“Saying” verbs in Spanish
Deepening the lexical semantics description

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The aim of this work is to provide a fine-grained semantic description of “saying” verbs in Spanish to try to determine the specific semantic features that permit these verbs to project their argument structure in an ample set of alternative syntactic constructions. The work provides a characterization of this verbal domain in specific semantic sub-domains through the notion of frame semantics. It is argued that the relevant frame for the description of these verbs’s meaning is Jakobson’s model of communicative functions. It’s claim that these functions play an important role in defining the semantics of the different sub-domains and that they permit the identification of the features that are behind the different constructional patterns of these verbs.

1. Introduction

Van Valin & LaPolla (1997: 116–118) propose that the verbs of “saying” constitute a special class of activity verbs, in as much as they behave syntactically in a complex manner. Concretely, the items that belong to this verb class can project clauses with different patterns of complementation. As an example they show the case of the verb to speak:

(1) a. Sandy spoke but a few words.
   b. Sandy spoke to Kim.
   c. Sandy spoke Telugu.

In order to avoid positing one different lexical entry for each of the predicates in these examples, Van Valin & LaPolla (1997: 117) make use of a common representation, valid for all the verbs of “saying”, which along with the syntactic variables, adds a set of internal variables that refer to the semantic elements that can have an alternative syntactic projection with this kind of predicates. The representation is the following:

(2) do’ (x, [express(a).to.(b).in language.(γ)’ (x,y)])
Resorting to this kind of syntactic and semantically driven templates has been systematically exploited in the research program of the Lexical Functional Grammar (Faber & Mairal 1999) and within the Lexical Grammar Model (Mairal & Faber 2002 and 2005; González 2002 and 2004). The basic idea behind this is to capture and formalize the description of the complete interplay between semantics and syntax.

The goal of this paper is to present a more fine-grained semantic analysis of the verbs of “saying”, or “communication” verbs, in Spanish. The aim is, in the spirit of Lexical Grammar, to deepen Van Valin & Lapolla's semantic characterization of this verbal class, in order to determine the particular features that are behind the different possibilities of each verb of the class to project one or another of their syntactic arguments, and the features that are behind the different coding properties of these arguments.

The semantic analysis I present here takes in consideration that the whole domain of “saying” verbs functions as a semantic frame (Fillmore 1982). I argue that the frame is organized in the same vein of the communication model first proposed by Jakobson (1956), which considers, not only the elements participating in the communication process (the speaker, the addressee, the message, the referent, etc.), but also the dynamic relations that these elements display among them; these relations are the so called communication functions (emotive, referential, connative, etc.). The claim is that the semantic and syntactic identity of the verbs can be predicted considering the values they lexicalize from this frame.

2. Some problems on the current approach

As has been said, Van Valin & Lapolla (1997) propose a generic logical structure for all the verbs of saying. It is repeated here as number (3):

\[(3) \quad \text{do'} (x, [\text{express}(\alpha).\text{to}(\beta).\text{in language}.(\gamma') (x,y)])\]

As one can see, along the syntactic variables x and y, this representation has a set of semantic or internal variables, the ones in Greek letters. These variables are behind the different patterns of complementation of a verb like to speak that, as we have seen, can select as direct core argument the thing expressed, or the addressee, or the language spoken by the speaker.

Van Valin & Lapolla also propose that there is another kind of verbs of saying; these are the ones of the type of to tell, which are said to have the following logical structure:

\[(4) \quad \text{do'} (x, [\text{express}(\alpha).\text{to}(\beta).\text{in language}.(\gamma') (x,y)]) \text{ CAUSE}
\[\text{BECOME aware.of}(y,z)], \text{where } y = \beta, z = \alpha\]
The representation in (4) accounts for the double fact that verbs as *to tell* are inherently telic and involve a causative value. This last feature is revealed by the paraphrase: *Sandy told Kim that Robin would arrive soon* = “Sandy’s speaking made Kim become aware that Robin would arrive soon”.

Although these two representations – (3) and (4) – account for a lot of semantic and syntactic phenomena within the domain of the verbs of “saying”, they are not strong enough for covering certain facts, as the following ones:

1. In the first place, one has to explain how is it that certain predicates that are canonically activities, as *gritar* “to shout”, can project the logical structure reserved for the items like *to tell*, as it is shown in the following Spanish example:

   (5)  *Juan se puso a llorar cuando María le gritó que lo dejaba.*

   John started to cry when Mary dat shouted that him leave.pass.impf
   ‘John started to cry when Mary shouted at him that she was leaving him.’

   In this example, the verb *gritar* appears with three syntactic arguments, rather than two, as it is expected for the activity verbs. These arguments are the speaker – *María* –, the addressee – the pronominal clitic *le*, which has *John* as referent – and the content of the utterance – *that she was leaving him* –. Furthermore, it is clear that what has been expressed by María by means of her shouting has caused John to be aware of some information that in turn causes his crying.

   From these two characteristics, the appearance of three syntactic arguments and the causative value, we can say that the example in (5) is a projection of the lexical template in (4), rather than the one for the activity verbs. It is true that the analyzed clause seems not to have an internal duration (*i.e.*, atelic), for it can not be modified by a PP introduced by the preposition *en* “in”, and in this sense, it seems not to correlate to the accomplishment semantic class. But this is an effect of the content of what “María” has expressed, which is very short in time. This point is clear when we see an example like the one in (6):

   (6)  *Pedro se apenó cuando María le gritó en la cara, en menos de cinco minutos, todos sus reclamos del año.*

   Peter ashamed when Mary dat shouted in the face, in less than five minutes, all her complaints of the year
   ‘Peter felt ashamed when Mary shouted at him, in less than five minutes, her complaints for the whole year.’

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1. It is true that the event denoted by this clause can be thought as a succession of different sub-events of shouting that express the different portions of the content, but it’s also true that from the conceptual point of view of the speaker, this situation can be seen just as one gestaltic-holistic event.
So then, how to explain the fact that verbs like *gritar* can project two different kinds of logical structures. As I will suggest later, it is possible to use just one representation that accounts for both uses of *gritar* and for all kinds of saying verbs.

2. A second problem that arises from the common semantic characterization in the templates of (3) and (4) is that they don’t take in consideration the “referent” of the communication as an independent semantic feature. As Goddard and Wierzbicka (2002: 2) claim in the context of the natural semantic metalanguage (NSM), the following syntactic template seems to be universal:

(7) **John talked to Pat about Sandy.**

Van Valin & LaPolla (1997: 668) claim that the complement in bolds is an optional realization of the “content” variable. Nevertheless, this variable – the content – can be projected in a sentence which simultaneously have a complement like *about Sandy*:

(8) **John said ugly things about Sandy.**

The question here is which one of the two complements *ugly things* or *about Sandy* is the projection of the so called content variable. It seems it would be *ugly things*. If it is so, then which semantic variable is projecting *about Sandy*? My proposal here, is that the content can be split into two different variables, namely, “commentary” and “referent”. Following this, we can say that *ugly things* is the commentary and that *about Sandy* is the referent.²

In Spanish, as also happens in certain verb types in English and in other languages, the semantic and syntactic requirement of the referent is strong. As we will see below, a broad class of verbs is semantically defined by it. Besides, the referent can be projected into the syntax as direct object, as with *discutir* “to discuss”, *reprochar* “to reproach”, *criticar* “to criticize”, etcetera, and when this is not the case, it is coded by means of a PP introduced by the preposition *de*, which is the canonical one used for introducing oblique core arguments with the so-called, in the Hispanic linguistic tradition, “prepositional verbs” or “verbs that govern preposition”. See the examples in (9):

(9) a. **Juan carece de oportunidades.**  
    John lacks of/from opportunities  
    ’John lacks opportunities.’

b. **Juan se ocupó del asunto.**  
    John took of the business  
    ’John took the business in his hands.’

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². When both referent and commentary appear together as different syntactic complements, as in (8), it is always the case that the commentary is projected as direct object and the referent is coded as a prepositional complement. Most of saying verbs can also appear with the commentary and the referent unified in a single complement — *John said that Peter* (the referent) *is a fool* (commentary) —, and that’s what can be called the content.
These facts, then, point out the need of the consideration of one more semantic and syntactic variable in the lexical representation of the verbs of saying.

3. Another possible question about templates (3) and (4) is, if the consideration of the internal variable “language” is enough to cover the following data:

(10) a. Juan dijo a María lo que sentía con la mirada/ con gestos/
John told Mary what felt with the glance/ with gestures/
con su proximidad/ con un ademán.
with his proximity/ with a gesture
‘John told Mary what he felt with a glance/with gesticipation/with his proximity/with a gesture.’

b. Juan le dijo a María lo que sentía en italiano.
John told to Mary what felt in Italian
‘John told Mary what he felt in Italian.’

c. ??Juan dijo a María lo que sentía en la mirada en gestos/ en su
John told to Mary what felt in the glance/ in gestures/ in his
proximidad/ en un ademán.
proximity/ in a gesture
‘John told Mary what he felt in a glance/ in gestures/ in his proximity/ in
gesticipation.’

d. ??Juan le dijo a María lo que sentía con el italiano.
John told to Mary what felt with the Italian
‘John told Mary what he felt with the Italian.’

The case in question with these examples is if this different behavior – the use of different prepositions in (10a) vs. (10c) and in (10b) vs. (10d) – accounts for the differentiation of two semantic categories, namely, “code” on one side – (10a) –, and “language” on the other side – (10b) –. Both are inherent semantic variables and they are not peripheral adjuncts as can be seen from the fact that the same participant they code in the above sentences can be encoded as direct core arguments in sentences like the following:3

3. In establishing the semantic and syntactic status of the “code” variable, I’m following the same criteria that is usually applied to the recognition of the instruments of verbs like to cut. Code is a kind of argument that can appear as subject only with verbs of saying. In fact, the constructions with the code as subject are very common, at least in Spanish. Despite the fact that it can be optional information, it is not in the same level of optionality as real peripheral information is. I’m assuming here a general working principle (Ibáñez 2004): the hypothesis that, leaving aside voice phenomena, only the participants that are inherent part of the lexical representation of one item can be coded, in the different constructional patterns of that item (its diathesis), as a direct core argument – i.e., subject and direct object –. More precisely, the hypothesis is that if a participant that is usually coded as a PP can appear as a direct core argument, then it is an inherent part of the LS of the predicate in turn, and it isn’t, when is coded as a PP, a peripheral complement.
(11) a. *Una mirada/el gesto se lo dijo todo. code = subject
    A glance/the gesture DAT ACC said all
    'A glance/the gesture said it all to her.'

    b. Juan *habla italiano muy bien. language = direct object
    John speaks Italian very well
    'John speaks Italian very well.'

However, it is meaningful that just the code can appear as the subject of the clause. This is because code and language have different semantic and syntactic identity:

(12) a. Una mirada /el gesto le dijo todo.
    A glance /the gesture DAT said all
    'A glance/the gesture said it all to her.'

    b. *El italiano /la clave morse/la lengua de señas le dijo todo.
    The Italian /the key morse/the language signs DAT said all
    'The Italian/the key morse/the sign language said it all to her.'

4. One more problem of the current characterization of the domain through the templates in (3) and (4) is that they don’t have the information that allows us to predict which verbs codify the addressee as direct object, as an indirect object or as an oblique complement introduced by the preposition con “with”, as the cases in (13) exemplify:

(13) a. Juan informó a María de la noticia. addressee = direct object
    John informed ACC Mary of the news
    'John informed Mary about the news.'

    b. Juan le dijo la noticia a María. addressee = indirect object
    John DAT said the news to Mary
    'John said the news to Mary.'

    c. Juan platicó con María de Pedro. addressee = oblique complement
    John talked with Mary of Peter
    'John talked with Mary about Peter.'

Below, we propose that these different coding patterns arise from semantic values that define different sub-domains and that have to be postulated as semantic constants in the lexical representation. These values refer to the particular relations that the semantic participants (e.g., speaker, addressee, content, etc.) maintain among them. These are the communication functions of Jakobson.

5. One last issue to take into consideration is the fact that some predicates can code the same semantic argument in different syntactic functions – direct object and indirect object –, but other verbs belonging to the same sub-domain can not, as it is shown in the examples in (14):
(14) a. María le recriminó a Juan su falta de cortesía.
Mary DAT recriminated to John his lack of politeness
'Mary recriminated his lack of politeness to John.'

b. María recriminó a Juan por su falta de cortesía.
Mary recriminated ACC John for his lack of politeness
'Mary recriminated John for his lack of politeness.'

c. María le reprochó a Juan su falta de cortesía.
Mary DAT reproached to John his lack of politeness
'Mary reproached his lack of politeness to John.'

d. *María reprochó a Juan por su falta de cortesía.
Mary reproached ACC John for his lack of politeness
'Mary reproached John for his lack of politeness.'

e. María reprendió a Juan por su falta de cortesía.
Mary scolded ACC John for his lack of politeness
'Mary scolded John for his lack of politeness.'

f. *María le reprendió a Juan su falta de cortesía.
Mary DAT scolded to John his lack of politeness
'Mary scolded his lack of politeness to John.'

The possibility or not of the alternation is ruled, it seems, by more particular semantic features than the ones that are stipulated in the templates of (3) and (4). So one has to go deep into the semantic analysis to find them.

3. The semantic frame in the lexical description of saying verbs

What I want to propose here is that the semantic domain of the verbs of “saying” functions as a frame in Fillmore's sense (1982). That is, the basic idea is that the architecture of a domain is not solely organized in terms of paradigmatic and hierarchical relations among the items in the domain (Mairal & Faber 2002), but in terms of the relation that these items hold to a more elastic and operational structure, charged with a broader range of features, that accounts for all the particular meaning features of each of the predicates in the domain in turn; that is, a frame. A frame can be seen as a cognitive schema that underlies the linguistic information and that has the relevant features for the construal and interpretation of scenes inside a context situation. This kind of structure permits that the items of a semantic domain that have more particular features and less range of meaning can naturally “recover” features that are not basic to their meaning but conform the nuclear content of items of the same domain with more general meaning. This is the case of a verb like gritar "to shout" that canonically is used as an intransitive activity predicate which focuses in its meaning the manner on which
the vocal sounds are articulated, but can also instantiate a structure that activates a complete communication scene, as in the examples (5) and (6) above.

The particular meaning of each one of the items in the domain is a part of the frame. The frame, in turn, has the complete set of features that are relevant for each of its pieces. The image that results from this is the one of a puzzle where each piece has at the same time a charge of particular information along the complete information of the schema. In this configuration one term activates the whole information of the domain, but focuses on one or two or several points in it, as in a network.

In this context, I propose that the relevant frame for using the verbs of saying is, at least as a departure point, the schema proposed by Jakobson (1988) as a communication model. This model was designed to cover the basic universal properties of a communicative situation:

![Figure 1. Jakobson's communication model.](image)

The simplified schema in figure 1 adds three more participants or semantic formants to the ones already postulated in the templates of (3) and (4); these are the referent, the code and the feedback. I have already intended to show some applications of the notion of code as differentiated from language. Below I show that both the referent and the feedback are features that define verbal sub-domains.

See in the example in (15) how a Spanish sentence can give place to the projection of all of the semantic variables in the frame:

(15) *Con palabras sordidas Juan le dijo a María mentiras de Pedro.*

\[ \text{With sordid words John said to Mary lies of Peter} \]

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4. Despite the fact that it seems a kind of genitive complement that modifies the direct object NP, the PP *de Pedro* is an argument of the verb. There are a lot of tests that allow us to consider it so. As an example see the difference between the sentences in (a)–(b) and (c):

(1) a. *Juan vio el reloj de Pedro.*  \[(PP\text{ internal to the DO})\]
   \[\text{John saw the watch of Peter}
   \[\text{John saw Peter's watch.}\]
   a'. *De Pedro Juan vio el reloj.*
   \[\text{Of Peter John saw the watch}
   \[\text{Of Peter John saw the watch.}\]
In this structure we can see the appearance of the speaker, the addressee, the commentary, the referent and the code. We need, then, a representation that stipulates all these variables not just as internal ones, but also as syntactic ones, because these semantic values are not just optional possibilities of the same argument; they can be arguments in their own right with a projection option of their own. In (16) it is presented a proposal of a generic maximal-template for saying verbs, that is isomorphic with Jakobson's model:

\[\text{(16)} \quad \text{do'} (x, \text{[use.code'} (x, y))] \land \text{do'} (x, \text{[refer.to'} (x,u))] \land \text{do'} (x, \text{[express.(a).to.}(\beta).in.language.(y)' (x, w)])] \text{CAUSE}
\text{[BECOME aware.of'} (z, w)], \text{where } z = \beta, w = \alpha\]

This structure can be interpreted as follows: an effector or speaker \(x\) uses a code \(y\) to refer to a referent \(u\) and express a commentary \(w\) causing that an addressee \(z\) becomes aware of the commentary \(w\) about \(u\).

Using this template a sentence like (15) would have this representation:

\[\text{(17)} \quad \text{do'} (Juan, \text{[use.code'} (Juan, palabras)) \land \text{do'} (Juan, \text{[refer.to'} (Juan, Pedro))] \land \text{do'} (Juan, \text{[express.(a).to.}(\beta).in.language.(y)' (Juan, mentiras)])] \text{CAUSE}
\text{[BECOME aware.of'} (María, mentiras)]\]

\[a'. \quad \text{Juan lo vio de Pedro.}
John \text{ACC saw of Peter}
'John saw it of Peter.'
\]

\[b. \quad \text{Juan rompió el jarrón de vidrio.}
John \text{broke the vase of glass}
'John broke the vase of glass.'
\]

\[b'. \quad \text{De vidrio Juan rompió el jarrón.}
Of glass John broke the vase
'Of glass John broke the vase.'
\]

\[b''. \quad \text{Juan lo rompió de vidrio.}
John \text{ACC broke of glass}
'John broke it of glass.'
\]

\[c. \quad \text{Juan dijo una mentira de Pedro.}
John \text{ACC said a lie of Peter}
'John said a lie about Peter.'
\]

\[c'. \quad \text{De Pedro Juan dijo una mentira.}
Of Peter John said a lie
'About Peter John said a lie.'
\]

\[c''. \quad \text{Juan la dijo de Pedro.}
John \text{ACC said of Peter}
'John said it about Peter.'
\]
With this general structure in mind, in the rest of this work I will try to present other
different semantic features that arise from the use of Jakobson's communication model,
and I will try to show the use of these values in defining lexical sub-domains.

Beyond its apparent formants – addressee, speaker, referent, etc. –, what is really
interesting about this model is that it is based on the consideration of the relations
among these formants. These relations are what Jakobson calls the communication
functions. These are the following:

a. The referential function: is the relation between the message and the referent.
b. The emotive function: is the relation between the speaker and the message.
c. The connative function: is the relation between the addressee and the message.
d. The poetic function: is the relation of the message with itself.
e. The metalinguistic function: is the relation between the code and the message.
f. The factive function: is the relation between the speaker and the addressee.

Each of these functions conform the semantic features that are basic in characterizing
semantically and syntactically particular sub-domains. As a very preliminary and
partial proposal for the semantic architecture of the domain, we identify seven big sub-
domains defined by Jakobson's functions, and some of their possible sub-domains:

1. Generic communication verbs. (X said something to Y): comunicar “to communi-
cate”; decir “to say”, expresar “to express”, hablar “to speak”, mencionar “to mention”,
referir “to refer”.

2. Emotive Verbs. (X said to Y “I think this about Z”).
   2.1 Verbs of ‘expressing a commentary/opinion’. (X said to Y ‘I think this about
   Z’): opinar “to express an opinion”, argüir “to argue”, declarar “to declare, to
   state”, postular “to postulate”, argumentar “to argue”.
   2.2 Verbs of ‘expressing praise or recognition to the addressee’. (X said to Y
   ‘I think you did something good, I want you to feel good because of this’): fe-
   licitar “to congratulate”, congratular “to congratulate”, reconocer “to acknowl-
   edge”, elogiar “to praise”, alabar “to praise”, aclamar “to acclaim”.
   2.3 Verbs of ‘expressing disapproval to the addressee’ (X said to Y ‘I think you
   did something bad, I want you to feel bad because of this’): reprochar “to
   reproach”, reprimir “to repress”, censurar “to censor”, reprobar “to
   reprove”, criticar “to criticize”.
   2.4 Verbs of ‘expressing self recognition’ (X said to Y ‘I think I did something
   good’): jactarse “to brag”, vanagloriarse “to take great pride”, alardear “to
   boast”, presumir “to show off”, preciar “to boast”, ufanarse “to glory in, to
   be proud of”.
   2.5 Verbs of expressing something new (X said to Y ‘I think you don’t know Z, ‘I
   want you to know it’): informar “to inform”, enterar “to inform”, avisar “to let
   someone know”, notificar “to notify”, prevenir “to prevent”, advertir “to warn”,
   anunciar “to announce”, difundir “to spread out”.
2.6 Verbs of expressing the attribution of someone’s responsibility about some action (X said to Y ‘I think Z did something bad’): *culpar* “to blame”, *acusar* “to accuse”, *denunciar* “to denounce”, *delatar* “to denounce”, *responsabilizar* “to make someone responsible for”, *acusar* “to attribute responsibility”, *imputar* “to impute”, *inculpar* “to assign guilt”.

3. Connative/perlocutive verbs (X said to Y ‘I want you to do/think Z’).

3.1 Verbs of ‘communicating a request’ (X said to Y ‘I want you to do something; I know you don’t have to do it if you don’t want to’): *pedir* “to ask”, *solicitar* “to request, to solicit”, *requerir* “to require”, *suplicar* “to beg”, *rogar* “to beg”, *implorar* “to implore”.

3.2 Verbs of ‘ordering’ (X said to Y ‘I want you to do something, I think you will do it because of this’): *ordenar* “to order”, *exigir* “to demand”, *mandar* “to command”, *demandar* “to demand”, *prescribir* “to prescribe”.

3.3 Verbs of ‘persuading’ (X said to Y ‘I want you to think that to do Z is good, if you do it it is good’): *persuadir* “to persuade”, *exhortar* “to exhort”, *incitar* “to incite”, *inducir* “to induce”, *disuadir* “to dissuade”, *sugerir* “to suggest”, *convencer* “to convince”.

3.4 Verbs of ‘forgiveness’ (X said to Y ‘I think you know I feel something bad about something you did, I think maybe you feel something bad because of this. I don’t want to feel bad after I say this. I want you not to feel bad after I say this’): *perdonar* “to forgive”, *disculpar* “to excuse”, *excusar* “to excuse”, *indultar* “to pardon”, *dispensar* “to excuse”, *absolver* “to absolve”.

4. Referential verbs (X said to Y what Z is like).

4.1 Verbs of ‘describing things’ (X said to Y what Z is like): *describir* “to describe”, *definir* “to define”, *exponer* “to expose”, *presentar* “to present”, *explicar* “to explain”, *especificar* “to specify”, *nombrar* “to name”, *detallar* “to detail”.

4.2 Verbs of ‘describing an event’ (X said to Y what happened): *narrar* “to narrate”, *contar* “to tell”, *relatar* “to relate”, *referir* “to refer”, *reseñar* “to review”, *resumir* “to summarize”.

5. Factive verbs. (X said some things to Y, Y said some things to X): *platicar* “to talk”, *dialogar* “to have a dialogue”, *conversar* “to converse”, *charlar* “to chat”, *hablar* “to talk”, *negociar* “to negotiate”, *parlamentar* “to parly”, *discutir* “to discuss”, *debater* “to debate”.

6. Metalinguistic verbs (X said to Y ‘someone could think Z is W, I want you to know Z is not W, I want you to know Z is Z’): *aclarar* “to clarify”, *definir* “to define”, *clarificar* “to clear up”, *explicar* “to explain”, *precisar* “to determine precisely”, *esclarecer* “to make clear”.

7. Poetic verbs (X said something to Y, he said it like this): *declamar* “declaim”, *recitar* “to recite”, *cantar* “to sing”, *rezar* “to pray”, *exclamar* “to exclaim”, *entonar* “to speak with some inflexion in the voice”, *deletrear* “to spell”, *gritar* “to shout”, *vociferar* “to speak vociferously”, *gruñir* “to growl”.
One of the advantages of using Jakobson’s model for organizing this lexical domain is that it is possible to presume that languages are going to have ways of lexicalizing such features, as they are values that are always present in the communication process. If the lexical items in case refer to that process or are used during it, it’s just natural that they can refer to those values in one way or another. In this sense, it is possible to assume that the kind of features that are crosslinguistically preferable to be lexicalized are among the ones that define these general sub-domains. As you can see above, each one of them can be paraphrased using the kind of primitives used in the NSM (Wierzbicka 1991; Goddard 1998; Goddard & Wierzbicka 2002). Here these paraphrases appear in simplified form. The general communication verbs correspond to the basic structure taking say as primitive, that is “X said something to Y”; the communication value of this kind of items arises from the structure of the definition, from the fact that the three variables subsume the whole communication schema: speaker, content and addressee. Emotive verbs correspond to the paraphrase “X said to Y “I think ...””; connative verbs have the structure “X said to Y “I want you to ...”,” etc. So they correspond to primitive meanings.

As Wierzbicka (1991) points out, labels as “ordering verbs”, “requesting verbs”, etc., commonly used for classifying speech act verbs, are for the most part misleading, in as much as they correspond to categories culturally determined; there is not such a universal linguistic meaning as “to order” or “to request”. In this sense, our general classification is more naturally driven. We too are using this kind of categories to define more particular sub-domains, but they are just mnemonic names for semantic values that are better expressed by the kind of paraphrases that are used within the NSM.

Now, I will try to show how the values defining each sub-domain can have an impact in blocking or selecting the projection of the arguments of the frame. I focus in such cases involving the projection of the speaker’s commentary, the projection of the referent, and in some of the alternative projections of the addressee. In what follows, I do a generic description of the verbals sub-domains implied, and then I present the semantic-syntactic schemas in which the verbs of those sub-domains are projected. These schemas show the different correlations that can arise between the semantic participants and the syntactic functions in which they are codified.

3.1 Generic communication verbs. (X said something to Y)

This sub-domain includes verbs as comunicar “to communicate”, decir “to say”, expresar “to express” and hablar “to speak”. They can project the whole communication schema with all its forms, but canonically project a reduced one with the referent and the speaker’s commentary unified as the message variable – (19), below –. What is important about this kind of verbs is that when the referent and the speaker’s commentary are expressed as independent variables, it is the commentary which gets coded as the direct object, and the referent, in turn, is coded as an oblique complement – (18), below. In all cases, the addressee is coded as an indirect object.
These semantic-syntactic correlations are captured in the schemas that are shown below. In these schemas, and the ones that are presented in the rest of this work, S stands for subject, V stands for verb, DO stands for direct object, IO stands for indirect object, OBC stands for oblique complement and GEN stands for the genitive modifier of the NP in the direct object function. The words between hyphens that follow the oblique complement abbreviation (OBC) are the specific prepositions that introduce the complement in question. So, a schema like “S (speaker) + V + (DO (referent) + OBC – con – (addressee)” implies that: (1) the speaker gets coded as subject; (2) the referent of the communication projects into the direct object function, and (3) the addressee is coded as an oblique complement introduced by the preposition con. The linear order of the syntactic elements in the schemas is irrelevant and doesn’t imply a similar ordering in the actual sentences.

(18) a. S (speaker) + V + DO (commentary) + IO (addressee) + OBC – de/acerca de – (referent).

b. Juan dijo a María mentiras de Pedro.
   John said to Mary lies about Peter
   ‘John said to Mary lies about Peter.’

(19) a. S (speaker) + V + DO (message) + IO (addressee).

b. Juan dijo a María que Pedro no era un buen trabajador.
   John said to Mary that Peter no was a good worker
   ‘John said Mary that Peter wasn’t a good worker.’

3.2 Emotive verbs. (X said to Y “I think this about Z”)

These are generic emotive verbs as opinar “to express an opinion”, argüir “to argue” and declarar “to state”. They just “refer” that the speaker is saying his opinion, but not what kind of opinion this is. For this reason, they can select the syntactic projection of both, the referent and the commentary, which still can be an open variable – (20) –. In a marked difference to the items in the first sub-domain, these verbs don’t project the addressee and rather the focus is placed on the speaker’s side of the schema.

(20) a. S (speaker) + V + DO (commentary) + OBC – de/acerca de – (referent).

b. Juan opinó de los niños que son muy gritones.
   John say.an opinion about the kids that are very noisy
   ‘John expressed the opinion that the kids are very noisy.’

