SECUENCIA GRAMATICAL PARA LA ENSEÑANZA DEL ESPAÑOL COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA: NUEVAS IDEAS

GRAMMATICAL SEQUENCING IN SPANISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE: NEW IDEAS

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Resumen: Este artículo es el resultado parcial de una investigación interdisciplinaria en curso sobre Lingüística computacional y la Enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera. La investigación intenta superar la falta de análisis serios sobre estructuras gramaticales en los libros de enseñanza de segundas lenguas, especialmente el orden de las estructuras gramaticales. Empezamos con varios corpus orales en español como C-Or-DiAL, CORLEC y PRESEEA. Más tarde incorporamos al análisis un corpus escrito como el Corpus del Español. Enviamos los corpus a través de un programa computacional de análisis elaborado por nosotros mismos para este fin, que etiqueta las palabras con sus partes del discurso para permitir a los usuarios seleccionar subconjuntos de palabras del corpus, y así determinar la frecuencia en esos corpus. Este análisis nos dará un mejor entendimiento del orden gramatical, porque la secuencia gramatical que plantearemos estará basada en la frecuencia de estas estructuras en los discursos de hablantes nativos, teniendo en cuenta las situaciones comunicativas en los que estas producciones orales y escritas aparecen. Será un paso importante hacia una mejor comprensión de la enseñanza de la gramática, y podría cambiar la forma de enseñarla.

Palabras claves: secuencia gramatical, enseñanza del español, adquisición de lenguas extranjeras.

Abstract: This article is a partial result of an ongoing interdisciplinary research in Computational Linguistics and the Teaching of Spanish as a Second Language. The research intents to overcome the lack of serious analysis on grammar structure of textbooks used for the Second Language Teaching market, especially the order of grammar structures. We started with various oral corpora in Spanish such as C-Or-DiAL, CORLEC, and PRESEEA. In a later stage we incorporated the written corpus, Corpus del Español. We send the corpora through a computational analysis program self-elaborated for this objective in mind, that tag words with their part-of-speech to allows the user to select subsets of corpus words, and determine their frequency in those corpora. This analysis provides a better understanding of the grammar sequencing, as the proposed grammar sequence will be based on the frequency of these structures found in native speaker utterances, taking in account the different communicational situations in which these oral and written productions take place. It will be big step towards a better understanding of the teaching of grammar, and we hope it would change the way of teaching it.

Key words: Grammar sequencing, Teaching Spanish, Second Language Acquisition.

INTRODUCTION: HISTORY OF GRAMMAR SEQUENCE

In the early 1970s, the grammatical skepticism and the growing focus on communicative methods of teaching stole the relevance of grammatical sequencing. Some authorities questioned the belief that it is possible to stablish criteria according to which a grammatical sequence might be organized in a logically, psychologically, and pedagogically satisfactory way.

Since the 1970s, a debate about the primacy of grammatical or functional categories has contributed to the al-

ready prevalent questioning of conventional arrangement of grammatical features. During this period, an attempt was made to give up grammatical sequencing and to build language courses on a semantic basis with grammar taking second place. The belief in the value of some kind of grammatical sequence structuring the teaching of a language has not been lost. However, modern thought on the grammatical syllabus is characterized by selectivity. Grammatical items are not included because they have always been taught, but because they can be justified in relation to the type of course, its length, objectives, and the student population.

Recent experience with notions, functions, and speech acts as well as with discourse and other communicative categories has not provided a replacement for the grammatical syllabus. However, thinking about grammar now tends to be related to functional-communicative aspects of language teaching. The key question is how best to integrate a grammatical syllabus with the demands of a functional or communicative/experiential syllabus. In order to create a grammatical sequence, there is a wide consensus about certain pedagogical principles that have to be kept in mind. Most writers on grammar teaching observe that grammar is cumulative. The concept of requisite knowledge: there are many complex items, which presuppose previous knowledge, and it has to be recognized when creating a grammatical sequence. Finally, no item that has once been introduced should ever be lost sight of.

