

Article

The Grammatical Properties of Perception Verbs: A Reflection Based on Some Recurring Oppositions

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Abstract

Verbs of perception show complex linguistic behavior, both grammatically and in semantic terms. Owing to their connection with perceptual processes (sight, hearing, smell. . .), they always operate in a heterogeneous way, since these types of verbs must code highly diverse events. In light of all the above, the specialized literature has tried to systematize the use of these verbs during the last few years, for the purpose of identifying the overall patterns which govern their utilization in natural languages. To that end, numerous authors chose to formulate dichotomous oppositions (for example, active vs passive perception), aiming to describe the syntax of verbs of perception rigorously. The aim of our paper is to critically analyze such dichotomies, which will allow us to ascertain how verbs of perception relate to grammar (type of transitivity, resultative nature of perception, aspectual typology of events, link between perception and space, etc.). This work will additionally provide evidence that, contrary to what has been argued at times, the dichotomies proposed by scholars are quite gradual or prototypical rather than rigid. In short, the aim sought with our study consists of offering an up-to-date review about a topic of great interest—namely, the methodology to analyze verbs of perception—insofar as these verbs stand out for being one of the most frequently used lexical categories in all languages around the world.

Keywords: verbs of perception; dichotomous opposition; verbal event; conceptualization of perceptual processes

1. Introduction

The literature devoted to verbs of perception frequently provides binary oppositions aimed at describing in an organized manner the links existing between the different verbs in this category. These oppositions are often defended from heuristic analyses where the researcher makes up sentences and determines whether they sound natural or not, with the pursued goal being to verify the scientific validity of such oppositions as well as their predictive potential. Nonetheless, when the examination of these hypotheses relies on functional approaches based on the direct observation of linguistic facts (examples extracted from corpora, oral language analyses. . .), it becomes clear that searching, sometimes too rigidly, for perfect dichotomies in which the different verbs fit unequivocally turns out to be complex, and very often specious. Verbs of perception cannot be easily described using discrete or obligatory features; they usually show such heterogeneous behavior that reducing it to a limited number of possibilities does not seem feasible. Furthermore, the verbs of perception associated with various senses (sight, hearing. . .) differ to a large extent, which makes it even harder to obtain homogeneous criteria for their analysis. All the same, a number of the proposed dichotomies can prove helpful when it comes to understanding



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verbs of physical perception, provided that they are regarded as something gradual which lacks perfectly defined limits.

In this sense, it is worth recalling that binary and dichotomous oppositions have been utilized in descriptive linguistics since the times of Structuralism (Fernández Jaén, 2012, pp. 25–30). According to this theoretical strand of thought, which began with Saussure's work, language is built through oppositions, in such a way that each element of a language (a sound, a word, a syntactic structure, etc.) always becomes defined from its complementary relationship with another element. Nevertheless, after the appearance of cognitive-functional theories (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Fernández Jaén, 2012), the structuralist approach was replaced by a prototypical flexible interpretation according to which linguistic phenomena do not behave as perfect and predictable oppositions, but rather as gradual continuums. Our aim consists of providing evidence that the oppositions proposed to explain verbs of perception can be useful, as long as they are used flexibly and considering real language-use conditions.

This paper seeks to show the most important dichotomies which have hitherto been put forward in the literature,¹ additionally offering a reflection on their validity and usefulness (both theoretically and descriptively). It becomes necessary to clarify that we are going to illustrate the diverse phenomena with examples from Spanish verbs of perception, even though, on occasion, references to other languages will be made too. For that purpose, the contents will be presented as follows: after the explanation supplied in Section 2 about some of the general features characterizing verbs of perception in grammatical terms, the following sections will focus on individually examining each of the dichotomies posed. A summary of overall conclusions drawn from our research will bring our work to an end.

Finally, we must point out that, at a methodological level, all the examples which are going to be provided in the article come from our linguistic introspection, and not from specific corpora. As explained by Bosque and Gutiérrez-Rexach (2009, pp. 46–48), introspection arises as a highly suitable source for linguistic analysis, especially when it comes to analyzing syntactic aspects, for several reasons. To start with, when one wants to measure the degree of acceptability of an utterance, the need arises to manipulate the latter experimentally, so that the exact limits of its validity can be established; otherwise, it will prove impossible to discern what is acceptable or not in a certain language. On the other hand, corpus data may not document the formal variations required in a research study, or alternatively, they sometimes document phenomena whose naturalness is arguable. In addition, it needs to be remembered that introspection is one of the most common research methods (although not the only one) in such fields as dialectology, which even resorts to the introspection of actual speakers, leaving aside that of the researcher. This methodology, which is likewise adopted in other sciences, among them psychology, sociology or anthropology, not only allows us to know what speakers intuitively find acceptable but also offers valuable data for the description of human language. In light of all the above and bearing in mind that this paper has as its aim to assess the degree of accuracy achieved with the dichotomies utilized to analyze verbs of perception, it seems to us that proposing laboratory exams constitutes the best means to reach useful and reproducible results in other languages or linguistic families. Furthermore, we must emphasize that our work constitutes an original scientific contribution, insofar as, by exploring the proposed dichotomies, it establishes theoretical adjustments and offers new descriptive analyses. In this sense, much of the experimental data we present in the article opens up unexplored avenues of analysis and provides evidence on the behavior of Spanish perception verbs that helps us understand more deeply how humans conceptualize sensory perception.

2. Verbs of Perception: Essential Concepts

One of the typical problems faced when studying verbs of perception has to do with the way to classify them from a grammatical point of view, insofar as their highly heterogeneous syntactic behavior makes it difficult to establish a single typology for their categorization. Indeed, these verbs have the potential to express (as will be verified later on in this paper) all sorts of predications—from actions to states—and can act not only as light verbs (Jansegers, 2017) but also as pseudo-copular verbs and discourse markers (Hanegreefs, 2008; Fernández Jaén, 2012); this becomes clear in sentences such as *Paula siente miedo* [Paula feels fear] (light verb), *Laura se siente triste* [Laura feels sad] (pseudo-copular verb) or *Felipe, ¡mira!* [Felipe, look!] (discourse marker). They admit direct objects of all kinds, e.g., (concrete or abstract) noun phrases (*Fernando vio el paisaje* [Fernando saw the landscape], *Fernando vio la solución* [Fernando saw the solution]), infinitive and gerund clauses (*Teresa oyó al niño gritar* [Teresa heard the child cry], *Teresa oyó al niño gritando* [Teresa heard the child crying]), or noun clauses with a conjugated verb (*el presidente vio que los trabajadores no estaban de acuerdo* [the president saw that the workers did not agree]), among others. If we add to the above that these verbs belong to one of the most commonly utilized lexical categories in every language, no doubt exists about the status of verbs of perception as hugely complex linguistic units.²

Based on data from numerous languages around the world, Viberg (1984), devised one of the best-known taxonomies for verbs of perception, according to which three basic types exist: verbs of active perception; verbs of pure perception (also known as experience verbs); and verbs of copulative perception. As highlighted by Horno Chéliz (2008), this typology draws on the aspectual theory of events developed by Vendler (1967) from which it obtains most of its basic notions.

