

COMPARING LOCATIVE AND EXISTENTIAL SMALL CLAUSES IN SPANISH

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1. Introduction

This paper investigates the distribution and internal structure of Small Clauses (SCs) that take PP predicates of location, i.e., of Existential constructions and Locative copulas whose SC structure is composed of a DP and a PP [_{SC} DP PP]. My focus is on the copular paradigm of Spanish, which alternates between three ‘to be’ verbs: *ser*, *estar*, and *haber*. In the case of prepositional SCs, *ser* and *estar* are standardly assumed to be in complementary distribution, while *haber* is treated as a separate construction. This stands in contrast with the cross-linguistic assumption that Locative and Existential constructions are derived from the same underlying structure. I attempt to reconcile these two assumptions by proposing that all three copula types have a common underlying structure: an asymmetrical small clause selected by a v^0 copula root. *Ser/estar* alternation is caused by the presence of an interpretable feature in the SC head, which is either checked by the Aspect Phrase of an event nominal (for *ser*), or forces head-to-head movement to be checked by sentential aspect (for *estar*). The alternation of *haber* with these two forms is caused by a fossilized clitic, *-y*, that prevents subject raising and ϕ -feature agreement.

The rest of this section introduces copula alternation in Spanish Locative and Existential constructions and why it poses a challenge to current analyses of the Locative/Existential alternation. Section 2 presents a brief overview of the literature on the internal structure of SCs, arguing in favor of an asymmetrical structure where both subject and predicate are selected by a null functional head. Section 3 discusses the *ser/estar* alternation, with focus on Bruçart’s (2012) proposal. This proposal is expanded upon and modified to set the foundation for *ser/estar* alternation. Section 4 re-introduces the challenge presented by the Existential form *haber* and attempts to incorporate it into the system of *ser/estar* alternation. Section 5 is the conclusion.

1.1 What are Locative and Existential constructions?

Copula, or ‘to be’, sentences are standardly assumed in the generativist literature to contain an underlying small clause, a syntactic constituent that links a subject and a predicate to each other without a verb. This small clause is usually characterized as the Complement of a v^0 (e.g., *to be* in English) (Hornstein 2000).

Regarding our object of study, Locative (1a) and Existential (2a) copulas are characterized as having the same underlying structure up to vP , in which the copula *be* selects a prepositional SC as Complement. In Locative constructions, the Specifier of the clause ([_{DP} a bee] in the examples below) moves to [Spec, T] to check the EPP feature in

T⁰ and acts as the sentence's subject (1b). In Existential constructions, the Specifier stays low, and the expletive *there* is introduced to check the EPP feature in T⁰ (2b).

- (1) a. A bee is in the room
 b. [TP [DP a bee]_i [_{vP} is [_{SC} *t_i* [_{PP} in the room]]]]]
- (2) a. There is a bee in the room
 b. [TP There [_{vP} is [_{SC} [DP a bee] [_{PP} in the room]]]]]

Freeze (1992) proposes that cross-linguistically, Locative and Existential constructions have the same underlying structure and exist in complementary distribution. He identifies a few specific patterns of alternation, such as word-order alternation, copula form alternation, and expletive insertion, across a wide range of languages including English, Hindi, Russian, Tagalog, and French. These pairs have a common underlying structure; the surface form depends on the definiteness of the subject. In Spanish, this assumption is complicated by the fact that there are three copula verbs: *ser*, *estar* and *haber*.

1.2 Copular alternation in Spanish

The pattern of distribution between *ser* and *estar* is one of the best-studied topics in Spanish linguistics. The standard story is that the alternation is driven by the semantic properties of the predicate (Camacho, 2012). *Ser* is associated with individual-level predicates, those that convey properties intrinsic or permanent to the subject (e.g., *La abeja es amarilla* 'The bee is yellow'). *Estar* is associated with stage-level predicates, which denote properties that are temporary (e.g., *La abeja está asustada* 'The bee is scared'). However, this general pattern only accounts for a fraction of all cases of alternation, and a wealth of proposals have been put forth to account for the many exceptions and counterexamples to this general rule.

What makes Spanish Locative copulas such an interesting case study is that the alternation seems to be driven by the semantic properties of the subject, rather than those of the predicate. In these constructions, *ser* is associated with an event subject¹ (3a), and *estar* is used with non-events (4a). Crucially, using *estar* with an event (3b), or *ser* with a non-event (4b), results in an ungrammatical sentence².