As a conclusion, it can be said that in spite of doubts about the feasibility of a sequential arrangement, the grammar of a language cannot be taught all at once. Some sort of selection and sequencing is needed when creating a grammatical syllabus for the teaching of a second language. This does not mean that it should be the only organizing principle. It must be related to other subsystems of language as well to the non-linguistic elements –culture for i.e.- that should be part of the second language curriculum.

RESEARCH ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

Grammatical organization and sequence are essential to the success of a language class. The immense majority of professors devoted to the Teaching of Spanish as Second Language follows a method (book or online platform) already in the market, or combines several methods in a class. Following my teaching experience, I used to alter the order of grammatical sequencing, because classes worked better, or because I thought it was more practical. After a while, I started questioning the reason behind the sequence adopted for methods in the market, and why we keep almost the same sequencing even with changes in methods (grammar-translation, direct, audiolingual, the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, community language learning, Total Physical Response, communicative approach, etc). At the same time, I started asking instructors thought of the sequence, and the majority agreed that they were not happy with it, but they used them because it was easy. When I approached editorial people questioning why they do not offer any novelty in sequencing, they responded that they did not see the reason for any changes if instructors were not backing it up: conclusion, it is a vicious circle.

As an attempt to respond to the question above mentioned, I am leading an ongoing collaborative research in Coastal Carolina University (with Dr. Alejandro Muñoz-Garcés from the Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies, Dr. William Jones from the Department of Computer Science, and Dr. Lindsey Bell from the Department of Mathematics and Statistics), since 2015. At the very beginning, we started with the collaboration of Dr. Carlota Nicolás-Martínez from the Università di Firenza. She visited us in 2015 with funds provided by Dean Roberts and Dean Ennis. Both Deans also funded the first Student Assistant for two semesters (Spring 2015 and Fall 2016), to work with Dr. Nicolás-Martínez and I with the data analysis. However, at the end of this collaboration, Dr. Nicolás Martínez and I realized we differed in

methods and objectives, therefore we parted ways in 2017. Dean Roberts has funded two Student Assistants for two semesters (Spring 2017 and Fall 2018), but it was the third Assistant, David Eastman, under Dr. Jones´ supervision, who completed the computational data collection and programming successfully, giving us the tool we use now to extract data presented in this article. Dean Ennis gave us fund for the fourth Student Assistant, who worked during Summer 2018 on the statistical analysis of the data. Unfortunately, we could not come up with a satisfactory outcome with this last assistant, but I am glad we could recruit Dr. Lindsey Bell who agreed on working on the statistical analysis.

The Office of Research Services under the leadership of Dr. Roberts saw the value of our research idea, and proposed us to patent it. The Provisional application was submitted in April 2018, and re-filed in April 2019, and April 2020. We were working to present the Final application before Summer 2021, but because of the COVID-19 situation we have decided to re-file the Provisional application one more year. The Final application will be presented in 2022.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes various oral speech corpora in Spanish: C-Or-DiAL (Corpus Oral Didáctico Anotado Lingüísticamente-Didactic Oral Corpus Linguistically Annotated- with 120 thousand words), CORLEC (Corpus Oral de Referencia del Español Contemporáneo-Reference Spoken Corpus of Contemporary Spanish- 1 million 100 thousand words), and PRESEEA (Proyecto Para el Estudio Sociolingüístico del Español de España y de América-Project for the Sociolinguistic Study of Spanish from Spain and America- Goal of 10 million words). Corpus del Español (Spanish Corpus with 40 thousand words) is the only written speech corpus. The computer program used for analyzing the above corpora is a web-based application written in HTML/Javascript that uses the FeeLing

text analyzer to tag words with their part-of-speech and then allows the user to select subsets of corpus words based on those parts-of-speech and determine their frequency in those corpora. There are options that allow for filtering the results based on certain communicational situations in which these oral and written productions take place (lectures, conferences, conversations in informal settings and work settings, dialogues, interviews). In order to allow for verification of the results, the texts containing the desired words are also available for display.

