On the Status of Preverbal Subjects in Spanish:
Evidence for a Dedicated Subject Position*

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1. Introduction

The status of overt (preverbal) subjects in null-subject languages like Spanish has been a hotly debated topic for decades. One of the major questions posed by this line of research has been whether subjects in Spanish are located in Spec,TP, or whether they occupy a left-peripheral position in the CP domain. In this paper, I discuss the relevance of the novel evidence presented to the controversy regarding the analysis of preverbal subjects in Spanish, and go on to argue that Spanish preverbal subjects can in fact occupy either Spec,TP or a specifier in the C range.

The main evidence for this claim comes from Spanish que /ke/ ‘that’ + V Subjunctive sentences with desiderative/exhortative meaning. It is shown that only bona fide subjects can readily occur between que and the subjunctive verb, as illustrated by (1d), despite the relatively free word order exhibited by Spanish. The contrasts manifested by the examples in (1) strongly suggest that there exists a dedicated subject position in Spanish located between the complementizer (in Cº or, as will be shown later, in Finitenessº) and the verb (standardly assumed to move to Tº in Spanish). Following standard assumptions on clausal architecture, I conclude that this position is Spec,TP (or Spec,AgrSP), as shown schematically in (2).¹

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¹ The data reported in this paper are representative of present-day Iberian Spanish, although speakers of other varieties report identical judgments. Similarly, a preliminary study of other null-subject Romance varieties such as standard Italian reveals the same word order possibilities regarding the construction at issue, though this paper focuses exclusively on Spanish. It is beyond the scope of the paper to provide a dialectal study of word order or a historical account of que + V Subjunctive patterns (since speakers note that sentences like (1b) and (1c) sound somewhat archaic and literary).
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(1) a. ¡Que se vaya Ángela con su hermana a Toronto!
   ‘I demand that Angela go to Toronto with her sister’
   b. ¡Que con su hermana se vaya Ángela a Toronto!
   c. ¡Que a Toronto se vaya Ángela con su hermana!
   d. ¡Que Ángela se vaya con su hermana a Toronto!

(2) ... [C*/Finiteness 'que' [TP Subject, [T V Subjunctive] ... ]]

More specifically, I argue for the following claims:
(i) preverbal subjects in Spanish can be either in Spec,TP or in a CP-specifier;
(ii) genuine preverbal subjects and cases of Clitic-Left Dislocation (CLLD) do not exhibit the same distribution; and
(iii) Spec,TP/AgrSP can be projected in Spanish and can only host bona fide subjects.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of the literature on Spanish preverbal subjects, with an emphasis on the lack of consensus regarding their structural position; Section 3 presents the relevant evidence from desiderative/exhortative contexts and discusses the implications of the data for the placement of preverbal subjects; Section 4 is the conclusion.

2. **The much debated account of subjects in Spanish**

The analysis of subjects in paradigmatic null-subject languages like Spanish has commanded much attention in a body of research that spans several decades, and at present remains the object of painstaking inquiry. In addition to null, non-overt subjects (cf. (3a)), much controversy has centered on the account of (overt) preverbal (cf. (3b)) and postverbal (cf. (3c)) subjects.

(3) a. Llegó a las tres
   ‘He or she arrived at three’
   b. Pedro te ha llamado
   Peter cl. has callPART.
   ‘Peter has called you’
   c. Te ha llamado Pedro
   cl. has callPART. Peter
   ‘Peter has called you’

Focusing on preverbal subjects (cf. (3b)), two major proposals polarize the spectrum of analyses of such subjects in languages like Spanish: the classical IP/TP-EPP account and the CP account. The TP-EPP analysis assumes that overt preverbal subjects in

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2 Throughout, I use TP instead of IP or IP/TP for ease of exposition.
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Spanish occupy Spec,TP, in parallel fashion to subjects in English, as shown schematically in (4).

\[
(4) \quad \text{[TP Pedro [\text{T} te ha] [VP llamado]]} \quad \text{(cf. (3b))}
\]

