Exploring English-Spanish contrastive grammar explanations in English for Academic Purposes reading comprehension materials at university level

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ABSTRACT

A topic of debate in English for Academic Purposes reading comprehension courses in Spanish speaking universities is the role of grammar in in-house materials. This study explored and analysed the way in which these materials deal with contrastive grammar, in order to promote reflection and discussion on the subject of English-Spanish contrastive grammar explanations. Results showed that there are inaccuracies in the metalanguage used, in the Spanish-English contrastive analysis of some morphosyntactic structures and in the choices of instances of direct translation from English into Spanish. It is concluded that Spanish teachers of English academic reading comprehension should be provided with reference materials that allow them to describe in a well-founded manner the differences and similarities between the linguistic resources used in these two languages.

Keywords: English-Spanish contrastive grammar, English for Academic Purposes, Reading comprehension materials.

RESUMEN

Un tema de debate en los cursos de comprensión lectora de Inglés con Fines Académicos en las universidades de habla hispana es el papel de la gramática en los materiales internos. En este estudio se explora y analiza la forma en que estos materiales abordan la gramática contrastiva, con el fin de promover la reflexión y el debate sobre el tema de las explicaciones gramaticales contrastivas inglés-español. Los resultados mostraron que existen imprecisiones en el metalenguaje utilizado, en el análisis contrastivo español-inglés de algunas estructuras morfosintácticas y en la elección de instancias de traducción directa del inglés al español. Se concluye que los profesores españoles de comprensión lectora de Inglés con Fines Académicos deben contar con materiales de referencia que les permitan describir de manera fundamentada las diferencias y similitudes entre los recursos lingüísticos utilizados en estas dos lenguas.

Palabras clave: Gramática contrastiva inglés-español, Inglés con fines académicos, Materiales de comprensión lectora.

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1. Introduction

English has established itself as the international language for the exchange of knowledge worldwide (Bhatia, 2008; Hyland, 2009; Swales, 1990; 2004, among other authors). As a result, "students and professionals around the world are now required to gain fluency in the conventions of their particular communicative domain of English to steer their learning and promote their careers" (Hyland, 2022: 203). In Argentina, as in many other Latin American countries, university students need to read in English as part of their academic requirements. To facilitate the access of students to texts written in English, Argentinean universities have implemented courses in academic reading in this language. This poses challenges to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioners, since they need to engage in in-house materials development in order to address their students' specific needs (Hyland, 2022; Kuzborska, 2011; Stoller, Horn, and Grabe, 2006) and help them acquire discursive competence (Bhatia 2004-2014, Ding and Bruce, 2017). When students whose L1 is Spanish are expected to read and comprehend in English, due mainly to the differing amounts of lexical, grammatical and discourse knowledge at initial stages of L1 and L2 reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2002), reading comprehension materials tend to put special emphasis on grammatical realisations from a contrastive point of view (Gómez Calvillo, Moyetta & Negrelli, 2015; Gómez Calvillo, Moyetta & Negrelli, 2016).

This study examines a sample of English reading comprehension handbooks used in different faculties of the National University of Córdoba, Argentina, designed by the practitioners in charge of the subject "Academic reading comprehension in English" (or, in Spanish "Módulo de Idioma Inglés"). The purpose of this paper is to explore and analyse the way in which handbooks for academic reading comprehension in English deal with contrastive grammar, in order to promote reflection and discussion on the subject of English-Spanish contrastive grammar explanations. The following questions guided our preliminary analysis: are there any explanations for the linguistic instantiations presented in the handbooks? If so, how are grammatical forms explained and exemplified? Are these explanations accurate?

We begin this paper by outlining the role of grammar in EAP materials; then, we briefly explain EAP practitioner competencies and describe the study. We continue with the findings obtained from the analysis. Finally, we consider the pedagogical implications for developing English reading comprehension materials in Argentinean universities.

