

## COMMUNICATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN WRITTEN TEXTS: VERBA DICENDI STUDY.

### CONSTRUCCIONES COMUNICATIVAS EN LOS TEXTOS ESCRITOS: ESTUDIO DE LOS VERBA DICENDI.

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**ABSTRACT:** By definition, a man is a social being who interacts with peers either by necessity as a hobby, which determines its relations with the group and shapes it. The way this communication is expressed is vitally important to the educational community regarding the acquisition and the transmission of knowledge, which is determined by how they are expressed in the written texts, and this is even more relevant to the literary field. My aim in this report is to study the main approaches to the way of expressing communication from the use of different type of verbs, including the linguistic forms, discursive procedures of the expression, and communicative activity types. In order to do that, I have studied constructions with and without *verba dicendi* collected in Corpuses of Spanish and English languages - such as CREA online database (Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual de la Real Academia Española) and BNC (British National Corpus from Oxford University Computing Services) - and constructions posted on various publications, novels, etc, written in both languages, to establish relevant comparison between the uses of each other.

I am particularly concerned with communicative construction, which presupposes interaction with others, and what I am trying to determine is how often do these constructions happen, is it common or isolated cases?

**Key words:** Communicative constructions, *verba dicendi*, verbs of communication, quotative constructions, language use.

**RESUMEN:** Por definición, el hombre es un ser social que interrelaciona con sus iguales ya sea por necesidad como por afición, lo cual determina sus relaciones con el grupo y le va dando forma al mismo. El modo en que se expresa esta comunicación es de vital importancia para la comunidad educativa en cuanto a que la adquisición de los conocimientos y la transmisión de los mismos, viene determinada por el modo en que se expresan en los textos escritos, y esto es aún más relevante en el ámbito literario.

Mi objetivo en este artículo es estudiar los principales planteamientos a la hora de expresar la comunicación, con la utilización de diferentes tipos de verbos incluyendo las formas lingüísticas, los procedimientos discursivos de la expresión y los tipos de actividades comunicativas. Para ello, he estudiado las construcciones con y sin *verba dicendi* recogidas en corpus del idioma español y del inglés, como son la base de datos online CREA (Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual de la Real Academia Española) y BNC (Corpus Nacional Británico de los servicios informáticos de la Universidad de Oxford), y las construcciones que aparecen en diferentes publicaciones, novelas, etc, escritas en ambos idiomas, para establecer las pertinentes comparaciones entre los usos de unos y otros.

Mi interés se centra principalmente en la construcción comunicativa, la cual presupone la interacción con los demás, y lo que trato de determinar es con qué frecuencia suceden estas construcciones, ¿es común o son casos aislados?

**Palabras clave:** Construcciones comunicativas, *verba dicendi*, verbos declarativos, construcciones de citación, uso del lenguaje.

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### 1.- The communicative process.

According to George H. Mead's theory (1968), communication is a part of the social process, in the sense that communication takes place only where a group of individuals make an effort to accomplish something jointly. In that way, communication is a social process where the acts of one individual depend on the actions of other individuals in the group. Because of that, where no group of individuals is striving to accomplish something jointly, no problem of communication arises - since there is no occasion for communication. Mead analyses the process of communication basically from a socio-centric approach, as he considers that the social process provides the array of meanings. This author suggests that communication is firstly a social process where the ability of individuals to communicate with one another depends on their capacity for role-taking. The social act, for Mead, is in the context of a dynamic process since there is a double aspect involved in the relationship between the self and the society: the self is an emergent from the social process, but the social process is possible only in the significant communication characteristic of human society.

As it is widely known, the communication process involves three main elements: sender, message, and receiver, which is fraught with a context and a code shared by both, sender and receiver. The elements of communication are:

1. An information source, which produces a message.
2. A transmitter, which encodes the message into signals
3. A channel, to which signals are adapted for transmission
4. A receiver, which 'decodes' (reconstructs) the message from the signal.
5. A destination, where the message arrives.

On the one hand we must take into account the possible difficulties for communication, which could be found in how accurately the message can be transmitted, and how precisely the meaning expressed is. On the other hand, we know communicators are not isolated individuals, so we must include different purposes of interpretations and situational contexts, so the factor of erroneous interpretation could undermine the correct interpretation of the message.

The communicative construction is mainly used in Reported Speech, when we quote or transmit what other people say, think or believe. As a consequence, saying verbs are significantly relevant as they lead the sense of the whole sentence.

