

ON INDIRECT QUESTIONS, COMMANDS, AND SPANISH QUOTATIVE QUE

Maria-Luisa Rivero
University of Ottawa

The que ‘that’ preceding the embedded interrogative word in the Spanish example (1) has attracted much attention in the recent literature, and will also be the topic of this squib.

(1) Dijo que qué querian.
said + 3s that what wanted + 3p
‘He inquired what they wanted.’

However, it has gone unnoticed that this que is used with a class of imperative complements, not just with wh-complements. This use, I argue, has consequences for views on Spanish questions and selection versus subcategorization. I first review earlier proposals on the function of que and later turn to new data on imperatives and the implications for those proposals.

Traditional grammars mention que before interrogatives only with preguntar ‘ask’ and with decir ‘say, inquire’ used interrogatively, as in (1). Rivero (1980:381–382), however, notes that que occurs generally with interrogative complements of speech act Vs, such as murmurar ‘murmur’ in (2).

(2) Murmuró que con quién podía ir.
murmured + 3s that with whom could + 3s go
‘He asked with a murmur who he could go with.’

Plann (1982) argues that que precedes the interrogative if, as Lahiri (1991:77) states, ‘the structure obtained by substituting the direct question correlate for the embedded interrogative is well-formed.’ Thus, (1) and (2) are possible because they contain Vs that can be followed by a direct discourse, as (3) illustrates.

(3) a. Dijo: ‘Qué quieren?’
said + 3s what want + 3s
‘He said, ‘What do they want?’’

b. Murmuró: ‘Con quién puedo ir?’
murmured + 3s with whom could + 1s go
‘He murmured, ‘Who could I go with?’’

Research for this squib has been partially subsidized by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (grant 410-91-0178) and the European Science Foundation (Eurotyp project). With the usual disclaimers, I thank two reviewers for helpful comments, and I. Bosque for earlier remarks on commands.
By contrast, Vs that take indirect questions, such as saber ‘know’ in (4a), but are not used in direct discourse, (4b), disallow que before the interrogative, as (4c) shows.

(4) a. Sabía con quién podía ir.
   knew + 3s with whom could + 3s go
   ‘He knew who he could go with.’
   b. *Sabía: ‘Con quién puedo ir?’
   *He knew, ‘Who could I go with?’
   c. *Sabía que con quién podía ir.

Plann assigns a recursive CP-structure equivalent to (5) to que + wh-phrase complements.

(5) Murmuro [CP₂ que [CP₁ con quién [IP podía ir ti]].

Suñer (1992, 1993) offers a different solution. She argues that que + wh-phrase complements are genuine questions: that is, questions selected by a wonder-type predicate, in the sense of Groenendijk and Stokhof (1989). By contrast, wh-phrase complements are answers or semiqes: that is, propositions selected by a know-type predicate. On this view, que converts the denotation of a proposition to the denotation of a question, and this requires a [+wh] syntactic feature independent of semantic type. To exemplify, for Suñer (1993:63–65), decir ‘say’ takes propositions, semiques, and questions as complements, because this V subcategorizes for a syntactic [wh] and selects for a semantic [QU], as shown in (6).

(6) a. Dijo que iban.
   said + 3s that went + 3p
   Proposition = [−wh, −QU]
   ‘He said that they were going.’
   b. Dijo cuándo iban.
   said + 3s when went + 3p
   Semique = [+wh, −QU]
   ‘He said when they were going.’
   c. Dijo que cuándo iban.
   said + 3s that when went + 3p
   Question = [+wh, +QU]
   ‘He inquired when they were going.’

On theoretical and empirical grounds, Lahiri (1991:75–97) proposes a return to the earlier approach to que + wh-complements. His objections to Suñer’s views are as follows. First, on this account semantic selection must be supplemented by subcategorization, which is undesirable. Second, investigar ‘investigate’ semantically belongs to the wonder-type: it takes a question, as in (7a), but not a proposition, as in (7b). However, as (7c) shows, this V disallows que + wh-complements, which is unexpected under Suñer’s analysis. By contrast, investigar is not a speech act V used in direct discourse, as (7d) shows.
As a result, Plann’s generalization predicts the deviance of que + wh-complements with this V.

(7) a. Investigaron {si, cómo} se puede curar el SIDA.
   ‘They investigated {whether, how} AIDS can be cured.’

b. *Investigaron que se puede curar el SIDA.
   ‘They investigated that AIDS can be cured.’

c. *Investigaron que cómo se puede investigated + 3p that how refl can
cure the AIDS

d. *Investigaron: Cómo se puede curar el SIDA?
   ‘They investigated, ‘How can AIDS be cured?’’

In his argument, Lahiri mentions just investigar. Other Vs with similar properties include examinar ‘examine’, inspeccionar ‘inspect’, sopesar ‘consider the pros and cons’, and those meaning ‘explore’ such as explorar, sondear, and tantear. Third, with speech act Vs wh-exclamatives and not just questions are preceded by que. This is illustrated in (8), which contains a que + Adjective sequence that cannot be used interrogatively.

