

Comparing Locative and Existential Small Clauses in Spanish

Andrea Levinstein Rodriguez

Presented for the 2021 Annual Meeting of the
Canadian Linguistics Association | Association canadienne de linguistique

June 04, 2021



**UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY**



Locative and Existential Small Clauses

- **Small Clause (SC):** A syntactic constituent where a subject and a predicate are linked to each other without a verb
- **Copula constructions:** 'To be' sentences. Contain an underlying SC
- Locative (1a) and Existential (1b) copulas are standardly assumed to share an underlying structure [_{sc} DP PP]
 - (1) a. A bee is in the garden
 - b. There is a bee in the garden
- In Spanish, this assumption is complicated by the fact that there are three copula verbs: SER, ESTAR, and HABER



Copula alternation in Spanish Locatives

- SER-ESTAR alternation is a widely-studied topic in Spanish literature
 - SER associated with **Stage-level predicates** (permanent/intrinsic)
 - ESTAR associated with **Individual-level predicates** (temporary/external)
 - Alternation between SER (2a) and ESTAR (2b) depends on whether the SC subject is an event nominal
- (2) a. La fiesta **es** en el jardín b. La abeja **está** en el jardín
 'The party is in the garden' *'The bee is in the garden'*
- Stage- vs. Individual- level can't account for complex alternation
 - To be 'temporary' is an 'intrinsic' property of event nominals



The Existential copula in Spanish

- Locative and Existential constructions are assumed to share the same underlying structure cross-linguistically
 - In complementary distribution re: definiteness (Freeze, 1992)
- In Spanish, the existential construction is characterized by the copula verb HABER (3)
 - (3) Hay una abeja en el jardín
'There is a bee in the garden'
- Non-agreement, VSO order, mandatory indefiniteness
 - Not treated as part of the copula paradigm in Spanish literature



Overview

(4a) la fiesta es en el jardín
the.F.SG party BE.3SG in the garden

(4b) la abeja *es en el jardín
the.F.SG bee BE.3SG in the garden

(4c) una fiesta *es en el jardín
a.F.SG party BE.3SG in the garden

(4d) una abeja en el jardín
a.F.SG bee in the garden

	SER	ESTAR	HABER
EVENT	✓		
NON-EVENT	X		
DEFINITE	✓		
INDEFINITE	X		



Overview

(5a) la fiesta *está en el jardín
the.F.SG party BE.3SG in the garden

(5b) la abeja está en el jardín
the.F.SG bee BE.3SG in the garden

(5c) una fiesta en el jardín
a.F.SG party in the garden

(5d) una abeja *está en el jardín
a.F.SG bee BE.3SG in the garden

	SER	ESTAR	HABER
EVENT	✓	X	
NON-EVENT	X	✓	
DEFINITE	✓	✓	
INDEFINITE	X	X	



Overview

(6a) la fiesta en el jardín
the.F.SG party in the garden

(6b) *hay la abeja en el jardín
BE.EXT the.F.SG bee in the garden

(6c) hay una fiesta en el jardín
BE.EXT a.F.SG party in the garden

(6d) hay una abeja *hay en el jardín
BE.EXT a.F.SG bee BE.EXT in the garden

	SER	ESTAR	HABER
EVENT	✓	X	✓
NON-EVENT	X	✓	✓
DEFINITE	✓	✓	X
INDEFINITE	X	X	✓

No SVO order



Research Questions

- What is the internal structure of these constructions?
- Can the distribution of HABER be folded into existing analyses of SER-ESTAR alternation?



