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Polar Verbless Clauses and Gapping Subordination in Spanish

Abstract Polar verbless clauses and gapping seem to differ in their capacity to be embedded. While polar verbless clauses can be easily subordinated, gapping constructions are traditionally considered main clause phenomena restricted to root contexts. Nevertheless, some languages, like Farsi, Rumanian and Spanish seem to allow gapping embedding with some particular predicates. This paper provides corpus data which show the extent of the capacity of subordination of Spanish gapping constructions, and their differences to the less restricted polar verbless clauses: on the one hand, gapping, like other fragments, can be embedded by verbal and non-verbal epistemic predicates. On the other hand, polar verbless clauses can be subordinated to these predicates, but are not restricted to them. They are much more frequently embedded, as can be seen by their distribution in the different genres of the CORLEC corpus.

Keywords Polar verbless clauses, gapping, subordination, fragments, ellipsis, embedding

1 Embedded polar verbless clauses

1.1 Introduction to embedded polar verbless clauses in Spanish

English polar verbless clauses can be defined as structures headed by a proclause, such as the polarity adverbs *yes* and *no*. It has been argued that polar clauses are not cases of ellipsis, but verbless clauses, because the pro-clause is anaphoric to a whole phrastic content of the type *message*, as is defined by Ginzburg and Sag (2000). In contrast, gappings are constructions where two clauses are coordinated and the verbal head of the second is elliptical. Also, in gapping, the remnant of the ellipsis is composed by two different phrases: the subject noun phrase and a phrase of the verb phrase. In this way, the elided verb leaves a gap between the two phrases.

Both polar verbless clauses and gapping constructions seem to be restricted to root sentences, as has been pointed out in several works, like Carlson (2001) and Merchant (2013), as is illustrated by (1a) and (1b) respectively. Nevertheless, Spanish seems to differ from English in this point, since it seems to accept these subordinations, as is suggested by the examples of Jimenez Julia (1995) (2):

- (1) a. *John won't come to the party but I think Anne yes.
 - b. *John will have caviar, although others beans.
- (2) a. Francisco quiere estudiar en la Universidad C, y creo que Javier en la A. 'Francisco wants to study in the Universidad C and I think Javier in the A.'
 - b. Andrés estudia Filología en Santiago, y me han dicho que Manolo no. Andres studies Philology in Santiago and I have been told that Manolo not.'

Jimenez Julia's claim is supported by corpus data. In fact, the CORLEC corpus of contemporary oral Spanish (Marcos Marin 1992) provides evidence which supports this claim, showing that gapping and polar fragments are indeed frequent in subordination in oral Spanish. The CORLEC corpus is composed of 63,000 utterances and classified by genre, such as *university lessons*, *high school lessons*, *TV news, informal conversation, broadcasting of sports events*, etc. We have classified these genres as either monologic or dialogic, depending on whether the utterances in a specific genre are generally produced by one or by several speakers.

In this corpus we find 543 cases of subordinated fragments, with a higher frequency in dialogic genres than in monologic genres (390 vs. 153 examples), and particularly in the genre *informal conversation* (183 examples). Examples of gapping in subordination are less frequent, but corpus data show that they are nevertheless employed in both kinds of genres: 43 cases in dialogic and 26 in monologic genres.

This article aims to present the syntactic diversity and corpus frequency of subordinated gapping and polar fragments in Spanish, as shown by the data in the CORLEC corpus. It will focus on the syntactic structures that can be found, the part of speech at the head of gapping fragments, and the syntactic type and illocutionary value of the clause where the fragment is embedded.

As said before, polar verbless clauses are headed by the polarity adverbs *yes / no*, which constitute pro-sentences that are anaphoric to a clausal content previously uttered (3) or a part of it (4). These structures are therefore non-elliptical, since their content is either present or recovered by anaphora. They are also syntactically complete, since they form whole syntactic structures where all elements meet their sub-categorisation requirements. These properties define them

as verbless clauses, and distinguish them from fragments such as (1b) and (2a), which do have elliptic content.

