Pseudo-split wh-exclamatives in Chilean Spanish

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1 Introduction

As is known, wh-exclamatory sentences in Spanish involve movement of a wh-phrase to the left periphery. As can be seen, the phrase undergoing movement forms a continuous constituent.

(1)   a. Eres   *muy alto*.
          are.2SG very tall
          'You are very tall.'

       b. ¡*Qué alto^i* eres   t^i!
          how tall are.2SG
          'How tall you are!'

In some languages, however, there are constructions in which the wh-phrase seems to be "split" into two parts.

(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^i* is die auto [t^i *snel*]!   *cf.* (2b)

Bosque (2017: 21) discusses some Spanish constructions that exhibit similarities with the split pattern in (2b).

(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 a constituent 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 the Romance family.

➥ This suggests the absence in these languages of exclamatory sentences where the components of the wh-phrase are separated.

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

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

In what follows...

✔ I present novel data illustrating some properties of the pattern in (6b) and its general distribution.
✔ I show that the phenomenon is restricted to contexts in which the degree quantifier *harto* 'quite' may appear.
✔ 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 (2b) by Corver (1990) and Broekhuis & Corver (2020), I argue that *que* in (6b) is an exclamative complementizer binding a null degree variable associated to the adjective *alto* 'tall'.

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2 Distribution and properties of the construction

The distribution of the exclamatory construction in (6b) is 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'.

➥ As noticed by Doetjes, degree quantifiers do not impose severe categorial restrictions and can combine with different types of element.

(7)   FRENCH
       a. Les linguistes ont   *beaucoup* dansé la   salsa.
          the linguists   have a.lot   danced the salsa
          'The linguists danced salsa a lot.'

       b. *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.

➥ These authors 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.'

Both types of exclamatory sentences in (6) 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. ¡Qué es rápido   ese   auto!
         what 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!
          what 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!   b. ¡Que   vamos lento!
         what slow go.1PL   what go.1PL slow
         'How slow we go!'   'How slow we go!'

(13) a. *¡Qué   ahora vamos!   b. *¡Que   vamos ahora!
          what now   go.1PL   what go.1PL now
          'How now we go!'   'How now we go!'

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

(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.'

Unsurprisingly, both types of exclamatory sentences can be formed with *calor* 'heat'.

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

An asymmetry emerges, however, with *auto* 'car'. As can be seen in (16), the non-split exclamatory sentence triggers an evaluative reading rather than a degree interpretation.

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

Some (singular) count nouns may combine with degree expressions if they can be interpreted as mass nouns, e.g., (17). In these cases, the degree expression has a quantificational reading.

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

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!   b. ¡Que   compraste   fruta!
         what fruit bought.2SG   what bought.2SG fruit
         'What a fruit you bought!'   'How much fruit you bought!'

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. ¡Qué   autos manejai!   b. ¡Que   manejai   autos!
         what cars drive.2SG   what drive.2SG cars
         'What cars you drive!'   'How many cars you drive!'

Thus, a preliminary conclusion we can draw is that the distribution and interpretation of the split exclamatory construction is related to the degree quantifier *harto* 'quite'.

➡ This will become an important part of the analysis provided in the next section.

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

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

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

Doubly filled COMPs are not available for the "split" pattern in Chilean Spanish (24).

(23) ¡*Qué contento* (que) estai!
what happy that are.2SG
'How happy you are!'

(24) ¡*Que* (*que) estai *contento*!
what that are.2SG happy
'How happy you are!'

Standard exclamative wh-phrases may move to the matrix CP from embedded sentences (25). "Split" patterns are also grammatical in long distance configurations (26).

(25) ¡*Qué tristes* parece que vienen!
what sad seems that come.3PL
'How sad it seems they come!'

(26) ¡*Que* parece que vienen *tristes*!
what seems that come.3PL sad
'How sad it seems they come!'

The "split" pattern is restricted to matrix clauses: while a standard exclamative wh-phrase can appear in an embedded sentence (27), its parts cannot be separated in this context (28).

(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 what are tall
'It surprized me how tall you are!'

Finally, there are at least two scenarios in which the "split" pattern is legal while the standard exclamative wh-phrase is unavailable.

➥ Indefinite nominals containing an adjective do not allow forming exclamatory sentences with it, e.g., (29a); this restriction does not apply with the "split" construction, e.g., (29b).

(29) a. *¡*Qué bonito* manejai un auto!
what nice drive.2SG a car
'What a nice car you drive!'

b. ¡*Que* manejai un auto *bonito*!
what drive.2SG a car nice
'What a nice car you drive!'

