Cross-Linguistic Perspectives on Verb Constructions

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Edited by

Signe Oksefjell Ebeling
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PREFACE

Over the past few years the annual ICAME conference has become a natural and popular outlet for corpus-based contrastive research. This volume originates from the 4th consecutive ICAME workshop on contrastive analysis, held in Nottingham in 2014. The 2014 edition had a focus on verb constructions and attracted a number of presenters and a sizeable audience, which contributed to a very stimulating workshop.

As its full name suggests – the International Computer Archive of Modern and Medieval English – ICAME is specifically concerned with the English language; thus cross-linguistic studies presented at this conference discuss issues relating to English in contrast with one or more other languages. The chapters in this book demonstrate this to the full in including studies that contrast English with at least one of the following languages: Czech, German, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Spanish, and Swedish.

We take this opportunity to thank the contributors to this book for sharing their cross-linguistic research on verb constructions and for meeting all the deadlines. Our gratitude is also extended to the many reviewers for their time, insights and thorough inspection of the contributions to this book.

S.O. Ebeling & H. Hasselgård
Oslo, May 2015

CHAPTER ONE

CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON VERB CONSTRUCTIONS

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The English verb phrase has "attracted an enormous amount of scholarly attention in recent years" (Aarts et al. 2013: 2). Prominent examples are Aarts et al.'s *The Verb Phrase in English* (eds, 2013), whose primary focus is on recent changes, and Aarts & Meyer (eds, 1995), which presents "theoretical and descriptive approaches to the study of the verb in English" (p. 1). The central position of the verb phrase in grammatical description is uncontested. Reference grammars, such as Quirk et al. (1985) and Huddleston & Pullum (2002), typically devote substantial chapters to it, detailing its morphology, syntax and semantics (including such grammatical properties of the verb as tense, aspect, modality, voice and aktionsart). Syntactically, the verb phrase may be referred to as "the key constituent of any clause" (Peters 2013: 356), since it is "properties of the verb [that] determine what other kinds of element are required or permitted" (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 50).

This book widens the scope of the verb phrase to include "complex verb phrases", which, according to Palmer (1987: 12), are "best dealt with in terms of sentence structure". Corpus studies are ideally suited to investigate such complex verb phrases: they can easily demonstrate how verbs pattern with other elements in terms of multi-word expressions, collocations, construction types and complementation patterns, as amply illustrated in Aarts & Meyer (1995), Aarts et al. (2013), and Hanks (2000-2014). For this broader definition of the verb phrase we adopt the cover-term "verb constructions", to capture the variety of expressions found when languages are compared, as in the subsequent chapters.

The present volume sheds new light on verb constructions by exposing them to cross-linguistic analysis based on multilingual corpora (parallel and/or comparable). Multilingual corpora give insights into the forms and meanings of verb constructions both within and across languages. Not least, "they give new insights into the languages compared – insights that are likely to be unnoticed in studies of monolingual corpora" (Aijmer & Altenberg 1996: 12). The cross-linguistic perspective on verb constructions highlights the fact that languages differ in the ways certain meanings are realised; for example progressive aspect, which is fully grammaticalized in English, may be expressed by lexical means in other languages. Similarly, the division of labour between verb morphology, auxiliaries and catenatives will vary across languages, as will the division of semantic space and the recurrent collocational patterns of verbs. In other words, the multilingual corpus studies "may make meaning visible through cross-linguistic correspondences" (Johansson 2011: 126).

A notable feature of cross-linguistic studies based on translation corpora is that they yield so-called "translation paradigms (involving members of different classes), which may also turn out to be lexicogrammatical paradigms for expressing [a particular] meaning" (Hasselgård 2012: 3). For example, as shown in previous contrastive studies, a simplex verb in one language may correspond to a complex verb phrase, or indeed a verb construction, in another language or vice versa (e.g. Johansson 2001; Ebeling 2003: 169f; Ebeling & Ebeling 2013: 156ff). A case in point is the English verb *seem*, which tends to correspond to multi-word verb constructions in Norwegian, e.g. *se ut til å* "look as if" (cf. Johansson 2001). Corpus-based studies, such as those in the present volume, thus bring to light differences and similarities of structure as well of system as regards verb constructions in different languages (cf. Halliday 2002; Hasselgård 2012).

The frequency data offered by multilingual corpora provide another invaluable source of information about differences between apparently similar linguistic constructions in different languages. As Johansson puts it: "languages differ not just in the means of expression, but also in the extent to which particular meanings are conventionally expressed in natural discourse" (2007: 307).

The nine studies contained in the current volume reveal much cross-linguistic diversity: seemingly equivalent verb constructions may differ in their semantics, and similar meanings may be expressed by different types of construction. In other words, different languages have different ways of lexicalising verb-based meanings, most notably by means of other, divergent verb constructions. A range of lexicogrammatical aspects of

verb constructions are explored: time reference, modality, voice, light verb constructions, non-finite complementation of lexical verbs, posture-verb constructions, semiperiphrastic constructions, and construction and semantic composition of verbs of putting. All of the studies involve English in comparison with at least one of the following languages: Czech, German, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Spanish, and Swedish. The collective effect is one of a truly multilingual perspective on verb constructions. The diversity of comparisons also highlights the multi-faceted nature of the verb phrase, which seems to have a virtually limitless potential for exploration in the fields of tense, aspect, modality, lexical semantics, syntax, and phraseology.

Each of the remaining chapters in this book presents a corpus-based case study of a verb construction, whose content is briefly outlined below.