This analysis was pioneered by Rizzi (1982) and adopted in the work of Torrego (1984), Belletti (1988), Motapanyane-Hill (1991), and Cardinaletti (1996), among many others. Recent proponents of this analysis include Goodall (2001), Suñer (2003), and Ortega-Santos (2005 et seq.). It should be noted that soon after the appearance of Pollock’s (1989) split-TP proposal, different preverbal subject positions were identified within the inflectional layer, including Spec,AgrSP and Spec,TP (see, mutatis mutandis, Cardinaletti 2004 and Zubizarreta 1999).

The CP account of preverbal subjects in Spanish, for its part, assumes that overt preverbal subjects are discourse-sensitive Á-constituents whose appearance and distribution is governed by discourse notions such as topic and focus. On this view, preverbal subjects are instances of topics or Clitic-Left Dislocation (CLLD) situated in a CP specifier (cf. (5)), more precisely in Spec,TopicP, assuming Rizzi’s (1997 et seq.) split-CP analysis.

\[
(5) \quad \text{[CP Pedro [C∅ [TP ... [\text{T} te ha] [VP llamado]]]]} \quad \text{(cf. (3b))}
\]

This analysis has been pursued by Contreras (1991), Otero (1993), Barbosa (1995, 2009), Dobrovie-Sorin (1994), Speas (1994), Olarrea (1996), Ordoñez (1997), Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (1998), Kato (1999), Ordoñez and Treviño (1999), Ticio (2004), and Holmberg (2005), among many others. This type of analysis often goes hand in hand with the claim that Spanish lacks the EPP, or alternatively that some parameterized version of the EPP is operative (e.g. in languages like Spanish, the EPP can be satisfied by head movement of the verb and its “rich” agreement morphemes to Tº, as argued by Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 1998). Under this account, lexical subjects in Spanish do not necessarily have to be in Spec,TP, since this position might not be projected, or ultimately it may be occupied by pro, in the spirit of Baker (1996). However, authors including Taraldsen (1992), Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (1998), Ordoñez and Treviño (1999), and Ticio (2004), among others, have tried to eliminate the empty category pro altogether by claiming that “rich” subject-verb agreement morphology licenses null subjects and receives Case. Moreover, Manzini and Savoia (2002) have put forward the suggestion that the verbal inflection is also capable of receiving a θ-role (see also Holmberg 2005 and Barbosa 2009, inter alia).

As a compromise between the TP and CP accounts, authors such as Uribe-Etxebarria (1991), Masullo (1992), Solà (1992), and Zubizarreta (1999), among others, have suggested that Spec,TP in languages like Spanish has Á-properties and can host Á-moved elements such as topics and wh-items (see Gallego 2007 for discussion).

Lastly, authors such as Casielles (2001), Camacho (2006), and López (2009) have argued that preverbal subjects in Spanish can but need not be in the CP domain. In other

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3 See Grinstead (1998 et seq.), Villa-García and Snyder (2010), and Villa-García et al. (2010) for acquisitional evidence in favor of the CP account.
words, preverbal subjects can occupy a CP specifier or a TP specifier, a view for which I present novel support.

Set against this background, this paper aims to explore the relevance of the data to be presented in the following section to the controversy surrounding the status of preverbal subjects summarized in the preceding paragraphs. As noted in the introduction, in what follows I provide evidence for the following claims: (i) Spanish preverbal subjects can be either in TP or in CP; (ii) Spanish preverbal subjects and cases of topics/CLLD do not exhibit the same distribution; and (iii) Spec,TP (or Spec,AgrSP) can in fact be projected in Spanish and can only host genuine subjects. The relevant evidence comes from the different distribution of subjects and bona fide cases of CLLD in the context of desiderative and exhortative constructions in Spanish.

