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# An interactional account of discourse-connective *que*-constructions in Spanish

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**Abstract:** This paper offers an interactional analysis of discourse-connective *que*-constructions in Spanish. In particular, we discuss how these constructions operate at discourse level and we analyze the kind of interactional activities conversation participants are engaged in while using them. In previous studies, initial *que* has been described along the following lines: as an expletive element, as a marker of background information, as a modal particle, as signaling the presence of the speaker, and as part of a quotative construction. Nevertheless, analyses of free-standing *que*-constructions are usually based on subjective data from introspection and tend to focus only on the clause introduced by *que*, regardless of its discourse context. Our hypothesis is that the meaning of discourse-connective *que*-constructions is primarily indexical: they refer to a relevant piece of contextual information that can be retrieved from a previous utterance or turn, a previous discourse situation, a proposition being observed or one that is inferable from the speech situation. This paper helps define the discourse contexts where *que*-constructions are used more precisely, while also providing a description of the situated meanings *que*-constructions express in particular types of context.

**Keywords:** insubordination, interactional linguistics, conversation analysis, discourse structure, dependency, complement clauses

## 1 Introduction

In this paper we analyze the interactional functions of discourse-connective *que*-constructions in Spanish, i.e. constructions introduced by the complementizer *que* without an accompanying matrix clause, that connect the clause with precedent discourse (Gras 2011, Gras 2013, and Gras forthcoming), as in (1) and (2).

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- (1) [Two friends talking about their weight]  
 J02: *he engordado*  
*es que yo me siento más gorda es que es verdad*  
 J01: [*que yo no te veo más gorda*  
*yo te veo perfecta tía como antes*]  
 J02: [*no he engordado*]  
 J02: I've put on weight  
 it's like I feel fatter it's true  
 J01: [[[QUE] you don't look fatter to me  
 you look perfect to me pal like before]  
 J02: [no I've put on weight]  
 (Mabpe2-01b)
- (2) [An adolescent wants to convince a friend that the baby she is taking care of is her son]  
 J01: *el padre quién es/ mentirosilla*  
 J02: *no se llama Andrés (..) que no se llama Andrés su padre*  
*que te lo juro joder tía por qué/ te voy a mentir a ver*  
 J01: who is the father/ you liar  
 J02: his name is not Andrés (..) [QUE] his name is not Andrés  
[QUE] I swear it damn girl why/ I'm gonna lie to you  
 (Mabpe2-11a)

From a cross-linguistic perspective, similar constructions have been treated as instances of *insubordination*, i.e. the independent use of formally subordinate clauses which throughout time get reanalyzed as main clause structures (Evans 2007), or of *extension of dependency* from sentence to discourse domain (Mithun 2008) or of *dependency shift* (Verstraete and D'Hertefelt 2013). Those papers indicate that one of the functions of *free-standing subordinate constructions*<sup>1</sup> is to establish dependency relations across stretches of talk (cf. Evans 2007; Mithun 2008; Verstraete et al. 2012; Verstraete and D'Hertefelt 2013). Although this general characterization allows us to posit a broad generalization across typologically unrelated languages, it also leaves some questions unsolved. On the one hand, since these constructions operate at discourse level, an adequate account of their contextual restrictions must be stated in terms of the positions

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<sup>1</sup> Not all these authors agree with the insubordinate status of the constructions they study (see note 6 for details). We use *free-standing subordinate clauses* as a theoretically neutral term to refer to clauses that bear some sort of subordination formal marking while not being embedded to a main clause.

they can occupy within discourse, mainly in conversational interaction. On the other hand, from a semantic-pragmatic point of view, these free-standing uses of subordinate clauses call for a detailed characterization of the meaning which the subordinator contributes to the clause it introduces.

Building on previous research in Interactional Linguistics, the aim of this paper is to analyze the discourse position and the interactional functions of discourse-connective *que*-constructions and, thus, to contribute to the general understanding of free-standing subordinate clauses with discourse-organizing functions.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews previous studies of free-standing *que*-constructions in Spanish and their equivalents in other languages. Section 3 describes the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the present study. Sections 4 and 5 discuss the results of the interactional analysis of discourse-connective *que*-constructions in initial and non-initial turn positions. Finally, Section 6 presents our conclusions.

## 2 Previous studies

### 2.1 Spanish free-standing *que*-constructions

Free-standing *que*-constructions take an unstressed initial *que* followed by a finite clause with a verb form marked for either indicative (3a) or subjunctive mood (3b).

- (3) a. Que        vien-e  
       COMP     come-PRS.IND.3SG  
       ‘S/he’s coming!’  
    b. Que        veng-a  
       COMP     come-PRS.SBJV.3SG  
       ‘May s/he come’ ‘S/he should come’

Clauses with subjunctive verb forms like (3b) have generally been attributed a deontic modal interpretation, ranging from obligation to desire (e.g. Butt and Benjamin 2000: 458; Sansiñena et al. in press-b). There is less agreement, though, on the interpretations attributed to free-standing *que*-constructions with indicative mood, such as (3a). Unstressed initial *que* has been analyzed in different ways, for example as an expletive element (Alarcos 1997), as a marker of background information (Porroche 2000), as a modal particle (Pons

2003), as signaling the presence of the speaker (Rodríguez Ramalle 2008), and as part of a quotative construction (Etxepare 2010). In most of these accounts, free-standing *que*-constructions are studied on the basis of introspection, with no further attention being paid to their specific discourse contexts (cf. Pons 2003; Rodríguez Ramalle 2008). However, we will argue that understanding the semantic-pragmatic function of free-standing *que*-constructions crucially depends on the analysis of the discourse contexts they appear in.

