

In this paper we argue that the combination of *ir -to go-+ gerund* in Spanish is best analyzed as a type of pluractional aspectual operator. Pluractionals, which are to events what plural is to nominals, have been argued to exist in West African and Amerindian languages but only lately has the concept been extended to Indo-European languages (see Van Geenhoven 2003, 2004, Laca 2005). We add to this typology the syntactic and semantic study of the *ir + gerund* periphrasis Serial Progressive or SP (name from Borgonovo&Bosque 2002-B&B), which has two main interpretations :

1. a. Los chicos fueron entrando.

the children GO-pret enter-gerund ‘The children entered one by one’

b. Truth conditions: the children in the context entered and this entering event is subdivided into sub-events of entering such that in each of them each one of the children entered and these sub-events are distributed in time intervals temporally ordered and which do not overlap.

2. a. Pedro fue armando el rompecabezas.

P. GO-pret solve-Gerund the puzzle ‘Pedro solved the puzzle little by little’

b. Truth conditions: Pedro solved the puzzle and this event is subdivided in puzzle-solving stages distributed in time intervals that do not overlap such that each of the stages gets the event closer to its telos.

Thus, SP multiplies instances of events –as in 1a-or stages of a single event –as in 1b-to form a pluractional macro-event. There are only four types of base predicate that form good SP : achievements with plural arguments (1), classical accomplishments (2), degree achievements (3) and delimited activities (4) (ex from B&B) :

3. el vaso se fue llenando.

‘the glass got progressively fuller’

4. fue encontrando arena en todas las habitaciones de la casa.

‘he kept finding sand in all the rooms in the house’

Activities and (some) states are not acceptable (5a,b; B&B, Laca 2005) :

5. a. \*fue siendo inteligente.

‘he WENT-being intelligent’

b. \*te fui esperando en la esquina.

‘I WENT-waiting for you at the corner’

We claim that scalarity is central to the analysis of SP. Informally, SP either finds or builds a scale (understood as a set of points totally ordered, in this case, along the temporal dimension) and imposes a requirement of a minimum of two intervals on it. Let’s see how this works with the examples shown so far. Degree achievements have been argued to introduce a degree argument as part of their semantics (Hay et al 1999 –H,K&L-, Piñón 2000,2007) ; they are thus inherently scalar. H,K&L claim that a verb like to fill is a three-place predicate between events, degrees and objects and it can be paraphrased « object x gets fuller in event e to degree d ». SP, in the case of degree achievements, modifies the relation that holds between the three entities –object, event and degree-by imposing a condition on the minimal number of degrees involved to three, i.e., the scale has to have at least two intervals. This is clearly shown in 6 : la letra A se va agrandando (A GOES-getting bigger) is not an appropriate description of (6b) but it is of 6(a), whereas la letra A se agranda is appropriate in both situations (ex from B&B):

6.a. AAA b.A A

Turning now to 1, SP builds a scale out on a non-ordered set (the children) whose members are ordered when interpreted as the agent-theme of a series of entering events, until the group of children is exhausted. This explains why 1 is ungrammatical with a singular subject :

7. \*el niño fue entrando

‘the child entered progressively one by one’

since a suitable scale cannot be build out of a one-membered set. In 2 we have a theme, the puzzle, which gets interpreted incrementally. According to H,K&L incremental theme verbs involve a gradable property which is defined by the spatial extent of this theme. In our example, it can be loosely defined as the area : each puzzle-solving stage adds to the area of what will become the solved puzzle. Again, SP changes the relation between the object, the degree and the event. If a computer solved puzzles instantly, this event could be described as *el ordenador armó el rompecabezas* (the computer solved the puzzle) but not as *\*el ordenador fue armando el rompecabezas*, because SP imposes the three degree requirement and not just the scale’s starting and final values (i.e., two degrees). In 4, a delimited activity, SP forms a scale out of the set of rooms and makes them the location of an ordered set of sand-finding events, until the set of rooms is exhausted. Our analysis gets confirmation from the fact that undelimited activities, which never form good SPs (see 5b), and some states can form an acceptable one once a scale is explicitly supplied in the form of an adjunct :

8. a. P. fue cantando \*(cada vez más fuerte)

P. Go-Pret sing-Ger each time more loud ‘P. sang progressively louder and louder’

b. P. fue sabiendo \*(más y más) física.

P. Go-Pret know-Ger more and more physics ‘P. knew more and more physics’

We explore further intriguing properties of SP :

1. in spite of its morphological kinship with progressive tenses, SP does not exhibit the imperfective paradox, i.e., the inference from the past SP to the simple past is always valid with accomplishments (B&B, Laca 2005) :

9. Juan se fue muriendo •

Juan murió. ‘Juan WENT-dying •

Juan died’

Since the imperfective paradox has been taken to be one of the central components of the meaning of the progressive and since SP does not show it, we conclude that SP is not aspectually progressive. The telos is under the scope of SP (compare J. se estuvo muriendo pero se salvó –he was dying but he survived-vs Juan se fue muriendo #pero se salvó).

2. the SP does not exhibit the sub-interval property but 3. SP rejects adverbials compatible with telicity (B&B, Laca 2005).

10. a. \*los chicos fueron entrando en una hora.

‘The children WENT-entering in one hour’ (entered one by one in an hour)

SP seems to exhibit contradictory behavior with regards to telicity (the imperfective paradox and the sub-interval property are the hallmarks of telicity ; in an hour is the traditional diagnostic telicity test). We claim that SP does not change the telicity properties of the base, all telic (with certain exceptions we discuss); in the case of delimited activities, we do not distinguish between telicity and boundedness (contra Depraetere 1997). The reason for the ungrammaticality of 8 is that *in an hour* is not the right kind of adverbial to combine with SP because SP, as our analysis claims, requires the gradual reaching of the telos by imposing at least three degrees on the scale which makes up the third argument SP requires. *In an hour* looks at an event as an undivided unit and does not permit getting inside the macro-event in its development, which is crucial to the semantics of SP. Thus the unacceptability of these adverbials does not constitute an argument against telicity but stems from a finer grained semantic incompatibility and provides indirect support for our analysis.

We predict that if there are two ways to build a scale, an SP could potentially be ambiguous.

The prediction obtains in an example like 11 (ex and discussion from B&B) :

11. los días van pasando ‘Days GO-passing’

Under one reading, the scale is formed from the plural subject and we get an ordered set of days and each one of them is the theme of pasar (but not of ir pasando). In the second reading, each day is sub-divided into stages of passing temporally ordered ; in this case, each day va pasando (i.e., the SP distributes among the plural subject).