- (3) A: -¿Hay o no hay? B: -Yo creo que sí. (EDU o18A)
 A: -'Is there some or not?' B: -I think that yes. (I think there is)
- (4) El problema es que él no puede aparcar tal y como está y yo sí. (CONV 119A)

'The problem is that he can't park as it is and I yes.' (and I can)

Some works, like Laka (1990) and Kramer & Rawling (2009), note that they cannot be embedded in English with an overt complementizer¹, as in the example *I suspect that {yes/no}. Other works, (such as Sailor 2012) observe that this is not a general property of pro-sentences, since polar verbless clauses can indeed be embedded in other languages, like French (5a), Spanish (5b), Catalonian (5c), Hebrew (5d) and Russian (5e):

- (5) a. Je pense que {oui / non} Lit.: 'I think that {yes / no}'
 - b. Creo que {sí/no} id.
 - c. Crec que {sí/no} id.
 - d. Ani xoshev she {ken/lo} id.
 - e. Ja dumaju cto {da / net} id.

1.2 Syntactic diversity of embedded polar verbless clauses in the corpus CORLEC

The corpus of oral Spanish CORLEC (Corpus oral de Referencia de la Lengua Española Contemporánea (Marcos Marín 1992)) supplies quite a number of examples of embedded polar verbless clauses. It is composed of 1,078,780 words, distributed in 63,291 utterances and classified by genres, which we have grouped as either dialogic or monologic. Among these, we find 734 subordinated verbless utterances, distributed in fragments (20,84%, 153 items) and embedded verbless clauses (79,16%, 581 items). Most of the embedded verbless clauses found in the corpus are polar verbless clauses (543 items), which shows they are often used in embedding contexts.

1 Examples without complementizer can be found (*I think yes*), and can be analyzed as transcriptions of two juxtaposed units (*I think, yes*). Also, as noted by an anonymous reviewer, relevant cases of subordinated *yes* and *no* can be heard in pidgin varieties of English.

Their distribution in the corpus shows that embedded polar verbless clauses are generally more frequent in dialogic contexts (390 items) than in monologic ones (153 items). Also, among the monologic genres, they are extremely frequent in the genre *instructions* (62 items), since this genre shares many properties with dialogic genres: in instructions, speakers do not interact with listeners, but nonetheless they ask them rhetorical questions like (6a) to ensure they follow the conversation. Many of these rhetorical questions display the subordination of polar verbless clauses, as in (6b). In the same way, polar verbless clauses occur infrequently in dialogic genres composed by short sentences and little subordination like *administration*, *sports* and *publicity*. These distributions are illustrated in table (1).

(6) a. -; Ves? 'You see?' (LUD 002A) b. -; A que sí? 'Isn't it?' (EDU 013A)

Table 1: Genres and frequencies of polar verbless clauses.

GENRE	ID	Freq	GENRE	ID	Freq	TOTAL
Dialogic			Monologic			
Administrative	Amin	0	Religion	Rel	5	
Sport	Dep	9	Instructions	Ins	62	
Publicity	Pub	15	Documentary	Doc	9	
Debate	Deb	42	University	Hum	11	
High School	Edu	20	Science	Cie	6	
Games	Lud	33	Law	Jur	14	
Interviews	Ent	88	Politics	Pol	10	
Informal	Conv	183	Technique	Tec	18	
			News	Not	18	
Sub-total		390			153	543
Sub-average		48,75			60,33	

This data shows that polar verbless clauses are the most frequent verbless structure found in subordination. A closer look at the examples reveals a great deal of syntactic diversity, as we find different syntactic structures: they can be composed of only a head (7a), of a structure head-complement (7b) or of a head-adjunct (7c). The head can also appear in the left-periphery of the clause together with a dislocated phrase, forming a head-peripheric structure, as in (7d). We can indeed note in (7d) that the demonstrative pronoun *ese* 'that' preceding the polar adverb *si* is neither the subject nor specifier of the polar head, but only a

dislocated (peripheric) pronoun. We find not only structures composed by two phrases, but also by three or more, as in (7e).

- (7) a. Les preguntamos si podíamos traer invitados y nos dijeron que no. (CONV 042B)
 - 'We asked them if we could bring any guests and they said that no.'
 - b. Seguro que sí que viene a decirnos algo. (CONV 152A) 'Sure that yes that he comes to tell us something.'
 - c. Me gusta comerlo y tal pero todos los días no. (CONV 061A)'I like to eat it and stuff but every day not.'
 - d. No llegan nunca a tener éxito, porque ese sí que es un precio demasiado alto que tiene que pagar la sociedad. (DEB 17)
 'They never get to be successful, because that one yes that it is a price too high that society has to pay'
 - e. El juez en un momento determinado sí. (JUR 003A) 'The judge in a given moment, yes.'