Our analysis adopts a constructional approach (Fillmore 1988; Goldberg 1995) that recognizes the existence of two different *que*-constructions: a modal construction and a discourse-connective construction (Gras 2011, Gras 2013, and Gras forthcoming).<sup>2</sup> The modal construction, illustrated in (4) below, always selects a subjunctive verb form and expresses an imperative-optative meaning: the speaker positions themselves towards the realization of the propositional content.

- (4) [Two friends talking about a third one]  
 G01: *está gilipollas tía que le den por el culo*  
 G01: she's acting like an asshole dude [QUE] damn her  
 (Mabpe2-01c)

In the discourse-connective construction, exemplified in (5), the *que*-clause is followed by an indicative verb form,<sup>3</sup> and it encodes a dependency relation between the free-standing *que*-clause and a previous utterance within the same turn, a previous turn, or some contextual information expressed non-linguistically. In (5) the *que*-construction is contextually dependent on a previous turn of the same speaker and is used for reiteration or self-repetition.

- (5) [A group of friends at a gathering]  
 G01: *lo hemos visto nosotros también*  
 J01: *eh/*  
 G01: *que lo hemos visto nosotros también*  
 G01: we have also seen it  
 J01: what/  
 G01: [QUE] we have also seen it  
 (Mabpe2-11c)

<sup>2</sup> See Gras (forthcoming) for formal and functional evidence on two types of *que*-constructions.

<sup>3</sup> We are not considering quotative constructions, like (i) that can take a verb on indicative or subjunctive according to the reproduced modality (see Gras forthcoming for more details). These cases fall outside the scope of the paper.

(i) Tu madre, que la llames  
 Your mother, [QUE] you should call her

## 2.2 Free-standing subordinate clauses with a discourse-organizing function

The main clause use of formally subordinate clauses has also been attested in languages other than Spanish. Koch and Oesterreicher (1990) point out that Romance languages share a polyvalent *que* that marks different types of syntactic relations within and beyond the sentence, and syntactic dependency markers display similar functions in unrelated languages.<sup>4</sup> The most complete analysis of this phenomenon is the insubordination account (Evans 2007), which provides a cross-linguistic functional typology of insubordinate constructions. According to Evans (2007: 368), insubordination realizes three macro-functions: (i) indirection and interpersonal control, including commands, permissives, threats and warnings; (ii) modal qualifications, including deontic, epistemic and evidential modality, but also exclamation and interrogation; and (iii) signaling of high levels of presupposed material in the insubordinated proposition.

In Evans' definition, 'presupposition' must be understood in discourse-pragmatic terms, as conditions for the appropriate discourse contexts in which the sentence can occur:

"[The] grammatical machinery that originally developed around overt relations between a main and a subordinate clause [...] is subsequently generalized to encode similar relations between the insubordinated clause and some other part of the discourse. This latter may be unexpressed or no longer involved in a subordinating grammatical relation to the insubordinated clause." (Evans 2007: 422–423)

In this respect, this function of insubordination can be viewed as an extension of dependency relations from sentence to discourse levels (cf. Mithun 2008; Verstraete and D'Hertefelt 2013).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Lindström and Londen (2008) for Swedish; Verstraete et al. (2012) for Dutch; and Mithun (2008) for Navajo and Yup'ik.

<sup>5</sup> The main difference between both accounts has to do with the type of syntactic change involved in the development of free-standing subordinate clauses. The insubordination account (Evans 2007) proposes a chain that goes from subordination to syntactic independence via ellipsis of main clause material (see Evans 2007: 370–376 for details). By contrast, the extension of dependency account (Mithun 2008; Verstraete and D'Hertefelt 2013) does not rely on the ellipsis of an erstwhile main predicate, but explains the phenomenon as a shift from narrow to wide scope of dependency markers. Although it is a relevant difference for the general explanation of the phenomenon, in this paper we do not make any claims about the diachronic origin of *que*-sentences and we use the term *free-standing subordinate clause* in a synchronic sense (i.e. the independent use of formally subordinate clauses).

As will be shown in Sections 4 and 5, discourse-connective *que*-constructions realize this third function of insubordination, since they are used to express dependency relations in talk-in-interaction. It should be noted that we faced some difficulties in conducting a fine-grained analysis of the structures studied. One of the problems is the lack of established analytical categories to deal with grammatical dependencies beyond the sentence. The first two functions of insubordination listed by Evans (2007) – indirection and interpersonal control, and modal qualifications – can be explained by making use of relatively well-known categories of linguistic analysis, such as illocutionary force and modality, respectively. By contrast, there is little agreement on the types of dependency that exist beyond sentence level or on whether we can speak of dependency at all. The analysis of discourse relations usually relies on rhetorical and logical concepts – such as consequence, condition or cause – that are suited to explaining highly planned discourse (Mann and Thompson 1988), but are hard to apply to the meaning conveyed by discourse-connective *que*-constructions. Since these constructions typically occur in spontaneous conversation, the type of dependency they express must be explained in terms of their distribution in talk-in-interaction.

