

# THE PSEUDO-SPLIT EXCLAMATIVE CONSTRUCTION IN CHILEAN SPANISH

Carlos Muñoz Pérez

Universidad Austral de Chile

Going Romance 2023

Radboud University

November 30 – December 1, 2023

# INTRODUCTION

Wh-exclamatory sentences in Spanish involve wh-movement. As a general rule, the phrase undergoing movement forms a continuous constituent.

- (1) a. Eres *muy alto*.  
are.2SG very tall  
'You are very tall.'
- b. ¡*Qué alto*! eres *t*!  
how tall are.2SG  
'How tall you are!'

In some languages, the wh-phrase seems to be “split” in exclamatory sentences.

- (2) DUTCH
- a. *Wat snel* is die auto!  
what fast is that car  
'How fast that car is!'
- b. *Wat* is die auto *snel*!  
what is that car fast  
'How fast that car is!'

In principle, this suggests an analysis in which only the wh-element *wat* 'what' moves to the left, leaving behind the rest of the original phrase.

- (3) *Wat*<sup>i</sup> is die auto [<sup>i</sup> *snel*]! cf. (2b)

# INTRODUCTION

Bosque (2017: 21) discusses Spanish constructions that exhibit a similar “split”.

- (4) a. ¡*Cómo* eres *bella*!  
how.much are.2SG beautiful  
‘How beautiful you are!’
- b. ¡*Cómo* es *grande* mi pueblo!  
how.much is.3SG big my town  
‘How big my town is!’

However, he dismisses the possibility of analyzing these cases as true syntactic splits since *cómo* ‘how much’ does not form constituents with adjective phrases.

- (5) \* ¡*Cómo bella* eres!  
how beautiful are.2SG  
‘How beautiful you are!’

In general, there seem to be no reports of alternations like (2) in Romance.

# INTRODUCTION

In this presentation, I will discuss data illustrating a syntactic pattern in Chilean Spanish that seems analogous to the Dutch alternation in (2).

- (6) a. ¡*Qué* *alto* eríh!  
          what tall are.2SG  
          ‘How tall you are!’
- b. ¡*Que* eríh *alto*!  
          that are.2SG tall  
          ‘How tall you are!’

There are orthographic conventions leading to transcribe *qué* ‘what’ and *que* ‘that’ differently: these conventions are analysis-dependant.

- ➡ If the “split” is due to movement of the exclamative to the left, it should be written *qué* ‘what’.
- ➡ If it is instead a conjunction that is based-generated in the left periphery, it should be written *que* ‘that’.

I picked the latter alternative for two reasons.

- ✓ This is how Chileans write it.
- ✓ This transcription is coherent with the analysis I will provide for the phenomenon.

# IN THIS PRESENTATION...

- ✓ I present novel data illustrating some properties of this (apparent) alternation and its general distribution.
- ✓ I show that the phenomenon is restricted to contexts in which the degree quantifier *harto* 'quite' may appear in the dialect.
- ✓ I dismiss an analysis in which the seemingly split elements in (6b) form a single constituent at some point of the syntactic derivation, i.e., (6b) is a *pseudo-split* construction.
- ✓ Following and adapting proposals for the Dutch pattern in (2b) by Corver (1990) and Broekhuis & Corver (2020), I argue that
  - (i) *que* in this constructions is an exclamative complementizer
  - (ii) that binds a degree variable associated to adjectives, adverbs, nouns or verbs.

# DISTRIBUTION

The distribution of the “split” exclamatory pattern seems analogous to that of a certain *degree quantifier* (Doetjes 1997) within the dialect: *harto* ‘quite’.

- ➡ Degree quantifiers are elements like English *more*, French *beaucoup* ‘a lot’ and (Chilean) Spanish *harto* ‘quite’.
- ➡ Degree quantifiers do not impose severe categorial restrictions.

## (7) FRENCH

- Les linguistes ont *beaucoup* dansé la salsa.  
the linguists have a.lot danced the salsa  
‘The linguists danced salsa a lot.’
- Beaucoup* des linguistes ont dansé la salsa.  
a.lot of linguists have danced the salsa  
‘A lot of linguists danced salsa.’

- ➡ González Rodríguez & Sánchez López (2021) observe that Spanish *harto* ‘quite’ may modify adjectives, adverbs, nouns and verbs, although its distribution varies from dialect to dialect.
- ➡ They also notice that these uses are more systematic and frequent in Chilean Spanish than in other varieties: all combinatorial possibilities are attested.

To begin with, *harto* 'quite' can modify gradable adjectives, e.g., it combines with the adjective *rápido* 'fast' but not with *eléctrico* 'electric'.