Verbs of active perception represent an activity event in which an animate subject voluntarily performs an action of a sensorial type. In Spanish, for example, verbs of active perception corresponding to different senses include *mirar* [to look], *saborear* [to savor] or *acariciar* [to caress]. As for verbs of pure perception, rather than as an activity, they function as an accomplishment in aspectual terms, which explains why, in these cases, we witness an involuntary effect that leads a subject to perceive a stimulus without wanting to. Such perceptions take place when a stimulus reaches a body organ which spontaneously deciphers it, without the subject being able to avoid it. These are, in addition, extremely brief moments which begin and end very fast at a given point in time. Examples of this kind appear in certain uses of the verb *sentir* [to feel] (*Laura salió de la casa y sintió frío* [Laura left the house and felt cold]) and in many occurrences of *ver* [to see] (*De repente vi un pájaro* [Suddenly, I saw a bird]), *oír* [to hear] (*Miguel se despertó porque oyó un ruido* [Miguel woke up because he heard a noise]), and *oler* [to smell] (*Lucía abrió la caja y rápidamente olió el perfume* [Lucía opened the box and quickly smelled the perfume]).

Finally, verbs of copulative perception refer to a state. For this reason, they convey predications which do not experience an internal development, insofar as they build stable situations that lack the perspective of a beginning and an end within the time sequence. This possibility in turn subdivides into two types. On the one hand, we have those verbs of copulative perception which serve to conceptualize an ability of the subject: the capacity to possess a specific sense. This is what happens in a sentence like *María no oye sin su audífono* [María cannot hear without her hearing aid], where *oír* [to hear] lexicalizes the actual ability to hear. On the other hand, these verbs sometimes have a syntactic subject that reflects the sensorial stimulus. In such cases, the verb exhibits an intransitive structure which highlights the presence of that stimulus, leaving the perceptor outside the stage. An example of the above can be found in sentences such as *esta canción se oye bien* [this song is nice to hear], *desde aquí se ve la montaña* [the mountain is visible from here] or *la camisa*

huele a rosas [the shirt smells of roses], where the subjects *canción*, *montaña* and *camisa* [shirt] stand for the objects that can be perceived thanks to the senses of hearing, sight or smell.

This classification should not be seen as fixed or unchanging, but rather as a continuum along which several variants sometimes overlap. Often, it is even possible for verbs of perception to fit in more than one group, or even in all three of them. Lexicalization trends do exist, though. Verbs of sight and hearing most commonly have specific terms for all or some of these possibilities, whereas verbs of touch, smell and taste tend to group together more easily in a single verb, especially in stative uses. Needless to say, there are also languages which shape the functioning of these verbs in various ways.

Swahili, for instance, resorts to three verbs of visual perception for each one of the values—*tazama* (active perception); *ona* (pure perception); and *onekana* (copulative perception) (Viberg, 1984, p. 139)—as opposed to Hindi, where a single term, the verb *dekhna*, expresses all three sight modalities (Viberg, 1984, p. 133). Concerning the senses of touch, smell and taste, the most common option is for a single word to convey all the values, and languages even exist in which a single verb represents all three possibilities (activity; accomplishment; and copulative perception) for these three senses. This happens in Swedish, whose verb *känna* can be interchangeably used referring to touch, smell and taste, as well as for every potential syntactic rendering (Viberg, 1984, p. 138).

The constructional flexibility that characterizes verbs of perception derives from both its own semantic nature and the pragmatic conditions governing the speakers' use thereof. Each perception scene incorporates several constant elements which give rise to the diverse grammatical configurations adopted by verbs of perception. Firstly, we have a PERCEPTOR, corresponding to the individual who perceives the scene. Likewise, there is a PERCEPT, i.e., the object perceived by the PERCEPTOR (Bolinger, 1974). To this must be added a DISTANCE FACTOR (Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot, 1989)—the distance existing between PERCEPTOR and PERCEPT. That distance acquires relevance because it can hinder perception and even annul it. By way of example, one can hear something from a relatively long distance, but listening carefully to it inevitably requires a shorter distance. Moreover, as will be explained below, the physical space separating the PERCEPTOR from the PERCEPT has enabled certain visual verbs, e.g., *look* or *mirar*, to develop prepositional structures reflecting the spatial trajectory of a look (See Miller, 2003, Hanegreefs, 2008, among other works).

Another frequently debated-upon issue in studies about verbs of perception has to do with the way to assign semantic roles to the PERCEPTOR and the PERCEPT, a problem which relates to how these two concepts materialize syntactically. In principle, it seems logical for the PERCEPTOR to be identified with a PROTO-AGENT, while the PERCEPT would correspond to a PROTO-PATIENT (Dowty, 1991; Primus, 1999). A PROTO-AGENT constitutes an entity characterized by exerting control over an action, by showing an intention, for being the cause of an event, and for existing independently of that event. In turn, the PROTO-PATIENT supposedly represents the entity controlled and affected by the event that might be physically altered by the PROTO-AGENT. Consequently, the relationship between these two semantic roles is uneven, since one of them, the agentive, acquires more conceptual prominence than the other. Naturally, at a syntactic level, the PROTO-AGENT usually functions as a sentence subject; instead, the PROTO-PATIENT tends to act as a direct object. Let us see some examples:

- (1) *Sonia saboreó el helado con mucho placer* [Sonia savored the ice cream with great pleasure].
- (2) *Luis tocó tanto el jarrón que acabó rompiéndolo* [Luis touched the vase so much that he ended up breaking it].
- (3) *El sumiller degustó los vinos para elegir el más apropiado* [The sommelier tasted the wines in order to choose the most suitable one].

As can be seen, these cases portray three syntactic subjects (*Sonia*, *Luis*, and *el sumiller*) that perfectly match the theoretical notion of PROTO-AGENT: they drive the predication, control the action, and exhibit a specific intention. For their part, the direct objects *el helado*, *el jarrón*, and *los vinos* act as PROTO-PATIENTS, insofar as they remain subordinated to the PROTO-AGENT and change their state after the perceptual action. Truth be told, however, except for the most prototypical cases with verbs of touch and smell, this schematic idealization is not always so clear. The next four sentences can prove revealing:

- (4) *José Miguel vio el partido de fútbol en su casa* [José Miguel watched the football match at his home].
- (5) *El estudiante ha mirado el cuadro durante una hora* [The student has been looking at the painting for an hour].
- (6) *Carolina escucha siempre buena música* [Carolina always listens to good music].
- (7) *En cuanto abrí la puerta, olí tu perfume* [As soon as I opened the door, I smelled your perfume].

The preceding examples illustrate a more unusual type of PERCEPTOR-PERCEPT relationship. To start with, none of the semantic subjects performs an action *stricto sensu*. Of course, the subjects in (4), (5) and (6) have an intention (enjoying the match, for example) but, in order to carry it out, they do not act in a literal sense, or at least their action does not appear to be evident; (7) exemplifies an even more unusual case, since no intentionality exists, and the event is expressed as an immediate accomplishment where a subject (an elliptic *yo*) cannot intervene (Fernández Jaén, 2012). As for the PERCEPTS *partido de fútbol*, *el cuadro*, *buena música*, and *el perfume*, they do not correspond with a true PROTO-PATIENT, insofar as the perceptual event does not affect them and they exist regardless of whether they are perceived or not.