1.1. The role of grammar in EAP materials

The importance of grammar in reading comprehension has been discussed by many authors. Grabe (2003) argues that "grammar resources are central to fluent reading comprehension abilities" (2003: 129). The author identifies the types of knowledge with which grammar contributes to the efficiency of the reading process: (1) grammatical word order constraints alternative meaning potential; (2) grammatical structure identifies parts-of-speech categories for words, the semantic roles of noun phrases in relation to the verb, and phrasal and clausal units for processing; (3) grammatical structure distinguishes main from subordinate information and signals given and new information in the sentence; (4) grammatical information helps us identify major referents in the text; the continuity and reappearance of referents, and the continuation or shift of events and ideas via tense, aspect, modality, and location of information; (5) grammatical information indicates the author's attitudes to events and ideas through prepositional phrases, adverbial phrases, and assorted lexical choices (2003: 133).

In the area of English for Specific Purposes, Bhatia (1993: 278) makes us aware of the fact that the teaching of general grammar may have very little role to play in ESP, unless "it carries genre-specific restricted values". To put it in the author´s words:

> The explanation for the use of nominal expressions of various kinds (and perhaps also for a number of other areas of grammar) comes not so much from the general grammar of English as from the grammar of the genre in which they regularly occur. In other words, these features of grammar carry genre-specific restricted values rather than general grammatical values. The teaching of general grammar, therefore, has very little role to play in ESP. In fact, it is not only counter-productive to teach grammar, as such, but inaccurate too. The explanation for the use of any aspect of syntax in ESP comes from the analysis and understanding of the genre in which it is conventionally used. (1993: 278)

Following Bhatia's claim, grammar takes a more central role only when the focus is on the characteristic of the genre.

In a similar vein, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) recommend teaching grammatical realisations when they interfere with understanding meaning. Furthermore, they emphasise making explicit reference to the relationship between meaning and form, and reviewing the situational and linguistic context through analysis and explanation, since, according to these authors, context determines which aspect of grammar is most appropriate. Hyland (2006: 91-92) also refers to the role of grammar. The author states that teachers tend to assist students with an explicit grammar, which is not the decontextualised, disembodied grammar of traditional methods but a grammar that represents the writer's choices for achieving certain purposes, expressing certain relationships, and conveying certain information. Along similar lines, Woodrow (2018: 68) states that a course designer needs to decide whether a focus on grammar will be included in the course and, if so, which aspects of grammar it will focus on and which description of language will inform the course. The author also claims that the decision about which grammatical items should be included in an ESP course can be informed by discourse analysis that can indicate common linguistic forms in the target situation. Therefore, grammar instruction in EAP contexts should not be seen as a decontextualised activity; the focus should be not on structures, but on the analysis and understanding of the genre in which the structures have been used (Bhatia, 1993).

As can be seen, the role of grammar in EAP instruction has been widely researched. However, the role of grammar in EAP from a contrastive English-Spanish perspective has, to our knowledge, not been studied so far.

1.2. EAP practitioner competencies

When discussing the role of specialised knowledge in languages for specific purposes teacher education, Ferguson (1997) makes a distinction between "specialised knowledge" and "specialist knowledge". The author claims that

> Specialised knowledge involves three elements: (a) a knowledge of disciplinary cultures and values; a form of knowledge which is essentially sociological or anthropological; (b) a knowledge of the epistemological basis of different disciplines; a form of knowledge which is philosophical in nature; (c) a knowledge of genre and discourse, which is mainly linguistic in character. (1997: 84-85)

In the same strain, Bruce (2011) groups specific teacher competencies in four areas of knowledge and professional skills that are required by a teacher of EAP drawing on The Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes developed by the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP, 2008): (a) competencies relating to academic practice, (b) competencies

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relating to EAP students, (c) competencies relating to curriculum development and (d) competencies relating to programme implementation. Among the competencies relating to academic practice, there is knowledge and understanding of discourse features and sub-technical vocabulary which would allow teachers to read and make sense of texts without being subject specialists: grammar and syntax at the level of sentence or clause; language features at discourse level, approaches to cohesion and coherence, semantics, pragmatics and approaches to text classification (2008: 109). In the case of Spanish speaking EAP practitioners, we would add a further category: knowledge of contrastive grammar. In Argentina, EAP practitioners often need to develop teaching materials. As materials designers, they not only need to develop awareness of specialist discourse (Basturkmen, 2017), but also awareness of English and Spanish grammar essentials, since, in the context of foreign language reading comprehension courses at the higher level, grammatical realizations are a means to achieve comprehension. We argue that it is not possible to design EAP reading comprehension materials for students whose L1 is Spanish without a solid foundation of essential grammatical knowledge of both the grammar of the source language and the target language.