- (8) a. Este auto es (*harto*) rápido.  
This car is.3SG quite fast  
'This car is (quite) fast.'
- b. Este auto es (\**harto*) eléctrico.  
This car is.3SG quite electric  
'This car is (\*quite) electric.'

# DISTRIBUTION

Both types of exclamatory sentences are acceptable with gradable adjectives and unacceptable with non-gradable adjectives.

- (9) a. ¡*Qué rápido* es ese auto!  
what fast is that car  
'How fast that car is!'
- b. ¡*Que* es *rápido* ese auto!  
that is fast that car  
'How fast that car is!'
- (10) a. \*¡*Qué eléctrico* es ese auto!  
what electric is that car  
'How electric that car is!'
- b. \*¡*Que* es *eléctrico* ese auto!  
that is electric that car  
'How electric that car is!'



Gradable adverbs may combine with *harto* 'quite', unlike non-gradable adverbs.

- (11) a. Se está moviendo (*harto*) lento.  
SE is.3SG moving quite slow  
'It is moving quite slowly.'
- b. Se está moviendo (\**harto*) ahora.  
SE is.3SG moving quite now  
'It is moving (\*quite) now.'

Exclamatory sentences can only be formed with gradable adverbs.

- (12) a. ¡*Qué lento* vamos!  
what slow go.1PL  
'How slowly we go!'
- b. ¡*Que* vamos *lento*!  
that go.1PL slow  
'How slowly we go!'
- (13) a. \*¡*Qué ahora* vamos!  
what now go.1PL  
'How now we go!'
- b. \*¡*Que* vamos *ahora*!  
that go.1PL now  
'How now we go!'

# DISTRIBUTION

Not every noun can combine with *harto* 'quite'. The relevant contrast can be exemplified with mass and count nouns like *calor* 'heat' and *auto* 'car'.

- (14) a. Pronosticaron (*harto*) calor para hoy.  
forecasted.3PL quite heat for today  
'They forecasted a lot of heat for today.'
- b. Yo tengo (\**harto*) auto.  
I have.1SG quite car  
'I have (quite) a car.'

Notice that the English translation in (14b) has an evaluative interpretation. This is a property of *quite* that *harto* does not share.

➡ *Harto* does not trigger evaluative interpretations.

# DISTRIBUTION

Both types of exclamatory sentences can be formed with the mass noun *calor* 'heat'.

- (15) a. ¡*Qué calor* hace!  
          what heat does.3SG  
          'How hot it is!'
- b. ¡*Que* hace *calor*!  
              that does.3SG heat  
              'How hot it is!'

An asymmetry emerges with *auto* 'car'. The non-split exclamatory sentence is acceptable, but triggers an evaluative reading rather than a degree interpretation.

- (16) a. ¡*Qué auto* manejai!  
          what car drive.2SG  
          'What a car you drive!'
- b. \*¡*Que* manejai *auto*!  
              that drive.2SG car  
              'What a car you drive!'

# DISTRIBUTION

Some (singular) count nouns may combine with degree expressions if they can be interpreted as mass nouns, e.g., (17).

- (17) Compré **harta** fruta.  
bought.1SG quite fruit  
'I bought a lot of fruit.'

In these cases, the noun receives a quantificational interpretation.

These nouns may participate in both exclamatory constructions, but only the split pattern has an interpretation related to quantity similar to that in (17).

- (18) a. ¡**Qué fruta** compraste!  
what fruit bought.2SG  
'What a fruit you bought!'
- b. ¡**Que** compraste **fruta**!  
that bought.2SG fruit  
'How much fruit you bought!'

# DISTRIBUTION

Plural count nouns like *autos* ‘cars’ may also combine with *harto* ‘quite’ to produce quantificational interpretations.

- (19) Compré        hartos    autos.  
bought.1SG quite.PL cars  
‘I bought a lot of cars.’

When appearing in exclamatory sentences, plural count nouns trigger quantificational readings only in the split pattern.

- |      |    |  |    |  |
|------|----|--|----|--|
| (20) | a. | ¡ <i>Qué autos</i> manejai!<br>what cars drive.2SG<br>‘What cars you drive!’ | b. | ¡ <i>Que</i> manejai <i>autos</i> !<br>that drive.2SG cars<br>‘How many cars you drive!’ |
|------|----|--|----|--|

# DISTRIBUTION

*Harto* 'quite' can modify verbs that allow graduable interpretations, e.g., (21).

- (21) Ayudé (*harto*) a mi hermano.  
helped.1SG quite DOM my brother  
'I helped my brother a lot.'

