TEMA

21

Topic 21: The Infinitive and the -ing Form: Their Uses

El infinitivo y la forma en -ing: sus usos.

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Material de elaboración propia a partir de las fuentes oficiales que se citan al final del tema. No es un temario oficial ni sustituye a la normativa publicada.

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Fuentes

1. INTRODUCTION

"To be, or not to be, that is the question": Hamlet's line, in the Project Gutenberg text of the play, is perhaps the most famous in English, and it is built on nothing more than an infinitive. Yet a learner who says "I enjoy to swim" or "I look forward to see you" shows how much can go wrong with two apparently simple forms: the infinitive and the -ing form. They look small, but they carry a great deal of English grammar: they allow us to embed one action inside another, to express purpose, to reduce clauses and to choose between meanings that differ in subtle ways. That is why they matter so much in the Secondary classroom, and why they are a constant source of error for Spanish-speaking learners.

This topic is organised as follows. Firstly, I will define the two forms and situate them within the non-finite system of the verb. Secondly, I will examine the infinitive in detail: its forms, the bare infinitive and the to-infinitive, and its functions. Thirdly, I will study the -ing form, distinguishing its nominal, verbal and adjectival uses. Fourthly, I will turn to the verbs and structures that can take either form, where the choice changes the meaning or leaves it almost unchanged. Fifthly, I will compare English with Spanish and describe the typical errors of Spanish-speaking pupils. Sixthly, I will consider the pedagogical and didactic implications, and finally I will draw the conclusion.

Before moving on, I would like to mention the sources consulted: Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik, A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language, published by Longman in 1985; Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum, The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language, published by Cambridge University Press in 2002; Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy, Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide, published by Cambridge University Press in 2006; and Michael Swan, Practical English Usage, in its fourth edition from Oxford University Press. I have also used the Cambridge and British Council online grammars for examples. As for the legal framework, I will refer to Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE), Royal Decrees 217/2022 and 243/2022, and Decrees 110/2022 and 109/2022 of the Junta de Extremadura, together with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and its Companion Volume.