
SPANISH VERB SUPPORT CONSTRUCTIONS FROM A LEARNER PERSPECTIVE

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Few studies exist on verb-support constructions (VSC) from a didactic perspective; however, the scant evidence available suggests that learners tend to employ these structures less frequently than native speakers. Didactic materials and dictionaries provide only very superficial treatment of these collocations. This corpus-based study of VSC in Spanish identifies a group of typical items for a specific genre (social sciences), and then describes certain morphosyntactic and semantic challenges that the extracted corpus examples present to English and German-speaking learners. Using these same concordances, we then develop model didactic exercises to focus on form, meaning and use.

Key words: verb-noun collocations; verb-support constructions; corpus analysis.

Pocos estudios existen sobre las construcciones con verbo soporte (CVS) desde una perspectiva didáctica. No obstante, la poca evidencia a nuestro alcance indica que los aprendices emplean estas estructuras con una frecuencia menor comparada con los hablantes nativos. Los recursos didácticos y los diccionarios proporcionan únicamente un tratamiento superficial de estas colocaciones. Este estudio de corpus de las CVS en español tiene como objetivo identificar los ítems más típicos para un registro particular (las ciencias sociales) y describir las dificultades morfosintácticas y semánticas que los ejemplos extraídos presentan a los aprendices de habla inglesa y alemana. Utilizando las mismas

concordancias, desarrollamos ejercicios didácticos que enfocan las formas, el sentido y el uso.

Palabras clave: colocaciones verbonominales; construcciones con verbo soporte; análisis de corpus.

1. Introduction

For some time, studies in phraseology have underlined the significant contribution of formulaic language to the achievement of fluency (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994) and, consequently, the need for language teaching contexts to dedicate increased attention and resources to the teaching of formulaic language. This study inquires into one aspect of formulaic language, noun-verb collocations with a so-called delexical, or support verb. These structures, common to many languages, have been variously termed: *formas descompuestas verbonominales* (Dubský, 1965); *stretched verb constructions* (Allerton, 2002); *Stützverbkonstruktion, Streckformen des Verbes* (Starke, 1975); *light verbs, verbos ligeros* (Bosque, 2001); *construcciones con verbo soporte* (Bustos Plaza, 2005); *construcciones con verbo de apoyo* (Alonso Ramos, 2004); *construcciones con verbo vicario* (Mendívil Giró, 1999); *construction à verbs support* (Giry-Schneider, 1987); *Funktionsverbgefüge* (von Polenz, 1963); *support verb constructions* (Danlos, 1992); *complex verb structures* (Nickel 1968); *unidades sintagmáticas verbales* (Ruiz Gurillo, 2001); *verbo-nominal predicates* (Ten Cate & Vandeweghe, 1991); *composite predicates* (Cattel, 1983; Álvarez Rodríguez, 2006); *perifrastični predikat* (Konjik, 2005; 2006).

Despite being considered very common in Germanic, Romance and Slavic languages, these structures have received little attention in didactic materials, dictionaries, or even in research into learner language. Altenberg and Granger (2001) investigated the use of the verb *make* in verb support constructions (VSC) by learners of English and concluded that learners under use VSC in comparison to native speakers. The authors suggest that this may be due to lack of awareness of the importance of VSC, and insecurity with regard to morphosyntactic characteristics and semantic

subtleties. From a learner's perspective, the morphosyntactic characteristics of VSC (i.e. article use, pluralisation, admittance of modifiers etc.) are not especially salient. Easily overlooked, they are unlikely to be correctly stored and retrieved without specific attention devoted to them in a didactic context (Laufer, 2001). Due to their relatively high level of semantic transparency, VSC arguably prove a greater hurdle in productive than receptive terms. The study's first objective is to identify which VSC are characteristically used in texts belonging to the social science genre and, for this purpose, an electronic corpus of written academic texts was compiled. The second step involved the analysis of concordances to extract morphosyntactic information for each VSC considered to be of particular relevance for the correct acquisition of form by English and German-speaking learners of Spanish. Finally, didactic exercises were developed which provide focus on aspects of form meaning and use of selected VSC from this corpus.