Moreover, we argue that discourse-connective *que*-constructions are indexical elements, in the sense that “they point to the presence of a semantic component which is lacking in the element itself” (Nielsen 2012: 61). The semantic element that is lacking in a *que*-construction is a relevant piece of contextual information that can be retrieved in a previous utterance or turn, a previous discourse situation, or a proposition being observed or inferable from the speech situation. We demonstrate that some of the meanings of free-standing *que*-constructions proposed in the literature (e.g. topic-comment relations, quotative, echo, focus, etc.) can be accounted for as situated meanings that emerge from the interaction between this fairly abstract indexical meaning and relevant aspects of the context types in which the *que*-constructions are used. An analysis driven by the principles of Interactional Linguistics is needed in order to describe such context types.

## 3 Theoretical and methodological assumptions

### 3.1 Interactional linguistics

This article aligns itself with Interactional Linguistics, which takes a multidisciplinary approach to language that combines insights from (Functional) Linguistics, Conversation Analysis and Linguistic Anthropology (Ford 1993; Ochs et al. 1996; Selting and Couper-Kuhlen 2001; Ford et al. 2002).

Interactional Linguistics is interested in language as a form of interaction, as different environments have different impacts on the structure of language. There are two main research questions in this approach: (i) what are the linguistic resources used to fulfill interactional functions in conversation; and (ii) what are the interactional functions or conversational structures that can be realized by particular linguistic forms and ways of using them (Selting and Couper-Kuhlen 2001: 3). In this article, we are mainly addressing the second question, i.e. what are the types of interactional activities that can be carried out with a discourse-connective *que*-construction?

### 3.2 Data

The data used in this study come from the Madrid section of the COLA corpus (Corpus Oral del Lenguaje Adolescente), which contains conversations among adolescents from Madrid (Spain).<sup>6</sup> The informants carry minidisks and record spontaneous interactions in different settings, such as school breaks, bars, private house chat, playing videogames, etc. We initially selected 200 tokens from 35 conversations, but 30 tokens were discarded due to insufficient description of context, obscure lexicon (adolescent argot) or deficiency in the transcription. Unintelligible examples were also done away with, which left us with 170 tokens to be analyzed.

### 3.3 Methodology

There were three requirements for a *que*-clause to be considered an instance of the discourse-connective *que*-construction: (i) to be syntactically non-embedded; (ii) not to be interpretable as a result of main predicate ellipsis; and (iii) to select an indicative verb form.<sup>7</sup> The analysis consisted in two phases: (i) the distribution of the *que*-constructions according to their position within turn and sequence; and (ii) the description of their situated meanings.

In the first phase, each token was analyzed according to its position in the conversational sequence, using well-known concepts of Conversation Analysis, such as turn construction units (TCU), adjacency pairs and preference organization

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<sup>6</sup> The COLA corpus is the result of a research project on teenage talk carried out at the University of Bergen (Norway) and can be consulted at [www.colam.org](http://www.colam.org). The corpus is made up of conversations of Spanish-speaking teenagers from different Spanish speaking cities in Spain and Latin America, but we have chosen to focus on the data coming from Madrid.

<sup>7</sup> We have excluded from this paper all cases with subjunctive (see note 4), and we have included cases with the pro-forms *sí* 'yes' and *no* 'no'.

(Sacks et al. 1974; Levinson 1983). Discourse-connective *que*-constructions in turn-initial positions were analyzed according to the sequential context in the adjacency pair and preference organization. First, we looked at whether each turn was a first-pair part of the adjacency pair, viz. an initiation, or a second-pair part, viz. a response (direct, indirect, response-initiation or re-initiation). Then, we took into account whether responses were *preferred* or *dispreferred* (Levinson 1983). *Que*-constructions in non-turn-initial positions were analyzed according to the internal structure of multi-unit turns (Ford et al. 1996; Ford and Thompson 1996; Ford et al. 2002).

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of the different positions of discourse-connective *que*-constructions. It shows that in more than 70% of the cases, the *que*-construction appears at the beginning of a turn. These include cases in which the *que*-construction constitutes the turn in itself, or merely forms the first constituent in the turn, or is preceded only by a preface, such as a discourse marker or a vocative. In addition, discourse-connective *que*-constructions also appear in medial position preceded by one or more TCUs in a multi-unit turn, but far less frequently (about 30%) than in turn-initial position.

**Table 1:** Positions of discourse-connective *que*-constructions within their turn.

Positions within the turn	Tokens (%)
Turn-initial	122 (71.76)
Non turn-initial	48 (28.24)
Total	170 (100)

For the second phase, we assumed the interactional functions of discourse-connective *que*-constructions to be situated meanings that emerge from the interaction of the meaning potential of linguistic elements and contextual factors (Linell 2009: 99). Our analysis of the interactional values of discourse-connective *que*-constructions is based upon three parameters: (i) the type of contextual information being retrieved (previous utterances or turns, previous discourse situations or situational context); (ii) the co-occurrence of linguistic resources; and (iii) the discourse position within the turn and sequence.

The next two sections present the main results of our analysis. Section 4 deals with *que*-constructions that operate within a turn, while Section 5 is devoted to the *que*-constructions in turn initial positions.