Chapter 2 contains **Tania de Dios**'s comparison of complementation patterns in English and Spanish. More specifically, she investigates the use or omission of a direct object with the verbs *eat*/*devour* and *comer*/*devorar*. English and Spanish are found to share a number of behavioural traits as regards object (in)omissibility. The interpretation of the corpus data suggests that the more entrenched a complement is, the more easily it can be omitted. However, the material shows considerably higher omission rates in Spanish for both members of the pair.

In Chapter 3, **Signe Oksefjell Ebeling** looks into the relationship between Norwegian pseudo-coordination and English posture-verb constructions and the progressive aspect. On the basis of a bidirectional translation corpus of English and Norwegian, she establishes that there is a stronger relationship between Norwegian pseudo-coordination and posture-verb constructions in English than between and Norwegian pseudo-coordination and the (grammaticalized) English progressive aspect. It is shown that pseudo-coordination is less grammaticalized than suggested in some previous research, while posture-verb + *-ing* constructions in English are more grammaticalized than has previously been held.

Thomas Egan investigates the ways in which Norwegian infinitival complement constructions are translated into English (Chapter 4). Where English has two types of non-finite construction, the infinitive and the gerund, Norwegian has just one, the infinitive. The Norwegian infinitive can be translated into English by both infinitives and gerunds, often with minimal differences in meaning. The chapter discusses possible reasons for choosing the gerund rather than the maximally congruent infinitive form. The translators' choice of English non-finite complement construction is motivated by semantic factors and by lexical similarity.

Syntagmatic adjacency of the matrix verb and complement, by contrast, does not seem to influence the choice.

In Chapter 5, **Hilde Hasselgård** compares two future-referring expressions in English and Norwegian that are both composed of a verb of motion plus an infinitive: *be going to* V and *komme til å* V "come to_{prep} $to_{inf.}$ V". Through a study of translation patterns, several differences in meaning are uncovered between the two constructions, the most important of which concern the expression of intention and non-actualization. The two expressions are, however, alike in typically viewing the future from a present-time point of view, and both are used to make predictions based on present-time evidence.

Semiperiphrastic constructions in English and Spanish are the topic of **Marlén Izquierdo**'s contribution in Chapter 6. These are composed of an aspectual verb followed by a non-finite verb, e.g. *keep running* and *seguir leyendo* "continue reading". Findings from the bidirectional corpus study suggest that the English semiperiphrasis expresses an array of aspectual connotations, and its semantic and syntactic behaviour resembles substantially that of the Spanish (semi)periphrasis. Alternative translational options provide further insight into the lexicogrammatical nature of the construction.

Magnus Levin & Jenny Ström Herold investigate light verb constructions (LVCs) with "give" and "take" verbs in English, German and Swedish (Chapter 7). The authors differentiate between three types of LVCs: (i) light verb + deverbal noun; (ii) light verb + suffixed noun and (iii) light verb + noun lacking corresponding verb. The contrastive study reveals that the three languages under study prefer different types of LVCs; while English prefers type (i), German prefers type (ii) and Swedish type (iii). Moreover, LVCs with GIVE/GEBEN/GE are more similar across the languages than LVCs with TAKE/NEHMEN/TA. This is most likely due to the fact that the "give" constructions are based on the double object construction, facilitating constructions with greater semantic transparency.

In Chapter 8, **Markéta Malá** contrasts patterns containing the English path verb *come* with their Czech translations, focusing primarily on the "*come* + V-*ing*" pattern. She argues that the pattern constitutes a single unit of meaning, support for which is found in the Czech counterparts showing a preference for univerbal renderings or counterparts comprising aspectual verbs. As pointed out by the author, "[t]his suggests not only that *come* is a part of a multi-word unit of meaning but also that its lexical meaning within the unit is weakened: *come* expresses an aspectual or

directional modification, with the complement of *come* constituting the semantic core of the predication".

Comparing grammaticalizing elements of evidentiality in English and Lithuanian, **Anna Ruskan** (Chapter 9) focuses on evidential passive constructions in English (e.g. *be said to, be thought to*) and parenthetical participle-based Complement-Taking-Predicates (CTPs) in Lithuanian (e.g. *sakoma* "said," *manoma* "thought"). The compared items differ structurally, but are shown to cover similar evidential functions, including hearsay, mindsay, proof and general knowledge. Nevertheless, the study also unveils functional differences across the two languages in that parenthetical participle-based CTPs in Lithuanian sometimes acquire discourse marker status at the expense of evidential functions.

Finally, in Chapter 10, **Åke Viberg** investigates verbs of putting in a range of languages, with special focus on Swedish and English. Such verbs are found to contrast along various dimensions: the semantic composition of the verb (e.g. the encoding of Posture), and the placement of the (physical) object inside or on the surface of the Ground. English *put* is unspecified for posture, unlike the less frequent *lay* and *set*, while the verbs typically used in Swedish, *sätta, ställa* and *lägga*, reflect the human postures of sitting, standing and lying, respectively. Postural placement verbs are also characteristic of Slavic languages, but the patterns of generalization of the postural meaning are different.

The present volume demonstrates the fruitfulness of corpus-based cross-linguistic comparison within a limited area. This perspective allows us to "compare not just structures, but their conditions of use" (Johansson 2011: 125). Still, this book has only scratched the surface of the potential offered by multilingual corpus studies. It is to be hoped that the breadth of languages explored, the descriptions offered and the methodologies used will inspire further explorations, thus enhancing our collective insight into language and language use in general and verb constructions in particular.

