



## ON THE RELATION BETWEEN SPANISH POSTVERBAL BARE PLURAL SUBJECTS AND UNACCUSATIVE VERBS

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**Resumen:** *Este trabajo investigará la relación problemática entre la inacusatividad y los plurales escuetos en posición de sujeto posverbal en español. La aparición de este tipo de SN suele considerarse como indicación de la inacusatividad de un verbo. Sin embargo, en algunos contextos, el de la construcción de la inversión locativa en particular, estos plurales escuetos llegan a aparecer también después de verbos considerados como inergativos. Además, hay unas indicaciones, que son restricciones discursivas-pragmáticas, que regulan la distribución de los plurales escuetos en posición de sujeto posverbal. En este trabajo, los dos tipos de propuestas serán analizados de manera crítica. Se concluirá que una aproximación pragmática, en vez de un análisis basado en el estatus inacusativo del verbo, es preferible a la hora de analizar los plurales escuetos en posición de sujeto posverbal en español.*

**Palabras clave:** *Inacusatividad, plurales escuetos, construcción de inversión locativa, pragmática.*

**Abstract:** *This paper will investigate the problematic relation between unaccusativity and Spanish bare plurals in postverbal subject position. The appearance of this type of NP is usually regarded as an adequate means to detect unaccusativity. However, in some contexts, most notably that of the locative inversion construction, bare plural subjects can also appear after verbs that are considered to be unergative. Furthermore, there are a number of indications that it is discourse-pragmatic restrictions that regulate the distribution of postverbal bare plurals as a subject. In this paper, both types of proposals will be analysed critically. It will be concluded that a pragmatic account, instead of one based on the unaccusative status of the verb, seems to be preferable when analysing Spanish postverbal bare plural subjects.*

**Key words:** *Unaccusativity, bare plurals, locative inversion construction, pragmatics.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the introduction of the Unaccusative Hypothesis (Perlmutter, 1978), which postulates the existence of two classes of intransitive verbs, much research has been carried out with respect to either its application in other grammatical frameworks<sup>[117]</sup>, or with respect to the features or tests that allow the detection of unaccusative verbs. Semantically, it has been proposed that the argument of these verbs is more ‘theme-’ or ‘patient-like’, while that of the other group of intransitive verbs, known as unergative verbs, is more ‘agent-like’ (Mendikoetxea, 2000: 1584).

[117] Different theoretical explanations on the phenomenon of unaccusativity, however, will not be treated in this paper. For an explanation in a generative framework, see Burzio (1986). Mendikoetxea (2000) provides a comprehensive overview of unaccusativity in Spanish.

Syntactically, while unergative verbs have an external argument, unaccusative verbs select an internal argument. In this respect, subjects of unaccusative verbs share properties of transitive verb objects, since they, too, are internal arguments<sup>[118]</sup>.

This is the reason why, initially, it was proposed that the presence of a Spanish bare plural in postverbal subject position was an indication of the unaccusativity of the verb (see, for example, Contreras (1986), Lois (1987), Torrego (1989), Hoekstra & Mulder (1990), and Radelli (1994)). In Spanish, bare plurals (BPs), that is, NPs that are not modified or determined in any way, have a much smaller distribution than in Germanic languages like English or Dutch, and they are usually found in an object position. BPs in Spanish appear neither in a preverbal subject position (1a), nor in a postverbal subject position (1b) (Suñer, 1982: 210; Lois, 1987: 67)<sup>[119]</sup>. It is also impossible for them to appear as the subject of a transitive verb (1c-d)<sup>[120]</sup>. Instead, they are only grammatical as the direct object of a transitive verb (2a), or when they are encountered in a prepositional object (2b)<sup>[121]</sup>.

