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APRESENTAÇÃO

Jorge Campos

Ainda que a sintaxe, ao lado da fonologia, seja o campo de investigações lingüísticas mais definido e típico, não há, absolutamente, consenso sobre a forma de concebê-la e praticá-la. De fato, Katz (1980-1985) e Langendoen & Postal (1985), a propósito de discussão crítica sobre filosofia da lingüística, disciplina adequada para a avaliação de questões sobre fundamentos, mencionam mais de vinte propostas contemporâneas de teoria da gramática. Se isso, entretanto, é algo surpreendente, pelo fato de que a lingüística já atinge uma razoável maturidade científica, mais surpreendente ainda é, certamente, a evolução e o progresso da sintaxe gerativa e a produtividade de seu programa de investigação ao longo dos últimos quarenta anos. Tendo origem no revolucionário trabalho de Chomsky, na década de 50, o paradigma gerativista representa um modo de se conceber a linguagem e de se fazer lingüística em que a falta de consenso para praticá-lo contrasta com o absoluto consenso para reconhecê-lo e admiti-lo. Desde a proposta clássica de 57 à concepção contemporânea de princípios e parâmetros de 91, passando pelo modelo padrão de 65 e suas revisões, a forma da teoria mudou muito, é verdade. Entretanto, conforme sugere Wasow (1985), da ênfase na adequação observacional do início, quando as propriedades matemáticas dos formalismos gramaticais estavam a serviço de gerar o conjunto correto de cadeias para uma linguagem natural, até a desejável adequação explanatória da gramática universal de hoje, em seu enraizamento na psicologia cognitiva, passando pela riqueza descritiva do componente transformacional de ontem, o roteiro do paradigma gerativista é, indiscutivelmente, incomparável, senão irrepreensível.

Este número da revista *Letras de Hoje*, organizado por mim e Carlos Mioto, e inteiramente dedicado à concepção gerativista de fazer lingüística, é uma forma discreta de reconhecer a excelência do percurso aberto por tal programa de investigação e de distinguir alguns de seus mais expressivos representantes no Brasil.

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ON THE SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS OF THE PERFECT TENSE*

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UMBC/USA

I - INTRODUCTION

In Spanish, as well as in English, both the past and the future perfect tenses are ambiguous:¹

- (1) a. Bill había llegado a las seis.
b. Bill had arrived at six o'clock.
- (2) a. Bill habrá llegado a las seis.
b. Bill will have arrived at six o'clock.

Indeed, in either of these examples, it is possible to interpret the event of Bill's arrival as occurring *at* or *before* six o'clock. This ambiguity does not arise in the present perfect:

- (3) a. Bill ha llegado esta mañana.
b. Bill has arrived this morning.

Grammarians have since long been aware of the ambiguity observed in examples such as (1) and (2). For example, Murray (1816: 127) refers to it in the following terms:

The pluperfect tense expresses an action which was past at or before some other time specified.

More recently, Comrie (1976: 56) observes the following:

* This is a revised version of a paper formally accepted for publication by *General Linguistics* in February of 1990 with the title "A Structural Approach to the Ambiguity of the Perfect Tense in Spanish and English." In September of 1993, after several inquiries regarding its publication, the GL's editor advised the author that "it would be more suitable for a journal more concerned with theory." Although since 1990 some crucial theoretical innovations have been introduced—e.g., binary branching and functional categories—, the analysis proposed appears to hold, and even challenge some of those innovations. Given this potential value of the paper and the fact that it sheds some light on some aspects of the syntax-semantics interface that tend to remain unexplored in current linguistic research, it is published in this volume.

¹ I.e., the time expression *at six o'clock* can refer either to *the time point of the event* or *the time point of reference*. Cf. Reichenbach (147: 287-298) for a justification of this terminology.

