

UDK 811.111'243
811.134.2'243
Pregledni rad

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METALANGUAGE IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION – HOW MUCH OF TRANSPARENCY?

Razlike u terminologiji u gramatičkome sistemu engleskoga i španskoga jezika često uzrokuju probleme onima koji ta dva jezika – španski i engleski – uče simultano. Standardna nomenklatura korišćena u gramatikama ta dva jezika ponekad (reklo bi se) traži različite pojmove da bi prikazala slične, često identične gramatičke pojave. Dovoljno je, na primjer, baciti pogled na sistem vremena u dvama jezicima. U standardnoj engleskoj gramatici nazivom „present perfect“ imenovano je gramatičko vrijeme koje se, među ostalim funkcijama, koristi za akcije koje su nedavno okončane i čiji je rezultat vidan do trenutka govorenja. U španskome, s druge strane, gramatičko vrijeme koje se koristi za slične akcije naziva se „pretérito perfecto“ (preterit perfekta ili perfekat prošli). Još jedan problem predstavlja upotreba tzv. „gerunda“. Premda termini „gerund“ i „gerundio“ postoje i u engleskome i u španskom, oni predstavljaju dvije različite stvari: dok se u engleskome pod terminom „gerund“ podrazumijeva element imeničkoga tipa koji se ponaša kao imenica (npr. to može biti i rečenični subjekat), u španskome je „gerundio“ glagolski elemenat koji čini sastavni dio složenih trajnih vremena i zapravo je ekvivalentan engleskome participu prezenta. Problem nastaje i usljed zastarjele podjele na prosta i složena vremena. Na primjer, engleski „simple present“ je prosto vrijeme samo u potvrdnim rečenicama, dok u većini upitnih i odričnih rečenica postaje složeno vrijeme. U španskome, pak, taj problem ne postoji. Stoga je cilj našega rada da pokažemo kako se baviti pomenutim problemima, kako učiniti predavanje jezika u učionicama transparentnijim i zabavnijim i, konačno, kako upravljati učenjem učenika.

Ključne riječi: *metajezik, gerund/gerundio, prezent, preterit, prosta vremena, složena vremena*

1. Introduction

We are living in times when more and more people decide to learn a foreign language, or even two or more foreign languages at the same time. While doing so, a number of difficulties may arise. The difficulties do not only concern the process of language learning/acquisition, like for example problems connected with negative transfer, but they very often have to do with the terminology that is used in the description of the linguistic system in grammar books or in classroom instruction. Since it is often the case that the native language grammar terminology in some areas does not match the linguistic terminology used in a target language, or the terminology of target language 1 does not match the terminology employed to describe target language 2 or 3 or more, the learning/acquisition process can be obscured and thus the life of the student/teacher can be made more difficult. It is such differences between English and Spanish that will be of our concern in this paper. We will concentrate upon three problem areas that we think important in drawing attention to in the process of teaching/learning of English and Spanish. They are: the gerund, the present perfect tense and simple/complex tenses. The aim of our discussion is not only to facilitate the students' learning process and solve their problems but also to make one aware that language is changing all the time and that perhaps it would be a good idea to keep the terminology used to describe grammatical systems up to date.

2.1. Gerundium vs. gerundivum

Before we turn into discussing the English and Spanish gerundival forms, let us first have a look at their etymology. In Latin there are two related verbal forms that sometimes cause confusion in students of this language. The forms that we have in mind are gerundium (gerund) and gerundivum (gerundival). Although they are related, and in many cases can be used interchangeably, there are some points of formal difference between the two verbal particles. Let us start with gerundium. As Jurewicz et al. 1998 state, the Latin gerundium is a verbal neuter noun and it expresses a general activity or an activity that is not yet finished. It is formed on the basis of the simple present tense base form and the feature *-(e)nd-* plus the case endings of the second declension (only in the singular). Let us take the verb *laudare* 'to praise' to see how gerundium declines in its declension paradigm:

| | Latin example | English translation |
|-------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| N. | <i>Lauda-re</i> | Praising |
| G. | <i>Lauda-nd-i</i> | Of praising |
| D. | <i>Lauda-nd-o</i> | For praising |
| Acc. | <i>Ad lauda-nd-um</i> | With the aim of praising |
| Abl. | <i>Lauda-nd-o</i> | By means of praising |

It needs to be mentioned that gerundium has not got any form in the nominative case. However, the empty space has been filled with the infinitive form that is translated as a verbal noun in the nominative case. To give an example, let us take a well-known saying: *Errare humanum est* – ‘to err is human’ (or literally ‘erring is human’). The other cases can also be exemplified as is shown in the table below:

| | Latin example | English translation |
|-------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| N. | <i>Errare humanum est</i> | To err is human |
| G. | <i>Ars amandi</i> | The art of loving |
| D. | <i>Pares amando sumus</i> | We all are equal for loving |
| Acc. | <i>Ad amandum vivimus</i> | We live in order to love |
| Abl. | <i>Docendo discimus</i> | We learn from teaching others |