- (1) a. \**Brujas* aparecerán en cuanto menos lo esperes (Suñer, 1982: 210)  
'Witches will appear when you least expect it'
- b. \*Quizás hablen *representativos* mañana (Hoekstra & Mulder, 1990: 58)  
'Maybe representatives will talk tomorrow'
- c. \**Hombres* cazaron un ciervo (Suñer, 1982: 212)
- d. \*Cazaron *hombres* un ciervo (Suñer, 1982: 212)  
'Men were hunting a deer'
- (2) a. Compré *libros* ayer (Lois, 1987: 65)  
'I bought books yesterday'
- b. Ayer salí con *amigos* (Lois, 1987: 66)  
'Yesterday, I went out with friends'

Given the restricted distribution of Spanish BPs, as illustrated in (1-2), it is striking that BPs, when they appear in a postverbal position, can sometimes be the argu-

[118] In order to illustrate this idiosyncrasy of unaccusative verb arguments, it might be useful to recall that in a Government and Binding framework, the arguments of unaccusative verbs are objects in the Deep Structure. They only receive subject characteristics in the Surface Structure (Burzio, 1986: 71).

[119] Postverbal bare plurals after the verb *haber* ('to be') will not be discussed in this paper, since this verb does not apply the same restrictions to its argument than other verbs. For an analysis of inversion with *haber*, see Suñer (1982: 17-124).

[120] It has to be borne in mind that the plurals in question cannot be modified in any way. If any determiner or specification is added to the plural, it can appear as a subject (Suñer, 1982: 210).

[121] There are a number of exceptions to the very brief description given above. Apart from the most notable exception that will be discussed in the remainder of this article, these exceptions include advertisements, newspaper headings, definitions, proverbs or BPs that are part of an enumeration. For a thorough description, see Suñer (1982: 220-224).

ments of intransitive verbs (3). However, as shown by (4), this possibility does not apply unconditionally.

- (3) a. Caen *gotas* (Suñer, 1982: 208)  
 ‘Drops are falling’  
 b. Llegaron *estudiantes* (Contreras, 1996: 142)  
 ‘Students are arriving’  
 c. Crecen *flores* (Torrego, 1989: 254)  
 ‘Flowers are growing’
- (4) a. \*Leen *alumnos* (Lois, 1987: 67)  
 ‘Students are reading’  
 b. \*Han dormido *animales* (Torrego, 1989: 254)  
 ‘Animals have slept’  
 c. \*Anidan *cigüeñas* (Torrego, 1989: 254)  
 ‘Storks are nesting’

On the one hand, it is clear that, syntactically, the arguments in (3) are subjects –a fact that can be deduced from the agreement in number between the argument and the verb. However, in Spanish, the lack of determiner which further characterises the arguments in (3) is usually regarded as a syntactic property of objects. The mixed syntactic status of these arguments, along with the empirical observation that the intransitive constructions which allow BP subjects typically belong to the unaccusative class ((3), as opposed to (4)), has led some linguists (e.g. Lois (1987), Torrego (1989)) to consider the compatibility of BPs in postverbal subject position with some verbs as a supplementary test to single out the unaccusative nature of these intransitive verbs. Moreover, the need for a postverbal position of the BP would further correspond to the typical ‘object-like’ behaviour of unaccusative verb subjects.

Despite these first appearances, this paper will argue that the presence of Spanish BPs in a postverbal subject position, such as in examples (3), is not regulated by the unaccusative status of the verb. Instead, it will be proposed that pragmatic constraints are more likely to be responsible for the grammaticality or non-grammaticality of this type of predicate.

In order to do so, the paper is organised as follows. In section 2, we will first turn to a particular construction, that of the locative inversion construction (LIC). In this construction, BPs as postverbal subjects do sometimes appear after unergative verbs. It will be argued that this construction is not an unaccusative one, which in turn poses a problem for traditional analyses of Spanish postverbal subject BPs. Section 3 will discuss postverbal BP subjects of intransitive verbs outside of the LIC. Relying heavily on the existing pragmatic accounts for BP subjects presented in section 2, it will present an alternative account of the presence of BPs with intransitive verbs. In section 4, I will propose a number of final considerations.

