Pseudo relatives: a type of complex small clause in Peruvian Spanish

Arturo Martel Paredes
Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos - Perú
arturomartelp@gmail.com

Abstract: In this paper I address the syntactic structure of the complex small clause (Rafel 1) in Peruvian Spanish, conformed by the verb ESTAR and a Pseudo Relative (a DP and a CP). In a first approximation, I will argue that the lexical DP of the complex small clause rises to the Specifier of ESTAR.

Keywords: pseudo relative, complex small clause, subject rising, complementizer phrase (CP).

Resumen: En este artículo dirijo mi atención a la estructura sintáctica de la oración reducida compleja (Rafel 1) en el castellano peruano, conformada por el verbo ESTAR y la pseudo relativa (una Frase Determinante (DP - Determinant Phrase) y una Frase Complementante (Complementizer Phrase -CP)). En una primera aproximación, argumentaré que la FD de la oración reducida sube al Especificador de ESTAR.

Palabras clave: Pseudo relativa, oración reducida compleja, subida de sujeto, Frase Complementante (FC).

0. Introduction

Spanish is a widespread language spoken in many regions, and each one has particular syntactic constructions. An across dialect phenomenon is the pseudo relative, such as *He visto a María que corría* ‘I saw Maria that (she) ran’. However, the Peruvian dialect\(^1\) presents a type of pseudo relative conformed by a small clause (a DP and a CP), and the verb ESTAR, making the entire construction a single complex one: *María está que corre* ‘Maria is that (she) runs’. In this article I will describe and explain the syntactic relations established in this construction, which is semantically equivalent to the progressive Spanish construction *Ella está cantando* ‘She is singing’.

1. What is a Pseudo Relative (PR)?

We might find the following construction in standard Spanish:

(1) *He visto a María que corría.*

Aux. HAVE(PRES.)1p.sg. 
SEE (P.P.) 
Maria 
que 
RUN(IPM.)3p.sg.

‘I saw Maria that (she) ran’
where apparently the DP ‘Maria’ is the direct object of the main verb *he visto* ‘I saw’, and is modified by the relative clause *que corría*. However, there are some characteristics that differentiate this construction, called a Pseudo Relative (PR), from ordinary relatives:

(i) Semantically, the relative construction modifies individuals; meanwhile the PR refers to an event in progress in which the individual concerned by the DP is a participant.

(ii) The DP introduced by the PR could be a proper name unlike the relatives:

PR: *He visto a Manuel que caminaba por la calle.*

R: *He conocido a Manuel que caminaba por la calle.*

(iii) In the PR the previous DP can only be interpreted as the subject of the finite verb appearing within the CP construction; while with relatives the DP may correspond to any argument of the finite verb that appears in the relative:

PR: *He visto a Juan que besaba a Maria.*

R: *He conocido a la chica que caminaba por la calle.*

(iv) In a relative clause *que* can be replaced by other pronouns, like *el cual, la cual*, meanwhile this is not possible in the PR:

PR: *He visto a Manuel *el cual* caminaba.*

R: El muchacho *al cual* entregué el lápiz ha de desaparecido.

(v) The tense in the PR must match the tense from the main verb, which is not the case in relatives:

PR: *He visto a Maria que caminaba/*caminá/*caminará por la calle.*

R: He conocido a la chica que caminaba/caminaba/caminará en la calle.

(vi) PRs do not accept perfective tense or tense auxiliaries as opposed to relatives, which accept these verb forms:

PR: *He visto a Manuel que había caminado/ha caminado/caminó por la calle.*
R: He conocido a la chica que había caminado/ha caminado/caminó.

(1p. sg.) PAST PERF. ‘meet’ the girl that (3p. sg.) ‘walk+ PLUSC. PAST. /PASR PERF/SIMPLE PAST by the street

‘I met the girl that (she) had walked/has walked/walked by the street’

(vii) PRs can co-occur without being coordinated. This is not possible when both constructions are relative clauses:

PR: He visto al estudiante que caminará por la calle que se veía con Juan.