Gerundivum, on the other hand, as defined in Jurewicz et al. 1998, is a participle. To be more precise, it is a future passive participle and it is derived from gerundium, hence the name *gerundivum* ‘gerundival’. It is sometimes referred to as a verbal adjective. It is formed by adding the suffix *-(e)nd-* to the present tense base form of the verb plus adjectival endings. Moreover, it declines together with the noun like a corresponding adjective. Its form is demonstrated in the table below:

| | | |
|--|-----------------|---------------|
| ‘laudandus’ – the one that should be praised; the one that is worth of being praised | | |
| masculine | feminine | neuter |
| laudandus | laudanda | laudandum |

Gerundivum has a number of functions, namely:

- attributive function. In this function it relates what a given object or person is worth of, for example: *mulier laudanda* – a woman worth of praising;
- complement function. In this case it is accompanied by the link verb *esse* ‘to be’, for example: *mulier amanda est* – a woman must be loved;

- present or future passive participle. In this case it relates what will/is going to happen with something/somebody, for example: *Caesar pontem faciendum curavit* – Caesar ordered that a bridge be constructed.

The two verbal forms, gerundium and gerundivum, may be formally different but, being genetically related, they have quite a lot in common and they can often be used interchangeably in a number of contexts. The basic characteristics that the two verbal forms have in common are the following: both can be translated in the same way; both can take the same prepositions; both can have the same cases; both can have same functions

2.2. Gerund vs. gerundio

Students who learn English and Spanish simultaneously often have problems with the following terms: gerund (in English) and gerundio (in Spanish). Both terms are genetically related but they describe two different situations. The English gerund is a verbal noun and it has many nominal features. For example, it can function as the subject (eg. *swimming is healthy*), as the object (eg. *Susan likes swimming*), and also as the complement of a verb eg. (*what is swimming?*). Moreover, it can be modified by an adjective as in *Peter likes long-distance swimming*; the Spanish equivalent of the English ‘gerund’ is the infinitive itself. As far as the Spanish gerundio is concerned, it behaves like the present participle in English, so it is more like a verbal adjective. It is for example used in the Spanish present continuous tense: *estoy hablando contigo ahora* ‘I am speaking with you now’. In other words, the Spanish present continuous tense has the structure ‘be + gerund’ (Span. *estar* + gerundio), so in this case it is identical with to the English present participle, and not with the gerund, because the English present continuous, which is used for continuous actions taking place at the moment of speaking like in Spanish, has the structure ‘be + present participle’. In the description of present continuous, then, due to the application of two different linguistic terms describing the same linguistic phenomenon, students of English and Spanish are unnecessarily confused. They often comment upon the situation: ‘wouldn’t it be better just to use equivalent terminology items to equivalent linguistic phenomena?’ They are certainly right. And there is a solution to the problem. What we do, for example, is we treat the Spanish ‘gerundio’ as if it were a present active participle, and in fact we call it like that in order to avoid calling it a gerund. At the same time, it is necessary to tell the students that in Spanish the function of the English gerund is fulfilled by the infinitive. As a matter of fact, the Spanish ‘gerundio’ has the form of the original dative and ablative case of the Latin ‘gerundium’ but its use is

not compatible with what we said about ‘gerundium’ above. The problem is that the Latin ‘gerundium’ seemed to have been the best candidate for something like the present continuous tense in Vulgar Latin that later on developed into Spanish. It needs to be mentioned that Latin itself did not have the present continuous tense but it had the present participle. The present participle, however, was not used the way it is used in English nowadays. It was much more like an adjective and not like a verb; in fact, if one wanted to, one could produce an artificial present continuous statement in Latin but it would sound very awkward, like for example in modern German or modern Polish. Only later in the history did the present participle start to function as part of continuous tenses in some Indo-European languages. Moreover, since the Latin gerundium and present participle had very similar forms (gerundium had the feature *-nd-*, whereas the present participle had the feature *-ns* in the nominative case and *-nt-* in the oblique cases), it was very easy for the speakers to confuse them, merge them and use interchangeably, especially after during the mediaeval period of Latin where numerous simplifications took place when it was turning into Vulgar Latin and later on into Spanish. At that time new grammatical systems developed on the basis of the indigenous substrate languages; present continuous, for example, can be found in Celtic languages.