- (3) a. La fiesta es en el jardín
 The party is_{SER} in the garden
 'The party is in the garden'

¹ The syntactic and semantic properties of event nominals will be discussed in Section 3.1.

² There are a few exceptions where *estar* can force a non-event interpretation on what is standardly an event noun. These exceptions are discussed briefly in Section 3.2.

- b. *La fiesta está en el jardín
 The party i_{SESTAR} in the garden
 ‘The party is in the garden’
- (4) a. La abeja está en el jardín
 The bee i_{SESTAR} in the garden
 ‘The party is in the garden’
- b. *La abeja es en el jardín
 The bee i_{SER} in the garden
 ‘The party is in the garden’

A further complication to the Spanish copular paradigm is the Existential construction, in which the verb *haber* selects a prepositional SC. As explained above, Locative and Existential constructions are assumed to share the same underlying structure cross-linguistically. However, *haber* is not standardly treated as part of the copula paradigm in the Spanish literature (but see: Rodríguez-Mondoñedo 2005, Perpiñán 2014). It is not hard to see why: The *ser/estar* alternation is an obvious and straightforward case of complementary distribution, even if the rules governing it are less so. It is easy to form ‘minimal pair’ sentences that differ only in the trigger property. The Existential construction, on the other hand, has a number of unique syntactic properties that set it apart from the rest of the copular system.

The most salient of these properties is the present tense form of the verb, *hay*. Unlike any other copula form, *hay* is not found elsewhere in the system (the standard 3SG form of *haber* is *ha*) and is insensitive to the number feature of the subject³. This non-agreement property prescriptively extends to other tense and aspect forms of the verb, although number agreement for these forms is commonly attested, and might be a matter of dialectal variation (Rodríguez-Mondoñedo 2005).

- (5) Hay una(-s) abeja(-s) en el jardín.
 i_{SHABER} a(-PL) bee(-PL) in the garden
 ‘There is a bee/some bees in the garden.’

Other significant differences between Existential and Locative constructions are: the mandatory VSO word order (6), which contrasts with the standard SVO word order of Spanish, and the Definiteness Effect (7), meaning that it is not grammatical to use a definite subject in an Existential construction. Both properties are relatively common markers of Existential constructions cross-linguistically, the latter more than the former.

³ All copula verbs in Spanish are polysemic, and show up somewhere in the auxiliary verb system. *Ser* also shows up in the passive form, *estar* in most progressive constructions, and *haber* in most perfective forms.

- (6) *Una abeja hay en el jardín.
 A bee ISHABER in the garden
 ‘There is a bee in the garden.’
- (7) *Hay la abeja en el jardín.
ISHABER a bee in the garden
 ‘There is the bee in the garden.’

In principle, none of these differences prevent *haber* and *ser/estar* from having a common underlying structure, especially at the small clause level. Thus, this paper seeks to explore the possibility of whether the distribution of *haber* can be folded into existing analyses of the *ser/estar* alternation. In order to do so, we must first explore the internal structure of SCs (Section 2) and examine the current proposals for the Locative *ser/estar* alternation (Section 3).

2. The structure of small clauses

Proposals into the internal structure of small clauses can be divided into those approaches that portray the structure as symmetrical, with the subject and the predicate being sisters that are conjoined by a separate unit (see Moro 1997), and those that are asymmetrical. Symmetrical small clauses violate basic principles of antisymmetry (Kayne 1994) and thus will not be considered in this analysis. Within asymmetrical approaches, we can further subdivide them into those that claim that the subject and the predicate are united by a distinct lexical head, and those that claim that the predicate head *is* the SC head, selecting the subject as Specifier.

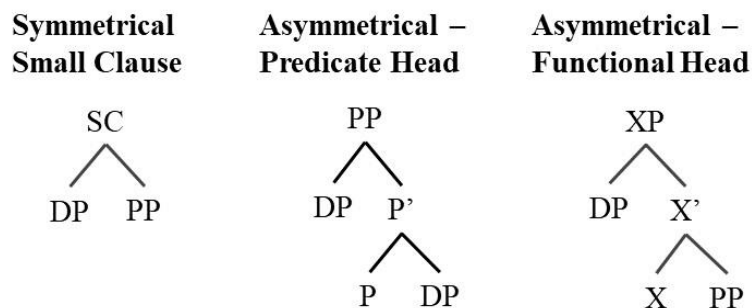


Figure 1. Types of small clause structures.

