Estar Predication in Spanish.
Scales, Adjectives and Participles

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1. Estar predication. The distribution of ser and estar in Spanish is traditionally analyzed in terms of the Individual or Stage Level nature of the predication (Escandell and Leonetti, 2002; Marín, 2000; 2004). Although other contexts for estar have been identified (Mangialavore, 2013), all Adjectives (Marta está feliz) and Participles (Los cordones están atados) are sensitive to this first mentioned use. The present study focuses on the first context of estar predications, and tries to provide a scalar account that explains and predicts all uses.

2. Proposal. The proposed interpretation is that estar predicates are determined by an interval on a scale. This interval is formalized by means of a difference function, similar to the one proposed by Kennedy and Levin (2008) and Baglini (2012). This difference function takes the following form.

\[ r_\Delta = \lambda x \lambda e. r(x) (\text{init} (e)) (\text{fin} (e)) \]

The function \( r_\Delta \) takes an individual \( x \) in the event \( e \), and returns the scalar distance between two degrees. These two points on the scale correspond to the degree projected by the individual (initial point) and a final point, which interpretation varies depending on whether the predication involves a closed or an open scale. The final point of the interval also acts as a probe for a different truth-value segment of the scale that the individual could project, generating the temporal readings of these predicates. Crucially, it is not necessary that this different truth-value is ever projected by the individual.

Once this difference function is applied to the pos morpheme (Kennedy 1997, Husband 2011) necessary for the derivation, we obtain the following morpheme.

\[ \text{pos} = \lambda x \lambda e. r_\Delta (x) (e) \geq \text{stmt} (e) \]

The morpheme takes an individual \( x \) and an event \( e \), and compares the interval \( r_\Delta \) generated by the measuring function and compares to a standard interval associated with the event. In the case of baseline interpretation of estar, this standard is any value \( \neq 0 \).

3. Adjectives and Participles. A homomorphic relationship can be established between scales and verbal event structure (Kennedy, 1999; Kennedy and McNally, 1999). In this manner, we can predict that the proposed account of estar will also be able to account for the distribution of estar with Participles. Adjectives always denote states. Participles on the other hand, do not. In order to be a candidate for estar predication, a Participle will need to determine a state, and also an event that delimits it, so the estar probe can access the different truth-value segment of the scale. If they have this structure, all that remains is that the estar measuring function can access a different truth-condition segment on the scale, just like in the case of Adjectives.

4. In the case of closed-scale adjectives, Interpretative Economy (Kennedy 2007) predicts that estar will make use of the endpoints of the scale in order to generate the necessary interval, not being context sensitive. In this manner, only the individual’s accessibility of the opposite truth-condition segment of the scale is necessary (1a). As predicted, Participles that also project a closed scale, behave in the same way
(1)  a. La puerta está abierta. b. Los cordones están atados.

Non-gradable Adjectives (2a) and Participles (2b), if considered as having a binary scale, also follow this pattern.

(2)  a. Pepe está vivo. B. La luz está encendida.

In this case of closed scales, there is no context-independent points for the interval, so pragmatics need to take over, as per IE. This involves not only the necessity of the access to a different truth-value segment, but also a process that allows this access – Color adjectives (3a,3b), rico (3c) and famoso (3d) are examples that display the importance of this process.

(3)  a. Marta está roja porque ha tomado mucho el sol. b.*Mi bicicleta está roja porque la he pintado.

Participles are also sensitive to this restriction (conocido).

5. Conclusion

A scalar account of estar based on intervals on a scale, and the homomorphism that can be established between scales and event structure, allows us to account for all estar predications that involve temporal/aspectual characteristics of both Adjectives and Participles. This provides us with a powerful that could be extended to the modal uses of estar, as well as account for the distribution of copulas in Passive and Progressive constructions.

References