On some occasions, PERCEPTS seem so alien to the PERCEPTOR or prove so hard to detect due to contextual conditions that the sentence tends to be configured differently (García-Miguel, 2005), as shown below:

- (8) *Desde aquí se ve la catedral* [The cathedral can be seen from here].
- (9) *De madrugada aún se oían las notas de la orquesta* [The notes of the orchestra could still be heard in the early hours of the morning].
- (10) *La cocina huele a quemado* [The kitchen smells as if something got burnt].

All these sentences belong to what Viberg terms as copulative perception with subject-stimulus, perception of a stative nature. Here the subjects are, respectively, the perceived stimuli *la catedral*, *las notas de la orquesta*, and *la cocina*. In cases like these, the PERCEPTOR understands from the experience level not only that the stimulus is uncontrollable but also that perceiving it depends to a greater extent on the circumstances than on who perceives it. For example, sentence (8) makes sense when the cathedral is far away (DISTANCE FACTOR) since, should any PERCEPTOR be near and thus in control of the situation, they would say *veo la catedral* [I can see the cathedral], thus conceptualizing themselves as a subject. Similarly, both the musical notes in (9) and the kitchen smell in (10) will be perceived or not according to the context, with the PERCEPTOR exerting very little control over the event.

In light of all the considerations above, classifying verbs of perception becomes much easier thanks to the agentivity scale devised by Van Valin and LaPolla (1997, p. 114) which presents the subject's semantic role as a gradual one, ranging from the most agentive (an AGENT) to the most unagentive one (the STIMULUS or the PATIENT), accounting for the existence of possible intermediate cases as well. This scale matches the features of semantic roles described by Dowty (1991) and Primus (1999) and their aspectual consequences: the closer the subject is to the PROTO-AGENT, the more control and transitivity (actions), and

Direct perception is consequently the one in which the PERCEPTOR experiences the PERCEPT in an objective manner, either through sight or using any other sense. Various possibilities arise within this context, with diverse characteristics (see, among others, the study authored by Rodríguez-Españeira, 2000); thus, we enjoy direct perception when the direct object is a concrete noun (i.e., a physical entity that can be perceived, as in the sentence *los niños vieron el cuadro* [the children saw the painting]), and also with events constructed using infinitive and gerund, in which the sense involved perceives a sequence of facts (*vi al policía salir de la habitación* [I saw the policeman leave the room] and *oímos a los cocineros preparando la cena* [we heard the cooks preparing dinner]).⁵ According to Rodríguez-Españeira (2000), direct perception can equally take place in virtual worlds; for example, when we dream of something or imagine it, or even in situations where someone experiences an optical illusion. In all of these cases, PERCEPTORS experience a vision that they see as a real one, since that imaginary vision becomes activated in their cognitive system.

By contrast, indirect perception is the one in which the PERCEPT serves as a source of deductions and inferences for the PERCEPTOR. In such perceptions, subjects not only receive stimulus but also interpret it in accordance with their knowledge of the world. The nature of these processes is thus more cognitive than perceptual. Numerous syntactic constructions provide evidence that, in addition to being perceived, the PERCEPT is rationally understood too. The most canonical one in a great many languages around the world is the structure which features the direct object of the verb of perception as a subordinate clause with a conjugated verb, basically an enunciative noun clause; at the moment when the PERCEPT takes the form of a sentence with a conjugated verb, perception becomes indirect, insofar as that structure precludes an exclusively physical perception by default (Delbecque & Lamiroy, 1999; Rodríguez-Españeira, 2000, 2004). An example of this phenomenon can be found in the sentence *el maestro corrigió los exámenes y vio que todos los alumnos se habían esforzado mucho* [the teacher marked the exams and saw that all the students had made a great effort], where the subject—the teacher—comes to the conclusion that his pupils have studied a lot based on the previous evidence that they all obtained a good grade in their exams. What matters syntactically speaking is that such a conclusion is coded by means of a direct object sentence subordinated to the verb *ver*, which thus codes an indirect conclusion of an epistemic nature, rather than a direct perception.

Nonetheless, the distinction between direct and indirect perception is more complex than it appears at first glance. As highlighted by several scholars (Willems, 1983; Hanegreefs, 2008; Carrasco Gutiérrez, 2011), this dichotomy must be understood as a progressive continuum, since a single analysis does not seem to suffice to explain many instances. We can consider the following examples for illustrative purposes:

- (11) *Veo que llevas una falda nueva* [I (can) see that you are wearing a new skirt].
- (12) *Veo que la reunión se va a alargar bastante* [I (can) see that the meeting is going to take quite long].

Albeit apparently identical, an important difference of a conceptual nature actually exists between the preceding two sentences. They both represent indirect perceptions because they have a sentential complement but, while the conceptualizer in sentence (11) has physically perceived something (a skirt) which made him state the intellectual verification of that fact in reality, sentence (12) contains a cognitive complement which does not stem from an intersubjective visual reality; the speaker in (12) has reached a conclusion (the meeting is going to take long) on the basis of his personal experiences along with clues that are not evident (it's five o'clock and the boss has not arrived yet, the computer is not working, the report must be ready for tomorrow. . .). Thus, *ver* can express

an indirect perception both from a literal vision and when following a purely subjective reasoning process.

On these grounds, Willems (1983, p. 155) drew a distinction between direct and indirect physical perception and cognitive perception. Direct physical perception takes place when something is perceived without the intervention of a mental process, as in *vi un rascacielos en Nueva York* [I saw a skyscraper in New York]. Indirect physical perception instead becomes visible in sentence (11); a literal vision occurs and, thanks to it, the speaker intellectually verifies a fact placed within the immediate reality. Finally, according to Willems, cognitive perception is the one appearing in cases such as (12); in other words, when deduction and intelligence come into play, but not from external data.⁶ This very interesting interpretation by Willems can be confirmed using the evidentiality theory (González Vázquez, 2006); in this sense, (11) would exemplify inferred evidence based on direct perception, while (12) corresponds to inferred evidence obtained through reasoning.⁷

Lastly, indirect perception arguably happens when the PERCEPT, as a noun phrase, remains inaccessible to the senses because of its metaphorical nature; examples such as *he visto la bondad en su mirada* [I have seen goodness in his look], *esta actuación me huele a premio* [This performance smells of an award, in my opinion] or *desde el otro lado de la habitación sentía su nerviosismo* [I could feel their nervousness from the other side of the room] cannot be regarded as direct perceptions.