(1p. sg.) PAST PERF. ‘see’ the student that (3p. sg.) ‘walk+ FUT by the street that (3p sg) that

(3p sg.) ‘see’ Juan

‘I saw the student that (he) will walk by the street that (he) saw Juan’

R: *He conocido al estudiante que caminará por la calle que se ve con

Juan.

(1p. sg.) PAST PERF. ‘meet’ the student that (3p. sg.) ‘walk+ FUT by the street that (3p sg) that

(3p sg.) see Juan

‘I saw the student that (he) will walk by the street that (he) sees Juan’

2. Complex Small Clause in Peruvian Spanish: ESTAR+PR

In this section I will present the phenomenon that concern us. In Peruvian Spanish it is well known that the construction that involves ESTAR and a PR, for instance Ella está que molesta ‘She is that (she) bothers’, which is in opposition to relative clauses and simple PRs seen above, this string shows particular semantic and syntactic features which we will show and analyze here.

In first place, I will provide a brief explanation about how the syntactic and semantic judgements were obtained from native speakers. Then, as a product of the previous research, we will see the structure of the construction and its possible transformations. Finally, I will sum up the characteristics of this structure in order to classify it as a pseudo relative.

2.1 Methodology

As a native speaker of Peruvian Spanish I realized this particular phenomenon, but in order to account for the possible and impossible syntactic transformations and their semantic effects, I took into consideration the grammatical judgement of different speakers of this variety with the following requisites: (a) being a native speaker of Peruvian Spanish, (b) to inhabit in Peru at least the last 5 years, (c) being above 15 years old, and (d) being familiar with colloquial speech. Thus, under these considerations, I took a brief survey of 10 participants in order to find out their grammatical judgements about some transformations and to determine: (1) the dependency of tense and subject between the main and “subordinate” verb, and their possible tenses, and (2) the constituency of ESTAR+PR. As I am describing a phenomenon that is shared by many speakers of my locality, any disagreement or judgement that contradicts my hypothesis will only show that they do not belong to the set of speakers who use and interpret this particular construction of Spanish.

2.2 Grammar of ESTAR +Pseudo Relative in Peruvian Spanish

After a survey to 10 native speakers, I deduced the following characteristics about the grammaticality of ESTAR+PR:

2.2.1 Person and tense

Simple present
Constructions are grammatical when both main and embedded verbs share the present tense. In addition, both verbs share the same subject.

(2) Estás que comes.
BE (PRES)2p.sg. that EAT (PRES)2p.sing.
‘You are that (you) eat’

Imperfect past

The constructions are also grammatical when they are both in the imperfect tense.

(3) Luis estaba que escribía.
Luis BE (IMP.PAST) 2p.sg. that WRITE (IMP.PAST) 3p.sg.
‘Luis was that (he) wrote’

However, the constructions are ungrammatical in the following cases:

Compound tense

(4) *He estado que se bailado.
AUX.HAVE (PRES)1p.sg. BE P.P. that AUX.HAVE (PRES)1p.sg. DANCE P.P.
‘I was been that (I) have danced’

Different subjects

(5) *Estaba que caminabas.
BE (PAST) 1p.sg. that WALK (PAST) 2p.sg.
‘I was that (I) walked’

Different tenses

(6) *Estás que engañabas a su novia.
BE (PRES) 3p.sg. that CHEAT (IMP) 3p.sg. ‘girlfriend’
‘He is that (he) cheated her girlfriend’

pro c-commands DP

(7) *Está que Carlos busca su libro.
BE (PRES) 3p.sg. that Carlos LOOK FOR (PRES) 3p.sg. POSS 3p.sing
‘He is that Carlos looks for his book’

We can summarize what we have seen until now:

(i) The construction presents the same subject for both ESTAR and the embedded sentence.
(ii) The tense is the same in both ESTAR and the embedded verb.
(iii) The construction accepts the present and imperfect past.
(iv) The construction is ungrammatical whenever the tense is compound or perfective.

2.2.2 Constituency of ESTAR + PR

In this section I will contrast in a series of constituency tests pseudo relatives whose matrix verbs are agentives, such as ver ‘see’ and oír ‘hear’, with ESTAR + pseudo relative in order to point out that while it is possible for the former to split the structure in two, this is not true for ESTAR+PR. The grammatical result –and contrastive meanings- of some split cases will show that, far from rebutting our hypothesis of the constituency of ESTAR+PR, helps to explain how ESTAR brings the progressive aspectual feature to PR.

a. Focus-Fronting

(8) PR
a. ¡A [Juan que bailaba tango] vimos ayer!
‘To Juan that danced tango we saw him yesterday’

ESTAR+PR
b. *[Que canta] está Ramiro
‘Even that he sings is Ramiro’

b. Neutral clitic lo

(9) PR
a. He visto a [María que bailaba con Juan]. Pedro también lo ha visto.
‘I saw Mary that danced with Juan. Pedro also saw it’

ESTAR+PR
b. María está [que camina], Pedro también lo está.
‘Maria is that she walks. Pedro also he is so’

c. Answer
(10)

PR
a. -¿Qué viste ayer por la noche?
- A [Juan que corria por el parque].
‘What did you see last night?
Juan that he ran by the park’

ESTAR+PR
b. -¿Qué estaba haciendo Nicolás?
-*Que jugaba.
-‘What did Nicolas was?
-That he played’

d. Clefting
(11)

PR
a. [Juan que corria por el parque] fue lo único que vi aquella noche.
‘It was Juan that he ran by the park the only thing I saw that night’

ESTAR+PR
b. [Carlos que marchaba] es lo único que estaba.
‘Carlos that he walked is the only thing that Carlos was’

e. Pseudoclefting
(12)

PR
a. Lo único que vi aquella noche fue a [Juan que corria por el parque].
‘The only thing I saw that night was Juan that he ran by the park’

ESTAR+PR
b. ??La única que está es [María que corre].
‘The only one that is is Maria that she runs’

f. Coordination
(13)

PR
a. He visto a [Juan que corria] y a [María que saltaba].
‘I saw Juan that ran and Maria that jumped’

ESTAR+PR
b. [Juan está que corre] y [que suda]./Juan está que corre, que suda
‘Juan is that he runs and that he sweats’

g. Constructions Not only... but also
(14)

PR
a. No solo vi a [Juan que bailaba] sino también [que bebía].
‘Not only I saw Juan that he danced but also that drank’

ESTAR+PR
b. #No solo [Marco está que baila] sino también [que rie].
‘Not only Marco is that he dances, but also that (he) laughs’

As I mentioned earlier, some constructions have been regarded as grammatical, such as the case of clefting in (11) and pseudo clefting in (12). However, a separation of ESTAR from the CP results in ESTAR with a different meaning, that of the existence of the thing referred by the DP, not of the aspectual information of the event being performed in progress when adjoined to the CP. The same occurs with the case of coordination in (13), while the second CP is alone, the first one, with ESTAR, brings the denotation of progression that helps to interpret the second CP in the same sense. In the case of Not only in (14), the construction is also regarded as grammatical, but native
speakers indicated that it would be better to mention ESTAR again before the second CP instead of omitting it. After these observations, we realized that, besides the dependencies of tense, ESTAR+PR is a single complex structure which cannot be split in two constituents, in opposition to the PR with agentive matrix verbs, because ESTAR functions as an auxiliary that helps the CP to be interpreted as an event in progress, hence ESTAR carries aspectual features that must be adjoined to the predicative CP.

3. Analysis

I propose that the subject, the lexical DP, is base-generated in the specifier of the lower V, but it moves on and rises cyclically to Spec of the higher IP, so the structure will have the aspectual interpretation that ESTAR provides, that of an event in progress.

3.1 ESTAR, a non-agentive verb

The subject of ESTAR is actually the subject of the small clause. ESTAR is a verbal head that functions as a link between a predicate and its subject; therefore, it has no subject or agent role. As Fernández mentions,

La base léxica del predicado de las oraciones copulativas es una categoría nominal, no verbal (…), denominada ‘atributo’. El verbo que presenta esta clase de oraciones es un verbo cópula, semánticamente vacío, portador de los morfemas que contienen el modo, tiempo y aspecto gramaticales, y de los morfemas de número y persona concordantes con el sujeto. (1999, p. 2359)

[The lexical base of the predicate in copulative sentences is a nonverbal nominal category (...) called attribute. The verb in this kind of sentences is a ‘linking’ verb, semantically empty, carrier of morphemes containing mood, time and grammatical aspect; and number and person morphemes that agree with the subject]. (Translation is mine)

What Fernández intended to say is that verbs like ESTAR do not impose subject selection; they lack lexical meaning and serve as auxiliaries of predicates; and mainly, this kind of verbs and their attributes make a type of non-cleavable complex predicate; in other words, neither of the two constituents is expendable.

These characteristics explain why ESTAR lacks external theta role and allow the raising of the lexical DP from the small clause. In addition, it explains why ESTAR + PR construction fails constituency tests when trying to separate the aspectual verb from its predicative.

We will represent the structure Juan está que corre as follows:
(15) Juan, está CP[t, que [t, corre]].
In Figure 1, we see that V CORRER projects a functional domain CP, which satisfies the predicate selection of ESTAR. The functional projection CP, which is predicative with the V because it must share categorical features with it, licenses the rising of the lexical subject DP, which establishes a predicative relation with C'. Subsequently, the subject raises to Spec of ESTAR and then to Spec of IP in order to check Nominative case. It is also important to note that the main verb tense binds the embedded verb tense, so they show the same tense features.

Our auxiliary ESTAR selects as complement an Aspectual phrase which bears the PROGRESSIVE feature; its head will check the PROG feature once it raises to Spec of AUX; and finally it will join the head of I, which bears IMPERFECTIVE feature. Hence, we can explain why perfective constructions (auxiliaries that bear PERFECTIVE features) would be ungrammatical.

Next, I will try to explain three important issues: how CP is originated in ESTAR+PR which I consider a Complex Small Clause, according to Rafel 2000); how a DP is licensed in Spec of CP; and why Tense must be shared between ESTAR and the embedded verb.

3.2 How CP is originated in PR?

I will follow Rafel’s Complex Small Clause (CSCI) analysis and his tenets based on Grimshaw. Grimshaw argues that X’s extension is possible if both categorial features and functional specification of X are preserved through the structure. In this case, V is an extended head of CP, and CP an extended projection of V because the categorical value of V and CP is [-N + V], and their functional specifications do not match, due to the functional specification of V is lesser or empty (F0) compared to that of CP (F2). The functional specification of V is empty because it is lexical, while the functional specification of CP is full or greater because CP is not the functional projection that immediately dominates the layer VP, since IP intervenes between CP and VP.

So, our structure is originated as follows. The higher projection V' is merged with a DP, which moves to a higher position later. Furthermore, a functional domain CP is extended from V, as it was explained above. Both CP, as an extended projection of V, and V share the same categorical features, and CP is projected above VP.
In the CP domain, the lexical DP generated in a lower level lands in Spec of CP and merges with C'. Thus, the constituent introduced by C' functions as the predicate of complex small clause, according to the predicate features that CP shares with V; while the argument in Spec of CP, that is, the lexical DP, functions as the subject of the construction. The difference between a finite sentence or an ordinary small clause and a CSCl is the existence of a CP layer containing a DP in the specifier.

3.3. How a DP is licensed in Spec of CP?
Semantically, a DP in Spec of CP would be licensed by predication. If the predication involves necessarily the assignment of a theta role, then we must assume that the DP get a theta role from the constituent C', since the constituent C' is predicate of this DP. That is, the whole constituent that is predicate of the subject of the external predication is the unit that assigns the role theta to the subject, mainly the constituent C'. This is in agreement with the idea that V is not the element that assigns the theta role to the subject, but V '/ I'. Then, that will help to assume that the semantic role of the subject of the CSCl should be similar for all types of CSCl. In them, an individual, the subject of the CSCl, and a situation, that is the predicate that the CSCl describes, are placed. The semantics of the CSCl suggests that the categories that can be predicates of an individual are not only properties or states, but also situations. By situation, I mean (dynamic) events and states of affairs (situations).