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CHAPTER TWO

LOOKING FOR DIFFERENCES IN OUR SILENCES: A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH TO OBJECT OMISSION IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH[1]

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Recent decades have witnessed increasing interest in the varying degrees of admissibility for object omission displayed by English verbs, even when these are closely related semantically (e.g. *She was eating* vs. **She was devouring*). Findings from a corpus-based pilot study suggested that the more entrenched a complement is, the more easily it can be omitted by speakers. However, according to Bosque and Gutiérrez-Rexach (2009: 363), the occurrence of implicit arguments may depend on the grammatical structure of a given language. The aim of the present paper is to explore such potential differences in the licensing of object omission in English and Spanish.

1 Introduction

The fact that object omission is possible with certain English verbs yet seems unviable with others has recently become a concern for linguists (cf. Groefsema 1995, Goldberg 2001, among others). Special attention has been paid here to those cases in which the semantic similarity between two given verbs is evident (cf. Fillmore 1986, Liu 2008), as with *eat* and *devour* (e.g. *She ate* vs. **She devoured*), which are often cited as prototypical examples of semantically related verbs showing different degrees of admissibility for object omission (cf. Löbner 2002: 106, among others). In a pilot study of the behaviour of these two verbs as attested in the *British National Corpus* (BNC), I examined the factors determining the degree of acceptance of elided objects displayed by each member of the pair. It was found that the high rate of object omission with the verb *eat* seems to be deeply connected to the inferability of the complement

with which it occurs. On the other hand, the lower incidence of objectless constructions with *devour* appears to be related to the existence of looser ties between the verb and a specific type of complement. These findings point to the possibility that the more entrenched a complement is, the more easily it can be left out by speakers.[2]

However, according to Bosque and Gutiérrez-Rexach (2009: 363), the occurrence of implicit arguments may depend on the grammatical structure of a given language, so that the way in which verbs like *eat* and *devour* operate in English might differ, to a greater or lesser extent, from the behaviour of their counterparts in other languages. In view of this, the aim of the present paper is to explore the potential differences in the licensing of object omission in English and Spanish. To this end, I will replicate the English study with Spanish material, looking at the verbs *comer* 'eat' and *devorar* 'devour' in the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* (CREA). A second source of data, the bidirectional English-Spanish corpus P-ACTRES (cf. Izquierdo et al. 2008), will provide a number of parallel structures containing these verbs. The comparison of the data from both languages will allow me to (i) determine the omissibility rate of direct objects with each verb in the two languages; (ii) identify factors which favour or disfavour such elisions in each case; (iii) trace possible patterns of usage; and (iv) provide a preliminary description of how English and Spanish verbs differ in terms of object (in)omissibility.

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a review of current research into object omission phenomena in English. A description of the methodology used in this study follows in Section 3, after which findings are presented and discussed in Section 4. Finally, Section 5 sets out the main conclusions and provides suggestions for further research.

2 A critical overview of the treatment of implicit objects in English

Within the framework of this study, the term *object omission* refers to those structures where a verb which is generally used with a direct object appears on its own, this missing complement being inferable or retrievable from the surrounding context. This situation is exemplified by pairs of sentences such as those in (1) and (2):

(1) a. He was *eating* an ice cream.
b. He was *eating [food]*.

(2) a. He *noticed* Ann's presence in the room.
b. Ann entered the room and Phil *noticed [that Ann entered]*.

In recent decades, the nature and behaviour of these structures have attracted increasing attention, giving rise to three principal explanations for the strategy of object omission: (i) accounts based primarily on lexical factors; (ii) proposals favouring a pragmatic explanation of the phenomenon; and (iii) those involving both lexical and pragmatic factors. This section offers a brief review of these three different approaches and provides some insights into the workings of object drop in English.[3]

Within lexically-based accounts, Fillmore's (1986) far-reaching division between what he calls *indefinite null complements* (INCs) and *definite null complements* (DNCs) is perhaps the most influential (cf. also Lehrer 1970 and Allerton 1975, among others). With this dichotomy, which is reflected in most subsequent studies on the same topic, a distinction is made between genuine instances of object drop (i.e. INCs like *He was* ***eating***) and cases in which the elided object can be unequivocally retrieved from the surrounding context (i.e. DNCs such as *Ann entered the room and Phil* ***noticed***). In an attempt to come up with an explanation as to why some verbs favour omission while others do not, Fillmore states categorically that the determinants of omissibility phenomena are purely lexical, arguing that "individual lexical items will simply have to be represented as having certain of their complements marked as indefinite omissible or definite omissible" (Fillmore 1986: 97). As proof for this he presents several groups of semantically related verb sets which behave differently as regards the licensing of object omission. Two of these verb groups are listed under (3) and (4):

(3) a. She promised
b.*She pledged
c.*She vowed

(4) a. I protest
b. I object
c.*I oppose

Moving on to the many lexico-pragmatic accounts of object omission, mention should be made of Groefsema's (1995) study, in which a central role is given to *Relevance Theory*.[4] Specifically, Groefsema seeks a connection between object drop and the so-called *Principle of Relevance* which establishes that "a (genuine) communicator tries to be optimally

