

# Complementizer Deletion in Spanish

## Revisiting the Empirical Evidence

Clarissa Facchin

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

**Abstract** Complementizer Deletion (CD) in Spanish is allowed with an emotional selecting verb and an irrealis embedded verb. No XPs can occupy the preverbal embedded position. The traditional accounts divided into two opposite strands: one argues that *que*-less clauses are IP structures, the other defends the presence of a C-layer and assumes that CD constitutes the alternative checker of the overt complementizer, thus requiring the verb movement to C° to check the relevant features. This article builds on the assumption that the CP is projected when the complementizer is omitted but proposes that no verb movement takes place. Empirical evidence based on the order of the embedded verb, subjects and adverbs will be provided to show that the inflected verb remains in a low position. The data, which are taken from two corpora of Spanish language, will also testify a wider production of CD beyond verbs of emotion. The analysis is framed within the Cartographic Approach.

**Keywords** Complementizer deletion. Complementizer phrase. Verb movement. European Spanish. Empty CP.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Complementizer Deletion in Spanish. – 2.1 Is There a CP? Two Proposals at Stake. – 2.2 Consequences of the IP-hypothesis. – 2.3 Consequences of Movement to a Syncretic Category. – 3 The Data. – 3.1 The Methodology. – 3.2 Descriptive Analysis. – 4 Revisiting the Analyses. – 5 Conclusions.



### Peer review

Submitted 2024-04-10  
Accepted 2024-05-12  
Published 2024-09-30

### Open access

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**Citation** Facchin, C. (2024). "Complementizer Deletion in Spanish". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie occidentale*, 58, 269-286.

## 1 Introduction

European<sup>1</sup> Spanish admits declarative Complementizer Deletion (henceforth CD) in clauses selected by certain classes of verbs. The optional omission of *que* ‘that’ is typically found with verbs such as *preocuparse* ‘to worry’ and *lamentar* ‘to lament’ (Torrego 1983).

- (1) *Lamento (que) no est-és contenta con tu trabajo.*  
 lament.1SG that not be-SBJV.2SG happy with your job  
 ‘I lament that you are not happy with your job.’

Although an overall agreement on the derivation of CD is missing, as much for Spanish *que* drop as for the other languages licensing this phenomenon (i.e., Italian, English, etc.), the literature converges on the idea that the possibility of C-drop is determined by the class of the main predicate and the mood of the embedded verb, which must bear [+ir-realis] features. The omission of *que* is allowed, in fact, in clauses inflected for subjunctive, conditional or future indicative (Brovetto 2002).

This phenomenon has led many scholars to discuss on the existence of a left periphery layer. For instance, Brovetto (2002) proposes that *que*-less clauses are IP structures showing no C-domain, whereas Antonelli (2013) defends the hypothesis that these structures do manifest a CP, though different from the sentences where the complementizer is overtly realized. Accordingly, the relevant feature is checked by the movement of the embedded verb from the IP to a syncretic C° position. The structures of both proposals are reported below in (3a) and (3b) respectively.

- (2) [<sub>IP</sub> Lamento [<sub>CP</sub> que [<sub>IP</sub> no estés contenta]]]  
 (3) a. [<sub>IP</sub> Lamento [<sub>IP</sub> no estés contenta]]  
       b. [<sub>IP</sub> Lamento [<sub>CP</sub> no estés contenta]]

From these accounts, two main questions arise. The first is how the IP-account explains the licensing of the subjunctive mood in the embedded clause, a necessary requirement in order to check the [+ir-realis] feature. The second is whether it is correct to assume that the embedded verb moves to the CP. Therefore, the present analysis aims to discuss the theoretical and empirical implications of the previous analysis relying on a study of authentic data sample of Spanish

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<sup>1</sup> Part of this work was presented at the conference *32nd Colloquium on Generative Grammar*, at the *Romance Linguistic Circle* at Cambridge University, and at the *53rd Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages*. I would like to thank the audience for their comments and suggestions. I would also like to extend a thanks to the two reviewers for the helpful comments and suggestions on the paper. All remaining errors are my responsibility.

complementizerless clauses. It will be shown that it is not the case that the embedded verb moves to a syncretic C° position, as argued by Antonelli (2013), since the data will suggest that it remains in a low position, most likely within the I-domain. Even so, assuming the existence of an empty CP in *que*-less clauses is needed in order to explain a series of empirical facts.

This article is structured as follows: § 2 provides an overview of the theoretical background of Spanish complementizer deletion and reviews the major arguments for CD analyses; § 3 offers a new and extensive sample of authentic data which will enrich the theoretical scenario; § 4 discusses the existing proposals in light of the new data and advances an alternative analysis on the derivation of *que*-less clauses; § 5 draws the conclusions.

## 2 Complementizer Deletion in Spanish

### 2.1 Is There a CP? Two Proposals at Stake

The possibility of dropping the *que* in Spanish has been discussed in the last four decades. Within the pre-minimalist framework, Torrego (1983; 1984) first introduced this topic and aligned the dropping of *que* to successive cyclicity and the theory of bounding nodes. Afterwards she was followed by Broveto (2002) who, along the lines of Stowell (1981) and Scorretti (1981), endorsed the view that CD phenomenon is the result of the selection of an IP structure, rather than a CP. Ten years later, the analyses of Spanish CD within the generative framework moved towards Poletto's (1995) proposal for Italian CD. The main contribution of this line is the one put forward by Antonelli (2013), who tries to identify which factors affect the omission of *que* in order to predict the alternation *que*/∅. The present work considers those contributions that, in order to explain the internal structure of Spanish *que*-less clauses and its derivation, assume the split periphery developed in Rizzi (1997), where the C-layer is decomposed into four different projections:

- (4) [ForceP [TopP\* [FocP [TopP\* [FinP ]]]]]

The starting point of the previous proposals is the observation that CD is available in Spanish when three conditions are satisfied: (i) the embedded complement must occupy its basic complement position, meaning that it cannot be left dislocated, (ii) the embedded verb must be a subjunctive, future indicative or conditional, and (iii) the selecting predicate must belong to a specific class, i.e. verbs of the class of *lamentar* 'to lament' and *preocuparse* 'to worry' (Broveto 2002; Antonelli 2013).

- (5) *Nos preocupa (que) hay-as estado malo.*  
 cl worry.3SG that have-SBJV.2SG been sick  
 ‘We worry about your being sick.’ (Antonelli 2013)

The embedded clause in (5) occupies its basic complement position to the right of its selecting predicate, and it contains a verb inflected for the subjunctive mood. The main verb is clearly one of those predicates compatible with *que* dropping, though, on this point, the existing literature on Spanish CD is not entirely clear with respect to which verbal classes can drop it. The examples taken into consideration by the previous contributions mainly consider complementizerless clauses selected by three predicates: *lamentar* ‘to lament’, *preocuparse* ‘to worry’ and *esperar* ‘to hope’. However, the point the authors want to make is that there seems to be a correlation between the possibility for a main predicate to drop the complementizer and the property of such predicate to select a [+irrealis] feature.

The main question the previous studies have tried to answer is whether *que*-less clauses manifest a CP layer (i.e. the CP-hypotheses; Antonelli 2013) or not (i.e. the IP-hypothesis; Brovotto 2002).

Brovotto (2002) observed that CD is incompatible with topicalization and left-peripheral movements involving the embedded CP. In fact, if any XP belonging to the C-layer is selected in a specific derivation, the C-field is activated as a whole, and *que* becomes mandatory, as shown in (6a) below. In contrast, the complementizer is optionally omitted if the topicalized element is hosted in the left periphery of the main clause, as in (6b).<sup>2</sup>

- (6) a. *Lamento \*(que), con tu trabajo, no est-és contenta.*  
 lament.1SG that with your job not be-SBVJ.3SG happy  
 ‘I lament that you are not happy with your job.’
- b. *Con tu trabajo, lamento (que) no est-és contenta.*  
 with your job lament.1SG that not be-SBVJ.3SG happy  
 ‘With your job, I lament that you are not happy.’

In (6a), the relative position of *que* is assumed to be in the highest projection ForceP, and the fronted XP lands in the specifier position of the

<sup>2</sup> The same restriction holds for wh-extraction. If a wh-phrase moves to the embedded C-field, the complementizer *que* is obligatory, but it may be optionally omitted, if the wh-constituent is extracted from the embedded clause and lands in the C-field of the main clause. I claim, however, that the ungrammaticality raised by this contrast is not a consequence of complementizer deletion. With the overt *que*, the sentence would still be ungrammatical because *lamentar* ‘to lament’ class of verbs do not select a question, like *verba dicendi* do.

TopP below ForceP. According to Broveto (2002), the obligatory realization of the complementizer is explained by assuming that the topicalization of a phrase of the lower clause to the embedded CP activates the C-field of the complement clause, and the CP as a whole is projected as a consequence. Therefore, Broveto (2002) claims that the absence of the overt *que* is due to the absence of the complementizer phrase in the derivation. Under this view, there is no TopP available, which explains why *que*-less clauses are incompatible with topicalized XPs.

Antonelli (2013) disagreed with Broveto (2002) on the lack of the C-layer in these structures. Antonelli (2013) entertained the position that the main verb selects a [+irrealis] feature, but he argues that this feature can be realized either by *que* or by the embedded predicate in the lowest CP projection Fin°. Moreover, according to Antonelli (2013), the main verb always selects a second feature [+declarative] that also can be realized either by *que* or by the embedded predicate in Force° projection. Therefore, the embedded predicate would be an instance of alternative checker (Zanuttini 1997; Obenauer 2001) of the missing complementizer, being capable of checking for the two relevant features. To be able to do that, the derivation of CD requires a syncretic projection Force/Fin which can host the embedded verb and value the features associated to Force° and Fin°, as represented in (7) below. Antonelli (2013) confirms this hypothesis by pointing out the fact that in some languages like Spanish itself, multiple declarative complementizers can co-occur, upholding the view first advocated by Rizzi (1997) and then by Shlonsky (2006), that Force and Fin projections split only if necessary. In other words, the split between ForceP and FinP takes place only if other discursive projections, like TopicP and FocusP, are activated, otherwise they constitute a syncretic projection.

(7) ForceP/FinP



This proposal accounts for the ungrammaticality of fronted phrases in embedded clauses lacking *que*, though from the opposite perspective with respect to Broveto's (2002). In fact, the ungrammaticality of fronted XPs in complementizerless clauses follows not because these structures do not manifest a C-layer, but rather because, if ForceP and FinP are syncretically projected, there is no room for the activation of the other left-periphery projections.

In the remainder of this section, a discussion of the consequences of Broveto's (2002) IP-hypothesis and Antonelli's (2013) CP-hypothesis will be reported.

## 2.2 Consequences of the IP-hypothesis

For BrovETTO (2002), the activation of the C-layer, which includes the head where *que* is merged, is determined by derivational processes involving the fronted projections. This claim leads to the wrong conclusion that complement clauses not hosting a topic phrase in their CP will not manifest the overt complementizer *que*. Indeed, the realization of *que* occurs regardless of the activation of fronted XPs.

- (8) *Lamento*      **que** *no est-és*                      *contenta con tu trabajo.*  
 lament.1SG    that not be-SBJV.2SG    happy    with your job  
 ‘I lament that you are not happy with your job.’

Another problem that this hypothesis faces is related to the unavailability of the preverbal subject. An IP-structure, in fact, should not prevent a subject from appearing preverbally, being it its argument position.<sup>3</sup> BrovETTO’s (2002) explanation for the subject restriction rests on two different assumptions. The first is that, if the C-layer is not projected, the preverbal embedded subject would inadequately receive accusative case from the main predicate, being the specifier of the IP adjacent to its position. Therefore, the subject must remain in post-verbal position to avoid this configuration, which would lead to an ungrammatical result. This configuration is reminiscent of that of Exceptional Case-Marking structures, but with a finite clause involved. In ECM constructions, the embedded subject of an infinitival verb appears in the superordinate clause and receives accusative case. According to BrovETTO (2002), if the CP cannot avoid the ECM configuration because it is missing, then the subject may remain in post-verbal position and receive case *in situ*. Nevertheless, I claim that this is not the reason for the ungrammaticality of preverbal subjects in *que*-less complements. Indeed, Spanish is a Differential Object Marking language and, according to Brugè and Brugger (1996), [+animate] referential nominal expressions which receive accusative case require the accusative marker *a*, as (9) below. Therefore, if we substitute the impersonal subject in (10a) with a [+animate] subject, we expect the accusative case marker to obligatorily precede the embedded subject. However, the presence of DOM before the constituent [Ygritte] in (10b) gives a strong ungrammatical result which, compared to (10c), makes the latter the best option.

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**3** The IP-hypothesis has been firstly proposed for English CD (see Stowell 1981, among others). This hypothesis is motivated by the fact that embedded subject appears in preverbal position in *that*-less clauses, following the configuration typical of IP-structures.

- (9) *Ygritte besó a Jon.*  
Ygritte kissed DOM Jon  
'Ygritte kissed John.'
- (10) a. *Espero Ø se solucionen pronto los problemas.*  
hope.1SG cl solve-SBVJ.3SG soon the problems  
'I hope that the problems will be solved soon.'
- b. \**Espero Ø a Ygritte solucion-e pronto los problemas.*  
hope.1SG DOM Ygritte solve-SBVJ.3SG soon the problems
- c. ?*Espero Ø Ygritte solucion-e pronto los problemas.*  
hope.1SG Ygritte solve-SBVJ.3SG soon the problems  
'I hope that Ygritte will solve the problems soon.'

Therefore, if we consider a *que*-less clause with a [+human] subject we will immediately see that the embedded subject cannot receive accusative case, since this gives rise to a strong ungrammaticality. The most acceptable option remains (10c), where the embedded [+human] subject is not preceded by the accusative marker.

The second explanation given by Broveto (2002) for the impossibility of a preverbal subject assumes that preverbal subjects in Spanish bear a topic feature. Some scholars have argued that those subjects occupy the specifier position of a syncretic category Tense/Topic (Zubizarreta 1998), though an overall agreement on this issue has not been achieved.

Finally, the IP-hypothesis assumes that CD is possible only if the *que*-less clause occupies its complement position. If we are dealing with an IP-construction, the dependency relation between the *que*-less clause and the main clause is unexpected. Even more unexpected is the inflection for subjunctive mood of the embedded verb. On the contrary, the adjacency condition suggests that the complementizer can be optionally deleted only if it is properly governed by a head, and the presence of the subjunctive can be explained only by assuming that the main predicate triggers it.

To sum up, Broveto (2002) analyzes complementizerless clauses as IP-structures lacking their embedded CP, which explains why derivational processes involving discourse projections are ruled out. This analysis, however, wrongly predicts that *que* should always be absent when fronted material is not derived, making complementizer deletion a mandatory phenomenon. Ultimately, the IP-hypothesis does not account for the dependency relation requirement between the *que*-less clause and the main clause.

### 2.3 Consequences of Movement to a Syncretic Category

Antonelli (2013) claimed that it is not the case that there is exclusively one position that can host the complementizer in clauses with an overt *que*, but both heads Force<sup>o</sup> and Fin<sup>o</sup> are always projected: Force<sup>o</sup> is filled by the complementizer *que*, where it is directly merged in order to value the clausal type feature, and Fin<sup>o</sup> hosts a lower homophonous complementizer, overt or not, to value the irrealis feature. The split between these two functional heads allows the activation of the intermediate projections, like TopP and FocP.

As previously mentioned, complement clauses lacking *que* have no room for the intermediate projections. This would happen because, according to Antonelli (2013), a syncretic projection Force/Fin blocks the activation of the left-peripheral projections normally intervening between them. The hypothesis defended by Antonelli (2013) is that *que*-less clauses take a syncretic C-layer from the Numeration, a necessary option for the embedded predicate to move to the embedded left periphery and value the sentential feature associated to Force<sup>o</sup> and the irrealis feature associated to Fin<sup>o</sup>. This proposal aims to be in line with the principle of economy known as Minimal Structure Principle (Bošković 1997; Chomsky 1995; 2001), which assumes that language operates under the principle of linguistic economy: it does not undergo unnecessary operations, but it favors the syntactic choice that has less structural material.

Accordingly, it follows that, if the derivation of *que*-less clauses serves the same function of complement clauses with overt *que*, and only the former satisfies the optimality condition, thus the MSP should prefer complementizerless clauses to complements with *que* whenever no fronted material needs to be derived. It is not the case, however, since CD is an optional phenomenon, and the absence of the intermediate peripheral projections does not rule out the merger of *que*. A good solution to this puzzle is to claim that the minimal pair in question does not share the same Numeration, a solution that Antonelli sketches in his analysis. In fact, as Chomsky (2001) suggests, the problem of optionality is sorted out by assuming that the two constructions start from a different Numeration, hence they cannot compete in optimal terms. Therefore, if we assume that all object complement clauses are CPs, then we need to assume a null C in our lexicon as the alternative to phonologically overt C. In Antonelli's analysis (2013), the null C is derived in syntax as a single syncretic projection. This hypothesis accounts for a wider number of facts.

The following section presents new empirical evidence of *que*-less clauses and discusses them in the light of the existing theories. The starting expectations are that CD is characterized by a selecting predicate belonging to the class of *lamentar* 'to lament', and by an irrealis embedded verb, and no XPs are expected in preverbal embedded position.



### 3 The Data

#### 3.1 The Methodology

In what follows, I will provide additional evidence on Spanish complementizer deletion which shows the possible influence of some additional variables on the outcome. In particular, I will show that, although *que*-dropping is favored by the proximity of the predicates, preverbal elements, such as subjects and adverbs, do not rule out the omission of *que*. With respect to the variable mood of the embedded verb, the absence of *que* is attested in complements inflected for the subjunctive mood, as well as in complements inflected for (present) indicative. Moreover, and perhaps the most surprising finding, the embedding of the main predicate into a subordinate clause introduced by *que* significantly favors the possibility for complementizer deletion to occur.

The data source of this study are two corpora of present-day Spanish: CREA (*Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual*) and CORPES XXI (*Corpus del Español del Siglo XX*). Both corpora constitute the most representative database of Spanish language, since they contain a wide variety of written and oral documents produced in all Spanish-speaking countries between 1975 and 2000 (CREA), and from 2001 to the present-day (CORPES XXI). The data that were gathered contain 18 complement-taking predicates, part of them is based on the existing proposals (Brovetto 2002; Antonelli 2013), i.e. verbs of emotion and desire, others are a novelty of this study, which aims at exploring the productivity of complementizer deletion with other verbal classes, i.e. belief predicates and volitives. The extraction of the tokens was realized by searching for all occurrences of the main predicate inflected for present indicative. The result was then manually filtered to eliminate false positives. The sample was reduced to a variable context: main verb + *que*/∅ + finite complement clause. This resulted in n=179,439 tokens, 0,8% of which are without the complementizer *que* (n=1,517). The data considered in the present study represent 4 semantic classes, as illustrated in Table 1 [tab. 1].

**Table 1** Overview of the semantic classes of complement-taking predicates in the dataset

Semantic class	Verbs	N. of tokens (total)	N. of tokens without <i>que</i>	Percentage of CD per class
Belief	<i>Creer, ...</i>	144,578	832	0.6%
Desire	<i>Desear, ...</i>	10,081	406	4%
Emotion	<i>Lamentar, ...</i>	4,053	32	0.7%
Volition	<i>Rogar, ...</i>	20,727	247	1,2%

The tokens that have been gathered belong to different settings or environments, i.e. novels, press reports, essays, oral interviews, transcriptions of radio or television newscasts, juridical and diplomatic

transcriptions. It suggests that CD can be found in oral language, though it is perceived as pretentious speech by native speakers, who take this construction to be a feature of formal or literary written speech.

### 3.2 Descriptive Analysis

The data gathered show the influence of a wider range of different language-internal constraints on the omission of *que* in Spanish in comparison with those highlighted by previous contributions.

Indeed, the optional omission of *que* is primarily affected by the class of the main predicate, although with a wider range of classes. It is attested, in fact, not exclusively with verbs of desire and emotion, as reported in (11a) and (11b), but also with verbs of volition (*querer* ‘want’, *mandar* ‘order’) and belief predicates (i.e., *creer* ‘believe’, *pensar* ‘think’), as illustrated in (11c) and (11d) respectively. In contrast, it is ungrammatical with verbs of communication and manner of speaking (i.e., *declarar* ‘declare’, *susurrar* ‘whisper’). This first evidence suggests that the mood of the complement verb may be the subjunctive as well as the indicative, since belief predicates select for the indicative mood in Spanish when their polarity is positive.

- (11) a. [...] *ha sido una grata experiencia que*  
 has been a grateful experience that  
*deseo ∅ sea el colofón de esta*  
 wish.1SG be-SBJV.3SG the climax of this  
*segunda parte de una saga [...]*  
 second part of a saga  
 ‘[...] it has been a pleasant experience that I wish it is the climax of this second part of a saga [...]’ (CREA, España. 2001, Actualidad, ocio y vida cotidiana)
- b. *Lamento ∅ siga usando esos insultos para*  
 lament.1SG keep-SBJV.3SG using these insults to  
*definir personas que no conoce, [...]*  
 define people that not knows  
 ‘I lament s/he keeps using those insults to define people s/he does not know [...]’ (CORPES, España. 2015, Salud)
- c. [...] *una neuritis óptica por lo que le*  
 a neuritis optic for the that cl  
*ruego ∅ me de la máxima información [...]*  
 beg.1SG cl give-SBJV.3SG the maximum information  
 ‘[...] an optic neuritis of which I beg you to give me the maximum information [...]’ (CORPES, España. 2005, Radio)

- d. [...] *unas cuantas piezas, que supones serán*  
a few parts that suppose.2SG will-be.3PL  
*el cargador, el ratillo [...]*  
the charger the mouse  
‘[...] a few parts, which you suppose will be the charger, the mouse [...]’  
(CORPES, España. 2001, Novela)

Secondly, *que*-deletion is always attested when the embedded sentence appears in its basic complement position, and never when the sentence is fronted. Within this configuration, the omission of *que* is indeed favored by the proximity of the main and the embedded predicates, though preverbal subjects and adverbs are not ruled out.

- (12) [...] *algo que me produce verdadera ilusión*  
something that cl produces true illusion  
*y que espero Ø los lectores*  
and that hope.1SG the readers  
*disfrut-en tanto como yo he disfrutado [...]*  
enjoy-SBJV.3PL as much as I have enjoyed  
‘[...] it gives me true satisfaction and that I hope that readers will enjoy as much as I have enjoyed [...]’ (CORPES, España. 2008, Actualidad, ocio y vida cotidiana)

- (13) *Ese día, que espero Ø pronto ve-amos,*  
this day that hope.1SG soon see-SBJV.1PL  
*la ciencia habrá encontrado su camino.*  
the science will-have found its path  
‘This day, that I hope we will soon see, science will have found its path.’  
(CORPES, España. 2011, Ciencias y tecnología)

Adverbs and subjects occupying the preverbal embedded position in complements without *que* are attested with two verbal classes: verbs of desire and belief. In contrast, complementizerless clauses of volitional verbs present the interpolation of lexical material belonging to the main clause, typically the dative argument of the main verb, see (14). Only a 2% of the 1,517 occurrences of *que*-less clauses is found with verbs of emotion, and none of them presents intervening lexical material between the two predicates. This is a surprising result given the fact that the literature has spent most of its attention on this specific verb class.

- (14) *Ruego a la policía y su concejal*  
beg.1SG to the police and its city councilor  
*Ø vigil-e las calles peatonales invadidas de coches [...]*  
oversee-SBJV.3SG the streets pedestrian invaded of cars  
‘I ask the police and their councilor to monitor the pedestrian streets invaded by cars [...]’ (CORPES, España. 2001, Actualidad, ocio y vida cotidiana)

A third important observation is that the omission of *que* is attested also when the main verb is subordinated in another clause, (see (15)), especially, but not exclusively, with verbs of desire and belief.<sup>4</sup> It has been suggested that complementizer deletion in current-day Spanish may occur with indicative complements only when the main predicate is embedded in a relative clause (RAE & ASALE 2009; Herrero Ruiz de Loizaga 2014).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, *que*-dropping is still possible even with non-subordinated main predicates, as shown in (16). Although quite rare, these examples must be taken into account.<sup>6</sup>

- (15) *Una paradoja que creo*     $\emptyset$  *le sirve*  
 a paradox that believe.1SG    cl serves  
*a Sicilia como metáfora* [...]   
 to Sicily as metaphor  
 ‘A paradox that I believe serves Sicily as a metaphor [...]’  
 (CORPES, España. 2017, Artes, cultura y espectáculos)

- (16) *Yo creo*     $\emptyset$  *ya es hora*  
 I think.1SG    already is time  
*de que se hub-iesen olvidado.*  
 of that cl have-SBVJ.PAST.3PL forgotten  
 ‘I think it is time that they had forgotten.’  
 (CORPES, España. 2001, Política, economía y justicia)

Examples of *que*-less clauses preceded by a belief predicate with a negative polarity are also attested. In these cases, the embedded verb is inflected for subjunctive, as expected in Spanish (see (17)). If we follow the starting hypothesis that *que*-dropping correlates with the presence of an irrealis embedded verb, we expect this factor also interacts with mood alternations, thus the omission is possible

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**4** This configuration is mentioned in the grammar RAE & ASALE (2009) as the only possibility for *que*-deletion to occur with belief predicates in European Spanish. In contrast, Mexican varieties seem to allow *que*-dropping when the belief verb is not subordinated (RAE & ASALE 2009, § 43.3i). A comparative analysis between the two varieties of Spanish is the aim for future research.

**5** According to Pountain (2015), since the relative *que* and the complementizer *que* are homophonous, the omission of the second *que* is due to a stylistic criterion known as euphony, which aims at avoiding repetitions. According to the data gathered though, CD is also attested in relative clauses introduced by relative pronouns other than *que*, as for instance *donde*, *cuyo* and *quien*. Being this the case, Pountain’s (2015) view does not hold. I thank one of the reviewers for making this helpful observation.

**6** From the data I have gathered, the omission of *que* is attested when the main verb is subordinated in a relative clause. I have no evidence of CD in other subordinated contexts. A question that naturally arises is why CD is only allowed within relative clauses. This observation should be further corroborated in future research before providing a more specific theoretical explanation.

(or at least more productive) when the belief predicate comes with a negative polarity. Nevertheless, the distribution of CD is not higher when the embedded clause is inflected for subjunctive than when it is in the present indicative, suggesting that the subjunctive mood is not a strong predictor of the omission of *que*.

- (17) [...] *estos arriesgados navegantes con naves que*  
 these daring sailors with ships that  
*no creo*  $\emptyset$  *pod-amos imaginar cuanta*  
 not believe.1SG can-SBJV.1PL imagine how much  
*audacia era necesaria.*  
 audacity was needed  
 '[...] these daring sailors with ships that I don't think we can imagine how much boldness was needed.' (CORPES, España. 2003, Ciencias y tecnología)

These examples constitute indirect evidence of the dependency relation between the main verb and the embedded clause. Therefore, assuming the IP-hypothesis, and thus considering *que*-less structures as IP-structures, would mean leaving unexplained the possibility for the main predicate to select a subjunctive mood in its embedded clause. The detailed discussion of the existing proposals is issued in the following section.

Before leaving this section, one last point must be highlighted. The configuration we have just seen, where the main predicate is embedded into a subordinate clause introduced by *que*, does not make *que*-dropping mandatory, since the same configuration is also attested with standard complementation with overt *que*.

- (18) [...] *en lengua extraña, que creo que tiene que*  
 in language stranger that believe.1SG that have.3SG that  
*ver con esa dichosa sensación de embarazo, que [...]*  
 see with that joyful sensation of pregnancy that  
 '[...] in a foreign language that I think it has to do with this blissful sensation of pregnancy, which [...]' (CORPES, España. 2001, Novela)

This evidence further proves that the main predicate is a selecting predicate instantiating a dependency relation with its complement clause. Under this new light, the IP-hypothesis becomes difficult to defend.

## 4 Revisiting the Analyses

Brovetto (2002) and Antonelli (2013), by means of some supposedly ungrammatical examples, claim that if *que* is absent, no overt lexical or pronominal subject may appear preverbally. Nevertheless, the corpora consulted reveal examples that contradict their statement, since overt and rather complex DPs subjects intervene between the main and the embedded predicate, like (12) above. In addition, adverbs are also found in preverbal embedded position, as in (13) above. Indeed, these examples are rare, but they must be considered into an analysis of Spanish CD, because otherwise part of the variation would remain unexplained.

At first sight, this new evidence seems to solve the main problem raised by the IP-hypothesis, since the unavailability of the preverbal subject needs not to be explained anymore: the embedded subject appears in preverbal position, following the configuration typical of IP-structures. On the other hand, however, the dependency relation requirement between the *que*-less clause and the main clause, and the licensing of the subjunctive mood, remain unexpected.

As for the CP-hypothesis, it assumes that verb movement to C° in *que*-less clauses would always assure a position structurally higher than any other element, thus the prediction is that the embedded verb cannot be preceded by any lexical material from the embedded clause.<sup>7</sup> Since the new data falsify this hypothesis, two main pathways remain open: either we assume that the CP is not constituted by a single head, but it maintains at least the lowest projections, or we assume that the syncretic Force/Fin° position remains empty. To verify which of the two hypotheses is the correct, we should investigate whether the preverbal elements are in a dislocated position, i.e. TopP or FocP. If they are, the first hypothesis would be confirmed, then it would remain to explain whether the verb moves to Fin° or not.

The first evidence that undermines the hypothesis of verb movement to a C° position are the occurrences of preverbal quantifiers as subjects, see (19). In fact, quantifier subjects cannot undergo topicalization (cf. Rizzi 1997). Moreover, according to Zubizarreta (1998, 103), bare negative quantifiers, i.e. *nadie* ‘nobody’, may be interpreted as negating or reasserting part of the hearer’s presupposition but, unlike contrastive focused phrases, they do not introduce a variable with an associated value. In other words, they cannot be focalized either. It ultimately suggests that these subjects are located within

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<sup>7</sup> Except for clitic elements and standard negation, a possibility that Antonelli (2013) leaves unexplained.

the I-domain, a possibility that goes against the hypothesis of verb movement, since it predicts the reverse word order.<sup>8</sup>

- (19) *Además, Carreño se toma una licencia más que*  
 in addition Carreño cl takes a license more that  
*creo ∅ nadie ha señalado todavía [...]*  
 think.1SG nobody has noted yet  
 ‘Also, Carreño takes another license that I think nobody has pointed out yet.’  
 (CORPES, España. 2006. Artes, cultura y espectáculos)

The view that the embedded verb does not move to a left periphery position is also supported by the nature of the adverbs found in preverbal position, i.e. *siempre* ‘always’ and *pronto* ‘soon’. These adverbs are labeled “lower pre-VP adverbs” (Cinque 1999), belonging to the Low Adverb Space (Ledgeway, Lombardi 2005), a syntactic space delimited to the left by presuppositional adverbial negators (cf. Italian *mica*) and to the right by arguments of the VP. The relative ordering of such adverbs with their associated functional heads is illustrated in (20). The adverb hierarchy is a reliable diagnostic for verb movement if the adverb is unstressed. The occurrences attesting preverbal *siempre* and *pronto* are read by native consultants with a flat, neutral intonation, and they do not have narrow scope over a single constituent, suggesting that they appear in their base FP, i.e., in  $\text{Asp}_{\text{perfect}}$  and  $\text{Asp}_{\text{proximative}}$ , respectively.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the embedded verb must be hosted in a position higher than the lowest VP but lower than IP. From a parametric and typological point of view, the assumption that the verb in languages like Spanish remains in a low position is not surprising, given that Spanish is classified as a very low-movement variety (Schifano 2018).

- (20) [Neg1presuppositional [*already* T(Anterior)] [*no longer*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{terminative}}$ ]  
 [still  $\text{Asp}_{\text{continuative}}$ ] [*always*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{perfect}}$ ] [Neg2 [*just*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{retrospective}}$ ]  
 [*soon*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{proximative}}$ ] [*briefly*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{durative}}$ ] [*characteristically*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{progressive}}$ ]  
 [*almost*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{prospective}}$ ] [*completely*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{SgCompletive}}$ ] [*everything*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{PlCompletely}}$ ]  
 [*well* Voice [*fast/early*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{celerative(process)}}$ ] [*again*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{repetitive(process)}}$ ] [*often*  
 $\text{Asp}_{\text{frequentative(process)}}$ ] [*completely*  $\text{Asp}_{\text{SgCompletive(process)}}$ ]  $\downarrow_{\text{V-VP}}$ ...

<sup>8</sup> The corpora consulted attest quantifier subjects exclusively with belief predicates. However, according to speakers and testimonies of daily language, they are accepted with volitive predicates too:

(i) *Ruego ∅ alguien me ayude.*  
 beg.1SG someone cl help.SBJV.3SG  
 ‘I beg for someone to help me.’

<sup>9</sup> If the adverb receives a marked intonation, the sentence is ungrammatical.

If preverbal embedded subjects cannot receive a focalized interpretation, it is reasonable to think that the lowest CP projections, as FocP, are not maintained either. Therefore, one last point remains to be explained, namely whether the CP is projected as a syncretic projection, or it is not projected at all. In this respect, the dependency condition and the selection for the subjunctive mood constitute indirect evidence for the former hypothesis, since they can be explained only under the assumption that a CP assures the embedded relation.

Hence, the hypothesis that best accounts for all the empirical data is assuming that the embedded verb does not leave the IP. At the same time, the CP is present but as an empty head which assures the dependency condition. The structure of the new proposal is reported here:

(21) [<sub>IP</sub> Lamento [<sub>CP</sub> ∅ [<sub>IP</sub> no estés contenta]]]

As the dependency condition operates also in indicative contexts, it is reasonable to assume that indicative complements manifest the same structural configuration, namely an empty CP. From the theoretical point of view, it means assuming that a single syncretic C-projection is derived in syntax as the alternative to phonologically overt C° (as in Antonelli 2013). The extent to which the omission of *que* is optional and, eventually, which is the interpretative difference between the two syntactic structures, are left for further research.

## 5 Conclusions

This article revisited the existing proposals of CD in European Spanish and suggested a new hypothesis based on new empirical data. Contrary to the existing analysis, the data gathered showed that: (i) CD is productive with four semantic verbal classes, (ii) it is attested both in subjunctive and indicative complements, and (iii) preverbal embedded material, as adverbs and subjects, is found when *que* is absent.

In light of these data, it has been argued that although the presence of preverbal subjects favors Brovotto's (2002) IP-hypothesis, it still does not account for the dependency condition required in *que*-less clauses. At the same time, the presence of low adverbs and quantifiers as subjects in the preverbal embedded position undermines the hypothesis that the embedded verb moves towards the syncretic Force/Fin° head assumed by Antonelli (2013). Hence, it has been claimed that the hypothesis able to account for all the empirical data is assuming that the left peripheral domain is projected but, as no verb movement to C° takes place, it remains phonologically empty.



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