

Exercise 9.2 The development of perfect auxiliaries in Spanish

In the following, the stages in the development of perfect auxiliaries in Spanish from its Latin origins are described and illustrated. On the basis of this information, compare the stages and attempt to determine the changes which took place and to identify the kinds of changes or the mechanisms involved. (Fem = 'feminine', Masc = 'masculine', Part = 'participle', Pl = 'plural', PPP = 'past passive participle').

Stage I: Latin used expressions with 'past passive participle' (PPP) in combination with the verbs *tenēre* 'hold', *habēre* 'keep, hold' and others meaning 'hold, possess, own', to represent something as ready or kept in a completed condition, as in (1):

- (1) *Metuō enim nē ibi vos habeam fatigā-tō-s* (Late Latin)
fear.I truly indeed there you have.I fatigue-PPP.Masc-Pl
'I fear that I have you tired'/'that I have tired you'/'that you are tired'

This construction with 'past passive participle' was quite limited in its occurrence in Classical Latin, but became associated with 'perfect' aspect in combination with the development of *habēre* as an auxiliary. Originally this construction had *habēre* 'keep, hold, have' (a main verb) with the 'past passive participle' form as an adjective which modified the direct object (both the logical and surface object) of this main verb (*habēre*), which agreed in number and gender with this object as its head, as in (2):

- (2) [habeō] [litter-ā-s scrip-t-ā-s]
have.I letter-Fem-Pl.Acc write-PPP-Fem-Pl.Acc
'I have written letters' = 'I have letters which are written'

Stage II: In Old Spanish, *haber* (spelled *aver* in Old Spanish, from Latin *habēre* 'to have, hold') in such constructions began to lose its possessive meaning and to consolidate the auxiliary function, resulting in compound tenses, but still with agreement in gender and number between the participle and the direct object until the mid-sixteenth century, as illustrated in (3) (where the *-o-s* 'masculine plural' of *hachos* 'made' agrees with the *-o-s* 'masculine plural' of *enemigos* 'enemies'):

- (3) *Los había . . . he-ch-o-s enemig-o-s de estotros* (Hernán Cortés)
They had make-Past.Part-Masc-Pl enemy-Masc-Pl of these.others
'He had made enemies of these others'

Stage III: Gradually, the *haber* + PPP construction changed, eliminating the requirement that 'past passive participle' must agree in number

and gender with the noun which it modified, losing its passive sense, with the verb *haber* becoming the 'perfect auxiliary', and Modern Spanish no longer permits agreement between the participle and the object, as in (4):

- (4) *Hemos escri-to cart-a-s*
have.we write-Past.Part letter-Fem-Pl
'We have written letters'

The adjectival participle source with number and gender agreement still survives in other contexts (but not in the perfect construction with forms of the verb *haber*), for example:

- (5) *Tenemos cart-ā-s escri-t-ā-s en tint-a roj-a*
have.we letter-Fem-Pl write-Past.Part-Fem-Pl in ink-Fem.Sg
red-Fem.Sg
'We have letters written in red ink'

In the series of changes described here, the meaning is no longer 'X possesses that which has been done', but 'X has done', and is accompanied by the structural change of *haber* from main verb to an auxiliary. *Stage IV:* Additional changes in connection with the new 'perfect' construction also came about. First, the verb *ser* 'to be' had formerly also been a perfect auxiliary used with certain intransitive verbs (especially verbs of motion) (as in (6a) and (7a)), but this was replaced by the auxiliary *haber*, as seen in the Modern Spanish equivalents in (6b) and (7b):

- (6a) Old Spanish *ella es naci-d-a*
she is born-Past.Part-Fem
(6b) Modern Spanish *ella ha naci-d-o*
she has born-Past.Part
'she has been born'
(7a) Old Spanish *ellos son i-d-o-s*
they are go-Past.Part-Masc-Pl
(7b) Modern Spanish *ellos han i-d-o*
they have go-Past.Part
'they have gone' (Lapesa 1981:212)

Second, the word order changed, placing the participle closer to the auxiliary, for example from the equivalent of 'I have a letter written' (as in (2)) to 'I have written a letter' (as in (4)).