➥ Just like *harto* 'quite' can modify verbs, e.g., (30), the "split" exclamative is acceptable with a degree interpretation over the verb, e.g., (31b).

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

(31) 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!
what have.2SG helped DOM your brother
'How much you helped your brother!'

3 Towards an analysis

The one mention I found about this phenomenon in the literature is in the *Diccionario pan-hispánico de Dudas* (DPD).[1]

➥ DPD distinguishes between (i) exclamatory sentences headed by the conjunction *que* in Chilean Spanish and (ii) analogous constructions headed by the exclamative *qué* (with an accent mark) in other dialects.

(32) a. ¡Qué me gustaría que vos conocieras a José!
what DAT.1SG would.like.1SG that NOM.2SG know.2SG DOM José
'How much I would like for you to get to know José!'   *Nicaragua*

b. ¡Qué me alegra que me digas que sí!
what DAT.1SG rejoices.3SG that DAT.1SG say.2SG that yes
'How happy it makes me that you say yes!'   *Spain*

c. ¡Qué me enterneces, estúpido!
what DAT.1SG move.2SG stupid
'How you move me, you fool!'   *Venezuela*

➥ The examples in (32) are all acceptable for Chilean Spanish speakers (except for the *voceo* forms and the accent mark on *qué*, which they systematically omit).

➥ The only reason presented in DPD for this distinction stems from the claim that the Chilean Spanish examples involve clauses selected by an interjection that may be dropped.

(33) ¡(Puta) que eres chistoso, flaco!
damn that are.2SG funny skinny
'Damn, how funny you are, dude!'

This diagnosis, however, does not really allow to distinguish between conjunctions and exclamatives, as the latter can also appear in clauses embedded by an interjection.

(34) ¡(Puta) qué chistoso (que) eríh, flaco!
whore what funny that are.2SG skinny
'Damn, how funny you are, dude!'

Thus, in order to offer an analysis of "split" exclamatory sentences in Chilean Spanish, <u>we need to establish whether these constructions are headed by a conjunction or an exclamative element</u>.

As you probably noticed already, I wrote *que* rather than *qué* when transcribing the examples.

➥ This is how Chileans write it.

➥ I argue that this element is an exclamative complementizer, i.e., a conjunction.

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[1] I am referring here to the entries *qué* (exclamative) and *que* (conjunction) in PDP (RAE-ASALE 2005).

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

➤ 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 (35a).

➤ Instead, they take *wat* 'what' to be a base-generated operator in the C domain that binds a degree variable $\triangle$ within the clause (35b).

(35) a. $[_{CP}$ Wat^i $[_{C'}$ C ... is die auto $[t^i$ snel]
    b. $[_{CP}$ Wat$_i$ ... is die auto $[\triangle_i$ snel]

This allows the authors to account for contrasts like (37): the ungrammaticality of the split *wat voor* 'what for' pattern in (37a) is in conformity with the fact that wh-movement from prepositional phrases is normally excluded in Dutch.

(36) a. [Wat voor een boeken]^i heb je t^i gekocht?
    what for a books have you bought
    'What kind of books have you bought?'

   b. Wat^i heb je [t^i voor een boeken] gekocht?
    what have you for a books bought
    'What kind of books have you bought?'

(37) a. * Wat^i schrijft hij $[_{PP}$ over t^i voor een onderwerpen]?
    what writes he about for a topics
    'About what kind of topics is he writing?'

   b. Wat$_i$ schrijft hij toch $[_{PP}$ over een $\triangle_i$ rare onderwerpen]!
    what writes he PRT about a strange topics
    'What strange topics he writes about!'

Accordingly, I propose that the syntactic representation corresponding to (6b) is not (38) but (39), where *que* is an exclamative complementizer binding a null degree variable $\triangle$.

(38) $[_{CP}$ Que^i $[_{C'}$ C ... es $[t^i$ rápido] ese auto

(39) $[_{CP}$ Que$_i$ ... es $[\triangle_i$ rápido] ese auto

According to this, there is no structural relation between *que* and the element over which degrees are interpreted, e.g., the adjective *rápido* 'fast' in (39).

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

I contend that the distribution of the degree variable $\triangle$ is identical to the distribution of (Chilean) Spanish *harto* 'quite', i.e., it combines with gradable adjectives, adverbs and verbs, and with plural and mass nouns.

➤ This amounts to say that $\triangle$ may function (i) as the head of DegP, (ii) as an adverb, or (iii) as a determiner, basically replacing *harto* 'quite' in each position.

