A single concept to teach mood contrast in Spanish

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Traditional methods for the teaching of the Spanish mood system are generally focused on the different morphosyntactic and semantic connections between the matrix and the embedded clause. This generally entails the provision of an extensive classification of subordinate clauses with the embedded verb in the subjunctive mood plus another classification with the exceptions which students need to learn/memorise in order to use them under controlled conditions. A preliminary study was carried out in which L2 learners were introduced to the subjunctive mood following a different approach (i.e. cognitive-operative). Based on the single binary opposition of declaration/non-declaration by Ruiz Campillo (2004), this approach provides a single operative value which can explain all the uses of the subjunctive without exception. The results were positive and showed that introducing Spanish mood contrast by means of this conceptual pair has the potential to improve learners' ability to select between moods.

Keywords: Spanish subjunctive, mood contrast, L1/L2 instruction, traditional/formalist approach, cognitive-operative approach, declaration/non-declaration

1. Introduction

The contrast between the indicative and the subjunctive moods is both one of the most taught and the most studied grammar structures in the Spanish foreign language classroom (e.g. *Creo que viene*^{IND} (I think he's coming) / *No creo que venga*^{SUB} (I don't think he's coming)). In spite of such pedagogical emphasis, research has consistently reported that, even after years of instruction, students select mood poorly in oral and written production (as described in Collentine's summary of previous studies, 2010). It has been argued that the lack of a marked subjunctive morphology in the L2 learners' L1 (e.g. English) might make its

acquisition more difficult (Collentine, 1995; Givón, 1979; Johnston, 1995; Lozano, 1972; Terrell, Baycroft, & Perrone, 1987).

This article describes a pilot study carried out as part of a larger investigation, which aims to examine the acquisition of the Spanish subjunctive by L2 learners with English as L1. It consisted of the introduction of the relatively new conceptual pair of “declaration/non-declaration” (Ruiz Campillo, 2004) as a single mechanism to select between the indicative and the subjunctive moods, which is at the same time grounded in a cognitive-operative approach (COA). Ruiz Campillo (2008) defines ‘declaration’ as the formal and explicit manifestation of what the subject knows (asserts) or thinks (assumes), that is, of what the subject contributes (fully or partially) towards the discourse. Therefore, ‘non-declaration’ would convey the opposite concept, that is, when the subject does not (want to) assert or assume the information contained in the proposition or embedded clause. The speaker will use the indicative when the proposition constitutes a declaration by the subject, that is, what s/he intends to assert or assume explicitly by means of the chosen matrix, and the subjunctive when it constitutes a non-declaration. The term ‘matrix’ within this context is redefined¹ by Ruiz Campillo (2008) as “the *meaning* of the word or group of words responsible for triggering mood in the subordinate clause, whether these words are explicit or not”. The conceptual pair of *declaration/non-declaration* is grounded in a cognitive-operative approach to teaching L2 grammar, and this study’s main aim is to examine whether a methodology based on this conceptual pair might improve the acquisition of Spanish mood contrast by L2 learners with English as L1.

An initial premise when beginning this investigation was that the most widespread method used to teach the Spanish subjunctive mood in the L2 classroom is based on a traditional or formalist approach, which is mostly prescriptive (i.e. introduction of set rules and the exceptions to those rules) and requires the memorization of structures formed by the combination of a matrix (i.e. main clause) and a proposition (i.e. embedded clause), which trigger the subjunctive mood in the latter, plus a list of exceptions in which similar (or the same) combinations trigger the indicative instead. Furthermore, this method does not seem to achieve the ‘learning’² of this mood in many cases, as Collentine (2010) pointed out.

The pilot study consisted of a lecture delivered to first- and second-year undergraduate students in which the universal concept of modality was introduced and explained first, to continue with the concept of linguistic mood and the

1. The term ‘matrix’ does not only refer to the syntactical term (i.e. the topmost verb in a sentence), but also includes its (cognitive) semantic traits.

2. By learning it should be understood the understanding of what this mood means plus the awareness of the situations where it is relevant to use it.

conceptual pair of declaration/non-declaration. This lecture was supplemented by an online task with the objective of finding out whether the students involved understood this conceptual pair. In addition, it also sought to find out whether the fact that some students might have had previous experience learning mood contrast by means of a traditional approach could affect their understanding of the new concept.