The most used verbs to do that are: *tell*, *say*, and *ask*. But there is a huge amount of verbs used in reported speech as:

accuse  
admit  
advise  
agree  
answer  
apologize  
assure  
blame  
complain  
compliment  
confess  
confide  
congratulate  
console  
convince  
demand  
deny  
describe  
discourage  
dissuade  
encourage  
explain  
greet  
inquire  
insist  
insult  
introduce  
invite  
mention  
offer  
order  
persuade  
praise  
propose  
recommend  
refuse  
remind  
request  
scold  
suggest  
warn

| Most used *verba dicendi* selection, extracted from *British National Corpus (BNC)*,  
| Oxford University Computing Services.

## 2.- The communicative construction.

The communicative construction is used to report communicative acts. These acts can be expressed both as communication or non-verbal communication, using non-speaking verbs. The core of communicative construction is the use or not of verbs of saying. Examples of communicative construction using verbs of saying can be noticed in:

- Jesse told me how babies get made. (Picoult, 2004)
- She reached for the bottle ... and told me to do it again. (Picoult, 2004)
- He told her he needed something functional. (Hosp, 2011)
- "Way to be strong, Boss", Lissa said. (Hosp, 2011)
- Coral accused her of stealing her husband, but she had told her he was divorced.

(*Journal of the Official Language School*, 2011).

I certainly agree with Jackendoff (1990:266) when he states that the verb *say* is an entity moving from a speaker to a receiver, thinking in the process of communication as same type of transfer which transmits the information from one to other.

Otherwise, communicative constructions can be also expressed without verbs of saying, as in the examples below (Hosp, 2011):

- "Yeah", Finn agreed. "It's a bad idea".
- The decorator ... had begged him to let her get an appropriate piece for him.
- She argued he needed something to proclaim his authority.
- "You sayin' no?" McDougal demanded from Finn.
- "It's Preston", she sobs.
- "Your Honor", Campbell Alexander interrupts.

I really consider the verbs classification of Levin (1993) clarifies the understanding on how different functions can be developed by verbs, since Levin proposes a large-scale classification of verbs in English. This author holds the hypothesis that the verbs sharing meanings components show similar syntax behaviour. He divided English verbs of communication into nine semantic categories:

1. Verbs of transfer of a message: *tell, quote*.
2. Tell.
3. Verbs of manner of speaking: *burble, sing*.
4. Verbs of instrument of communication: *phone, telecast*.
5. Talk verbs: *speak, talk*.
6. Chitchat verbs: *argue, gossip*.
7. Say verbs: *report, state*.
8. Complain verbs: *brag, object*.
9. Advice verbs: *counsel, warn*.

Coming up next, the construction with and without *verba dicendi* will be discussed below.

## 3.- Constructions with *verba dicendi*.

The most used verbs in English, as basic verbs of communication are *to say* and *to speak*, which focus on the linguistic action itself. In the same way, the most general Spanish verbs are *decir* and *contar*.

- Pedro ha dicho quién viene. → Pedro said who is coming.
- Pedro ha dicho que quién viene. → Pedro said: who is coming? (Etxepare 2007).

Although critical work has tended to focus on lexical content, not enough attention has been paid to the thematic structure and complement selection. According to Etxepare (2007), events typically have participants and clause initial complements in Spanish with the presence of nominal expressions, which play a thematic role in the speech act. Consider for instance the following cases:

- a. Tu padre, que cuándo vas a ir a visitarle.
  - Your father that when you-are-going to visit him (literal translation).
  - Your father is saying: 'when are you going to visit me?'
- b. Si viene mi madre, tú a ella que el tabaco es tuyo.
  - If comes my mother, you to her that the tobacco is yours (literal translation).
  - 'If my mother comes, say to her that the tobacco is yours'.

It has been shown that the verbs of saying take prepositional rather than nominal complements, which makes it suitable for use in serial verb construction as a marker of proposition. This explains the large number of lexical innovations in the verbs of saying as compared with other verbs.

#### 4.- Constructions without *verba dicendi*.

##### 4.1. Discharge verbs.

Discharge verbs denote an idea of motion through space, like: *spread, hurl, spit, gossip* (English) or *soltar, lanzar* (Spanish). The following demonstrative examples are taken from the *British National Corpus* (BNC 2011):

- Mhm, spread the word.
- The new service allows the hyper-stressed to hurl verbal abuse down the phone and the recipient responds with appropriate apologetic noises until the angry caller has let off steam.
- I hiss and spit: 'And to what do I owe this dubious honour?'
- 'Never mind your gossip now, Thomas,' exhorted their hostess.

There is also a big quantity of examples in Spanish, as we can find in the *Corpus de referencia del español actual* (CREA 2011):

- El viejo, escupió malhumorado. Bueno, se acabó la función.
- Después de rogar para que lo recibieran le soltó la información al diplomático.
- "Yo no toco", soltó terminante el bajista Diego Arnedo.
- ¡El Premio Nobel! De Kerguelen escupió con rabia.
- Toques de ironía y humor, como los que lanzaba Freddy Mercury en su, a menudo, mordaz producción.