## 2. SUBJECT BARE PLURALS IN SPANISH IN LOCATIVE INVERSION CONSTRUCTIONS

### 2.1 The problem posed by bare plural subjects in locative inversion constructions

With respect to the data given in (3-4) and the hypothesis according to which Spanish postverbal BP subjects can only appear after unaccusative verbs, the sentences in (5), all locative inversion constructions, present a clear paradox.

- (5) a. Aquí han dormido *animales* (Torrego, 1989: 255)  
 ‘Animals have slept here’  
 b. En este patio juegan *niños* (Mendikoetxea, 2000: 1613)  
 ‘Children play in this garden.’  
 c. En este árbol anidan *cigüeñas* (Torrego, 1989: 255)  
 ‘Storks nest in this tree’

Agreement on the verb shows that the highlighted BPs in examples (5) are all subjects. The problem, then, is that the verbs in examples (5) are usually considered to be prototypical unergative verbs (L&RH, 1995: 224), and not unaccusative verbs. However, this would constitute a contradiction to traditional rules which exclude BPs in subject position with unergative verbs.

In the following paragraphs, a summary of Levin and Rappaport Hovav’s (1995) (L&RH, henceforth) analysis of the English LIC will be provided. Instead of favouring an unaccusative analysis for the verbs in (5) –which would explain their compatibility with the BP subjects–, they propose an alternative view on the grammaticality of the examples in (5).

### 2.2 The analysis of Levin & Rappaport Hovav (1995)

Since the LIC is a context that allows BPs to appear as postverbal subjects in Spanish, it is important to evaluate the validity of the LIC itself as a diagnostic for the unaccusative status of the verb. In order to do so, we must turn away from Spanish BPs as subjects for a moment.

According to L&RH (1995), who investigated the English LIC, there is no strong link between the unaccusative status of a verb and its presence in the LIC. The authors establish that “the set of verbs found in the locative inversion construction is [...] both too small, [...] and too large” (L&RH, 1995: 223). Firstly, even though some semantic categories of unaccusative verbs are attested in the construction (such as verbs of apparition, verbs of existence and verbs of inertly directive motion), other categories of unaccusative verbs, such as externally caused change of state verbs, rarely participate in the construction. Secondly, the set of verbs is also too large, since some semantic categories of unergative verbs (such as verbs of emission) are also featured in the construction. Consequently, L&RH (1995) propose that the grammaticality of the LIC cannot be explained solely by means of the unergative or

unaccusative status of a verb. Instead, they suggest that a better explanation is based on the analysis of the discourse function of the sentence. In doing so, the authors follow Birner (1994), who proposes that a LIC is grammatical whenever the rules in (6) are adhered.

- (6) a. The use of a locative inversion construction is allowed whenever the postverbal NP presents information that is less known than the information in the NP of the preverbal PP, even though said information need not be completely new in the sentence.
- b. In order to comply with (6a), the verb that has to be *informationally light*, that is, it can not introduce new data to the sentence.

This hypothesis explains why not all unaccusative verbs participate in the LIC, e.g., those of externally caused change of state. These verbs produce ungrammatical instances of the LIC, since they necessarily introduce new knowledge or data about their arguments in the sentence. The examples in (7) (taken from L&RH, 1995: 224) illustrate this observation.

- (7) a. \*On the top floor of the skyscraper broke many windows.
- b. \*On backyard clotheslines dried the weekly washing.

On the basis of their semantics, the verbs in (7) are all unaccusative (they are externally caused change of state verbs), but because of their high degree of informativeness in these sentences, their use in a LIC is ruled out by (6b). At the same time, the construction does feature certain unergative verbs. Crucially, these do not introduce new information to the predicate. These verbs include, among others, verbs of emission (8a), some activity verbs (8b) and body-internal movement verbs (8c). The examples are taken from L&RH (1995: 224-226).

