

A CORPUS -BASED STUDY ON THE MULTAL AND PAUCAL SERIES IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH

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Before going into the matter, I'd like to devote a word of gratitude to the people who have provided me with the necessary materials for this paper. Without the help of Professor Guillermo Rojo, in the case of ARTHUS, the Spanish corpus, and without the help of the Cobuild team, I wouldn't have been able to carry out the present research.

As a sort of introduction, I shall describe, very briefly, the two corpora involved. As I couldn't find any bilingual corpora specifically designed for contrastive linguistics, that is, corpora made up of source texts in two different languages, not texts in a language and their translations in another (in which case, the target texts might be influenced by the source language), I chose to use two monolingual corpora. ARTHUS, "archivo de textos hispánicos de la Universidad de Santiago", is a one million word corpus (1,141,431), selecting only the variety of Spanish used in Spain, and it is mainly composed of books (novels, essays and plays) and oral transcriptions. As for the corpus of Cobuild, it has 323 million words, 50 million of which are on line. I decided to take only the subcorpora of British books and of oral British English, with 14,626,841 words. In any case I have calculated all figures per million so that the results are comparable.

The next step was the choice of the formal items that were to constitute the input, the search queries, the "prototypical equivalents": "one can start from L2 establishing a prototype and family resembling constructions in L2 and pass on to the analysis of matching constructions from L1... Finally it may be shown which properties are shared by the two prototypes." (Kalisz, 1988:42). I decided on the following items: *little, few, much, many* and *lot* and *poco, poca, pocos, pocas, mucho, mucha, muchos* and *muchas*. *Lot* was the most controversial unit; although it looks like a partitive, I included it in the set because I considered it had a long tradition of being studied along with *much* and *many* due to one functional fact: it is said to bear a relationship of complementary distribution with them, although this fact

will be put in doubt in the analysis. As for the others, they appear to be the main representatives of the multal and paucal expression of quantity. The two main guidelines for this purpose are as follows: "Underlying such specific instances of language use, are more general functions which are common to all cultures", in this case, quantification and "we shall consider language in terms of its use", which can be better seen in a corpus (Halliday, 1980: 141-142). Hymes also talks about use, about observing whether and to what degree the linguistic elements can be possible, feasible, appropriate and actually performed. (Hymes, 1971: 281). The time has arrived to go a step further and add a fifth variable: to see whether and to what degree they are typical, which joins the notions of performance and frequency, that is, how often they are done, how common and idiomatic they are. The first part of the analysis is then to do with the rates of frequency, shown in this chart:

	SPANISH QUANTIFIERS AND FREQUENCY FIGURES		ENGLISH QUANTIFIERS AND FREQUENCY FIGURES	
MULTAL QUANTIFIERS	MUCHO	1,216	MUCH	2,256.9 / m.
	MUCHA	197	MANY	1,496.9 / m.
	MUCHOS	316	A LOT	1,315 / m.
	MUCHAS	362		
PAUCAL QUANTIFIERS	POCO	1,317	LITTLE	1,449.3 / m.
	POCA	67	FEW	912 / m.
	POCOS	118		
	POCAS	66		
TOTAL		3,659		7,430.1 / m.

FIGURA 1

The fact that the total frequency rate of the English quantifiers is double the number of the Spanish group can have different explanations: the selected Spanish terms are in fact grammatical variants, in gender and number of two lexemes *poco*, *mucho* whereas in English, we have selected five different lexemes. Secondly, due to the fact that Spanish is a more analytical language and it is morphologically richer than English, the lexemes are often modified by suffixes. But searching for all the word forms starting with their roots would have allowed for the inclusion of words such as *muchedumbre*, *muchacho* and *poquedad* apart from *muchísimo*, *poquito*, etc. The inclusion of these morphological variants would obviously increase the present figures. Some other noteworthy details about these data are the following:

a) Most grammars say that *much* and *many* usually occur in non-assertive contexts and *a lot* in assertive ones. It is surprising then that the most frequent of them is *much* and not *a lot* (assuming that assertive utterances are more common), which is, in addition, not limited to being followed by only countable or uncountable nouns.

b) It is true that the number of occurrences of *little* is somewhat distorted as it is in fact a polysemic word form. It is also an adjective that expresses size. There is a similarity, though: Both express a small reality either in terms of amount or size (a little water is a small amount of water and a little child is a "little amount of child").

c) In both languages, the number of occurrences of the multal quantifiers is slightly higher than that of the paucal quantifiers. This might be due to psychological factors. For some reason or other, we may tend to express big quantities more often than small ones.

d) Because of the nature of the Spanish language, you would expect the masculine forms to be more frequent than the feminine, but this isn't always the case. The rates of *muchos* and *muchas* contradicts any intuitions. The explanation is that there are frequent feminine collocates (*veces, cosas, gracias*) that account for this fact.

