

# Verb type effects on complementizers in Spanish embedded gapping

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Keywords: ellipsis, gapping, complementizers, clausal embedding, factivity

Spanish, unlike English, allows complementizers in embedded gapping, see *que* 'that' in the elliptical conjunct in (1). The complementizer is generally optional but shows subtle constraints depending on the type of embedding verb (Bonke & Repp 2022). The verbs show varying degrees of degradation in acceptability with *que* compared to the version without *que*. Bonke & Repp (2022) hypothesize that the relevant verbal property governing these constraints is factivity. In this talk, I investigate this hypothesis by presenting the results of two experiments on the relevance of factivity for *que* in gapping.

(1) Él cree que el mundo es su empresa y (**que**) los mexicanos sus lacayos.  
he thinks that the world is his company and that the Mexicans his lackeys  
"He thinks that the world is his company and the Mexicans his lackeys." (Bonke & Repp 2022: 528)

Based on Degen & Tonhauser's (2021, 2022) gradual and variable view of factivity, I hypothesize that the gradual effect of *que* on acceptability represents the gradual factivity of the clause embedding verbs (= more factive verbs show a larger degradation), and that present *que* leads to less factive readings.

Experiment 1 tested Bonke & Repp's (2022) embedding verbs with non-elliptical, non-coordinated embedded clauses within an entailment cancelling environment (polar questions). Participants indicated whether they thought the utterer of the question was certain that the content of the complement clause was true (= Degen & Tonhauser's *certain that*-diagnostic). The resultant ratings are indicative of the degree to which the speaker is understood to presuppose the content of the complement clause, and therefore of how factive each embedding verb is. The mean certainty ratings for each clause-embedding verb (Figure 1) show a gradual cline, with no abrupt boundaries between possible types. The means correlate significantly with the verbs' mean *que*-effect in gapping from Bonke & Repp (2022) (Spearman's *rho* = .37, *p* = .014, Figure 2, left). However, the correlation is only moderate and seems to be driven by a specific subset of non-factives, verbs of saying and thinking. Without this subset, the correlation disappears (Figure 2, right).

Experiment 2 directly measured certainty ratings for gapping sentences like (1). The results show that *que* has no significant effect on ratings (Figure 3), which indicates that *que* does not shift interpretation towards a non-factive reading. The two experiments thus suggest that factivity as such is not relevant for the acceptability of *que* in gapping.

## References

Bonke, Max & Sophie Repp (2022), Complementizer deletion in embedded gapping in Spanish, *The Linguistic Review* 39(3), 525-555.

Degen, Judith & Judith Tonhauser (2021), Prior beliefs modulate projection. *Open Mind* 5, 59–70.

Degen, Judith & Judith Tonhauser (2022), Are there factive predicates? An empirical investigation, *Language* 98(3), 552-591.

Figure 1: Factivity ratings by verb

Coloured dots = individual ratings, black dots = means, errorbars = 95% confidence intervals

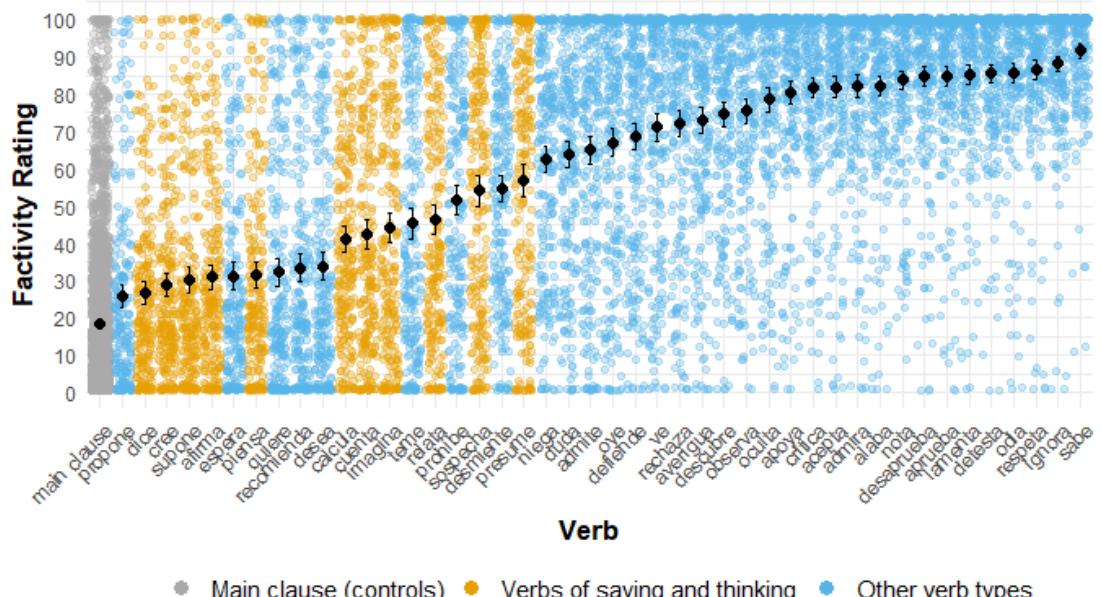


Figure 2: Correlation of mean factivity ratings and complementizer degradation by verb

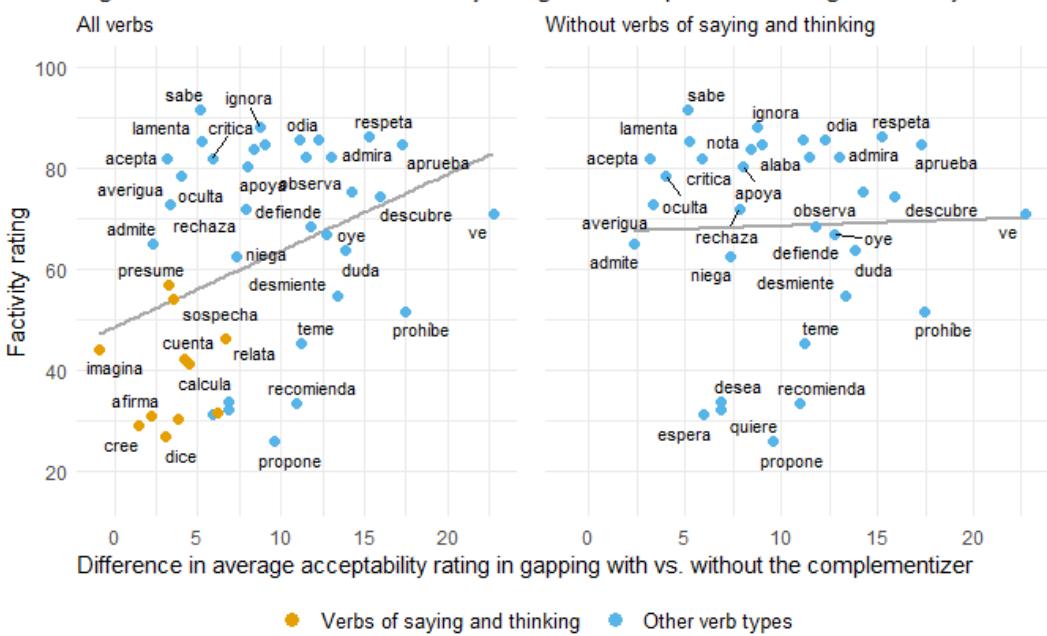


Figure 3: Complementizer effect by verb type in gapping

Dots = mean ratings; error bars = 95% confidence intervals