4. Resultative vs. Non-Resultative Perception

This is another extensively examined dichotomy (Hanegreefs, 2008, pp. 38–42). Some verbs of perception, including *ver*, *oír*, *sentir*, and *oler* cannot be conceived in the absence of a PERCEPT, since the latter is logically presupposed by its predication. Hence the resultative nature of such verbs: they become defined by the presence of the stimulus, which is always perceived. Therefore, anybody who is not blind or deaf, for example, automatically perceives certain stimuli just because the latter are near or because they have their eyes open in front of those stimuli. By contrast, more agentive verbs of perception do not necessarily have a resultative character, since by stressing the intention of the OBSERVER, the process temporarily divides into two phases: (1) a voluntary intention to perceive a stimulus attentively; and (2) an accomplished perception. In the case of agentive verbs of perception, nothing guarantees the completion of this process (perception is not always accomplished), whereas in resultative verbs, due to their more stative nature, the consummation of perception is instantaneous. This dichotomy acquires special importance when it comes to understanding how verbs of perception behave in aspectual terms, and adequately accounts for examples like the following ones:

- (13) *En cuanto abrí los ojos, vi su rostro* [As soon as I opened my eyes, I saw his face].
- (14) *Miré durante un rato, pero no vi nada* [I looked for a while, but saw nothing].
- (15) *El ruido era tan fuerte que no pude escuchar la conversación* [The noise was so loud that I could not hear the conversation].

Example (13) shows a resultative use of *ver*; the speaker expresses that he saw the face simply as a result of opening his eyes, without there being any will or cognitive attention on his part. Contrarily, (14) and (15) illustrate non-resultative uses of *mirar* and *escuchar*. In (14), *mirar* exclusively represents the first part of his conceptualization; or expressed differently, the desire of the OBSERVER to succeed in perceiving something, a perception which cannot be completed for whatever contextual reasons, as evidenced by the negated presence of *ver*. The same holds true for (15), with the only difference lying in the fact that the sensorial action to be performed is an auditory one this time; the OBSERVER wishes to hear a conversation (first phase) and the surrounding noise prevents him from doing so (lack of success in the second phase of the process). The

resultative/non-resultative dichotomy consequently opposes perceptions which are finite, perfective and closed (resultative) to others of an open nature where no certainty exists about the PERCEPT being captured⁸ (non-resultative) (Collinot, 1966; Hanegreefs, 2008).

5. Accidental vs. Non-Accidental Perception

Following the line of thought adopted by Rogers (1971), we can also speak about a dichotomy between accidental and non-accidental perception. This duality, supported by the previous one, starts from an assumption: the fact that certain perceptions are resultative allows them to occur accidentally. This is why a specific PERCEPTOR can see, for instance, something involuntarily, with the consequences that such a perception may trigger. In this case, the physiological differences between sight and hearing become decisive, to the extent that, according to Rogers, accidental perception is possible with sight, but not with hearing; someone can look at something randomly and then take their eyes off it.⁹ However, it seems unlikely for anyone to listen carefully to an auditory PERCEPT (for example, a conversation or a song) by accident, insofar as, unlike what happens with vision, which operates on an objectual basis (and is therefore accomplished instantly), sounds are processual; i.e., hearing them requires a certain length of time (Enghels, 2007). Consequently, one can hardly assume an involuntary listen, insofar as whoever listens needs to remain attentive during a minimum time stretch.

All the oppositions considered so far have in common that the distinctive feature generated by the binomial relates somehow or other to the will of the PERCEPTOR. Direct, resultative, and accidental perceptions are uncontrolled, with the subject lacking responsibility over the process in them; quite the opposite is true when it comes to indirect, non-resultative, and non-accidental perceptions, which involve the presence of an active PERCEPTOR who makes decisions, examines the perception context, and pursues a specific aim. Thus, it is our contention that the most important dichotomy among those proposed in the literature devoted to verbs of perception is the one opposing active to passive perception.

6. Active vs. Passive Perception

The literature devoted to verbs of perception has frequently defended the argument that, since the reception of a stimulus may be involuntary or voluntary, the verbs linguistically channeling those experiences will be stative (for involuntary perceptions) and agentive (for active ones) in syntax. However, agentivity in verbs of perception does not work on a two-pole basis, but rather gradually, which explains why this active/passive opposition needs to be understood as being much more complex than it might superficially appear.

The hypothesis according to which verb pairs such as *ver*/*mirar* [see/look], *oír*/*escuchar* [hear/listen], *sentir*/*tocar* [feel/touch] or *oler*/*olfatear* [smell/sniff] represent permanent dualities between a non-marked term of a stative, unagentive nature (*ver*, *oír*, *sentir*, *oler*) opposed to another markedly active one (*mirar*, *escuchar*, *tocar*, *olfatear*) has received strong support in numerous studies. If such an interpretation were right, one would expect passive verbs of perception to behave grammatically as aspectual states (with all the syntactic properties that it entails), whereas active verbs of perception should act as prototypical agentive verbs exhibiting all the features associated with predicates whose subject functions as a PROTO-AGENT. In fact, this premise very often fails to be fulfilled. To begin with, only some verbs of touch and taste admit being used as true actions, since the rest of them, regardless of their potential degree of agentivity, have no capacity whatsoever to causatively alter the PERCEPT, which also explains why the subjects accompanying highly agentive verbs such as *mirar* or *escuchar* can only represent OBSERVERS, but not AGENTS. Furthermore, apparently passive verbs very frequently appear within syntactic structures

that suggest agentivity, which casts doubts about the accuracy of the dichotomy between active and passive perception.

In effect, applying a syntactic agentivity test to supposedly passive verbs such as *ver* and *oír* will provide us with surprising data, since this sort of analysis clearly reveals that *ver* and *oír* can operate, at least on an aspectual level, as active predicates. By way of example, the agentivity tests brought together in the work authored by Rodríguez-Espiñeira (2002) can prove useful to check whether *ver*, *mirar*, *oír*, *escuchar*, *sentir*, *tocar*, and *oler* can behave in an agentive manner or not. A description of these tests can be found below. It needs to be clarified that Rodríguez-Espiñeira only dealt with visual verbs (*mirar* and *ver*) and auditory ones (*escuchar* and *oír*), while we have broadened the scope of this analysis, applying it to Spanish verbs of perception corresponding to the other senses as well (see Fernández Jaén, 2012 for a more in-depth examination).

- (a) Test for progressive structures. In theory, stative verbs cannot combine with aspectually progressive periphrases, insofar a state lacks internal time development. Instead, it is easy for an agentive verb to form part of such structures because every action takes place within a specific time framework about which one can specify the degree of eventive development.
- (b) Test for the complement function in verbs of begging. If a verb can act as the verbal complement of a verb of begging, command, or promise, this will surely happen because it is an agentive verb. After all, the fact that they express static properties prevents states from being imposed or requested.
- (c) Test for the replacement of predicates with pro-verbs. If a predication can be substituted for the pro-verbs *hacer* [to do] (agentive) or *suced* [to happen] (unagentive) inside equational structures with the verb *ser*, this will be possible because the subject of such predications is an AGENT.
- (d) Test for the imperative. One can expect that only active verbs will admit the imperative mood, for states can neither be imposed nor be represented as something obligatory or necessary.
- (e) Test for the final construction. If a verb can be accompanied by a subordinate clause of purpose with the form *para* + infinitive, it will be showing its agentive value. After all, a final intention can only exist when the subject controls the action, as described above in relation to the dichotomous opposition between resultative and non-resultative perception.
- (f) Test for elements of intentionality. Only agentive verbs appear in the company of prepositional phrases, locutions, or adverbs such as *con entusiasmo* [with enthusiasm], *voluntariamente* [voluntarily] or *a propósito* [on purpose] inside the syntactic sequence.