relevant" and so "she intends the utterance to provide the addressee with adequate contextual effects for as little processing effort as possible" (Groefsema 1995: 154-155). Taking the notion of the ideal communicator as a starting point, Groefsema claims that deletion of a direct object can only happen when one of the following two conditions is met: (i) if the conceptual representation of a verb contains a selectional restriction such that it gives us an interpretation in accordance with the Principle of Relevance; and (ii) if the rest of the utterance makes immediately accessible an assumption (or assumptions) which gives us an interpretation in accordance with the Principle of Relevance (cf. Groefsema 1995: 159). Another interesting contribution among the lexico-pragmatic proposals is Liu (2008), who in his taxonomy of English verbs used without an object includes a remarkable distinction between what he terms *transitive converted intransitive verbs of activity* and *object-deleting verbs*. Such a contrast essentially mirrors Fillmore's (1986) opposition between INCs and DNCs discussed above. However, Liu's account improves previous descriptions by proposing a new criterion to discriminate the two classes of object omission. Thus, he argues that *transitive converted intransitive verbs of activity* can be used without a discourse or situational context, while this is not possible with *object-deleting verbs*. Also, he maintains that, with the latter type, omission can be motivated not only by the fact that the object is retrievable from the preceding linguistic material, as in (5), but also by the salient presence of the missing complement in the situational context, as happens in constructions such as the one in (6):

(5) Each time we met she invited me, and each time I *declined*. (Liu 2008: 303)

(6) *Bake* for 45 minutes. [in the instructions on a cake mix box] (Liu 2008: 204)

Finally, some accounts of object omission rely primarily on pragmatics (cf. Goldberg 2001; Scott 2006; Onozuka 2007; Glass 2012, among others). Goldberg (2001) contends that almost any English verb might be used without its direct object provided that the latter is deemphasized and the action acquires a more prominent role. She argues that such conditions would even apply in the case of patient objects, which have generally been considered not to be eligible for elision, given that they portray a change in the state of the object and thus draw attention to it (cf. Fillmore 1986; Rappaport Hovav 2008; Rappaport Hovav and Levin 2010). Such a shift in the focus of meaning would be fostered by a number of linguistic contexts,

like those involving iteration and generality, as in (7), an action portrayed as the discourse topic, as in (8), and those presenting a strong affective stance, as in (9):

(7) Pat *gave* and *gave*, but Christ just *took* and *took*. (Goldberg 2001: 506)

(8) He has always opposed to the idea of murder, but in the middle of the battlefield, he had no trouble *killing*. (Goldberg 2001: 513)

(9) Why would they give this creep a light prison term!? He *murdered*! (Goldberg 2001: 513)

Another noteworthy study here is Glass (2012), who opts for a purely pragmatic account of the phenomenon and claims that any transitive verb "may be used without an object when this object is recoverable to a degree such that speakers can still proceed with their goals" (Glass 2012: 24). This implies that, unlike in Goldberg's approach, no linguistic requirement is needed for the omission to take place, retrievability being the only condition for (10) and (11) to be acceptable utterances:

(10) Learn to *break* like A pro! Chad Netherland takes you from the basics of how to break to breaking stacks of concrete! [a strain of martial arts where people break boards, concrete blocks, etc. competitively] (Glass 2012)

(11) Honey, let me teach you how to toast: First you *clink*. And then you drink [raising a glass, addressing a child] (Glass 2012)

However, as attractive as this approach may be, it seems to fail in one key aspect: whereas Glass considers (10) and (11) as instances of omitted indefinite objects, I believe there are compelling reasons to analyse these, rather, as cases of definite null complementation. Thus, even though no specific objects of *break* and *clink* are expressed linguistically, they are certainly present in the situational context. As a matter of fact, Glass explicitly mentions that context is needed in order for these utterances to be felicitous, contrary to what happens, for example, with a sentence such as *She is eating*, which can be understood perfectly well even in a wholly perfectly decontextualized situation.

The foregoing discussion has shown that each of the different accounts for object omission in English has contributed to the description of the

phenomenon in its own way. On the one hand, lexical accounts have shown that characteristics of individual verbs may play a vital role in determining the viability of a specific instance of object omission. On the other, pragmatic-based approaches have shown that such lexical properties may be relaxed under specific contextual situations. Taking this into consideration, it seems that the best course of action would be to conflate the most insightful aspects of the different frameworks into a coherent whole that would result in an improved, all-embracing description of the strategy of object omission.

One way of combining both viewpoints would be through the recognition that lexical and pragmatic factors might well have a different impact on the allowance of elided objects depending on whether we are trying to ascertain the degree of omissibility of a complement with either definite or indefinite reference. Thus, it seems that, in dealing with INCs, the nature of lexical items per se is more relevant than when DNCs are at stake. As Liu (2008: 300-302) points out, verbs allowing the former type of object omission show three main traits: (i) the emphasis is on the action; (ii) no definite complement is retrievable from the surrounding context; and (iii) no specific context is needed for the utterance to be felicitous. What I argue here is that the possibility of fulfilling these conditions is, in turn, subject to the existence of a particular relationship between a given verb and its complement in that the object required by such a verb must be fairly specific. In other words, for INC to occur, speakers must be allowed to infer the possible implicit object simply by relying on the information provided by the verb. This might explain why INCs are only feasible with certain verbs, whereas a wider range of lexical items might appear with DNCs, for which no comparable inferential process is needed. Such an approach might help in understanding why a construction such as *She was eating* is perfectly normal, while the semantically related **She was devouring* is considered ungrammatical or, at least, highly awkward. However, the degree of acceptability of object omission would undoubtedly change if the verb *devour* is used in an instance of DNC, as shown in (12):

(12) For Charlie's first birthday in October, I got him a Frosty Paws Ice Cream for dogs and he *devoured*. I had to take the empty cup away because he started eating that too. (Glass 2012)

The hypothesis put forward in the preceding paragraphs seems to hold true for English, as seen in a pilot study on the behavioural patterns for the verbs *eat* and *devour* in relation to object drop. In what follows, I will

further discuss the methodology and results of this study and contrast them with a parallel investigation involving the Spanish equivalents *comer* and *devorar*.