3. The different behavior of subjects and CLLD-ed phrases in Spanish desiderative/exhortative que + V_S subjunctive sentences: implications for the analysis of preverbal subjects

Spanish exhibits a construction characterized by the obligatory presence of an overt complementizer and subjunctive morphology on the verb, illustrated in (6) (see also (1)). This pattern includes both exhortative/jussive (6a) and desiderative/optative (6b) sentences. By way of illustration, the speaker who utters (6a) is telling his/her interlocutor about an order or command that affects a third party. The speaker who utters (6b), on the other hand, does not need an interlocutor, since he or she is just expressing his/her desire that something happen to the person he or she is talking about (RAE 2009).

(6) a. ¡*(Que) se vaya! [Exhorative/jussive]
   ‘I demand that he or she go away’

b. ¡*(Que) sea muy feliz! [Desiderative/optative]
   ‘May he or she be happy’

Paoli (2003, 2006), Demonte and Fernández-Soriano (2009), and Villa-García (in press) argue that the mandatory complementizer in the que + subjunctive construction is the lexical realization of the subjunctive mood. Assuming Rizzi’s (1997) highly articulated structure of the left periphery (i.e. ForceP (TopicP) (FocusP) FinitenessP), the aforementioned authors argue that que in the construction exemplified in (1)/(6) heads the lowest projection in Rizzi’s split-CP system, namely FinitenessP, which Rizzi (1997)

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It is important to mention that this construction is not limited to third-person contexts, but can actually be used with all persons when interpreted as a desiderative/optative, as shown in (i).

(i) ¡Que me muera/te mueras/se muera/nos muramos/os muráis/se mueran!
   ‘I hope that I/you/he or she/we/you/they die(s)’

The reason why the examples provided throughout the paper all involve the third person is that the third person is compatible with non-pronominal subjects.
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claims is the locus of finiteness and mood features. An argument in favor of this analysis comes from the distribution of left-peripheral material in the construction at issue. Demonte and Fernández Soriano (2009) claim that if left-dislocated material occurs in preverbal position, it precedes mandatory que, although the reader should note that the authors do not provide data to this effect. Thus, the contrast in (7)/(8) strongly suggests that que heads a very low CP-related projection (i.e. FinitenessP), since left-peripheral constituents (italicized in the examples in (7) and (8)) have to precede it (see also Ledgeway 2005 and references therein for Italian).

(7) a. ¡De mi hija, que no hablen nunca más!
     ‘I demand that they not talk about my daughter ever again’
 b. ¡Si deciden dejarme, que les vaya bien!
     ‘I hope everything goes well for them if they decide to leave me’
 c. ¡El tenedor, que lo cojan!
     ‘I demand that they grab the fork’
 d. ¡Este fin de semana(,) a mi casa, que vengan todos!
     ‘I demand that they all come to my place this weekend’
 e. ¡A tu hermana, que la busquen!
     ‘I demand that they look for your sister’
 f. ¡Enfermo, que no vaya a trabajar!
     ‘I demand that he not go to work if he’s sick’

(8) a.?*¡Que de mi hija no hablen nunca más!
 b.?*¡Que si deciden dejarme les vaya bien!
 c.?*¡Que el tenedor lo cojan!
 d.?*¡Este fin de semana, que a mi casa vengan todos!

5 The reader should note that in the absence of left-peripheral material, ForceP and FinitenessP appear as a single, syncretic projection: CP or FFP (Rizzi 1997). See also Villa-García (forthcoming, in preparation) for discussion of the syntax of different homophonous complementizers that can occur in the left periphery of Iberian Spanish clauses.

6 The left-dislocated phrases in the examples in question are more natural if a brief pause occurs between the dislocate and que. This pause is represented orthographically by the comma that appears in the examples. It is important to bear in mind that, when uttered normally, all the desiderative/exhortative sentences in this paper end with falling intonation.