2. Semantic and Syntactic Characteristics of VSC¹

Particular emblematic features can be discerned from the terms used for VSC above, such as the verb-noun unit, the extended predicate construction, and the desemantised nature of the verb. Although this phraseological phenomenon has been defined with slight variations depending on the author and language studied, an operational definition may be formulated as follows. Central examples of verb support constructions (VSC) are formed by a verb and a deverbal or deadjectival noun. The prototypical structures in the three languages used in this study are: support verb + direct object (*tomar precauciones; make a statement; eine Entscheidung treffen*), and support verb + prepositional object (*poner en duda; fall into decay; zu Ende bringen*)². Nevertheless, Romance (and Germanic) languages very commonly display VSC examples with a structure of support verb + preposition + adjective (*poner en común; poner en claro*). Pfeleiderer et al. (2000: 79, 101) include these structures in their study of Italian and maintain the adjective functions as a noun: *mettere/ avere in comune (questi due tavoli hanno in comune il colore scuro)*. Due to their apparent frequency, we consider it advantageous for didactic purposes to include such examples in

this study. Further, we find that while a VSC may be formed by verb +direct object in one language, the equivalent expression in another language may involve the structure verb + preposition + adjective (e.g. *poner de relieve; to make clear; deutlich machen*). We consider that a broader, more inclusive view of the structure is of greater didactic use in a study which involves the analysis of linguistic data from a multilingual perspective.

Arbitrary restrictions (typical of any collocation) exist upon the selection of the VSC verb (for example, *tomar providencias; dar una disposición, adoptar una determinación*). In free combinations or verb-noun collocations, the support verb displays its full sense, or a semantically tailored sense (Allerton, 2002), which is largely lost in the VSC, or is at least only present in a vague, metaphorical manner. Rather, the verb is known for its ability to express aspect, causativity and voice, in addition to being the carrier of grammatical markers. The VSC noun does not express a figurative meaning and appears in other contexts (in free combinations) with the same meaning.

The structure displays restricted collocational characteristics: synonyms and antonyms of the support verb in its full lexical meaning do not collocate with the noun (*tomar/coger el vaso; tomar/*coger una decisión*). However, support verbs do have their own synonyms within the VSC, and series of synonymous verbs may be formed: *have, take, make, give a guess; tener, coger, dar miedo; die Verantwortung haben, tragen*.

Perhaps the most emblematic feature of VSC is the relationship with a simple verb. This is more complex than a mere etymological correspondence; indeed, authors such as Bustos Plaza (2005) and Pirela and Varela (1999) distinguish up to four types. Firstly, the correspondence may be both morphological and semantic: *dar un abrazo, abrazar; to make a wish, to wish; Überlegungen anstellen, überlegen*. Secondly, a semantic correspondence may be found but without the morphological correspondence: *dar una clase, enseñar; set fire, ignite; den Tod finden, sterben*. Conversely, a morphological relationship may be found, but without a semantic relationship: *tener ganas, ganar; to take the initiative, to initiate; einen Fehler machen, fehlen*. Finally, a VSC without a homologous verb is

the fourth possible relationship; in this case, the VSC fills a lexical gap, which is of particular didactic relevance when a simple verb equivalent does exist in the learner's native language, as in the case of *dar una pista*, **pistar*; *give a clue*, **to clue*; but: *einen Hinweis geben*, *hinweisen*. In our view, a fifth type of correspondence may be added: VSC which express only one of the possible meanings which the morphologically related simple verb is capable of expressing (*dar cita*, *citar*; *Verständnis haben*, *verstehen*; *make a statement*, *to state*).

A second well known characteristic of VSC is the noun's facilitation of adjectival modifiers (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Nickel, 1968): *hacer un elogio encendido*; *tributar a alguien un recibimiento caluroso* (Koike, 2001). While VSC may admit adjectival modification, in the homologous simple verb construction, modification of the verb by the adverbial derivative of the same adjective is often not possible: *he had a critical fall*, **he fell critically*; *they had an interesting journey*, **they journeyed interestingly* (Live, 1973; Cattel, 1983). Helbig (1979) establishes the following three-tier classification regarding the use of attributes:

- a) the noun does not take attributes: *dar vista*, *dar abasto*, *dar caza*, *dar suelta*, *dar acceso* (Bustos Plaza, 2005); *to take shelter/ cover*; **der Betriebsleiter nahm von den Beschüssen schnellen Kenntnis* (Helbig, 1979).
- b) the noun may take attributes: *dar paseos largos* (Bustos Plaza, 2005); *make strong progress*; *eine vorschnelle Entscheidung treffen*.
- c) the noun requires an attribute: *dar un trato personalizado*; *die Versammlung nahm einen ausgezeichneten Verlauf*, **die Versammlung nahm einen Verlauf* (Helbig, 1979).