(8) Dijo que qué bonito era Madrid.
   said + 3s that how pretty was Madrid
   ‘He said how pretty Madrid was.’

Lahiri does not discuss the semantic type of exclamatives. On intuitive grounds, however, they resemble answers or propositions, as in He said that Madrid was very pretty, and not questions. In my view, this similarity may pose an additional problem for Suñer’s account. If the complement in (8) combines the [+wh] feature of que and the [−QU] semantic type, as intuition suggests, then que does not convert a proposition into a question and must have another function. For Lahiri, que is a quotative marker and indicates a report, or the object of a speech act, as opposed to a question or a proposition. From this perspective, the complements in (1), (2), and (6c) are semantic reports and not questions, and (8) is also a report. Lahiri’s proposal obviates the need for syntactic subcategorization. In addition, I will now argue that it can accommodate the use of quotative que with certain commands that have gone unnoticed in the existing literature.

Spanish sequences formed by the prepositions a ‘to’ and sin ‘without’ and a V in the infinitive are used as direct commands, as in (9).

(9) a. A correr!
   to run + INF
   ‘Let’s run!’ ‘Run!’
b. Sin empasar!
   without push +INF
   ‘Let’s not push!’; ‘Do not push!’

Since infinitives lack person and number, the sentences in (9) serve for all persons associated with commands, as the English glosses indicate. Infinitives not preceded by prepositions can also be used as commands, as in (10).

(10) Correr!
    ‘Run!’

However, the P + infinitive sequences in (9) and the bare infinitive in (10) used as a command differ. First, as traditional grammars state, bare infinitives used as commands are vernacular and may be absent in some registers. However, the P + infinitive commands are standard. Second, and more important, the P + infinitive sequences in (9) are intrinsic commands. By contrast, interpreting the bare infinitive in (10) as a command depends not only on intonation, but also on context. On the one hand, Vivir en Madrid! with a bare infinitive is more likely to be interpreted as expressing a wish than a command, as in ‘To live in Madrid!’. On the other hand, A vivir en Madrid! with P + infinitive must be interpreted as a command and means ‘Let’s live in Madrid!’ or ‘Live in Madrid!’. When a P + infinitive sentence receives a question intonation, it becomes a command over which the speaker expresses doubt or surprise, as in What do you mean? Are you telling me to live in Madrid?: in this sense, this sentence could be considered an ‘echo’ command, resembling the more familiar ‘echo’ questions.

P + infinitive sequences have the intrinsic force of a command. With regard to syntax, however, they share the formal properties of infinitival clauses discussed in more detail in Rivero 1993. First, in the P + infinitive command, V can be negated, whereas in the command with V inflected with imperative morphology, negation is excluded. This is because a V with imperative morphology must reach C to be licensed and cannot cross the Neg that stands in the raising path. By contrast, a V with infinitive morphology remains lower than Neg in the syntactic tree. Second, in P + infinitive commands, V precedes clitic pronouns, which is never the case when V has finite morphology. This is because infinitive Vs raise beyond the clitics in I (Kayne 1991), whereas Vs with finite morphology remain in I. In view of this, I propose that the structure of the P + infinitive command in (11a) is (11b), irrelevant details omitted.

(11) a. A no molestar-le!
   P not bother +INF-him
   ‘Do not bother him!’

b. [CP a [NegP no [IP molestar-le]]]
The aspect of (11b) that is important for the purposes of this squib is that P occupies the CP level and is the constituent indicating force (I. Bosque suggests to me that P is in Spec CP). From this perspective, the sentences in (9) and (11) are direct commands in the same sense that (12a) is a direct question. That is, P encodes illocutionary force in infinitival commands just as the wh-word moved to the CP level does in infinitival questions.

(12) a. Por qué no molestar-le?
   why not bother + inf-him
   ‘Why not bother him?’

   b. [CP por qué; [NegP no [IP molestar-le t]]]

Direct P + infinitive commands share a second property with questions. (13a) illustrates the embedding of a question under a speech act V. (13b) and (14a) illustrate the same situation with commands.¹

(13) a. Dijo que por qué no molestarle.
   ‘He said, “Why not bother him?”’

   b. Dijo que a no molestar-le.
   said +3s that P not bother + inf-him
   ‘He said not to bother him.’

   c. Dijo: ‘A no molestarme!’
   ‘He said, “Do not bother me!”’

(14) a. Murmuró que sin empujar.
   murmured +3s that without push + inf
   ‘He said with a murmur not to push.’

   b. Murmuró: ‘Sin empajar!’
   ‘He murmured, “Do not push!”’

Like que + wh-complements, que + P + infinitive complements can be analyzed as containing a recursive CP, as in (15) for (14a), which should be compared with (5).

(15) Murmuró [CP que [CP sin [IP empajar]]].