The rest of this section briefly compares the Functional Head and Predicate Head proposals. Historically, the earliest proposals on small clauses took a Predicate Head approach (Bowers 2001). Stowell (1983, as cited in Contreras 1987) argued that, in sentences like *I consider [John][a fool]*, there is a relationship of predication between the two nominals that cannot be explained by both being complements of the same verb. Variations on this analysis have established themselves as the default assumption for SC

structure; they are found in most relevant proposals of Locative SCs, such as Freeze's (1992) cross-linguistic examination of Locative/Existential alternation.

Bowers (1993, as cited in Bowers 2001) was the earliest analysis to propose that SCs are selected by a functional head, which he called Pr. Since then, there have been a wide variety of arguments that support the existence of functional heads of predication (summarized in Bowers 2001). The strongest evidence, in my opinion, comes from languages that have a 'predicational particle' that cannot be analyzed as anything other than an overt manifestation of this functional head, such as Korean *-kye* and Welsh *yn*.

It is difficult to give an overall, abstract comparison of Functional Head vs. Predicate Head approaches, in part because this debate does not seem to exist in the literature. Proposals since Bowers (1993, as cited in Bowers 2001) have been presenting the benefits of portraying small clause structures with a functional head and/or the drawbacks of the Predicate Head approach, but not viceversa. This is not to say that the Predicate Head approach has fallen out of favour, just that defending its existence does not seem to be a concern for its proponents. It also seems to be possible for these approaches to co-exist in different languages or even different constructions within the same language (see examples in Citko 2011).

In this paper, I have chosen to represent the prepositional small clause in Spanish Locative and Existential constructions as having a functional head. This choice is partially made for the simple reason that the proposal of Locative *ser/estar* alternation that I have found most compelling, Brucart (2012), makes use of a Functional Head framework. This proposal is presented and expanded upon in the following section. However, it is also a matter of personal preference – I find the option of a single null functional head (or a limited number thereof) more compelling than the idea of every potential predicate having small clause selectional properties as part of its lexical specification.

3. Locative small clauses in Spanish

As discussed in the introduction, the *ser/estar* alternation in Locative SCs seems to be driven by the eventive-ness of the subject. This section provides a brief overview of the literature on event nominals (Section 3.1) before delving into Brucart's (2012) proposal on the *ser/estar* alternation (Section 3.2), which I modify to present my own proposal (Section 3.3).

3.1 Event nominals

Grimshaw (1990) first proposed that event nouns have more structural similarities with verbs than standard nouns (which she called Referential Nouns) do. She further differentiates between Complex Event Nouns (CENs), which are derived from verbs and often have mandatory arguments (e.g., *la demolición del edificio* 'the demolition of the building'), and Simple Event Nouns (SENs), which refer to a semantic event and have some verb-like properties (e.g., *la fiesta* 'the party'), but are structurally identical to Referential Nouns.

The distinction between CENs and SENs is partially challenged by Resnik (2010), who argues that the verb-like properties of SENs come from the fact that they have an Aspect Phrase as part of their grammatical structure. Resnik showed that, in Spanish, all event nouns can be modified by phrases referring to time and duration (e.g., *la fiesta a las tres* ‘the three o’clock party’), but non-event nouns cannot (e.g., **la abeja a las tres* ‘the three o’clock bee’).

Brucart (2012), discussed in detail below, can be seen as additional support for Resnik’s proposal, as it claims that the AspP common to both types of event nouns is key to the *ser/estar* alternation. Indeed, the copula form of event Locatives is *ser* regardless of whether the event noun is simple (8a) or complex (8b).

- (8) a. La fiesta es en la calle Roma
 The party _iSSER in the street Rome
 ‘The party is at Rome street’
- b. La demolición del edificio es en la calle Roma
 The demolition of the building _iSSER in the street Rome
 ‘The demolition of the building is at Rome street’

3.2 Background of Brucart (2012)

Brucart (2012) builds on previous proposals in the literature, such as Zagona (2012), which claim that *estar* is a composite form derived from *ser* + an abstract functional element, such as the head of a SC. These proposals either implicitly or explicitly assert that *ser* and *estar* select different types of SC structures; the heads of some of these SCs have a property that triggers the *estar* form. In other words, these proposals claim that *ser* and *estar* share an underlying root form, but not an underlying structure.