7 As the exemplification throughout the paper reveals, desiderative and exhortative que + subjunctive patterns behave in the same way in all the relevant respects.
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e.?*¡Que *a tu hermana la busquen!
that your sister cl. search

f.?*¡Que enfermo no vaya a trabajar!
that sick not go 3.SG-Subj. to work

On the assumption that CLLDed elements (viz. the italicized phrases in (7) and (8)) target Spec,TopicP, Demonte and Fernández-Soriano (2009) and Villa-García (in press) argue for the structure in (9) (see also Paoli 2003, 2006 and Ledgeway 2005 for the same analysis for different varieties of Italian). 8

(9) \[\text{[ForceP [For [TopicP CLLD [Top' [FinitenessP [Fin' que [TP ... [T' V Subjunctive ]]]]]]]]}

The account sketched in (9) correctly captures the observation that CLLDed material must precede *que ((7) vs. (8)) as well as the close connection between obligatory *que and the subjunctive mood. Similarly, it is important to note that, much like CLLDed phrases, focused constituents cannot appear after *que in the structure under consideration, as (10) shows. This is expected under (9) on the assumption that focused phrases target Spec,FocusP, given that *que is in a very low CP-related projection (i.e. FinitenessP). 9

(10) *¡Que SÓLO A TU MADRE inviten (, no a tu padre)!
that only your mother invite3.PL-Subj. not your father
‘I demand that they invite only your mother, not your father’

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8 The reader is referred to Villa-García (in press) for a number of additional arguments in favor of analyzing “jussive/optative” *que as the head of the low projection FinitenessP. For our current purposes, suffice it to note just one more argument, as follows: the sentences in (8) improve as long as the italicized dislocated material is followed by an additional instance of *que, as illustrated in (i):

(i) ¡Que si deciden dejarme, *que les vaya bien! (cf. (8b))
that if decide leave+cl. that cl. go3.PL-Subj. well
‘(I said that) I hope everything goes well for them if they decide to leave me’

This fact lends further support to the analysis currently pursued, since in multiple-homophonous-complementizer constructions such as (i), discussed at length in Villa-García (in press), the high complementizer is a report/quotative marker in the spirit of Etxepare (2010), and the low complementizer is precisely the mandatory lexicalization of Finiteness8. This state of affairs is predicted under our analysis (cf. (9)), since the dislocated material is sandwiched between complementizers in a medial CP-related projection (i.e. in TopicP), with the low complementizer in the lowest left-peripheral head, namely Finiteness8. Put differently, the low occurrence of *que in (i) is an instance of the complementizer with which this paper is concerned. Therefore, it is natural to assume that sentences like (i) receive the following (simplified) analysis: […] *que [TopicP si deciden dejarme [Top' … [Fin' que … ]]]. Therefore, sentences like (i) further corroborate the correctness of the analysis in (9).

9 Foci cannot occur to the left of the low complementizer *que, since medial and low complementizers in Spanish display island-creating properties (Villa-García forthcoming, in preparation), and thus only elements that can be base-generated in pre-que position can occur in this construction. Consequently, only dislocated phrases, which can be derived either by base-generation or by movement (Villa-García, in preparation, inter alia) can appear to the left of low complementizers. It follows that constituents such as foci and wh-items, which are standardly assumed to be derived by movement, cannot precede the complementizers at issue (see Villa-García forthcoming, in preparation, for evidence and an account of the phenomenon).
At this point, a natural question to pose is where preverbal subjects can occur in the construction under consideration. In glaring contrast to unambiguous cases of CLLD (cf. (8)), subjects can appear in the position sandwiched between que and the subjunctive verb in the configuration in question, as shown by the examples in (11).

