Adding and Subtracting Variation: Resumptive Pronouns and Prepositional Phrase Chopping in Spanish

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The occurrence of resumptive pronouns (RPs) in relative clauses (RCs) as in (1) is attested in a number of languages (Hawkins 2004) in the world. In languages like Spanish, RP-containing RCs alternate with gap-containing RCs, as in (2).

1. Voy a trabajar con un amigo, César Márquez, que trabajé con él en Puente Hills Ford
   ‘I am going to work with a friend, César Márquez, that I worked with him at Puente Hills Ford.’

2. Hay un joven también con el que estudié y… creo que nada más.
   ‘There is also a young man with whom I studied and… I guess that’s it.’

In Spanish, the gap-containing variant is considered the standard one, and the RP-containing variant is non-standard. In addition, in Spanish, just like in Portuguese (Tarallo 1986), there is a second non-standard variant within oblique RCs: prepositional phrase (PP) chopping, as in (3).

3. La novia, [con la] que tiene 14 años, todos son ludópatas.
   ‘The girlfriend, who he has been [with] for 14 years, all of them are ludopathic’.

This variationist quantitative study aims at explaining the aforementioned alternation. The results show that RP presence in oblique RCs is triggered by RCs that have a somewhat ‘loose’ relation (Tarallo, 1986) with their antecedents, like non-restrictive RCs and the second or third RC in a coordinated sequence; oblique RPs are also caused by cognitively prominent NPs such as animate antecedents; finally, they are triggered by the prepositions para, and por.

PP-chopping, instead, is favored by contexts that suppose a relatively easy processing of the complex antecedent + RC, such as adjacent antecedents and small domains (Hawkins, 2004); conversely to what happens with RPs, PP-chopping is produced with inanimate antecedents; finally, the preposition de, commonly chopped in the Spanish phenomenon dequeísmo, favors PP-chopping in oblique RCs.

References