3 Methodology

The process of data retrieval for the English pair started with the searches [eat].[v*] and [devour].[v*] in the BNC. These produced a total of 363 tokens of *devour* and 13,604 of *eat*, from which a random sample of 500 examples was extracted. As to the data for Spanish, the searches were restricted to the time span 1980-1993, the period covered by the BNC, and to texts representing only Spanish spoken in Spain.[5] Once these preliminary measures were taken, the main searches aiming at a balanced sample of the uses of *comer* and *devorar* were performed. Given the lack of POS tagging in CREA, and hence the impossibility of carrying out semi-automated queries analogous to the ones employed for the BNC, an alternative solution had to be adopted. For the verb *devorar*, a search was made for the string *devor**, yielding 694 tokens. The 'filter' tool provided by the corpus interface was then used to reduce the cases to a number comparable to those for English *devour* without altering representativity. In the case of *comer*, however, the same procedure could not be followed, as the coincidence of the initial letter combination for the verb (i.e. *com**) with that of several other Spanish words resulted in very low precision of retrieval and thus the inability of the interface to adequately handle the results of the query. In view of this problem, a search for each individual form of the verb (47 in all) was performed, and a well-proportioned sample roughly matching in size the one for *devorar* was manually compiled.[6] This laborious process yielded a total of 449 tokens for *comer* and 401 for *devorar*. However, the above figures for the four items do not tally with the exact number of tokens analysed for the current study, as many of the examples had to be excluded for the purposes of this investigation. The disregarded instances were of two basic types:

(a) cases in which the forms are not used as verbs, but appear in nominal, adjectival, adverbial, prepositional and conjunctive uses, as examples (13) – (17) show, respectively:[7]

(13a) Sayeed (2 years) was showing severe behaviour and *eating* problems. (BYU-BNC. 1992. Jo Douglas. *Behaviour problems in young children: Assessment and management*)

(13b) La embriaguez alcanza muchas veces el estado de *coma* o precoma alcohólico […]. (CREA. 1980. Carlos Castilla del Pino. *Introducción a la psiquiatría 2. Psiquiatría general. Psiquiatría clínica*)
"Drunkenness often reaches the stage of alcoholic coma or pre-coma"

(14a) I wanted to present another Lagerfeld, a man of *devouring* intelligence […]. (BYU-BNC. 1999. *Harpers & Queen*)
(14b) Por primera vez tuve conciencia de la necesidad de salvar vidas humanas en medio de aquella Guerra civil *devoradora*. (CREA. 1989. *El País*)
"For the first time I was aware of the necessity of saving human lives in the midst of that devouring Civil War"

(15) Procura hacerse notar como sea, coquetea con cualquiera, "liga" con quien se le ponga por delante, actúa "*devoradoramente"* con la gente, etc. […]. (CREA. 1989. Enrique González Duro. *Las neurosis del ama de casa*)
"She tries to draw attention to herself no matter what, flirts with whoever gets in her way, acts devouringly with people, etc."

(16) Yo, *como* ministro de justicia, las acato absolutamente. (CREA. 1990. *Tiempo*)
I, as a Minister of Justice, comply with them absolutely"

(17) Y entonces yo, *como* trabajaba en la con en la Universidad. y mi hermana luego también trabajaba ahí, la pobre, en el bar […]. (CREA. ORAL)
"And then I, as I was working at the University. and my sister was also working there later on, poor thing, in the bar […]"

(b) cases involving verbal forms employed in contexts which are irrelevant for a number of different possible reasons: they include (i) tokens containing phrasal verbs (18); (ii) examples of idiomatic expressions (19); (iii) cases of metalanguage (20); (iv) ill-formed strings (21); (v) passive constructions (22); or (vi) instances involving a language other than Spanish or English (23), Latin in the case of my data.

(18) Ladybirds […] are encouraged, not killed off, so that they *eat up* harmful aphids. (BYU-BNC. 1990. Caroline Wheather & Angela Smith. *Here's health: The green guide*)

(19a) Lugh was going to fool Medoc very neatly, and they would all *eat* their words. (BYU-BNC. 1992. Bridget Wood. *The lost prince*)
(19b) Hay que saber imponerse, sino *se lo comen a uno vivo*. (CREA. 1989. Felipe Hernández. *Naturaleza*)
"You need to know how to impose yourself, otherwise the will eat you alive"

(20a) 'I eaten seven potatoes!' 'I think you mean *ate*, David,' said the teacher.' (BYU-BNC. 1991. *Return of the red nose joke book*)
(20b) Ya Larramendi (1729, 60), […], señaló la coincidencia en la oposición he comido/*comí*. (CREA. 1980. *El País*)
"The coincidence in the opposition *he comido/comí* was already pointed out by Larramendi (1729, 60)"

(21) There is the final and fourth way in which it could be *devoured* this […]. (BYU-BNC. 1993. Royal Courts: hearing)

(22a) A big slice was wrapped up […] to be *devoured* in the early hours of the morning […]. (BYU-BNC. 1992. *Daily Telegraph*, elect. edn.)
(22b) Me acaban de informar que O'Farrill *ha sido devorado* por un monstruoso insecto diabólico […]. (CREA. 1983. Juan Perucho. *Pamela*)
"I have just been informed that O' Farrill has been devoured by a monstrous diabolical insect"

(23) Et dixit mihi: Accipe librum, et *devora* illum…". (CREA. 1991. Mariano Arias. *El silencio de las palabras*)

After having pruned all tokens following the procedure detailed above, relevant examples of *eat* and *devour* in the BNC numbered 425 and 298 instances, respectively. As for the data from CREA, there were 284 instances of *devorar* and 341 of *comer*. All these tokens were then analysed according to a number of parameters, including (i) presence/ absence of object, (ii) specificity of expressed object, (iii) retrievability of unexpressed object, and (iv) degree of retrievability of unexpressed object.