3.1. Praesens vs. praeteritum

Another problem area for students learning English and Spanish again lies in the temporal system. This time it concerns the present perfect tense. The present perfect tense, however, can be called ‘present’ only in English but in Spanish it is called ‘preterite’. Before we start the comparison proper, a few words explaining the etymology of some words are necessary. Etymologically, the term ‘present’ derives from *prae-* ‘pre-, ahead of’ + *esse* ‘to be’. The term ‘preterite’, on the other hand, derives from *praeter* ‘by, past, aside’ + *ire* ‘to go’. As can be seen, the two terms refer to two totally different things: the term ‘present’ refers to what is present, whereas the term ‘preterite’ refers to what has past, gone by.

3.2. Present perfect vs. pretérito perfecto

Both in English and Spanish there is a grammatical tense that tells us about an action that took place in the recent past and whose result can be seen in the present. However, in English this tense is called ‘present perfect’. It is formed according to the pattern *have* + *past participle* where the auxiliary verb *have* is a tensed personal verb and the past participle is an element that does not carry tense but simply serves as an aspect marker. To give an

example let us take the following sentence: *Sasan has bought a car*. As far as Spanish is concerned, here the tense is called 'pretérito perfecto' (Eng. *preterite perfect, past perfect*). It is built exactly according to the same pattern, that is *haber* + *participio pasado* (Eng. *have* + *past participle*). As an example, let us take the following sentence, which is a translation of the English example given right above: *Susana ha comprado un coche*. What is confusing for students about the tense in question is that in Spanish and English the terminology does not overlap, although one and the same event is being described. The terms 'present perfect' and 'pretérito perfecto' distort the whole picture and one is likely to get the impression that two distinct tenses are being spoken about. The problem is that in English the word 'present' refers to the result of the action, whereas in Spanish the word 'pretérito' refers to when the action took place. As regards the past participle, it is not problematic at all because in both languages it tells us about the aspect, namely, the perfective aspect of the action. To a student not familiar with the historical development of the two languages it may seem an utter nonsense that such a misunderstanding should ever take place. The problem becomes clearer when one has a look at the formal structure of the tense in question. In English, the verb *have* apart from having the function of an auxiliary, also denotes possession. The fact that it is still used as a verb of possession, places the speaker more in the present when they mention the verb in the present perfect tense. For example, when the speaker says *Susan has bought a car* they state that Susan is in the state of having/possessing something in the present. In Spanish it is not that obvious because the auxiliary *haber* does no longer denote possession. In the past by all means it did when it still was Latin, but nowadays it does not. In the history of the Spanish language the verb *haber* lost its semantic force and stopped to be used as a verb denoting possession, and in its time was substituted by the verb *tener* which from then on fulfilled the function of expressing possession. Nevertheless, although in the process of language development many elements are lost, some tend to be preserved to fulfill other functions, very often semantically related ones, as if they were regarded as the best candidates to do so. It so happened that the verb *haber* according to the process of grammaticalisation became part of the grammatical system and now has the function of an auxiliary, or to be more general, is now a function word. It no longer expresses possession but the context in which it occurs still has a shade of possession whether the speakers realises it or not. Because it is grammaticalised, it is more abstract now and the speakers cannot associate it with any concrete notion. It in fact is only a marker of recent past. If one looks at the whole

problem from this perspective, one will come to terms with the existing terminology more easily perhaps.

3.3. Sequence of tenses

As regards the Spanish *pretérito perfecto* (present perfect) the situation is further complicated when it comes to the notion of the sequence of tenses in Spanish. On the one hand, grammar books, for example Cybulska-Janczew et al. (2001), tell the student that when there is the requirement to use the subjunctive mood, the present subjunctive mood (*presente de subjuntivo*) should be used in the dependent clause when the indicative main clause introducing the subjunctive mood is in the following tenses: *presente simple* (present simple), *pretérito perfecto* (present perfect) or *futuro simple* (future simple). On the other hand, as regards the use of the past subjunctive mood (*imperfecto de subjuntivo*), it should be used in the dependent clause when the indicative main clause introducing the subjunctive mood is in the following tenses: *pretérito imperfecto* (simple past), *pretérito pluscuamperfecto* (pluperfect), *pretérito de indefinido* (indefinite preterite), *pretérito anterior* (a type of pluperfect) or *condicional* (conditional, or future in the past). The former group of indicative tenses offers the student an unnecessary difficulty, namely, the *pretérito perfecto* (present perfect) seems to belong to the past group rather than to the present one. Although it is a present tense, it is called a preterite tense and thus misleads the student, who thinks that the *pretérito perfecto* should be the odd one out.