Other syntactic restrictions include determiner variation, relative clauses and voice (Starke, 1975; Piera & Varela, 1999; Live, 1973; Bustos Plaza, 2005). Article usage, despite displaying certain restrictions, is varied and zero article, definite and indefinite article can be used and, in some

VSC, the noun may appear in both singular and plural (Helbig, 1979; Grimm, 1981):

Varied: *Er nimmt kontakt/ den Kontakt/ einen Kontakt mit den Genossen auf* (Busch, 1987); *tomar nota/ tomar una nota; dar aviso/ dar un aviso* (Bustos Plaza, 2005). Zero article (frequently with uncountable nouns): *hacer daño; tener hambre; take aim, make mention*. Obligatory, fixed article use: *take the lead; make an impression; have a bath; tomar la iniciativa*.

Similarly, restrictions may exist on operations such as relative clauses and the passive voice. As Alonso Ramos (2004) and Mendívil Giró (1999) maintain, these restrictions arise because the freedom to undergo such operations would imply a normal syntactic relationship of verb and complement. However, categorisation is not water-tight, and plentiful examples of VSC exist which permit transformations such as relative clauses and the passive voice: *las críticas que hizo; la decisión fue tomada; the look she gave him; the decision was taken; die Anerkennung, die das Theaterstück gefunden hat* (Helbig, 1979).

A final syntactic characteristic we shall note only in passing here concerns the reduction of valency (an increase is also possible but less common), whereby the simple verb's complement is omitted: *me hizo una sugerencia, *me sugirió; we passed judgement, *we judged; wir stiften Verwirrung, *wir verwirren*. This characteristic is of stylistic interest, as the VSC allows a certain manipulation of informational content through this change of argument structure. In the case of English, Live (1973) and Renský (1964) point out that the VSC is the only means by which the proposition can be expressed devoid of complementation: *he walked*, while not grammatically incorrect, is uncomfortably incomplete, while *he took a walk* is not. Though this phenomenon is perhaps less common in Spanish or German than in English, similar examples can be found in these languages: *él se paseó, él dio un paseo; er spazierte, er machte einen Spaziergang*.

In addition to the aforementioned syntactic features, VSC also express certain semantic values which are not found in the homologous simple verb. The aspectual values expressed by VSC are well documented:

Durative: *andar con + ambages, bromas, cautela; andar de + viaje, caza, patrulla; guardar silencio; sich in Verwirrung befinden.*

Inchoative: *ponerse a prueba; take by surprise, take into account, take into consideration; in Verwirrung geraten.*

Terminative: *levantar la sesión, llegar a una conclusión; come to fame; pass judgement, reach a conclusion, meet with success; einen Entschluss fassen.*

VSC may also express passive or causative values. Koike (2001) cites the following verbs as being typical for Spanish VSC which express the passive value: *recibir, sufrir, llevarse, padecer, tener, llevarse, encontrar (recibir el bautismo)*. Likewise, for English, examples such as the following may be found: *find recognition; receive credit; suffer defeat*. Rösch (1994) lists the following verbs for German: *finden, erfahren, geniessen, erleiden, erhalten, bekommen etc. (unter den Einfluss geraten)*.

Similarly, certain support verbs in combination with a VSC noun may express causation, although these verbs do not express causation in other contexts (i.e. in free combinations): *llenar, sumir, llevar, reducir, dar (dar pena, miedo, vergüenza, prisa)* (Koike, 2001). Von Polenz (1963) describes the power of verbs such as *bringen* and *setzen* to express causative values in German: *in Bewegung, in Umlauf, in Gang, in Brand, in Betrieb setzen*. In English, examples such as the following may be found: *take by surprise, take into consideration* (Live, 1973).

VSC may be distinguished from idioms on account of their lack of idiomaticity, their relative syntactic flexibility and semantic transparency. They may be distinguished from free combinations due to the arbitrary selectional restrictions, and from general verb-noun collocations owing to syntactic restrictions and the delexicalization of the support verb.

Notwithstanding, the close relationship between the three phenomena mean that borderline examples exist of VSC which display certain idiomaticity and greater syntactic restrictions, or which contain a support verb with stronger semantic content, likening the construction to a verb-noun collocation.

VSC do not represent a monolithic category; while certain syntactic movements such as the formation of the passive construction, interrogatives, and attribution are often restricted, some cases can be found in which these movements are permitted. Greater levels of restriction indicate a higher degree of lexicalization, whereas nouns subject to fewer restrictions appear to be more like arguments of the verb (Giry-Schneider, 1987; Alonso Ramos, 2004).