As mentioned in the introductory section, additional data were drawn from the ACTRES Parallel Corpus (P-ACTRES 2.0), a bidirectional English-Spanish / Spanish-English corpus which is being compiled by the ACTRES research group based at the University of León (http://actres.unileon.es/). Currently, only the English-Spanish part of the corpus has been completed (ca. 2.5 million words), with the repository of texts for the Spanish-English part still under construction. Hence, for the present study, and with the aim of looking for potential changes in transitivity derived from the translation process, a search for the relevant verbs was performed in the English-Spanish component of the corpus. The initial queries yielded 288 tokens for the verb *eat* and 16 instances of *devour*, which were individually analysed following a procedure similar to the one described for the data drawn from BNC and CREA. In this case, however, apart from tokens involving irrelevant categories,[8] several instances had to be discarded due to mismatches resulting from different translation practices. Therefore, it was also necessary to disregard cases in which a verb other than *comer* and *devorar* or a different construction altogether had been employed in the translated text, as well as those examples in which no corresponding material was available in the target text. Once the pruning process was concluded, the number of examples of roughly equivalent instances of *eat* and *comer* had been reduced to 187, while only 11 tokens of comparable uses of *devour* and *devorar* were found.

A careful examination of all data revealed interesting findings concerning object omission in English and Spanish. These are discussed in detail in Section 4 below.

4 Results and discussion of the findings

4.1 The comparable corpora: BNC and CREA

The analysis of the data from both languages confirmed an expected finding, namely a noticeably higher rate of occurrence of the objectless pattern with *eat* and *comer* compared to *devour* and *devorar*. This is clearly shown in Figure 2.1.

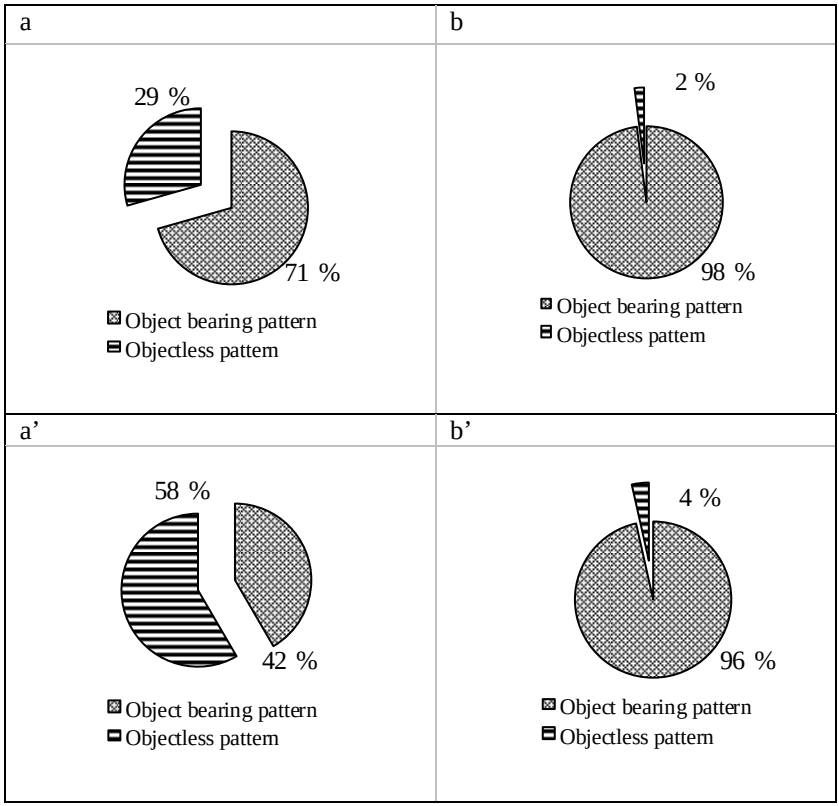

Figure 2.1: *Omission rate for* eat *(a) and* devour *(b) in the BNC and for* comer *(a') and* devorar *(b') in CREA.*

In the pilot study for English, the starting hypothesis was that the verb *eat* omits its argument much more readily than the semantically related *devour* as a consequence of the strong link between this verb and the type of complement it generally appears with, which makes it easier for speakers to leave out the direct object. This was confirmed by the results of the empirical study: when examining the kind of complement appearing in the object-bearing patterns for both verbs, the verb *eat* tends to select edible entities as objects, while *devour* much more frequently collocates with non-edible entities, as Figure 2.2 illustrates.[9] Similarly, Figure 2.2 shows that the same trend is attested for Spanish. These percentages were calculated without taking into account the total number of object-bearing examples, but rather the number of cases in which the identity of the object could be traced back. In some instances, the referents of pronominal

direct objects could not be identified due to copyright restrictions of the corpus used.

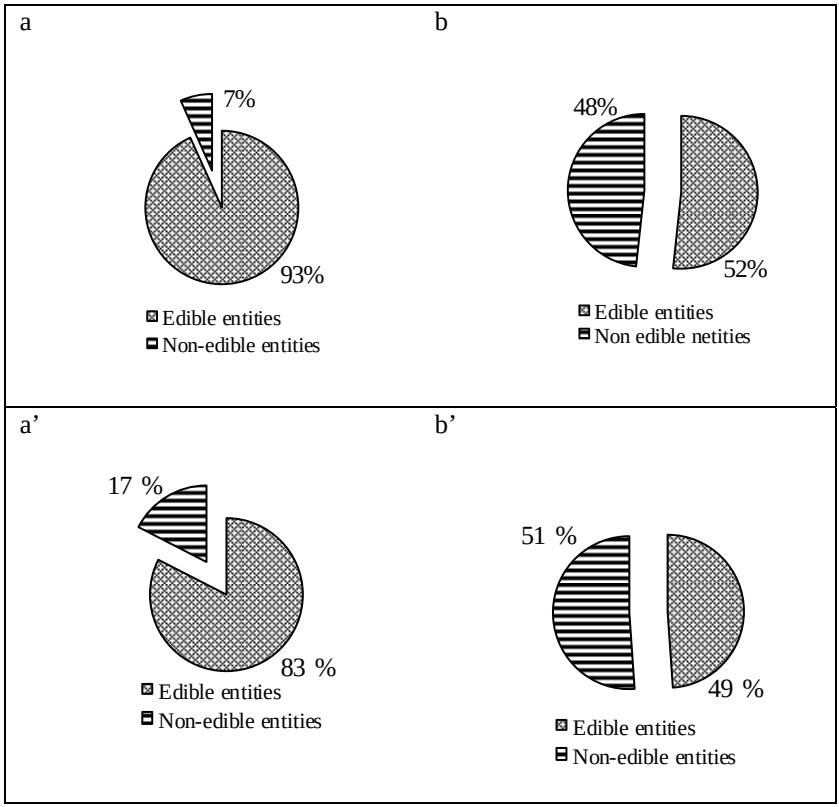

Figure 2.2: *Type of object for* eat *(a) and* devour *(b) in BNC and for* comer *(a') and* devorar *(b') in CREA.*

Instances of non-edible entities appearing as objects of *devour* and *devorar* are illustrated in (24) and (25):

(24) Mona watched Sheila more *devour* than read *the results*. (BYU-BNC. 1990. McGahern, J. *Amongst women*)

(25) También es muy golosa... *devora la mitad de mi sueldo* como si fueran caramelos. (CREA. 1992. Gutiérrez Aragón, Manuel. *Morirás de otra cosa*)

> "She is greedy as well… she devours half my salary as if it were candy"

Going a step further, we note that the corpus data for English also showed that, when used with an edible entity as an object, *eat* tends to select items that one would straightforwardly classify as food, whereas the range of edible entities which *devour* usually takes as objects is much wider (e.g. edible items that one would only expect animals to eat, human flesh, liquids, etc.). This can be seen in Figure 2.3.

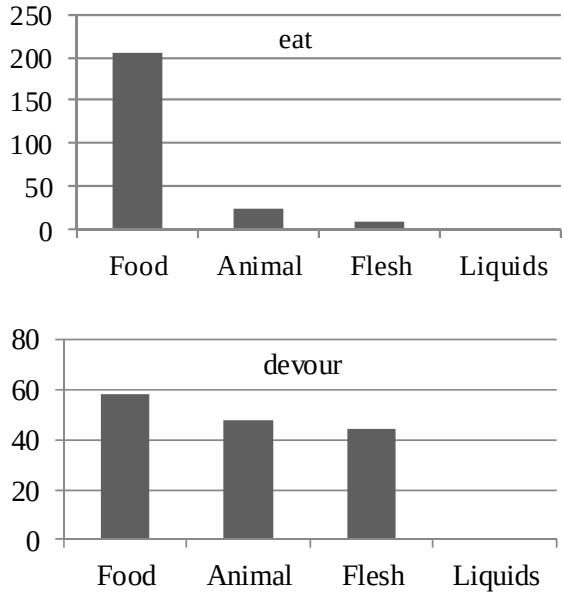

Figure 2.3: *Specificity of edible object for* eat *(a) and* devour *(b) in the BNC.*

As regards Spanish, the situation is again quite similar to the one for English. Although Figure 2.4 shows that there are several edible items not classifiable as food featuring as objects with *comer*, their very low rate of appearance nevertheless confirms edible entities of the type *food* as the prototypical object of the verb. This does not apply to *devorar*, for which the number of objects of the kind *flesh* almost equals the total of cases in which the verb is used with edible entities involving some sort of *food*.

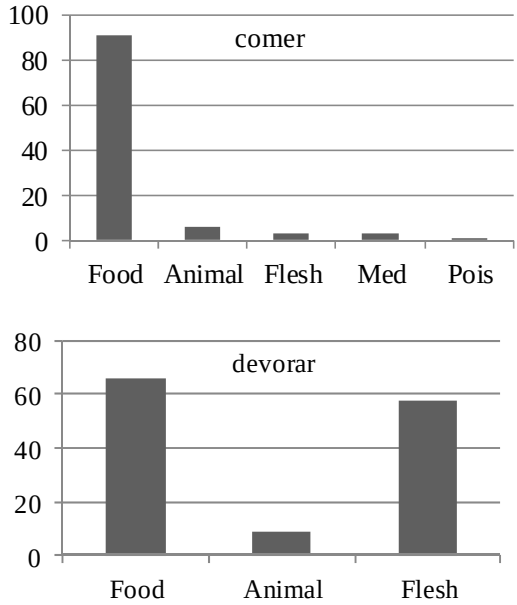

Figure 2.4: *Specificity of edible object for* comer *(a) and* devorar *(b) in CREA.*