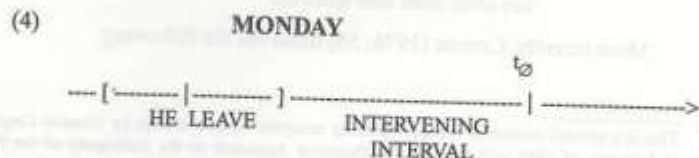
A sentence like *Bill had arrived at six o'clock* is ambiguous. On the one hand, it can mean that six o'clock is the vantage point in the past from which we are observing the results of earlier events, one of which was Bill's arrival: Bill may have arrived at five o'clock, though he was still there at six. This is the strict perfect-in-the-past, i.e. denotes a past state which results from an even earlier situation: at six o'clock we would have said Bill has arrived. On the other hand, it is also possible to interpret the sentence in question as saying that six o'clock was the time of Bill's arrival. In this case, we are simply stating that Bill's arrival preceded some other past situation (past-in-the-past), without there being any relation between Bill's arrival and any state in existence at the time of this latter situation; e.g. *Bill had arrived at six o'clock and had left again at seven; the inspector did not get there until eight*. The same is true of the Future Perfect, which can be either a perfect-in-the-future, or a past-in-the-future.

The question of Comrie's terminology aside, his approach basically focuses on the ambiguity already observed by Murray (1816) and it merely describes the facts.

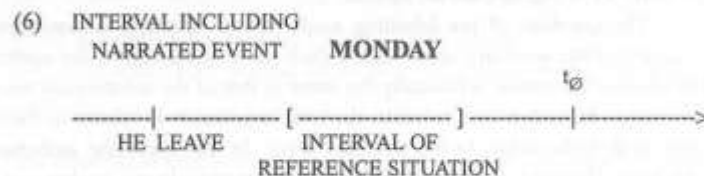
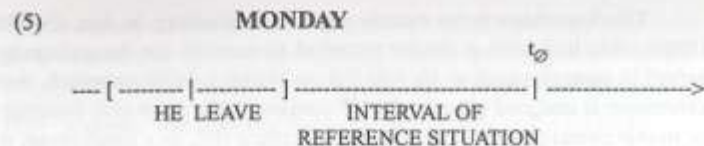
An alternative approach to the problem is the one advanced by Woisetschlaeger (n.d.). According to him, the ambiguity of sentences such as (1) and (2) is to be explained with respect to the non-ambiguity of those such as (3) in terms of the difference between the present tense and the other tenses. Indeed, he has claimed (n.d.: 88):

... [the present tense] requires the time of the reference event to be simultaneous with t_0 . This fixes the time of the reference event absolutely, with respect to any utterance of a sentence. But past tense and future tense merely stipulate that the time of the reference event is either some time earlier, or some time later, than the speech event.²

Thus, according to Woisetschlaeger (n.d.: 88), "for the sentence *He has left on Monday*, we get the schematic diagram" under (4):



and "for *He had left on Monday*, we get" either (5) or (6):



In (5) the time point of the event coincides with the time point of reference, whereas in (6) the time point of the event is prior to the time point of reference.

Although Woisetschlaeger's approach does explain why the present perfect is non-ambiguous and why the past and the future perfect are open to the two interpretations diagrammed under (5) and (6), it does not explain the non-ambiguity of examples such as (7) below, and that of some other examples I shall discuss in Section 2 of the paper:

(7) It seems that at six o'clock Jack had exploded a bomb.

The time expression in (7) can only refer to the time point of reference, not the time point of the event, i.e. the explosion of the bomb occurred before six o'clock.

In What follows, I shall argue that the two readings diagrammed in (5) and (6) correspond to two different structural configurations. Specifically, I shall argue that the time expression in (5) corresponds to that of a VP adverb, whereas that in (6) corresponds to an adverb directly attached to S (IP).

