

Individual Level Adjectives with *estar* in Spanish (L1 and L2).

An experimental study about the possible interpretations of the mismatch

Individual Level Adjectives (hereinafter referred to as I-level Adjectives) are those that lexicalize properties of individuals (Carlson, 1977) such as *tall*, *big* or *fat*. This kind of adjectives is different from others (called State-Level Adjectives), such as *dirty*, *sick* or *closed*, which lexicalize states of individuals. The differences between these two kinds of adjectives are well-known in the bibliography. Thus, S-Level Adjectives (but not I-Level Adjectives) could be inserted in English existential sentences: *There were people sick* but **There were people tall* (Milsark, 1974). In a similar way, I-Level Adjectives (but not S-Level Adjectives) have some restrictions in their combination with locative or frequency adverbs: **Peter is tall in the park* but **Peter is sick in the park* (Chierchia, 1995). Besides, in languages such as Spanish, there seems to be a copula for each kind of adjectives: If I-Level Adjectives usually combine with *ser* (*Juan es alto*), S-Level Adjectives tend to appear with *estar* (*Juan está enfermo*).

This last difference (the copula) is the object of study of this research. Despite the tendency to appear with *ser*, I-Level Adjectives can, in fact, appear with *estar* in Spanish. When this combination occurs, speakers have to resolve the mismatch and the result is an additional inference. The aim of this study is to know which inference appears both in native speakers and in second-language learners. For that, two questionnaires have been designed. In both, different situations have been described. In the first questionnaire, some of these situations are described with an I-Level Adjective and *ser* (*Ana es guapa*, for example), and others with an I-Level-Adjective and *estar* (*Juan está alto*, for instance). In the second questionnaire, we have inverted the combinations, and therefore, the situations that appeared with *ser* in the first questionnaire appear with *estar* in the second one, and the other way round (e.g. *Ana está guapa* and *Juan es alto*).

We have tried to prove three proposals in this research. The most classical one has to do with the stability of the property. According to this proposal, an adjective with *estar* (as *Juan está guapo*) is understood as less stable than the same adjective with *ser* (*Juan es guapo*). This first hypothesis is especially important because it is the explanation usually offered in second language manuals and, therefore, we expect it to be the most important proposal for L2 speakers.

The second proposal analysed in this research has to do with the standard of comparison of gradual adjectives. All the adjectives used in the questionnaires need a standard of comparison to check their truth conditions. Following Gumiel-Molina and others (2015), an I-Level Adjective with *ser* has an external standard of comparison, in such a way that *Juan es guapo* means that he is more handsome than the average of his group of reference (the man of their age, for example). On the contrary, this same adjective with *estar* has an internal standard of comparison, so *Juan está guapo* means that he is now more handsome than he used to be.

The last proposal checked in this study considers that I-Level Adjectives have an evidential interpretation when they are combined with *estar* (Escandell, 2018). So, a sentence like *Juan está guapo* means somehow that the speaker knows that Juan is handsome because s/he has seen him with his/her own eyes.

In the questionnaires, each situation is followed by 16 sentences: six of them are experimental ('I think Juan has been always tall', 'I suppose Ana is prettier than women of

her age' or 'It's likely that the speaker hasn't seen Pedro for some years, and he knows it only by hearsay), and ten are non-experimental. Informants have to answer *Yes, No* or *I don't have enough information to answer*. Subjects were randomly distributed into the two questionnaires and they had to answer firstly a series of questions about their mother language (just for us to know if they were L1 or L2 speakers). These answers were analysed to know which of the proposals (if any) could be proved and if native speakers and learners show different behaviours in this task.

The findings of this research seem to prove that the three hypotheses have been verified (and therefore that they are complementary). They also show that there are no significant differences between L1 and L2 speakers. These results have important consequences, we think, both for the nature of the interpretation of mismatches and for our knowledge of their acquisition.

References

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