Polar verbless clauses can be embedded in clauses of different syntactic types: declarative, without any formal marker of syntactic type (8a) or interrogative, with an interrogative word like *cómo* in (8d). Nevertheless, we do not find examples of either desiderative or exclamative types, and the latter seem to be only marginally acceptable, as shown in (8e). Declarative clauses can have different illocutionary values, since they can be used to convey an assertion (8a), an exclamation (8b) or an question (8c):

- (8) a. Todos queremos resolver esto, ¡claro que sí! (POL 010A) 'We all want to solve this, of course!'
 - b. ¡Vaya que sí!'Of course that yes!' (yes indeed!)
 - c. El caviar persa, lo mejor es tomárselo sólo, ¿verdad que sí? (CONV 021A) 'Persian caviar, it is better to have it alone, true that yes?'
 - d. A: -Yo no estaba. B: -¿Cómo que no? (CONV 029B) A: -I wasn't there. B: -How that not? (=Sorry?)
 - e. ?; Qué suerte que no! 'How lucky that not' ('Luckily not')

Nevertheless, these different syntactic configurations are not all equally frequent. Most embedded polar verbless clauses are composed of only a head (494 cases), although the polar head can also have a complement (28 cases), an adjunct (9 cases) or a dislocated element in the left periphery of the clause (12 cases). Similarly, most of them are declarative assertive (522 cases), although they can have a questioning value (12 cases) or an interrogative type (10 cases).

1.3 Types of subordinators

Polar verbless clauses can also be embedded by a variety of heads and constitute either their complement or their adjunct. In this way, they can be adjuncts to a noun (9abc) or to a verb (10), expressing a variety of semantic relations: cause (10a), condition (10bd) and time (10c). Interestingly, the embedded polar verbless clause is not always interpreted as a verbal adjunct, as in (10c). Sometimes it is interpreted as an illocutionary adjunct, like in (10abd); in (10a), the adjunct seems to be a cause of the illocutionary act of saying, being interpreted as 'I say that because...' Similarly, in (10bd), the condition does not seem to rely on the predicate, but on the illocutionary act of committing, so for (10b), rather than 'If I don't call you and if we cannot meet...' the interpretation seems to be: 'Instead of committing to this...'

Polar verbless clauses can also constitute the complement of a verb (11a) or of an adjective (11bc). We can note that all cases of polar verbless clauses embedded as a complement are complements of epistemic predicates like the verbs *decir* 'say', *responder* 'answer', *parecer* 'seem', *imaginar* 'imagine', *puede ser* 'maybe' and *temer* 'fear', and like the adjectives *cierto* 'certain' *seguro* 'sure' and *claro* 'clearly'.

- (9) a. Hay chicos que sí que saben comportarse. (CONV 023A) 'There are children that (yes that they) can behave.'
 - b. Las instrucciones normalmente suele venir, pero a veces hay algunos que no. (DEB 023A)
 - 'The instructions usually come with it but sometimes there are some that not.'
 - c. (...) en vez de éstas de abrir y cerrar, que sí que están bien, pero es innecesario. (CONV 11A)
 'instead of this ones to open and close, that yes are good, but it
 - 'instead of this ones to open and close, that yes are good, but it is unnecessary.'
- (10) a. La gente exterioriza más su sociabilidad, porque eso sí que lo puedo decir. (CONV 006A)
 - 'People reveal more their sociability, because that yes that I can tell you.'
 - b. Te llamo yo, sí, y podemos quedar, o si no, espera un momento. (CONV oooA)
 - 'I will call you, yes, and we can meet or, if not, wait a moment.'
 - Muchas veces me dan las doce o la una de la noche, y cuando no, pues te levantas a las tres de la mañana. (POL 007A)
 Often I stay awake until midnight or 1am, and when not, you would
 - Often I stay awake until midnight or 1am, and when not, you would wake up at 3 am.

d. Esto sería una cierta sorpresa (...), como no, se quedaría sin representación parlamentaria. (NOT 019A)

'This would be a certain surprise (...), how not, he would lose his seat in the Parliament.'

