

Null complementizers in Twitter Spanish

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Complement clauses lacking complementizer *que* are a rare phenomenon in Spanish, much more restricted than the use of null complementizers in English and restricted to only formal registers of Spanish. Syntacticians observe that numerous factors condition the possibility for *que*-drop including embedded subject status, left-dislocation in the subordinate clause, irrealis mood on the embedded verb, and properties of the matrix verb (Brovetto 2002; Cattell 1978; Etxeparre 1996; Kempchinsky 1998; Torrego 1983). Verbs permitting *que*-drop have been grouped together and given loosely related names such as ‘verbs of volition,’ ‘verbs of propositional attitude,’ and ‘stance predicates.’ One empirical sociolinguistic study has attested null complementizers (Silva-Corvalán 1993, 1994, 2007) where *creer*, *pensar*, and *saber* are said to permit *que*-drop. For English, other relevant factors conditioning *that*-drop include the distance between the matrix verb and its embedded complement, the length of the embedded subject, whether a pronominal embedded subject marks nominative case or lacks case marking, whether the embedded subject can be coreferenced with the matrix subject, and the person features of the embedded subject (Kearns 2007).

Here I investigate what syntactic properties condition the distribution of *que*-drop and address the possibility that *que*-drop might be a ‘contact feature’ unique to LA Spanish. 48,048 tweets were extracted from a 50-mile radius surrounding Mexico City and 6,553 tweets were extracted from a 50-mile radius surrounding Los Angeles using the beta application *Twitter Analytics for Excel* (Husting 2013). All tweets were returned from queries with values ‘*espero*’ ‘*juro*’ ‘*digo*’ ‘*confieso*’ and ‘*creo*’. 900 tokens were submitted for analysis, a binomial logistic regression with application value COMPLEMENTIZER (overt/null) was performed. Results reveal that VERB TYPE and EMBEDDED SUBJECT STATUS were both returned as significant ($p = 1.73e-25$ and $p = 0.0237$, respectively). Among the verbs used in the study, it was found that *esperar* most often permitted *que*-drop (32.2% of total, Log odds = -1.557) followed by *confesar* (14.29% of total, Log odds = -0.568). For EMBEDDED SUBJECT STATUS, it was found that NULL SUBJECT was the strongest possible correlate for *que*-drop (Log odds = -0.514). CITY did not achieve significance leading us to reject the possibility that this distribution is related to language contact with English in Los Angeles. Twitter’s limitation of 140 characters per tweet was not an important factor as an average character count per Tweet containing a null complementizer was 90 characters in length.

Pilot data is being expanded to include a wider range of verb types, more Spanish speaking cities, as well as matrix verbs conjugated for all persons. The authors suspect a certain class of verbs operates on a ‘*que*-drop continuum’ along which null complementizers are varyingly permitted. We do not suspect that *que*-drop in Spanish is a result of language contact with complementizer dropping languages. Methodologically, it remains unclear how precisely one can specify a population using geolocation and how closely Twitter language reflects spoken language. Nonetheless, we have shown that data extracted from Twitter remains relevant for assessing issues of language contact and change.

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