Lab: Direct and Indirect Objects

CSI 3305: Introduction to Computational Thinking

1 Introduction

In order to communicate in both English and Spanish in an effective way, a person must know how to replace nouns used in certain contexts with pronouns. By using pronouns, people rid their sentences of redundancy and allow a more efficient way of communicating orally as well as on paper. In English, the pronoun replaces the noun and stays in the same position in the sentence. Direct objects in both languages answer the question "what" or "who".

In the Spanish system of **direct object** pronouns, *me* means "me", *te* is you (singular and informal), *lo* is him or it (masculine), *nos* is "us", *los* is "them" when referring to masculine people or objects and finally, *las* is "them" when referring to feminine people or objects. For example in the sentence, "I see John", John is the direct object because he directly receives the action of the verb "to see". In Spanish, the same sentence is *(Yo) veo a Juan*, and Juan is still the direct object because we haven't yet replaced his name with a direct object. (NOTE: The reason that the subject pronoun (*Yo*) meaning "I" is contained in parentheses is that, unlike English, it is not needed since the ending of the verb in Spanish tells us who is doing the action).

If I replace "John" in English with the pronoun "him", the resultant sentence is "I see him". However, in Spanish, the pronoun *lo* used for him must be moved in FRONT of the verb when used, since it depends upon the verb of the sentence for support. So the resultant sentence is *(Yo) lo veo.*

In contrast, an **indirect object** of a verb is typically a human or animate being because he or she receives the direct object or benefits indirectly from the verb. Indirect objects typically answer the question "to who(m), for who(m), at who(m)" or "from who(m)." In English, the words "to, for, from or at" are prepositions and used to show the relationship of the "who" to the verb. For example, the verb "to give" will always have both a direct object and an indirect object because we always give SOMETHING (direct object) to SOMEONE (indirect object). In the sentence, "I give the book to Teresa," book is the direct object and Teresa is the indirect object. If we replace those nouns with pronouns, the sentence in English becomes "I give it to her."

In Spanish, however, the indirect object pronoun is NOT used with a preposition and is simply the word *le* when it refers to a third person like "him, her, or it." To say "to me, for me, at me, or from me," in Spanish, the indirect object pronoun is *me*; to you, for you, at you, or from you is *te*; and "to us, for us, at us, or from us" is *nos.* The only pronouns whose forms are different from their direct object forms are the 3rd person ones *le* for a third person like "him, her, or it" and *les* meaning "to, for, at, or from them."

Just like with the direct object pronoun in Spanish, the *me, te, le, nos* or *les* must move up in front of the verb and **cannot stay in place**. So "I give the book to her" becomes *(Yo) le doy el libro.*

Notice we did not replace "the book" with a direct object pronoun yet. That is because the pronouns *le* and *les* become *se* when preceding a third person direct object pronoun. So instead of *Yo le lo doy* which is incorrect, *(Yo) se lo doy* is the correct way to say "I give it to her" in Spanish. The pronoun order is always that the indirect object pronoun goes in front of the direct object pronoun and then the verb so Spanish speakers don't confuse the two objects.

A further complication is that all nouns have gender in Spanish, unlike English, but direct object pronouns have gender just like they do in English, so *lo* works for "him" or a masculine direct object. *La* is the direct object pronoun for "her" or a feminine direct object. *Le* and *les*, however, do NOT have gender and can refer to "him, her, it, or them" when replacing an indirect object in a sentence.

2 Problem Statement

In computation, we often transfer problems in a domain that is hard to conceptualize to one that we understand better. Solving the problem in the simpler domain then allows us to map the solution back to the original domain and discover a solution to our original problem. This lab attempts to apply this basic computational skill to the problem of language acquisition.

Spanish direct and indirect object pronouns used together are often problematic for the person whose native language is English. Students must understand that if a pronoun is left in its place in Spanish, the resultant sentence is unintelligible to the Spanish speaker or causes confusion. By comparing the use of direct and indirect objects first individually and then together in English, students will be able to apply the same strategies to identifying these items in Spanish.

3 Exercises

The following exercises will help you to identify direct and indirect objects in English and then apply that knowledge to Spanish in order to create new sentences that have meaning. In order to facilitate the identification of pronouns without having to have an extensive Spanish vocabulary, the conjugated verbs used will be glossed in English.

3.1 Identifying English Pronouns

First lets try some identification of pronouns in English. Replace the direct object in the following sentences with a pronoun:

1. Sally sees Luisa.

2. He knows Harold.

3. I know Paul and Luisa.

4. We watch television.

In the following sentences, find the direct object pronoun:

1. She sees me.

2. He knows her.

3. I know them.

4. We watch it.

These are pretty simple because the direct object always follows the verb. In Spanish, those same sentences would have the direct object in front of the verb. So if *ve* is she sees, *me ve* is "she sees me." If he knows is *conoce*, how would you say "he knows her"? (*La conoce*). And *conozco* is "I know" so I know them is ? (*Los conozco*). *Miramos* is "we watch" so we watch it? (*Lo miramos* if it is a masculine thing like a program, *la miramos* if it is a feminine thing like a snake).

Now replace the indirect objects with a pronoun:

1. She gives the papers to Terry.

2. He writes the letters to his friends.

3. I throw the ball at the dog.

4. We receive gifts from our parents.

In these sentences in English, you would be correct if you found the indirect object after a preposition like "to", "at", or "from".

3.2   Using Spanish Pronouns

Try the previous sentences in Spanish, remembering that the pronoun has to go in front of the verb. Replace the indirect objects with a pronoun:

1. (Ella) da los papeles a Terry.

2. (El) escribe las cartas a sus amigos.

3. (Yo) tiro la pelota al perro.

4. (Nosotros) recibimos regalos a nuestros padres.

If you figured out that the indirect object was after "a", you are correct. If you replaced "Terry" and "perro" with "le" and "sus amigos" and "nuestros padres" with "les", you are correct.

Here are the answers for 1-4:

1. (Ella) le da los papeles.

2. (El) les escribe las cartas.

3. (Yo) le tiro la pelota.

4. (Nosotros) les recibimos regalos.

Now try replacing the direct objects with pronouns as well. *Papeles* is masculine and plural, *cartas* is feminine and plural, *la pelota* is feminine and singular and *regalos* is masculine and plural. Remember to change *le* and *les* to *se* when using them in front of third person direct object pronouns.

4 Questions

1. Translate the following sentences into English. The verb is given in each case.

   (a) (Ella) me las manda. (manda = she sends)

   (b) (Tú) nos la haces. (haces = you do and la is the pronoun replacing "homework")

   (c) (Nosotros) te lo dejamos. (dejamos = we leave and "lo" is the pronoun replacing "the problem")

   (d) (Yo) se las tengo. (tengo = I have and "las" is the pronoun replacing "the cookies")

2. Create four sentences, using direct and indirect pronouns in Spanish, from the following word bank:

   - Verbs: recibimos, dejamos, manda, haces, tengo, tiro, da, escribe, ve, conoce, conozco, miramos
   - Nouns: la pelota, los regalos, el problema, los papeles, las cartas, el perro, nuestros padres, sus amigos

3. Translate the four sentences you just created into English.