## 4 *Que*-constructions in non-initial position

Discourse-connective *que*-constructions in non-initial position are turn *increments*: “any nonmain-clause continuation of a speaker’s turn after that speaker has come to what could have been a completion point, or a “transition-relevance place”” (Ford et al. 2002: 16). Incremental *que*-constructions display two main functions: adding support to some prior claim or projecting larger turns.

### 4.1 Support of prior claims

An incremental *que*-construction adds support to a previous TCU which can be a directive speech act – question or request- (6), a dispreferred response to a directive speech act (7) or even a previous *que*-clause with a deontic or volitional modal value (8).

- (6) [An adolescent is listening to the radio but one of his friends keeps on talking]  
 J01: *calla que estoy escuchando*  
 G01: *no me da la gana*  
 J01: shut up [*QUE*] I’m listening  
 G01: I don’t want to  
 (Mabpe2-01b)
- (7) [Two friends are cooking and one of them wants the other one to try the ketchup]  
 G01: *toma mira prueba*  
 J02: *no no no que estoy comiendo chicle Pablo*  
 G01: take it look try  
 J02: no no no [*QUE*] I’m chewing gum Pablo  
 (Mabpe2-01)
- (8) [Several friends are talking about the recording device they use to record their conversations]  
 G02: *el volumen se hace allí*  
 J01: *bien*  
 J03: *bien ja ja ja ja*  
 J03: [*vale* ]  
 G02: [*has grabado algo/* ]  
 J01: *bien bien bien bien*

- J01: *que yo este finde te lo doy el cacharro este (.) que a mí me vuelve loca tronca*
- G02: you set the volume there
- J01: right
- J03: right ha ha ha ha
- J03: [OK ]
- G02: [have you recorded anything/ ]
- J01: right right right right
- J01: [QUE] I will give you this device this weekend (.) [QUE] it drives me crazy girl
- (Mabpe2-11c)

In these cases, speakers support their actions by pointing to some evidence that can be observed or inferred from the situational context: the fact that the speaker is trying to listen to the radio (6), the fact that the speaker is already chewing gum (7), or the fact that the minidisc is disturbing the speaker (8). Incremental *que*-constructions are used as a device to justify speaker decisions by means of making explicit a piece of evidence that can be easily accessed from contextual observation.<sup>8</sup>

In other cases, incremental *que*-constructions do not build on the immediately previous TCU, but they provide additional support for the speaker's position in the whole turn, to insist on some information that (s)he presented in previous turns. In (9), for example, the incremental *que*-clause supports G02's decision of talking about Helga, whereas G01 thinks that it is not polite to do so. G02 then repeats what was already said in a previous turn (*me da igual que se escuche tío* 'I don't care that they can hear me').

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**8** Constructions like these have been traditionally treated as subordinate reason clauses by Spanish reference grammars (see, for instance, RAE 2009: 884). As subordinate reason clauses, incremental *que*-constructions describe the cause of a previous clause. However, unlike subordinate reason clauses, they cannot be clefted, since they are not syntactic adjuncts of the previous clause. Consider, in this respect, the following contrast:

- 1a. Me voy a la cama porque tengo sueño  
'I go to bed because I am sleepy'
- 1b. Porque tengo sueño es por lo que me voy a la cama  
'Because I am sleepy is why I go to bed'
- 2a. Me voy a la cama, que tengo sueño  
'I go to bed, [QUE] I am sleepy'
- 2b. \*Que tengo sueño es por lo que me voy a la cama  
'\*[QUE] I'm sleepy is why I'm going to bed'

Therefore, incremental *que*-constructions are pragmatic dependent on a previous turn, but they are not syntactically subordinated to it.

- (9) [A group of classmates are talking about a researcher who visited their school]
- G02: *es que estaría todo guapo que la Helga esa*
- G01: *es que se llama Helga tío*
- G01: *1[me da igual que se escuche- ya lo sé que se lo- lo va a escuchar tío pero yo soy como soy]*
- G02: *1[que te va a escuchar]*
- G01: *es que por eso me reí tía porque es que mira te lo juro coge y salta\ porque yo cuando era pequeña vivía vine a España con mis padres que me da igual que se escuche tía es que quiero que lo escuche tía porque me hizo gracia sabes/*
- G02: *nada luego lo borramos*
- G02: *it's that it would be really great that that woman Helga*
- G01: *her name is Helga dude*
- G01: *2[I don't care that they can hear me – I know that that they are going to hear it dude but it's just how I am ]*
- G02: *2[[QUE] she will hear you ]*
- G01: *that's the reason why I laughed pal because it's like she looks at everything I swear and she's like\ because when I was a little girl I came to Spain with my parents [QUE] I don't care that they can hear me pal I want her to hear it pal because it made me laugh you know/*
- G02: *ok we will erase it later*  
(Mabpe2-02)

In a similar vein, in (10) J02 projects her turn by means of a *que*-clause that repeats what she said in a previous turn (*sí tía, es mi hijo* 'yes girl, he is my son'), to try to convince her friend.