2. The study

2.1. The purpose and guiding questions

As stated in the Introduction, the purpose of this paper is to explore and analyse the way in which handbooks for academic reading comprehension in English deal with contrastive grammar, in order to promote reflection and discussion on the subject of English-Spanish contrastive grammar explanations. The following questions guided our preliminary analysis: are there any explanations for the linguistic instantiations presented in the handbooks? If so, how are grammatical forms explained and exemplified? Are these explanations accurate?

2.2. The context

The subject is inserted in one of the four contexts identified by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998: 35). According to the authors, EAP courses can take place in four different situations: (1) an English speaking country; (2) an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) situation where English is the official language of education and is widely spoken; (3) a situation in which certain subjects are officially taught in English, while for other subjects and at other levels of education the national language is used, (4) a situation where all subject courses are taught in the national language, but English may be important for auxiliary reasons. Within situation 4, Martínez (2011: 40-41) identifies what she calls the "Latinate situation". In this particular context, the practitioner is usually a non-native speaker of English (most of the times a native speaker of Spanish) and teaches ESP/EAP in the national language: Spanish. More particularly, the handbooks analysed are being currently used in different schools of the National University of Córdoba, Argentina. In these institutions, the EAP reading course is a compulsory subject, whose main goal is to equip students with a repertoire of strategies to become independent, autonomous readers of academic texts written in English. Thus, to meet this specific need, the materials are created by the teachers in charge of the subject.

2.3. The handbooks

The materials are organised in "study guides". Each study guide is generally sequenced in the following types of activities: some are aimed at raising students' genre-consciousness, others are designed for developing reading comprehension strategies (pre-reading, reading and post-reading activities), while there are also activities aimed at recognising linguistic forms (formal grammar instruction) and specific vocabulary. The focus on linguistic forms is an additional tool to help develop reading comprehension, showing students how a certain structure is used in order to decode text at the level of sentences. The emphasis is on recognition and metalanguage is minimised.

2.4. The sample

The corpus analysed consists in 15 handbooks designed to teach reading comprehension in English in the Schools of Architecture, Arts, Economics, Engineering, Chemistry, Industrial Design, Law, Nursing, Geography, Humanities, Kinesiology, Medicine, Nutrition, Dentistry and Psychology.

2.5. The procedure

Following the lines of content analysis (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017; Krippendorff, 2004), the handbooks were explored to find instances of grammatical explanations. When those instances were found, they were analysed based on the postulates of descriptive grammar and normative grammar of contrasting systems (English-Spanish). If errors were found, these were described according to Biber *et al.* (1999), Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (1999), Bosque & Demonte (1999), Di Tulio (2010) and the *Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española*, RAE (2010).

3. Findings and Discussion

Three overarching categories emerged from our analysis:

(i)   Inaccuracies in the metalanguage and/or concepts used when presenting, defining and/or describing different linguistic instantiations in Spanish or English,

(ii) Inaccuracies in the Spanish-English contrastive analysis of different morphosyntactic structures used in those languages, and

(iii) Erroneous choice of instances of direct translation from English into Spanish.

3.1. Inaccuracies in the metalanguage and/or concepts used when presenting, defining and/or describing different linguistic instantiations in Spanish or English

In our study, we found the use of the label "frase sustantiva" although the Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española, RAE (2010) explains that syntax articulates simple lexical units into larger units, which it calls "grupo nominal" (2010: 231). Probably, due to the fact that the nomenclature used in English usually refers to the term "phrase" -for example in Biber *et al.* (1999) and Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (1999)- we consider that the term used in the reading comprehension handbooks can be linked to a direct translation

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from English into Spanish without consulting a specific Spanish grammar book. This lack of review of a Spanish grammatical source is also evident in the definition of this group in one of the handbooks analysed:

> (1) "Una frase es un grupo de palabras dentro de una oración. Las frases pueden constar de una, dos, tres o más palabras. Las partes de una frase giran en torno a un elemento más importante. Por ejemplo, las frases sustantivas deben contener un sustantivo, las frases verbales deben contener al menos un verbo, etc."

> (A phrase is a group of words within a sentence. Phrases can consist of one, two, three or more words. The parts of a sentence are centred around one most important element. For example, noun phrases must contain a noun, verb phrases must contain at least one verb, etc.)

Note the absence of a key point in this explanation, namely the fact that a group is not a mere "grouping" of words but involves a hierarchy among them. This hierarchy is manifested by the existence of a nucleus, defined by the Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española, RAE as "categoría o clase de palabras central o fundamental en la constitución interna de un grupo sintáctico", and the group as a whole constitutes an "expansión o proyección de su respectivo núcleo" (2010: 231), although it may be that the group is made up of only the nucleus. The notion of "proyección del núcleo" is crucial, since a projection will be a constituent (such as nominal group) containing a core, and it is the core that determines the type of modifiers and complements that may be present in the group. In this respect, Radford (2004: 472) points out that a projection is a constituent containing a nucleus, as is evident in the nominal group "linguistics students", in which the nucleus "students" is projected onto the group "linguistics students". At the same time, a minimal projection is a constituent that is not the projection of another nucleus, as are words that function as nuclei.

There were other inaccuracies regarding the metalanguage used when instructors provide in Spanish the explanation for certain English grammatical phenomena:

> (2) "Cuando la palabra que indica poseedor termina en –s, sólo se agrega el apóstrofe."

> (When the word indicates the possessor ends in -s, we only have to add the apostrophe s.)

In this case, we should point out that the correct word in Spanish is "apóstrofo", no "apóstrofe", since the latter has a completely different meaning.

> (3) "Los determinadores son términos que delimitan al sustantivo núcleo en una frase sustantiva."

> (Determiners are words that limit the head noun in a noun phrase.)

In this case, there are two mistakes: on the one hand, the use of the word "determinadores", as, in Spanish, the correct label is "determinantes" o "determinativos".

> (4) "En inglés, el adjetivo solo puede ser usado en posición predicativa o atributiva.

> Posición atributiva: el adjetivo precede al sustantivo: his main article.

> Posición predicativa: el adjetivo es parte del predicado: Those students are brilliant."

> (In English, the adjective can only be used in predicative or attributive position. Attributive position: the adjective precedes the noun: his main article. Predicative position: the adjective is part of the predicate in the sentence: Those students are brilliant.)

On the one hand, it is necessary to highlight the fact that the EAP practitioners have not referred to cases such as "I consider education important", in which the adjective is used predicatively. On the other hand, they do not mention the case of adjectives in postpositive position.

(5) "En inglés, la forma de superioridad de los adjetivos se realiza de diferentes maneras dependiendo del número de sílabas del adjetivo o de si el adjetivo se considera regular o irregular."

(In English, the superiority form of adjectives is made in different ways depending on the number of syllables of the adjective or on whether the adjective is considered to be regular or irregular.)

It is important to note that, given that there are some cases in which it is not the number of syllables that determines the form but the ending of the word, the conceptual overgeneralization provided by the instructors can lead the student to misunderstand the rule. Such is the case of "friendly: friendlier / more friendly; common: commoner / more common; clever: cleverer / more clever; polite: politer / more polite"; cruel: crueller / more cruel; narrow: narrower / more narrow; quiet: quieter / more quiet; handsome: handsomer / more handsome; mature: mature / more mature; just to mention a few.

(6) "Los verbos "be", "have" y "do" pueden tener diferentes funciones en la frase verbal, ya que pueden funcionar como verbos léxicos o auxiliares dependiendo del tiempo verbal en el que se utilicen."

(The verbs "be", "have" y "do" can have different functions in the verb phrase, as they can function as lexical or auxiliary verbs depending on the verb tense in which they are used.)

Clearly, there is an erroneous concept in this claim, since whether these verbs are used as lexical or auxiliary verbs does not depend on the verb tense in which they are used but on the other hand, the meaning and on the function of the verb, as in "The patient had a severe haemorrhage." And "the patient has had a severe haemorrhage." In the first example, the verb "had" is lexical because it conveys the meaning of "to undergo", while in the second example, the verb "has" is an auxiliary verb, since it expresses grammatical meaning and helps construct the verb tense, whereas the verb "had" is a lexical verb, as it predicates lexical meaning.

(7) "Cuando el autor expresa recomendaciones, sugerencias, órdenes o peticiones, puede utilizar el modo imperativo. En estos casos, usamos el infinitivo sin "to" y el verbo no se conjuga."

(When the author expresses recommendations, suggestions, orders or requests, he can use the imperative mood can be used. In these cases, we use the infinitive without to and the verb is not conjugated.)

We must point out that it is not true that the verb is non-finite, since in the imperative mood, we must use the base form of the verb, which means the verb is finite or conjugated.

(8) "A veces, las frases verbales conservan prácticamente el significado original de sus componentes, en esos casos, las llamaremos "literales". Ej.: He's getting into the office = He's entering the office. Está entrando a la oficina."

(Sometimes, phrasal verbs practically keep the original meaning of their components; in such cases, we'll call them "literal". Ej.: He's getting into the office = He's entering the office. Está entrando a la oficina.)

In this case, "get into" does not illustrate an instance of a "phrasal verb" but a case of "prepositional verb".

(9) "En inglés, los verbos conjugados son aquellos que por sí solos pueden conformar el predicado de una oración. La mayoría de ellos presenta cuatro formas posibles: paint – paints – painted – painting, aunque algunos irregulares pueden presentar cinco en total: do – does – did – done – doing."

(In English, finite verbs are those which can make up the predicate by themselves. Most of them present four possible forms: paint – paints – painted – painting although some irregular verbs can present five in all: do – does – did- done – doing.)

Clearly, in this explanation, there is a mistake, as the verb "painting" cannot "form the predicate by itself"; neither can "done" or "doing". These forms need the finite auxiliary verb to become finite.

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3.2. Inaccuracies in the Spanish-English contrastive analysis of different morphosyntactic structures used in those languages

In one of the handbooks analysed, the definition of 'phrasal verb' is presented as follows:

> (10)   "Las frases verbales están formadas por un verbo y una preposición. Estas dos palabras forman una unidad que tiene las mismas características y funciones que los verbos. Las frases verbales se utilizan mucho en inglés, sobre todo en el habla informal. Debemos prestar especial atención a estas frases porque tienen diferentes significados o acepciones. Cuando nos encontramos con una frase desconocida, debemos decidir qué significado corresponde al contexto en el que se utiliza. A menudo, el significado literal de la frase diferirá mucho del significado real."

> (Verb phrases are made up of a verb and a preposition. These two words form a unit which has the same characteristics and functions as verbs. Verb phrases are widely used in the English language, especially in informal speech. We must pay special attention to these phrases because they have different meanings or meanings. When we come across an unfamiliar phrase, we must decide which meaning corresponds to the context in which it is used. Often the literal meaning of the phrase will differ greatly from the actual meaning.)

In this respect, Biber *et al.* (1999: 403) explain that, in English, there are four main combinatory possibilities between verbs and other words, which form idiomatic expressions and function as simple verbs:

> (a)   verb + adverbial particle, called "phrasal verbs" (e.g. "pick up");

> (b)   verb + preposition, called "prepositional verbs" (e.g. "look at");

> (c)   verb + adverbial particle + preposition, called "phrasal-prepositional verbs" (e.g. "get away with"); and

> (d)   other constructions combining a verb with some other type of constituent, which the authors call "multi-word verb constructions" (e.g. when there is a verb + a noun phrase (+ a preposition) - "take a look (at)"; a verb + a prepositional phrase - "take into account"; a verb + another verb - "make do").

For the cases of (a), there is no literal counterpart in English, but such verbs are usually translated by different lexemes in our language; for (b), we could compare them to verbs which in English are governed by a specific preposition, which heads "complemento de régimen"; as for (c), these verbs in English combine the constituent parts of the other two types (i.e. an adverbial particle and a preposition) and do not seem to find an exact equivalent in our language but give rise to a single word (a single verb); and on (d), we can point out that, in some cases, we would be dealing with so-called "lexicalised expressions" or "locutions", which, as Di Tullio (2010: 57) points out, "are made up of a group of words equivalent to one word", (e.g. "darse cuenta", "tener en cuenta", "tomar el pelo", etc.). We can highlight, then, that the fact that instructors call these verbs "phrasal verbs" and claim that "phrasal verbs are made up of a verb and a preposition" lacks solid theoretical support. At the same time, such a definition makes it clear that some materials designers tend to neglect both the metalanguage used in Spanish grammar and the notions and definitions that may be used in it.

> (11)   "La forma del denominado "pasado simple", es decir en el caso de los verbos regulares Sujeto + Verbo + ED, también se utiliza en inglés para marcar lo que en castellano se corresponde con el pasado del modo subjuntivo. I wished my husband painted good pictures. (pintara/ pintase) If you travelled to Italy from Argentina, how long would it take? (viajaras / viajases)."

The statement the verb to be in the past means fue/estuvo is an example of an oversimplified translation from English into Spanish, as these verbs can also be translated as "era/estaba". The translation will depend on the aspectual meaning of the verb in a particular context. In fact, while in English we use the simple past

tense, in Spanish we use the "pretérito imperfecto" to refer to present, past or future actions or situations in which we express a hypothesis or a wish, for example: quería pedirle un favor. / ¿Necesitaba algo?

> (12)   El sujeto, es decir, aquella persona o cosa sobre la cual queremos hablar, siempre se encuentra al comienzo de la oración y salvo en las oraciones en modo imperativo en las cuales el sujeto implícito es "YOU" - "Open the door, please." En inglés no existen las oraciones con sujeto tácito como en español.
>
> (The subject, that is, the person or thing we want to talk about, is always at the beginning of the sentence and, except in sentences in the imperative mode in which the implicit subject is "YOU" - "Open the door, please" In English there are no sentences with a tacit subject as in Spanish.)

It is not true that "you" is the only case in which we omit the subject when a verb is in the imperative mood. There are some cases in which the subject that is omitted is "we": for example, "Let's do some research on this topic."

3.3. Erroneous choice of instances of direct translation from English into Spanish

> (13)   La terminación -ING en inglés puede cumplir, a diferencia del español, varias funciones. Ya hemos visto en la Unidad 1 que puede tener la función de sustantivo. También se utiliza obligatoriamente después de preposiciones. En este caso, en español, la terminación -ING suele interpretarse como infinitivo.
>
> (The ending -ING in English can fulfil, unlike in Spanish, several functions. We have already seen in Unit 1 that it can have the function of a noun. It is also used obligatorily after prepositions. In this case, in Spanish, the ending -ING is usually interpreted as the infinitive.)
>
> (14)   "Las palabras terminadas en -ing tienen muchas funciones. Dentro de la frase nominal, estas palabras pueden cumplir la función de un sustantivo o pueden cumplir la función de un adjetivo."
>
> (Words ending in -ing have many functions. Within the noun phrase these words can fulfil the function of a noun or they can fulfil the function of an adjective.)
>
> (15)   "Las palabras terminadas en -ing y -ed en estos casos se llaman participio presente y participio pasado respectivamente. Cada uno de ellos confiere un significado particular al sustantivo que modifica."
>
> (Words ending in -ing and -ed in these cases are called present participle and past participle respectively. Each of them confers a particular meaning on the noun they modify.)
>
> (16)   "El participio presente (-ing) expresa una acción que el sustantivo está realizando, por ejemplo: manufacturing workers (personas que llevan a cabo la fabricación de un producto). Mientras que el participio pasado (-ed) expresa una acción que el sustantivo está realizando. Ejemplo: producto fabricado (es el producto resultante de esa fabricación)."
>
> (The present participle (-ing) expresses an action that the noun is performing, for example: manufacturing workers (people who carry out the manufacture of a product). Whereas the past participle (-ed) expresses an action that the noun is performing. Example: manufactured product = the product resulting from that manufacture.)

The use of the -ing form is a subject to be taken into account in a reading comprehension course given the polyfunctionality of this form in English and the limited functional capacity of its equivalent -ndo in Spanish. In other words, it can be said that the syntactic complexity of this form when translated into Spanish is due to the greater lexical and morphological simplicity that characterises the English language as opposed to the greater complexity in Spanish. The -ing form is a clear example of the creative capacity of the English language which admits different functions: noun, adjective, adverb, present participle, while, given that its use involves stylistic aspects related to grammatical rules, the use of the gerund in Spanish is much more restricted and one of the most controversial non-personal forms of the verb for linguists.