The implementation of the preceding tests reveals that *ver*, *oír*, and *oler* (apart from the clearly agentive verbs *mirar*, *escuchar*, and *tocar*) fit in with the particularities that one can expect from an activity verb. This can be attested through the examination of sentences like the following ones:

- (16) *Ayer estuve viendo un documental* [I spent some time watching a documentary yesterday] (progressive structure¹⁰).
- (17) *El dependiente me pidió que oliera aquella nueva fragancia* [The shop-assistant asked me to smell that new fragrance] (verbs of begging).
- (18) *Lo único que hace Eduardo en todo el día es ver películas* [The only thing Eduardo does throughout the day is watch movies] (use of the pro-verb).
- (19) *¡Oye lo que te dice tu padre!* [Listen to what your father is saying] (imperative¹¹).
- (20) *Pedro vio la obra de teatro para poder escribir la crítica* [Pedro saw the theater play in order to be able to write the review] (final construction).

- (21) *Sergio ha oído con interés esa canción* [Sergio has listened to that song with interest] (element of intentionality).

Performing these tests does not provide homogeneous results for every verb,¹² and it is also true that some tests work better than others.¹³ Nonetheless, it can hardly be denied that this type of analysis tends to clearly show that the dichotomy between active and passive perception does not operate on a systematic basis, insofar as no problems exist for the verbs in the even number series which supposedly lack agentivity to admit active uses.

In order to solve the theoretical contradictions posed by these refractory examples, Horno Chéliz (2002–2004) put forward an interesting hypothesis inspired in the analyses of verbal aspect in Spanish undertaken by De Miguel (1999). According to Horno Chéliz, the verb *ver*¹⁴ can operate as an activity event because it has a twofold internal aspectual structure. On the one hand, *ver* works as a verb of ingressive accomplishment in those cases where it only indicates pure perception with no agentivity; thus, at first, this verb exclusively conveys the resultative capture of a physical element located near the speaker. Nevertheless, such a perception can be reanalyzed as a second durative process if the initial perception—intrinsically brief and punctual—continues over time; *ver* would thus move towards a second utilization focused on the voluntary duration of perception, that time duration being the one which allows the verb to behave as an agentive predicate. Examples thereof are provided below:

- (22) *En cuanto Claudia llegó al parque, vio al perro* [As soon as Claudia arrived at the park, she saw the dog].
 (23) *Claudia vio al perro y siguió viéndolo mientras este se iba* [Claudia saw the dog and continued to see it while the latter was leaving].

In (22) we have a prototypical use of *ver* as a passive verb of visual perception; the subject *Claudia* perceives the object *perro* simply because she has the ability to see, that vision taking place instantly (accomplishment). By contrast, (23) exemplifies a syntactic occurrence where *ver* no longer functions as a passive verb; taking into account that the perception of the dog continues, this becomes an activity that extends over time and accordingly moves on to develop as an active event, which is why *ver* can appear in the durative periphrasis *seguir* + gerund.

This theory posed by Horno Chéliz seems plausible because some verbs that usually code aspectual accomplishments due to their semantic nature do not admit this second phase which is, however, admitted by *ver* and *oír*. This becomes clear in the oppositions illustrated by the examples below (Horno Chéliz, 2002–2004):

- (24) *El bebé nació* [The baby was born].
 (25) **El bebé nació y siguió naciendo* [*The baby was born and continued to be born].
 (26) *Juan oyó un ruido* [Juan heard a noise].
 (27) *Juan oyó un ruido y siguió oyéndolo* [Juan heard a noise and continued to hear it].

What makes it possible for the verb which can express an accomplishment to progress into a second durative phase? According to Horno Chéliz, the cause lies in the presence of an animate participant in the event; if the subject is active, the first stage can continue if that subject focuses cognitively on the PERCEPT that was initially detected. Needless to say, this cannot happen if the syntactic subject represents an entity that acts as a PATIENT of the predicate and lacks will.¹⁵

It follows from the above that those verbs of perception which have a twofold active/passive use need to be inserted in a time sequence so that they can cover the two phases that characterize a compound event (initial accomplishment and durative process), since the anchoring in an event which develops over time arises as the most outstanding difference between a state and an activity (Vendler, 1967). In the case of (23), that dynamic

pattern is obtained from the context and the lexical meaning of the noun *perro*. Dogs are autonomous animals who move at their own will and act freely, which means that the event conceptualized in the segment *ver un perro* can metonymically portray a situation which can be paraphrased as TO SEE A DOG WHILE IT IS MOVING; in other words, by stating that a dog has been seen, it is understood that the latter was performing some movement or that the scene showed some development.

In addition to nouns describing three-dimensional objects that can move on their own (dogs, birds, etc.), with less agentive verbs of visual or auditory perception, many languages often feature the direct object represented precisely by eventive nouns (Fernández Lagunilla, 2006; Enghels, 2007) which characteristically present a dynamic internal structure that can be broken down into a first punctual stage (accomplishment) and a second one which extends over time indefinitely.¹⁶ Such nouns include very habitual direct complements of *ver* and *oír*, among them *película* [movie], *canción* [song], *espectáculo* [show], *historia* [story] or *cuento* [tale], to quote but a few. All these nouns conceptualize entities which only exist in their development over time, that development being the one voluntarily captured by PERCEPTORS in sentences like these:

- (28) *Vimos el partido de tenis en casa* [We watched the tennis match at home].
- (29) *Carlos oyó la ópera por la radio* [Carlos listened to the opera on the radio].
- (30) *El niño estuvo oyendo el relato con los ojos abiertos* [The child listened to the story with his eyes open].

In all these cases, the subjects have experienced a first ingressive accomplishment of a visual or auditory kind; however, they have stayed concentrated on that perception to attentively follow the progress over time of those entities (*the match, the opera, the story*).

It seems clear, in light of all the above, that *ver/mirar*, *oír/escuchar* and a number of similar verb pairs do not represent a perfect dichotomy, since the verbs in both binomials can function as actions, albeit different ones.¹⁷ When it comes to *ver* and *oír* (the most problematic verbs), their potential to appear in typically active syntactic structures such as the ones studied in agentivity tests lies in the fact that, very often, these verbs do not express a mere physiological verification about the existence of objects and sounds in the world, but rather serve to conceptualize how sentential subjects stop being involuntary PERCEPTORS to become active OBSERVERS who consciously record the time development of certain realities (films, songs. . .).