2. Background

Traditionally, the teaching of the Spanish subjunctive, both in L1 and L2 settings, has been grounded in the numerous linguistic traits of this mood, both in its own right and in contrast with the indicative. The cognitive-operative approach (COA), however, stems from cognitive grammar and claims that mood contrast in Spanish can be explained by means of the single binary opposition of *declaration/non-declaration*.

2.1 The morphosyntax, semantics and pragmatics of the Spanish subjunctive

The subjunctive mood has complex morphosyntactic features. These comprise, for instance, the fact that this mood is characteristic of embedded clauses. It can be selected by lexical or functional heads (e.g. nouns or prepositions); by a modal operator (i.e. adverb *no*, also called ‘polarity subjunctive’, or interrogation); and it can also appear without a trigger, substituting imperatives in the formal second person (i.e. *usted/ustedes*) and negative structures.

Another syntactic characteristic of some instances of the obligatory subjunctive (e.g. volitive verbs) is ‘obviation’ or ‘disjoint reference’. This phenomenon refers to a particular situation when the subjunctive cannot be used if there is co-reference between the subject of the matrix and the subject of the embedded clause, and therefore, a non-finite complement is used instead (e.g. *Quiero ir* vs. *Quiero que vayas* – I want to go vs. I want you to go).

In regards to the subjunctive morphology, it is important to note that, in Spanish, there is a whole set of verbal forms exclusive to this mood, which include four tenses, each comprising six different forms denoting person: present, imperfect (with two different forms ending in *-ra* and *-se*), perfect and pluperfect.³ This

3. The future and the future perfect subjunctive disappeared from the Spanish verbal system some centuries ago, although the future remained in a few set phrases (e.g. *Donde fueres*^{FUT.SUB} *haz lo que vieres*^{FUT.SUB} – When in Rome, do as the Romans do).

set of subjunctive forms works in parallel with the indicative system, which comprises nine tenses with its various forms. Two extra forms characteristic of the third mood: the imperative⁴ (i.e. non-formal second person singular and plural) should be added to this ensemble.

Research on mood contrast in Spanish from a semantic perspective has been characterised by the contrast of several (pairs of) concepts, in each of which normally the marked concept is associated with the indicative and the non-marked counterpart to the subjunctive.⁵

The concept used here of 'assertion', which can be defined as the commitment of the speaker to the truth of their utterance in communication, has its origin in the philosophical notion of assertion by Stalnaker (1978), where an assertion is produced by any new proposition provided by the participants of a conversation (i.e. which is added to the set of propositions that the participants view as being true at a specific point in the conversation). Typically, in Spanish, the indicative conveys assertion and the subjunctive conveys non-assertion, which represents the opposite concept, that is, the 'lack' of commitment of the speaker to the truth of their utterance in communication. However, these two concepts do not explain all the cases of indicative/subjunctive usage in Spanish,⁶ therefore, some authors have subsequently redefined the concepts of assertion and non-assertion in order to be able to explain most uses of mood contrast in Spanish (e.g. Lunn, 1995; Mejías-Bikandi, 1994, 1996).

In more recent studies (e.g. Farley, 2004; Haverkate, 2002; VanPatten, 1997), discourse-pragmatic matters concerning mood contrast have been recognised as playing an important role. These matters are relevant, for instance, when deciding between moods in many situations in which both indicative and subjunctive can alternate with a slight change of meaning or implications in what the speaker (or subject of the matrix) intends to communicate.

Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory (1986, 1995) proposes that relevance is an organising factor in linguistic communication. The opposition 'background / foreground' information within the embedded proposition is related to this idea of relevance (e.g. Ahern & Leonetti, 2004). The subjunctive mood conven-

4. The remainder of the imperative forms match with the subjunctive forms.

5. For instance, the concept of 'assertion' when related to the indicative mood is marked because it describes a characteristic or quality this mood has. However, the subjunctive is characterised for the lack of that quality, that is to say, 'non-assertion', which represents the unmarked concept.