Current Spanish teaching methods present verb systems as a "skeleton" to organize grammar sequencing around, because verbs present the most difficulty for a learner's acquisition of the language, (verb endings in Spanish are all different depending on the mood, tense, person and number). They also present the grammar in bulk, instead of sequencing it gradually for a learner's better acquisition and assimilation. They introduce all tenses at once (first, second, third person singular and plural), and verb tenses are ordered in a certain way that needs deep analysis and revisions. The computational tool analyzes the native language grammar sequencing of Spanish: it takes native speakers´ oral language data and finds out which grammatical structure is used, in which order, how, and when these structures are utilized. Then, we intent to compare our findings with the grammar structure of methods used for the Second Language Teaching market. As a result, these findings provide a language learning system that includes a much better sequenced program to teach a language. Students will learn the structure of the language based on the frequency of these structures found in native speaker utterances, instead of learning a totally arbitrary grammar sequencing as disclosed via prior language teaching methods. This research includes the presentation of a new grammar sequence to the students to make learning process more accurate and easier.

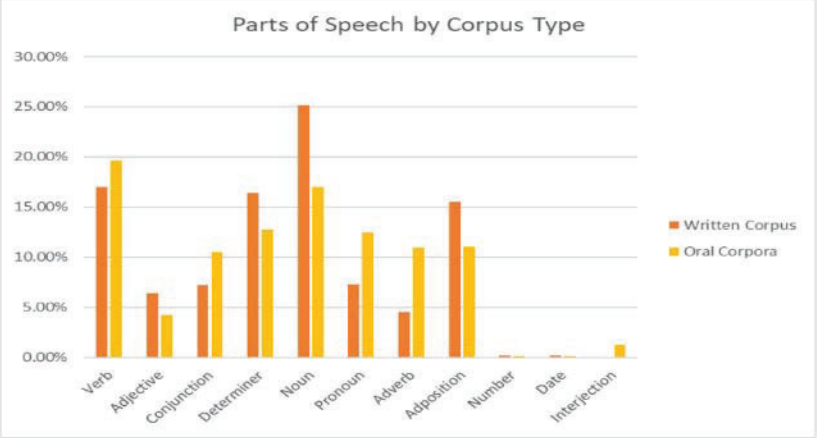
PARCIAL RESULTS

Parts of Speech by Corpus

Verbs are used most frequently among three of the four corpora. Nouns make up the second most common part of speech. A Chi-square test shows that part of speech usage is not homogeneous among the corpora (X-squared = 204548, df = 30, p-value < 0.00001). Post hoc tests reveal in fact that the distribution of parts of speech is different among all four corpora (p-values < 0.00001). This indicates that the four corpora exhibit a variety of utterances of the Spanish language.

Corpus	C-Or-DiAL	Percent	CORLEC	Percent	PRESEEA	Percent	Corpus del Espanol	Percent
Verb	22398	19.84%	152033	19.50%	308543	19.69%	316638	16.99%
Adjective	5592	4.95%	34905	4.48%	63141	4.03%	118798	6.37%
Conjunction	12838	11.37%	73216	9.39%	172721	11.02%	134236	7.20%
Determiner	14321	12.69%	105869	13.58%	192566	12.29%	306042	16.42%
Noun	17889	15.85%	145720	18.69%	254602	16.25%	468311	25.13%
Pronoun	13954	12.36%	85986	11.03%	205485	13.11%	136470	7.32%
Adverb	12857	11.39%	71294	9.14%	185223	11.82%	84856	4.55%
Adposition	12290	10.89%	95346	12.23%	163933	10.46%	289324	15.52%
Number	86	0.08%	1113	0.14%	1401	0.09%	4189	0.22%
Date	93	0.08%	1053	0.14%	1818	0.12%	3643	0.20%
Interjection	579	0.51%	13257	1.70%	17596	1.12%	1263	0.07%
Totals	112897		779792		1567029		1863770	