Another very solid argument exists which supports the non-existence of a permanent distribution between active and passive uses of the Spanish verb pairs *ver/mirar*, *oír/escuchar* with a diatopical pattern. Across some areas of the Spanish-speaking domain, the theoretically active elements in the opposition specialize in expressing passive perception. By way of example, in Panamá, *mirar* behaves as a stative verb, in such a way that a sentence like *ayer te mire* [I looked at you yesterday] simply indicates that the subject fleetingly saw someone else for a moment (Horno Chéliz, 2002–2004). On the other hand, several informers assured us that uses resembling the Panamanian ones take place in Galicia at present, and that in the Albacete province, one can still hear sentences where the verb *catar* (and old verb of visual perception) is used with a passive meaning, as in *que no te cate cogiendo galletas* [don't let anyone catch/see you taking biscuits], in which *catar* means TO DISCOVER/TO CATCH or TO SEE INVOLUNTARILY. Finally, it also deserves to be highlighted that the use of *mirar* with eventive nouns (*estoy mirando una película* [literally, I'm looking at a film] is becoming increasingly common in Catalonia, this being in principle anomalous, insofar as the complements of *mirar* rarely have a dynamic nature.

Therefore, the language does not usually express punctual resultative perceptions, instead tending to verbalize more pragmatically relevant situations, among them the vision

or audition of events occurring during certain time intervals which arouse the interest of speakers.

In short, what types of events can Spanish verbs of physical perception give rise to? Vendler (1967) distinguished four types structured around the features ‘process’ and ‘defined’; the former refers to duration over time, while the latter serves to ascertain whether the time framework has fixed limits or not. There would consequently be four possible events:

In fact, applying the preceding typology (Figure 2) to verbs of perception in Spanish allows us to obtain the following classification (Devís Márquez, 2010):

Type of event	Process	Defined
State	-	-
Activity	+	-
Realization	+	+
Accomplishment	-	+

Figure 2. Types of events (Vendler, 1967).

As shown above (Figure 3), of all these verbs, only *ver*, *oír*, and *escuchar* can be realizations in the opinion of Devís Márquez, which means that only those three verbs admit PERCEPTS endowed with an intrinsic time limit. This is what happens in the following cases:

Verbs of perception	Type of event
<i>ver, oír, escuchar</i>	Activities Realizations Compound events
<i>tocar, oler</i>	Activities Accomplishments
<i>Mirar</i>	Activities
<i>Sentir</i>	Accomplishments Compound events
<i>Saber</i>	States

Figure 3. Aspectual events with verbs of perception.

- (31) *Vi el partido de fútbol* [I saw / watched the football match].
- (32) *Oí una canción italiana* [I heard / listened to an Italian song].
- (33) *Escuché una conferencia sobre literatura* [I listened to a lecture on literature].

The previous predications not only have a time duration but also incorporate an inherent limit imposed by the actual semantic nature of the PERCEPTS *partido*, *canción*, and *conferencia*: these three stimuli always present a well-defined structure with a beginning and an end that are conventionally established, which leads PERCEPTORS to receive them

voluntarily as well as to experience them being conscious of the fact that such perception is framed within a time pattern that has been closed beforehand. This use does not in principle appear to be possible with the remaining verbs, which, due to their peculiar conceptual configuration, can exclusively express durative activities, albeit without a fixed limit, as shown below:

(34) *Estoy oliendo tu guiso* [I'm smelling your stew].

(35) *El médico tocó el brazo del paciente* [The doctor touches the patient's arm].

(36) *Hemos mirado ese cuadro durante una hora* [We have looked at that painting for an hour].

The preceding sentences feature *oler*, *tocar* and *mirar* with PERCEPTS showing that their syntactic behavior is agentive and durative, even though none of the three examples shows signs of a time limit; the voluntary action of smelling a stew may last for a few seconds or some minutes (depending on who the subject is and on their intentions), but it is not an activity whose duration has been established *a priori*. Likewise, *tocar* or *mirar*, regardless of whether it is an arm or a painting, express activities which will last more or less time according to the context.¹⁸

Finally, *ver*, *oír*, *escuchar*, and *sentir* sometimes behave as compound events in the terms upheld by Horno Chéliz, that is, with a double configuration which includes an achievement phase and a durative one, whereas the verb *saber*, associated with taste, exclusively acts as a state verb, since having taste or not is a property that, when owned, cannot be subject to time-related changes. Thus, saying *este chocolate sabe muy mal* [this chocolate tastes very bad] implies stating that the subject *este chocolate* has a disagreeable taste which describes a permanent quality.

Such an analysis proves very interesting as well as enlightening, but empirical research adds some nuances to it. By way of example, for Devís Márquez (2010), although *tocar* and *oler* have the potential to express achievements (*toqué de repente su brazo* [I suddenly touched his arm], *olí de repente el gas de la cocina* [I suddenly smelled the gas from the kitchen]), it is not possible for them to describe compound events, insofar as the initial resultative contact tends not to be followed by a durative phase. This claim is highly arguable, especially in the case of *oler*; olfactory activities very often originate from the voluntary perception of a smell (achievement) which causes the PERCEPTOR to take an interest in that smell and, accordingly, to decide to smell it voluntarily (activity). It also seems striking that the ability to act as a state should only be attributed to the verb *saber*, considering that practically every verb of perception¹⁹ can function in that way. What is more, that utilization appears relatively often with *oír*, *escuchar*, *ver*, and *sentir*; and it clearly predominates in the case of *oler* (Fernández Jaén, 2012). Consequently, it becomes obvious that the link between perceptual verbs and events varies to a greater extent than what any rigid analysis may suggest.

7. Location vs. Orientation

This last dichotomy related to verbs of perception is worth highlighting as well (Hanegreefs, 2008, pp. 43–47). Now the duality has to do with the aforesaid connection between verbs of perception and distance in space (DISTANCE FACTOR). As explained above, the two key elements in the scenes featuring verbs of perception are the PERCEPTOR and the PERCEPT; both of these elements are endowed with autonomy and located in certain spatial coordinates. Location establishes that some verbs of perception outline the position of the PERCEPTOR, which in turn becomes essential in order to be able to determine the one occupied by the PERCEPT. The PERCEPTOR thus operates as a deictic reference point by means of which one can check where the PERCEPT is. As for orientation, it takes place with other verbs belonging to this category which do not specifically define the relative location of PERCEPTOR and PERCEPT, but rather the vectorial orientation

generated between them; in other words, these verbs describe the path separating the subject from the object.

As regards the binomial *ver/mirar*, the analyses performed by Hanegreefs (2008) provided evidence that *ver* behaves as a verb of location in Spanish, while *mirar* operates as a verb of orientation. *Ver* usually appears accompanied in the syntactic chain by locative circumstantial objects that give accurate information about the position of the PERCEPTOR, which demonstrates the high relevance that such information acquires for the conceptualizer. Considering that *ver*, in its capacity as a resultative verb, cannot possibly be conceived without a PERCEPT, and bearing also in mind that the latter does not exist independently of its compulsory relationship with the subject,²⁰ one can easily understand why the verbalized scene tends to specify where the PERCEPTOR is. Some examples can prove illustrative:

- (37) *Antonio vio los fuegos artificiales desde la azotea* [Antonio saw the fireworks from the terrace roof].
- (38) *El biólogo vio los pájaros a cierta distancia* [The biologist saw the birds from a certain distance].
- (39) *A la izquierda se ve la casa de mis abuelos* [On the left, you can see my grandparents' house].