The "split" exclamatory construction is acceptable with a degree interpretation over these verb, e.g., (22b).

- (22) a. \* ¡*Qué ayudao* hai a tu hermano!  
what helped have.2SG DOM your brother  
'How much you helped your brother!'
- b. ¡*Que* hai *ayudao* a tu hermano!  
that have.2SG helped DOM your brother  
'How much you helped your brother!'

There is no corresponding non-split exclamatory construction in this case, as the exclamative *qué* cannot form a constituent with a verb, e.g., (22a).

## INTERIM CONCLUSION

The distribution of the “split” exclamatory construction seems to correlate with the distribution of degree quantifiers; in particular, *harto* ‘quite’.



# PROPERTIES

The alternation is only possible with *que/qué*. Other exclamative wh-elements do not allow to form both exclamatory constructions.

(23) a. ¡*Cuánto calor* hace!  
how.much heat does.3SG  
'How hot it is!'

b. \*¡*Cuánto* hace *calor*!  
how.much does.3SG heat  
'How hot it is!'

(24) a. \*¡*Cómo calor* hace!  
how heat does.3SG  
'How hot it is!'

b. ¡*Cómo* hace *calor*!  
how does.3SG heat  
'How hot it is!'

# PROPERTIES

Doubly filled COMPs are not available for the “split” pattern in Chilean Spanish.

- (25) ¡*Qué contento* (que) estai!  
what happy that are.2SG  
‘How happy you are!’
- (26) ¡*Que* (\*que) estai *contento*!  
that that are.2SG happy  
‘How happy you are!’

# PROPERTIES

The “split” pattern is restricted to matrix clauses.

- (27) ¡Me sorprendió *qué* *alto* estás!  
to.me surprized what tall are  
‘It surprized me how tall you are!’
- (28) \* ¡Me sorprendió *que* estás *alto*!  
to.me surprized that are tall  
‘It surprized me how tall you are!’

# PROPERTIES

The “split” pattern is insensitive to certain movement restrictions applying over wh-movement.

- (29) a. Manejai [DP un auto muy bonito].  
drive.2SG a car very nice  
‘You drive a very nice car.’
- b. \*¿[Cuán bonito] manejai [DP un auto]?.  
how nice drive.2SG a car  
‘How nice is the car you drive?’
- c. \*¡*Qué bonito* manejai [DP un auto]!  
what nice drive.2SG a car  
‘What a nice car you drive!’
- d. ¡*Que* manejai [DP un auto *bonito*]!  
what drive.2SG a car nice  
‘What a nice car you drive!’

# ANALYSIS

I follow and adapt the proposals in Corver (1990) and Broekhuis & Corver (2020) for the Dutch pair in (2).

## (2) DUTCH

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| a. <i>Wat snel</i> is die auto!<br>what fast is that car<br>'How fast that car is!' | b. <i>Wat</i> is die auto <i>snel</i> !<br>what is that car fast<br>'How fast that car is!' |
|---|---|

- ➡ They dismiss an analysis in terms of movement: they reject the hypothesis that *wat* 'what' is an exclamative element that moved to the left periphery leaving behind the rest of the wh-phrase (30a).
- ➡ Instead, they take *wat* 'what' to be a base-generated operator in the C domain that binds a degree variable  $\Delta$  within the clause (30b).

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| (30) a. $[_{CP} \text{Wat}^i [_{C'} C \dots \text{is die auto } [t^i \text{ snel}]]$ | cf. (2b) |
| b. $[_{CP} \text{Wat}_i \dots \text{is die auto } [\Delta_i \text{ snel}]]$          | cf. (2b) |

# ANALYSIS

I advance a parallel analysis for the Chilean Spanish pattern in (6b).

(6) a. ¡*Qué* *alto* eríh!  
what tall are.2SG  
'How tall you are!'

b. ¡*Que* eríh *alto*!  
that are.2SG tall  
'How tall you are!'

I propose that the syntactic representation corresponding to (6b) is not (31) but (32), where *que* is an exclamative complementizer binding a null degree variable  $\Delta$ .

(31) [CP *Que*<sub>i</sub> [C' C ... eríh [t<sub>i</sub> alto]

(32) [CP *Que*<sub>i</sub> ... eríh [ $\Delta$ <sub>i</sub> alto]

According to this, there is no structural relation between *que* and the element over which degrees are interpreted, e.g., the adjective *alto* 'tall' in (32).

- ➡ The pattern does not involve a syntactic (i.e., movement-based) split, but it is a *pseudo-split* construction.