Corpus	CORLEC	C-Or-DiAL	PRESEEA	Corpus del Espanol
Verb	19.50%	19.84%	19.69%	16.99%
Adjective	4.48%	4.95%	4.03%	6.37%
Conjunction	9.39%	11.37%	11.02%	7.20%
Determiner	13.58%	12.69%	12.29%	16.42%
Noun	18.69%	15.85%	16.25%	25.13%
Pronoun	11.03%	12.36%	13.11%	7.32%
Adverb	9.14%	11.39%	11.82%	4.55%
Adposition	12.23%	10.89%	10.46%	15.52%
Number	0.14%	0.08%	0.09%	0.22%
Date	0.14%	0.08%	0.12%	0.20%
Interjection	1.70%	0.51%	1.12%	0.07%
Totals				



Parts of Speech by Oral vs Written

C-Or-DiAL, CORLEC, and PRESEEA are all oral corpora while Corpus del Español is a written corpus. Therefore, we may consider the usage of parts of speech by corpus type. Chi-squared tests verify that usage of parts of speech is different in written and oral language (X-squared = 189005, df = 10, p-value<0.0001).

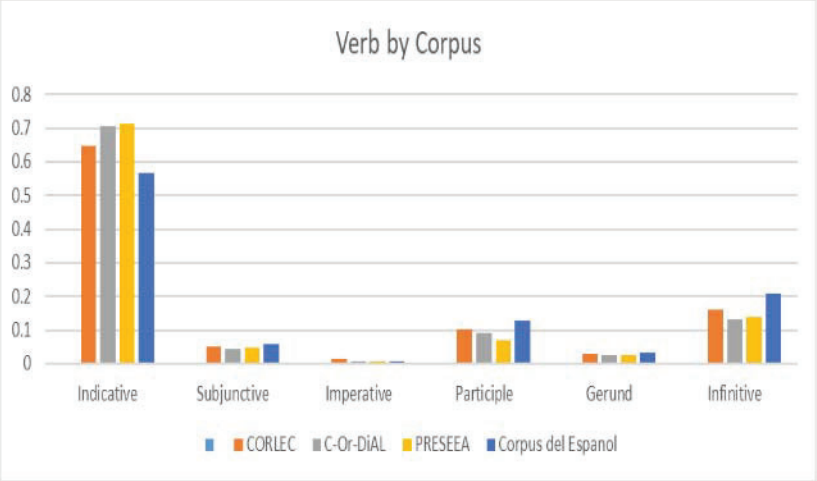
Corpus	Oral Copora	Percent	Written Corpus	Percent
Verb	482974	19.64%	316638	16.99%
Adjective	103638	4.21%	118798	6.37%
Conjunction	258775	10.52%	134236	7.20%
Determiner	312756	12.72%	306042	16.42%
Noun	418211	17.00%	468311	25.13%
Pronoun	305425	12.42%	136470	7.32%
Adverb	269374	10.95%	84856	4.55%
Adposition	271569	11.04%	289324	15.52%
Number	2600	0.11%	4189	0.22%
Date	2964	0.12%	3643	0.20%
Interjection	31432	1.28%	1263	0.07%
Totals	2459718	**1**	1863770	**1**

Breakdown of Verbs by Mood and Tense

Among all corpora, indicative present tense is by far the most frequent verb usage at about 46.4%. This is followed by the infinitive at about 17%. Imperative is used the least among the corpora. A Chi-square test shows that verb tense is not homogeneous among the corpora (X-squared =13058 , df = , p-value < 0.00001). Post hoc tests reveal in fact that the distribution of verb tense is different among all four corpora (p-values < 0.00001). The same results are summarized graphically in the following figure.

