

# Contrastive Analysis (Spanish/English) of Actualized Infinitives within the Scope of a Translation

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## Resumen

Estudiaremos el infinitivo actualizado en español como *{el + infinitivo}* en contraste con las formas alternantes de verbos no finitos nominalizados en inglés con el fin de colaborar con el trabajo del traductor. En concordancia con el análisis contrastivo, se proporcionará un corpus de doble entrada. Las construcciones seleccionadas serán analizadas según un enfoque morfosintáctico y siguiendo la metodología del análisis empírico, es decir, partiendo del lenguaje en uso y respetando las formas según se producen en el corpus. Con esta pertinencia, el objetivo principal será desarrollar un análisis pragmático con la intención de identificar la regularidad evidente de las construcciones que constituyen el paradigma, que se encuentran motivadas por principios cognitivos generales (Langacker, 1987) a los que el hablante recurre con el fin de alcanzar relevancia y coherencia comunicativas (García, 1995).

**Palabras clave:** infinitivo actualizado, enfoque cognitivo, variación, verbos no finitos, traducción.

## Abstract

*Actualized forms of nominalized infinitives in Spanish such as {el + infinitive} will be studied in contrast with the alternating forms of nominalized non-finite verbs in English with the intention to collaborate with the translator's work. As required by*

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*the contrastive analysis, a double entry corpus will be provided. The selected constructions will be analyzed morphosyntactically, following the methodology of an empiric analysis, i.e. dealing with language in use and respecting the forms produced in the corpus. With this pertinence, our main objective will be to develop a pragmatic analysis with the aim to identify the evident regularity of the constructions that constitute our paradigm and that are motivated by general cognitive principles (Langacker, 1987) that the speaker resorts to in order to achieve communicative relevance and coherence (García, 1995).*

**Keywords:** *actualized infinitive, cognitive approach, variation, non-finite verbs, translation.*

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of a contrastive analysis which wishes to benefit the complex craft of translating is to delve into the grammars of the contrasted languages with the hope that the comparison will allow us to observe the intrinsic structural behavior and to perceive how the speakers of each of the languages, in this case, English and Spanish, conceptualize the entities that surround them (Stockwell, 1965).

This paper addresses a problematic issue concerning actualized forms of the nominalized infinitive in Spanish {*determiner* + infinitive} which will be studied in contrast with its equivalent forms of nominalized non-finite verbs in English with the intention to collaborate with the translator's work.

## 2. Objectives and Methodology

The first step in a contrastive analysis in variation is to measure the given frequency of a form within a corpus which alternates with other possible forms that are called variants. This quantitative assessment indicates what Labov (1972) calls *Relative Frequency of Usage*. However, we will concentrate on a qualitative assessment deriving from a morphosyntactic analysis which will follow an empirical methodology which works with language in use, i.e. within the context in which the utterances appear, respecting the form that the speaker produces, and assuming that the speaker's knowledge of language is not random.

With this pertinence, our objective will be to develop a pragmatic analysis, considering the different syntactic combinations that are detected in each of the languages (English and Spanish) with the intention to

identify their evident regularity which, we believe, is motivated by general cognitive principles (Langacker, 1987) that the speaker resorts to with the aim to achieve communicative relevance and coherence (García, 1995).

In this research, the aim is to discover the reasons that allow the use of each of the variants, i.e. nominalized infinitives with or without determiners in Spanish and their alternating forms in English, i.e. the nominalized infinitive without determiner and the nominalized gerund with or without determiner. Moreover, our intention will be to detect the motivated relations that result in several possible linguistic interpretations that define the use of each of the selected constructions.

### 3. Corpus description

Considering the contrastive analysis, this study will require a double entry corpus, beginning with an original text in Spanish, more precisely, Jorge Luis Borges's *Indagación de la palabra* (1928) and its translation into English produced by the American writer Eliot Weinberger entitled *An Investigation of the Word* (1999).

About the corpus, it must be stated that:

- The original work consists of 6 pages whereas the translation has got an extension of 8 pages, each of them with different editing versions.
- We have identified 53 cases of nominalized infinitives in Spanish, among which only 9 cases were actualized by means of a determiner and alternated with infinitival phrases, gerundial phrases or even noun phrases in English.
- In addition, there were 7 cases in which the original version in Spanish used a noun as the head of the construction and alternated with a gerund in the English translation.

### 4. The cognitive approach within this contrastive analysis

It is assumed that every construction expresses a specific meaning, and that represents what Tomasello (1999) calls a "symbolic entity". This concept becomes useful for the contrastive analysis, since we consider that if we can recognize the way in which speakers conceptualize entities, objects, feelings, ideas and even actions using language, we will manage to determine the meaning which is assigned to that entity through the analysis of the consciously selected construction.

Therefore, it can be stated that the selected grammatical unit becomes the expression of a definite cognitive resource which has been carefully chosen from several symbolic conventions which are useful for the speaker

to reach his/her communicative purpose and that, in turn, will allow the speaker to conceptualize entities in the real world in a specific manner.

Furthermore, the selected constructions enable speakers and listeners to make a variety of interpretations, even metaphorical, like the interpretation of actions as objects in the case of the nominalized infinitive, which is being presented in this paper. In this respect, the linguistic resource that uses the verb as a noun allows us to generate several analogies which relate to the need to take the verb as a specific “object”, and, consequently, affect its categorization as a noun which will eventually aid the use of an actualized infinitive by means of a determiner (Hopper & Traugott, 2003).

## **5. Paradigm and Hypothesis**

The paradigm in Spanish is composed by two independent variants that include the use of nominalized infinitives with or without determiners (Hernanz, 1999). Likewise, in a contrastive analysis, the English paradigm is composed by two independent variants, which do not include the actualized infinitive as a possible grammatical option (Quirk, Greenbaun, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985) but identify an equivalent in the infinitive when it is not actualized and, in the gerund, when the use of determiners is required (Roberts, 1954).

According to our hypothesis, the dependent variants are associated with a higher or lower degree of delimitation expressed by a) the semantic value of the non-finite verb, b) the ability of the non-finite verb to conceptualize actions as “objects”, c) its possibility to alternate with subjunctive clauses, d) its relationship with the type of subject and e) the capacity of the non-finite to coordinate with a noun.

## **6. Analysis of the actualized infinitive and its alternating forms in English**

In this research, we will attempt to understand the double (verbal-nominal) nature of the infinitive in Spanish (Rodriguez Ramalle, 2008) and contrast it with its alternating forms in English. This will be performed with the aim to prove the capacity of non-finite verbal forms to admit the use of determiners, to identify possible interpretations deriving from the use of determiners (in the cases in which they are accepted) and mainly to understand the intrinsic meaning expressed by actualized constructions.

With this purpose, a series of tests will be applied to fundament our hypothesis in a systematic manner.

### 6.a) The test of the semantic value of the non-finite verb

It is believed that the actualized infinitive in Spanish is preferred when the non-finite refers to a high lexical content of “generalization”. Besides, there seems to be a higher frequency of usage of the nominalized infinitive {with determiner} when the infinitival phrase contains stative and inchoative verbs in which the infinitive designates general properties of the entities it predicates about (Bosque & Demonte, 1999).

When trying to identify the conceptual structure which underlies these constructions, it can also be observed that there is a need to resort to an impersonal sentence. This, in turn, allows a general interpretation in which there is no direct reference to a doer or experiencer but mainly to an action taken as an ‘event’ (Plann, 1981), as it can be seen in (1), in which “*El no atinar- el no poder atinar*” means “*el que no se pueda atinar*”, in a general sense.

(1) *El no atinar —el no poder atinar— con la solución, es tragedia general de todo escribir. Yo acepto esa tragedia, esa desviación traicionera de lo que se habla, ese no pensar del todo en cosa ninguna.*

In (1), the infinitives, which are non-dynamic, are actualized by two determiners including a definite article and a demonstrative, as it can be seen in the original text; however, a variety of phrases are chosen in the translation to solve the problem of the actualized infinitive in Spanish.

(1.a) *Not to discover-not to be able to discover-the solution, is the general tragedy of all writing. I accept that tragedy, that treacherous deviation of which we speak, that not thinking at all about anything.*

On the one hand, it should be stated that non-finite phrases are still found in the English version despite not having the exact equivalent in the English grammar, and “*El no atinar —el no poder atinar*” is translated by means of an infinitival phrase: “*Not to discover-not to be able to discover*”, which does not allow the use of the definite article, so the determiner is lost in the English version.