Brucart (2012) argues that this cannot be the case, as there are cases where the same small clause can take both *ser* and *estar* forms. When a SC with an event nominal is selected by an *estar* copula, this triggers a non-eventive interpretation, referring to the participants and/or organizers of an event (9)⁴.

- (9) a. La manifestación es en Las Ramblas
 The protest _iSSER in the Ramblas
 ‘The protest is in Las Ramblas’
- b. La manifestación está en Las Ramblas
 The protest _iSESTAR in the Ramblas
 ‘(Some of) the protestors are in Las Ramblas’

(Brucart 2012, p. 31)

⁴ The examples of this phenomenon in Brucart (2012) all had an event or path subject selected by an *estar* copula. It is not clear to me whether it is also possible for a non-event noun to be paired with *ser* to trigger an eventive interpretation.

Instead, Brucart (2012) argues that all Locative SCs have the same underlying structure, headed by a functional head he calls R_T . This head has an uninterpretable feature, $[uR_T]$, that links the temporal and spatial properties of the predicate to those of the subject. In the case of *ser* SCs, the feature is valued by an interpretable feature within the event subject, specifically in the AspP⁵ (10). If such a feature is not available, Brucart argues that *estar* comes equipped with one such interpretable feature that is able to value $[uR_T]$ (11).

- (10) a. El auditorio está en el centro de la ciudad
 The arena i_{SESTAR} in the center of the city
 ‘The arena is in the city centre’
- b. $[_{VP} \text{ está}_{[iRT]} [_{RP} [_{DP} \text{ el } [_{nP} \text{ auditorio}_i [_{\sqrt{N}} t_i]]] [_{R'} \sqrt{uR_T} [_{PP} \text{ en el centro de la ciudad}]]]]]$
- (11) a. El concierto es en el auditorio
 The concert i_{SSER} in the arena
 ‘The concert is in the arena’
- b. $[_{VP} \text{ es } [_{RP} [_{DP} \text{ el } [_{nP} \text{ concierto}_{[iRT]i} [_{AspP} t_i + [_{iRT}] [_{\sqrt{N}} t_i]]]]] [_{R'} \sqrt{uR_T} [_{PP} \text{ en el auditorio}]]]]]$

(Brucart 2012, p. 31)

3.3 Commentary on and expansion of Brucart (2012)

While Brucart (2012) does not explicitly oppose the previously established claim that *estar* is a complex form of *ser*, the way that his examples are presented and discussed implies that he believes *ser* and *estar* to be distinct lexical items that can be inserted as v^0 . Other than their surface form, the main difference between these two lexical items seems to be the presence of the interpretable $[iR_T]$ feature.

Brucart has very valuable insights in focusing on the fundamental commonalities between the Locative *ser* and *estar* constructions, and in identifying the key role of nominal aspect in the alternation. However, I do not think that it is necessary to dismiss the previous insight that *estar* is derived from *ser* in order to implement the R_T feature; the presence or absence of nominal aspect is sufficient to explain the different behaviours of R_T in *ser* vs. *estar* constructions. I also find it ad-hoc to attribute the $[iR_T]$ feature to *estar*, especially when he has already established that this feature can be checked by the

⁵ In Brucart (2012) and in this paper, this interpretable feature is portrayed as an ad-hoc $[iR_T]$ feature. While an analysis of the exact properties of this feature is beyond the scope of this paper, I think it likely that it is a pre-existing feature of the Aspect Phrase.

nominal Aspect head. It makes more sense for the $[uR_T]$ to be valued by the sentential Aspect head in *estar* sentences.

My proposal for the internal structure of *ser/estar* takes the building blocks of Brucart (2012) and reincorporates the assumption of *ser/estar* having a common underlying form. I propose that *estar* is a complex form derived from R-to- v head movement. The R_T head moves to v^0 when it needs to check its uninterpretable feature outside of the RP. The $[uR_T]$ feature is then checked by an $[iR_T]$ feature available at the Asp^0 . This feature combination results in a spellout of *estar* (see Figure 2)⁶.

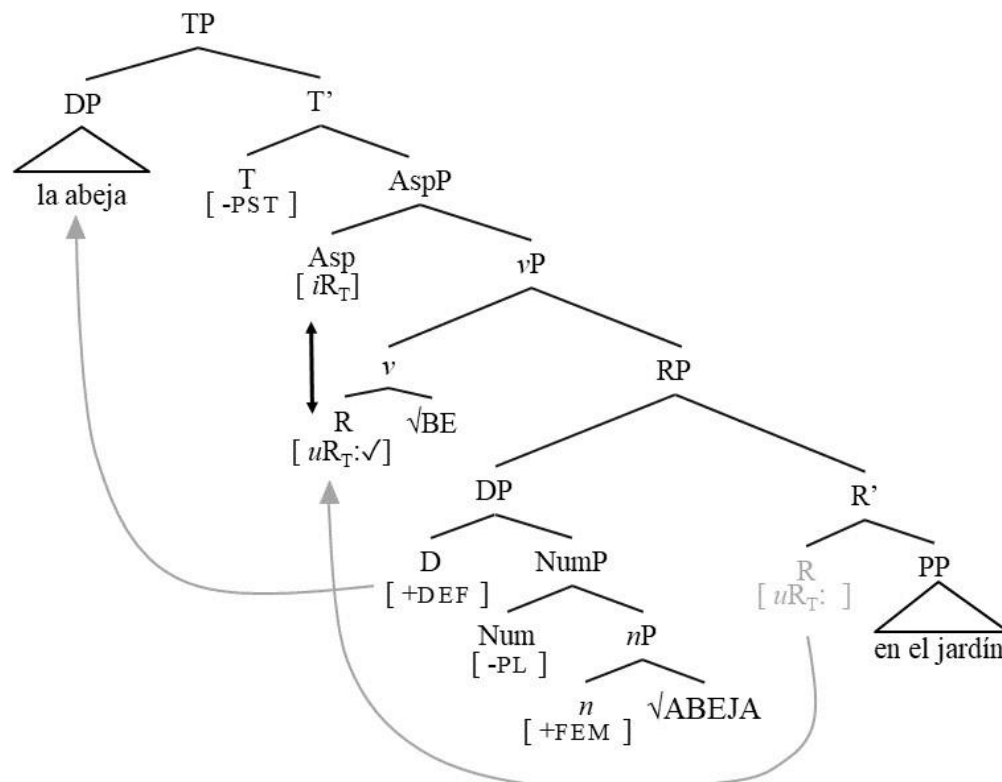


Figure 2. Tree for *La abeja está en el jardín* ‘The bee is in the garden’ showing how R^0 moves to v^0 to check $[uR_T]$ by the sentential Aspect head.

By contrast, *ser* works as proposed by Brucart (2012). The $[uR_T]$ feature gets checked internally in the small clause by its Specifier. The SC is subsequently selected as the Complement of the v^0 root. As the copula root has no additional aspectual features, it receives the default spell-out *ser* (see Figure 3).

⁶ To be more precise, a form of *estar* also specified for tense and ϕ features. The rest of the derivation is left vague in both trees and description, as it is beyond the scope of this paper.