2 - A STRUCTURAL DISAMBIGUATION

The hypothesis advanced in this paper amounts to saying that the readings diagrammed in (5) and (6) above correspond to the following structural configurations:

(8) [IP [NP He] [AUX had] [VP left [PP on Monday]]] (cf. (5), where the time point of the event coincides with the time point of reference.)

(9) [IP [NP He] [AUX had] [VP left] [PP on Monday]] (cf. (6), where the time point of the event is prior to the time point of reference.)

² Following standard conventions in the semantics of tense, the expression t_0 in this quote and below refers to the time point of speech.

This hypothesis is not exactly new in the literature. In fact, Huddleston (1969: 785) has made a similar proposal to account for the ambiguity observed in examples such as *He had left on Monday*. In his approach, the time expression is assigned either to the VP containing the main verb (reading (5)), or to that containing the auxiliary *have* (reading (6)), in a dendrogram where the latter VP is higher than the former.

The question of the labelling aside—which crucially depends on the structure of the auxiliary, a problem I shall not discuss here—, the content of Huddleston's proposal is basically the same as that of the solution advanced in this paper. Indeed, in one instance the time expression is related to the main verb, and in the other, to the auxiliary *have*. In this view, the ambiguity is structural. However, Huddleston (1969) does not provide any evidence in support of his analysis, which he substantiates on the basis of the ambiguity his approach is supposed to explain. This renders Huddleston's solution circular, a deficiency I will attempt to overcome here using some data from Spanish and English.

2.1 – Adverb Preposing

The first piece of evidence in support of the analysis defended in this paper is based on Adverb Preposing in English.

In simplex sentences in English, it is possible to prepose VP Adverbs, i.e. to place them in sentence initial position. Consider (10) and (11):

(10) John put the book on the table.

(11) On the table, John put the book!

That the prepositional phrase *on the table* is a VP adverb is demonstrated by the fact that verbs such as *put* strictly subcategorize a locative and elements that are strictly subcategorized (selected) by the verb must be under the domination of VP (cf. Chomsky (1965: 99)). This is substantiated by the ungrammaticality of (12):

(12) * John put the book.

Nevertheless, VP Adverbs cannot be preposed in embedded sentences. Consider (13) and (14) below:

(13) It seems that put the book on the table.

(14) * It seems that on the table John put the book.

The locative prepositional phrase in (13), which is strictly subcategorized by the verb *put*, cannot be moved to initial position of the subordinate clause as the ungrammaticality of (14) shows.

However, Sentential Adverbs, which are not subcategorized by the verb, can appear in sentence initial position in embedded clauses. Consider the distribution of the time expression *at six o'clock* in the examples below:

(15) It seems that John put the book on the table at six o'clock.

(16) It seems that at six o'clock John put the book on the table.

The contrast in acceptability between (14) and (16) is sharp.

With these differences in mind, let us now consider the example below:

(17) It seems that Jack had exploded the bomb at six o'clock.

This example is ambiguous in the sense already discussed above. It can mean either (a) that the event of the explosion of the bomb occurred at six, or (b) that it occurred before six. If our hypothesis about the structural configurations that correspond to these two readings is correct, then only reading (b) should be possible if the time adverb in (17) is placed in sentence initial position in the embedded clause. That this is indeed the case is shown by example (18):

(18) It seems that at six o'clock Jack had exploded the bomb.

Example (18) is unambiguous. It can only mean that the event of the explosion of the bomb occurred before six. It follows that under these conditions, the time adverb must be a sentential adverb, as our hypothesis predicts.

As already pointed out above in relation to (7), Woisetschlaeger's approach cannot predict the non-ambiguity of these examples. The approach adopted here can.

2.2 – VP Preposing

The second argument is based on VP Preposing. According to Emonds (1976: 31-32), VP Preposing is a Root Transformation that fronts the bracketed VP constituent in examples such as (19) to generate structures such as (20):

(19) John intends to make a table, and he will [make one].

(20) John intends to make a table, and [make one] he will.