Some examples of the verbs *devour* and *devorar* taking edible objects not readily categorised as food are included below:

(26) The plants grow naturally in impoverished peat bogs, and they *devour insects* as a source of protein. (BYU-BNC. 1985-1994. Central television news scripts)

(27) Prometeo que, por no obedecer a los dioses y, apiadándose de los humanos que tenían frío, les dijo cómo hacer fuego, fue castigado eternamente a estar atado a una roca, donde un águila le *devoraba las entrañas*. (CREA. 1986. Hernáiz, Juan Ignacio. *Teoría, historia y sociología del arte*)
"Prometeo, who, disobeying the Gods, and taking pity on the humans who were cold, told them how to make a fire, was tied to a rock where an eagle would devour his entrails for eternity as a punishment"

The fact that *eat* and *comer* very strongly prefer edible entities classifiable as food as direct objects is, then, proved by the results for both English and Spanish, which implies that speakers might have created very

specific expectations about the range of objects with which those verbs might collocate. This does not happen, however, in the case of *devour* and *devorar*, where speakers have fewer clues regarding what to expect as verbal complements. These observations, together with the previous finding that the verbs *eat* and *comer* show a stronger tendency to appear in objectless patterns than the semantically related *devour* and *devorar* (cf. Figure 2.1), might well be seen as a confirmation of the existence of a direct relationship between the inferability of an object and the possibility of object omission to which I referred in Section 1.

Such an idea is further confirmed if we look at the instances in which *eat* and *comer*, on the one hand, and *devour* and *devorar*, on the other, are used without an object. Thus, while in almost all of the examples with *devour* and *devorar* the elided object can be invariably retrieved from the previous context to a greater or lesser extent, the objects of *eat* and *comer* can be traced back only 45% of the time (68 out of 125 examples) in the case of English and only 17% (34 out of 198 examples) in Spanish. In the rest of the examples, the unexpressed object cannot be recovered from the preceding context, although we, as interlocutors, are perfectly able to relate the missing complement with an edible entity of the kind *food* thanks to our knowledge of the world. Examples (28) and (29) are instances of this kind:

(28) I have to remember '*Eat* regularly, you cannot dance on an upset stomach.' (BYU-BNC. 1983. John Percival. *Theatre in my blood: biography of John Cranko*)

(29) El problema de la alimentación ha llegado a un momento crítico. Le repugna *comer*, como habrá observado. (CREA. 1989. Alfonso Sastre. *Los últimos días de Emmanuel Kant contados por Ernesto Toedoro Amadeo Hoffman*)
"The problem with her diet has reached a critical point. Eating makes her sick, as you may have noticed."

So far, we have looked at aspects of the behaviour of the English and the Spanish pairs in which they show similar patterns. Specifically, it has been argued that in both systems a marked difference can be perceived in the degree of acceptance of elided objects for each member of the pair, with one of these (i.e. *eat* and *comer*) much more consistently omitting its complement than the other (i.e. *devour* and *devorar*). Moreover, the level of entrenchment of *eat*-type verbs with a highly specific kind of

complement has been posited as a possible motivating factor for object drop.

However, the two languages seem to depart from each other in some respects. Thus, even though both languages share the tendency just described, they clearly differ in that the proportion of elided objects is markedly higher in the case of Spanish. Hence, while only 29% of the instances of the verb *eat* are used with no object, the proportion rises to 58% for Spanish *comer*, thus outnumbering cases in which an object is present. The same pattern seems to emerge when we turn to *devour* and *devorar*: whereas the English verb is used with no expressed object in only 2% of cases, this rises to 17% for *devorar* (cf. Figure 2.1 above). The reasons for this difference in rates of omission in the two languages cannot be definitively determined. However, several factors may have a bearing on such divergent behaviour between the two languages. For example, the noticeable higher rates of object omission with Spanish *comer* than with its English counterpart *eat* may be related to the fact that specific intransitive senses of the verb are more established in Spanish. That is, the Spanish verb *comer* is quite frequently used in order to refer to one of the three meals of the day, a nuance of meaning for which no direct object is needed. Although this use exists in English as well, it is not as frequently attested as in the Spanish data, as Figure 2.5 indicates (note that the percentages here are for objectless examples of both verbs).

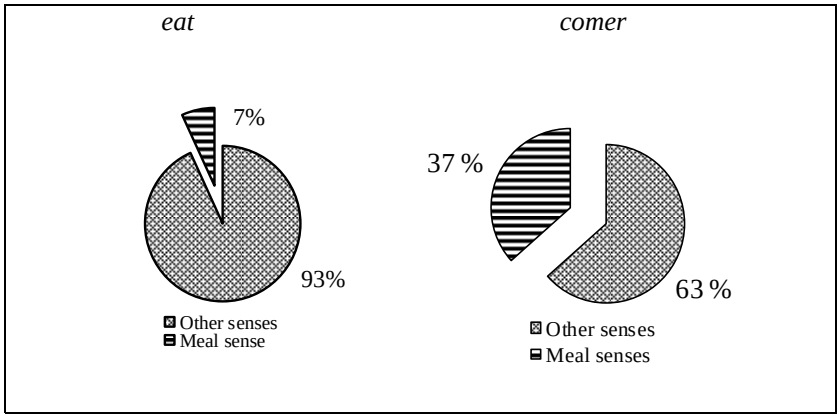

Figure 2.5: *Specific sense for* eat *in the BNC (a) and* comer *in CREA (b)*

Examples (30) and (31) illustrate the verbs *eat* and *comer* used in objectless patterns with this specific sense: