

## Projecting the external argument in Spanish passives

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**Goals:** We argue for a uniform syntactic structure for nominal and verbal passives in Spanish. We do so by providing empirical evidence showing how both constructions are subject to the same grammatical constraints involving the external argument, namely: a) thematic restrictions in *por* ‘by’-phrases; ii) the disjoint reference effect.

**Thematic restrictions:** Alexiadou et al. (2014) argue that Spanish *por*-phrases in nominals show the direct participation effect (DPE), meaning that they can only introduce initiators (human or not) that directly bring about the event denoted by the nominal (e.g. (26)), from op.cit). Alexiadou et al (2013) link the DPE to the thematic restrictions of *by*-phrases, noting that there are similar effects in Romanian and German.

- (26) a. El huracán justificó la evacuación de los habitantes  
      'The hurricane justified the evacuation of the inhabitants'  
      b. #La justificación de la evacuación de los habitantes por el huracán  
      'The justification of the evacuation of the inhabitants by the hurricane'  
      c. El huracán destruyó nuestros cultivos  
      'The hurricane destroyed our crops'  
      d. La destrucción de nuestros cultivos por el huracán  
      'The destruction of our crops by the hurricane'

**Problems with this view:** Native speakers of (European) Spanish dislike *por*-phrases with non-human direct causers quite generally (e.g. (1)). Human direct causers, on the other hand, are acceptable (speakers have a preference to use a *por parte de* ‘by’-phrase, which is only available with human entities in nominalizations). The same situation carries over to verbal passives (we do not include examples here for space reasons).

- (1) a. ??La inundación del sótano por el río.  
      ('The flooding of the basement by the river.')
- b. ??El agrietamiento de la pared por el extintor.  
      ('The cracking of the wall by the fire extinguisher.')
- c. ??El enterramiento de los coches por la arena.  
      ('The burying of the cars by the sand.')
- (2) a. La invasión de Ucrania por (parte de) el ejército ruso.  
      'The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army.'
- b. La declaración de hostilidades por (parte de) Putin.  
      'The declaration of hostilities by Putin.'
- c. El ensamblaje de las piezas por (parte de) trabajadores cualificados.  
      'The assembly of pieces by qualified workers.'

Then how come (26c) above is judged grammatical? The issue here is that there are two kinds of *por*-phrases in Spanish; one that introduces the external argument in the passive and a second one that introduces the cause of a given eventuality but which, crucially, is not an external argument. We can observe this in the *se* passive construction, a kind of passive that disallows the introduction of external arguments in a *por*-phrase but which allows for causal *por*, as shown in (3). The reading in (3) would be one in which crops were destroyed because of the hurricane, but crucially, not that the hurricane was the initiator of the event. It is the same (and only) reading available in (26d), we claim. Our first reaction, due to our world knowledge, is to interpret the hurricane in (26d) as the initiator of the event, but in fact it is a causal complement.

- (3) Se destruyeron cultivos (por el huracán).  
 ‘Crops were destroyed (because of the hurricane).’

Note that these two types of *por*-phrases are not in complementary distribution. This is the case for verbal passives (e.g. (4a)) as well as for nominal passives (e.g. (4b)).

- (4) a. La puerta fue vigilada por los vigilantes por órdenes del jefe.  
 ‘The door was surveilled by the guards due to orders from the boss.’  
 b. La vigilancia de la puerta por (parte de) los vigilantes por órdenes del jefe.  
 ‘The surveillance of the door by the guards due to orders from the boss.’

We claim that the restriction in Spanish passives (nominal and verbal) regarding the external argument is that it be human. Note that it would be inaccurate to say it needs to be an agent (in the classical sense of a human being that purposefully brings about an event), as we find examples with stative verbs where the external argument would be an experiencer, rather than an agent (e.g. (5a)), and the “human” effect is equally found in both nominal (e.g. (5b)) and verbal (e.g. (5c)) passives.

- (5) a. {Los soldados/ los perros} conocen bien el terreno.  
 b. El buen conocimiento del terreno por (parte de) {los soldados/ ??los perros}.  
 c. El terreno es bien conocido por {los soldados/ ??los perros}.

**The disjoint reference effect (DRE):** Baker et al. (1989) noticed that short verbal passives in English (i.e. without a *by*-phrase) show the DRE, i.e. the theme cannot be understood to be co-referent with the external argument. The same situation holds in both Spanish nominal and verbal passives (e.g. (6)), again pointing at an underlying common structure for the two constructions.

- (6) a. Los animals fueron ocultados. ‘The animals were hidden.’  
 b. El ocultamiento de los animales. ‘The hiding of the animals.’  
 OK: The animals were hidden by someone else.  
 NOT: The animals hid themselves.

**The proposal:** Building on Bruening (2013), we assume that passives are built via a Pass head that selects a transitive vP which has not yet projected their external argument syntactically (see Ramchand 2018’s *initP* or Harley’s 2013 vP). Pass encodes the Disjoint Reference Effect via a presupposition, as in Spathas et al. (2015). In addition, the head Pass has a [+HUMAN] feature requiring that the external argument of the verbal predicate be human (but in itself Pass does not assign a theta role). The *por*-phrase adjoins to PassP as an adjunct and saturates the external argument slot. In the absence of a *por*-phrase, the external argument is existentially bound.

- (7) [<sub>PassP</sub> [*por*-phrase] [<sub>PassP</sub> Pass[+HUMAN] [<sub>vP</sub> (transitive) ]]]

If the passive is verbal, PassP will follow T and Asp projections; if it is nominal, PassP will be taken as a complement by a nominalizer N. But PassP is present in both constructions, which explains their identical behavior in terms of argument structure.

**References:** Alexiadou, A. G. Iordachioaia, M. Cano, F. Martin & F. Schäfer. 2013. The realization of external arguments in nominalizations. *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 16:73-95 ■ Alexiadou, A., M. Cano, G. Iordachioaia, F. Martin & F. Schäfer. 2014. Direct participation effects in derived nominals. *Proceedings of the 48th Annual Meeting of the CLS*, 17-32 ■ Baker, Mark, Johnson, Kyle & Roberts, Ian. 1989. Passive arguments raised. *Linguistic Inquiry* 20(2): 219–251 Bruening, B. 2013. *By*-phrases in passives and nominals. *Syntax* 16(1) ■ Harley, Heidi. 2013. External arguments and the Mirror Principle: On the distinctness of Voice and v. *Lingua* 125: 34–57 ■ Ramchand, G. 2008. *Verb meaning and the lexicon*. CUP.