- (10) [An adolescent wants to convince a friend that the baby she is taking care of is her son]
- J02: *si tía (.) es mi hijo*
- J01: *qué dices/*
- J02: *que no es ninguna broma tía no te has enterado de que estaba embarazada*
- J01: *venga ya*
- J02: *jodeeeeer cómo te lo digo como quieres que te diga que vayamos a mi casa y te diga mi madre para que te creas que es mi hijo que te lo juro que es mi hijo coño*

- J02: yes girl (.) he is my son  
 J01: what are you saying/  
 J02: [QUE] it's not a joke girl you haven't heard that I was pregnant  
 J01: OK enough  
 J02: damn how can I say it to you  
 How do you want me to tell you shall we go home and ask my mom  
 to tell you so that you believe it is my son  
[QUE] I swear he is my son damn  
 (Mabpe2-11a)

## 4.2 Projection of larger turns

Speakers also use incremental *que*-constructions as devices for projecting textual sequences within a turn. This resource is typically found in contexts where the speaker reports a previous speech event. In (11), for instance, speaker G01 builds a long and complex turn in order to tell a story: a Norwegian researcher introduced the COLA research project in the English class at G01's school. Incremental *que*-constructions display a double function: they project the turn and they signal the dependent status of the clauses as reproducing a past speech event.

- (11) [An adolescent is telling his friends about a Norwegian researcher who came to visit their school and talked to them during an English class]  
 G01: *os cuento/ una movida rara yo\  
 sabéis lo de inglés de ayer\  
 G03: el qué/ ah sí  
 G01: lo de la noruega  
 G02: qué de inglés\  
 G01: que vino una noruega y y y (...) queee  
 de la Universidad de Bergen o no sé qué leches  
 que es la mejor Universidad de Noruega y tal  
 pero por lo visto el español es el segundo idioma de Noruega y tal  
 más importante y y y bueno el caso es que están estudiando  
 la evolución del español en plan palabras nuevas tú sabes\  
 yyy eso lo estudian en los jóvenes  
 entonces que habían hecho ya unnn unos de esos estudios en Oslo  
 o en Helsinki y otros en Estocolmo otro eeen en Londres  
 y no sé qué a ver cómo iban evolucionando las lenguas no sé qué  
 G01: shall I tell you/ a weird thing I\  
 Do you know what happened in the English class yesterday\  
 ]*

- G03: what/ oh yes  
 G01: the thing about the Norwegian  
 G02: what happened in the English class\  
 G01: [*QUE*] a Norwegian woman came and (...)  
[*QUE*] from the University of Bergen or I don't know what freaking thing  
that is the best university in Norway and such  
 but apparently Spanish is the second language in Norway and  
 most important and and and well, the thing is that they are studying  
 the evolution of Spanish like new words you know\  
 aaand they study that in youngsters  
 so [*QUE*] they had already done soome some studies in Oslo  
or in Helsinki and some others in Stockholm another one iiii in London  
and I don't know what to see how languages were evolving I don't  
know what  
 (Maesb2-01b)

## 5 *Que*-constructions in turn-initial position

In this section, we provide an analysis of discourse-connective *que*-constructions in turn-initial position. As Table 2 shows, *que*-constructions in turn-initial position show a strong tendency to be used in responsive turn types, whether they are responses (56.56%), response-initiations (2.46%) or re-initiations (11.47%), which together amount to 70.49% of the total of *que*-constructions in turn-initial position. Hence, *que*-constructions can be considered dependent at a discourse level: they react and build on a previous conversational turn. However, as it will be argued below, discourse dependency not only characterizes initial *que*-constructions in responsive turns. Even *que*-constructions that are initiations are contextually dependent.

**Table 2:** *Que*-constructions in turn-initial position according to turn type in the adjacency pair.

Turn type	Tokens (%)
Initiation	36 (29.51)
Response	69 (56.56)
Response-initiation	3 (2.46)
Re-initiation	14 (11.47)
Total	122 (100)

## 5.1 *Que*-constructions in responsive turn types

### 5.1.1 *Que*-constructions as responses: coherence and emphatic contrast

*Que*-constructions can occupy the initial position of preferred or dispreferred responses to direct or indirect initiations, as shown in Table 3. We have distinguished two types of situated meanings for *que*-constructions which function as responses: (i) marking of a coherence relation with the immediately previous turn; and (ii) emphatic contrast.

**Table 3:** *Que*-constructions in turn-initial position according to type of response.

Type of response	
Direct response	26 (37.68%)
<i>Preferred</i>	14 (20.29%)
<i>Dispreferred</i>	12 (17.39%)
Indirect response	43 (62.32%)
<i>Preferred</i>	3 (4.35%)
<i>Dispreferred</i>	40 (57.97%)
Total	69 (100%)

The first situated meaning – marking of a coherence relation with the immediately previous turn – is found in preferred responses to direct initiations, which are generally questions containing verbs of speaking and existence, as in (12).

- (12) [A group of friends talking about their plans for a long weekend]  
 G03: *qué pasa el puente de mayo/*  
 J01: *que me mudo*  
 G03: what will happen during the long weekend in May/  
 J01: [QUE] I'm moving  
 (Maesb2-02)

The *que*-clause in (12) is ‘dyadically’ dependent (Sansiñena et al. in press-a) on the main predicate of the previous turn (*Lo que pasa es que me mudo* ‘What happens is that I am moving’). From a discourse-interactional point of view, the *que*-clause signals a coherence relation between the two turns.

The most frequent situated meaning found in our corpus is that of emphatic contrast, which is the default interpretation of *que*-constructions that occupy the first position of dispreferred responses. They are either direct – such as refusals to requests (13)– or indirect ones – such as negative assessment of comments by the addressee (14).