(11) a. ¡Que Antonio no lo vea!  
that Anthony not cl. see3.SG-Subj.  
‘I demand that Anthony not see it’  
(Demonte and Fernández-Soriano 2009:39)

b. A ese alumno, que los profesores no lo dejen salir hasta las 6  
that student that the teachers not cl. let3.PL-Subj. leave until the 6  
‘I demand that the teachers not allow that student to leave until six’  
(Demonte and Fernández-Soriano 2009:39)

c. ¡Que los que maten se mueran de miedo!  
that the that kill cl. die3.PL-Subj. of fear  
‘I hope those who kill will die of fear’  
(Noches de Boda, Spanish song by Joaquín Sabina, 1990)

d. ¡Que la niña del segundo se calle de una vez!  
that the girl of+the second cl. shut-up3.SG-Subj. of one time  
‘I demand (or hope) that the girl living on the second floor stop(s) talking once and for all’

Furthermore, subjects can precede que, in analogous fashion to CLLDed phrases (cf. (7)), as illustrated in (12), which confirms the by-now standard claim that subjects in Spanish can be left-dislocated in the CP layer (López 2009).

(12) ¡Antonio, que no lo vea!  
Anthony that not cl. see3.SG-Subj.  
‘I demand that Anthony not see it’

The contrast between (11) and (8) brings to light an important difference between preverbal subjects and uncontroversially left-dislocated/CLLDed constituents: whereas preverbal subjects can be either higher (cf. (12)) or lower (cf. (11)) than compulsory que in que + VSubjunctive desiderative/exhortative constructions, non-subject dislocated phrases can readily occur above que (cf. (7)), but not below que (cf. (8)), in the construction at hand. The different distributional possibilities of the relevant constituents in the construction at issue are summarized in simplified form in the bracketed structure in (13):

(13) ... [TopicP ∨DISLOCATE-CLLD/DISLOCATED SUBJECT [TopP [FinP que [TP ‘SUBJECT XP/(?)*NON-SUBJECT XP [T VSubjunctive ∨DISLOCATED SUBJECT [TopP [FinP que [TP ‘SUBJECT XP/(?)*NON-SUBJECT XP [T VSubjunctive ∨DISLOCATED SUBJECT [TopP [FinP que [TP ‘SUBJECT XP/(?)*NON-SUBJECT XP [T VSubjunctive ∨DISLOCATED SUBJECT [TopP [FinP que [TP ‘SUBJECT XP/(?)*NON-SUBJECT XP [T VSubjunctive ∨DISLOCATED SUBJECT [TopP [FinP que [TP ‘SUBJECT XP/(?)*NON-SUBJECT XP [T VSubjunctive ... ]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]

This state of affairs points to a crucial distributional asymmetry between preverbal subjects and CLLD in Spanish, which refutes the influential claim that preverbal subjects are always CLLDed constituents in the CP layer.\(^{10}\)

\(^{10}\) Demonte and Fernández-Soriano (2009) do not note the contrast between subjects and non-subjects. They present the relevant examples regarding subjects (i.e. subjects can appear in between the
Likewise, the data above provide evidence that there exists a dedicated preverbal syntactic position in Spanish which can only be occupied by genuine subjects to the exclusion of non-subject preverbal XPs (see D’Alessandro and Ledgeway 2010 for evidence to this effect from the Italian dialect of Abruzzese). Given the analysis in (9) and the standard assumption that Spanish displays V-to-T movement, the position occupied by the subject (and only by the subject) in (11) must be located within the inflectional layer (i.e. the subject must be in a position along the lines of Spec,TP/AgrSP), which strongly suggests that Spec,TP can indeed be projected in Spanish, contrary to what is often assumed in the literature (cf. (14)).

(14) $\ldots [\text{FinitenessP} [\text{Fin'} que [\text{TP la niña del segundo } [\text{T'} se calle} \ldots ]]]$ (cf. (11d))

More abstractly, the evidence adduced in this paper leads to the conclusion that there is a specialized subject position between the CP layer and the verb in Tº, namely Spec,TP, as shown in arboreal form in (15).

(15) $\ldots \text{C'/*Finiteness'}$

$$\quad \text{que} \rightarrow \text{TP}$$

$$\quad \text{T'}$$

$$\quad \text{V}_{\text{Subjunctive}} \rightarrow \ldots$$

Additionally, the contrast between (11) and (8) indicates that Spec,TP in Spanish is unable to host phrases other than subjects, which weakens the claim put forward by proponents of the Spec,TP-as-an-Ā-position account that Spec,TP can host Ā-moved elements such as topics.