## ANALYSIS

I contend that the distribution of the degree variable  $\Delta$  is identical to the distribution of (Chilean) Spanish degree quantifier *harto* 'quite'.

➡ That is,  $\Delta$  may function (i) as the head of DegP, (ii) as an adverb, or (iii) as a determiner, basically occupying the positions of *harto* 'quite'.

- (33) [DegP harto [AP contento]] → [CP Que<sub>i</sub> ... [DegP Δ<sub>i</sub> [AP contento]]  
quite happy that happy
- (34) [DegP harto [Adv bien]] → [CP Que<sub>i</sub> ... [DegP Δ<sub>i</sub> [AdvP bien]]  
quite well that well
- (35) [DP harta [NP arena]] → [CP Que<sub>i</sub> ... [DP Δ<sub>i</sub> [NP arena]]  
quite sand that sand
- (36) [VP trabajaste [AdvP harto]] → [CP Que<sub>i</sub> ... [VP trabajaste [AdvP Δ<sub>i</sub>]]  
worked.2SG quite that worked.2SG

# ANALYSIS

The underlying hypothesis here is that *harto* 'quite' and  $\Delta$  are very similar objects.

This is corroborated by the fact that *harto* can appear in the "split" exclamative construction seemingly replacing the variable  $\Delta$ .

- (37) a. ¡*Qué* estabai (harto) *contento* ayer!  
what are.2SG quite happy yesterday  
'How happy you were yesterday!'
- b. ¡*Qué* nada (harto) *bien* ese weón!  
what swims.3SG quite well that dude  
'How well that guy swims!'
- c. ¡*Qué* compraron (harta) *arena*!  
what bought.3PL quite sand  
'How much sand you bought!'
- d. ¡*Qué* *trabajaste* (harto)!  
what worked.2SG quite  
'How much you worked!'



# ANALYSIS

- ➡ The analysis accounts for the correlation between the use of *harto* 'quite' and the availability of the pseudo-split pattern.
  - In particular, a movement-based account cannot explain the “split” pattern with verbs.
- ➡ Since there is no movement, the construction is not sensitive to the same restrictions as wh-movement.
- ➡ The analysis captures in a very simple way the restriction that only *que/qué* (and not *cómo* 'how' or *cuánto* 'how much') may participate in the alternation: it is because *qué* and *que* are homophonous elements.
- ➡ The fact that the pseudo-split pattern cannot appear in embedded context should also stem from the properties of the exclamative complementizer *que*.
  - It arguably is an element that appears only in full CP projections; as is known, embedded context have been proposed to be structurally simpler (e.g., Haegeman 2012).
- ➡ The proposal explain why there is no doubly filled COMP with the pseudo-split pattern: because there is nothing in Spec,CP; *que* is in C<sup>0</sup>.

# IN THIS PRESENTATION...

- ✓ We discussed a case of variation in the expression of exclamatory sentences: exclamative *wh*-phrases may form a continuous constituent or may be “separated” into two parts.
- ✓ Chilean Spanish seemingly displays both types of pattern.
- ✓ We reviewed data showing that the “split” pattern in Chilean Spanish strongly correlates with the distribution of the degree quantifier *harto* ‘quite’, suggesting that both are related in some way.
- ✓ The “split” pattern exhibits distinctive properties when compared to standard exclamatory sentences in (General) Spanish: it is a root phenomenon and disallows doubly filled COMPs; moreover, they do not share the same grammatical contexts.
- ✓ The phenomenon seems to behave in the same lines as its Dutch counterpart, with a base-generated element in the left periphery binding a variable within the clause.

# REFERENCES I

- Bosque, Ignacio. 2017. Spanish exclamatives in perspective: A survey of properties, classes, and current theoretical issues. In Ignacio Bosque (ed.), *Advances in the analysis of Spanish exclamatives*, 1–52. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Broekhuis, Hans & Norbert Corver. 2020. Wh-exclamatives. In *Taalportaal*, <https://taalportaal.org/>.
- Corver, Norbert. 1990. *The syntax of left branch extraction*. Tilburg: University of Tilburg dissertation.
- Doetjes, Jenny S. 1997. *Quantifiers and selection: on the distribution of quantifying expressions in French, Dutch and English*. Leiden: Holland Academic Graphics.
- González Rodríguez, Raquel & Cristina Sánchez López. 2021. Variación en el sistema de cuantificadores: el caso de *harto*. *Revista de Filología Española* 101(2). 361–389. doi:10.3989/rfe.2021.012.
- Haegeman, Liliane. 2012. *Adverbial clauses, main clause phenomena, and the composition of the left periphery*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

# THANKS!

Thank you for your attention!