Verb	C-Or-DiAL	Percent	CORLEC	Percent	PRESEEA	Percent	Corpus del Español	Percent	Overall	Percent
Indicative	15777	70.44%	98446	64.75%	219713	71.21%	179524	56.70%	513460	64.21%
Present	12123	54.13%	81012	53.29%	149089	48.32%	128785	40.67%	371009	46.40%
Imperfect	2268	10.13%	8061	5.30%	34351	11.13%	12538	3.96%	57218	7.16%
Future	163	0.73%	2345	1.54%	1995	0.65%	7341	2.32%	11844	1.48%
Past	1067	4.76%	5262	3.46%	30315	9.83%	26984	8.52%	63628	7.96%
Conditional	156	0.70%	1766	1.16%	3963	1.28%	3876	1.22%	9761	1.22%
Subjunctive	964	4.30%	7938	5.22%	14806	4.80%	18939	5.98%	42647	5.33%
Present	770	3.44%	6605	4.34%	10888	3.53%	15655	4.94%	33918	4.24%
Imperfect	191	0.85%	1328	0.87%	3911	1.27%	3164	1.00%	8594	1.07%
Future	3	0.01%	5	0.00%	7	0.00%	120	0.04%	135	0.02%
Imperative	135	0.60%	1902	1.25%	2293	0.74%	1686	0.53%	6016	0.75%
Participle	2003	8.94%	15349	10.10%	20827	6.75%	40052	12.65%	78231	9.78%
Gerund	542	2.42%	4121	2.71%	8255	2.68%	10680	3.37%	23598	2.95%
Infinitive	2977	13.29%	24277	15.97%	42649	13.82%	65757	20.77%	135660	16.97%
Total	22398	100.00%	152033	100.00%	308543	100.00%	316638	100.00%	799815	100.00%

Verb	CORLEC	C-Or-DiAL	PRESEEA	Corpus del Espanol
Indicative	64.75%	70.44%	71.21%	56.70%
Subjunctive	5.22%	4.30%	4.80%	5.98%
Imperative	1.25%	0.60%	0.74%	0.53%
Participle	10.10%	8.94%	6.75%	12.65%
Gerund	2.71%	2.42%	2.68%	3.37%
Infinitive	15.97%	13.29%	13.82%	20.77%

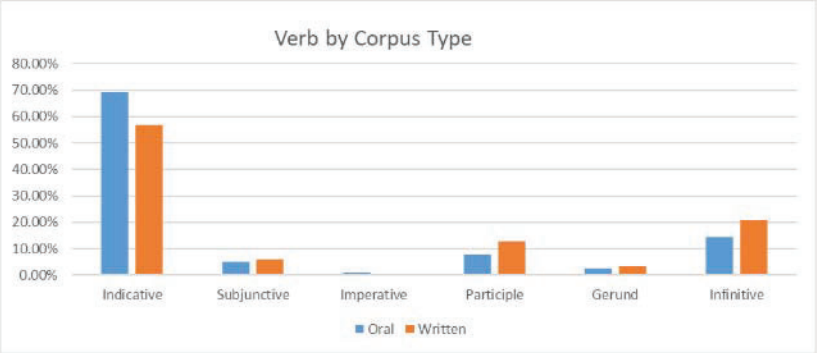


Verbs among Written and Oral by Mood and Tense

We may also consider the distribution of verbs by written and oral language differently. The results are displayed in the following table and figure. There is a difference in verb usage between oral and written language (X-squared = 21171, df = 11, p-value<0.0001).

Verb	Oral Corpora	Percent	Written Corpus	Percent
Indicative	333936	69.14%	179524	56.70%
Present	242224	50.15%	128785	40.67%
Imperfect	44680	9.25%	12538	3.96%
Future	4503	0.93%	7341	2.32%
Past	36644	7.59%	26984	8.52%
Conditional	5885	1.22%	3876	1.22%
Subjunctive	23708	4.91%	18939	5.98%
Present	18263	3.78%	15655	4.94%
Imperfect	5430	1.12%	3164	1.00%
Future	15	0.00%	120	0.04%
Imperative	4330	0.90%	1686	0.53%
Participle	38179	7.90%	40052	12.65%
Gerund	12918	2.67%	10680	3.37%
Infinitive	69903	14.47%	65757	20.77%
Total	482974	100.00%	316638	100.00%

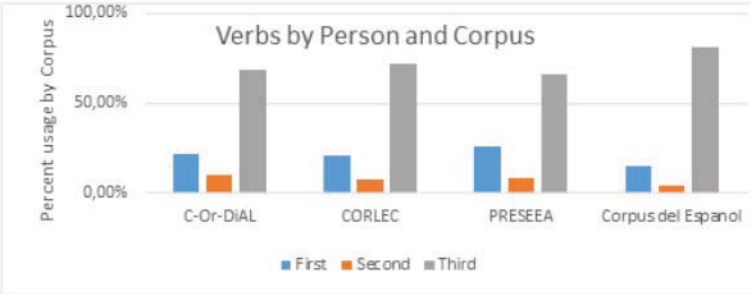
Verb	Oral	Written
Indicative	69.14%	56.70%
Subjunctive	4.91%	5.98%
Imperative	0.90%	0.53%
Participle	7.90%	12.65%
Gerund	2.67%	3.37%
Infinitive	14.47%	20.77%



Breakdown of Verbs by Person

A Chi-square test (x-squared = 12658, df =6, p-value <0.0001) show that use of person is dependent on corpus. Post hoc tests show that in fact each corpus is different from the others (p-values <0.0001).

Person	C-Or-DiAL	Percent	CORLEC	Percent	PRESEEA	Percent	Corpus del Espanol	Percent	Overall	Percent
1	3591	21.28%	22780	21.04%	61152	25.82%	30652	15.32%	118175	21.02%
2	1731	10.26%	8119	7.5%	19610	8.28%	7894	3.94%	37354	6.65%
3	11554	68.46%	77387	71.46%	156050	65.90%	161603	80.74%	406594	72.33%
Total	16876	100.00%	108286	100.00%	236812	100.00%	200149	100.00%	562123	100.00%



Nouns in the Oral Corpora

After verbs, nouns are the most important grammatical structure in oral language. To explore themes of the subject of conversation the twenty most frequent nouns were identified in each of the three oral corpora. These are displayed in the following table.

Top 20 Nouns by Frequency in Oral Corpra									
Rank	Noun	C-Or-DiAL	Percent	Noun	CORLEC	Percent	Noun	PRESEEA	Percent
1	cosas	195	1.09	día	935	0.64	años	3508	1.38
2	años	195	1.09	verdad	879	0.6	casa	3475	1.36
3	gente	194	1.08	cosas	876	0.6	gente	3368	1.32
4	cosa	184	1.03	años	801	0.55	cosas	2967	1.17
5	verdad	154	0.86	momento	786	0.54	día	2344	0.92
6	ha*	151	0.84	parte	707	0.49	tiempo	1968	0.77
7	trabajo	150	0.84	gente	704	0.48	veces	1940	0.76
8	parte	103	0.58	cosa	702	0.48	vida	1762	0.69
9	periódico	101	0.56	señor	695	0.48	trabajo	1723	0.68
10	momento	96	0.54	tiempo	667	0.46	año	1669	0.66
11	año	94	0.53	casa	622	0.43	uhum	1529	0.6
12	día	92	0.51	año	555	0.38	mamá	1527	0.6
13	vida	90	0.5	vez	536	0.37	cosa	1476	0.58
14	veces	89	0.5	proble-ma	531	0.36	verdad	1435	0.56
15	su*	86	0.48	sí	518	0.36	vez	1402	0.55
16	casa	84	0.47	caso	503	0.35	familia	1387	0.54
17	mundo	83	0.46	mundo	498	0.34	por*	1370	0.54
18	hombre	81	0.45	veces	492	0.34	persona	1334	0.52
19	tiempo	78	0.44	días	462	0.32	barrio	1234	0.48
20	en*	77	0.43	Madrid	458	0.31	amigos	1199	0.47
Totals		17889	13.28		145270	8.88		254602	15.15

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Ten nouns were common to the top 20 list among all three corpora. The remaining 10 were missing from at least one corpus. These are highlighted in the following tables.