- (8) a. On the folds of his spotless white clothing, above his left breast, *glittered* an enormous jewel.
- b. On the third floor *worked* two young women called Maryanne Thomson and Ava Brent, who ran the audio library and print room.
- c. [...] and in this lacy leafage *fluttered* a number of grey birds with black and white stripes and long tails.

The highlighted verbs in examples (8) have in common that their meaning is characteristic or typical of the predicate: there is “a relationship of mutual predictability between the verb and the argument” (L&RH, 1995: 255). The verb *to glitter* in example (8a), for instance, is an inherent quality of jewellery. In (8c), *to flutter* indicates a typical activity of birds. Furthermore, using other examples, L&RH (1995: 256-257) show that unergative verbs exert more restrictions in selecting their arguments when they are present in a LIC, than when they are present in normal,

declarative sentences. Therefore, in the light of (6b), the verbs in (8) are considered to be informationally light.

Summarising, L&RH (1995) propose that the verb of the LIC is not sensitive to the unaccusative/unergative opposition: both may appear in the construction whenever a certain set of pragmatic rules is adhered to.

### 2.3 Conversion from unergativity to unaccusativity

In essence, the stance of L&RH (1995), explained above, goes against a type of reasoning that has been used to resolve the problem of the presence of certain unergative verbs in the LIC as in (5) and, more precisely, in order to account for the appearance of Spanish BP subjects in this construction. This reasoning is present in, for instance, Torrego (1989). In order to explain the problem in question, she argues that the LIC is responsible for the conversion of unergative verbs into unaccusative ones. This conversion would then explain the grammaticality of example (9b). Omission of the adverb of place gives rise to an unacceptable sentence (9a), where *dormido* 'slept' is used unergatively.

- (9) a. \*Han dormido animales (Torrego, 1989: 255)  
       'Animals have slept'  
       b. Aquí han dormido animales (Torrego, 1989: 255)  
       'Animals have slept here'

In order to reinforce her proposal, Torrego (1989: 256) shows that a number of unergative verbs can participate in *en*-cliticisation in Catalan, but only when they are accompanied by a locative pronoun. Comparable to *ne*-cliticisation in Italian, the partitive clitic would only be compatible with the arguments of unaccusative verbs, and not with arguments of unergative ones. However, this means of determining the unaccusative status of a verb has been criticised both for Italian (Lonzi, 1985: 111-112) and for Catalan (Gràcia i Solé, 1989: 300). This argument, then, can be considered as not completely conclusive.

Mendikoetxea (2006) also argues in favour of the unaccusativity-unergativity conversion analysis in order to account for the grammaticality of (9b). More precisely, according to this linguist, evidence in favour of this hypothesis can be found in the fact that unergative verbs in a LIC acquire a meaning of mere existence or apparition –a meaning that is typical of one of the semantically specified subclasses of the groups of unaccusative verbs.

### 2.4 Problems with the unergativity-unaccusativity conversion

It has to be mentioned that, on the one hand, Mendikoetxea's (2006) analysis does not oppose the pragmatic restrictions proposed by Birner (1994) for the English LIC, and which have been adopted by L&RH (1995). After all, a verb with a mere

meaning of existence or apparition is incapable of adding much information to its argument. On the other hand, her analysis does defend a conversion from unergativity to unaccusativity whereas the analysis of L&RH (1995) rejects it. According to Mendikoetxea (2006), this conversion is necessary precisely in order to guarantee that the verb does not contribute new information to the sentence. At the same time, L&RH (1995: 251-252) signal that invoking such a generalisation might not be the best option. According to them, the meaning of the verbs that can be present in the LIC (such as verbs of emission, agentive verbs of manner of motion and a number of activity verbs) is too disparate and variable to defend a conversion to unaccusativity. A large number of semantic verb classes would be implicated, which would result in a vague generalisation that cannot be very convenient.