(13) [Two friends are trying to convince a third one to sing a Mexican song]

J03: *venga canta*  
 G01: *no*  
 J03: *canta*  
 J03: 2[*sí venga* ]  
 J02: 2[*o mejicano* ]  
 J03: 1[*venga canta* ]  
 J01: 1[*mejicano* ]  
 J02: *aaleee venga*  
 J01: 2[*canta tío* ]  
 G01: 2[*que no (.) venga* ]  
 G01: *me da vergüenza*  
 J03: *come on sing*  
 G01: *no*  
 J03: *sing*  
 J03: 2[*yes come on* ]  
 J02: 2[*or mexican* ]  
 J03: 1[*come on sing*]  
 J01: 1[*mexican* ]  
 J02: *aaleee come on*  
 J01: 2[*sing pal*]  
 G01: 2[[*QUE*] *no (.) come on*]  
 G01: *it's embarrassing*  
 (Mabpe2-03)

(14) [Friends talking about their lunch: a chicken breast. They are discussing the size of the chicken breast]

G01: 1[*es que yo no he dicho que sean así (.) cacho de basta que eres una basta*]  
 J02: 1[*me has dicho así* ]  
 J02: *son así tío joe son así*  
 G01: *pero que no son tan pitufas*  
 J02: 2[*que sí son pitufas* ]

- G01: 2[*a ver*]  
 G01: *que no son como la Vane a ver*  
 J02: *bueno me he comido una de esas luego he salido*  
 G01: 1[I haven't said that they are like this (.) you're rough as a cob]  
 J02: 1[you've told me like this]  
 J02: they're like this pal fuck they're like this  
 G01: but they are not so tiny  
 J02: 2[[*QUE*] they are tiny indeed ]  
 G01: 2[let's see]  
 G01: [*QUE*] they're not like Vane come on  
 J02: well I ate one of those then I went away  
 (Mabpe2-01b)

Emphatic contrast is not a codified meaning of *que*-constructions, but a situated meaning that arises from the interaction of the abstract meaning of discourse-connective *que*-constructions and their discourse position. On the one hand, *que*-constructions introduce information that is either a repetition of a previous turn (13) or related to a stimulus that can be directly observed or inferred from the situational context (14). On the other hand, contrast is part of the meaning of dispreferred responses. This meaning is often reinforced by concomitant discourse markers, such as *pero* 'but'.

The emphatic nature of *que*-responses is corroborated by examples such as (15). Although it is the first time that G02 is asking the question, G01 thinks that G02 is being insistent (*que qué pesado* '[*QUE*] you are such a drag') and replies in an emphatic way, as if the answer to the question were obvious or evident.

- (15) [A group of friends talking about why G01 did not go to class the previous day]  
 G02: *supongo que te habrá explicado cosas/*  
 G01: *que qué pesado que sí*  
 G02: I guess (s)he must have explained things to you/  
 G01: [*QUE*] you are such a drag [*QUE*] yes  
 (Maesb2-02)

Therefore, although *que*-sentences in dispreferred responses generally refer to information from the discourse or situational context, it is not necessary that the information be actually evident. In some cases it is not, but the speaker crucially conceptualizes it as evident.

### 5.1.2 *Que*-constructions as response-initiations: echo

A response-initiation is a turn that is predicted by the previous turn and simultaneously predicts a subsequent turn. That is, they represent a reaction to the previous turn, but at the same time they demand a response. *Que*-sentences that appear in response-initiation turns, such as (16), have often been referred to as echoic questions (Escandell-Vidal 1999).

- (16) [A group of friends talking about smoking marihuana cigarettes]
- J02: *vamoosss*  
 J03: *qué qué qué drogadictos sois eh/*  
 J02: *míralo*  
 J03: *sois todos unos putos yonkis*  
 J02: *que yo soy yonki/ qué dices\*  
 J01: *yo soy alcohólica vale\*  
 J02: *come on*  
 J03: *you are such drug addicts eh/*  
 J02: *look at him*  
 J03: *you are all fucking junkies*  
 J02: *[QUE] I am a junkie/ what are you saying\*  
 J01: *I am an alcoholic ok\*  
 (Mabpe2-03)

Echo-questions are always context dependent: they refer to information that was stated in the addressee's previous turn.

### 5.1.3 *Que*-constructions as re-initiations: self-repetition

We have coined the term *re-initiation* to refer to turns that (partially) repeat a previous initiation or where speakers re-introduce initiations that have not been successful, given that interlocutors had not taken them into account. In (17) the turn by speaker J01 *¿eh?* indicates that the previous turn has not been successful and, therefore, *que* signals the re-introduction of the utterance. Re-initiations can be realized by declarative, interrogative or imperative sentences.