4.1. Simplex vs. complex

On the basis of what has so far been said in this article the reader might get the impression that the terminology used to describe the grammar is more transparent in English than in Spanish and that it should be looked up to as the better one. It is in fact not so. It is true that the Spanish terminology should in some areas learn from the English terminology in order to make the life of the students less complicated, but we have also found areas where the English terminology could learn a lot from the Spanish one. What we have in mind still concerns the Spanish-English temporal system but this time we will concentrate upon whether a given tense is simplex or complex. To give a somewhat simplified definition of what is a simplex tense we can say that a sentence is written in a simplex tense if it contains only one verbal form that is tensed and personal, and moreover it does not need any additional verbal form to convey the meaning. An example of such a sentence would be *John eats apples every day*(Eng.) /*Juan come manzanas todos los días* (Span.). As far as the definition of a complex tense is concerned, it would more or less

sound as follows. A sentence is written in a complex tense when it contains only one verbal form that is tensed and personal. This tensed and personal verbal form, however, usually has the function of an auxiliary and cannot stand alone and thus it requires some other verbal form to complete its meaning.

4.2. Simplex or complex?

If we look at the English simple present tense, we will see that it is a simplex tense in positive statements, eg.: *Peter reads books twice a week*. However, if we turn this statement into an interrogative one, we will automatically obtain a complex tense, as in *does Peter read books twice a week?* The same happens when we turn the sentence into a negative statement *Peter does not read books twice a week*. Does this mean that the so called simple present tense should on the one hand be called 'simple present' and on the other 'complex/composite present'? Perhaps it would be a good idea to do a review of the terminology used to describe the tense in question. Nevertheless, there are a number of verbs in the English language that are still capable of forming simplex tenses in all the three kinds of statements (positive, negative and interrogative). For example the verbs 'be' and 'have' do not need to form complex tenses in interrogative and negative statements but they are only the few ones that still work according to the old system. In Old English, the majority of the verbs preserved the simplex tense structure not only in positive statements but also in interrogative and negative ones. As far as Spanish is concerned, a similar problem does not exist there, as the simplex tense pattern is preserved all the way. If we translate the above English example about Peter reading books into Spanish, we will obtain the following results: Positive – *Pedro lee libros dos veces a la semana*, Interrogative – *¿lee Pedro libros dos veces a la semana?* Negative – *Pedro no lee libros dos veces a la semana*. In Spanish when a tense is simplex it is simplex all the way, but when it is complex it is complex all the way too. So in this respect English should learn from Spanish, namely the terminology used to describe the English grammar should be more transparent in order that students learning this language could get a clearer picture of the temporal system of the language.

5. Conclusions

In the grammatical system of English and Spanish there are a number of areas where the two systems do not agree with each other. The lack of correspondence arises from the fact that the two languages were developing independently of each other and one simply cannot expect one-to-one corre-

spondence in all of the areas of their grammars. Such situation is often a source of misunderstandings and misinterpretations on the part of the student learning the two languages simultaneously. We have described particularly three areas where the English and Spanish terminology items do not correspond very well. The areas are: the gerund/gerundio, the present perfect tense /pretérito perfecto and simplex/complex tenses. The solution of the problems is not an easy task because the nomenclature cannot be changed at once. Moreover, it is part of national heritage and perhaps it should be left intact. What we aim at in our paper, however, is that we would like to make the teacher and their students aware of the problem areas because if one is aware of such things, one can see grammatical systems much more transparently. And if one sees the systems more transparently, one can teach them more transparently in order that one could learn them more transparently

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Differences in the descriptive apparatus of the English and Spanish grammar system often pose problems to students of Spanish and English, who learn the two languages simultaneously. The standard nomenclature used to describe the grammars of the two languages sometimes employs (seemingly) unrelated notions to describe similar, and often identical grammatical phenomena. It is enough to have a look at the temporal system of the two languages, for example. In the standard grammar of English the name 'present perfect' has been given to a grammatical tense that, among other functions, is used for recent completed actions whose result can be seen in the present. In Spanish, on the other hand, the grammatical tense that is used for similar actions is called 'pretérito perfecto' (English: preterite perfect or

past perfect). Another problem area is the use of the so called 'gerund'. Although the terms 'gerund' and 'gerundio' exist in English and Spanish respectively, they describe two different phenomena: whereas in English the term 'gerund' is a noun-like element and behaves like a noun (for example it can be the subject of a clause), in Spanish the term 'gerundio' is a verb-like element that forms an integral part of complex continuous tenses, and in fact is equivalent to the English present participle. Problems also arise due to the outdated division into simplex and complex tenses. For example, the English 'simple present' is a simplex tense only in positive statements, whereas in the majority of interrogative and negative statements it becomes a complex tense. In Spanish this problem does not exist, however. Therefore, the purpose of my presentation is to demonstrate how to deal with the above mentioned problems, how to make the language of classroom instruction more transparent and fun, and consequently how to facilitate students' learning.

Key words: *metalanguage, gerund/gerundio, praesent, praeteritum, simplex tenses, complex tenses*