Apart from the arguments of L&RH (1995), there are other considerations which seem to indicate that a conversion from unergativity to unaccusativity is not evident. Firstly, Pérez Jiménez and Moreno Quibén (2005) make use of the fact that unaccusative verbs select internal arguments whereas unergative ones select external arguments in order to dispute a possible conversion of the unergative verb in a LIC. If these verbs were converted into unaccusative verbs, their arguments would be internal. The authors observe that the verbal anaphore *do so* is only admitted with external arguments (which, furthermore, are not predicated of a verb which indicates a state): “it is the lexicalisation of the projection that introduces the external argument” (Pérez Jiménez & Moreno Quibén, 2005: 209-210; my translation). By making use of coordinated structures, they show that there is an inherent difference between sentences like *Aquí vienen niños*, on the one hand, and *Aquí juegan niños*, on the other. Observe the contrast in (10), taken from Pérez Jiménez & Moreno Quibén (2005: 209).

- (10) a. Aquí juegan niños y allí lo hacen niñas  
 ‘Over here, children are playing, and over there girls are doing so’  
 b. \*Al colegio vinieron niñas y al partido lo hicieron niños  
 ‘Girls went to college and boys did so to the game’

Sentence (10b), which contains a verb with a non-problematic unaccusative status, is ungrammatical. Since unaccusative verbs require an internal argument, they cannot be followed by the verbal anaphor *hacerlo* ‘do so’. (10a), however, is completely acceptable. In order to account for the compatibility of the first part of this sentence with the second (which contains the verbal anaphor *hacerlo*), the argument of *jugar* ‘to play’ would have to be an external argument. Therefore, *juegan* ‘they play’ in (10a) cannot be an unaccusative verb, but maintains its ‘original’ unergative status. This observation casts serious doubts on the proposal that unergative verbs convert to unaccusative verbs when they are present in the LIC, since the fact that they still select an external argument implicates that they remain unergative.

Secondly, another critique arises when we compare Torrego's (1989) analysis with proposals that were made in Coopmans (1989) and Hoekstra & Mulder (1990). Though these articles do not treat Spanish data exhaustively, their proposals have in common that they defend a conversion to unaccusativity for an unergative verb when this verb is accompanied by an adverbial phrase that indicates direction. Data from Dutch (11-12) ascertains this hypothesis.

- (11) a. Jan heeft/\*is gerend (Coopmans, 1989: 741)  
 'John has/is ran'  
 b. Jan heeft/is *naar Engeland* gerend (Coopmans, 1989: 741<sup>[122]</sup>)  
 'John has/is ran to England'
- (12) a. \*de gerende/gevlogen jongen (Coopmans, 1989: 742)  
 'the ran/ flown boy'  
 b. de *naar Engeland* gerende/gevlogen jongen (Coopmans, 1989: 742)  
 'the ran/ flown to England boy'

In Dutch, the selection of the auxiliary *zijn* 'to be' instead of the auxiliary *hebben* 'to have' is a property of unaccusative verbs (11). Furthermore, only unaccusative verbs can function as a prenominal participial modifier (12). It can be deduced from (11-12), then, that the unergative verbs (*rennen* 'to run' and *vliegen* 'to fly') come to behave themselves as unaccusative verbs when they are accompanied by a PrepP that indicates direction.

Given the previous discussion, the potential to draw parallels with the conversion proposals with regards to the LIC becomes obvious. Indeed, Torrego (1989) and Mendikoetxea (2006) propose such a conversion in the presence of an adverbial of *place*, as well. However, while there exists a fair amount of literature that defends a conversion caused by an adverbial of direction, there are much fewer sources that argue in favour of this conversion caused by an adverbial of place. In fact, when the same Dutch tests present in (11-12) are applied to sentences which contain an adverbial of place, and not one of direction, no data in favour of the conversion Torrego (1989) and Mendikoetxea (2006) propose is found at all. Instead, considerations against the hypothesis they adopt are produced. Consider (13) and (14).