(40) $[_{DegP}$ harto $[_{AP}$ contento]] $\rightarrow$ $[_{CP}$ Que$_i$ ... $[_{DegP}$ $\triangle_i$ $[_{AP}$ contento]]
    quite happy what happy

(41) $[_{DegP}$ harto $[_{Adv}$ bien]] $\rightarrow$ $[_{CP}$ Que$_i$ ... $[_{DegP}$ $\triangle_i$ $[_{AdvP}$ bien]]
    quite well what well

(42) $[_{DP}$ harta $[_{NP}$ arena]] $\rightarrow$ $[_{CP}$ Que$_i$ ... $[_{DP}$ $\triangle_i$ $[_{NP}$ arena]]
    quite sand what sand

(43) $[_{VP}$ trabajaste $[_{AdvP}$ harto]] $\rightarrow$ $[_{CP}$ Que$_i$ ... $[_{VP}$ trabajaste $[_{AdvP}$ $\triangle_i$]]
    worked.2SG quite what worked.2SG

The underlying hypothesis here is that *harto* 'quite' and $\triangle$ are very similar objects. This is corroborated by the fact that *harto* can appear in the "split" exclamative construction seemingly replacing the variable.

(44) 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!'

The analysis in (39) allows to account for contrasts in Chilean Spanish that are parallel to (37), which cannot be immediately captured in terms of wh-movement, i.e., (38).

(45) a. ¿[Cuán bonito]^i es tu auto t^i?
    how nice is.3SG your car
    'How nice is your car?'

   b. * ¿[Cuán bonito]^i manejai $[_{DP}$ un auto t^i]?.
    how nice drive.2SG a car
    'How nice is the car you drive?'

(46) a. * ¡*Qué bonito*^{i} manejai $[_{DP}$ un auto t^i]!
    what nice drive.2SG a car
    'What a nice car you drive!'

   b. ¡*Que*$_i$ manejai $[_{DP}$ un auto $[_{DegP}$ $\triangle_i$ *bonito*]]!
    what drive.2SG a car nice
    'What a nice car you drive!'

Moreover, this approach allows to capture examples in which the "split" exclamatory construction is based on a gradable verb, e.g., (31b) and (44d).

➤ Exclamatives do not combine with verbs, which makes a movement-based analysis untenable, i.e., there is no wh-phrase from which *que* could be extracted, e.g., (47).

(47) $[_{CP}$ Que^i $[_{TP}$ hai $[_{VP}$ t^i ayudado $[_{DP}$ a tu hermano]]]]

The proposed analysis captures in a very simple way the restriction that only *que* (and not *cómo* 'how' or *cuánto* 'how much') may participate of the pseudo-split construction, e.g., (21) and (22).

➥ Only the exclamative complementizer *que* can bind the degree variable.

➥ This suggests that *cómo* 'how' may function as an exclamative complementizer in other varieties, e.g., (4).

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).

Finally, the analysis explains why while doubly filled CP projections are acceptable in standard exclamatory sentences, e.g., (23), they are disallowed in the pseudo-split construction, e.g., (24).

(48) a. [$_{CP}$ qué^i [$_{C'}$ C$_{excl}$ ... t^i ...   *allows doubly filled COMPs*
      b. [$_{CP}$ [$_{C'}$ que$_i$ ... $\triangle_i$ ...   *precludes doubly filled COMPs*

4   Concluding remarks

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 be behave in the same lines as its Dutch counterpart, with a base-generated element in the left periphery binding a variable within the clause.

At a more general level, this study suggests that there are two dimensions in which pseudo-split wh-exclamatives may vary in Spanish.

i. They can differ on the form of the wh-word heading the sentence: it can be either *cómo* or *que*.

ii. They can differ on the type of expression the degree reading can relate to: in Chilean Spanish, pseudo-split wh-exclamatives apply to adjectives, adverbs, nouns and verbs; other languages are less "prolific" when using this sort of construction.

Consider the case of Rioplatense Spanish. In this dialect, the degree variable $\triangle$ seems to occupy adverbial positions only, as degree readings can only be related to verbs.

(49) ¡Cómo laburaste   ayer!
      how   worked.2SG yesterday

'How much you worked yesterday!'   *Rioplatense (Argentina)*

For Rioplatense speakers, the interpretation of degree over an adjective is odd with this construction. Thus, patterns like (50) are unacceptable in this dialect, just as the ones in (4).

(50) ¡Cómo son   duros esos   engranes!
      how   are.3PL tough those gears

'How tough those gears are!'   *Mexico*

As we saw, the Chilean data leads to the conjecture that *the parameters of variation at play here are the same ones ruling the distribution of specific degree quantifiers within the language*.

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