heard the surf roar.
He (Zero) did not know the name of Rigel.

PRIORITY HIERARCHIES

Apart from the Semantic Function Hierarchy, there are a number of priorities which also influence the speaker's decision to present an SoA from a particular perspective. Thus, aspects such as whether the term has the properties of being *human, definite* and *singular* in contrast with *inanimate, indefinite*, and *plural*, for instance, may play an important role in the speaker's choice of a specific perspective. These hierarchies present an unmarked sequential order which establishes which properties a term should preferably have in order to be assigned the function of Subject. This, of course, does not imply that there may be cases in which the unmarked sequential order established as preferable by the hieraracy is altered[8].

I shall now present each of the priority hierarchies separately, and provide examples to observe how these priority hierarchies operate as far as the notion of Subject assignment to a non-first argument is concerned.

Among the different priority hierarchies we will begin by studying the *Person Hierarchy*, which states that an argument with the property *first person* is more accessible to Subject assignment than one with the property *second person*, followed in frequency by an argument with the property *third person*:

1st person > 2nd person > 3rd person

In other words, given a predication with two arguments, one of which is a first person and the other is a third person, the Person Hierarchy claims that the function of Subject will be more frequently assigned to the first person argument:

Past e_i [tow_V (a fish)$_{Ag}$ (I)$_{Go}$]
I was being towed by a fish.
?A fish was towing me.

The *Number Hierarchy* establishes that speakers will usually prefer to present an SoA from the point of view of an argument with the property *singular*, followed in frequency by *plural* arguments: singular > plural.

(17) It was as though he himself (sing.) were hit [by the other sharks (pl.)][9]

One further priority hierarchy is the *Concreteness Hierarchy* which claims that *concrete* arguments are more accessible to Subject assignment than arguments which present the characteristic of being *abstract*: concrete > abstract. Thus, speakers or writers will normally present the SoA from the point of view of an entity which is concrete when some other argument in the predication is abstract. However, this does not imply that the unmarked sequential order of the hierarchy may be altered and the function Subject may be assigned to an abstract entity when the Agent is concrete:

(18) ... but they [bad things] are said [by the people who love "la mar"] as though ...

(19) There was nothing to be done by [by the old man].

The *Definiteness Hierarchy* postulates that the *definite* term will normally preceed the *indefinite* term: definite > indefinite. It should be recalled that definite terms normally present known information as opposed to indefinite terms which generally introduce new information, and that the message is normally organised in such a way that the Given Topic (known information) comes first followed by the New Topic (new information), which is normally introduced at the end.

(20) Su camisa había sido remendada tantas veces [por alguien].

The last priority hierarchy which will be mentioned as far as the notion of Subject assignment is concerned is more complex due to the different properties it contains: the *Animacy Hierarchy*. This hierarchy establishes that *human* Subjects have preference over *non-human animate* (or *other-animate*) Subjects, and these, in turn, have preference over Subjects which refer to *inanimate forces* such as the wind or the rain; finally, these have preference over *inanimate* Subjects in general.

human > other animate > inanimate force > inanimate
I (human)'m being towed by a fish (other anim.).
Was he (the fish, other anim.) frightened by something (inanim.) at night?

CONCLUSIONS

At this point it should be clear that the choice of a particular perspective in order to present an SoA is very much dependant on a number of factors which have been presented in the form of hierarchies. Our main concern has been to observe which factors influence the speaker's decision to make him decide to present the SoA from the viewpoint of a non-first argument, i.e., what makes the speaker use, on a particular occassion, a passive construction and, on some other occasion, an active one?

Some hierarchies have more influence than others on the assignment of the function of Subject. Thus, we have asked ourselves if these hierarchies could also be organised in a hierarchical order in which a particular hierarchy could take priority over another. In this way, we have come to the conclusion that, in fact, there is some kind of hierarchical ordering between them as the following hierarchy shows:

Definiteness / Person > Concreteness > Number > Animacy

This *Prioritising Hierarchy* should be understood in the following way: the Definiteness and the Person Hierarchies are the ones whose unmarked sequential order is more frequently kept, followed by the Concreteness Hierarchy, which is also fulfilled in a large number of cases; next, the Number Hierarchy is more often fulfilled than the Animacy Hierarchy, which is the one whose unmarked sequential order is more often violated.