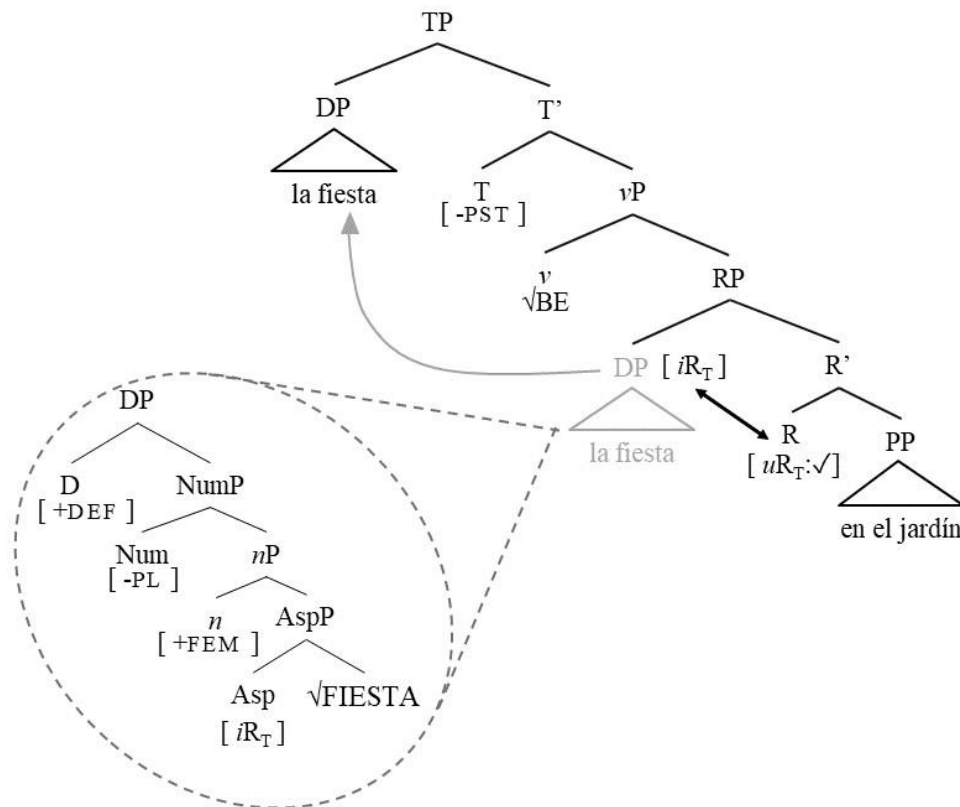


Figure 3. Tree for *La fiesta es en el jardín* ‘The party is in the garden’ showing how $[uR_T]$ is checked within the small clause.

4. Existential small clauses in Spanish

Having established that *ser* and *estar* are different surface forms of an underlying copula root, differing on whether the head of the SC was able to check an aspectual feature within its domain, we can now move on to the issue of the Existential copula form *haber*. As established in the introduction, there is a cross-linguistic assumption that Locative and Existential SC constructions have a single underlying form; this assumption is not found in the Spanish literature. Section 4.1 presents an overview of the unique properties of *haber* as they fit within the cross-linguistic pattern of Existential constructions. Section 4.2 explores the possibility of integrating *haber* into the *ser/estar* alternation. Section 4.3 addresses a mayor limitation of this proposal.

4.1 The properties of Existential constructions

Existential constructions are characterized by having an existential subject, i.e., one that has not been previously referenced in the conversation. In fact, the function of the Existential construction is to introduce a new entity or entities into the common ground

(ter Beek 2008). It is also common cross-linguistically for Existential constructions to have a non-canonical word order (Freeze 1992).

Diesing (1992, as cited in Diesing & Jelinek 1995) observes that indefinite subjects have two possible interpretations: an existential interpretation (when in Existential constructions) and a quantifier-like interpretation (when in canonical word order). Diesing's Mapping Hypothesis proposes that the existential interpretation is the result of this non-canonical word order being mapped into a logical form. According to Diesing, different domains within the syntactic tree map into a tri-partite structure consisting of an operator (the quantifying element), the restriction (delimits the potential referents of the operator) and the nuclear scope. The VP domain maps to the nuclear scope; the TP domain maps to the restrictor. When the subject moves to [Spec, TP], it becomes part of the TP domain, eventually mapping to the restrictor. When this movement does not occur, the result is an existential interpretation.

4.2 Incorporating *haber* into the *ser/estar* alternation

Before we attempt to integrate *haber* into the *ser/estar* alternation, it is worth interrogating whether there is any evidence beyond the cross-linguistic assumption that supports the possibility of *haber* having the same underlying SC structure as *ser/estar* (i.e., the RP described above). I argue that this evidence does exist, in the form of *había/hubo* alternation in the past tense. Like *ser/estar*, the perfective and imperfective forms of *haber* seem to be in complementary distribution. The imperfective form *había* is only grammatical with a non-event subject (12); the perfective form *hubo* is only grammatical with an event subject (13).

- (12) a. Había una abeja en el jardín
 Wa_{HABER}.IMPF a.F.SG bee in the garden
 'There was a bee in the garden'
- b. *Había una fiesta en el jardín
 Wa_{HABER}.IMPF a.F.SG party in the garden
 'There was a party in the garden'
- (13) a. Hubo una fiesta en el jardín
 Wa_{HABER}.PFV a.F.SG party in the garden
 'There was a party in the garden'
- b. *Hubo una abeja en el jardín
 Wa_{HABER}.PFV a.F.SG bee in the garden
 'There was a bee in the garden'

Having established that it might indeed be possible for *haber* to have the same SC structure as *ser/estar*, we can move on to figuring out the underlying mechanisms that derive *haber*. To do so, we must first discuss the properties of *haber* that are less

common cross-linguistically and less easy to integrate, i.e., the non-standard form *hay* and the lack of ϕ -feature agreement. Fernandez Soriano (1989, as cited in Rodriguez-Mondoñedo 2005) proposes that these two properties are related. She identifies an expletive clitic, *-y*, a fossilized remnant of a locative marker (comparable to French *y* and Catalan *hi*), which purportedly blocks agreement morphemes from being inserted into the derivation, giving *hay* its distinctive form.