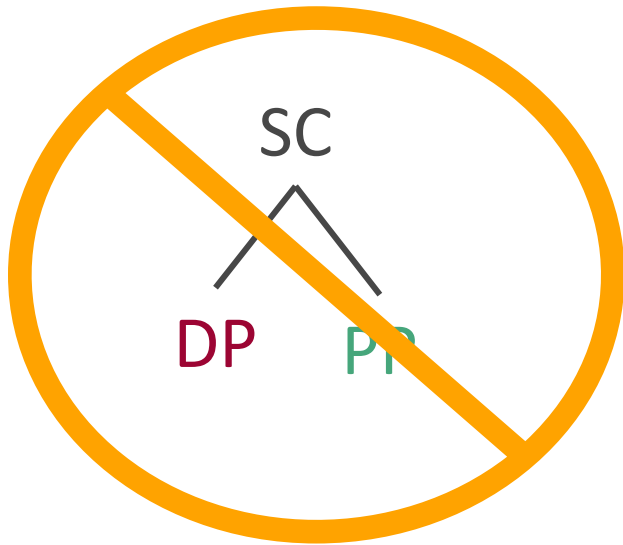
UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

Small Clause Structure



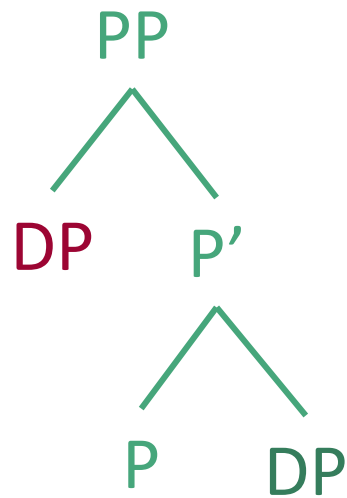
What do SCs look like? (Citko, 2011)

Symmetrical
arguments

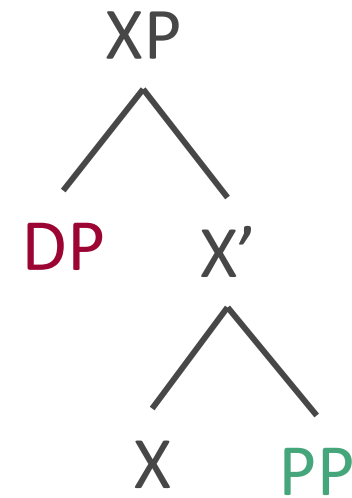


NOT RELEVANT

Predicate
head



Functional
head





Asymmetrical proposals

- ‘Predicate head’ first proposed by Stowell (1983), arguing for the existence of Small Clause structures distinct from VP and TP
 - For Freeze (1992), the shared structure of Existentials and Locatives was a PP Small Clause
- ‘Functional head’ can manifest overtly in some languages
 - e.g., Welsh *yn*
- Pros of ‘functional head’ approach
 - Allows for a smaller, neater lexicon than proposing that every possible predicate has optional arguments
 - A matter of preference, bigger lexicon vs. bigger tree



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

Locative Small Clauses



Event Nominals

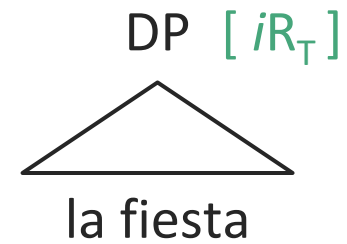
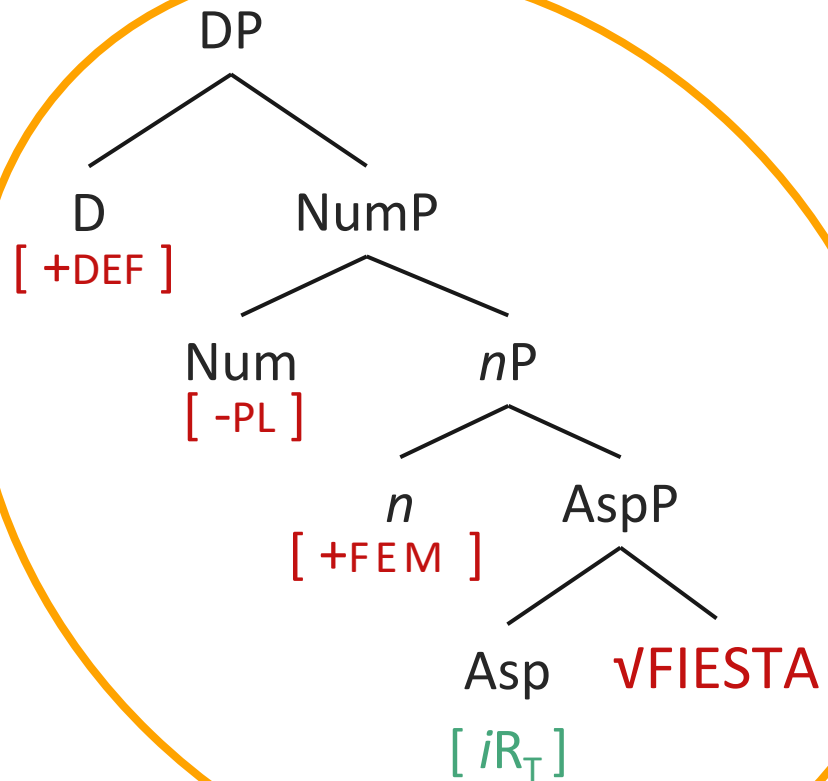
- Grimshaw (1990) identified three types of nominals:
 - Complex Event vs. Simple Event vs. Referential
- Complex events have more structure, including arguments
 - [_{DP} the destruction of the city]
- Simple events don't, but are still distinct from non-events
 - [_{DP} the party]
- What matters is that they both have AspP
 - Crucial component of Brucart (2012)'s proposal on SER-ESTAR alternation