There are two reasons why we have decided to put the Definiteness and the Person Hierarchies together. The first reason has to do with the degree of frequency. Both the Definiteness and the Person Hierarchies are fulfilled in more than 90% of the cases in both languages[x]. But there is one further reason to put the Definiteness and the Person Hierarchies together and this has to do with the fact that the elements which constitute these two hierarchies are somehow connected. The participants in the speech act, i.e the first and second persons, have to be definite, whereas the non-participant entity (third person) could either be definite or indefinite; as a matter of fact, Dik argues that these two hierarchies could be conflated in

just one which would be "the Person/Definiteness Hierarchy: {1,2}, 3 definite > other specific > non-specific" (Dik, 1989: 35).

Let us observe how this hierarchy works by using an example which has been borrowed from Dik (1989:33) and which we have already mentioned before:

(23) a. A man hit the dog.
b. The dog was hit by a man.

In (23a), the Subject has the property of being indefinite, whereas the Object is definite; this contradicts the unmarked order established by the Definiteness hierarchy (definite > indefinite); nevertheless, the Animacy hierarchy is fulfilled in the sense that a human Subject precedes a non-human animate entity. Notice that the other three hierachies are not really relevant in this case because the two arguments in this predication refer to third persons, which are both singular and concrete entities. The analysis of (23b), in which there has been Subject assignment to a non-first argument, reveals just the opposite, that is, the Subject is a definite non-human animate entity and the Agent is a definite human one.

Which of these two structures is going to be found more frequently in the English language? Which of them is the more natural and less marked? We agree with Dik in considering that English speakers are going to prefer (23b) to its active counterpart (23a). This preference proves that the Definiteness hierarchy exerts more influence on Subject assignment than the Animacy hierarchy, which comes at the end of our hierarchy. Thus, if speakers were given the SoA described in (1), they would more frequently present this SoA from the perspective of the Goal (the dog), since this entity has the property of being definite as opposed to the indefinite Subject *a man*. The fact that *a man* is human and *the dog* is a non-human animate entity does not seem to be relevant for the speaker, and, this is why we have placed the Animacy hierarchy at the very end of the Prioritising Hierarchy.

Whenever we assign the function Subject to a non-first argument, which is going to be the Goal, for the Spanish and the Goal or the Recipient for English, a number of factors influence upon our decision, factors

such as whether the entity represented by a particular term from which we would like to present the SoA has the property of being singular or plural; definite or indefinite; concrete or abstract; third, second or first persons; and human, other animate, inanimate force or inanimate.

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NOTES

1 The reasons inducing the speaker to present an SoA from a different perspective may be numerous, but I will just present the ones Dik exposes in his theory and which are directly related to the Spanish and the English languages (1989:214).

2 For a complete analysis of the concept of "empathy", see Kuno and Kaburaki, (1977:628).

The examples illustrating the behavioural properties have been taken from Dik (1989:221-2).

3 Recall Dik's definition of hierarchy: "a preceding property can occur without the following properties but not the other way around" (1989:28). The underlining is mine.

4 Recall that hierarchies inform about "the frequency rather than the (im)possibility of using certain constructions types" (Dik, 1989:33).

5 Not all native speakers of the English language would accept the presentation of an SoA from the perspective of the Benefeciary (? *Dave* (BenSubj) *was bought a watch by Tracey*), which means that in English there is some linguistic insecurity around the cut-off point.

6 The examples used to illustrate the behaviour of the SFH and the five priority hierarchies have been taken from the English novel *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway and from its Spanish translation *El viejo y el mar.*

7 See note 5 above.

8 The square brackets used in some of the examples contain what I consider could be the Agent of that particular sentence in those cases in which the Agent is not lexically expressed in the original texts.

9 The results of the Spanish and English copus which I have analised on the basis of these hierarchies will be presented in a forthcoming paper.