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In this context, it should be noted that the English form in -ing can fulfil four different functions: it can act as a verbal adjective or nominal adjunct in an exciting story or the lady wearing a red dress; in addition, it can have an adverbial function as "Driving along the main road, I realised I had to post the letter Ann had given to me" (circumstantial adjunct of time). Also, in its adverbial function, it can modify an adjective: It's freezing cold in here. On the other hand, in English, the -ing form can function as a verbal noun (gerund), as in "Reading is a pleasure." (subject nucleus); "I like reading." (direct object); "Her hobby is reading" (obligatory subjective predicative); "She is fond of reading." (complement or object of a preposition); "I call that cheating." (obligatory objective complement); a walking stick (a stick for walking). Finally, it can function as a present participle as part of a progressive verb phrase: It has been raining for hours.

On the other hand, we must point out that, in Spanish, the functions performed by the non-personal form of the verb -ndo - called gerundio - are normally found within the values of the English present participle. Thus, the gerund in Spanish, represented through the form -ndo, is connected to the meaning and syntactic behaviour of an adverb, since, according to the standard norm, it describes the manner or circumstances in which the action takes place. Thus, the gerund acts as a circumstantial adjunct in the sentence. However, in Spanish, the gerund can determine a noun, exhibiting a behaviour analogous to that of an adjective. Thus, the comparison between the -ing form in English and the gerund in Spanish reveals a complex case of non-univocal equivalence, since the morpheme -ing does not correspond exclusively to that of the gerund -ndo in Spanish.

4. Conclusions and Implications

In this paper, through an exploratory analysis of different materials developed specifically for the teaching of reading comprehension in English at the higher level in different academic units of our university, we have corroborated our hypothesis on the existence of conceptual inaccuracies, in terms of: (i) the metalanguage used when presenting, defining and/or describing different linguistic instantiations in Spanish or English, (ii) the Spanish-English contrastive analysis of different morphosyntactic structures used in those languages, and (iii) the erroneous choice of instances of direct translation from English into Spanish. The illustration with written examples has shown, on the one hand, certain lack of knowledge of Spanish grammar, and, on the other, the absence of consultation of reliable bibliographical sources, by practitioners who teach EAP at the National University of Córdoba.

The scope of this paper does not allow for generalisations; this is a small-scale analysis and it would be enriching for our study to broaden the scope of analysis and increase the size of the corpus. For example, analysing handbooks used in other Argentinian universities could provide us with interesting data so that we can confirm or reject our hypothesis. Nevertheless, this paper does allow a position to be taken. While we understand that students using English reading comprehension in-house materials do not need to know about morphology and syntax in depth, we believe that comprehension in the foreign language can be enhanced if the materials contained explanations which take advantage of the existing grammatical metalanguage in Spanish on the point of study in question. So, instead of including definitions that lack precision, for example, by saying that "the ending -ing can fulfil, unlike in Spanish, several functions" or that "the present participle (-ing) expresses an action that the noun is performing", why not capitalise on a brief, but precise, explanation of the different functions that words ending in the suffix "-ing" can perform in English? In this way, students can be made aware that when this suffix is used in a verb phrase, for

example "is milking" in "The farmer is milking the cow", the suffix has been added to an action verb and forms a non-conjugated verb form, "milking".

It is our belief that practitioners' knowledge of the grammatical system of a language is an essential tool for optimizing the process of materials design in reading comprehension courses in a foreign language. Therefore, based on our findings, we recommend EAP practitioners whose L1 is Spanish, in particular Argentinean EAP practitioners, to expand their knowledge of English-Spanish contrastive grammar based on the current literature and empirical research. In this regard, we also strongly recommend that Spanish teachers of English academic reading comprehension should be provided with reference materials that allow them to describe in a well-founded manner the differences and similarities between the linguistic resources used in these two languages, as a way to promote competencies related to academic discourse.

We firmly believe that EAP reading comprehension materials for Spanish speakers which include grammatical explanations from reliable sources (both Spanish and English grammar) will be beneficial for students to accomplish the primary objective of a reading comprehension course: to achieve discursive competence in L2. In conclusion, through this exploratory study, we aim to provide a general reflection on the way in which English and Spanish grammar is dealt with in EAP materials design.

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