This proposal can be easily transformed into a minimalist framework by saying that *-y*, inserted at [Spec, v P], satisfies the unspecified ϕ -feature of the v^0 and the EPP feature of the T^0 , removing the need for subject raising. The presence of this unique clitic leads to an *haber* spellout with default (3SG) agreement, *ha*, to which the clitic attaches to give the form *hay* (see Figure 4). In non-present forms, the lack of ϕ -agreement and subject raising can be attributed to a null version of this clitic.

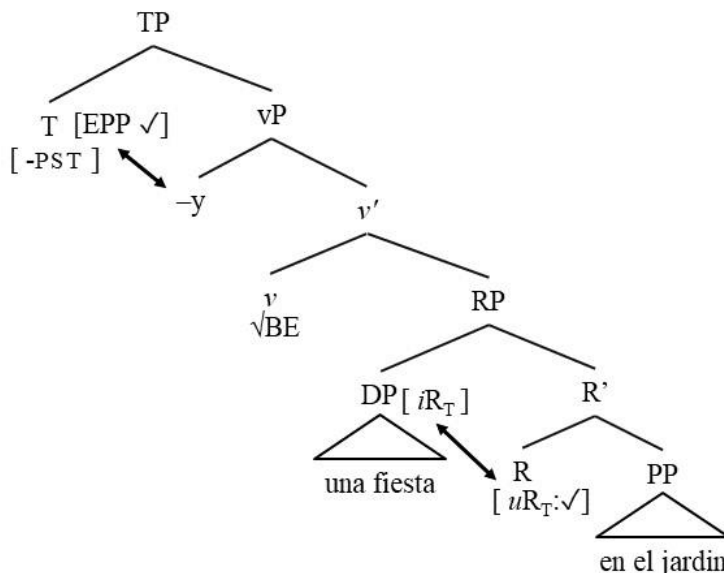


Figure 4. Tree for *Hay una fiesta en el jardín* ‘There is a party in the garden’. The copula root takes the clitic *-y* as Specifier, rendering subject raising unnecessary.

4.3 A note on non-agreement

Although non-agreement is the prescriptive form for non-present Existential constructions in Spanish, Rodriguez-Mondoñedo (2005) identifies two dialect groups: those that show number agreement in non-present constructions (14), and those that do not. Among these partial agreement varieties, person agreement in sentences like (15) has sometimes been attested. To the best of my knowledge, number agreement is considered standard in those varieties (except for formal writing), but person agreement is not.

- (14) Habían veinte estudiantes en la manifestación
 Were_{HABER.3PL} twenty students at the protest
 ‘There were twenty students at the protest’
- (15) Habíamos veinte estudiantes en la manifestación
 Were_{HABER.1PL} twenty students at the protest
 ‘There were twenty of us students at the protest.’

The proposal I present above, where a null version of the -y clitic blocks agreement and subject raising in non-present forms, cannot be extended to these constructions. The presence of partial or full ϕ -agreement suggests that the null clitic is not available in these language varieties. Therefore, the lack of subject raising in these varieties remains unexplained and should be the main topic of consideration for future research into this construction.

5. Conclusion

This paper attempts to reconcile two assumptions: The explicit assumption in generativist literature that, cross-linguistically, Locative and Existential constructions are derived from a common form, and the implicit assumption in the Spanish syntactic literature that this alternation does not take place in Spanish. I claim that all three copula forms, *ser*, *estar* and *haber*, have a common underlying structure consisting of an asymmetrical small clause (RP) that is selected by an abstract v^0 copula root.

This proposal unifies multiple pre-existing accounts into a cohesive whole and expands upon them. It also provides additional evidence in support of the Functional Head approach to small clause structure. However, the nature of feature checking for the uR_T still needs to be expanded upon and integrated better with Aspect. As noted above, the proposal does not account for partial-agreement varieties, and it is not yet clear why the feature combination for Existentials should result in an *haber* spellout.

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