In the second case, where we also find a non-dynamic verb: “*ese no pensar*”, it can be observed that, probably with the ambition to keep the demonstrative ‘that’ as a nominal modifier, the translation resorts to a gerundial phrase: “*that not thinking at all about anything*”. This responds to the evidence that the grammatical form in English which best alternates with the actualized infinitive in Spanish is the gerund, because it shows an equivalent capacity to take determiners as well as verbal modifiers.

### 6.b) The test of the conceptualization of the ‘action’ as an ‘object’

It is supposed that the article is rejected in the cases in which the verbs do not denote ‘events’ (Plann, 1981). In actualized constructions, the article takes a pronominal value with a null head and, in turn, that head can be replaced by the phrase {the fact that}, in Spanish, {*el hecho de*}. This explains the exceptional capacity of the Spanish infinitive to take nominal and verbal complements or modifiers at the same time, as in (2).

(2) *Es cosa servicial un resumen. Dos proposiciones, negativas la una de la otra, han sido postuladas por mí. Una es la no existencia de las categorías gramaticales o partes de la oración y el reemplazarlas por unidades representativas, que pueden ser de una palabra usual o de muchas.*

<i>El</i>	{Null H}	<b>reemplazarlas por unidades representativas (...)</b>
Determiner	{Ø}	Infinitive
Nominal Modifier	{hecho de} {the fact that}	+ non-finite verbal phrase with Verbal Complements/ Modifiers

The nominal value in this Spanish construction is also denoted by the fact that it can alternate with a nominal phrase in English, as we can see in (2.a).

(2.a) *A summary may be helpful. I have postulated two propositions, negatives of one another. One is the non-existence of the grammatical categories or parts of the sentence and **the replacement of them** with representative units, which can be a common word or many.*

Here the determiner (definite article) remains, but the verbal complements become complements of the noun in the translation, not only to emphasize the nominal value of the original non-finite phrase, but also to keep balance with the construction it is coordinated with, i.e. a nominal phrase: “(...) **the non-existence of the grammatical categories (...)**” and “**the replacement of them with representative units, (...)**”.

It has been revealed that the use of actualized infinitives in Spanish leads to the conceptualization of the verb as an “object”. However, as the infinitive cannot be actualized in English, the replacement for a nominal phrase serves as a reasonable solution for the English translation.

### 6.c) The test of the alternation with Subjunctive Clauses

Since the infinitives are identified as reduced subordinate clauses which depend on the main verb of the main clause, these constructions will obtain temporal information and reference to the subject through the connection with the rest of the sentence (Hernanz, 1999). Something comparable occurs with Subjunctive Clauses, so it can be pointed out that there is an alternation with infinitival phrases, which allows us to derive

the meaning that arises from this sort of constructions with subjunctive verbs.

In this sense, the semantic notions that relate to the Subjunctive connect with the ideas of hesitation, possibility, desire and final purpose, which usually depend on factual emotional predicates (Kovacci, 1992). In (3), for instance, the infinitive is actualized by means of a determiner when the idea expressed by the verb refers to a possible event. The idea of possibility is derived from this connection with the Subjunctive, which within this context means {that one may think}, in Spanish, *{el que se piense}*, in a general sense, as explained in 6.a.

(3) *La lengua: es decir, humilladoramente el pensar.*

Once more, this construction alternates with a noun in the English version (3.a) where “*el pensar*” is translated as “*thought*”; thus, revealing the high nominal value in the Spanish construction.

(3.a) *Language: to humbly speak, thought.*

As already observed in (2.a), here again the replacement of an actualized non-finite verb “*el pensar*” for a nominal phrase “*thought*” seems to be the best solution for the translation.

#### 6.d) The test of the Subject-Verb relation

About the possibility to identify the subject of the infinitive, it should first be stated that in the cases in which the Spanish infinitival phrase appears as a complement of a verb of willingness, such as “*querer*”, the determiner is rejected as in (4) and (4.a). This is due to the fact that the use of a verb of willingness does not allow the subject to be co-referential if we want it to alternate with subjunctive clauses, which would be the most suitable thing to do when paraphrasing an infinitival phrase, as stated in test 6.c and described above.

(4) *Queden para otra página mi padecimiento y mi regocijo, si alguien quiere leerlos.*

(4.a) *My joys and sufferings will be left for other pages, if anyone wishes to read them.*

The determiner is rejected in those cases in which there is co-reference with the subject of the main clause, which, in turn, derives from the inability to alternate with subjunctive clauses. On the one hand, it would be ungrammatical to utter a statement such as: “\*(...) si alguien quiere *el leerlos*”, and, on the other hand, this same statement would become unacceptable if we meant it to alternate with the subjunctive: “\*(...) si

*alguien quiere que los lea*”, since there is too much ambiguity when it comes the time to identify the subject of the infinitival phrase.

This indicates that the type of main verb regarding its semantic value and the kind of subject are closely connected with the acceptance of actualized infinitives in Spanish. In the English version, however, no difficulty is offered, since the determiner is not required by these constructions with nominalized infinitives. Here the contrastive analysis shows that there is balance between English and Spanish if the nominalized infinite appears as a complement of the verb and when there is a co-referential subject.

#### 6.e) The test of the coordination with a noun and the replacement for a noun

The structure of coordination with a noun which is shown in (2) where *“la no existencia”* coordinates with *“el reemplazarlas por unidades representativas (...)”* proves the high nominal value of actualized infinitival phrases in Spanish. Besides, its translation into English represented in (2.a) **“the non-existence of the grammatical categories (...)”** and **“the replacement of them** with representative units, (...)” proves the need to resort to a different categorical unit, i.e. a nominal phrase or a gerundial phrase, which, among all the English non-finite phrases, seems to be the right equivalent for the actualized infinitive, since it allows the use of determiners as already shown in (1.a).

In this respect, with the aim to collaborate with the translator’s work, we would like to add that, in an analogous manner as the noun alternates with the infinitive in Spanish without difficulty, on many occasions the English grammar resorts to a gerundial phrase which may be actualized by determiners so as to reinforce the high nominal value in these non-finite phrases (Crystal, 2003).

This can be observed in many cases throughout our corpus, as shown in the chart below:

(5) (...) quiero publicar una volvedora indecisión de <u>mi pensamiento</u> , (...)	(5.a) (...) to publish a crucial indecision in <u>my thinking</u> (...)
(6) (...) <u>obra es de él.</u>	(6.a) (...) it is <u>his doing.</u>
(7) Buena prueba de la arbitrariedad de <u>nuestra escritura</u> , (...)	(7.a) A good proof of the arbitrariness of <u>our writing</u> (...)
(8) (...) así lo anuncio para <u>aviso</u> de aquellos lectores que (...)	(8.a) (...) which I announce as <u>a warning</u> (...)
(9) (...) <u>toda página escrita.</u>	(9.a) (...) <u>all writing.</u>
(10) (...) <u>mi padecimiento</u> y mi regocijo	(10.a) <u>My joys and sufferings</u> (...)
(11) (...) la leemos (...) de <u>una sentada</u> , (...)	(11.a) (...) in <u>one sitting</u> (...)



This final comment on the possibility for the gerund to alternate with a noun has been made to contribute with the translation and to prove that actualized non-finite phrases are also frequent in the English language; however, the use of actualized gerunds in English deserves a more detailed treatment which is suggested for a future research paper.

## 7. Conclusion

It can be established that the use of determiners within infinitival phrases does not only refer to the categorical classification of the non-finite phrase as a noun, but also to the extraordinary fact that these nominalized verbal constructions allow the presence of verbal complements and modifiers within their internal structure.

Our hypothesis is that the use of determiners with non-finite phrases contributes to more limitation in the action expressed by the non-finite verb. That has been revealed within our corpus in the cases in which the verb contains a generic lexical value, usually expressed by a non-dynamic verb, which, in turn, is able to alternate with subjunctive clauses when it shares the reference to an impersonal subject, when it is not co-referential with the subject of the main clause.

Moreover, the actualized infinitive in Spanish seems to be effective when it coordinates with a noun or even when it is easily replaced by a noun, which also allows us to mention that the gerund is frequently preferred in the English translation due to its high nominal value.

About this contrastive analysis, it can be concluded that the selection of the linguistic constructions, such as the one we have analyzed in this paper, determines the way in which a speaker views the world around him/her. More precisely, when a speaker chooses to use an actualized infinitive in Spanish, he/she attempts to generalize and to make the whole construction more impersonal.

The use of determiners within the infinitival phrase in Spanish seems to limit the lexical value of the infinitive which heads the construction and aids the speaker in conceptualizing the verb as an object, which, in the end, allows this extraordinary use of a nominal modifier within a verbal phrase.

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