- (11) a. A: -¿Qué significa, que no vale el texto entero?
 - B: -Pues me temo que no. (DEV 014A)
 - A: -'What does it mean, that the whole text is not good?'
 - B: -'I fear that not.'
 - b. Es cierto que ahora sí que existe un comité de las regiones. (POL 006A) 'It is true that now yes that it exists a committee for regions.'
 - c. A: -¿Es que no hay variación de temperatura?
 - B: -Claro que sí. (CIE 006A)
 - A: -'Is there not a variation of temperature?'
 - B: -'Clear that yes (=of course)'

They can also appear as complements of a noun (12), of an adverb (13) or of a prepositional phrase (14). Furthermore, they can also be embedded to polar verbless clauses in root position, as complements (15a) or as adjuncts (15b).

- (12) a. ¿Y es cierto? Porque corre el rumor de que sí. (ENT 040A) 'And is it true? Because I have heard the rumor that yes.'
 - b. A: -¿No le no le da a usted miedo (...)?
 - B: -Yo tengo confianza en que no. (ENT 012A)
 - A: -'Don't you fear that?' B: 'I have faith that not.'
- (13) a. Si me dieran alternativas, para modificarlo, naturalmente que sí. (ENT 059A)

'If I were given alternatives to modify it, naturally that yes.'

(= of course I would)

b. ¡Ojalá que no! (ENT 064A)

'I-wish that not' (= I wish it won't)

- (14) a. A: -¿Y usted cree, como escritor, que se podría hacer?
 - B: Sí: Por supuesto que sí. (POL 010A)
 - A: And you, as a writer, do you think it could be done?'
 - B: 'Yes. Of course that yes.'
 - b. A: -Un percance realmente singular.
 - B: -Sí, desde luego que sí. (NOT 012A)
 - A: 'An incident really particular'.
 - B: 'Yes, of course that yes.'

- (15) a. Usted ha mandado su propio signo (...) y a eso sí que no se lleva los nueve millones. (PUB 033A)
 - 'You have sent your own sign (...) and for that yes that you don't get nine millions.'
 - b. No, porque sí que tengo que conducir. (CONV 031B)'Not, because yes that I have to drive.'

1.4 The subordination of Spanish polar verbless clauses: Conclusions

These corpus data show a number of properties of Spanish polar verbless clauses that can be generalised: they can be easily embedded, as both adjuncts and complements. Firstly, as complements of nouns, they provide the content of one of the arguments of the noun (12). Secondly, as complements of verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositional phrases, they have epistemic meanings (11), (13), (14). Thirdly, as adjuncts, they focalise the polarity adverb that can be cataphoric to a clausal content syntactically realized as its complement (9ac) (10a) or anaphoric to a previous content, being therefore placed in focus (final) position (9b) (10bcd).

Therefore, embedded polar verbless clauses provide an argument where polarity is focalised, and can be found in two different contexts: on the one hand, they can be complements of predicative heads with an epistemic content (verbs, adjectives, adverbs or prepositional phrases), and on the other hand, they can be complements of nouns or adjuncts of noun or verbs. It seems that in the last case, the embedded polar verbless clause can constitute an adjunct of the illocutionary act instead of an adjunct of the verb (10abd).

2 Subordinated Gapping in Spanish

2.1 Introduction to Embedded Gapping in Spanish

Gapping, the construction found in the second conjunct of a coordination where the verb is elided (16a), is a major subject in the literature on ellipsis. It is traditionally accepted that it cannot be embedded in English (Niejt 1979, Hankamer 1979, Johnson 2014) (16b). Similarly, the gapping antecedent cannot be embedded either (16c). In spite of this, the corpus CORLEC of contemporary oral Spanish offers some examples of subordinated gapping (17a) and of cases where the clause that contains the antecedent of the gapped constituent is subordinated (17b).

- (16) a. Some ate beans and others, rice.
 - b. *Alfonse stole the emeralds, and I think that Mugsy the pearls.
 - c. *I think that Alfonse stole the emeralds, and Mugsy the pearls.
- (17) a. Pero el chico la ama y dicen que ella a él. (CONV 033A) 'But the boy loves her and they say she him.'
 - b. Parece que el tío se fue a su casa y ella a la suya. (CONV 009A) 'It seems that the guy went to his house and her to hers.'