This section has outlined briefly the principal syntactic and semantic characteristics of VSC in German, English and Spanish which will serve as a basis for our corpus investigation of these constructions. The majority of existing descriptions of VSC for these three languages are based on introspective rather than electronic corpus data. Hence, we identify a need to corroborate this data with corpus material and, secondly, to identify potential didactic challenges that VSC from this corpus may present to English and German-speaking learners of Spanish.

3. Approaching VSC from a Didactic Perspective

Approaching VSC from a practically oriented perspective, the remainder of this paper explores the type of descriptive information that can assist learners reach greater confidence in their use of VSC. We attempt to identify the VSC that appear in the social science genre (and which consequently would be of greater interest to students enrolled in this academic discipline), and the type of morphosyntactic information didactic materials should aspire include. For example, the verbs *hacer* and *usar*, and the expression *hacer uso* are by no means new to upper intermediate learners, but what is it that they need to know in order to use this VSC appropriately? Further, we consider the type of morphosyntactic information that learners should be encouraged to consider when confronted, for example, by the following two possible options of expressing a particular idea:

La crisis tomó por sorpresa/ sorprendió a los costarricenses.

The crisis took the Costa Ricans by surprise/ surprised the Costa Ricans.

Los esquemas burocráticos rígidos ponen énfasis excesivo en/ enfatizan excesivamente los procedimientos.

The rigid bureaucratic structures put excessive emphasis on/ excessively emphasize the procedural issues.

3.1 Methodology

A corpus of 1,8 million words was compiled from academic texts from the socio-political and qualitative economics sphere, written by a variety of authors (Spanish and Latin American) from the website of *Comisión económica para América Latina* (CEPAL). By working with authentic written texts and limiting ourselves to a particular genre (social sciences), we aspired firstly to identify typical VSC structures for this genre and, secondly, provide authentic syntactic and semantic descriptions of these VSC, as well as model sentences to illustrate different uses. We consider that much can be gained by using concordances in a didactic context specifically for the purpose of highlighting variants of form and contrasting VSC with the homologous simple verbs (Allen, 2007).

In order to limit the study, only two support verbs were selected: *tomar* y *poner*. The concordancing programme Wordsmith Tools 4 was used to identify all instances of these verbs, and the concordances were sifted through manually to limit the examples to VSC, according the criteria described in Section II. The concordances were then analysed to identify information which we considered to be important from a didactic perspective.

3.2 Results and Discussion

The corpus search produced the following 39 examples of VSC with the support verbs *poner* and *tomar*.

<i>poner acento</i>	<i>poner en peligro</i>
<i>poner énfasis</i>	<i>poner a prueba</i>
<i>poner atención</i>	<i>poner a disposición</i>
<i>poner límite</i>	<i>poner al servicio</i>
<i>poner un tope</i>	<i>poner a consideración</i>
<i>poner los límites</i>	<i>poner al alcance</i>
<i>poner el acento</i>	
<i>poner el foco</i>	<i>tomar la forma</i>
<i>poner de manifiesto</i>	<i>tomar la decisión</i>
<i>poner en marcha</i>	<i>tomar acciones</i>
<i>poner en práctica</i>	<i>tomar decisiones</i>
<i>poner en ejecución</i>	<i>tomar notas</i>
<i>poner en relieve</i>	<i>tomar posición</i>
<i>poner en riesgo</i>	<i>tomar fuerza</i>

<i>poner en igualdad</i>	<i>tomar impulso</i>
<i>poner en claro</i>	<i>tomar distancia</i>
<i>poner en común</i>	<i>tomar en cuenta</i>
<i>poner en evidencia</i>	<i>tomar en arrendamiento</i>
<i>poner en movimiento</i>	<i>tomar por sorpresa</i>
<i>poner en contacto</i>	<i>tomar a su cargo</i>

The ensuing concordance analysis provided the following morphosyntactic and semantic information relating to the characteristics of these VSC, which we consider of potential value in didactic contexts. The examples are derived straight from the corpus³.

3.2.1 Apparent Synonymy between the VSC and the Etymologically Related Simple Verb

Tomar nota (= apuntar)

*Si se contestaba afirmativamente a alguna de estas preguntas, se **tomaba nota** de/ se **apuntaba** el nombre, apellido, sexo y edad en años cumplidos.*

English or German-speaking learners are likely to compare these two possible expressions to their equivalents: *to take note of sthg*, *to note sthg*; *sich Notizen machen*, *notieren*. It is advantageous for didactic materials to make such correspondences explicit, rather than assume they will be implicitly noticed. In the case of the German VSC, a different support verb is used.

