

Finite verb movement in Chilean Spanish

1. Introduction

One of the premises of Generative Grammar – specially within Syntactic Cartography –, based on Pollock's (1989) seminal work, is that the verb (V) must raise to an IP head in some languages in order to check its inflectional features, notably in Romance. Numerous works on the subject (Belletti, 1990; Galves, 2001; Cyrino, 2013; Tescari Neto, 2013; Schifano, 2018; among others) attest that the exact height to which the V raises varies parametrically among different languages and depending on tense, aspect, mood, and finiteness features of each verb form.

Studies on different Spanish varieties, such as Schifano (2018), Caraballo (2018), Pataquiva (2021), and Tescari Neto (2025) – respectively on European and Mexican, Venezuelan, Colombian, and Peruvian Spanish – have found different raising heights for the finite V, indicating that it is possible to identify (micro)parametric variation regarding V-raising even between closely related varieties of one same language.

Thus, the main goal of this work is to investigate the mandatory and optional raising heights of the finite V in Chilean Spanish (CS), placing CS in the *continuum* of V-movement height throughout Spanish varieties. Our initial hypothesis is that the tense (T) feature may interact with V-movement; therefore, three verb forms were tested: present, past perfect, and future indicative.

In what follows, we detail the methodology used for identifying the position of the V; present and discuss the obtained results; and outline some final remarks. The references are listed at the end.

2. Methodology

Within the theoretical framework of Syntactic Cartography and with an expanded IP model, we take the adverbs of the functional IP hierarchy (Cinque, 1999 and subsequent refinements), tested for CS by Wechsler (2023), as diagnostic elements of the minimum and maximum heights reached by the finite V. We created sentences combining the three V forms under study (present, past perfect, and future) with each of the adverbs of the hierarchy.

Each sentence was formulated in three possible relative orders: (a) Subject (S)-Adverb (Adv)-**Verb (V)**-Object (O); (b) S-V-Adv-O; (c) S-V-O-Adv. Only transitive verbs with direct objects were used, with both arguments being expressed, and without clitic pronouns or quantifiers. The grammaticality of the sentences was judged by introspection, following a common practice in Generative Grammar.

3. Results and discussion

The tests with most of the low adverbs resulted in mandatory movement, as exemplified in (1) for the present tense. V-raising is mandatory up to Asp. SgCompletive for the present tense and up to Asp. Frustrative for the past perfect and future tenses (see the extract of the hierarchy in Figure 1, in the final remarks section).

- (1) a. *María temprano **toma** la once.
 'Mary early has her tea'
 b. María **toma** temprano la once.
 c. María **toma** la once temprano.

In the medial zone, the three verb forms can optionally raise over the lower categories, as exemplified in (2) for the future tense. As of a certain height, however, the V cannot raise: Asp. Retrospective for the future tense and Asp. Continuative for the present and past perfect tenses.

- (2) a. Ellos recién **empezarán** la prueba.
 'They (only) now will begin the exam'
 b. Ellos **empezarán** recién la prueba.
 c. Ellos **empezarán** la prueba recién.

In the high zone, on the other hand, movement is forbidden for all three verb forms. Sentences with the V-Adv-O order are grammatical only if there is a reading of contrastive focus on the object, as exemplified in (3). Since this type of reading involves a different syntactic structure, in which

the adverb focalizes the object, these sentences do not imply that there's movement of the V over the high functional IP head at issue.

- (3) a. Rebeca finalmente/al fin **consiguió** la medalla.
'Rebeca finally got the medal'
- b. #Rebeca **consiguió** finalmente *la medalla*. ('and not the trophy')
- c. *Rebeca **consiguió** la medalla finalmente.

For all verb forms tested, V-movement with pied-piping of the object (sentences (c)) is preferred to isolated V-movement (sentences (b)). Such preference is even more prominent for the past perfect, whose isolated movement lead to marginality and even ungrammaticality in several of the tests, allowed only with an emphatic reading of the adverb.

The V-raising height in different Spanish varieties, including CS, is summarized below:

- (i) European/Mexican Sp. (Schifano, 2018): Mandatory movement higher than **Asp. SgCompletive**; no optional movement.
- (ii) Venezuelan Sp. (Caraballo, 2018): Mandatory movement up to **Asp. Frustrative**; optional movement up to **Modality Obligation**.
- (iii) Colombian Sp. (Pataquiva, 2021): Mandatory movement up to **Asp. Inceptive**; optional movement up to **Mood Speech Act**.
- (iv) Peruvian Sp. (Tescari Neto, 2025): Mandatory movement up to **Asp. SgCompletive**; optional movement up to **Mood Speech Act**.
- (v) Chilean Sp. (made by the author): Mandatory movement up to **Asp. SgCompletive/Asp. Frustrative**; optional movement up to **Asp. Continuative/Asp. Retrospective**.

4. Final remarks

The results of this research, summarized in Figure 1 and in (v), indicate that the finite V must raise to an IP head in CS. The height of this movement varies depending on tense, which seems to be a determining feature of V-movement. An interesting finding is the preference for movement of the V accompanied by the object rather than isolated. Variation in the V-raising height was also detected in comparison to other Spanish varieties (cf. (i)-(v)). We thus conclude that the cartographic methodology of turning to adverbs of the IP hierarchy to diagnose the position of other constituents proves to be a powerful tool in understanding the nature of V-movement and identifying (micro)parametric variation among varieties of the same language.

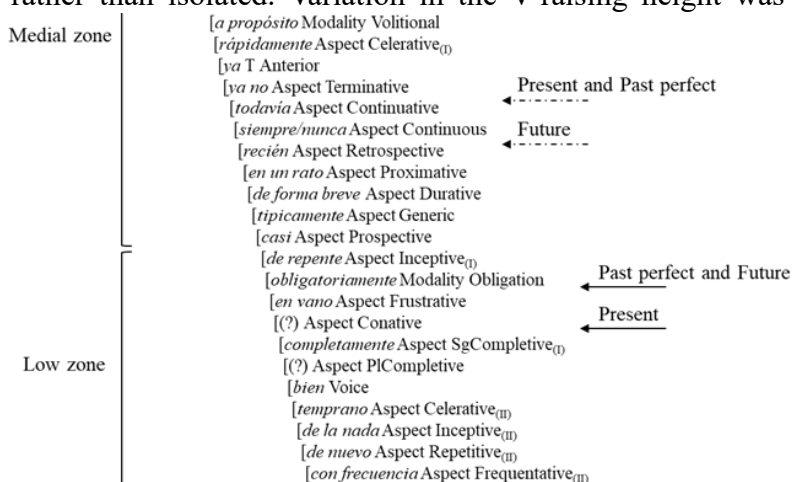


Figure 1 – Mandatory (solid line) and optional (dashed line) movement of the finite V in CS. Source: made by the author

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