WHERE FRAME SEMANTICS MEETS CONSTRUCTION GRAMMAR: THE CASE OF
SPANISH ESCRUTAR AND ESCUDRIÑAR ‘TO SCRUTINIZE’
Hilde Hanegreefs
Lessius University College / University of Leuven (Belgium)
hilde.hanegreefs@lessius.eu

While originally only applied to lexemes (frames of semantic knowledge), frame semantics has been expanded to grammatical constructions and has more or less been integrated into construction grammar.

In the study of the semantic field of visual perception I have come across a large variety of lexemes used to denote visual sensations and acts, which can all be ‘framed’ in a different way, evoking different conceptualizations of active and passive perception. Escrutar and escudriñar (‘to scrutinize’) is one such pair of verbs that, although traditionally seen as synonyms, can be differentiated on the basis of a number of semantic and syntactic features. While Spanish dictionaries and even the database ADESE (similar to the Spanish FrameNet) fail to account for the differences between these two less frequent verbs of visual perception, I will show that, in spite of their etymological relation, escrutar and escudriñar function as two sides of the same coin. More specifically, an in depth corpus analysis will show that escrutar and escudriñar entail a difference in point of view that can be captured by the “objective” vs. “subjective” contrast in the sense of “depending on the object, as opposed to the subject”.

By stating that escrutar has an objective point of view, whereas escudriñar expresses a subjective point of view, I mean that the act of escrutar concentrates on and is determined by the object of perception that limits the physical boundaries of perception. Escudriñar, on the contrary, highlights the subject of perception, i.e. the observer. This observer interprets his/her visual input and imposes his/her view on the object of perception.

The general concepts of ‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity’ encompass more specific perceptual modalities, which can be situated at four levels: (i) the presence vs. absence of expectations; (ii) direct vs. indirect access to the object of perception; (iii) the immanence vs. transcendence of the gaze; and (iv) the attitude of the subject of perception.

A detailed lexico-constructural analysis of the corpus will discuss the contextual elements, such as the type of direct object or the presence of adjuncts or subordinate clauses, etc. that helped me reveal the meaningful differences between escrutar and escudriñar.

On a larger scale, this study is to be situated within the framework of Cognitive Grammar. Unlike traditional grammar, Cognitive Grammar claims that semantics is not to be studied separately from the other components of language (e.g. syntax, morphology, pragmatics). Instead, cognitivists emphasize the link between form and meaning, i.e. they start from the premise that lexico-semantic properties can be induced from syntactic behavior.


Corpus: CREA, Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual; http://www.rae.es

Electronic databases:
ADESESE: https://webs.uvigo.es/adesse