- (17) [A girl tells about a date she had last week]
- G01: *joder Ana eres una cerda*  
 G01: *[eres una putilla con patas eh ]*  
 J01: *[eee/ ]*  
 G01: *que eres una putilla con patas*

- G01: damn Ana you're a pig  
 G01: [you're a little slut eh ]  
 J01: [eh/ ]  
 G01: [QUE] you're a little slut  
 (Mabpe2-01a)

## 5.2 *Que*-constructions as initiations: topicalization and focus

Finally, we are going to consider *que*-constructions that form the first-pair parts of adjacency pairs, i.e. turns that are not predicted by a previous turn. Initiations can be further classified into direct and indirect initiations: direct first-pair parts, such as questions or requests, require the presence of a following turn (an answer or an acceptance); indirect initiations, such as comments or assessments, do not project a subsequent turn. Most of the initiative *que*-constructions are indirect. Direct first-pair parts only amount to 3 cases in the corpus and, unfortunately, are not reliable due to poor transcription of the data. As was previously stated, even *que*-constructions in initiative turn types are contextually dependent. Specifically, they receive two types of situated meanings, that we call *topicalization* and *focus*.

We define topicalization as the reintroduction of a topic that has been previously discussed in the conversation or in previous conversations. In (18) the *que*-clause is used at the beginning of a turn that does not react to the previous turn. However, speaker J02 does not introduce a new topic in the conversation, but she goes back to the topic they had been discussing in a previous sequence. *Que*-constructions are used as a device to link a turn to a previous conversational sequence or a previous conversation.

- (18) [An adolescent wants to convince a friend that the baby she is taking care of is her son]  
 J02: *conoces a mi hijo/*  
 J01: *venga ya*  
 J02: *sí tía (.) es mi hijo*  
 [...]  
 J03: *a qué hora se pasó su maya ayer\*  
 J02: *a las siete a las siete*  
 J03: *a las siete horas o antes de las siete*  
 J02: *eso fue a las siete y diez o así*

- J03: 2[*sí* ]  
 J02: 2[*que no es mi hijo que es mi hermano (.) subnormal* ]  
 J02: have you met my son/  
 J01: come on  
 J02: yes, pal (.) he is my son  
 [...]  
 J03: what time did he come yesterday\  
 J02: at seven at seven  
 J03: at seven or before seven  
 J02: it was at ten past seven more or less  
 J03: 2[yes]  
 J02: 2[[*QUE*] he's not my son he's my brother (.) retarded]  
 (Mabpe2-11a)

The second interpretation of *que*-constructions in initial position is focus (Garrido 1998). By using a focus *que*-clause, the speaker directs the addressee's attention to stimuli that can be directly observed or inferred from the situational context. In example (19), the *que*-clause is used in a turn that does not react to a previous turn, but functions as an initiation. The new topic, i.e. the turtle trying to bite the minidisc, can be directly observed from the situational context. In addition, focus *que*-constructions have a secondary directive meaning: their propositional content describes a situation that requires some future action by the speaker or the addressee. In example (19), the *que*-construction can be interpreted as a warning, and therefore the addressee is urged to move the minidisc away from the turtle.

- (19) [Two boys talk in front of a turtle]  
 G05: *se lo digo a la tortuga*  
 G01: *guuus ja ja* <laughter>  
 G05: *groooooo*  
       *que se lo comeee*\ <laughter>  
 G01: *se va a comer el micrófono este tío coño mira mira*  
 G05: I tell it to the turtle  
 G01: *guuus ha ha* <laughter>  
 G05: *groooooo*  
       [*QUE*] he eats it\ <laughter>  
 G01: this guy is going to eat the microphone damn look look  
 (Maesb2-01c)

The intonation is different in the instances of topicalization and focus. In the latter case, as in (19), the intonation is clearly exclamative, whereas this is not

the case with the former. The contexts of use are different in both cases, given that the latter is related to the situational context and the former reintroduces topics covered in previous conversational sequences. Speakers use instances of focus *que*-constructions to direct the attention of the addressee to stimuli that can be observed or inferred from the physical and situational context, while they use topicalization *que*-sentences to point to a previous conversational sequence.

Other linguistic devices that help to identify the interpretation of initial *que*-constructions used as initiations are vocatives, interjections and discourse markers that act as prefaces which express different attitudinal, interpersonal and metadiscursive values. In particular, *que*-constructions in turn-initial position are preceded by interjections such as *eh* and *ah*, which contribute to determine the topic or focus status of the propositional content of the *que*-clause. In example (20) the topicalization *que*-clause is preceded by *ah*, an interjection that could be glossed as ‘I’ve just remembered’. In addition, the speaker also uses *por cierto* ‘by the way’, a discourse marker which signals digression or topic change (cf. Pons and Estellés 2009). In (21) the focus *que*-clause is preceded by the interjection *eh*, which is used to catch the addressee’s attention. The interjection, then, contributes to the warning interpretation generally attached to focus *que*-constructions.

(20) [A group of friends chatting, when one of them receives a phone call]

J03: *mira no smoking me están llamando*

G02: *2[ti ti ti ti ti ti ]*

J03: *2[si es para mí que no estoy vale/que me he ido de vacaciones]*

G02: *ah que por cierto dijo ah bueno ya te lo habrá dicho*

G02: *1[ el qué ]*

J01: *1[Villarriba]*

G02: *que se iba a traer (...) porros de Huelva que son los mejores no sé qué*

J03: *look no smoking somebody’s calling me*

G02: *2[ti ti ti ti ti ti]*

J03: *2[if it’s for me, tell them I’m not here ok/ tell them that I’ve gone on vacation]*

G02: *ah [QUE] by the way [s]he said oh well [s]he must have already told you*

G02: *1[ what ]*

J01: *1[Villarriba]*

G02: *that he was going to bring (...) joints from Huelva ‘cause they’re better dunno*

