

Valuating aspect in Spanish verbal participles: the case of passives

Isabel Crespí Riutort (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

Introduction and aim

Aspect in participles has been largely discussed in current linguistics (cf. Embick 2004; McIntyre 2013; Arche, Fábregas & Marín 2014). Specifically, we still have problems to explain how the combination of a verbal participle with distinct auxiliaries or modifiers can yield such different interpretations, as stative (*está cocinado* / ‘is cooked’), perfect (*he cocinado* / ‘I have cooked’), perfective or so-called passives (*fue cocinado* / ‘was cooked’) or imperfective (*cuidadosamente cocinado* / ‘carefully cooked’). What seems clear is that they do have some aspectual content, but it cannot be totally interpreted unless we combine the participle with another element, i.e. an auxiliary.

Hence, the aim of this study is twofold: firstly, we want to show that, to be totally interpretable, verbal participles must define their aspect derivationally, this is, via combination with an auxiliary. Secondly, we want to focus on the case of passive constructions to demonstrate that the passive in Spanish does not exist, since actually it is a simple interpretation derived from the valuation of the participial aspect by the tense of the verb *ser* (‘to be’).

Data

To start with, a verbal participle, such as *cocinado* (‘cooked’) or *escrito* (‘written’), can take part in some different constructions and it acquires different aspectual meaning depending on the construction:

- (1) El libro está *escrito* con tinta roja (COPULATIVE STATIVE)
the book is written with ink red
‘The book is written with red ink’
- (2) He *escrito* dos cartas (PERFECT)
have written two letters
‘I have written two letters’
- (3) La novela fue *escrita* por Cervantes (PERFECTIVE)
The novel was written by Cervantes
‘The novel was written by Cervantes’
- (4) Una dedicatoria cuidadosamente *escrita* (IMPERFECTIVE)
a dedicatory carefully written
‘A carefully written dedicatory’

Concerning the periphrastic passive constructions in Spanish, we consider real “passives” just the constructions with *ser* (‘to be’), and not with *estar* (‘to be’), since the former have been deeply proved to be copulative statives.

- (5) María está triste = María está engañada (COPULATIVES)
Mary is sad = Mary is tricked

Thus, regarding the passives with *ser*, we observe that the passive interpretation is more easily inferable when the copula is in a marked tense (i.e. past or future) and not in present (vid. Gili Gaya 1961, Jurado 2000, Bartra 2014).

- (6) a. [#]El cuadro es pintado por Miró
the painting is painted by Miró

- b. El cuadro fue pintado por Miró
 the painting was painted by Miró

Proposal

Following the distinction between inner aspect and external aspect (cf. Travis 1991, Thomas 1999, Arsenijevic 2006, MacDonald 2006), we will defend that verbal participles in Spanish are the materialization of external aspect because of their morphology (cf. Bosque 1990). However, we will assume that this aspect is not valued but unspecified for the value and, because of that, to be totally interpretable, they have to combine with an auxiliary. Thus, it is the auxiliary that specifies the concrete aspectual interpretation of the participle and thus the interpretation of the whole construction.

We will formalize this idea in the framework of the feature checking theories, following especially the model by Pesetsky & Torrego (2007). We assume that verbal participles have an uninterpretable aspectual feature unspecified for the value [uAsp: __] and auxiliaries have an interpretable one, but each one has a different concrete value which checks the feature of the participle: *estar* has a feature with a “stage” value (cf. Silvagni 2014): [iAsp: S], *haber* has a feature with a perfect value: [iAsp: pf], manner modifiers such as *cuidadosamente* (‘carefully’) have a feature with an imperfective value: [iAsp: impf]

(7) [AspP [Asp *estar*_[iAsp:S]] [PartP ... [Part *cocinado*_[uAsp: __]]]

(8) [AspP [Asp *haber*_[iAsp:pf]] [PartP ... [Part *cocinado*_[uAsp: __]]]

(9) [AspP [Asp *cuidadosamente*_[iAsp:impf]] [PartP ... [Part *cocinado*_[uAsp: __]]]

In the case of passives, since *ser* has no inner aspect, the feature of the participle cannot be checked and it looks for its valuation in the domain T/AspP (cf. Klein 1995; Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria 2015) of the copula. If *ser* is in present, since it is the absence of tense, it does not codify any external aspect and the feature of the participle keeps unchecked and unvalued. To the contrary, if *ser* is in a marked tense, since it expresses external aspect features, the participle can receive valuation. We postulate that the value the participle receives in these cases is “perfective”: [iAsp: pv]

(10) [T/AspP [T T_∅ ... [CopP [CopV *es*] [PartP ... [Part *cocinado*_[uAsp: __]]]]]

(11) [T/AspP [T T_[iAsp:pv] ... [CopP [CopV *fue*] [PartP ... [Part *cocinado*_[uAsp: __]]]]]

Selected references: Arche, M., R. Marín & A. Fábregas (2014): Argument structure and aspect in adjectives and participles: Where are we? *Lingua*, 149, part B. Bartra, A. (2014): Voice phenomena: how many properties behind this label?. *Catalan Journal of Linguistics*, Vol. 13. Demirdache, H. & M. Uribe-Etxebarria (2015): The Syntax of Time Arguments. *Lingua*, 117(2). Embick, D. (2004): On the structure of resultative participles in English. *Linguistic Inquiry* 35. MacDonald, Jonathan E. (2006): The Syntax of Inner Aspect. PhD dissertation, Stony Brook University, New York. McIntyre, A. (2013). Adjectival passives and adjectival participles in English. In A. Alexiadou & F. Schäfer (eds.), *Non-canonical Passives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.