SER/ESTAR alternation and Aspect

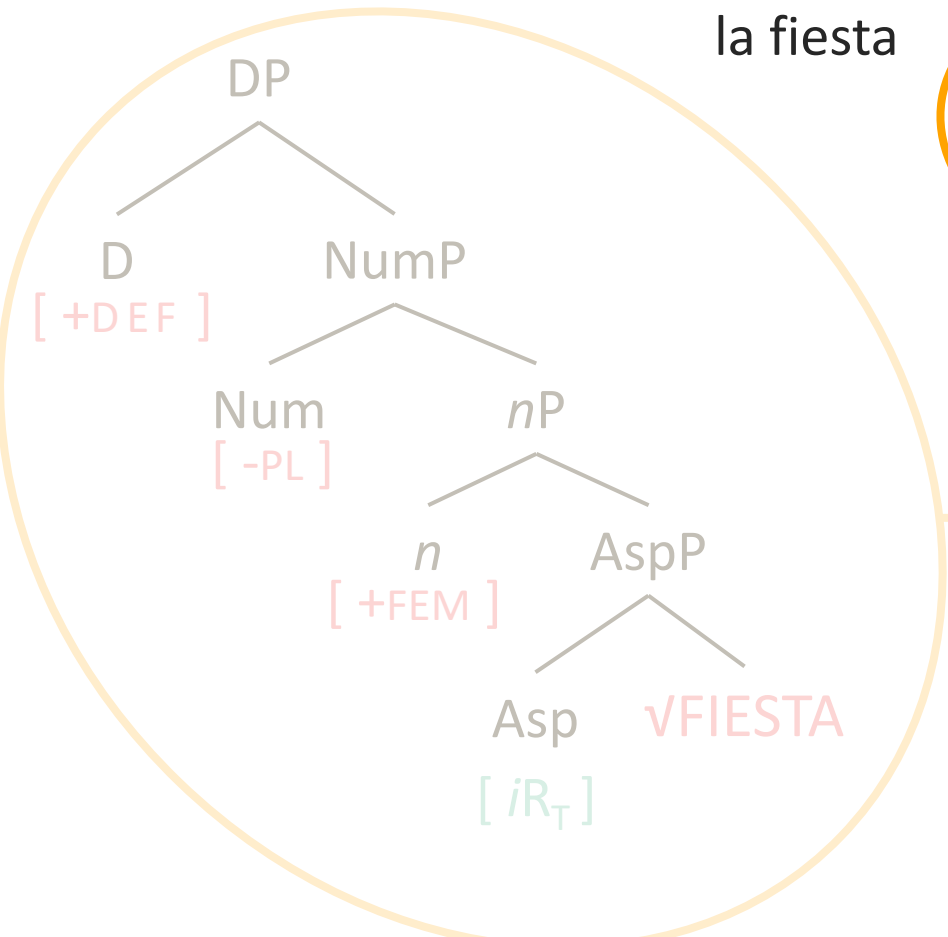
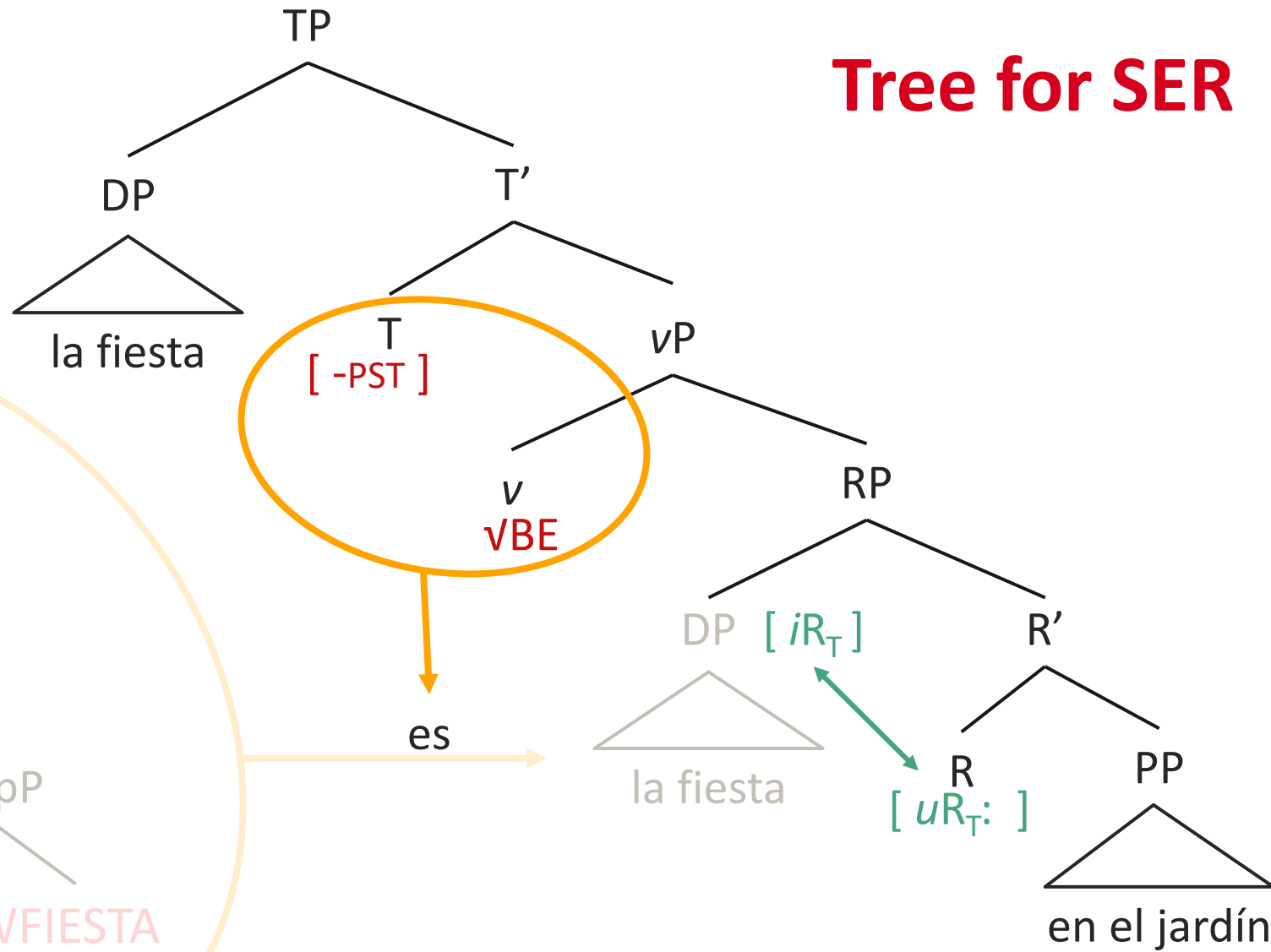
- Builds on proposals claiming SER and ESTAR have the same root
 - $ESTAR = SER + [R_T]$
- **Terminal coincidence relator:** Links the temporal and spatial properties of the predicate to those of the subject
- Functional feature $[uR_T:]$ must be valued by a matching feature at the Aspect head
 - Event nominals have Aspect within the SC
- If there is no Aspect layer within the SC, the relator moves to v to be valued by sentential Aspect

Tree for SER

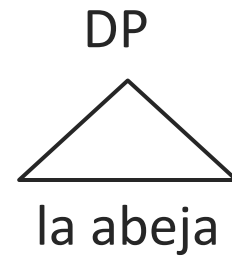
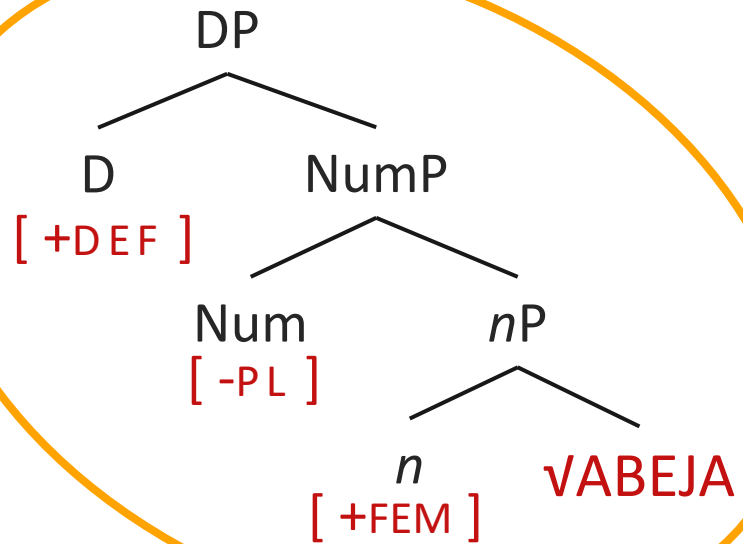




Tree for SER

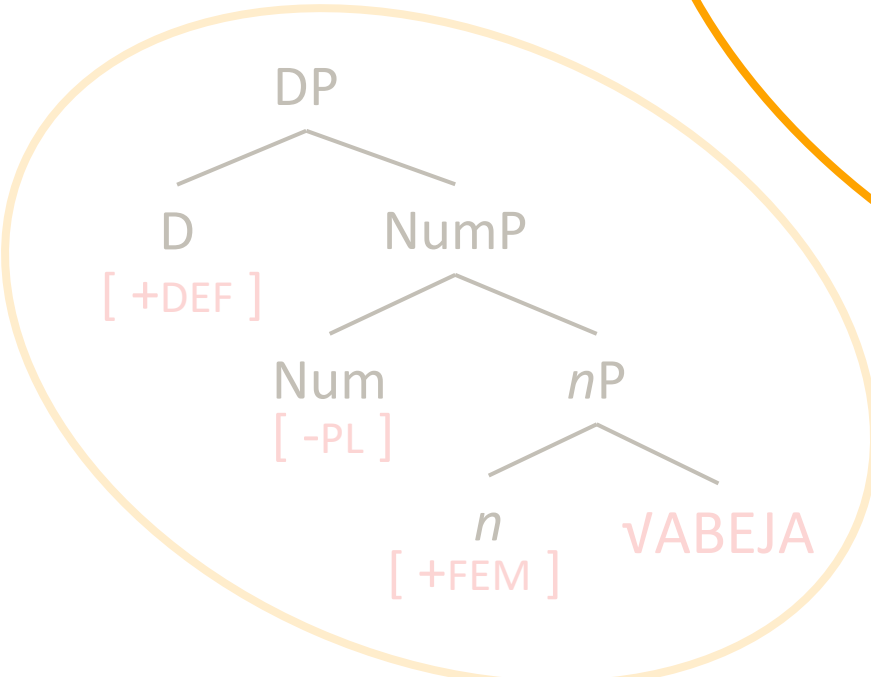
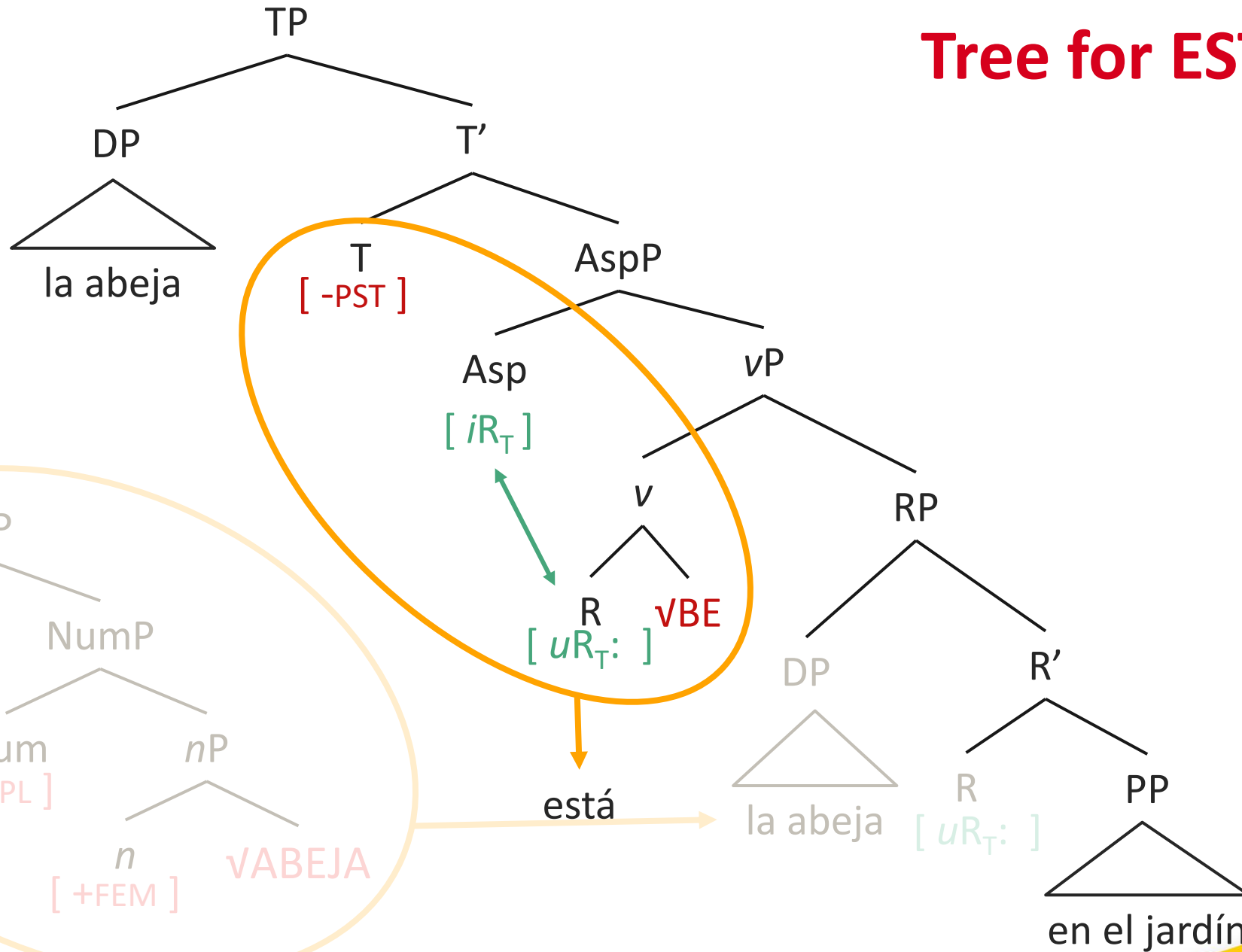


Tree for ESTAR





Tree for ESTAR





UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

Existential Small Clauses

HABER and Aspect

- Evidence that Spanish Locative and Existential have the same SC structure comes from past tense alternation of HABER
- Perfective ~ event (6a); imperfective ~ non-event (6b)

(7)	a.	Hubo	una	fiesta	en	el	jardín
		HABER.PST.PFV	a.F.SG	bee	in	the	garden
				<i>'There was a party in the garden'</i>			
	b.	Había	una	abeja	en	el	jardín
		HABER.PST.IMPF	a.F.SG	bee	in	the	garden
				<i>'There was a bee in the garden'</i>			

- In complementary distribution



HABER and Aspect

- Evidence that Spanish Locative and Existential have the same SC structure comes from past tense alternation of HABER
- Perfective ~ event (6a); imperfective ~ non-event (6b)

(7) a. ~~X~~Había una fiesta en el jardín
HABER.PST.IMPF a.F.SG bee in the garden
'There was a party in the garden'

b. ~~X~~Hubo una abeja en el jardín
HABER.PST.PFV a.F.SG bee in the garden
'There was a bee in the garden'

- In complementary distribution



The Mapping Hypothesis (Diesing 1992)

- Accounts for indefinite subject and VSO word order in Existentials
- Tri-partite structure: operator, restrictor and nuclear scope
 - TP domain, including moved Subject, maps to restrictor (modifies what the operator applies to)
 - VP domain maps to nuclear scope
- Existential interpretation for DP comes from it being still part of the VP domain (didn't move out)
 - Introduces the entities that the subject refers to



Non-agreement

- Present form *hay* does not show any morphological agreement
- In other tenses, two dialect varieties – non-agreement (8a) vs. number agreement (8b) (Rodriguez Mondoñedo, 2005)

(8) a. **Había** muchas abejas en el jardín
HABER.PST many bee.PL in the garden
'There are many bees in the garden.'

(8) b. **Habían** muchas abejas en el jardín
HABER.PST.PL many bee.PL in the garden
'There are many bees in the garden.'

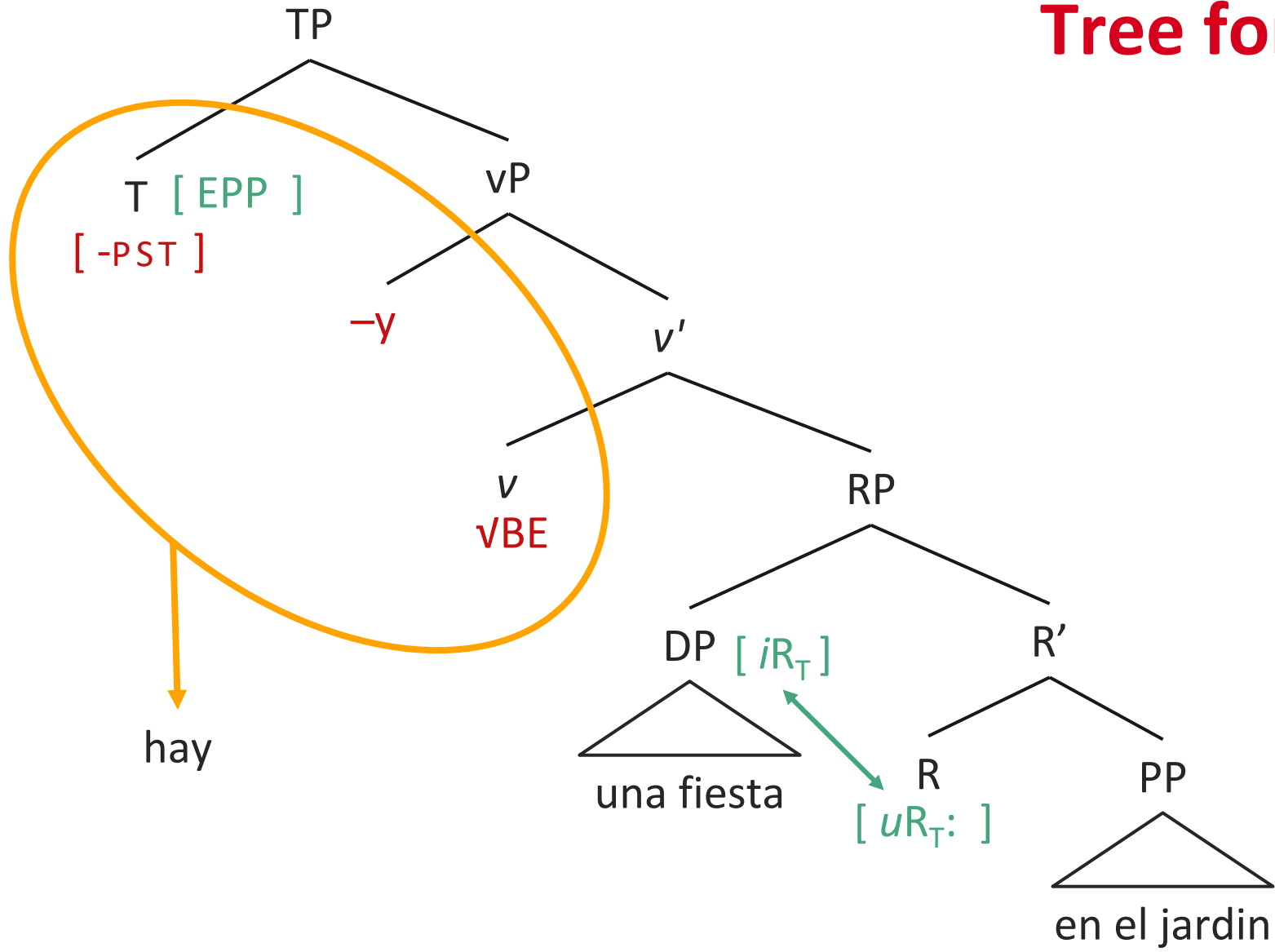


Existing proposals

- Present form attributed to expletive clitic **-y**
 - Comparable to English *there*; French *y*
- Rodriguez Mondoñedo (2005) claims that the clitic is a “morphological fossil” that blocks subject agreement
 - Evidenced by the fact that forms without **-y** do show agreement in certain varieties
- I elaborate on his proposal; the clitic merges @ Spec, vP and blocks DP movement
 - This forces HABER spellout with default (3sg) agreement **ha**, to which the clitic attaches to give **hay**



Tree for HABER





Limitations

- This account can work well for the non-agreement varieties of Spanish
 - For non-present forms, we can just say that there is a null version of $-y$ fulfilling the same role
- It does not explain SER/ESTAR ~ HABER alternation in number agreement varieties beyond present tense
 - If there is no $-y / -\emptyset$, as evidenced by agreement, then
 - What prevents subject raising? What forces HABER spellout?



Summary & Conclusion

- SER, ESTAR, HABER have the same underlying structure consisting of a small clause headed by a terminal coincidence relator R_T
- This SC is selected by a v head which, through a combination of different features, results in a spellout of SER, ESTAR, or HABER
- SC head needed for SER~ESTAR alternation; supports asymmetry
- Whether this proposal could work in agreement varieties is the elephant in the room; more research needed

Thank you!

Questions? Comments?

Please let me know at andrea.levinsteinrod@ucalgary.ca



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY



Partial Bibliography

- Brucart, J. M. (2012). Copular alternation in Spanish and Catalan attributive sentences. *Linguística: Revista De Estudos Linguísticos Da Universidade do Porto*, 7, 9-43.
- Citko, B. (2011). Small clauses. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 5(10), 748-763.
- Contreras, H. (1987). Small clauses in Spanish and English. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*, 5(2), 225-243.
- Den Dikken, M. (2006). *Relators and linkers: The syntax of predication, predicate inversion, and copulas*. MIT Press.
- Diesing, M. (1992) *Indefinites*. MIT Press.
- Freeze, R. (1992). Existentials and other locatives. *Language*, 68(3), 553-595.
- Grimshaw, J. (1990). *Argument Structure*. MIT Press.
- Moro, A. (1997). *The raising of predicates: Predicative noun phrases and the theory of clause structure*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rodríguez-Mondoñedo, M. (2005). Case and Agreement in Spanish Existential Constructions (and beyond). Retrieved April, 2018, from <http://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/000164>
- Roy I., & Soare, E. (2013). Event-related Nominals. In *Categorization and category change*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.123-152.
- Stowell, T. (1983). Subjects Across Categories, *The Linguistic Review*, 2, 285–312.