The PERCEPTORS in (37) and (38) see a particular object from a specific position which is coded with the adjuncts *desde la azotea* and *a cierta distancia*. Instead, the circumstantial *a la izquierda* in (39) indicates the position of the PERCEPT, which on this occasion behaves as a subject-stimulus, since the sentence is formulated using an impersonal passive pattern (stative use). In this last case, we infer the position of the PERCEPTOR from contextual circumstances: if the house is visible and stands on the left, that necessarily places the conceptualizer in a position near the one occupied by the object. Therefore, verbs of perception with location frequently combine with lexical elements (e.g., adverbs or prepositional phrases) which help adjust the deictic information about the scene.

Concerning *mirar*, this is a verb of orientation which offers a profile of the OBSERVER, the one who wishes to visually examine a PERCEPT. For this reason, what matters most with this verb is the distance between them both and the way in which OBSERVERS orient the eyes to achieve their purpose. Since we find ourselves before a non-resultative verb, nothing guarantees that the perception will be successfully achieved,²¹ which is why *mirar* sometimes behaves intransitively; as opposed to *ver*, which cannot be understood without the PERCEPT, *mirar* often lacks a direct object, since the subject's intention acquires the most importance. Thus, the Spanish verb *mirar* has the potential to appear in intransitive structures and accompanied by prepositional complements that show the orientation of someone's look, which is impossible for *ver*.²² The following alternances give proof thereof:

- (40) *Mateo se pasa la tarde mirando por el balcón* [Mateo spends the evening looking from the balcony].
- (41) **Mateo se pasa la tarde viendo por el balcón* [*Mateo spends the evening seeing from the balcony].
- (42) *Tomás ha mirado hacia la catedral* [Tomás has looked towards the cathedral].
- (43) **Tomás ha visto hacia la catedral* [*Tomás has seen towards the cathedral].
- (44) *A Pedro le gusta mirar antes de comprar* [Pedro likes to look around before buying].
- (45) *# A Pedro le gusta ver antes de comprar* [# Pedro likes to see around before buying].

There is no doubt that, while the sentences in (40) and (42) sound perfectly coherent, those portrayed in (41) and (43) are agrammatical; the local character associated with *ver* prevents it from being complemented with phrases preceded by prepositions that suggest oriented movement such as *por* and *hacia*. (44) and (45) exemplify intransitive uses with no prepositional phrases present. In the first case, *mirar* metonymically represents

the actions typical of a subject while comparing products prior to making a purchase; what matters is the attitude of the subject, not any of the things that the latter is going to buy—a piece of information which can be suppressed. This rarely happens with *ver*²³ because, although this verb has the ability to develop a meaning resembling that of *mirar* (TO EXAMINE SOMETHING) through the same metonymic process, the presence of the PERCEPT becomes inescapable; hence the appeal of the sentence in (45), even if the PERCEPT is habitual in pragmatical terms.

This opposition which has just been explained seems valid to analyze the various conceptualizations adopted by verbs of sight in the Spanish language but, does it apply to verbs of the remaining senses? Truth be told, the location/orientation dichotomy does not supply a very operational path of analysis. Hearing, touch, smell, and taste do not have such a markedly directive biological organ as the eyes; hence the inability for their specific verbs to generate prepositional phrases of vectorial direction that can syntactically reflect the orientation of the perceptual organ; for this reason, this dichotomy does not seem too clear outside the group of visual verbs (Fernández Jaén, 2012).

Now then, the notions of location and orientation have revealed themselves as interesting when it comes to studying the peculiar behavior of non-visual verbs. For instance, this distinction does not exist in the pair *oír/escuchar* (they both are local), which allows these two verbs to be easily interchangeable, due to the absence of a decidedly different, incompatible configuration between them (Fernández Jaén, 2012, 2020). As for *sentir, tocar, and oler*, evidence suggests that, despite the non-existence of an actual opposition between location and orientation, such an opposition does exist between the position of the conceptualizer and the origin and orientation of the stimulus; while the speaker is usually the origin of the energy flow projected towards the STIMULUS with some verbs, in others the conceptualizer represents the passive entity located at a point in space reached by stimuli which act as a causal force. Although one cannot speak about orientation *stricto sensu* when it comes to these verbs (opposed to location), there is indeed a location related to oriented forces which sometimes emanate from it and, on other occasions, reach it. The following three examples will help explain this idea:

- (46) *Los niños tocaron las obras de arte del museo* [The children touched the works of art in the museum].
- (47) *A Pedro le tocó la pierna una serpiente* [A snake touched Pedro's leg].
- (48) *Esta habitación me huele a rosas* [To me, this room smells of roses].

In (46), *los niños* voluntarily touch the works of art in the museum; hence their status as the origin of the force and the spatial reference point for the predication. By contrast, (47) shows *tocar* conceptualizing a different situation in which the PERCEPTOR (the indirect object *a Pedro*, duplicated by *le*) adopts a passive role, with an external stimulus (a snake, in this case) that works as a syntactic subject, the one which reaches and touches him (Fernández Jaén, 2012). Similarly, in (48) it is the room that gives off the smell and, consequently, plays the role of spatial reference point; this time the PERCEPTOR (represented by the pronoun *me*) does nothing but verify the presence of the smell.

8. Conclusions

This article provides a thorough review of the most important theoretical oppositions proposed in the scientific literature to explain how verbs of perception work; the conclusion reached being that although such dichotomies prove helpful insofar as they offer interesting analytical patterns, they are not valid to carry out closed descriptions. The linguistic reality, in particular when verbs of perception are dealt with as a group, refuses to fit in with rigid parameters. That is why these theories only serve as the starting point for analyses and cannot possibly provide the final answer to how linguistic usage takes place. All the same,

the attempt to find oppositions able to account for the grammatical behavior of verbs of perception has made it possible to deepen into their knowledge. This in itself constitutes a remarkable step ahead for both descriptive and typological linguistics.

Our article additionally makes a theoretical contribution to the bibliography on verbs of perception, insofar as it systematizes, on the one hand, the previous literature on the oppositions proposed to describe these verbs and, on the other hand, it enlarges their descriptive possibilities by applying them to verbs and physical senses (smell, touch. . .) which had not been studied using this methodology so far. Likewise, the examples provided in this paper, created introspectively with the aim of achieving the highest possible level of syntactic accuracy, serve as a representative sample of the various ways to conceptualize verbs of perception in Spanish (and, to a lesser extent, in other languages). This means that the syntactic tests used in this article have the potential to be replicated in the examination of other world languages when looking for an overview of the syntactic variations admitted by verbs of perception in a particular language. Therefore, our work represents an original scientific contribution: it expands theoretical concepts, establishes guidelines for linguistic typology, and offers novel grammatical descriptions of the Spanish language.