Having studied the number of occurrences of these items on their own, let us move on to their behaviour with regard to other members of their lexical field (their paradigmatic relationships) and in co-occurrence with other words (their syntagmatic relations). As for the former, these items are undoubtedly elements that take part in a continuum; they can be analysed from the perspective of *scalar implicatures*: "these are created by choice of one member from a set of related linguistic items, where the choice implies further meanings that are encoded... One such is the set: {all, most, many, some, few}" (Channell, 1994: 33, 97). The fact that they are generally thought of as a scale is also supported by Lamíquiz; that's the way he arranges the gradual quantifiers:

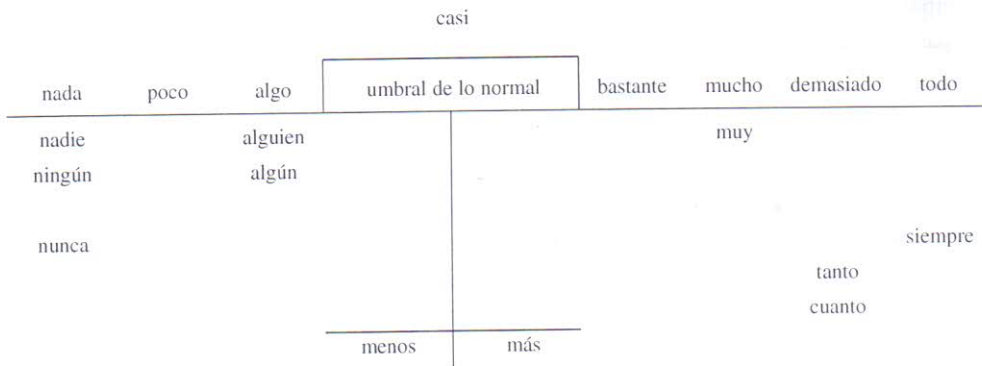


FIGURA 2. (Lamíquiz, 1991:85)

Although they all seem to belong to the same gradual scale, there are important differences that set the multal and paucal quantifiers apart from the others: "Items like *many, few...* are not usually studied within the framework of symbolic logic because the assignment of truth values to sentences containing them may vary from speaker to speaker" (Aldridge, 1982:18). So, whereas the universal and negative quantifiers are objective and precise (they can be assigned truth values), the others falling in between are subjective and imprecise. As for the set of existential quantifiers, they focus on the existence rather than the quantity of a

certain reality. And finally, regarding *bastante* and *demasiado*, they are still more subject to relativity from the speaker's perspective; they add certain connotations and enter different nets of relations: it makes sense to say "poco pero bastante" but "poco pero mucho" is either paradoxical or nonsense.

And to round off the section concerning paradigmatic relations, let me just mention the case of *much* as opposed to *many* and *little* as opposed to *few*. It has long been said that their choice depends on the nature of the noun they modify; whether it is mass or count. However, this feature of nouns has been called into question: "Countability is not a fact characteristic of nouns per se, but of NP's; thus it is associated with nouns in syntagmata, not with nouns as lexical entries"; he talks about countability preferences and levels of countability (Allan, 1980:546). Now it looks as if the relationship between two members of a paradigm can be better observed through their syntagmatic links. This takes us to the text, the words in context. And that's why the following step was to get lists of the most frequent collocates (the words on either sides of the quantifier), the top 25, to be more precise. Some of the conclusions that were drawn from the lists of collocations and supported by observing the concordances, (the stretch of text where the items studied occur) are as follows:

1. Partition: One of the highest collocates in the lists was the preposition *of / de*. It indicates a quantity that is restricted to the limits of a larger group, eg. "he displayed many of the weaknesses outlined above", "...con un poco de aquel entusiasmado escepticismo suyo". The figures show that the partitive use of this type of quantifiers is slightly superior in English as compared with Spanish, being a common function in any case. Not all of them are examples of partition, eg. "me cuido mucho de contradecirlo".

2. Comparison. The use of comparative elements, especially *más / more* and also *como, menos, as, like, less, better, easier* and *longer* seems to be very common in the surroundings of these words except for *poca* and *pocas*. One of the resources used to express imprecise quantity is by means of comparison, by reference to another object or entity that acts as a sort of scale (Lamíquiz, 1991:93-114). There are some cases of idiomatic combinations, eg. "their populations turned out to be much the same", "Designing a garden is much like decorating a room", "pasado mañana o al otro como mucho" and "cualquier crítica es poco menos que una herejía".

