

# Contrastive Analysis of Actualized Forms of Nominal Infinitives in Spanish and their Alternating Forms in English Within the Scope of a Translation

Marina Álvarez\*  
 Universidad del Salvador  
 Universidad Católica Argentina

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## 1. Introduction

The intention 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 enable both the observation of the intrinsic structural behavior and the perception of how the speakers of each of the languages, in this case, English and Spanish, conceptualize the entities that surround them.

This paper addresses a problematic issue concerning actualized forms of the nominal infinitive in Spanish {*determiner* + infinitive} which will be studied in contrast with its equivalent forms of nominalized non-finite verbs in English. Our aim is, on the one hand, to bring light to the cases in which the nominalized infinitive in Spanish is actualized by means of a determiner; and, on the other hand, to observe the alternating forms in English, with the unique intention to collaborate with the translator's work.

## 2. Objectives and Methodology

The first step in every 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 the language is not random.

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\* **Marina Laura Alvarez** is a Conference Interpreter graduated from Universidad del Salvador with a participation in the Exchange Programs in the University of the Pacific in San Francisco, California, USA. She also holds a BA in English Language and in Teaching at Higher Education. She is a doctoral student in Letters at Universidad Católica Argentina, holds a research scholarship and is currently writing her thesis on the contrastive analysis of non-finite verbs in English and Spanish. As a professor and a researcher, she has devoted herself to the areas of Grammar and Linguistics and is currently teaching English Grammar I and II at the School of Modern Languages, Universidad del Salvador and Linguistic Structures III and IV as well as Contrastive Grammar at the Language Department of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Universidad Católica Argentina. Contact: marinaalvarez76@hotmail.com

With this pertinence, our main objective will be to develop an ethnopragmatic analysis, considering the syntactic combinations that are detected in our corpus to identify their evident regularity which, we believe, is motivated by general cognitive principles (Langacker, 1967) 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.

### **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.
- Besides, 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 by means of the consciously selected construction.

Therefore, it can be stated that the selected 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.

The selected constructions enable speakers and listeners to make a variety of interpretations, even metaphorical (Lakoff, 1987), like the interpretation of actions as objects in the case of 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 that will eventually aid the use of an actualized infinitive by means of a determiner.

### **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 et. al, 1985), but identify an equivalent in the infinitive when it is not actualized and, in the gerund, when the use of determiners is required.

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 (Rodríguez 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 and mainly to understand the intrinsic meaning expressed by these 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 on the entities it predicates about.

When trying to identify the conceptual structure within these constructions, it can also be observed that there is a need to resort to an impersonal sentence, which 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) that is expressed in a more general manner, 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, because it shows an equivalent capacity to take determiners as well as verbal modifiers, is the gerund.

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

The actualized infinitive in Spanish supposes 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 nule 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>	{Nule H}	<b>reemplazarlas por unidades representativas (...)</b>
Determiner	{Ø}	Infinitive
Nominal modifier	{hecho de} {the fact that}	+ non-finite verbal phrase with complements/modifiers

The high nominal value in this Spanish construction is 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, probably to emphasize the nominal value of the original non-finite phrase and to keep balance with the construction it is coordinated with, i.e. “(...) **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, this would apparently force the use of an actualized gerund in English, or, as shown in (2.a) the replacement for a nominal phrase which serves as a reasonable solution for the 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. Something similar occurs with Subjunctive Clauses, so it can be pointed out that there is an alternation with infinitival phrases, which behave equally and that allows us to derive the meaning related to the Subjunctive that arise from this sort of constructions.

In this sense, the semantic notions that relate to the Subjunctive connect with the ideas of hesitation, possibility, desire and final purpose and usually depend on factual emotional predicates (Kovacci, 1992).

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

As we can see in (3), the infinitive is actualized by means of a determiner when the idea expressed by the verb refers to a possible event, which can be paraphrased by means of a subjunctive clause, meaning: {that one may think}, in Spanish, {*el que alguien piense*}.

Not surprisingly, once more, this construction alternates with a noun in the English version (3.a) where “**el pensar**” is translated as “**thought**”. As we can see, the contrastive analysis proves the high nominal value in Spanish actualized infinitives.

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

Seemingly, so as not to overuse nominalized non-finite phrases in English, here again the replacement of the non-finite for a nominal phrase seems to be the best solution for the translation.

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

It is evident that if the infinitival phrase in Spanish appears as a complement of a verb of willingness, such as “*querer*”, the determiner is rejected as in (4) and (4.a). This is because the use of a verb of willingness does not allow the subject to be coreferential if we want it to alternate with subjunctive clauses as stated in test (6c).

(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**.*

It has already been observed that the kind of subject shows incidence in the impossibility for the infinitival phrase to alternate with a subjunctive clause when the infinitive appears as a complement of a verb of willingness and there is a coreferential subject.

Apparently, the determiner is rejected when there is coreference with the subject of the main clause, which, in turn, derives from the inability to alternate with subjunctive clauses. This indicates that the type of main verb regarding its semantic value and the kind of subject, are closely connected with the possibility to use actualized infinitives in Spanish and that derives into an acceptable use of nominalized infinitive in English, since there is no need to use determiners.

#### 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 of the English language to resort to a different categorial 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, actualized by determiners with the intention to reinforce the high nominal value in these non-finite phrases.

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

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

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. Conclusions

It can be established that the use of determiners within infinitival phrases does not only make reference to the categorial classification of the non-finite phrase as a noun, but also to the extraordinary fact that these nominalized verbal constructions also 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, which is not coreferential with the subject of the main clause.

Besides, 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.

In other words, the language a speaker uses tells others about the way in which that speaker perceives the world, and when a speaker chooses to use an actualized infinitive in Spanish, he/ she attempts to generalize and to make the whole construction more impersonal by limiting the lexical value of the infinitive which heads this sort of constructions and is, basically, conceptualizing the verb as an object, which, in the end, allows the use of a nominal modifier within a verbal phrase.

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