

# Microvariation in Spanish Comparatives\*

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## Abstract

While phrasal comparatives of inequality with the comparative marker *que* ‘than’ (*Pedro es más inteligente que yo* ‘Pedro is more intelligent than I.SG.NOM’) have received a fair deal of attention in the study of Spanish (e.g., Bolinger 1950, Plann 1984, Sáez del Álamo 1990, Gutiérrez Ordóñez 1994, Romero Cambrón 1998, Brucart 2003 or Reglero 2007), dialectal variation has not figured prominently in the literature. Microvariation within Chilean Spanish provides evidence for the existence of both a reduced clause analysis and a PP analysis of the *que*-XP in the context above, as opposed to standard Spanish, where only the former analysis applies. This microvariation is the result of the availability of two distinct lexical entries for *que* (a pure complementizer vs. a preposition) or lack thereof. The PP analysis is argued to be consistent with the gradual change from *de* ‘of’ to *que* in the history of comparatives in Spanish (Romero Cambrón 1998).

**Keywords:** phrasal comparatives; microvariation; ellipsis; experimental syntax; Chilean Spanish.

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## 1. Introduction

While comparative constructions have received a fair deal of attention in the study of Spanish and beyond (e.g., see the synchronic analyses in Piera 1983, Gutiérrez Ordóñez 1994, Plann 1984, Sáez del Álamo 1990, Brucart 2003, Reglero 2007, a.o., and the diachronic analysis in Romero Cambrón 1998, a.o., for Spanish), dialectal variation has not figured prominently in the literature (though see Bolinger 1950 for a notable exception). The purpose of this research is to fill this gap in our knowledge while contributing to our understanding of these constructions. Specifically, this research focuses on microvariation for a subcase of comparative structures illustrated in (1), namely, phrasal comparatives of inequality which make use of the comparative marker *que* ‘than’ (PC-*que*):

- (1) Pedro es más inteligente que yo.  
 Pedro is more intelligent than I.SG.NOM  
 ‘Pedro is more intelligent than me.’

Other subcases of phrasal comparatives, structures where the comparative marker is followed by a single phrase, will not be discussed, as these have been established to have different syntactic properties (see Sáez del Álamo 1999 and Brucart 2003 for discussion, a.o.). E.g., I abstract away from phrasal comparatives introduced by the preposition *de* ‘of’ taking a measurement phrase as the compared NP, (2a),<sup>1</sup> or pseudo-comparatives, structures that resemble comparatives in their form but not in their meaning, e.g., (2b):

- (2) a. Tiene más de 500 euros.  
 has more than 500 euros  
 ‘He/she has more than 500 euros.’  
 b. Leyó más libros que *El camino*.  
 read more books than *El camino*  
 ‘He/she read some books on top of *El camino*.’

Furthermore, a comprehensive literature review, even when limited to Spanish, is beyond the scope of this article and, therefore, I focus on those proposals that will be most relevant for the discussion.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, there is an ongoing debate on the following two aspects of the syntax of PC-*que*: (i.) whether the *que/than*-XP has full-fledged clausal syntax underlyingly as opposed to being base-generated; (ii.) the syntactic category of *que/than* (a complementizer introducing a reduced clause, a coordinating conjunction or a preposition). Not all of these analyses are mutually exclusive. For instance, a number of authors have shown that comparatives with

1. For discussion on the distribution of *de* vs. *que*, see Bolinger (1950), Solé (1982), Plann (1984), Romero Cambrón (1997) or Brucart (2003), a.o.  
 2. For discussion on the semantics of comparatives, see Bresnan’s (1973) Comparative Deletion and Chomsky’s (1977) empty operator analysis. See also fn. 3 in this regard.

one single phrase in the coda may divide themselves into clausal and prepositional comparatives in the same language, e.g., Napoli (1983), Hankamer (1973) or Bhatt and Takahashi (2011), a.o., whereas the view that a certain comparative marker (*than*) is a preposition or a coordinating conjunction is a priori compatible with both a clausal or a base-generation analysis. Still, the prepositional analysis of *que/than* has traditionally been linked to the base-generation analysis or direct analysis, e.g., see Hankamer (1973), Hoeksema (1983) and Napoli (1983), a.o, whereas an understanding of the comparative marker as a complementizer has been linked to the reduced clause analysis for obvious reasons (see Bresnan 1973, Hankamer 1973 and Pinkham 1982, a.o.). The analyses of *que* as a preposition, a complementizer and a coordinating conjunction are illustrated in (3a,b,c), respectively:<sup>3</sup>