6. An example to illustrate this: if someone utters the words "I love you", the concept of assertion dealt with here would imply that the statement is true or that it was true at a specific point in the conversation. However, it could perfectly have been always a lie and at no point be true.

tionally indicates defocalised information⁷ (i.e. background), whereas the indicative conventionally indicates focalised information (i.e. foreground). Haverkate (2002) claims that the indicative's pragmatic function is often one of assertion and stating what is most relevant to the topic, as opposed to the subjunctive, which indicates presupposed information and hence is less relevant. Other authors (e.g. Farley, 2004; VanPatten, 1997) also support this claim: that the subjunctive conventionally indicates defocalised or background information. The following two sentences, which only differ in the mood of the embedded verb, illustrate this idea:

- (1) *No sabía que se habían casado.* (I did not know that they got^{IND} married)
- (2) *No sabía que se hubieran casado.* (I did not know that they got^{SUB} married)

In sentence (1) the information contained in the proposition (i.e. they got married) is believed to be new and thus relevant for the speaker or/and the hearer, and that is why the indicative mood is used. However, in sentence (2), the same information expressed by the proposition is presupposed, that is, it has been previously shared by both, speaker and hearer, and therefore the subjunctive is selected instead.

2.2 The cognitive-operative approach

The cognitive-operative approach (COA) brings in an innovative approach to study (and teach) mood contrast in Spanish. It is grounded in Cognitive Grammar (CG), which is grounded in Cognitive Linguistics (CL). One of the CL's central tenets is that language is primarily linked to human cognition and general cognitive processes such as perception, attention and categorisation (Cadierno & Hijazo-Gascón, 2013).

CL views grammar as inherently meaningful and not just a simple system of formal rules or principles. A major phenomenon of CL is referred to as 'construal', which might be defined as "the relationship between a speaker (or hearer) and a situation that he conceptualizes and portrays" (Langacker, 1987, pp. 487–488). Therefore, the speaker has a central role in how s/he conceptualises or construes a specific situation or event. On the other hand, languages themselves also make available conventional ways of construing situations and events, which speakers adopt and use when linguistically coding their ideas.

7. This defocalised information refers to information which has been previously shared by both the speaker and the hearer, so it is not new to either. On the other hand, focalised information is new to one (or both) of the interlocutors.

Relevant for pedagogical purposes is the proposal that general principles of perception are paired with other forms or representation, such as graphic representation. Grammar is explained to learners via graphic aids, and always considering language structures as symbols or associations between signifier and signified, which are natural conceptual representations.

CG has also been characterised as a communicative grammar. This alludes to the fact that every single combination between meaning and form selected by the speaker has the primary purpose of communicating a ‘message’ to the hearer.

Cognitive-operative grammar (COG) is based on CG. According to Ruiz Campillo (2007) COG is a grammar of basic and unalterable meanings with which the speaker takes grammar decisions in order to communicate. Llopis-García (2011, p.107) adds that COG does not resolve around the description of the uses of language but seeks the common values among those uses so that they can operate under a minimum number of conditions within the maximum number of contexts.

Therefore, the added term ‘operative’ refers not only to the fact that this approach has a strong didactic component but also to the fact that it seeks a single (operative) value in order to explain the logic of every grammar point to L2 learners. This operative value can be used as a mechanism to decide between the different meaning-form combinations characteristic of the language. This basic single operative value is considered to be the ‘prototype’ concept, which in the case of mood selection in Spanish is the conceptual pair of declaration/non-declaration.

Ruiz Campillo (2008) further explains this prototype concept with the aid of the following examples. The marked concept of ‘declaration’ is illustrated by the first three sentences:

- (3) *Yo sé que te quiere*^{IND} (I know s/he loves you) – the speaker asserts that s/he loves you.
- (4) *Elena piensa que te quiere*^{IND} (Elena thinks s/he loves you) – the subject of the matrix (i.e. Elena) assumes that she (or the subject of the embedded verb, if different) loves you.
- (5) *Es evidente que te quiere*^{IND} (It’s obvious that s/he loves you) – anybody can assert that s/he loves you.

However, when the speaker cannot or does not want to declare a proposition, s/he will choose the subjunctive and a matrix structure appropriate to the situation.

- (6) *No creo que te quiera*^{SUB} (I don’t think I/he/she love/s you) – the speaker does not (want to) assert or assume that the speaker/he/she loves you, but quite the opposite, that the speaker does not believe it.