(21) a. S (speaker) + V + DO (message).

b. Juan arguye que los niños son muy gritones.
   John argues that the kids are very noisy
   ‘John argues that the kids are very noisy.’
3.3 Verbs of “expressing the attribution of someone’s responsibility about some action” (X said to Y “I think Z did something bad”)

These items are semantically complex. Some of them are *culpar* “to blame”, *acusar* “to accuse”, *denunciar* “to denounce” and *delatar* “to denounce”. They refer a double predication: firstly, they imply the speaker’s attribution of some negative action regarding a third participant; secondly, they refer to the speaker’s communication of that attribution to an addressee. The lexicalized commentary is the speaker’s belief in the truth of his attribution of the negative action to the person pointed out. The referent of the communication is the attribution itself. It is composed by two inner formants; the negative action, which I’m referring to as referent 1 in the semantic-syntactic schemas below, and his possible doer, which I’m labeling referent 2. Both of these referents are projected independently into the syntax, and if the addressee appears, it is as a fourth complement coded as an oblique complement.

(22) a. S (speaker) + V + DO (referent 2) + OBC – del/por – (referent 1) + OBC – con – (addressee).

   b. *Juan culpó a su hermanito con su mamá de hacer trampa.*
   John blamed ACC his brother.little with his mother of make trick
   ‘John blamed his little brother with his mother for making tricks.’


   b. *Juan denunció el crimen de Pedro con la policía.*
   John denounced the crime of Peter with the police
   ‘John denounced Peter’s crime with the police.’

(24) a. S (speaker) + V + DO (referent 1) + IO (referent 2).

   b. *Juan le achacó el crimen a Pedro.*
   John DAT blamed the crime to Peter
   ‘John blamed the crime on Peter.’

3.4 Verbs of “expressing praise or recognition to the addressee”. (X said to Y “I think you did something good, I want you to feel something good because of this”)

They refer the positive opinion of the speaker about the addressee or about his/her behavior. That is, items like *felicitar* “to congratulate”, *reconocer* “to acknowledge” and *elogiar* “to praise”, lexicalized a specific kind of commentary and for this reason the commentary variable is blocked. In consequence, it is the referent which is projected to the direct object function – (25) –. In this kind of construction the direct object NP usually appears with a genitive modifier that refers to the possesor or maker of the object of praise; this participant can be, and usually is, correferential with the addressee. There is another very productive construction in Spanish where the addressee is coded as direct object and the referent as an oblique complement – (26) –.
The alternation of these two constructions is ruled by the alternative conceptual focus on the addressee or on the referent of the praise, which is the addressee's behavior. If the focus is on the referent, then this is the one which is coded as direct object; if the focus is on the addressee, then this is coded as direct object. In this case, it is a connative value which is in charge of the projection in turn; this value can be captured as the last part of the paraphrase above: “I want you to feel something good because of this”.

(25)  

a.  

S (speaker) + V + DO (referent).

b.  

Juan alabó los escritos de María.

John praised the writings of Mary

‘John praised Mary’s writings.’

(26)  

a.  

S (speaker) + V + DO (addressee) + OBC – por – (referent).

b.  

Juan felicitó a María por sus escritos.

John congratulated ACC Mary for her writings

‘John congratulated Mary for her writings.’

3.5 Verbs of “expressing disapproval to the addressee” (X said to Y “I think you did something bad, I want you to feel bad because of this”)

This sub-domain includes items as reprochar “to reproach”, recriminar “to recriminate”, reprobar “to reprove” and criticar “to criticize”. These are very similar to the verbs of “expressing praise”. Their meaning implies an emotive value – the “I think ...” part of the paraphrase- combined with a connative feature – the “I want ...” part of the paraphrase -. This combination allows the coding alternation between the referent and the addressee.

(27)  

a.  

S (speaker) + V + DO (referent) + IO (addressee).

b.  

Juan le recriminó su comportamiento a María.

John DAT recriminated her behavior to Mary

‘John recriminated Mary for her behavior.’

(28)  

a.  

S (speaker) + V + DO (addressee) + OBC – por – (referent).

b.  

Juan recriminó a María por su comportamiento.

John recriminated ACC Mary for her behavior

‘John recriminated Mary for her behavior.’

3.6 Verb of “forgiveness” (X said to Y “I think you know I feel something bad about something you did. I think maybe you feel something bad because of this. I don’t want you to feel something bad after I say this. I want you not to feel something bad after I say this”)

This is the case of verbs like perdonar “to forgive”, disculpar “to excuse”, excusar “to excuse”, indultar “to pardon” and absolver – “to absolve”, that just as the items above imply in their meaning the combination of an emotive value and a connative feature.
Again, this combination triggers the possibility of coding the addressee alternatively as direct object or as indirect object.


b. El Padre Juan perdonó a Pedro de todos sus pecados.  
The Father John forgave to Peter of all his sins  
'Father John forgave Peter all of his sins.'