##### 4.2. Cognitive verbs.

Martínez Vázquez (2005) points out cognitive verbs develop the function of cognitive process, so the most used verbs of this type are *reason* and *speculate*:

- Foreign diplomats speculate that the helicopter was shot down by a Blowpipe. (BNC 2011)
- The way to avoid that, she reasoned, was to marry him. (BNC 2011)
- A royal affair, we speculate here. (BNC 2011)
- Never again, we reasoned, would there be a combination of circumstances like this! (BNC 2011)

On the one hand, the Spanish verbs *razonar* and *especular* are the most common cognitive verbs. According to CREA (2011), the form of the cognitive verb *razonó* is mostly shown in fiction and the more limited cases occur in Arts issues, as we can appreciate in the table below:

Table 1. Occurrence of the verb *razonó* in texts of different types (Source: CREA).

Tema	%	Casos
7.- Ficción.	52.08	25
3.- Política, economía, comercio y finanzas.	22.91	11
5.- Ocio, vida cotidiana.	14.58	7
1.- Ciencia y Tecnología.	6.25	3
4.- Artes.	4.16	2

On the other hand, the verb *especular* is mostly used in news, as shown below:

- En aquellos días se especuló sobre su enfermedad. (CREA 2011).
- Inclusive se especuló sobre su no asistencia. (CREA 2011).

However, there are some different verbs used in communicative construction like: *know, remember, perceive, prefer, want, forget, and understand*. Those verbs are involved in the cognition process, as we can see in the next examples (BNC 2011):

- I knew of another man who dealt in them.
- She remembered me coming down to the burn.
- They perceive that gains involve risking capital in the acquisition of chargeable assets.
- It is natural for the student to prefer a more straightforward wording and form.
- Even so, she wanted to keep the peace so she said nothing when she got indoors.
- And when the oceans die, forget it.
- But if you understood it properly, you saw it repeating itself.

The same thing can be applied to *muse* and *reflect*, as in the examples below (BNC 2011):

- You are, of course, free to think both things if you can bear the strain, and even to muse on the connection between them.

- Perhaps it is not in the grammar books because the grammar books do not reflect how people actually use language.

These verbs have not such an open action since they are involving mental or cognitive processes.

#### 4.3. Manner of speaking verbs.

We shall refer hereto the verbs in charge of communicative construction, which depend on how the sender produces the verb. Most studies, such as Zwicky (1971), have emphasized on the classification of these verbs in order to put them into categories so that we can study them group by group, in a separate way. However, Faber & Sánchez (1990) considered that the manners of speaking verbs are located on a transition zone between speech sounds and non-speech sounds, putting the stress on the sound component in the meaning of communicative issue is left behind.

The verbs of manner are classified on three main categories, depending on the sound class in question: sounds emitted by human beings, emitted by animals, and emitted by inanimate beings.

Firstly, sounds emitted by human beings can result in verbs like scream, whisper or murmur. Here you can appreciate some examples coming from BNC (2011):

- 'Oh my God, Charlie!' she screamed.
- 'My name is Creggan,' he whispered.
- 'It's rather like a cathedral,' she murmured.

There are some other examples from Hosp's novel (2011), such as:

- "My father don't fuckin' run me", he mumbled. (2011:27)
- The young man was wheezing through the pain. (2011:28)
- "Ahhh!" he yelled as Kozlowski applied additional pressure to the arm. (2011:28)
- "You wait a goddamned minute!" he yelled. (2011:225)
- "This is unacceptable!" Carleson yelled, rising out of his chair. (2011:234)
- "Oh my God", he whispered. "Sally". (2011:164)

Some examples in Spanish language can be found on CREA (2011), as:

- El individuo que iba al lado derecho me gritó "usted que hace ahí..."
- Y agua salada – susurró él.
- Si tú lo dices – murmuró Natalia.

Secondly, sounds emitted by animals develop manner of speaking verbs, which are commonly used for giving the idea of some animal feature inside the personality of the speaker, or some particular feeling in their mind. It has been proved that the construction with that type of verbs appears with direct speech, both in English language as in Spanish. The main verbs used in this category are: *roar*, *howl*, *purr*, *bark* or *crow* for English, and *rugir*, *alular*, *ronronear*, *ladrar* o *gorjear*, for Spanish.

These speaking verbs are often used on fiction novels, because of the need from the author to express the mood of the characters involved in the play. This argument can be shown in the last novel from David Hosp, as it follows:

- "Fuck you want?" one of them barked at Finn. (2011:26)

- "Fuck your ground rules", Long growled. (2011:226)

There are also some interesting examples in Spanish, as we can appreciate at CREA (2011), like:

- La furia de todo un pueblo rugió como la de un gigante mítico.
- Es muy joven el caballero- ronroneó la anciana desde la mesa de camilla.
- Lo intentaré – gorjeó Gil, que hablaba siempre en tono de alarma.