Plann’s and Lahiri’s proposals easily extend to the patterns in (13b) and (14a). That is, que + P + infinitive complements are reports in that the structure obtained by substituting the direct command for the embedded command is well formed. However, Suñer’s views on que cannot cover this case, because commands are neither questions nor answers. In other words, it is not the case that que in (13b) and (14a) is an indication that what follows is to be interpreted as a question rather than an

¹ Verbs with imperative morphology cannot be embedded (see Rivero 1993 for discussion). Embedded commands are infinitives, as in the text, or subjunctives, as in Dijo que fueran ‘He ordered them to go’, a frame to be added to those for decir in (6).
answer. Instead, *que* shows that what follows is the object of a speech act, or a so-called semantic report.2

Direct commands are excluded as complements of Vs that are not used in direct discourse and thus do not select reports. This is true of *saber* ‘know’, which selects questions, as already shown in (4), and propositions, as in (16a). This V does not belong to the speech act class, as shown in (4b) for a question, and (16b) for a command. Therefore, it disallows quotative *que*, as in (4c) for a question, and (16c) for a command.

(16) a. Sabía que corría.
    knew + 3s that run + 3s
    ‘He knew that he was running.’

b. *Sabía: ‘A correr!’
    knew + 3s P run + INF

c. *Sabía que a correr.
    knew + 3s that P run + INF

2 A reviewer mentions that Suñer offers arguments based on co-
ordination that could undermine Lahiri’s position. Following Groenen-
dijk and Stokhof (1989), Suñer suggests that the conjoining of *wh* and
*that*-complements is proof of their syntactic and semantic homogeneity,
as in (i).

(i) María dijo [que estaba enfadada] y [a quiénes no quería in-
vitar].
    ‘Mary said [that she was angry] and [who she did not want to
    invite].’

I do not find this argument persuasive. To my ear, *that*-complements
can also be conjoined with reports of exclamations, as in (iia), com-
mands, as in (iib), and questions, as in (iic). By the logic of the approach,
this would make all complements homogeneous.

(ii) a. María dijo [que estaba cansada] y [que qué difícil era su
trabajo].
    ‘Mary said [that she was tired] and [how difficult her work
    was].’

b. María dijo [que estaba cansada] y [que a callarnos].
    ‘Mary said [that she was tired] and [ordered us to shut
    up].’

c. María dijo [que estaba cansada] y [que cuándo se iban los
    invitados].
    ‘Mary said [that she was tired] and [asked when the guests
    were leaving].’

Suñer finds coordinations like (iic) semantically odd. The conditions
making them appropriate need study, but I find (iic) felicitous to report
the following discourse of an exasperated Mary: ‘Boy, am I tired! When
are these people leaving?’ A problem may be to distinguish whether
the first conjunct in (i)–(ii) counts as an indirect assertion, or a report
of an assertion, if the dichotomy proves pertinent. Structures with two
adjacent *que*’s are ungrammatical, so the distinction cannot be estab-
lished on syntactic grounds: *María dijo que que estaba cansada*. This
problem extends to indirect commands versus reports of commands with
*que*-subjunctive complements, as in footnote 1. That is, *María dijo que
nos calláramos* ‘Mary ordered us to shut up’ also lacks a grammatical
counterpart with two *que*’s.
Creer ‘believe’ selects propositions and not questions. As a verb of control, it takes infinitival complements, as in (17b). Because this V is not of the speech act class, as (17c) shows, it too disallows infinitival commands as complements, as in (17d).3

(17) a. Creía que corría.
   believed + 3s that run + 3s
   ‘He believed that he was running.’
 b. Creía correr.
   believed + 3s run + INF
   ‘He believed that he was running.’
 c. *Creía: ‘A correr!’
   ‘He believed, “Run!”’
 d. *Creía que a correr.

In conclusion, I have shown how P + infinitive commands imply a wider range of uses for the Spanish marker que than previously discussed. I have also argued that the properties of these commands provide additional motivation for the view that semantic selection for questions, propositions, and reports accounts for Spanish complements involving quotative que, without appeal to syntactic subcategorization.

References


---

3 A reviewer mentions that my argument would be further strengthened by the existence of a V that functions as a counterpart of investigar: it takes embedded command complements but, because it is not a speech act verb, it disallows the extra que. This could be pedir ‘request’, perhaps the only V of command inappropriate for direct discourse. As shown in (ia) and (ib), pedir takes embedded subjunctive and infinitive commands. To my ear, this V sounds odd in direct discourse, as in (ic), whether with imperatives or with P + infinitive. The same status holds with quotative que, as in (id), which I already mentioned in Rivero 1993, without drawing the appropriate conclusion. By contrast, I find ordenar ‘order’ grammatical in all four contexts, which means that it is a speech act V.

(i) a. Pidió a los niños que le escucharan.
   requested + 3s of the children to-him listen + 3p
   ‘He requested of the children that they listen to him.’
 b. Pidió a los niños escucharle.
   (same as (ia))
 c. ??Pidió a los niños:
   requested of the children
   ‘Escuchad-me!’ / “A escuchar-me!”
   listen + IMP-to + me/P listen + INF-to + me
 d. ??Pidió que a escuchar-le.
   requested that P listen + INF-to + him