This conclusion is reinforced by Locative Inversion facts in Spanish. Authors including Torrego (1989), Zubizarreta (1998), and Ortega-Santos (2005) have argued that Spec,TP in Spanish can be occupied by non-subject phrases such as locatives, depending on discourse structure, as (16) shows.

(16) $\text{Aquí ponemos unas mesas de bienvenida}$

here put$_{1,\text{PL}}$ some tables of welcome

‘We place some conference registration tables here’

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11 The standard diagnostic test for verb movement indicates that the verb moves to the inflectional domain in the que + V$_{\text{Subjunctive}}$ patterns under consideration, as shown in (i) (see Emonds 1978 and Pollock 1989, inter alia).

(i) ¡Que los hijos de Juan se coman rápido la manzana! that the children of John cl. eat$_{3,\text{PL-Subj}}$ fast the apple

‘I demand that John’s children eat the apple fast’

12 I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this issue to my attention and for providing the sentences (and the judgments) in (16) and (17).
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As illustrated in (17c), whereas the locative adverb aquí ‘here’ can appear in different positions in the sentence, it cannot occur between que and the subjunctive verb in exhortative constructions headed by que.

(17) a. ¡Que pongan unas mesas de bienvenida aquí!
   that put3.PL-Subj. some tables of welcome here
b. ¡Que pongan aquí unas mesas de bienvenida!
c. *¡Que aquí pongan unas mesas de bienvenida!
d. ¡Aquí, que pongan unas mesas de bienvenida!
   All: ‘I demand that they place some conference registration tables here’

The data in (17) suggest that Locative Inversion in Spanish does not target Spec,TP, since it is not possible to place the locative in the position sandwiched between que and the subjunctive verb (cf. (17c)). If locatives were subjects in Spec,TP, they should display the same distributional properties as subjects (cf. (11)), contrary to fact.13

4. Conclusion

Based on the different distribution of bona fide subjects and uncontroversially left-dislocated/CLLDed phrases in the context of que + V_Subjunctive patterns with desiderative/exhortative meaning, I have shown that whereas subjects in Spanish can occur either higher or lower than que, CLLDed phrases can precede que, but they cannot appear between que and the subjunctive verb. This state of affairs strongly suggests that Spec,TP is available in Spanish and can only host genuine subjects. More generally, in this paper I have provided evidence that preverbal subjects in Spanish can be in Spec,TP or in a CP-specifier, genuine preverbal subjects and cases of CLLD do not exhibit the same distribution, and Spec,TP/AgrSP can be projected in Spanish and can only host bona fide subjects, which contrasts with the often-made claim that overt preverbal subjects in prototypical null-subject languages like Spanish are not situated in Spec,TP.

Overall, this paper contributes to the longstanding debate over the analysis of preverbal subjects in null-subject languages like Spanish, since it provides novel support for the claim that preverbal subjects in Spanish can (but need not) be left dislocated: preverbal subjects can occupy a CP specifier, but crucially they can also occupy the canonical subject position – Spec,TP.

13 The reader is referred to Kempchinsky (2002) for the claim that locatives in Spanish are not in Spec,TP; the position occupied by locatives in English is also controversial (see, e.g., Williams 2006). The reader should note that some of my consultants disallow any phrase between que and the verb, but accept sentences where an adverbial intervenes between que and the verb. At this point, we have two options for the grammars of such speakers: either the adverbials are adjoined to TP or, in the case of locative adverbials (cf. (17c)), the locatives behave as subjects hosted in Spec,TP for these speakers. It is important to note that even if it turns out that the right analysis of locatives in Locative Inversion is that they are located in Spec,TP, nothing changes regarding the main hypothesis advanced in this paper that Spec,TP is a dedicated subject position, since, as shown by Ortega-Santos (2005), among others, the locative behaves like a subject in certain relevant respects.
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