3.2.2 Apparent Synonymy with Non-etymologically Related Simple Verb

Poner un tope = limitar

*El segundo factor que condiciona el escenario financiero es el principio de estabilidad presupuestaria, que **pone un tope** de gasto al conjunto de las economías de los países miembros.*

Poner en común = compartir

*Por esta razón se requiere trabajar en equipo interdisciplinario, que permita **poner en común** los aportes de cada faceta de análisis.*

English or German-speaking learners are likely to find these two VSC challenging. The synonymous VSC *poner un límite/limitar* is likely to prove less problematic, and this is how *poner un tope* is likely to be understood, as both English and German allow both structures: *put a limit on, to limit; einen Höchstbetrag setzen, begrenzen*. Again, in the case of the German VSC, a different support verb is used. *Poner en común* may cause some surprise and learners and may well avoid its use, preferring instead a simple verb such as *compartir* which would be more akin to how this proposition would be expressed in these two languages (*to share; teilen*).

3.2.3 Avoidance of the Passive Voice or *se*-constructions

Tomar en arrendamiento (= serán arrendados/ se arrendarán)

*Se confeccionaron 230 copias para ser utilizadas en equipos de proyección, los cuales **se tomaron en arrendamiento**.*

Tomar distancia (= se distanció de algo)

*Facilitaron el desarrollo de un enfoque que **tomó distancia** respecto al tradicional pronóstico.*

Tomar a su cargo (= *se encargó*)

*El programa **tomó a su cargo** la implementación de consultorios legales para poder destrabar las situaciones en los organismos provinciales.*

These three VSC are likely to be problematic for English or German-speaking learners who, although understanding them, may avoid using them. The passive voice would be more appropriate in both languages in the case of *tomar en arrendamiento* (*to hire; mieten*), while the reflexive constructions would be preferred to a VSC in the case of *tomar distancia* (*to distance oneself; sich distanzieren*). *Tomar a su cargo* does have a VSC equivalent in English (*take charge*) but would sound inappropriate if used with a non-human subject.

3.2.4 Expression of Causation

Poner en marcha (= *implementar*)

*En 2002, el gobierno del Presidente Lagos **puso en marcha** un proyecto de ley destinado a solucionar los persistentes déficit presupuestarios*

Poner en práctica (= *implementar*)

*Debido al agotamiento del modelo de sustitución de importaciones, se **puso en práctica** un programa de diversificación de las exportaciones.*

These two VSC are less of a challenge to English or German-speaking learners, as both languages have both a VSC and simple verb equivalent which express causation: *in Kraft setzen, durchführen; implement, put into practice*. The English VSC (*put into practice*) would not, however, be appropriate in this context and the simple verb in English would be preferred.

3.2.5 Adjectival Modification

Poner en peligro (=peligrar, arriesgar)

La caída de las reservas no pone en peligro inminente la solvencia externa.

Poner énfasis (=enfaticar)

Los documentos de Honduras y de El Salvador ponen mayor énfasis en la prevención de desastres medioambientales.

Adjectival modification proved exceedingly common with the VSC *poner en peligro* and *poner énfasis*, which suggests that they should be presented and practised together with examples of typical adjectival modifiers. This would underscore the “chunking” characteristic of formulaic language. We do not anticipate problems for English or German-speaking learners, as they may be expressed as VSC with adjectival modification in both languages: *put in immanent danger; in drohende Gefahr setzten; to put great emphasis on; schweren Nachdruck legen auf*. As is always the case with interlinguistic studies of collocations, equivalence is sought in the functional meaning of the word (in this case, adjective) in combination with the base (in this case, noun). The adjectives used to express the meaning of ‘greatness’ will vary from language to language, and didactic contexts need to focus on the importance of learning the appropriate adjectival collocations for VSC such as these. In these examples, German uses quite a different adjective collocation from Spanish and English.

3.2.6 Emphasis on the Semantic Contribution of the Noun

The use of the VSC rather than the simple verb equivalent may result in a marked emphasis on the semantic contribution of the VSC noun. This leads to a semantic shift in the sentence.

Poner en evidencia (=evidenciar)

Con los resultados del Censo de 1993, se pone en evidencia que el proceso de urbanización continúa en el país.

Poner de manifiesto (=manifestar)

Las encuestas de opinión ponen de manifiesto una tendencia a la pérdida de confianza en el sistema de justicia y en otras instituciones públicas.