These examples of embedded gapping could be interpreted as the result of dysfluent productions, such as overlappings, grammatical errors or hesitations. Nevertheless, the CORLEC corpus is annotated for these types of dysfluencies. This suggests that embedding gappings are not the result of disfluency, but of a different syntactic configuration available in Spanish. This seems to contradict Johnson (2014), who, following Niejt (1979), states that the constraint that gapping cannot be embedded is a structural constraint of language, with a few exceptions: firstly, gapping can be a non-initial conjunct in an embedded clause containing a coordination if its antecedent is in a preceding conjunct (18a); secondly, gapping can be embedded if the antecedent and the gap are subordinated by an infinitive (18bc). Thirdly, gapping can be subordinated if the remnant is a wh-phrase (18d) (Niejt 1979).

- (18) a. Jerome wishes that [Julie had bought a dress and Jennifer a pair of shoes.]
 - b. John tried to put his car in the garage and his bike in the barn.
 - c. John seems to be happy and Mary unhappy
 - d. Charles may decide which boys are coming along and Max which girls.

Johnson (2014: 7) describes this constraint of gapping as the *No Embedding Constraint*, formulated as follows:

"Let A and B be conjoined or disjoined phrases, and β be the string elided in B whose antecedent is α in A. Then α and β must contain the highest verb in A and B."

2.2 Gapping subordination in other languages

This constraint has nevertheless been recently questioned for Farsi by Farudi (2013), who furnishes data where gaps occur in embedded contexts (19a). According to this work, Farsi also allows the antecedent of the gap to be in an embedded clause (19b). Furthermore, both the gap and its antecedent can be embedded (19c).

- (19) a. maman chai xord va fekr mi-kon-am baba qahve.
 - 'Mother drank tea and I think father coffee.'
 - b. Fekr mi-kon-am ke Nasrim gormeh sabzi-ro dorost kard va man adas polow-ro.
 - 'I think that Nasrin made spinach stew and I lentil rice.'
 - c. Ajib nist ke Râdmehr mâhiro xorde vali ajibe ke Ânâhitâ gushtro. 'It's not unusual that Rodmehr ate fish, but it's strange that Anahita meat.'
 - d. mujhe lag-taa hai ki mummi=ne caai pii thii lekin mujhe nahiiN lag-taa ki papa=ne coffee. 'I think that mother drank tea, but I don't think that father coffee.'

Interestingly, in these examples, gapping is embedded under an epistemic predicate like to think, to know, to be possible, to hear, to be strange and to be unusual. Nevertheless, Farudi (2013) argues that these verbs are not parenthetical; if they were, they would not be able to establish syntactic or semantic relationships with the embedded clause, such as negation, wheareas negation is possible (19d). In conclusion, for Farudi (2013), these data seem to provide evidence that the restrictions on gapping embedding are not a universal property of gapping; rather, they seem to be at work in only some languages.

Gapping embedding also seems possible in other languages. In Romanian, Bîlbiie (to appear) shows that verbs which allow gapping embedding are a particular class of verbs, with a particular syntactic behaviour. They express an epistemic content, especially in the first person (20). In this way, these verbs with epistemic content have particular properties which distinguish them from other verbs. They have received different analysis, as "weak verbs" (Blanche-Benveniste & Willems 2007), "grafts" (van Riemsdijk 2006) or "hedges" (Lakoff 1973).

- (20) a. Andrei a luat cartea și cred că Marga atlasul. 'Andrei has taken the book and I think that Maria the atlas'
 - b. Ion are trei copii şi pare-se că Maria doar unul.'Ion has three children and it seems that Maria only one.'

2.3 Gapping subordination in Spanish

The corpus data from the CORLEC suggest that in Spanish, like in Farsi, and more than in Rumanian, gapping can be embedded in various contexts, such as with an impersonal form (21a). Also, Spanish, like Farsi, respects island constraints, like the relative clause and indirect question constraints (21bc).