3.4 Constraints on tense
One way to explain why both verbs share the same tense features is that the tense of the embedded sentence is anaphoric to the one of the main verb or bounded to it (Khomitsevich 59). Enç – cited by Khomitsevich - also explains that there is a binding by dependency from head to head, the relationship is established between T and T and between T and C.

4. Discussion and further research
In PRs with agentive matrix verbs, Rafel (37) proposes that the lexical DP is base generated in Spec of the embedded CP, and it c-commands a null pronoun pro from the lower sentence, which merges with the lower verb:

Fig. 2. Analysis of Juan que corría from He visto a [Juan que corría] by Rafel (79)

However, there is a problem with the existence of pro in the embedded sentence: pro, as a pronoun in general sense, could refer to the DP of the matrix verb or to someone else:
but in PRs seen so far, it could not, because it refers straight to the lexical DP. This observation makes us think that it could not be a pronoun. On the other hand, if we assume it is not a bounded pro, but a trace left by DP moved that is base-generated in Spec of V, when reconstructed it as *He visto que Juan corría*, we get ambivalent interpretations:

(17)  
  a. María ha visto a Juan que corría (event in progress)  
  b. Pedro escuchó a Alberto que jugaba (event in progress)  

Reconstruction:

(18)  
  a. María ha visto que Juan corría (progress//proposition, state of things)  
  b. Pedro escuchó que Alberto jugaba (progress//proposition, state of things)  

In (18) we get the interpretation of an event in progress, but also a second meaning that of a proposition, a state of things, such as an ability of the person to perform an activity. Therefore, it could not be generalized that PRs are derived from conventional sentences via DP movement.

Finally, another issue concerns how aspectual auxiliaries interact with other complex constructions in dialects other than the Peruvian one. It is a well known fact that some verbs has lost their lexical content to serve as modals or aspectual auxiliaries (‘poder’, ‘tener’, ‘ir’, ‘venir’, ‘terminar’, ‘empezar’, etc.), but it is a subject of further research how the predicate that follows could be others besides the gerund and the infinitive across the varieties of Spanish in all the innovative regions of America, and why this is so.

5. Conclusions

The construction analyzed here is more complex than the small clauses found in standard Spanish pseudo relatives. Since ESTAR assigns an important information to the structure, the aspectual tense of progress, therefore ESTAR+PR operate as a single complex predicate, and they are inseparable in two different constituents, in opposition to PR with agentive verbs.

From the above, the close dependency of tense between ESTAR and V from the small clause follows, which, as we saw, can be explained by binding. Furthermore, the lexical emptiness of ESTAR (but no aspectual), and the inability of the small clause to assign nominative case to the lexical DP subject (sister of C’) requires this DP to rise to Spec, AuxP, and then to Spec of IP.

Notes

1 Chilean dialect (Cifuentes 2009) also presents this phenomenon, but its semantic implications will not be discussed here.


3 The value of the head of categorial features corresponds to the specification this head receives in the dual system: V is assigned the value [-N + V]; N [N-V +]; A [+ N-V]; and P [-N-V]. As for the functional specification of the head is concerned, it is stated that the lexical categories are zero F0 because they lack functional properties, and that functional categories are assigned F1 value if they introduce immediately a lexical domain, otherwise they receive FN value, where N is a number greater than 1. V, for example, is a perfect head for VP, and VP a perfect projection for V because the categorial value of V and VP in both
cases is \([-N + V]\), and its functional specification is \(F_0\) as both belong to the lexical layer \(XP\). However, when \(X\) is the extended head of \(Y\), and \(Y\) is an extended projection of \(X\), where

(a) \(Y\) dominates \(X\),

(b) \(Y\) and \(X\) share all the categorical features,

(c) All nodes involved between \(X\) and \(Y\) share all categorical features,

(d) If \(X\) and \(Y\) are not in the same perfect projection, \(F\) value of \(Y\) is higher than the \(F\) value of \(X\).

4 The idea is that lexical categories are associated with functional categories, and that lexical projections are complements of functional projections.

References:


