

The Morphology of Non-Canonical Imperfect Subjunctives in Spanish

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This paper addresses issues in the morphology of the RA-subjunctive in Spanish as the RA-form has a ‘non-canonical’ use as a past perfect and a preterite. This non-canonical use of the imperfect subjunctive has received little attention in the linguistic literature, save Jardón Pérez (2016) who looks at Eo-Navian (EoN) Spanish spoken in Asturias, Spain. In EoN the imperfect subjunctive form can be associated with a past perfect and preterit interpretation, in (1) and (2), respectively, alongside its traditional modal value.

(1) PLUPERFT: Cuando llegué yo, Ana ya **salie-ra** /(*-se)
by the time I arrived, Ana **had** already left

(2) PRET: Las flores, me las **regala-ra** /(*-se) mi abuela
The flowers, my grandmother **gave** them to me Jardón Pérez (2016:23)

Also, in these non-canonical forms the SE-subjunctive is not permitted and the verb appears in main clauses. In contrast, the ‘standard’ imperfect subjunctive form exhibits free variation between the RA\SE-subjunctive (Fábregas 2014), and is usually found in embedded contexts (e.g. [_{C1} *quería* [_{C2} *que canta-ra* /-se]]) ‘I wanted her to sing’).

Jardón Pérez (2016:32) accounts for the data in Nanosyntax by proposing that the exponent is composed of a span (=series) of syntactic projections (e.g. Caha 2009), as in (3). Each projection codifies a single feature and all features must be identified in lexicalization (i.e. Ex(haustive) Lex(icalization)).

(3) RA-Perf(ect): PluscamP+MoodP[+indicative]+AspectP+VP = ra
RA-Pret(erite): DeixisP[+past]+PluscamP+MoodP[+;indicative]+AspectP+VP = ra

DeixisP has a past feature and PluscamP accounts for the past perfect interpretation. The past perfect interpretation is always available when the simple past interpretation is, but the reverse is not true. The imperfect subjunctive proper is lexicalized by a structure without DeixisP or PluscamP and MoodP is [–indicative].

While the analysis accounts for the lexicalization of –ra and interpreting it as a preterite, it does not identify the difference in licensing between the –ra form and the simple past (e.g. *aquí comiéramos/comimos una vez* ‘we ate here once’) both of which are used in EoN. Second, the proposed structure does not account for the RA-perf as PlusquamP must be decomposed into *two* projections that give a past feature and a perfective feature to satisfy ExLex.

We propose that a single underspecified Vocabulary Item (VI): [FIN(ITE), PRECED(ENCE) ≡ PAST] ↔ ra accounts for both canonical and non-canonical cases. Following Cowper (2012), indicatives as opposed to subjunctives have full temporal deixis and thus have a [DE(IXIS) = temporal anchor] feature while subjunctives lack deixis and only have a [FIN] feature. We use an impoverishment rule, [DE, FIN] → [∅ FIN], to neutralize the contrast between the subjunctive and the indicative after syntax but before lexical insertion. The structure of the clause after impoverishment occurs is as in (4).

(4) a. imperfect subj: [MoodP Mood_[FIN] [TP T_[PRECED] [...]]]
b. RA-Perf/Pret: [MoodP Mood_[∅E FIN] [TP T_[PRECED] [PerfP Perf_[PERF / ∅] [...]]]]

In order to account for the RA-perf we propose that there is a [PERF] feature on Perf₀. The representation for the RA-pret is much the same except Perf₀ is underspecified for [PERF]; importantly the [PERF] feature does not contribute to the VI. Lastly, following Cowper (2005) the simple past is given by the specification [DE, ENTIRETY], and is therefore different from the RA-pret.

Unlike Nanosyntax, DM (see Harley & Noyer 1999) allows for underspecified VIs and thus a more indirect association between form and meaning which we exploit here to posit to a single VI.

This analysis also avoids the problems of the previous approach (i) by positing different licensing for the RA-pret and the simple past, and (ii) a unified representation of the RA-perf/pret.

References

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