English or German-speaking learners of Spanish are likely to employ the Spanish simple verb rather than a VCS in these cases (*evidencian, manifiestan, muestran*) as VCS equivalents would be used less frequently in these languages (*den Beweis erbringen, give proof of sthg.*). This avoidance would lead to a certain stylistic loss, as well as a loss of syntactic versatility.

3.2.7 Emphasis on the Process

Tomar decisiones (=decidir)

Por lo surgido de la evaluación se tomó la decisión de hacer un cambio de gerente del proyecto.

Subrayamos la necesidad de incorporar a los actores sociales en el proceso de toma de decisiones.

Mientras tanto se debe seguir tomando decisiones con respecto a la orientación del desarrollo.

Tomar fuerza (=profundizarse)

La experiencia del Estado costarricense como empresario, tomó fuerza durante la década de los setenta.

Este proceso tomó fuerza en los años ochenta e involucró a grandes empresas estatales.

VSC may place greater emphasis on the process of the action expressed than the simple verb equivalent. This is especially apparent in VSC such as *tomar decisiones* or *tomar fuerza*, when compared to their simple verb equivalents *decider* and *fortalecerse/ profundizarse*. Although both English and German have equivalent VSC for *tomar decisiones* (*Entscheidungen treffen; take decisions*), they are not used with the same syntactic flexibility of the Spanish VSC. For example, the nominalisation of the VSC (*la toma de decisiones*) appears frequently in Spanish but would not be common in either English or German. With respect to *tomar fuerza*, no satisfactory VSC equivalent can be found in English or German for these contexts of use, and we foresee a tendency for learners to opt for the less expressive option of, for example, *profundizarse* in their language use.

3.2.8 Differences in Article Usage and Prepositions

Although English and German may have equivalent VSC for examples in Spanish, there may be morphosyntactic differences involving, for instance, article usage or prepositions, as in the case of:

Poner a disposición = put at the service/ disposal of; zur Verfügung stellen

Poner límite = to put a limit on; eine Grenze setzen

Poner en claro = make clear; deutlich machen

Poner de relieve = make clear; deutlich machen

As these differences have a low level of saliency, it is likely that learners will continue making minor errors of form long after the VSC have been introduced in the curriculum (Laufer, 2001).

El Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática puso a disposición de los usuarios el documento “Perú: Mapa de Necesidades Básicas”.

Por primera vez se puso límite al endeudamiento del gobierno.

El esquema de análisis con que trabajaremos es una primera herramienta que se pone en común en este curso.

Los aspectos destacados en el punto anterior ponen de relieve que los factores socioculturales requieren un tratamiento cuidadoso.

3.3 Summary

This brief analysis of corpus data has shed light on syntactic and semantic characteristics of VSC which English and German-speaking learners of Spanish may find challenging, and which may contribute to students' avoidance of using VSC. We have also demonstrated how a relatively modest corpus analysis may provide a word list, as well as authentic examples, which can be used for didactic purposes.

4. Development of Didactic Exercises for VSC

As a final contribution, we shall discuss the development of didactic exercises to practise aspects of both form and meaning of VSC and present model exercises for students at tertiary level with an interest in social sciences⁴ (see Appendix). The emphasis is not on teaching meaning, as this does not present a great obstacle due to the largely transparent nature of VSC, but rather on encouraging greater *noticing* (in the sense of Schmidt, 2000) of these structures and their relevant syntactic and semantic characteristics, and on fostering greater use. The exercises presented here begin in a controlled fashion (gap-fill type) to check learners' awareness of form and meaning, before moving towards greater freedom of use. The

variety of decision-making required by these exercises aims to promote deep processing of VSC, identified as being important for the storage and retrieval of lexical items (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001; Meara, 1984). The exercises attempt to reflect some of the key semantic and syntactic characteristics uncovered by the corpus analysis. As learners are likely to associate the VSC with the homologous simple verb, the first exercise explores the relationship between the two structures and invites learners to reflect on criteria which might influence their decision to employ either the simple verb or the VSC (depending on the examples used, we would expect that criteria such as those discussed in 3.2.3, 3.2.6, 3.2.7 to be of relevance here).

Exercise (2) invites attention to aspects of form. Learners need to change the verb in parentheses to a noun (*disponer – disposición; considerar-consideración*), choose the appropriate support verb from the options provided (in this case, *tomar* and *poner*), identify the appropriate verb tense or verb form, and decide whether a preposition is required. This exercise requires considerable processing on behalf of learners as they need to retrieve the appropriate form of the VSC as well as make adjustments for person and tense.

In exercise (3), learners are encouraged to analyse the immediate context in which each VSC occurs for syntactic information which may assist learners use the structure appropriately. It is designed to encourage greater *noticing* of morphosyntactic elements with a low level of saliency (subject/complement, number, preposition, adjectival modification etc.). Criteria such as those discussed in 3.2.5 and 3.2.8 are likely to be of relevance here. In addition, we noted in 3.2.3 the importance of registering the type of noun that tends to appear in subject or complement position (e.g. animate vs. inanimate, singular vs. plural). The second part of the exercise requires learners to use the listed VSC in order to assess the level of control they have achieved over these morphosyntactic elements.

5. Conclusion

The study has investigated the morphosyntactic and semantic aspects of Spanish VSC in an electronic corpus of written academic texts of the social science genre. The corpus search, undertaken using WordsmithTools, identified 39 examples of VSC. An analysis of the concordance lines provided us with morphosyntactic information we consider of relevance to learners of Spanish, in particular by speakers of English or German. Using the information extracted in the initial corpus analysis, we have explored how concordances can be used to develop didactic exercises for VSC. We consider concordances to be particularly suited to the study of VSC, as they allow both lexical and grammatical characteristics of this structure to be highlighted. The exercises consider aspects of form, meaning and use, with particular attention to form and use as meaning tends to be relatively transparent in the case of this structure. The exercises proposed here have sought to highlight important morphosyntactic features with a low level of saliency (such the use of articles and prepositions), and encourage learners to identify stylistic and semantic differences between the use of a VSC and the simple verb equivalent.

Due to the limited nature of this study, we have been unable to establish whether the examples of VSC identified here are typical for the social science discipline. A further study is needed with the objective of contrasting results from more than one specialised corpus (for instance, the social sciences and medicine) to establish the degree to which the VSC in each corpus are discipline-specific.

Notes

¹ Throughout this paper we will endeavour to provide examples in three languages: Spanish, English and German. However, for reasons of space, at times we may restrict examples to one language.

² In Spanish, the structure support verb + prepositional object is particularly common in VSC with the support verb *poner* but does not occur (or occurs comparatively very rarely) with other support verbs such as *tomar*, *tener* or *dar*.

³ Only minor changes have occasionally been made (e.g. the elimination of multiple clauses, acronyms, bibliographic references, etc.).

⁴ Learners of Spanish who have the intention of undertaking university studies in a Spanish-speaking country can benefit from the inclusion of materials which offer a degree of discipline-specific input during their preparatory language study programme. Excerpts from disciplinary journals provide ideal authentic texts for the study of both discipline-specific vocabulary and VSC.

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Appendix

Suggested exercises for VSC with a focus on form, meaning and use

The following exercises appear in Spanish as they are intended for English and German-speaking learners of this language. For reasons of space we have included only a limited number of examples for each exercise.

1) Diferenciar el verbo simple de la CVS (Although other terms are also used, we have chosen to refer to VSC in Spanish as *construcciones con verbo soporte* (CVS).)

En los siguientes ejercicios, tenéis dos alternativas para completar las oraciones, eligiendo entre una CVS (*tomar una decisión*), el verbo simple (*decidir/ decidirse*) o el sustantivo (*decisión*). ¿Hasta qué punto podéis emplear el verbo simple (o el sustantivo) en lugar de la CVS? Para cada oración, dad razones para apoyar vuestra respuesta. Ojo: Considerad motivos tanto sintácticos como semánticos en su evaluación.

Ejemplo: Este Gobierno, con el apoyo del Congreso, **(ha tomado la decisión/ ha decidido)** de atacar el problema.

Respuesta: La presencia de la preposición *de* hace que la respuesta correcta sea la CVS (*ha tomado la decisión de atacar el problema*).

1. La migración de los hombres puede tener como resultado que las mujeres asuman la responsabilidad de la tierra, sin el poder de participar en **(la toma de decisiones/ decidir)**.

2. Los discapacitados creen tener menor libertad para **(tomar sus propias decisiones/ decidir)** que el resto de las personas.

3. El proceso de **(toma de decisiones/ decidir)** en las organizaciones públicas y privadas no es ni rápido ni inteligente ni óptimo.

4. Existen organizaciones indecisas, incapaces de **(tomar una decisión/ decidirse)** acertada a tiempo.

Respuestas posibles

(1) CVS (*la toma de decisiones*). El verbo simple no puede ser complemento de *participar en* .

(2) y (3) Ambas respuestas son posibles, sin embargo la CVS permite expresar la acción como proceso. Al emplear la CVS, el énfasis semántico de la oración recae sobre el nombre (*decisiones/ toma de decisiones*).

(4) La presencia del modificador (*acertada*) hace que solamente *tomar una decisión* sea posible.

2) Ejercicios para trabajar la forma

En las siguientes oraciones, sustituid el verbo simple en paréntesis por una CVS utilizando el verbo soporte *poner* o *tomar* y el sustantivo derivado de este verbo simple. Tened cuidado con la elección de tiempo o forma verbal del verbo soporte. Ojo: Algunas CVS exigen un artículo y/o preposición.

Ejemplo: Los resultados del sondeo fueron **(disponer)** del Gobierno.

Respuesta: Los resultados del sondeo fueron **puestos a disposición** del Gobierno.

1. Estos sectores han buscando una oportunidad para **(participar)** en el conflicto social.
2. La empresa puede **(optar por)** de concurrir a las tribunales para exponer el caso.

3. En estas instancias (**manifestarse**) los problemas inherentes en el proyecto.
4. La tarifas (**peligrar**) la rentabilidad de la inversión.

Respuestas: (1) tomar parte; (2) tomar la opción; (3) se ponen de manifiesto; (4) ponen en peligro (otros tiempos verbales son posibles)

3) Las CVS: análisis y empleo

a) Observar y analizar

Las siguientes CVS expresan un significado muy parecido:

poner atención, poner el acento, poner de relieve,

Contemplan las concordancias abajo. ¿Qué tipo de información te proporcionan sobre las características sintácticas de estas tres CVS (por ejemplo, uso de determinante, número, modificación, sujeto/ complemento)?

Tomad notas de vuestras observaciones.

Poner atención (We would expect to include about five example sentences for each VSC, but for reasons of space, we have limited ourselves to just two.)

1. Especial **atención se puso** en las experiencias de México, país con una considerable brecha de igualdad.
2. La Organización Mundial de Comercio **ha puesto atención** sobre los efectos de la dimensión internacional de la política.

Poner el acento

1. Los trabajos presentados y el debate posterior **pusieron el acento** en las potencialidades de esta tecnología.
2. El programa debe **poner acento** en las mujeres embarazadas y los niños en edad preescolar.

Poner de relieve

1. Esto **pone de relieve** el rol central que tiene la cooperación internacional en la implementación de la política de seguridad alimenticia.
2. El estudio **ha puesto de relieve** las causas de desigualdad distributiva.

Respuestas posibles (un mayor número de ejemplos facilitaría una descripción más detallada)

Poner atención: nombre en singular sin artículo, preposiciones *en* y *sobre*; modificación adjetival (*especial*); en posición de sujeto: entidad abstracta (*una organización*), sin sujeto explicitado (construcciones con *se*); en posición de complemento: nombres abstractos (muchas veces en plural) (*las experiencias, los efectos*).

Poner el acento: nombre en singular con o sin artículo; preposición *en*; sin modificación adjetival (en estos ejemplos); en posición de sujeto: nombres abstractos (*los trabajos, el programa*); en posición de complemento: nombres abstractos (muchas veces en plural): (*las potencialidades*), personas (muchas veces en plural): (*las mujeres, los niños*).

Poner de relieve: verbo+complemento preposicional (preposición: *de*) nombre en singular sin artículo; sin modificación adjetival; sin preposición; en posición de sujeto: nombre abstracto (*el estudio*); referencia textual (pronombre: *esto*); en posición de complemento: nombre abstracto (*las causas, el rol*).

b) Empleo

A continuación, escribid cinco oraciones utilizando estas CVS, describiendo acciones que el gobierno de vuestro país ha llevado a cabo (o no), o fenómenos y tendencias que se han dado recientemente en vuestro país. Podéis emplear algunos de los sustantivos que aparecen en el cuadro abajo.

*el gobierno, el ministerio de educación, los sectores pobres, los
municipios,
la investigación, el sector empresarial, el sistema de salud
los problemas, las negociaciones, el bajo/alto rendimiento, los
riesgos,
las políticas anteriores, la corrupción, la distribución de la renta*

Respuestas posibles

El gobierno ha puesto atención en el bajo rendimiento del sector de salud.

La investigación puso de relieve la desigual distribución de la renta.

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