When the speaker is a human being, these verbs are used with a metaphorical sense, transferring the animal features to the sender and this process is more regularized in English than in Spanish.

Finally, sounds emitted by inanimate beings produce some verbal expressions establishing a correspondence between an object and a human being, resulting in a metaphorical expression. These verbs have the same function both in English and in Spanish. As we can appreciate in the examples below:

- Tronó la madre-. ¡Habrás visto desfachatez! (CREA 2011)
- ¿Qué cuentas, hombre? – trompeteó el gordito calvo. (CREA 2011)
- "Sick, my eye", thundered Miss Lodsworth. "That horse isn't sick, it's dead drunk". (BNC 2011)
- "But the responsibility is yours", the doctor trumpeted. (BNC 2011)

In my opinion, there is another verb that could be considered inside this group of speaking verbs: *reveal*, so that we can use it to express the idea of show somebody's soul as if they were developing a photograph. It is shown in the example of *Journal of the official language school of Cordoba* "Revenge is sweet" (2011:12):

- From the beginning they had a weird relationship. He revealed very little of himself.

#### 4.4. Instrumental verbs.

These verbs are, in my view, tightly close to the category which includes all communicative construction verbs, because they are related to the way in which the message is sent. The verb itself refers to the means by which the receiver gets the message, so that not only is the noun of the instrument turned into the verb expressing the action, but these verbs are also inserted into a communicative construction. That point can be observed in an easy example – the verb *phone* and *telefonar*. We can notice some examples of instrumental verbs from BNC (2011) and CREA (2011):

- The government faxed a clear signal last week (BNC, 2011).
- I was telephoned at home as soon as it happened (BNC, 2011).
- Bush telefoneó el jueves a los presidentes de Honduras (CREA, 2011).
- Su antiguo marido regresó de la India y telegrafió que "la necesitaba". (CREA, 2011)

It is quite striking that there are a huge number of instrumental verbs in English but the quantity of Spanish verbs attested in CREA (2011) is limited to only four. In addition, this type of verbs corresponds with the fourth category in verbs classification on Levin (1993): Verbs of Instrument of Communication.

#### 4.5. Verbs of gesture.

When we communicate something to others, we are used to make our speech with sentences in which verbs has some definite purpose, to show our answer to the demand received from the other individual. To illustrate this point, I would like to set some examples:



- Vestido con ropa blanca de trabajo asintió con la cabeza. (CREA 2011)
- He nodded, and the condemned men were sent away to the starvation bunker. (BNC 2011)

In this category of verbs, we can find gesture verbs in the meaning of something done with the hand or the face, as well as acts of agreement. For the first one, we have the verbs *nodding, smiling, and waving...* but also the verb *frown*, as in the example from Hosp:

- Long nodded. "It's a felony". (2011:293)
- Finn frowned. "My mother worked for McDougal?" (2011:164)
- He frowned. "With my drinking?" (2011:292)
- Finn shrugged. "I don't know". (2011:298)

And for the second one, we have the verbs *grin, smile, squeeze...* Here are some examples:

- I grinned in reply, pretending I liked the exercise. (BNC 2011)
- Miss Susan sonrió su aprobación. (CREA 2011)

We note that the verbs of gesture are far more abundant in English than in Spanish language, as it can be verified in both studied corpus.

## 5.- Conclusion.

On the whole, while mobility between the elements in the Spanish clause is rather high, we can notice that the same clause in English is characterized by a huge inflexibility. Sometimes, the sentence with verbs of saying is active but, if we just translate it, we realize that we must use a verb in the passive voice.

As far as I am concerned, the use of constructions without *verba dicendi* can be utilized when several sentences are written or said following one after the other, so that the author wants not to be repetitive. In fact, the alternation of verbs is used to get more fluency, specially in novels, to make the dialogues less monotonous, as in the example of the novel *Next to Kin* (Hosp 2011), where the report of what the characters tell each other is shown by using the following verbs, alternatively, in just one page: asked-said-demanded-said-pointed out-said-offered-asked-agreed-said-agreed.

As I stated in the introduction, I intended to prove whether communicative constructions, are commonly used or not. In that point, it is my contention that communicative constructions involve the most used verbs to transfer information focusing on both the sender and the message itself. In this sense, some communicative verbs can express the mood of the sender or the way in which it is transmitted. In addition, the great amount of given examples shows we are not dealing with isolated cases, but with a common use of verbs transmitting direct communicative intention.

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