3. Intensification. Another case could be thought of as being the union of two quantifiers: "a little bit" but it could also be considered a quantifier premodified by an adjective of size, just the same as "a great many" and "tiny little bit". Adjectives of quality are common as premodifiers as well, eg. "an awful lot", "pretty much" "bien poco", "a good few" and "a fair few". There is a difference, however, as refers paucal quantifiers: whereas "bien poco" suggests that it is less than *poco*, e.g. "Pero bien poco iba a durarme la euforia, porque apenas hube dado el primer paso en dirección a la calle...", "a good few" and "a fair few" suggest more than *a few*, e.g. "when my children were smaller they used to go fishing there... But that's a good few years ago now". Similarly "a whole lot" and "a hell of a lot" are frequent

combinations. Another typical intensifier to the left of the quantifier in English is *very*, which, as opposed to *my*, also modifies *much* (412 examples) and *many* (12) as in "they're not saving very much" and "it is much healthier to cook very many foods in the microwave". Another instance is "that much" (82) e.g. "there's not that much to tell about school". In any case, the behaviour of certain intensifiers varies across quantifiers; for instance "quite a lot" occurs 89 times and "quite a few" 67 but there is only 1 example of "quite a little". In general, the English language has a tendency to add premodifiers to the quantifiers in order to emphasize or precise a little more and this phenomenon is rare in Spanish, which seems to prefer the use of another lexeme or the addition of suffixes.

4. Negation. The combinations *not many* (31 occurrences) and *not much* (44) are quite common, the first especially before the verb, e.g. "not many babies are born at home now" and the second especially after the verb, as in "the President had not much life left in him". In Spanish, however, there are fewer occurrences and it is especially rare to find the combination "no muchos", "no muchas" as a subject, whereas in English it is an option preferable in many cases to the negation of the verb, e.g. "Not many people realize that..." instead of "Many people do not realize that ...". As for the paucal quantifiers there are a few cases in Spanish but none has been registered in English.

As for the idea that *a lot* mostly occurs in affirmative contexts and *much* and *many* in negative and interrogative contexts, the corpus gives enough evidence to refute that assertion. There are 76 cases of *lot* in negative contexts, approximately 1,600 cases of *much* in affirmative contexts and 1,328 cases of *many* in affirmative contexts. The difference might lie in the register (*many* occurs double the times in the books than in the oral subcorpus, *lot* is six times more frequent in the oral one and *much* occurs around the same number of times in both) and in preferences of use that need further research.

5. Agreement in number. In Spanish there are more restrictions regarding grammatical agreement in number; in English there are various examples which show more freedom and a different concept of numeral concordance: the most common verb pattern before "not many", even more frequent than "there are" is "there's", to such an extent that a hypothesis could be raised that it is a neutral abbreviation of both "there is" and "there are". Other examples are: 16 occurrences of "many a", 20 of "that many", 2 of "another few", 645 of "a few" 12 of "a great many" and 7 of "a good many".

6. Adverbial and prepositional phrases. Many of the most frequent quantifiers are adverbs or prepositions that show, in many cases, the existence of idiomatic expressions: The second collocate to the right of *poco* is *a*, which is most of the times followed by *poco*, in the expression "poco a poco". Its prototypical equivalent in English is not so common, as neither *by* nor *little* are registered in the 25 top. Other collocations of *poco* convey temporal and conditional meanings and it is often synonymous with *almost* e.g. "al poco tiempo se dormía", "cargados de sorpresas que caerían al suelo después a poco que tirasen de los hilos" and "de poco me desmayo". *Poca* collocates with *cosa* 5 times meaning something very different to

"pocas cosas", eg. "... como una madonna que siempre pintan niña y poca cosa". The most common meaning of "por mucho/a/s" is concessive, eg. "por muchas vueltas que le doy, no consigo averiguarlo". Other relevant collocations are "ni mucho menos", "con mucho", "como mucho", "en muchos casos", "hace mucho (tiempo) que" and "¡y a mucha honra!".

There aren't so many prepositional expressions including English *multal* and *paucal* quantifiers. However, some of the uses of these elements are worth commenting as they make a difference with regard to the Spanish use of quantifiers: (*very*) *much* often precedes a verb, especially a participle, eg. "he was much obliged". And it is also very common before an adjunct introduced by *in* as in "so much in love", "very much in vogue", "very much in favour of...", etc. These expressions are better translated by *muuy* or other resources in Spanish. A different use of *much* is the combination with *anything* and *nothing* e.g. "we couldn't do anything much", which is ungrammatical in Spanish.

From all this, the main conclusion that we can draw is that two apparently equivalent lexical sets in two languages vary not so much in their meaning as in their use, in the words they collocate with, in their context. To finish with, just say that this has been a tiny example of a corpus-based approach to contrastive studies. The data's there, at our hands, lying in the corpora, waiting for us to take it and make the most of it.

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