Consider example (21):

(21) I suspected that Jack had exploded a bomb, and he had exploded one at six.

The second conjunct under (21) is ambiguous in the already familiar sense, but if the string *exploded one at six* is preposed as per the terms of the VP Preposing Rule, the output should be unambiguous. Moreover, if our hypothesis is correct, the only possible reading should be the one where the time

expression *at six* refers to the time of the event, i.e. the explosion of the bomb. This is attested by the reading of (22):

- (22) I suspected that Jack had exploded a bomb, and exploded one at six he had.

Example (22) constitutes evidence that the time expression that refers to the time of the event must be under the domination of VP, i.e. the relevant bracketing must be [_{VP} *exploded one at six*].

Again, it must be pointed out, if the solution proposed here is adopted, the non-ambiguity of examples such as (22) is perfectly predictable from its structural configuration, a prediction that Woisetschlaeger's approach cannot make.

2.3 – The Semantics and Pragmatics of Durative Verbs in English

The third argument is also based on VP Preposing, but this time I would like to consider certain examples involving the verb *read*, which is a durative verb, i.e. a verb that refers to a situation that has both "a beginning and an end (at different points in time)" (Lyons (1977: 711)).

Let us first consider example (23):

- (23) John had read the voluminous novel at noon.

Sentence (23) is unambiguous. It can only mean that John had read the novel by noon, i.e. that the time expression *at noon* is the time of reference and not the time of the event. This is so because *read* is a durative verb in the sense defined by Lyons (1977: 711), and *noon*, "no matter how flexibly interpreted, is too short an interval to accommodate the reading of the novel from start to finish." (Woisetschlaeger (n.d: 24)).

Although Woisetschlaeger is perfectly aware of the non-ambiguity of examples such as (23), his explanation on purely semantic grounds lacks independent motivation. In what follows, I will provide a semantico-syntactic argument for the structural hypothesis defended in this paper. Consider example (24) below:

- (24) John denied that he had read any voluminous novels, but he had read one at noon.

Example (24), as well as (23), is non-ambiguous and the time expression *at noon* corresponds to the time of reference, not the time of the event. Thus, according to the terms of our hypothesis, we expect that VP Preposing be inapplicable to the sequence *read one at noon*. This is shown below:³

³ The # in front of the examples below indicates that they are semantically or pragmatically deviant.

- (25) #John denied that he had read any voluminous novels, but read one at noon he had.

Sentence (25) is pragmatically incongruous in the same sense the following example is (cf. Woisetschlaeger (n.d: 28)):

- (26) #John read the voluminous novel at midnight.

The deviance of (25) is also predicted by our hypothesis, since the VP Preposing Rule cannot move material which is not dominated by the VP node, and our hypothesis explicitly says that the adverb *at noon* in (24) and (25) is dominated by the S node. In Woisetschlaeger's approach, the deviance of (25) *vis-à-vis* the non-deviance of (24) remain unexplained.

2.4 – Intraposition in Spanish

The next argument is based on Spanish. In Spanish, but not in English, it is possible to place a VP Adverb between the verb and the arguments it strictly subcategorizes or selects. Consider example (27) below:

- (27) Juan quería lavar el auto el domingo.
'Juan wanted to wash the car on Sunday.'

Example (27) is ambiguous. Indeed, the time expression *el domingo* (on Sunday) can either refer to the upstairs or to the downstairs verb, but if such time expression is intraposed as in (28) below, it can only refer to the downstairs verb:

- (28) Juan quería lavar el domingo el auto.

For this to be possible, it follows that the time expression *el domingo* in examples such as (27) must be dominated by the downstairs VP in the reading that corresponds to (28).

Let us now consider some Spanish examples involving ambiguity with respect to the time point of reference and the time of the event, in the light of the syntactic process I have identified as 'intraposition.'

- (29) El Juancho había detonado la bomba a las seis.
'Jack had exploded the bomb at six.'