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Notes

- ¹ For an overview of these oppositions and dichotomies, see the study authored by [Hanegreefs \(2008, pp. 23–47\)](#). Despite revolving around visual perception, this author's work proves extremely useful as a general introduction to this issue.
- ² For an overview of these verbs, see the works of [Ibarretxe-Antuñano \(1999\)](#), [Fernández Jaén \(2012\)](#), [Jansegers \(2017\)](#) and [Galac \(2020\)](#).
- ³ Light on this topic is also shed in the work authored by [Hanegreefs and Fernández Jaén \(2012\)](#).
- ⁴ This conclusion is based on an empirical study which can be found in [Fernández Jaén \(2012\)](#).
- ⁵ These possibilities can likewise arise in stative structures, as in *se oye música* [music is heard] or in *desde aquí se ve trabajar a los obreros* [the workers are seen working from here].
- ⁶ [Dretske \(1969\)](#) proposed a distinction resembling that of Willems (primary/secondary perception), although his approach is more philosophical than linguistic. [Carrasco Gutiérrez \(2011\)](#) performed a compelling analysis about *ver* applying Dretske's model whose results broadly matched those achieved in the works authored by [Willems \(1983\)](#) or [Hanegreefs \(2008\)](#).
- ⁷ [Gisborne \(2010\)](#) came to a similar conclusion when he analyzed the sentential complements of the English verb *see*. The studies on evidentiality carried out by [Squartini \(2001, 2008\)](#) also deserve to be mentioned in this respect. This author assigns the category of 'specific inference' to any reasoning process based on data which can be observed through the senses (example 11), and defines as a 'conjecture' any reasoning that does not depend on observable data (example 12).
- ⁸ Naturally, when the second phase of agentive verbs of perception is indeed reached, such verbs inclusively presuppose their corresponding resultative correlates. In other words, while *ver* and *oír* do not presuppose *mirar* and *escuchar*, the actions of *mirar* and *escuchar* do necessarily presuppose *ver* and *oír* ([Fernández Jaén, 2006](#)).
- ⁹ To express his support for this idea, [Rogers \(1971\)](#) pointed out that despite their inability to see, even the blind can perform the physical action of looking at something if that something calls their attention for some reason (it made a noise, it has a peculiar smell. . .).
- ¹⁰ [Jørgensen \(1999\)](#) examined the use of progressive structures in English and gave proof that, contrary to the opinion of other researchers, the verb *see* perfectly admits them.
- ¹¹ The possibility for the verb *oír* to permit the imperative seems especially logical taking into account that verbs of hearing very often acquire the markedly agentive meaning of TO OBEY, without that making them lose their auditory meaning. To deepen into this semantic feature of verbs of hearing, see the works of [Ibarretxe-Antuñano \(1999\)](#) and [Fernández Jaén \(2012, 2020\)](#).

- 12 For example, the test for complements with verbs of begging supplies peculiar outcomes with the verb *ver*. In principle, one can find valid statements such as *Tomás le suplicó al médico que viera a su hermana* [Tomás begged the doctor to see his sister]; what happens in these cases is that *ver* has a metonymical meaning which goes beyond the mere visual value; here *ver* means TO EXAMINE WITH SIGHT and, while the perceptual content stays, the verb has slid toward a highly agentive value (TO EXAMINE), as a result of which its appearance in these constructions turns out to be logical. The metaphor TO EXAMINE IS TO SEE consequently derives from a metonymy according to which the means used to examine something (sight) replaces the desired goal (knowing what something looks like). This semantic association lies at the basis of the meaning of a verb like *observar* [to observe], specialized in expressing a concentrated vision aimed to discover something (Hanegreefs, 2008), and it already existed in Latin, a language which had the visual verb *considero*, which meant TO EXAMINE and TO VALUE and was used in commercial contexts where the purchaser had to value the merchandise before paying for it (García-Hernández, 1999–2000).
- 13 Fernández Lagunilla (2006, p. 358) claimed that these tests to ascertain the degree of agentivity in a predicate are not very effective because the possibility always exists to find a context or to propose an example where they work. To our mind, though, this kind of grammatical test does prove useful, however high its margin of error may be, since some verbs such as *sentir* [to feel] (stative) match what the test presupposes (unagentivity), the invention of contradictory examples being almost impossible (Fernández Jaén, 2006, 2012).
- 14 And by extension, also *oír*, even though this researcher did not deal with that verb in her paper.
- 15 In fact, as explained by Horno Chéliz herself, verbs like *nacer* and similar ones which only permit the accomplishment phase tend to be unaccusative verbs whose subjects refer to the (passive) entity where the change of state expressed by the predicate becomes manifest.
- 16 In this respect, it is worth highlighting the linguistic behavior of the English verb *watch*. The English language covers visual perception with three basic verbs (not with two): *see*, *watch*, and *look*. *Look* is the marked term in the trinomial because it conveys the most agentive uses, whereas *see* and *watch* express visual perceptions fluctuating between the passive and the active spheres. Curiously enough, *watch* cannot take as direct objects nouns referring to objectual entities which are not endowed with mobility if these do not appear within a dynamic context, which is, however, allowed for *see* (Poch & Verdaguer, 1997). Thus, the possibility exists in English to say both *I watched the film* and *I watched the birds*, since both the film and the birds necessarily imply movement. Nonetheless, a rendering like **I watched the chair* is impossible because chairs do not move on their own. This anomalous example would only be correct if we incardinated the element *chair* in a dynamic setting—e.g., *I watched the chair falling down*. It thus becomes clear that the distinction between PERCEPTS evoking movement and objectual PERCEPTS without intrinsic movement acquires such cognitive importance that some languages have lexicalized specific verbs of perception for each option.
- 17 *Mirar* and *escuchar* stand for a more marked agentivity, which allows them to appear in the absence of a direct object to highlight the subject's agentive will, as will be explained below.
- 18 An example of activity with *ver* would be *estoy viendo los árboles* [I am seeing/looking at the trees], where the visual action might extend during a longer or shorter period, since no previously established time limit exists.
- 19 *Mirar* (unlike *escuchar*) is undoubtedly the one for which it proves harder to behave as a state, insofar as its prototypical conceptualization focuses solely on the agentive subject (Hanegreefs, 2008), and its most habitual PERCEPT is a highly specific objectual entity, which makes it difficult for the latter to eventually play the role of subject-stimulus within a stative structure. This possibility does exist, though, with *escuchar*, which has an auditory PERCEPT that can act as a subject. This difference becomes clearly visible in the following contrast: *se escucha muy bien el concierto desde la última fila* [One can listen to the concert very well from the last row]/ **se mira muy bien el cuadro desde aquí* [*One can look at the painting very well from here].
- 20 Expressed differently, it is not ontologically possible for a PERCEPT to exist in the absence of a PERCEPTOR. In the sentence *Francisco ve un barco en el puerto* [Francisco sees a ship in the port], *barco* has the status of a PERCEPT only because it is being observed by Francisco; if the latter stops looking at it, the object will immediately become just another 'unseen' element which forms part of the overall picture.
- 21 What is more, the action of looking sometimes takes place with no specific purpose.
- 22 García-Miguel (2005, p. 183) cited a text of the Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska extracted from her work *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela y otros cuentos* which features *ver* accompanied by a phrase starting with the directional preposition *a*. The sentence in question reads like this: *Ella también comía viéndolo a la cara* [She also ate seeing him in the face]. It is a surprising structure where *ver* undoubtedly has an oriented meaning, but it is such a strange, uncommon use that, in our opinion, it does not suffice to challenge the essential hypothesis posed by Hanegreefs (2008).
- 23 We signal the strange or unusual (though not necessarily agrammatical) nature of this sentence with the symbol #.

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