- (13) a. Jan heeft/\*is gespeeld/geslapen  
 'John has/is played/slept'  
 b. *In de slaapkamer* heeft/\*is Jan gespeeld/geslapen  
 'John has/is played/slept in the bedroom'
- (14) a. \*de gespeelde/geslapen jongen  
 'the played/slept boy'

[122] The grammatical judgment of example (11b) corresponds to that of Coopmans (1989: 741). However, in my view –as a native speaker of Dutch–, the use of the auxiliary *hebben* 'to have' in this example is substandard, at best, and possibly even ungrammatical.



- b. \**de in de slaapkamer gespeelde/geslapen jongen*  
'the in the bedroom played/slept boy'

In contrast to sentences (11b) and (12b), not one of the sentences in (13-14) participates in the tests for detecting unaccusativity in Dutch (see above), even though an adverbial of place is present. Consequently, a conversion in the predicational nature of the intransitive verb is more difficult to defend in the LIC, i.e., in the presence of an adverbial of place, and not one of direction.

Therefore, rather than arguing in favour of the conversion hypothesis proposed by Torrego (1989) and Mendikoetxea (2006), the data in (10b) and (13b, 14b) seem to reject it. It would, thus, seem that, contrary to when they are present with an adverbial of direction (11b, 12b) unergative verbs do not convert into unaccusative verbs in the presence of an adverbial of place.

## 2.5 Preliminary conclusion

The considerations exposed in the preceding paragraphs show that it is not very likely that an unergative verb converts to an unaccusative verb when it figures in a LIC. However, when denying the hypothesis that all verbs in a LIC are unaccusative, a serious problem emerges with respect to the status of BPs in postverbal subject position in Spanish. According to traditional analyses exposed in the introduction, these will only be capable of following a verb when this verb is unaccusative. In a Spanish LIC, however, I have just concluded that some verbs which are followed by BPs seem to be unergative, after all. This observation, in turn, puts the validity of the test of Spanish BPs for determining unaccusativity in doubt.

Starting from this observation, and turning back to Spanish postverbal subject BPs outside of the LIC, there are two ways to consider the role BPs have vis-à-vis unaccusativity. On the one hand, it could be argued that postverbal subject BPs remain an indication of the unaccusativity of a verb, but only when the verb is found outside of a LIC, i.e., when it is not accompanied by an adverbial of place. Furthermore, this option could be defended, since the semantic categories of verbs that can take a postverbal subject BP indeed roughly correspond to semantic categories of unaccusative verbs, as many of them are verbs of apparition or (non-)existence – verbs which are considered to be unaccusative in Spanish (Mendikoetxea, 2000: 1606-1607). However, the solution proposed here is still not satisfactory, as will be shown in the next section.

## 3. TOWARDS A PRAGMATIC ACCOUNT OF SPANISH BARE PLURAL SUBJECTS

In the preceding sections, it was shown that a purely syntactic account of Spanish postverbal BP subjects does not suffice in order to fully explain their presence in some constructions, most notably in that of the LIC. In this section, a tentative basis for a pragmatic account of the distribution of Spanish BPs in postverbal subject

position will be presented. Even though a more thorough investigation is needed, it seems that a verb that can be followed by a postverbal BP outside of the LIC in Spanish needs to be informationally light, as well, in the same way Birner (1994) proposed with regards to the English LIC.

The following sections will show that a verb in the construction under question can be informationally light in two ways. Firstly, its lexical meaning may be informationally light by itself, a possibility that will be explored in 3.1. Secondly, a verb can become informationally light in combination with its subject, an option that will be discussed in section 3.2.

### 3.1 The semantic categories of verbs found with postverbal bare plural subjects

In section 2.2, it was explained that, on the one hand, not all semantic categories of unaccusative verbs were found in the English LIC, and on the other hand that some categories of unergative verbs were present in the construction. It is evident that the latter fact is more problematic for supposed tests to detect unaccusativity. After all, not all unaccusative verbs participate in every unaccusativity test<sup>[123]</sup>. As for postverbal subject BPs outside of the LIC in Spanish, it seems that they are not compatible with all categories of unaccusative verbs either, but also that their use with unergative verbs is extremely restricted (see, however, §3.2). Consequently, one is left with a relatively weak observation, since it is a fairly common one with respect to unaccusativity tests.