(30) a. S (speaker) + V + DO (referent) + IO (addressee).

b. El Padre Juan le perdonó sus pecados a Pedro.  
The Father John dat forgave his sins to Peter  
'Father John forgave all his sins to Peter.'

3.7 Verbs of “expressing something new” (X said to Y “I think you don’t know Z”, “I want you to know it”)

These verbs lexicalize the speaker’s evaluation about the addressee’s knowledge about some situation. Among them are included informar “to inform”, enterar “to acquaint”, avisar “to inform”, notificar “to notify” and prevenir “to prevent”. They imply a connative feature: the speaker’s desire that the addressee comes to know some new information that can serve him to change his mind and his acting. Again, in the first place, the lexicalization of the commentary permits the coding of the referent as the direct object; in the second place, it is the presence of the connative value what is behind the possibility of coding the addressee as direct object.

(31) a. S (speaker) + V + DO (referent) + IO (addressee).

b. Juan le informó la noticia a María.  
John dat informed the news to Mary  
'John informed the news to Mary.'


b. Juan informó a María de la noticia.  
John informed acc Mary of the news  
'John informed Mary about the news.'

3.8 Factive verbs. (X said some things to Y and Y said some things to X')

These are verbs like platicar “to talk”, dialogar “to dialogue”, charlar “to chat”, hablar “to talk” and discutir “to discuss”, that lexicalize the communicative interaction between the speaker and the addressee as a prime feature. They refer to a kind of reciprocal predication, as they denote a holistic event where two persons act at the same time as speakers and as addressees. That is, they imply the reciprocal act of communication between the speaker and the addressee. We can say that these items
lexicalize the “feedback” as their principal semantic feature. This situation has its syntactic consequences: in the first place, we can see that these verbs can project two alternative constructions resembling the commitative alternation. That is, on one side, they can project a construction where the two interactors are coded as the subject of the clause – (33) –, and on the other side, they can instantiate a construction where one of the interactors is projected as subject and the other one as an oblique complement introduced by the preposition con – (34) and (35) –. In both cases, as the semantic focus is on the interplay between the two interactors, the referent can be coded as a direct object – (34) – or as an oblique complement – (35) –.

Other coding alternative for the addressee with the factive verbs, limited to some of them, is to code this argument as an indirect object – (36) –, but this construction implies a simple semantic schema where one person is speaking and one is listening, as it is common with the rest of the verbs in the domain.

(33) a. S (speaker/addressee 1 + speaker/addressee 2) + V + DO (referent).
   b. Juan y María dialogaron el proyecto.
      John and Mary dialogued the project
      ‘John and Mary dialogued about the project.’

   b. Juan discutió todos sus problemas con María.
      John discussed all his problems with Mary
      ‘John discussed all his problems with Mary.’

   b. Juan habló con María de todos sus problemas.
      John talked with Mary of all his problems
      ‘John talked with Mary about his problems.’

(36) a. S (speaker) + V + DO (referent) + IO (addressee).
   b. Juan le platicó sus problemas a María.
      John dat talked his problems to Mary
      ‘John talked to Mary about his problems.’

Summing up, the majority of the other verbs in the general domain of the verbs of saying doesn’t imply a clear differentiation between the commentary and the referent, or doesn’t lexicalize a combination of emotive and connative features as its principal meaning. In this sense, they don’t present an argument competition for the direct object function and they don’t require the implementation of alternative ways of coding. They all project the canonical syntactic construction where the message is coded as direct object and where the addressee gets its canonical projection as indirect object.
The alternative semantic and syntactic constructional schemas arise when there are certain features in operation: first, when the speaker’s commentary and the referent are differentiated, the commentary gets coded as the direct object, and the referent appears as an oblique complement introduced by the preposition de “of”, or by the preposition acerca de “about”. Second, when the commentary is lexicalized, as with the emotive verbs, the referent is coded as the direct object and the addressee as an indirect object, as it is expected; but there is also the possibility of coding the addressee as a direct object and the referent as an oblique complement; this possibility arises with items that we have classified as emotive verbs, and that along with the emotive value have a subsidiary connative feature. This is the case of the verbs of “expressing praise to the addressee”, the verbs of “expressing disapproval to the addressee”, the verbs of “expressing something new”, and the verbs of “forgiveness”. And third, the addressee can get an alternative coding as an oblique complement introduced by the preposition con “with” when there is a factive value at play; that is, when the semantic schema denoted implies the feedback as a feature and the predication is conceptualized as a complex reciprocal event. This is the case of factive verbs.

4. Conclusion

I hope I have shown that for giving a more complete account of the semantic and syntactic phenomena related to a certain verbal domain, deepening the semantic characterization of such domain is required. One way of doing this is by analyzing the domain as a frame, that is, as an architecture functioning as a cognitive schema that has all the relevant information for the construal and interpretation of scenes inside a context situation. Finally, I have proposed that the relevant frame for analyzing the domain of “saying” verbs is Jakobson’s communication model.

References


