The Spanish subjunctive (subjv) is largely understood as being selected by verbs, nouns, adjectives, and prepositions that take sentential complements. In some cases, however, the Spanish subjunctive is selected by a construction, rather than by a lexical item. In this paper, I will discuss one of these constructions in its different versions. I will call it the sentential subject construction (SSC):

(1)

a. \([s[NP[det\{el\} que [s [NP \ldots] [VP [V_{subjv} \ldots]]]]] [VP [V \ldots]]]\)

b. El que la policía los haya interrogado tiene lógica.

The that the police them have\(_{subjv}\) interrogated has indicative logic

“the fact that the police interrogated them has some logic”

In (1a) the subjunctive sentential subject is introduced by the determiner (det) \(el\) ‘the’ followed by the complementizer \(que\) ‘that’, plus a sentence obligatorily conjugated in the subjunctive. The main verb of (1a) can be any verb. A different version of the SSC is the one in which the sentential subject appears without the determiner, and optionally to the right of the construction, as shown by (2a):

(2)

a. \([s [NP]; [VP [V es [NP_{predicative} \ldots]]] [NP [det \emptyset] [[s que[s[NP] [VP[V_{subjv} \ldots]]]]];]]\)

a. es acoso que llames a María todas las noches.

‘It is harassment that (you) call\(_{subjv}\) to María all the nights’

The main verb of (2a) is always \(ser\) ‘to be’, followed by a predicative NP. The predicative slot can have as its head any noun that refers to an event or state (Jackendoff, 1990). Another version of the SSC is the one which has an infinitival sentential subject. The main verb of this version is also \(ser\) ‘to be’, and the predicative is a sentence introduced by \(que\) ‘that’, and conjugated in the subjunctive:

(3)

a. \([s [NP[S_{infinitival}] [VP [V[ser [SP_{predicative} que[s [NP] [VP[V_{subjv} \ldots]]]]]]]]\)

a. Ser buen estudiante es que saques buenas notas en todas las clases.

‘to be a good students means you getting good grades in all the classes’

Both (2a) and (3a) are used to express the conceptualization by the speaker of the situation expressed by the predicative noun (2a), or by the infinitival sentential subject (3a). For example, (3a) could be used in a context in which the speaker is contrasting his conceptualization of the state \(ser\) buen estudiante ‘to be a good student’ with that of the hearer, for whom the situation only involves getting good grades in one class.

Interestingly, construction (1a) is not used to express a conceptualization of a situation by the speaker, and its meaning may be related to presupposition.

References