- (7) *Es posible que te quiera*^{SUB} (It's possible that I/he/she love/s you) – the speaker does not (want to) assert or assume that the speaker (i.e. “I”)/he/she loves you, but only that it is possible.
- (8) *Marta se alegra de que te quiera*^{SUB} (Marta is glad that I/he/she love/s you) – Marta does not (want to) assert or assume that the speaker (i.e. “I”)/he/she love/s you; she just provides comment on that information.

2.3 The instruction of the Spanish subjunctive

As mentioned at the beginning of Section 2, the instruction of the Spanish subjunctive has been mostly grounded in the description of its linguistic features: morphosyntactic and semantic (lexical/functional). Therefore, these features have been the basis of the grammatical explanations and practice exercises/tasks when developing courses, textbooks or websites.⁸ This is true for both L1 and L2 instruction.

Within L2 settings, which are the concern of this study, the Spanish subjunctive mood is mostly introduced to students by means of a formalist approach. This consists of the explicit introduction of this mood's morphology and syntax by providing some examples (i.e. sentences) to explain its use in which semantic notions, such as ‘possibility’ or ‘hypotheticality’, are also presented. Usually, this introduction takes place at a quite early stage of proficiency (i.e. at level A2+ or B1 as described by the CEFR).⁹

A typical lesson to introduce the Spanish subjunctive mood would include, firstly, the presentation of several (subordinated) sentences with the embedded verb in subjunctive, possibly followed by the request that students translate them into their L1 to ensure the comprehension of what they communicate. This will most probably be followed by the introduction of relevant metalanguage (i.e. mood, subjunctive, indicative, main clause and subordinate clause) to continue with some tables in which its morphology, in contrast with the indicative, is presented. It is worth noting that in most cases, when the subjunctive mood is

8. Some of the numerous websites which attest to this claim include the following:

<http://zoniaele.com/subjuntivo/>

<http://studyspanish.com/grammar/lessons/subj1>

http://www.123teachme.com/learn_spanish/present_subjunctive_intro

<http://grammar.spanishintexas.org/verbs/subjunctive/>

<http://www.elsubjuntivo.com#>

And some textbooks include: Gramática de Uso del Español (SM); Gramática en Diálogo (Enclave); Gramática Española Básica (Edinumen); etc.

9. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

introduced, L2 learners are not aware that all the tenses they have learned so far (i.e. present and past tenses) belong to the indicative mood.

A salient characteristic of this approach is the fact that students are presented with a list or classification of structures (i.e. combinations of main and subordinated clause) which trigger the subjunctive mood in the embedded verb based on semantic (sometimes functional) explanations. Some examples are provided below to illustrate this:

(9) *Espero que se recupere*^{PRES.SUBJ.} *pronto.* [It conveys a wish]
(I hope s/he will get well soon)

(10) *Quizá compren*^{PRES.SUBJ.} *esa casa en la playa.* [It conveys a possibility]
(Perhaps they will buy that house on the beach)

However, this classification usually includes another classification with the 'exceptions', which represent instances of similar or the same structures that trigger the indicative instead, such as in the next sentence:

(11) *Quizá compran*^{PRES.IND.} *esa casa en la playa.* [It conveys more certainty]
(Perhaps they will buy that house on the beach)

By means of some drill and elicitation exercises, the morphology and uses of the subjunctive are then practised and entrenched. These generally consist of a series of isolated sentences in which the embedded verb is deleted and replaced by a gap. The student then needs to fill that gap with the correct form of the infinitive shown in brackets. Lastly, other contextualised and interactive activities where more spontaneous production of the target form is encouraged might be completed by students.

In fact, as part of the larger investigation this pilot study was included in, class observation¹⁰ was carried out at every level of proficiency in order to examine how mood contrast was introduced. Of the teachers whose lessons were observed, four were also involved in the pilot study. The teaching in all classes followed the formalist method described above, that is, the deductive introduction of classifications of subjunctive structures within specific contexts plus some controlled practice in order to learn this mood's morphology and uses.

Possible issues that may arise when attempting to achieve the 'learning' of Spanish mood contrast by means of a formalist approach include, for instance, the fact that it is introduced at quite an early stage of proficiency (i.e. A2+ in most cases), as mentioned above. Some authors (Collentine, 1995; Pereira, 1996) have claimed that when students are introduced to this mood their syntactical knowl-

10. Class observation was carried out in second-, third- and fifth-year classes.

edge is not developed enough to understand the syntactical features of complex sentences. This is what Givón (1979) called the ‘pre-syntactic stage’, which is characterised by the use of simple sentences comprised of a topic and a comment (e.g. Yo estudio – I study). An example of this issue is that students at this stage tend to use structures from their L1 instead of the target language structures. Within the context of this study, the L1 is English, so students tend to use either an indicative form with clausal complements or infinitival complements rather than a subjunctive subordinate structure. The following two sentences illustrate the above:

- (12) *No creo que *tienen^{PRES.IND.} el libro.* (instead of *tengan^{PRES.SUBJ.}*)
(I don’t think they have the book)
- (13) *Quiero que *tú *estudiar^{INF.}* (instead of *Quiero que estudies^{PRES.SUBJ.}*)
(I want *that you to study)

Another obvious issue is the fact that L2 learners need to memorise a lengthy list of structures (i.e. combinations of main and subordinate clause) which trigger the subjunctive in the embedded verb, plus another list of exceptions in which the same or similar structures trigger the indicative instead. These structures are based on morphosyntactic and/or semantic connections between the main clause or matrix and the subordinate clause or proposition, but do not take into consideration other relevant discourse-pragmatic traits characteristic of mood contrast in Spanish.

Morphosyntactic explanations include, for instance, co-reference or negation. This is a negative polarity effect: some verbs trigger the indicative in the embedded verb when used in positive form but the subjunctive when used in negative form, as illustrated in the next two sentences:

- (14) *Creo que voy^{PRES.IND.} a salir esta noche.*
(I think I’m going out tonight)
- (15) *No creo que vaya^{PRES.SUBJ.} a salir esta noche.*
(I don’t think I’m going out tonight)

Semantic-based (and/or functional/lexical) explanations include a lengthy list of terms, such as ‘possibility’, ‘doubt’, ‘intention’, ‘emotion/feelings’, ‘subjectivity’, ‘uncertainty’, ‘opinion’, ‘hope’, ‘wish’, ‘improbability’, ‘command’, ‘fact’, ‘untrue’, ‘indefinite’, ‘hypothetical’, etc. In some cases, in which none of the above explanations may be applied, a possible answer might be in the form of ‘because it sounds better or more native-like’.

It is not uncommon to find grammar reference sites in the Internet (as illustrated at the beginning of this section), which are accessed by teachers, in order to search for explanations and examples, or by learners, in order to widen their

grammatical knowledge, for instance. The explanations provided by these sites generally include a good deal of inconsistencies or dubieties that might be quite perplexing for learners. Some examples include: “the subjunctive mood is used to express *everything except* certainty and objectivity”, “a list of clauses *commonly* used...”, “*Sometimes*, the main verb...”, “this list is quite long, and this *isn’t even a complete list!*,”¹¹ etc.

The cognitive-operative approach (COA) to introduce mood contrast in the Spanish L2 classroom is relatively recent (i.e. Ruiz Campillo, 2004) and represents a total change to what most teachers have been doing in the language classroom.

COA is grounded in cognitive grammar and claims that the conceptual pair of *declaration/non-declaration* (Ruiz Campillo, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, and Llopis García, Espinosa, & Ruiz Campillo, 2013) can explain all the cases of mood contrast without exception. Therefore, this method abandons the necessity to memorise lengthy lists of combinations of matrices and propositions which take the subjunctive (or indicative) plus other lists of exceptions in which the same (or very similar) matrices take the opposite mood. It also abandons the use of numerous semantic terms which have been associated with the subjunctive, such as hypotheticality or unreality, that cannot be applied in many cases (i.e. exceptions) causing confusion to learners.

Therefore, the conceptual pair of *declaration/non-declaration* represents the only mechanism that learners need to use in order to select between indicative and subjunctive. If the proposition constitutes a declaration by the speaker or subject, the embedded verb will be in indicative, whereas if the proposition constitutes a non-declaration, the embedded verb will be in subjunctive.¹²

A technique that might be employed to help learners to understand initially how this concept works consists of replacing the matrix for ‘The speaker or subject asserts or assumes that’. If the change allows us to maintain the same (or similar) meaning, we are dealing with a declaration, and if this change does not allow us to maintain the same (or similar) meaning, then we are dealing with a non-declaration. Below, there are two examples to illustrate this technique:

(16) *Creo que tengo fiebre.* (I think I have a fever)

(16") *Afirmo/Asumo que tengo fiebre.* (I assert/assume that I have a fever)

(17) *Quiere que te quedes en casa.* (She wants you to stay home)

11. Examples taken from <https://studyspanish.com/grammar/lessons/subj1> (last viewed 02/08/19)

12. A declaration is the formal and explicit manifestation of what the subject knows (asserts) or thinks (assumes), that is, of what the subject contributes (fully or partially) towards the discourse (Ruiz Campillo, 2008).

(17") *Afirma/Supone que te quedas en casa.* (She asserts/assumes that you stay home)

In sentences (16) and (16)' the change works (i.e. thinking and assuming have similar meaning: the speaker is declaring that s/he has a fever). However, in sentences (17) and (17)' the change does not work because the meaning of both matrices is different: wanting something to happen does not correspond to what the subject of the matrix asserts or assumes that will happen (or it is going to happen), so it is not a declaration.

Since a traditional or formalist approach does not seem to successfully achieve a good understanding of mood contrast in Spanish by L2 learners (even after years of instruction), a pilot experiment was carried out in order to test the COA based on Ruiz Campillo's conceptual pair of *declaration/non-declaration* among undergraduate students of a UK university.

3. Pilot experiment

This pilot study was undertaken as part of a PhD investigation. It consisted of the introduction of the conceptual pair of *declaration/non-declaration* within a university setting. This introduction was carried out during a lecture and the results were analysed qualitatively by means of class observation. The aim was to examine whether this method could have the potential to improve the understanding and use of Spanish mood contrast among L2 learners.

3.1 Participants

A total of 144 first- and second-year students participated in this study. These participants were studying a university degree in which Spanish was one of the subjects, not necessarily the main subject. They were grouped in three different levels: 16 were first-year beginner students with no previous knowledge of mood contrast, 50 were first-year non-beginner students, among those, some had previous knowledge of mood contrast, and lastly, 78 were second-year students¹³ with previous knowledge of mood contrast.

Four university teachers were involved in the introduction of this conceptual pair to the student participants. In order to do this, all of them received two training sessions in advance in which the COA and the pilot's procedure were explained in detail.

13. The 78 second-year students were grouped in three smaller groups of 23, 27 and 28 students, respectively.

3.2 Materials

By means of a Powerpoint presentation, the student participants were introduced to the conceptual pair of *declaration/non-declaration*. This presentation was delivered in English and comprised numerous visual illustrations to explain some key concepts, such as modality, as well as numerous examples in both English and Spanish in order to understand the different mechanisms to linguistically convey modality.

Following that presentation, student participants completed an online practice quiz. This exercise was extracted from the textbook employed in the first- and second-year courses,¹⁴ which follows a COA to explaining grammar. It consisted of a series of contextualised sentences describing a police interrogation which implied a ‘play on words’ of the verb ‘to declare’, since it was used in both senses: ‘testify’ and ‘assert/assume’ the proposition of the embedded clause. After replying to the question: ‘Is the speaker declaring in the following sentences?’ students needed to explain why they had answered yes or no.

3.3 Procedure

The Powerpoint presentation began by presenting the universal concepts of modality and linguistic moods. Comparisons with the English language were drawn so students could identify the different moods in their L1. Furthermore, some relevant terminology to widen the students’ metalanguage was also introduced at this stage (i.e. matrix/main clause and proposition/subordinate clause) with the aid of examples and images.

The next step was the presentation of some compound sentences sharing the same proposition (i.e. John will come tomorrow):

- (18) I know John will come tomorrow.
- (19) I assume John will come tomorrow.
- (20) It’s possible John will come tomorrow.
- (21) I don’t think John will come tomorrow.

Students were then asked to explain the difference between sentences (18)/(19) and (20)/(21). The students were expected to answer based on the (apparent) lexical/semantic meaning of the main clause or matrix. For instance, for sentence

14. Gramática Básica del Estudiante de Español. Alonso R., Castañeda A., Martínez P., Miquel L., Ortega J., & Ruiz Campillo J.P. (2011, new edition: exercise 1, p.168) Difusión.

(20), it was expected that some students mentioned that it was a 'possibility' or that the speaker was unsure whether John would come the next day.

They were subsequently told by the lecturer that the sole difference was that only in the first two sentences the speaker was 'saying' that John will come tomorrow. This is, essentially, what the concept of declaration entails, and it was introduced to these students using the following words:

Declaration takes place when the speaker or subject of the matrix *asserts* or *assumes* that a proposition (i.e. piece of information the speaker intends to communicate) is (or will come) true, according to her/his knowledge.

It needs to be stressed that what is really relevant regarding this conceptual pair is the speaker's perspective¹⁵ on what s/he is communicating (i.e. proposition), and not whether the proposition is true or false, has been (or is going to be) realised or not, etc. In sentence (18), the speaker asserts that John will come tomorrow, and in (19), the speaker assumes the same information. However, in sentence (20), the speaker is saying both that John will and will not come tomorrow, and in sentence (21), the speaker is saying nearly the opposite, but not quite. Therefore, in the last two sentences, the speaker does not (cannot or does not want to) 'declare' that John will come tomorrow.

Other straightforward sentences reinforcing the opposite idea (i.e. non-declaration) were then shown to students. These also shared the same proposition in order to facilitate the understanding of the new conceptual pair.

(22) I want it to rain.

(23) I hope it rains.

(24) It's not likely to rain.

As expected, all the students answered 'no' to the question 'Is the speaker "saying" or "declaring" that it rains or it will rain in any of the above sentences?' Now learners were told that whenever the speaker wants to declare a proposition s/he uses the indicative, but when s/he does not want to declare a proposition s/he uses the subjunctive. They were also told that this explanation can be applied to all cases of mood contrast in Spanish.

Lastly, in order to consolidate the concept, students were presented with all the sentences which had been used as examples throughout the presentation and were asked to answer 'yes' or 'no' to the question 'Is the speaker *declaring* in the

15. Concept of *contrual* as defined by Langacker (1987): The relationship between a speaker (or hearer) and a situation that he conceptualizes and portrays.

following situations? This introduction did not require the students to produce the form, only to notice it.

In order to examine whether the concepts of *declaration* and *non-declaration* had been understood, since there was a 50% chance of guessing the right answer, it was essential that students provide an explanation to justify their response.

This introductory session finished with the online practice quiz described at the beginning of Section 3.2.

Data collection was undertaken qualitatively by the researcher by means of a diary and by direct observation.

3.4 Results

Most students¹⁶ at all levels (i.e. A2, A2+ and B1) seemed to have understood the conceptual pair of declaration/non-declaration after the presentation, since they were able to answer the question ‘Is the speaker declaring in the following sentences?’ correctly. However, when it was time to explain their responses, there were some obvious differences between students with no previous knowledge of mood contrast and students who had studied the subjunctive through a traditional/formalist approach.

The beginner group was quite small (i.e. 16), therefore, students had more opportunities to participate in the discussion. They mostly provided logical responses and agreed with the clarifications and further explanations presented by the teacher. One student even challenged the concept when presented with one particular situation (i.e. sentence 21: *I don't think John will come tomorrow*). She asked whether the speaker was in fact declaring that *John will not come tomorrow*. She was then provided with the following explanation: if the speaker were to declare that *John will not come tomorrow*, s/he would have chosen that proposition¹⁷ and not the one presented in the example, which was in the positive form. In sentence (21), the speaker is not declaring that John will come tomorrow because s/he cannot or does not want to assert or assume that information. When the speaker chooses to use that particular matrix (i.e. *I don't think*), s/he implies that, according to his/her knowledge, John will do the opposite of coming tomorrow, but that information cannot be asserted (nor even assumed) because the

16. We need to consider the possibility that not everybody might be willing to share their answers/views in front of a big class and that only the most confident students might. Therefore, it could only be inferred that most students understood the conceptual pair when the introduction took place, since just a few replied and others just confirmed their concurrence.

17. I think John won't come tomorrow.

speaker does not have enough confidence (or information) to declare that *John will not come tomorrow*.

At that point, it was important to remind learners that what the speaker or subject decides to 'declare' (or not) is the information expressed by the subordinate clause and not the information expressed by the matrix clause, since the latter is always a declaration and thus always goes in indicative.

When the beginner students completed the practice exercise and were asked to provide explanations for their 'yes/no' answers, these mostly related to the just introduced concepts of declaration/non-declaration and were generally correct. The following two sentences illustrate this:

- (25) "*Creo que Jenaro Orol ya está en otro país*"
("I believe Jenaro Orol is already abroad")
- (26) "*Es posible que Lourdes Milo todavía esté en España*"
(It is possible that Lourdes Milo is still in Spain)

For both sentences students at beginner level answered correctly: in sentence (25) the speaker is declaring the proposition and in sentence (26) the speaker is not declaring. This was in fact easy to guess due to the slight difference in morphology between the embedded verbs. However, when these students were asked to explain the reasons for their answers, they used the recently learned concept of *declaration*. Thus, they recognised that, in sentence (25), the speaker 'supposes'/'believes' that Jenaro is abroad, but in sentence (26) the speaker does not know and for that reason he uses "it is possible" and the subjunctive. There is an interesting contrast with students who had previous experience learning the Spanish subjunctive by means of a traditional approach. Although responding accurately to the same question,¹⁸ they tended to employ morphosyntactic and semantic explanations typical of this traditional approach (e.g. 'it's a possibility', 'it's a fact', 'it's not true', etc.).

The first-year students with previous experience met in one group of 50 students. This larger size was managed by using a game-based learning platform (i.e. www.kahoot.com) so all students could complete the practice activity after the presentation. This platform has the advantage of gathering the results in the form of percentages when the quiz has been completed. As a matter of fact, 68.5% of these 50 students answered correctly to the question *Is the speaker declaring in the following situations?* in all the situations presented in the activity (i.e. nine situations), which means that this conceptual pair was mostly understood by over two thirds of the attendees. Very similar results were observed with the second-year

18. *Is the speaker declaring in the following sentences?*

groups. However, in order to consolidate this conceptual pair as a mechanism to select between moods, a follow-up study, which examined not only the comprehension abilities but also the production abilities, was necessary.

4. Final remarks

Overall, the results of this pilot study were positive, since the first encounter with the conceptual pair of declaration/non-declaration showed an understanding by the students who were involved. Only when these needed to provide an explanation for their choice of mood, some differences between groups emerged. These were mostly related to the fact that students with previous experience learning the subjunctive by means of a traditional or formalist approach tended to use concepts characteristic of that approach in their explanations, despite having just been introduced to the new conceptual pair, which could easily explain all their choices without exception.

Teachers involved in this experiment were provided with two training sessions in order to ensure that this conceptual pair was clearly understood and to listen to their thoughts and concerns. We need to take into consideration that the traditional approach is the most popular among the teachers involved in this investigation, so the cognitive-operative approach introduced in this pilot study was also new to them and implied a substantial change in the way they teach grammar. These teachers agreed with this new methodology's potential to improve their students' understanding of mood contrast in Spanish. However, a clear outcome involved the fact that further training would be required in order for this new method to be properly introduced to students and reinforced over the different levels of proficiency. Most importantly, in order for this method to work, L2 learners would need consistency during the whole learning process. Therefore, it would be vitally important that most teachers, if not all, be on board when it comes to introduce mood contrast in their classes by means of this conceptual pair.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that only the interpretation/comprehension of this conceptual pair was tested at this stage. Furthermore, only instances of the obligatory subjunctive were employed, which represent more clear-cut cases of declaration and non-declaration. Therefore, an obvious next step would involve the examination of this method's operability by means of production tasks and including other cases of the optional subjunctive. In fact, a more systematic follow-up study is taking place at the time of publication in which not only the comprehension of this conceptual pair but also its production are investigated with highly promising results.

In conclusion, it can be established that a cognitive-operative approach to introducing Spanish mood contrast to L2 learners with English as L1 by means of the conceptual pair of declaration/non-declaration has the potential to improve these learners' ability to select between moods. In addition, this approach encourages learners to reflect about what mood means and recognise the importance of the speaker's (or subject of the matrix) perspective when linguistically communicating ideas. What this means is that rather than memorising the numerous different structures that trigger (or not) the subjunctive in the embedded verb based on numerous morphosyntactic and semantic connections, the learner has a single mechanism available with which s/he can decide which mood is used in each situation.

Inasmuch as this conceptual pair represents both a relatively recent theory (i.e. 2004) and a substantial change in the way teachers introduce grammar in the language classroom, we need to consider all the challenges that this involves. The lack of publications embracing this new approach and the need of teacher training result in the dilemma between investing the time, effort and resources needed to implement it, and leaving things as they are.

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