If intraposition applies to examples such as (29), we obtain structures such as (30):

- (30) El Juancho había detonado a las seis la bomba.
'Jack had exploded at six the bomb.'

Example (30), as well as the other examples that follow, is to be uttered without comma intonation after the intraposed element. Comma intonation in that position marks extraposition or right dislocation of the element to its right, not intraposition.

As it stands, example (30) is unambiguous, and its only possible reading is the one where the time expression *a las seis* refers to the time of the event.

That this is the only possible reading of (30) is attested by the ungrammaticality of (31), which includes the adverb *ya* (already):

- (31) *El Juancho ya había detonado a las seis la bomba.
'Jack had already exploded at six the bomb.'

The ungrammaticality of (31) is due to the fact that the meaning of the adverb *ya* (already) requires a time of reference to which the time of the event must be prior. In (31), the time point of the event coincides with the time point of reference, which conflicts with the meaning of *ya*.

The non-ambiguity of examples such as (30) constitutes evidence that the adverb that refers to the time of the event must be under the domination of the VP node, as our hypothesis states.

2.5 – The Semantics and Pragmatics of Durative Verbs in Spanish

The fifth and last argument is also based on intraposition in Spanish, and it involves the durative verb *leer* (read), in a fashion already familiar to the reader. Consider example (32):

- (32) Gastón Lisandro había leído *El Quijote* al mediodía.
'Gastón Lisandro had read *Don Quixote* at noon.'

This example is unambiguous for the reasons already discussed in relation to examples (23) and (24) above. The time expression *al mediodía* can only correspond to the time point of reference, not the time of the narrated event, and therefore it must be a sentential adverb according to our hypothesis. That this is in fact the case is demonstrated by the deviance of example (33):

- (33) #Gastón Lisandro había leído al mediodía *El Quijote*.
'Gastón Lisandro had read at noon *Don Quixote*.'

The ungrammaticality of (33) lends strong support to the claim made in this paper in the sense that time adverbs that correspond to the time point of reference must be Sentential Adverbs, not VP Adverbs. Indeed, if the time expression *al mediodía* in (32) were a VP Adverb, it should be possible to intrapose it between the verb and its object. The fact that this is not possible, indicates that it must be a Sentential Adverb.

3 – CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have presented five arguments that support the claim that the ambiguity observed with respect to the time point of reference and the time of the narrated event in sentences involving the past perfect is to be ac-

counted for in structural terms. Specifically, I have presented evidence showing that when the time adverb corresponds to the time point of reference, such adverb is a Sentential Adverb, and that when it corresponds to the time of the event, it is a VP Adverb. Since the same ambiguity is observable when the future perfect is involved, the analysis substantiated for the past perfect is to be extended to the future perfect as well.

In the preceding discussion, it was also pointed out that, although Woisetschlaeger's approach correctly predicts the non-ambiguity of the present perfect and the ambiguity of the past and the future perfect in a number of instances, it fails to account for the non-ambiguity of several examples involving the past perfect (e.g. (7), (18), (22), (30)) or the semantic deviance of some others (e.g. (25), (33)). By extension of our discussion, the same problem arises when the future perfect is involved. Any treatment of the perfect must address itself to this problem, which—to the best of my knowledge—has not been documented in the literature.

In an attempt to overcome this problem in the treatment of the perfect, I have proposed the structural solution which, it was observed, does explain both the ambiguity and the non-ambiguity of the structures considered. In this respect, the approach presented here is superior to that of Woisetschlaeger.

Nevertheless, there is one aspect of the general problem posed by the perfect that the structural approach proposed here cannot explain and that Woisetschlaeger's can. This is the non-ambiguity of the present perfect:

- (34) a. Bill has arrived this morning.
b. Bill ha llegado esta mañana.

According to Comrie (1976: 54):

in English, the Perfect may not be used together with specification of the time of the past situation, i.e. one cannot say *I have got up at five o'clock this morning*, because the specific reference to the point of time *at five o'clock this morning* is incompatible with the English perfect. It is not specification of time as such that is excluded, since one can specify the time within the past situation held, provided the time includes the present, e.g. *I have seen Fred today*, or even *I have seen Fred this morning*, provided it is still morning at the time of speaking.

However, Comrie (1976: 54) contends that this does not hold in Spanish and he quotes the following example from Stevenson (1970: 62):

- (35) Gustavo Ferrán ha muerto ayer.
'Gustavo Ferrán has died yesterday.'

but this is simply incorrect since Spanish observes the same restriction that holds in English:⁴

⁴ Thus, it is not surprising not to find any examples such as (35) in Bull (1971: 86-90), where an

- (36) *Gustavo Ferrán ha llegado ayer.
 **Gustavo Ferrán has arrived yesterday.

If (35) is acceptable at all, its acceptability is highly marginal, just like that of the following example in English:

- (37) I've been to the dentist this morning.

which appears to be acceptable for some speakers if said in the afternoon (cf. Leech (1971: 40-41) and Comrie (1976: 54, footnote (1))).

The point to be made, then, is not that examples such as (35) and (37) are (marginally) acceptable, but that generally unacceptable. Hence, no true generalization can be based on them, particularly given the clear-cut ungrammaticality of examples such as (36) in Spanish and that of their English analogues, as illustrated by the translation of (36). Under these circumstances, the most reasonable move is to assume that Spanish and English are alike with respect to the restriction discussed by Comrie (1976: 54), which may be suspended under certain conditions still-to-be-discovered, so that examples such as (35) and (37) can be accommodated if they are indeed acceptable. If this is correct, then the interesting question to ask is *Why do we have such a restriction?* i.e. *Why is any specific reference to point-of-time-not-included-in-the-present generally incompatible with the present perfect?*

The structural approach motivated in this paper cannot explain this, but Woietschlaeger's can, and I quote again:

[The present tense] requires the time of the reference event to be simultaneous with t_0 . This fixes the time of the reference event absolutely, with respect to any utterance of a sentence. (Woietschlaeger (n.d.: 88); emphasis mine, G.F.W.)

The adequacy of this statement is now apparent since it not only explains why the present perfect is not compatible with a specific time reference not included in the present, but also its non-ambiguity.

Consequently, if the statement quoted is introduced into the grammar of Spanish and English as a general semantic convention that marks a semantically deviant any sentence that does not satisfy the relevant condition, no other mechanism is necessary for the correct interpretation of sentences involving the perfect tense, provided that the structural approach advanced here is adopted. In fact, to the extent that generalized transformations apply to X' expansions in an unconstrained fashion in the minimalist approach (cf. Chomsky (1992) & Chomsky & Lasnik (1991)), structures such as (38) and (39) will be generated:

- (38) [IP [NP Bill] [AUX has] [VP arrived] [ADV this morning]], where the adverbial phrase is a Sentential Adverb that specifies the point time of reference (not of the event)--a reading that is not available in the present perfect.
- (39) [IP [NP Bill] [AUX has] [VP arrived [ADV this morning]]], where the adverbial phrase is a VP Adverb that specifies the point time of the event--the only reading available in the present perfect.

However, a grammar that incorporates both the syntactic analysis defended in this paper and the semantic convention quoted above will mark (38) as semantically deviant and only allow for the generation of (39). What is interesting of this approach is that it allows for an interaction between syntax and semantics that can generate the desired results with respect to all ambiguities and non-ambiguities discussed in this paper, a goal that a purely syntactically or semantically based approach would not be able to accomplish.

Moreover, if we assume that some speakers can optionally suspend the semantic convention above under certain conditions dealing with questions of language use that remain to be determined, we have an explanation for the occurrence of examples such as (35) and (37), if acceptable at all.

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extensive illustrative list of Spanish examples involving the present perfect is included.