

An empirical study on Complementizer Deletion in Spanish. New evidence in favour of an empty C head.

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The discussion on optional omission of the complementizer *que* ‘that’ in Spanish is played by two fundamental assumptions. First, the optionality is restricted to complement clauses conveying an *irrealis* meaning (Torrego 1983; Broveto 2002; Antonelli 2013). That is, the omission of *que* is typically possible if the embedded verb is in subjunctive or another *irrealis* mood, - and, consequently, it is mostly found in complements introduced by verbs such as *lamentar* ‘to lament’ - whereas it is mandatory when introducing an indicative embedded clause. The second assumption shared by the literature is that the omission of *que* correlates with the absence of a preverbal embedded subject, as shown in (1):

- (1) *Lamento* (*Carmen) *no esté* (Carmen) *contenta con su trabajo*.
I-lament Carmen not be-SBJV-3sg Carmen happy with her job
‘I lament that Carmen is not happy with her job.’ (Broveto 2002)

The possibility of omitting *que* in a complement clause was first noted in the work of Torrego (1983). Building on her observations, Broveto (2002) and Antonelli (2013) propose two different analyses of the phenomenon, both of which trying to determine whether *que*-less clauses manifest their C-layer. The conclusions are opposite: Broveto (2002) argues in favour of the lack of the CP, whereas Antonelli (2013) proposes the presence of a syncretic C projection.

The aim of my investigation is to bring to the discussion new empirical evidence collected from the *Corpus del Español del Siglo XXI* (CORPES) and show that the data assumed by the literature ignore the complexity of the phenomenon.

The first observation is related to the mood of the *que*-less clauses. The omission of *que* was annotated in each of the occurrences in the dataset ($n=1382$). About 37% of *que*-less clauses are found in embedded subjunctive contexts of volitive predicates and verbs of desire, (see (2)), and about 63% in embedded indicative contexts of belief predicates, (see (3)). Contrary to what previous studies suggest, the data I gathered do not indicate a strict correlation between CD and the conveying of an *irrealis* meaning typical of the ‘lament’ class of verbs¹.

- (2) *El pasaje termina con una fugaz visión: la madre, ya recuperada,*
the passage ends with a brief vision: the mother already recovered
abrazando al padre le suplica Ø perdone la vida de su hijo.
hugging the father cl. begs spare-SBJV-3sg the life of her son
‘The passage ends with a brief vision: the mother, now recovered, hugging the father, begs him to spare her son’s life.’ (CORPES, 2002, Spain)
- (3) [...] *nos hemos interesado por realizar una mayor indagación sobre el Arco Iris,*
cl. we-have interested for perform a major investigation on the rainbow
que opinamos Ø es de gran valor para ampliar la percepción de la [...]
that we-think is of great value for expand the perception of the
‘[...] we have taken an interest in performing a deeper research about the rainbow that we think is of great value to expand the perception of the [...]’ (CORPES, 2007, Spain)

¹ However, as it can be observed in the examples mentioned here, the omission of *que* appears also in contexts where the matrix verb is embedded in a relative phrase.

As for the second assumption on the impossibility of a preverbal embedded subject, the dataset shows that about 2% occurrences present subjects and adverbials appearing on the left of the embedded verb both in indicative and subjunctive contexts, as reported in the examples below.

- (4) a. [...] *algo que me produce verdadera ilusión y que espero Ø los lectores disfruten tanto como yo he disfrutado al fraguarlo.*
 something that cl. produces true joy and that I-hope the readers enjoy-SBJV-3pl as much as I have enjoyed while forging
 ‘[...] something that causes me true joy and that I hope the readers will enjoy as much as I did while forging it.’ (CORPES, 2008, Spain)
- b. *Ese día, que espero Ø pronto veamos, la ciencia habrá encontrado su camino.*
 that day that I-hope soon see-SBJV-1pl the science will.have found its path
 ‘That day, which I hope we will soon see, science will have found its way.’ (CORPES, 2011, Spain)

We have just seen that our data contradict the two major assumptions. Now I will show that they also raise problems for Brovetto’s and Antonelli’s proposals.

First, analysing *que*-less clauses as IPs (Brovetto 2002) prevents us from justifying the presence of the subjunctive mood if the latter is triggered exclusively under a C-T relation. Therefore, assuming the presence of the C-layer of the embedded clause is needed to account for (i) the presence of subjunctive mood, and (ii) the possibility of long A’-movement from inside the *que*-less clause.

Antonelli’s (2013) proposal also raises some problems. His claim is that, if *que* has been omitted, V-movement to C takes place. However, as I showed earlier, the predictions made by the literature on linear order are not borne out by the empirical data found in the corpus, since preverbal embedded material is attested. In particular, among the elements preceding the verb, low adverbs (in the sense of Cinque 1999; see (4b)), and quantifiers as subject (see (5)) are also found.

- (5) *Además, Carreño se toma una licencia más que creo Ø nadie ha señalado todavía.*
 in addition Carreño cl. takes a license more that I-think nobody has noted already
 ‘Also, Carreño takes another license that I think nobody has noted yet.’ (CORPES, 2006, Spain)

The point to be emphasized here is that, if the verb moves to C, (i) it should be in a position structurally higher than low adverbs, and (ii) it should be followed by subject quantifiers, given that they cannot undergo topicalization. If the preverbal subject is not in the C layer, neither the embedded verb can be.

Summarizing, empirical data suggest that the embedded verb does not move to the C layer, as the preverbal embedded position can be filled only by unmarked subjects, quantifiers, and low adverbs. Nevertheless, the presence of C seems to be necessary given that the embedded mood must be involved somehow in the establishment of the dependency, and an intermediate landing site is required in order for the A’-movement to be possible.

On the basis of this discussion, I claim the necessity of postulating the presence of an empty C head as the best theoretical way to account for empirical data that, otherwise, would remain unexplained.

Selected references

Antonelli, A. 2013. On the Left Periphery of Spanish Complementizerless Clauses. In *Selected Proceedings of the 16th Hispanic Linguistics Symposium*, ed. Jennifer Cabrelli. Amaro et al., 15-26.

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