However, in this context, this somewhat weak observation acquires more importance and significance when it is investigated in a more rigorous manner. A strong systematicity arises when comparing the semantic categories of verbs in the English LIC, on the one hand, and the categories that are present with a Spanish BP in postverbal subject position, on the other<sup>[124]</sup>. In fact, almost all structures with a BP in postverbal subject position (without the presence of an adverbial) are composed of said BP and either a verb of apparition or (non-)existence (15), or a verb of motion (16). This observation is exemplified in the following small selection of sentences.

- (15)a. *Aparecieron niños* (Mendikoetxea, 2000: 1611)  
'Children appeared'
- b. *Existen problemas* (Mendikoetxea, 2000: 1611)  
'Problems exist'
- c. *Faltan estudiantes* (Contreras, 1996: 146)  
'Students are missing'

[123] In Dutch, past participles used as modifiers of the noun they precede, for example, are sometimes used to detect the unaccusativity of a verb (Coopmans, 1989: 742; Hoekstra & Mulder, 1990: 5). However, without denying the validity of this test, it has been indicated as well that not all unaccusative verbs participate in this test (L&RH, 1995: 12).

[124] I refrain from including a comparison with the Spanish LIC here, due to reasons of space.

- d. No asistieron profesores (Bosque, 1996: 33)  
'Professors were not present'
- (16) a. Caen gotas (Suñer, 1982: 208)  
'Drops are falling'
- b. Llegaron invitados (Lois, 1987: 77)  
'Guests arrived'
- c. Vienen mujeres (Mendikoetxea, 2000: 1611)  
'Women are coming'
- d. Pasan trenes (Torrego, 1989: 255)  
'Trains are passing'

All the verbs in (15-16) are regarded as unaccusative verbs. At the same time, the semantic category of (unaccusative) externally caused change of state verbs is rarely attested in the construction in question. This lack of externally change of state verbs is not very meaningful in itself. However, it acquires more importance when this fact is related to a comparable argument L&RH (1995) use to discard the validity of the English LIC as a test to detect unaccusativity (see §2.2). There seems to be a correlation between those semantic categories of unaccusative verbs that are attested rarely, at best, in the English LIC, and those that do not take a BP in postverbal subject position in Spanish outside of the LIC. The categories that do not figure in the English LIC do not take a postverbal BP as a subject in Spanish, either, while the categories that are widely present in the English LIC are also those which are most regularly encountered in the Spanish structure under investigation.

In the case of the English LIC, according to L&RH (1995), the explanation lies in pragmatic constraints which restricted the presence of certain unaccusative verbs in the construction, by dictating that the verb should be informationally light. Consequently, it was observed (cf. 2.2) that verbs of apparition or (non-)existence, or verbs of motion (to a certain extent<sup>[125]</sup>) do not contribute a large amount of information to their predicates. This observation can be repeated here, as well: in many instances of (15) and (16), it is easily possible to replace the lexical verb with the verb *haber* 'there are', without a large difference in meaning. It can be deduced, then, that the verbs discussed in this section are informationally light, simply by belonging to a semantic category that is informationally light by itself.

### 3.2 The information status of intransitive verbs with postverbal subject bare plurals

In the Spanish construction under investigation, a verb can also adhere to the restriction of being informationally light in another way. As already mentioned in section 2.2, a consequence of the restriction that the verb should be informationally

[125] Some verbs of motion do not seem to be informationally light by themselves in every context. See the discussion of the verb *caer* 'to fall' in the following section.



light is that there is a predictable semantic relation between the verb and its subject in an English LIC: the meaning of both constituents is mutually predictable (L&RH, 1995: 256-257). Preliminary data indicate that this observation is valid for the construction under investigation here, as well. Consider the examples in (17).