Nouns Shared by all three Oral Corpra in Top 20				
cosas	casa	día	verdad	gente
años	tiempo	veces	año	cosa

Top 20 Nouns not Shared by All			
Noun	C-Or-DiAL	CORLEC	PRESEEA
ha*	X		
trabajo	X		X
parte	X		X
periódico	X		
momento	X	X	
día	X		X
su*	X		
mundo	X	X	
hombre	X		
en*	X		
señor		X	
vez		X	X
problema		X	
sí		X	
Madrid		X	
uhum			X
mamá			X
familia			X
por*			X
persona			X
barrio			X
amigos			X

PARTIAL CONCLUSIONS

a. Verbs are used most frequently among three of the four corpora. Nouns make up the second most common part of speech. This verifies the idea that instruction based on frequency of word usage in everyday language should be arranged according to verb conjugations with regular introduction of vocabulary or nouns.
b. Grammar sequencing in Spanish teaching textbooks is based on verb conjugation: Present Indicative first, then Preterite Indicative, Imperfect Indicative, Present Subjunctive, and so on. Based on the overall frequency of use among the four corpora, the suggested order of verb introduction follows: Present Indicative, Preterite Indicative, Present Subjunctive and so on. It is clear that early introduction of Present Indicative is important due to the high frequency of use in both written and oral language. We may also consider the distribution of verbs by written and oral language differently. For example, the indicative mood is used about 12% more often in oral language than written language, while infinitive is used about 6% more often in written language than oral. Among all corpora, indicative present tense is by far the most frequent verb usage at about 46.4%. This is followed by the infinitive at about 17%. Imperative is used the least among the corpora.
c. Use of person is dependent on corpus. Post hoc tests show that in fact each corpus is different from the others. However, we can generally see agreement that third person is most commonly used, followed by first person and then second person.
d. Usage of parts of speech is different in written and oral language. For example, interjections, conjunctions, and pronouns are more common in oral language than written language. Verbs are the most

commonly used part of speech in oral language, while nouns are the most commonly used part of speech in written language.

e. After verbs, nouns are the most important grammatical structure in oral language. The summaries suggest the majority of conversation revolves around relationships with other people, daily activities, and time. Percentages given tell us the percent make-up of all the nouns in the corpus.

PLANS FOR FUTURE WORK

a. In oral corpora, verbs are the most commonly used word followed by nouns; while in written corpus, exactly the opposite happens. It is clear that usage of parts of speech differs in written and oral language. We will have to incorporate more written corpora in our analysis to confirm these differences or refute it. Two different grammar sequencing: one for teaching oral skills, and another one for written?
b. If we base the grammar sequencing on verb conjugation, we will need to run more analysis to come up with the best order: what is clear is that it will be different than the grammar sequencing offered by methods in the market. Present tense Indicative Mood is clearly the most frequent, followed by infinitive. However, more analysis is needed to determine if "these infinitives (or participles or gerund)" are part of verbal periphrases or not. Third person is most commonly used, followed by first person and then, second person. This is also something we have to reorder in our new sequence order: not only tenses and mood of verbs, but also person sequence. We will need to refine our computer tool to reflect changes needed.
c. We are researching for finding a way to incorporate

nouns in the analysis, for this to start reflecting different communicational situation that will affect the grammar sequencing order.

This is an ongoing research, which immediate utility is for the teaching Spanish. However, when finished, this could extend to the teaching of other languages. We are confident that this research will become a significant advance, since through these findings we are going to propose a better sequenced grammar. It will be big step towards a better understanding of grammar teaching, because the proposed sequence will be based on the frequency of grammar structures found in native speaker utterances.

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