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Gerunds and Perception Verbs

Both in English and Spanish perception verbs can appear followed by I.an NP and a Gerund, as in (1):

- (1) a. lo vi a Pedro_k [bailando una mazurka]_k
 him-Acc saw-1p,sg dance-Ger a mazurka
 b. I saw Pedro dancing a mazurka

The Gerund is predicated of the NP object, as indicated by the indices. Despite the superficial structural similarity between these sentences I will claim in this paper that whereas Spanish (1)a. receives one structural representation, its English equivalent is ambiguous between two structures. The one structure that both languages share is that in which the NP is the direct object and the gerund is an adjunct depictive. English has an extra possibility: the NP + Gerund can be interpreted as one constituent that denotes the type Event. These two structures represent two theta marking patterns (though not necessarily two theta grids): in the first case, the NP receives the only theta role assigned by the verb, that of Percept or Object of Perception; the gerund, being an adjunct, receives none. In the second case, the eventive gerund receives the Percept theta role. Experiencers can perceive individuals (pattern 1) or events (pattern 2); English is systematically ambiguous between both structures. Supporting evidence for this hypothesis is provided by:

1) extraction contrasts, predictable from the argument or adjunct status of the Gerund Phrase:

- (2) a. what_k did you see him eating t_k ?
 b. *qué_k lo viste comiendo t_k a Juan ? (*qué lo viste comiendo?)

2) presence of post-verbal expletives: since in Spanish the object position is obligatorily a Theta Position, no expletives should be

found there. In English, when the gerund is the sole argument it can license an expletive subject (i.e., in this case, the expletive will be a subject and not an object, hence ruled in):

- (3) a. *vi lloviendo / *vi la gorda armándose /
 b. I saw it raining / I heard the shit hitting the fan (in the room next door)

3) passivization: the postverbal NP will be the passive subject in Spanish but not in the eventive gerund in English; this NP is neither Theta Marked by the matrix verb nor case marked by it (as shown in Reuland 1985 and others):

- (4) a. Juan fue visto manejando un auto robado
 b. John was seen driving a stolen car: passivization disambiguates the construction in the direction of 4a.

but

- c. *it was seen raining (unambiguous eventive structure)

I will provide semantic evidence that supports the hypothesis put forward here, evidence based on the discussion of what constitutes the object of direct perception (Higginbotham 1983, Barss 1985, Gee 1977)

Finally, I will show that Spanish perception verbs can also take Event arguments; the difference with English lies in the fact that the Canonical Structural Realization for the type Event is the infinitive. I will conclude by showing that gerunds and infinitives play different roles in the complementation system of the two languages: English gerunds, being categorially underspecified, can surface as any category and can be either predicates or arguments. Spanish gerunds, on the other hand, are fully specified as purely verbal categories: as such they are always predicates, and can only be adjuncts or form complex predicates.