

INFINITIVE LICENSING THROUGH A'-MOVEMENT: WH-ELEMENTS vs. FOCI

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1. Goal. This talk provides an account of why in Spanish an infinitival clause can be licensed by a wh-element, while another instances of A'-movement, such as focus movement, do not have the same effect. We will argue that wh-elements, located in Spec, CP, can bind the situation pronoun (SitPron) in the defective T° of the infinitive.

2. The data. In Spanish, wh-elements are allowed in infinitive embedded domains (1). These sentences must have a deontic reading –either an obligation or a possibility one–, something that does not follow from the normal licensing conditions of these structures, as the inflected versions can lack it (2).

(1) ¿En quién confiar?
in who trust.INF
“Who should one trust?”.

(2) ¿En quién confié?
in who trusted.1ps
“Who did I trust?”

Foci are excluded from infinitival clauses (3)a, contrasting the possibility of hosting these elements in finite embedded clauses (3)b (Hernanz 2011).

(3)a. *Juan cree LENTEJAS comer. b. Juan cree que LENTEJAS comió
Juan believes lentils eat.INF Juan believes that lentils ate.3ps
“Juan believes that he ate LENTILS”

3. A new analysis. Our analysis has three components.

3.1. The role of C and T in finite clauses and their defectivity in infinitives. I will assume that in finite clauses, T has to be anchored by C, thus giving a reference to it. I formalize this as T containing a situation variable SitPron (which other authors have called [$\pm T$], [$\pm Fin$] or [$\pm COINC$]). However, in infinitive clauses, the defectiveness of C makes this anchoring impossible, and another way of satisfying the pronoun is needed. We claim that in the sentences in (1) the infinitive’s SitPron is satisfied because it is interpreted as a variable under the scope of the wh-element. Following standard assumptions on wh-movement, we will argue that wh-elements are operators that quantify over propositional alternatives, giving rise to a Hamblin (1973)/Karttunen (1976) set. The wh-operator takes the SitPron of the infinitive under its scope, and in doing so, it becomes bound and is interpreted as the whole range of possible alternative situations. In other words, the wh-operator gives the required reference to the SitPron of the defective T, for it treats it as a variable under its scope. This would be, then, another way of satisfying anchoring in defective infinitival constructions, next to the one widely discussed in previous literature where there is a controller main verb that anchors the infinitival temporal variable (Wurmbrand 1998, Landau 1999).

3.2. The deontic reading under wh-movement. We will argue that the deontic reading that arises in these infinitival contexts is required because the defective C head needs to be interpreted as non-veridical, in order to match the non-veridical reading that the wh-element that moves to Spec, CP triggers in the situational pronoun. In other words, once wh-movement has taken place and head movement T-to-C applies (Pesetsky & Torrego 2001),

the C head needs to be read as non-veridical, which is congruent with the alternative-semantic of the Hamblin/Karttunen set. Moreover, the fact that the deontic modal goes through T as an intermediate step explains why the sentences in (1) have a prospective reading, as this kind of modal auxiliaries have a future-oriented interpretation (Hacquard 2006). This explains the ungrammaticality of infinitival sentences with perfect auxiliaries (*¿En quién haber confiado? ‘Who should one have trusted?’). Moreover, we will argue that in Spanish SitPron is not bound by any modal operator, since this would incorrectly predict that modal operators bear grammatical infinitive sentences (*Deber ir a Roma, ‘Must go to Rome’).

3.3. Foci cannot bind SitPron. As shown in (3)a, foci cannot appear in the infinitival periphery. We will claim that, in the first place, this is because unlike wh-elements, foci are not operators that quantify over a Hamblin/Karttunen propositional set. Instead of leaving a set of alternatives open, they pick one specific element among the set of alternatives (Rooth 1985, 1992). Therefore, they cannot define as a variable the SitPron of the infinitival T, and T is not satisfied in any way. The fact that foci can appear in indicative embedded clauses (3)b is due to the fact that C is not defective in these contexts, so it can anchor T. In embedded infinitives, the focal element in the infinitival periphery is ungrammatical because (i) it does not satisfy SitPron for the mentioned reasons and (ii) it blocks binding by the main verb because it acts as an offending intervener (Beck 1996, 2006).

4. Advantages with respect to previous analysis. This approach has advantages over cartographic previous analyses. Studies such as Rizzi 1997, 2004, Haegeman 2003 claim that infinitives only reach FinP. However, these analyses cannot explain why wh-elements are possible in some contexts (1), as they should occupy a position higher than Fin (Foc or Int). Furthermore, these studies neither explain the contrast between wh-elements, on the one hand, and foci (2), on the other, considering that at some point in the derivation they occupy the same Foc position.

5. Consequences and extensions. Our analysis provides an explanation of how wh-elements can bind the infinitival SitPron, giving rise to a set of non-defined, possible alternatives. We are thus in a position to also provide an explanation of why infinitival restrictive clauses must be non-specific (so that they are non-veridical). By the same token, we can also account for why infinitival non-restrictive relative clauses are ungrammatical (*Juan, a quien besé/*besar, es alto* ‘Juan, who I kissed, is tall’): they denote a singleton set with just one possible alternative, and thus they do not denote the alternative-semantic value that ranges over a set of possible answers.

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