- (3) a. Pedro es más inteligente [<sub>PP</sub> que María].  
 Pedro is more intelligent than María
- b. Pedro es más inteligente [<sub>CP</sub> que María<sub>x</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> <sup>t</sup><sub>x</sub> es inteligente]].  
 Pedro is more intelligent than María is intelligent
- c. [<sub>TP</sub> Pedro es más inteligente] que [<sub>TP</sub> María<sub>x</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> <sup>t</sup><sub>x</sub> es inteligente]].

With regard to Standard Spanish (SS), both a clausal and a prepositional analysis for PC-*que* have been put forward. Specifically, Gutiérrez Ordóñez (1994) and Brucart (2003) defend both a clausal and a prepositional analysis, though for slightly different syntactic contexts. Brucart (2003: 40) assumes a base-generation PP analysis for structures where the correlate of the compared NP, that is to say, the correlate of the complement of *que*, includes the comparative particle *más*, e.g. (4a), whose analysis is illustrated in (4a').<sup>4</sup> This contrasts with (4b), which for him should receive a clausal analysis, illustrated in (4b'):

3. I abstract away from irrelevant details; in (3c), where *que* is a coordinator, clausal ellipsis is also present, though, as stated, not every researcher that adopted this kind of analysis would agree, (e.g., cf. Sáez del Álamo 1999 and Lechner 2001). If phrasal comparatives have clausal syntax, one single unified semantic analysis would work for both reduced and unreduced comparatives (see Heim 1985 and Bhatt and Takahashi 2011 for discussion). Furthermore, under the plausible assumption that the comparative marker *más/-er* is a degree quantifier that takes the *que/than*-clause as an argument, the lack of adjacency between those two elements in certain examples has been explained as the result of extraposition of the latter element (Bresnan 1973 and Heim 2000, a.o.; see Kennedy 1999, a.o. for an alternative view).
4. A PP analysis has also been put forward for (i), under the second interpretation (Plann 1984, Sáez del Álamo 1990, a.o.):
- (i) Mariano ha tenido mejores profesores que Sánchez y Rodríguez.  
 Mariano has had better teachers than Sánchez and Rodríguez  
*Clausal interpretation*: 'Mariano has had better teachers than Sánchez and Rodríguez have had.'  
*PP-interpretation*: 'Mariano has had teachers who are better than Sánchez and Rodríguez.'



### 2.1. Some arguments against the base-generated PP analysis<sup>5</sup>

First, more than one remnant may survive ellipsis, as long as the remnants are focused, as seen in (6) where the two remnants clearly are not a constituent. In fact, unelided counterparts of PC-ques are attested as well, provided that the material in the *que*-XP does not constitute old information (e.g., Gutiérrez Ordóñez 1994: 25, among many others; see Reglero 2007 for detailed discussion; example taken from Price 1990), (7), an observation that applies as well to other ellipsis contexts, e.g., Sluicing (Merchant 2001, a.o.).

- (6) Pedro es inteligente y María amable.  
 Pedro is intelligent and María friendly  
 ‘Pedro is intelligent and María is friendly.’
- (7) Mi padre vende más libros que discos compra mi madre.  
 my father sells more books than records buys my mother  
 ‘My father sells more books than my mother buys records.’

This suggests that the PC-que construction is derivationally related to the full clause counterpart (see Lechner 2001 for recent discussion; see Hankamer 1973 or Napoli 1983 for divergent views on this issue).

Similarly, the *que*-XP may host a temporal adverb different from the main clause, a fact that suggests that it has tense specification:<sup>6</sup>

- (8) Hoy Jorge comió más que Pedro ayer.  
 today Jorge ate more than Pedro yesterday  
 ‘Today, Jorge ate more than Pedro did yesterday.’

The ellipsis remnant shows the connectivity effects typically seen in non-elliptical sentential environments. E.g., in (9) the correlate needs to bear a preposition consistent with the lexical entry of the verb as opposed to a dummy preposition such as *de* ‘of’, in keeping with the idea that it has originated from a full-fledged sentential structure (Merchant 2001, a.o.):<sup>7</sup>

5. Note that I am not committed to excluding a base-generation PP analysis in other subcases of phrasal comparatives such as (2) or the ones discussed by Gutiérrez Ordóñez (1994) and Bruccart (2003) (see section 1).
6. As noted by an anonymous reviewer, the fact that no tense mismatches are tolerated, provides further evidence that the category affected by ellipsis is at least TP as opposed to vP or any smaller category (see Saab 2010: 92 for discussion on the size of ellipsis):
- (i) \*Hoy Jorge comió más que Pedro mañana.  
 today Jorge ate more than Pedro tomorrow  
 ‘Today, Jorge ate more than Pedro will eat tomorrow.’
7. See Pinkham (1982) for an LF-copying approach as opposed to an ellipsis or PF-deletion approach; see also Chung et al (1995) for a closely-related approach to prototypical ellipsis constructions such as Sluicing.

- (9) Ayer se peleó con Pedro más gente que con /\*de/\*para Juan.  
 yesterday REFL fought with Pedro more people that with of for Juan  
 ‘Yesterday more people fought with Pedro than with Juan.’

Furthermore, *que* can take a PP, that is to say, an element that does not need Case, as a complement, (9), in contrast to what the base-generation prepositional analysis of PC-*que* would predict.

Additionally, unlike English, the Spanish comparative particle is homophonous with complementizer *que*, a fact that lends indirect support to the reduced clausal analysis.

- (10) Faustino dijo *que* Nuncia es inteligente.  
 Faustino said that Nuncia is intelligent  
 ‘Faustino said that Nuncia is intelligent.’

While there are a number of different functions *que* can realize in the syntactic structure, its prepositional use is unattested – even if complementizers are known to have a close relation with prepositions (see Emonds 1985, van Riemsdijk 1978 and Kayne 2004; see also section 1 for discussion).<sup>8</sup>

Case morphology, which is overt in the pronominal system of the language, provides evidence against the prepositional analysis in phrasal comparatives.<sup>9</sup> As expected, the Case of the remnant is determined by its function in the clause, (1), repeated here.

- (11) Pedro es más inteligente que *yo* / \**mí* / \**me* soy inteligente.  
 Pedro is more intelligent than 1SG.NOM 1.SG.PREP 1.SG.ACC am intelligent

While *me* is a clitic, a fact that introduces an interfering factor when accounting for the data in (11), that observation does not explain the ungrammaticality of the counterpart which includes the pronoun with prepositional phrase Case (PP-Case) *mí*.

To sum up, a number of arguments in favor of the clausal ellipsis and/or the coordination analysis of PC-*que* have been put forward. This means that SS does not have prepositional comparatives, that is to say, truly phrasal comparatives, in the context under discussion.<sup>10</sup>

8. As noted in Section 1, the reduced clause analysis and the coordination analysis are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, connectivity effects and other properties discussed in this section would also follow from a coordination analysis of comparatives. In fact, *que* seems to be used as a pseudo-coordination conjunction in expressions as (i) where the use of *que* as opposed to the coordinator *y* ‘and’ entails a certain amount of criticism:

(i) Esta gente, todo el día come que /y come.  
 these people all the day eats that and eats  
 ‘These people eat all day long.’

9. Within the pronominal paradigm of Spanish only the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular pronouns exhibit the Nominative vs PP-Case contrast at the phonetic level. Hence, I concentrate on those two forms throughout the discussion whenever Case properties are relevant.

10. For discussion of a number of arguments against an ellipsis approach to phrasal comparatives and some possible counterarguments, see Lechner (2001) and Merchant (2009).

### 3. PC-ques in Non-Standard Chilean Spanish

The goal of this section is to analyze PC-ques in NSCSp. Section 3.1 deals with the history of Spanish comparatives, which suggests the existence of prepositional *que* (Romero Cambrón 1998). Section 3.2 presents the methodology used to gather the data. Section 3.3 presents the results arguing that prepositional comparatives are available in this variety. Section 3.4 analyzes the differences between SS and NSCSp in the context of current proposals on microvariation. Section 3.5 presents issues for future research.

#### 3.1. On the history of comparative structures in Spanish

A first hint concerning the prepositional nature of *que* can be found in the history of Spanish. Specifically, Romero Cambrón (1998; her data) shows that the use of the preposition *de* in phrasal comparatives was increasingly replaced by *que* starting in the 15th century. In fact, the variation was so prevalent that in certain documents both options are found in the same sentence:

- (12) Qui es mas dulce *que* la miel o qual mas fuerte *del* leon?  
 what is more sweet than the honey or which more strong than-the lion  
 ‘What is sweet than honey or which one is stronger than the lion?’  
 [Fazienda de Ultramar, 209]

According to Romero Cambrón, the *que* version does not substitute the previous *de* version, but rather the data shows the continuity between both structures. That is to say, for Romero Cambrón, cases with *que* include a prepositional coda at least at a certain stage in development. In particular, she argues for the adoption of the comparative marker which was «more generic in the comparisons [*que*], maybe because of a process of analogy, at a time when *de* was increasingly felt to be the comparative particle specific to the «comparison of magnitudes», present in *más de dos* ‘more than two’, *más de lo que debe*, ‘more than he/she should’, *más de lo debido* ‘more than it is pertinent» (Romero Cambrón 1998: 87; my translation).

Nonetheless, Romero Cambrón notes the paradoxical absence of prepositional Case on the complement of *que* when presenting the prepositional analysis of Sáez del Álamo (1990), an absence also noted by Piera (1983), Plann (1984), Price (1990) or Reglero (2007) when developing a synchronic analysis of SS (see also (11)).

- (13) mejor que tú / \*ti Standard Spanish  
 better than 2.SG.NOM 2.SG.PREP  
 ‘Better than you’

In contrast, the data included in this research supports the prepositional analysis for NSCSp in that the ungrammatical pattern in SS in (13) is indeed attested in that variety. If true, that pattern is the intermediate link or state between the original

prepositional comparatives with *de* and the phrasal *que*-comparatives, namely, a prepositional *que*-XP.

### 3.2. Methodology

Initial attempts to study NSCSp revealed the stigmatization of the structure, in that speakers who used it in naturalistic speech, consistently rejected the non-standard patterns in informal grammaticality judgment tasks. Furthermore, no cases were documented in newspapers or magazines and only relatively few cases were documented from other sources. E.g., the following examples were found in a movie, (14a), and on the internet using *Google* ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)), (14b,c):<sup>11</sup>

- (14) a. Yo actúo mejor que ti.  
I perform better than 2.SG.PREP  
'I am a better actor than you.'  
[example from the Chilean film *Mitómana*]
- b. Tiene solo 9 años y sabe pelear mas que ti.  
has only 9 years and knows fight more than 2.SG.PREP  
'He is 9 years old and he knows how to fight better than you.'  
[Video title on the web [www.quechimba.com](http://www.quechimba.com)]
- c. Por que llorar x ti mientras hay 1.000 personas mas  
why cry for 2.SG.PREP while there are 1.000 persons more  
que ti en este mundo  
than 2.SG.PREP in this world  
'Why should one cry for you if there are 1.000 people other than you in this world?'  
[Facebook community]

11. The national origin of the web contents could not be verified. It is hypothesized that the usage of PP-Case is found in other countries. E.g., the following example was documented by the author in naturalistic speech of Honduras:

- (i) Conocieron más que mí.  
visited more than 2.SG.PREP  
'You visited more places than I did.'

A search in the *Corpus diacrónico del español* (CORDE) revealed the productive use of PP-Case in PC-ques in the *Biblia de Ferrara* (1553), (ii.), whereas a search in the *Corpus de referencia del español actual* (CREA) returned one single case, (iii.):

- (ii) ... siete gentes, muchas y fuertes mas que ti  
seven people many and strong more than 2.SG.PREP  
[Párrafo 5, Anónimo, Biblia de Ferrara, Moshe Lazar, Laberinthos, Culver City 1992]

- (iii) Me encontré con un hombre mucho mayor que mí.  
me found with a man much older than 1.SG.PREP  
'I found myself with a man who was much older than me.'

[Párrafo 2, Hablando con Gemma, Telemadrid, 20/11/96 Spain]

As a result a large scale questionnaire was developed to be able to elicit judgments from a larger population in a less time-consuming and more effective manner. In particular, a grammaticality judgment task was designed in order to gather negative data that an observational study or a corpus study could not provide. 30 students (29 females and 1 male) from the Universidad San Sebastián de Osorno participated voluntarily in a grammaticality judgment task which included the most important data points in order to analyze the comparative structures of both SS and NSCSp.<sup>12</sup>

The questionnaire consisted of an indirect grammaticality judgment task combined with a scale followed by a sentence completion task. With regard to the indirect grammaticality judgment task, it was indirect in the sense that instead of asking subjects whether a specific sentence was good in their dialect, a methodology that can lead speakers to use the most prestigious forms as opposed to the more representative ones (see Labov 1972), speakers were asked whether they could encounter the sentence in their dialect, be it in their own speech or in the speech of their friends and relatives (see Barbiers and Cornips 2000 and papers in that volume). This task was combined with a scale. Specifically, speakers could choose between three options (*yes / I am not sure / no*).<sup>13</sup> Sentences included, for instance, both the standard and the non-standard pattern:

- (15) a. Pedro es más inteligente que *yo*.  
 Pedro is more intelligent than 1.SG.NOM
- b. Pedro es más inteligente que *mí*.  
 Pedro is more intelligent than 1.SG.PREP

Additionally, a sentence completion task was included. Specifically, certain properties of the subject were compared to another person so that the subject would have to use a pronoun, e.g., either *yo* or *mí* in (16), when completing the sentences:

12. The questionnaire was administered in a classroom setting, so it was not possible to exclude the male participant. Given that the questionnaire was not intended to unveil the link between certain linguistic usages and social variables, this sample was considered adequate for our research goals.
13. While the use of an indirect grammaticality judgment task is well-justified given the object of research, such tasks conflate to a certain degree the notion of acceptability with the notion of familiarity. In particular, if a speaker is unfamiliar with a specific syntactic variant, that variant is absent from his/her grammar and it is, therefore, ungrammatical. The reverse is not necessarily true: the fact that a given speaker is familiar with a certain form, might not necessarily mean that this form is part of his/her grammar. This, in principle, could pose a problem when interpreting the results. However, the systematicity in the data concerning the predictions of the syntactic analysis can be taken as an indication that speakers did not only make use of the notion of familiarity, but indeed, acceptability. I thank M. Yoshida for discussion of this issue. Furthermore, since the purpose of the questionnaire was to gather syntactic data a small scale was used in contrast to a 5-point Likert scale frequently used in psycholinguistic research.

## (16) Sentence completion task



Usted    Luisa  
You     Luisa

Question: ¿Quién es más pequeño de los dos?  
who is more small out-of the two  
'Who is smaller?'

Answer: Luisa es más pequeña que \_\_\_\_\_  
Luisa is more small than \_\_\_\_\_  
'Luisa is smaller than \_\_\_\_\_.'

The sentence completion task was included to further observe the linguistic behavior of the subjects when given the opportunity to use the language as opposed to only evaluating sentences. Furthermore, it is a task that closely resembles an exam format – even more so than the grammaticality judgment task. As a consequence, speakers were expected to perceive it as a rather formal situation. Thus, the sentence completion task was expected to provide evidence for any link between the grammatical usage of PC-que and the choice style.

### 3.3. Prepositional Case on the complement of que

30 subjects rated examples of PC-ques including 1<sup>st</sup> person and 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular pronouns bearing either Nominative or PP-Case. The standard pattern clearly was judged grammatical (Mean = 3.0 (SD = 0)) in contrast to the PP-Case pattern (Mean = 1.45 (SD = 0.851)). Still, a number of speakers judged the PP-Case pattern as grammatical and it is the grammar of these speakers that I will be analyzing. The following table includes the percentage of speakers who accepted PC-ques with a Nominative and a PP-Case pronoun, respectively, be it a 1<sup>st</sup> person or 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular pronoun.

## (17)

**Table 1.** Percentage of speakers who accepted Nominative Case or PP-Case on the pronominal remnant in the PC-que construction

Case of the remnant	%
Nominative Case	100
PP-Case	33.3

As can be seen, while all speakers accepted the standard pattern in (18), 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the subjects also accepted PC-ques with PP-Case on the pronominal remnant, (19) (the number of speakers who accepted each example out of the 30 subjects is included throughout):

- (18) Pedro es más inteligente que yo. 30/30  
 Pedro is more intelligent than I.SG.NOM  
 ‘Pedro is more intelligent than me.’
- (19) Pedro es más inteligente que mí. 9/30<sup>14</sup>  
 Pedro is more intelligent than I.SG.PREP

Therefore, the questionnaire succeeded in documenting the availability of prepositional comparatives in the community even in such homogeneous sample, as suggested by the history of Spanish. Crosslinguistic variation provides further support for the availability of the prepositional analysis (see section 2.1). E.g., in English, evidence for the prepositional nature of *than* comes from the fact that it can be stranded in phrasal comparatives, just like a preposition (Hankamer 1973), (20), and from the Case properties of the complement of *than*, which shows PP-Case, (21):

- (20) a. Who<sub>x</sub> are you taller than t<sub>x</sub>? *Comparative*  
 b. What<sub>x</sub> did you look at t<sub>x</sub>? *P-Stranding*
- (21) a. Peter is more intelligent than *me*. *Comparative*  
 b. She bought this for *me*. *PP-Case*

A number of data points relevant to the exact analysis of NSCSp were included in the questionnaire. Specifically, the prepositional Case analysis in English has been called into question, among other reasons, because the Case morphology of the pronoun can be found in other contexts, e.g., in coordinate structures, hanging topic constructions, or Gapping. This state of affairs suggests an analysis in terms of Default Case (see Lechner 2001 and Schütze 2001, a.o.):

- (22) a. Peter and *me* ... *Coordination*  
 b. *Me*, I would .... *Hanging Topic*  
 c. John is eager to meet them, and me too. *Gapping*  
 [Lechner (2001: 728)]<sup>15</sup>

14. The 1<sup>st</sup> person singular pronoun was the first case of PP-Case found in the questionnaire. The fact that the very first example of NSCSp had such a high acceptance rate provides evidence that this result is not a task effect, e.g., a habituation effect whereby acceptability scores increase after repeated exposure to a structure.
15. In the unelided counterpart of Gapping, the subject receives Nominative Case, in contrast to the ellipsis structure (Lechner 2001: 728):
- (i) John is eager to meet them and I / \*me am eager to meet them, too.

Crucially, this explanation is not available to explain the Chilean paradigm as Nominative is the Default Case in Spanish (Casielles 2006, a.o.) irrespective of the variety: the structures in (23a) and (23b) were included in the questionnaire and all subjects uniformly rejected the PP-Case version, thus providing evidence against the view that PP-Case might be the Default Case in this variety. In turn, (23c) was only tested with a limited number of speakers, but the results point in the same direction:

- (23) a. Pedro y yo / \**mí* Coordination 30/30  
 Pedro and I.SG.NOM I.SG.PREP  
 ‘Pedro and me’
- b. Yo / \**mí*, parece que tengo la culpa.  
 I.SG.NOM I.SG.PREP seems that have.I.SG the blame  
 ‘As to me, it seems that I am the one to blame.’
- Left-Dislocation* 30/30
- c. John está ansioso por conocerlos, y yo / \**mí* también  
 John is eager to meet-them and I.SG.NOM I.SG.PREP too.  
 ‘John is eager to meet them and me, too.’
- Gapping*

Furthermore, within the base-generated PP analysis only one remnant may appear in the structure. It is therefore predicted that when the syntactic context forces the presence of a full-fledge structure, e.g., by the presence of multiple remnants, the Case of the remnant will coincide with the Case of the antecedent for speakers of both SS and NSCSp, that is to say, for all subjects. The prediction is borne out. In (24) the presence of a second remnant shows that we are not dealing with a phrasal comparative, but that there is more (null) structure, (24b). All the subjects rejected the PP-Case counterpart, in favor of the standard pattern where the pronoun receives Nominative Case.

- (24) a. Juan compró más libros que yo / \**mí* películas. 30/30  
 Juan bought more books than I.SG.NOM I.SG.PREP movies.  
 ‘The number of books Juan bought is bigger than the number of movies I bought.’
- b. Juan compró más libros que yo/\**mí* películas<sub>x</sub> compré t<sub>x</sub>.

From these judgments one can infer that the *que*-XP includes a full clause in (24), not just a base-generated pronoun. Again this is what the view that prepositional *que* is available in NSCSp predicts, as this kind of *que* is banned from (24). A Default Case analysis of PC-ques in NSCSp, on the other hand, would apply a priori in such a context unless stipulated otherwise.<sup>16</sup>

16. PPs have been argued to be movable in contrast to the conjuncts of a coordination or CPs (see Napoli 1983 or Romero Cambrón 1998:73, a.o.). As expected, (i) is ungrammatical in SS:

Most importantly, the uniform behavior of the subjects when judging (23) or (24) in contrast to the judgments concerning the PC-que construction provides evidence that the acceptance of the latter structure by a percentage of the subjects is not an artifact of the methodology – subjects are not giving judgments on the basis of interpretability or familiarity as opposed to grammaticality (see n. 14) or else such asymmetry in the results would remain unexplained. It seems, therefore, to be the case that in NSCSp PC-ques the pronouns receive PP-Case. Given the synchronic data discussed by Romero Cambrón (1998), *que* is the most likely candidate to be the Case assigner. If true, this means *que* in PC-ques in NSCSp is not a coordinator.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.3.1. The idiosyncratic nature of *que* in NSCSp

If indeed the idiosyncratic property of *que* is what underlies the pattern in NSCSp, it is predicted that other comparative particles should not allow for DPs with PP-Case (unless the comparative marker is clearly a preposition, e.g., *de* in (2a)). Indeed, the prediction is borne out. To test this pattern, a comparative of equality with a comparative marker other than *que* was included in the questionnaire. All subjects agreed with the judgment reported below, which rejects PP-Case, as expected:

- (25) Pablo come tanto como yo / \*ti. 30/30  
 Pablo eats as-much as 1.SG.NOM 2.SG.PREP  
 ‘Pablo eats as much as I do.’

Furthermore, while I have restricted the discussion to PC-ques of inequality for the sake of simplicity, speakers of NSCSp also accept PC-ques of equality with PP-Case on the pronoun as expected if indeed *que* is available as a preposition in this variety.

- (i) ?Que yo, Pedro es más inteligente. *Standard Spanish*  
 than 1.SG.NOM Pedro is more intelligent

If true, one would predict that the variant of (i.) with PP-Case should be grammatical for speakers of NSCSp. Nonetheless, this data point was not included in the questionnaire because even PP-comparatives are not movable under certain conditions in Spanish (e.g., Sáez del Álamo 1999:1138):

- (i) a. Juan leyó más de 500 libros.  
 Juan read more of 500 books  
 ‘Juan read more than 500 books.’  
 b. \*De 500 libros, Juan leyó más.

Therefore, it is not clear that this criterion can draw the line between the competing analyses at least in Spanish.

17. Merchant (2009) shows that phrasal comparatives with PP-Case remnants are island-sensitive in Greek, a fact that leads him to suggest that those remnants originate within a full clause that undergoes deletion. The remnant escapes ellipsis by raising into SpecPP, that is to say, into the Spec of the comparative marker. In that position, the remnant receives prepositional Case which determines its morphological realization (see Merchant 2009 for details as well as other alternatives). At present, no data from the island-sensitivity of PC-ques in NSCSp is available and, therefore, I abstract away from this option, leaving it for future research. Still, the fact that the number of remnants determines the availability of PP-Case in NSCSp a priori is at odds with this analysis (though see Lin 2009 for relevant discussion).

- (26) Pablo es igual que mí. 9/30  
 Pablo is equal than me  
 ‘Pablo and I are the same.’

This contrasts with the standard variety which would use Nominative Case in this context.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.3.2. PC-ques with non-pronominal objects in NSCSp

While only pronouns were tested to be able to see their Case properties, we assume that PP-Case is also assigned in PC-ques including a single full DP or any pronoun which does not exhibit the Nominative vs PP-Case contrast at the phonetic level, e.g. (3a), when used in NSCSp. Still, while the PP analysis for nominal codas in PC-ques is fairly straightforward, questions arise as to the exact analysis of PC-ques involving a PP complement (other than the *que*-XP itself), (27), or an adverbial – after all PPs and adverbs do not need to receive Case (see Napoli 1983 or Merchant 2009: 138, a.o., for this same point).

- (27) Ayer se peleó con Pedro más gente que con Juan.  
 yesterday REFL fought with Pedro more people that with Juan  
 ‘Yesterday more people fought with Pedro than with Juan.’

The previous discussion has shown that all speakers of Chilean Spanish have the reduced clausal ellipsis analysis available in their grammars (see the uniform acceptance of (18) and the pattern in (24). Therefore, I adopt the reduced clausal analysis (or the coordinative conjunction analysis) for (27) for speakers of both SS and NSCSp.

### 3.3.3. Sentence completion task

Sentence completion tasks, by their very nature, do not provide evidence regarding the grammaticality of a certain expression, but rather the preference subjects have for a particular linguistic variant. All subjects used the standard pattern, avoiding the non-standard one. Inasmuch as sentence completion tasks are formal, almost exam-like, this shows a certain degree of stylistic awareness, particularly because the NSCSp variant was attested both in naturalistic speech and in the indirect grammaticality judgment task.

## 3.4. The grammar of SS vs. the grammar of NSCSp

Evidence in favor of the existence of prepositional phrasal comparatives introduced by *que* in NSCSp has been provided. In contrast, this structure has been argued to be absent in SS (standard Chilean Spanish and beyond; see section 2). Furthermore, all speakers of Spanish allow for the standard pattern of PC-ques where either the

18. A similar case found in naturalistic speech involves the comparative adverb *después* ‘after’:

(i) ... después que ti.  
 after than you  
 ‘... later than you’.

reduced clause analysis or the coordination analysis applies irrespective of the variety they speak (as stated in section 2.1, the present research remains neutral as to the best analysis of the standard variety, while rejecting the PP analysis). This fits with Bhatt and Takahashi's (2007) view that UG may allow a language to interpret phrasal comparatives as reduced clauses or as base-generated PPs depending on the properties of the comparative marker. E.g., Japanese allows for both kinds of structures whereas Hindi-Urdu only allows for PP-comparatives.

As stated in fn 12, the questionnaire was not designed to study the link between linguistic variation and sociolinguistic variables –other than style–, but rather to develop a syntactic analysis of the structures. This style of analysis concurs with Embick's (2008) claims that the question of whether there is a sociolinguistic effect on the distribution of variants, can be kept distinct from the study of the constructions under consideration. As a result of maintaining this sharp distinction between grammar and use, it becomes possible to understand variation in terms of competing grammars (e.g., Kroch 1989, a.o.) and the grammar does not have to be modified to accommodate variation.<sup>19</sup> For Spanish, this means that speakers using the non-standard pattern have two «grammars» available. Thus, syntactic variation would be restricted to the lexicon, specifically to the lexical entries of *que* available to the speakers (see Adger and Smith 2005), namely, a prepositional *que* and a complementizer *que*.<sup>20</sup> Within this view, the syntactic system gives the same semantic output with two distinct syntactic outputs.

### 3.5. A remaining issue: The feature person of the pronominal remnant

As presented in section 3.3, 10 speakers out of 30 used some form or other of PP-Case comparatives. Still, not all of them accepted both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns. The following table details the distribution of usage:

(28)

**Table 2.** Acceptance rate of PC-ques with a pronominal remnant bearing PP-Case<sup>1</sup>

Grammatical person of the pronoun	%
1 <sup>st</sup> person singular	30
2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular	13.3

1. This table includes the results of speakers who either accepted or rejected the test sentences. In addition, one speaker had doubts concerning the grammaticality of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular PP-Case remnant, though he/she rejected the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular PP-Case remnant.

19. For related discussion see Bickerton (1971) and Henry (1995), where syntactic variation has been argued to result from multiple grammars or multiple parametric settings being available to the speakers, respectively. See Toribio (2000) for related discussion concerning the analysis of preverbal subjects in Dominican Spanish. See also Labov (1972), a.o., for the view that probabilities are built into the definition of grammatical rules.
20. Alternatively, it could be that *que* is a preposition in both SS and NSCSp, but only in the later variety would it have the ability to assign Case. I leave this issue for future research noting its relevance. I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this option to my attention.

Clearly, 1<sup>st</sup> person PP-Case is more common than 2<sup>nd</sup> person. Future research is needed to gain a better understanding of this pattern.

#### 4. Conclusion

Microparametric variation concerning the syntax of phrasal comparatives introduced by *que* ‘than’ in Spanish has been unveiled. In particular, the grammar of non-standard Chilean Spanish has been shown to allow for both a prepositional analysis and a reduced clause analysis in that syntactic context, whereas standard Spanish only allows for the latter. Speakers of non-standard Chilean Spanish have two grammar available, where the source of the parametrization is arguably restricted to the lexicon (Adger and Smith 2005, a.o.), namely, to the lexical entries available for *que*.

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