(Mabpe2-01c)

- (21) [A group of friends about to enter a shop]  
 J03: *hola*  
 G01: *eh que no está abierto esperar aquí*  
 J03: *hi*  
 G01: *eh [QUE] it's not open wait here*  
 (Maesb2-02)

### 5.3 Summary

In sum, regardless of being initiations or responses, discourse-connective *que*-constructions in initial positions are context dependent: speakers use *que*-constructions to refer to information from the discourse or situational context, or they treat the content of the clause as being evident or shared (cf. 15 *supra*). Situated meanings such as emphatic contrast, self-repetition or topicalization arise from the contextual dependency *que*-constructions codify and the relevant aspects of the discourse contexts in which *que*-constructions are used.

## 6 Discussion and conclusions

Our paper fills a gap in the literature on free-standing *que*-constructions in Spanish and, from a more general perspective, on free-standing subordinate constructions with a discourse-organizing function, in that it provides an analysis of interactional functions that accounts for their forms and meanings in interactional terms. In line with the assumptions of Interactional Linguistics, we postulate that the grammar and semantics of linguistic forms in interaction should be explained using interactional concepts. Traditionally, subordinate clauses are explained in terms of syntactic dependency to a matrix clause. In this paper we have shown that the grammar of constructions with initial unstressed *que* can also be accounted for from their functional distribution in talk-in-interaction.

Meaning in interaction is probably the most complex dimension of language to analyze. As we have pointed out in the literature review, constructions with *que*, like most free-standing subordinate constructions, have often been described in an intuitive and impressionistic way: their meaning is associated with idiomatic or emotional dimensions. In this paper, we have departed from the actions performed by the speakers (start an adjacency pair, re-ask a

question, disagree with the opinion of the interlocutor in the previous turn, etc.), in order to describe the interactional role of discourse-connective *que*-constructions in particular contexts and, then, reflect upon the possibility of seeking higher generalizations.

The interactional analysis developed in this paper has a number of implications for the study of insubordination, both from the perspective of Spanish and from a more general linguistic perspective. In the more restricted scope of free-standing *que*-clauses in Spanish, our analysis confirms some aspects of the form and meaning of the construction outlined in previous studies. In particular, our account supports the existence of a free-standing *que*-construction with a meaning which connects to a previous context and does not express a modal value, which is in line with Gras (2011, Gras 2013, and Gras forthcoming) (cf. Rodríguez Ramalle 2008). Our analysis has led to a typology of contexts with which the *que*-construction interacts (the speaker's own discourse, discourse of the interlocutor, situational context). We are now in a position to relate them to definable patterns based on conversational parameters (i.e. turn-initial dispreferred response, non-turn-initial preceded by a TCU). Thus, the analysis of meaning depends not only on the intuition of the analyst (linguistic competence), but also on observable units that are part of the turns and the sequence(s) of the conversation.

This interactional analysis also has implications for the discussion about the nature and limits of subordination and insubordination. From a semantic-pragmatic perspective, the analysis of a free-standing subordinate clause in its natural habitat – spontaneous oral interaction – has allowed us to accurately describe the types of activities in which speakers engage when using the *que*-construction. In this way, we are now in a position to propose a revision of Evans' (2007) functions of insubordination, especially the signaling of presupposed material. According to our findings, speakers resort to the construction with *que* when they want to show that their contribution is not entirely new to the conversation, but that it retakes some context, which might be the speech situation itself, preceding discourse or shared knowledge. Therefore, we consider it more appropriate to define the meaning-function of this construction in terms of contextual dependency rather than presupposition.

In addition, our analysis has incorporated a discursive level from which to discuss the concepts of independence, subordination and insubordination. Insubordination is defined as the independent use of constructions with subordination markers. In most studies, independence is defined in negative terms: a construction is independent if it is not embedded in a higher syntactic unit, here, the sentence unit. Our analysis refines in two different ways the notion of independence applied to constructions with *que*. On the one hand, in illocutionary terms, it is possible to consider them as independent clauses, since these

constructions possess their own illocutionary force and, in a very high percentage, they themselves constitute a turn. On the other hand, in semantic-pragmatic terms, discourse-connective *que*-constructions express the entailment or linkage of the content of the turn to the context and, therefore, they can be understood as devices instructing the interlocutor to retrieve information from the context. In this sense, *que*-constructions can be described as contextually dependent constructions. In sum, they are illocutionary independent but contextually dependent constructions. This is consistent with previous analyses of free-standing subordinate clauses in other languages. The research by Mithun (2008) for Yup'ik and Navajo, and by Verstraete et al. (2010, Verstraete et al. 2012) for Dutch and other Germanic languages, questions the concept of insubordination applied to certain constructions with elements of subordination that still feature discourse dependency. The main contribution of our study to this debate is the inclusion of discourse-interactive criteria in the definition of dependency.

Finally, our paper also opens up new lines of research that we hope to undertake in the future. So far our analysis has not taken into account intonation. Our hypothesis is that the fact that there is more than one interpretation for a discursive pattern (turn-initial indirect first action, for instance) may depend on intonational factors. Therefore, we consider it necessary to conduct a supplementary analysis that adds the intonational dimension to the discourse-interactive criteria of this study.

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