- (21) a. Pero el chico la ama y dicen que ella a él. (CONV 033A) 'But the boy loves her and they say she him.'
 - *Luis quiere ir a sitios que tengan playa y Sara prefiere sitios que montaña.
 - 'Luis wants to go to places with beach and Sara prefers places that mountain.'
 - c. *Tu no sabes quién compró el vino y yo no sé quién el pan
 'You don't know who bought the wine and I don't know who the bread.'

Gapping can also be analysed as a particular construction where a fragment with an unheaded structure is coordinated to a clause with a verbal head. These same fragments can appear in other contexts, such as answers (22a), and they can also be embedded by epistemic verbs like *to say* (22b). We even find in the corpus examples of answers (or reactions) composed of a coordination of two fragments where only one of them is embedded by an epistemic verb and the antecedent of both is in the previous utterance (22c)

- (22) a. A: -¿Quién iba agarrado de quién?
 - B: -Vicky de un niño pequeñito. (CONV 112B)
 - A: -'Who was holding who? Vicky a little child.'
 - b. A: -¿Sabéis en qué situación podéis quedar los trescientos trabajadores del independiente?
 - B: -Pues por aquí dice una compañera que la mayoría en la calle. (DOC 010A)
 - A: 'Do you know which situation can the three hundred independent workers expect?'
 - B: -'Here a colleague says that the majority in the street.'
 - c. A: -Esperemos que hagan un poco más de las cuarenta mil, que es más o menos la media habitual de las taquillas.
 - B: -Pues el otro día, Juanjo, _____ treinta y dos mil contra el Vicálvaro, y hoy me da que _____ ni la mitad, vamos. (DEP 013A)
 - A: -'Let's hope they earn more than forty thousand, which is more or less the usual average in the ticket window.'
 - B: 'The other day Juanjo thirty-two thousand against Vicalvaro, and today I think not even half of them, let's see.'

This contrast suggests that epistemic predicates can embed not only gapping constructions, but also fragments such as those found in answers or reactions. These data allow us to draw two main conclusions: firstly, it seems that a variety of epistemic heads (verbs or other predicative part-of-speech) can embed gapping constructions. In this way, the analysis of these predicates as weak verbs

(Blanche-Benveniste & Willems, 2007) must be extended to non-verbal parts-of-speech. Secondly, it seems that these predicates can not only embed gapping, but also other types of fragments (22) or even verbless utterances.

3 Conclusions

The corpus data presented here on Spanish gapping and polar verbless clauses, and the contrast with data from other languages, allow us to draw a number of conclusions. Firstly, it seems that weak (epistemic) heads are not limited to verbs, but may also extend to non-verbal predicative heads. Secondly, these weak heads behave differently in different languages, since some of them allow more embedding than others. Thirdly, Johnson's (2014) embedding constraint should be enriched with an account of weak verbs to deal with cross-linguistic variation.

In this way, some elliptical constructions like gapping or fragments seem to constitute root phenomena, excluded in embedded contexts. Nevertheless, weak predicates seem to constitute an exception to this. This unorthodox embedding has a particular behaviour that has been described in several works (de Cuba & MacDonald 2013, Fernández-Sánchez 2016): syntactically, they constitute fully integrated predicates, as showed by Farudi (2013). Semantically, they provide a content which is not the main content of the utterance. Indeed, the main content is supplied by the embedded clause, whereas the weak predicate is limited to expressing an epistemic modality. Pragmatically, the embedded predicate in the root clause has the discursive function of an evidential marker, making explicit the speakers' reason for asserting the content of the complement.

In some languages, evidentiality is morphologically marked, as logophoric pronouns (Weir 2014: 242), or as bound morphemes (Aikhenvald 2004). This capacity for embedding epistemic predicates seems to constitute a syntactic means of encoding evidentiality. Languages seem to differ in the extent to which they allow embedding of weak epistemic predicates, leading to cross-linguistic differences.

Finally, we have observed that gapping embedding is restricted to weak epistemic predicates, whereas polar verbless clauses can also be subordinated to other heads, as adjuncts or as noun complements. This difference shows that polar verbless clauses are less restricted. If they can be embedded by weak heads, like gapping and other fragments, they can also share with verbal clauses the capacity of being subordinated as adjuncts or noun complements. These properties mark a direction for future research: what are the properties of other types of verbless clauses and fragments regarding subordination? Can all fragments be embedded only by weak epistemic heads? Are verbless clauses less restricted in this regard?

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