- (17)a. *Crece*n flores. (Torrego, 1989: 254)  
'Flowers are growing.'
- b. *Saltan* chispas.  
'Sparks are flying [lit. jumping].'
- c. *Caen* gotas (Suñer, 1982: 208)  
'Drops are falling.'
- d. *Brillan* diamantes como si fueran ojos [...] <sup>[126]</sup>  
'Diamonds are sparkling as if they were eyes ...'

The examples in (17) all deserve a separate explanation. However, one thing that they have in common is that there is a logical connection between the argument and the verb with respect to their joint meaning. While, technically, *crecer* 'to grow' is not an informationally light verb, it can be when paired with the NP *flores* 'flowers'. In fact, the mere existence of flowers implies that these flowers are either growing or wilting.

Similarly, the existence of sparks (example (17b)) implies that these sparks are flying. In example (17c), the properties of drops of liquid cause them to be unable to do much else apart from falling. And, finally, the mere existence of diamonds (example (17d)) implies that they are shiny and that they sparkle. It bears notice, furthermore, that the verb *brillar* 'to sparkle' is an unergative verb of emission. Notwithstanding the rarity of attested unergative verbs in the construction in question, the fact that it can take a BP in postverbal subject position casts further doubt on the validity of the construction as a means to detect unaccusativity.

At first glance, these observations may seem trivial, but as a matter of fact, even though the verbs in examples (17a-c) are unaccusative, it is nearly impossible for them to have another argument that does not directly imply the described state of affairs. The near unacceptability of (18b) can be contrasted to the very natural example (17b) <sup>[127]</sup>.

- (18) a. ??*Crece*n niños  
'Children are growing'
- b. ??*Saltan* niños  
'Children are jumping'

[126] Example from [http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca\\_virtual/literatura/tentaciones/7.html](http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/literatura/tentaciones/7.html) > [consulted in January 2011].

[127] Example (17b) even figures as the title of a motion picture (<http://www.imdb.es/title/tt0126938/>).



- c. ??Caen niños  
'Children are falling'

It seems, then, that if a verb is not informationally light by itself, it can become so by means of a logical semantic relation between the verb and its argument, in turn being able to select Spanish BPs as a postverbal subject.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In section 3.2, it was shown that with regards to the Spanish construction under investigation—that of postverbal BP subjects without there being a locative adverbial present—it is important for the verb to be informationally light. The verbs which select a BP in postverbal subject position either seem to be informationally light by themselves, by means of the semantic category they belong to ((non-)existence or motion), or they become informationally light in combination with their arguments, in which case a logical link between the verb and its subject emerges.

The account proposed here is only a preliminary account. The exact pragmatic constraints that play a role in determining the acceptability of constructions with postverbal BP subjects should still be explored more thoroughly, and interactions with other pragmatic factors should be investigated systematically, as well. Rivas (2008), for example, shows that there are certain semantic categories of verbs which show a predisposition for selecting a postverbal subject instead of a preverbal subject, regardless of whether or not said subject is a bare noun phrase. Furthermore, it is not unlikely that the broader context in which a construction with a BP appears will have an influence on the acceptability of the construction, as well. In order to present an exact account of the construction that formed the subject matter of this paper, these considerations will have to be taken into account. However, lack of a useful corpus of Spanish BPs and the rarity of the construction in question makes this a daunting task.

As preliminary as this work may be, its main point will hopefully be well-illustrated. It has been argued that the presence of BP subjects in postverbal position in Spanish is not an indication of the unaccusative status of the verb. The main reason for abolishing an unaccusative analysis of the construction in question is constituted by the LIC. This latter construction, in fact, does not seem to be unaccusative after all, even though in it BPs regularly appear as a postverbal subject. Using data from Dutch and Spanish (see section 2.4), it has been shown that verbs in a LIC do not convert to unaccusatives, effectively denying that BP subjects only appear after unaccusative verbs in Spanish. Moreover, it has been shown that the distribution of postverbal BP subjects in general can be explained by means of pragmatic factors as well, thus rendering an unaccusative account of the construction less necessary.

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