

Events and copulas. An approach to a phenomenon of variation across Spanish dialects

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the study of a particular phenomenon of variation related to the distribution of Spanish copulas: the (in)compatibility of event nouns with predication structures where the copula *estar* and an evaluative adjective are combined. Some structures, such as *La boda estuvo preciosa* ('The wedding *wasESTAR* beautiful') are present across all Spanish varieties, contrasting with examples such as *La tormenta estuvo horrible* ('The storm *wasESTAR* horrible'), that are attested only in certain specific varieties, and that could be considered an instance of so-called *innovative uses* of *estar*. We give here a first picture of the extension of this phenomenon. Secondly, we develop the relevant distinction within the domain of event nouns that is needed to give an accurate explanation of the facts under examination. Finally, we show how these facts fit within the overall picture of copulative variation in Spanish, thus making a significant contribution to our broad understanding of Spanish copulas.

Keywords: *ser*, *estar*, copulative verbs, event nouns, syntactic variation.

1. Introduction

The double copula system that characterises Spanish (*ser*-‘be_{SER}’ vs *estar*-‘be_{ESTAR}’), among other Romance languages (see Pérez-Jiménez, Gumiel-Molina & Moreno-Quibén 2018), has received much attention over the past few decades. Within formal linguistics, the hypotheses on this phenomenon can be included in two main groups: (a) those which suggest that the copulative distinction is to be explained in *aspectual* terms and (b) those which are based on *modes of comparison* and, therefore, state that each copula provides a different kind of comparison between the subject of predication and other entities (see Fábregas 2012, Silvagni 2017: §2 or Moreno-Quibén 2022: §3, for recent overviews on the most prominent theories on Spanish copulas). All these hypotheses have managed to elucidate the copulative uses in general/standard Spanish, but they do not provide an explanation for the phenomena of dialectal variation highlighted by the sociolinguistic literature (see, among many others, Silva-Corvalán 1986, Gutiérrez 1994, Alfaraz 2012 and Malaver 2009), whose existence adds a further point of complexity to the matter, as already pointed out by Crespo (1949).

However, in the last decade, several works have appeared that, from a formal perspective, try to explain the different distribution of these two verbs with different types of adjectival predicates across dialects (i.a. Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti 2016, Sanchez-Alonso, Piñango & Deo 2019, Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez 2020 and subsequent works). Even though these studies develop different implementations of the distinction, they assume that the so-called *innovative use* of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) implies a certain degree of subjectivity, which is explained in different ways. Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, none of the works cited above show differences related to the subject type.

On this matter, this paper aims to shed more light on the divergent distribution of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) in some dialectal areas by considering variables that have not been studied so far. In particular, we will try to show that, in those cases where *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) appears with eventive subjects, it is essential to consider the properties of the noun heading the subject. To this end, we have carried out some preliminary queries on the social network Twitter, and have subsequently set a database of examples from the Spanish Web 2018 (esTenTen18) corpus, contained in Sketch Engine. This corpus manager, unlike Twitter, enables complex queries and has allowed us to empirically show some differences among dialectal areas.

With this aim, the paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we review the main groups of proposals that explain the distribution of copulative verbs in Spanish –namely, aspectual proposals vs modes-of-comparison proposals–. We also address the evidential and innovative uses of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’). Finally, we introduce a context, understudied so far, where the subject of predication is eventive, and which is also a locus of geolectal variation. In section 3, we present the methodology used to compile the database, and the results obtained from its examination. Section 4 proposes a classification for (event) nouns appearing in the subject position that allows us to explain the existing differences. In section 5, we present a short discussion intended to serve as a first approach to the variation facts studied. Section 6 serves as a conclusion and suggests some avenues for further research.

2. The distribution of <ser/estar + Adjectival Phrase>. General, evidential, and innovative uses of *estar* (be_{ESTAR})

The distribution of the two copulative verbs (*ser*-‘be_{SER}’ vs *estar*-‘be_{ESTAR}’) in general/standard Spanish is well established in the vast literature on the subject. Nevertheless, several aspects of this distribution are particularly challenging to account for, even ignoring dialectal variation. This is the case of some (sub)classes of qualifying adjectival predicates, which can appear either with *ser* (‘be_{SER}’) or with *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) but whose combination with the latter is more or less constrained to specific contexts. In what follows, we focus on the distribution of copulas with adjectival predicates, particularly emphasising the most challenging cases.

In section 2.1 we describe the overall picture of general/standard Spanish, briefly presenting the theories that have tried to explain it. Subsequently, in 2.2 we present the so-called *evidential* uses of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’), as well as, in connection with them, those that have been considered *innovative*. Finally, in 2.3 we refer to the type of sentences which constitute the main object of our study, those in which *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) cooccurs with a qualifying adjective and a subject denoting an event.

2.1. The general picture

As is well-known, the two Spanish copulas partially overlap in their distribution with adjectival predicates, and thus do not simply display a complementary distribution, which is in turn the case in other multiple-copula systems. In the case of Spanish, some contexts allow only for the use of one of both copulas: in (1)-(2) we see instances of relational adjectives which only appear with *ser* (‘be_{SER}’); in (3)-(4), we see stage-level adjectives (also called in the literature “perfective adjectives”) which are always combined with *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’). But there is also a great number of qualifying adjectives where either of the two copulas can mediate between the subject and the adjectival predicate, with some difference in meaning, sometimes rather subtle, between the two possible combinations (5).

- (1) El restaurante es vegetariano.
the restaurant be_{SER}.PRS.3SG vegetarian
‘The restaurant is vegetarian.’
- (2) Su coche era híbrido.
her/his car be_{SER}.PST.IPFV.3SG hybrid
‘Her/his car was a hybrid.’
- (3) El vaso está {roto / lleno}.
the glass be_{ESTAR}.PRS.3.SG broken / clean
‘The glass is broken /clean.’
- (4) El niño estaba {desnudo / descalzo / hambriento /
the boy be_{ESTAR}.PST.IPFV.3SG naked / barefoot / hungry /
inmóvil / muerto / borracho / enfermo}.
still / dead / drunk / sick
‘The boy was naked / barefoot / hungry / still / dead / drunk / sick.’

- (5) Camilo{era / estaba} muy {delgado / viejo / guapo /
 Camilo be_(SER/ESTAR).PST.IPFV.3SG very thin / old / handsome /
 brillante / amable / grande}.
 brilliant / kind / big
 ‘CJC was very thin / old / handsome / brilliant / kind / big.’

Many studies have tried to explain this overlap in different terms. In any case, most of these works can be included in two main groups: namely, as mentioned above, the aspectual proposals and the modes-of-comparison proposals (see Moreno-Quibén 2022: §3, and also Leonetti, Pérez-Jiménez & Gumiel-Molina 2015, for more information about these).

For aspectual theories (e.g. Luján 1981, Clements 1988, Leonetti 1994, Marín 2010, Camacho 2012 or Silvagni 2017), the paradigm of (1)-(5) must be explained in relation to the lexical information (aspectual in nature) contained in adjectival predicates, which would allow us to distinguish between two (or three) major classes of adjectives. This distinction is implemented in different terms. Usually, a feature pair is used, the first term of the pair corresponding with *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) and the second with *ser* (‘be_{SER}’): *temporal* vs *permanent*, *perfective* vs *imperfective*, *bounded* vs *unbounded*, *+NEXUS* vs *-NEXUS*, *inchoative* vs *non-inchoative*... Some recent works point out that the relevant distinction is between *stage-level* predicates and *individual-level* predicates. The copula *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) would give rise to stage-level predications, while *ser* (‘be_{SER}’) would give rise to individual-level predications. The fact that a considerable number of adjectives can appear with both copulas is usually explained in these theories by assigning such adjectives to the less restrictive class (the individual-level-predicates class) and postulating that their combination with *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) is the result of some process of coercion, reinterpretation or readjustment. The diversity in the details of the numerous theories that conform this group is, in any case, quite significant. For example, Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti (2002) crucially point out that the difference between individual-level predicates and stage-level predicates is that the latter must be associated with a spatio-temporal variable (following Kratzer 1995). Moreover, individual-level predicates do not denote permanent properties but classificatory ones, which allows the authors to explain the co-occurrence of age adjectives (e.g. *joven* ‘young’) with *ser* (‘be_{SER}’) in standard Spanish.

For what concerns this paper, the crucial point is that predications with *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) do not simply attribute a property to the individual denoted by the subject but to a *stage* of such individual, thus referring to a situation in which the subject is involved. So, for example, in the case of *Camilo era muy amable* (‘Camilo was_{SER} very kind’), kindness is directly attributed to Camilo as a classificatory property, whereas in the case of *Camilo estaba muy amable* (‘Camilo was_{ESTAR} very kind’), kindness is attributed to a *stage* of Camilo that was involved in a particular situation.

Modes-of-comparison proposals (we refer here mainly to the one developed in Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez 2015 and subsequent works, but see also Falk 1979a, 1979b, and Franco & Steinmetz 1983 for some earlier developments of this kind of proposals) suggest that the combination of qualifying adjectives with *ser* (‘be_{SER}’) or *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) can be explained on the basis of different modes of comparison. When the comparison is established *between* different individuals, we have a *relative* interpretation of the adjective and the copula used is *ser* (‘be_{SER}’); if, on the other hand, the comparison is established with respect to

different stages or counterparts of the subject, then we have a comparison *within* the individual, the adjective is interpreted as *absolute*, and the copula used is *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}'). This proposal assumes, therefore, that adjectival predicates do not contain (in the lexicon) information about their interpretation as relative or absolute; rather, it is obtained from their syntactic merge with *pos* to project a DegP (following Kennedy & McNally 2005). This would explain why qualifying adjectives can appear with both copulas in many cases, with slight differences in meaning, although it remains to be explained why different subclasses of adjectives show divergent behaviour in their combination with *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}').

In this paper, we assume that there are, in fact, differences in the lexical information of adjectival predicates relevant to understanding their distribution in copulative contexts, but that this information cannot be reduced exclusively to the stage-level/individual-level distinction. We understand that, nonetheless, the hypothesis we are going to advance here is compatible with the two kinds of theories discussed here, since a key notion underlying all of them is the contrast between stages of the subject, or the variability of the subject with respect to the qualifying dimension.

The proposals we have briefly discussed above reflect in one way or another the general distribution in the use of copulative verbs followed by qualifying adjectives. There remain, however, at least two significant phenomena to be explained regarding the copulative distribution: the first one, to which we refer in the following section, concerns the *evidential* uses of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}'); the second one, closely related, as proposed in this paper and others (e. g. Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti 2016, Sanchez-Alonso 2018, Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez 2020, Moreno-Quibén 2022), is the dialectal (particularly, geolectal) variation in this distribution.

2.2. Evidential and innovative uses of *estar*

Among the cases where *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') alternates with *ser* ('be_{SER}'), the so-called *evidential* uses (see, i.a., Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti 2002, Roby 2009, Camacho 2012, or Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez 2015)¹ have proved to be an interesting case at hand. Their accommodation within the framework of the several available theories has been largely challenging. And it is, in fact, a point of enormous relevance for the latest theoretical developments both along the lines of the *modes-of-comparison* theories (i.a. Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez 2015, and subsequent works) and of the *spatio-temporal anchoring* or *alternative circumstances* theories (i.a. Escandell-Vidal 2018a and subsequent works, and Deo, Sanchez-Alonso & Piñango 2018). Examples such as (6)-(7) show some evidential uses of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}').

- (6) Este sándwich está delicioso.
 this sandwich be_{ESTAR}.PRS.3SG delicious
 'This sandwich is delicious.'

¹ The references to the 'evidential contribution' of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') are already present in earlier works, even if not labelled as such, and can even be traced back to such early works as Andrade (1919).

- (7) ¡Qué estúpido has estado!
 how stupid have.AUX.PRS.(PFV).2SG be_{ESTAR}.PSTP.PTCP
 ‘How stupid you have been!’

These examples are generally characterised as implying some perspectival, evidential or subjective meaning, directly related to the speaker or other participant explicitly introduced in the discourse. Different ways of dealing with this idea appear in most theories developed in recent years (see García-Márkina 2013, Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti 2016, Sanchez-Alonso, Deo & Piñango 2017, Deo, Sanchez-Alonso & Piñango 2018, but also other works just cited containing similar ideas). Thence, the speaker that states, for example, (6), is intended to be speaking based on first-hand information, so that she/he has experienced the ‘deliciousness’ of the sandwich by tasting it. Similarly, (7) does not apply to the subject in an out-of-the-blue fashion, but some kind of experience of the ‘stupid behaviour’ of the individual being characterised is entailed and, thus, it is meant that she/he has exhibited such a behaviour in a concrete occasion.

Neither of these nuances emerges in such a way when, *ceteris paribus*, *ser* (‘be_{SER}’) is used. Nonetheless, its use is always possible in these cases, albeit with different implications: the use of *ser* (‘be_{SER}’) in (6) would necessarily give rise to a generic interpretation of the kind discussed in Pearson 2022, for the occurrence of personal taste predicates [PPTs] like *delicious* in contexts similar to the one commented on, in which the subject would refer to a kind of sandwich rather than to a particular one (see also Escandell-Vidal 2018a: 102-103, and Deo, Sanchez-Alonso & Piñango 2018: 9, 30-31 for a similar claim about structures involving other kinds of adjectives). Therefore, it can be claimed that this sort of perspectival/evidential meaning is only achieved with *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’).

In these cases, variability of the subject along with the qualifying dimension (i.e. with respect to the property attributed) is not required. They contrast, in this regard, with those sentences where non-evaluative adjectives such as *alto* ‘tall’, *grande* ‘big’ (dimensional adjectives), *duro* ‘hard’, *azul* ‘blue’, and so on (adjectives denoting physical properties, shape- and color-properties) are employed. Modes-of-comparison theories assume that in (6)-(7), in which non-verbal predicates are evaluative adjectives, the comparison class is not built by counterparts/stages of the subject of predication but is instead related “to an implicit experiencer introduced by the evaluative adjective” (Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez 2015: 993), which somehow refers to the existence of alternative situations of perception/experience in which the subject-predicate relation would not hold. The experiencer is crucially related to the adjectives’ argument structure, and thus perspectival meaning is only expected to arise when they themselves can support an experiencer.

This proposal gives room to the explanation of the so-called *innovative uses of estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’)², a term we now use to refer to structures such as those exemplified in (8) and (9), whose grammaticality status is not alike in all Spanish varieties.

² Here we follow common terminology from the sociolinguistic and variationist literature on Spanish copulas (a.o. Silva-Corvalán 1986, Gutiérrez 1994, Cortés-Torres 2004, Malaver 2009, 2012, Díaz-Campos & Geeslin 2011, Alfaraz 2012, Brown & Cortés-Torres

- (8) Spanish Web 2018, esTenTen18; Mexican domain .mx
 [...] **el patio está grande** y tengo plant-itas porque
 the yard be_{ESTAR}.PRS.3SG big and have.PRS.1SG plants-DIM because
 me gusta mucho plantar plantas [...] plants-DIM because
 me like.PRS.3SG a lot plant.INF plants
 ‘The yard is big and I have plants because I like planting plants very much.’
- (9) Spanish Web 2018, esTenTen18; Mexican domain .mx) [...] [
 en particular estamos interesados en estudiar **los genes del agave**
 in particular be_{ESTAR}.PRS.1PL interested in study.INF **the genes of agave**
 que **están importantes** para los procesos de desarrollo.
 that be_{ESTAR}.PRS.3PL important for the processes of development
 ‘We are particularly interested in studying the genes of the agave, which are
 important the developmental processes.’

Notice that an example like (8) cannot mean that the yard was small before and now is big (so, the subject cannot be compared with other previous or possible stages of itself, since yards do not change their size). This would be possible in a sentence like *La higuera está grande y frondosa* (‘The fig tree is_{ESTAR} big and lush’), since fig trees are supposed to grow. This use of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) with a dimensional adjective is possible both in innovative and non-innovative varieties. In contrast, sentences like the one in (8) are only possible in innovative ones, such as Mexican or Puerto Rican Spanish. Consistent with their previous work, Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez (2020, 2023, 2024) propose that these innovative uses should be explained by an augmentation in the argument structure of certain adjectival classes, as would be the case for dimensional adjectives. The argument structure of those adjectives would include an experiencer in the innovative varieties but not in the non-innovative ones. Thus, the subjective (evidential/perspectival) meaning of such structures can be explained in the same lines as those of the general/standard evidential uses of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) common to all Spanish varieties.

Alternatively, the *evidential commitment* theory by Escandell-Vidal (2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2024) generalises this meaning, that is modelled in terms of a direct evidence explication directly linked to the *origo* of the proposition (identified with the

2012, Negrón Medina 2013, Bessett 2015; cf. De Jonge 1993a, 1993b for a historical perspective). Innovative uses are basically defined as those that are not widespread in all Spanish-speaking communities. Malaver (2009: 97-98) also considers them a syntactic Americanism (a syntactic schema found in the speech of urban areas in two or more Latin American countries, following Company Company 2006: 26). This does not imply, from our point of view, that certain innovative uses of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) do not appear in any case in certain varieties of European Spanish, although Malaver's study (2009: 314-316) on age adjectives documents only twelve uses of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) (as opposed to 422 of *ser* (‘be_{SER}’)) in five different varieties of European Spanish, out of which only one is a clear example of an innovative use, while the remaining can be characterised as non-innovative uses in which the adjective is not used to refer to the chronological age of the subject, but to describe its degree of growth, maturity or cognitive/physical deterioration caused by ageing (i.e. a within-the-individual comparison in which the subject shows variability with respect to the quality attributed; see also De Jonge 1993b: 100). In any case, see section 3.1 for a more extensive justification of the use of the term *innovative* to the cases at hand.

speaker in the absence of any explicit shift to another source-participant), to all the cases where an adjective that can be used with *ser* (be_{SER}) is used with *estar* (be_{ESTAR}), therefore to all the cases where an *individual-level* adjective (non-*stage-level*, see (3)-(4)) is combined with *estar* (be_{ESTAR}). It is then assumed that the speaker has some direct evidence in which she/he bases her/his statement. And this would also apply for cases where the adjectival predicate is non-evaluative. Evidential commitment arises as a consequence of a feature (semantic) mismatch between *individual-level* adjectives and *estar* (be_{ESTAR}), which is given the following denotation:

(10) Escandell-Vidal (2018a: 65)

Estar: $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda e \exists s_e [[P(x) \approx e] \wedge [A(e, s_e)]]$

[Where e is the predication event $P(x)$, s_e is a specific spatio-temporal situation and A is an anchoring abstract relation that links the former to the latter.]

With stage-level predicates, the anchoring relation A between the predication event and the spatio-temporal situation introduced by *estar* (be_{ESTAR}) is simply reached by identity ($P_e \approx e_e \approx s_e$), since P is itself spatio-temporally anchored or bounded (see Escandell-Vidal 2018a: 66ff.). With individual-level predicates, A cannot materialise as an identity relation. A different relation between e_i (where the index i indicates the unbounded nature of the predicate involved) and s_e must arise, what finally gives rise to the inclusion relation ($e_i \subset s_e$) and to the understanding of s_e as the situation where the knowledge on which the statement is based has been acquired, so the situation where the speaker has first-hand information to support her/his statement (all the details are given in the cited references). The adjectival subclasses within the individual-level class are, in any way, significantly relevant in this theory as well, and considerably shape how the inclusion relation is to be interpreted (cf. Leonetti & Escribano 2018).

Finally, it should be noted that these explanations deny the direct relevance, for the interpretation of the evidential and innovative uses, of any stages/counterparts of the subject itself; i.e., in a certain sense, the subject is not itself the ‘anchor’ of the predication. As we shall see later, the treatment of the examples with eventive subjects that we will deal with requires a great deal of nuance to this assertion.

2.3. Events as subjects of *estar*-sentences in general Spanish

The type of evidential/subjective (first-hand supported, experiential) meaning we have addressed in section 2.2 is also clearly recognisable in (11), and in the cases presented in (12)-(16), where part of the original discourse context where they appear is provided, undoubtedly illustrating the fact that speakers uttering them have been directly involved with the event being qualified.

(11) Spanish Web 2018, esTenTen18; European Spanish domain .es

Os	contaré	que	la	fiesta	estuvo	estupenda.
you	tell.FUT.1SG	that	the	party	$\text{be}_{\text{ESTAR}}.\text{PST}.\text{PFV}.\text{3SG}$	great
y	eso	que	era	una	fiesta de celebración de	
and	DEM	COMP	$\text{be}_{\text{SER}}.\text{PST}.\text{IPFV}.\text{3SG}$	a	party of celebration of	

cincuentañeros. Vaya marcha que tienen en Albacete!!!!
 fifty-year-olds what party that have_{PRS.3PL} in Albacete
 ‘I can tell you that the party was great. And that’s despite the fact it was a celebration party for fifty-year-olds. What a great partying they do have in Albacete!’

- (12) CORPES; Colombia
 Está bien que no digas que **mi conferencia**
 be_{ESTAR.PRS.3SG} good that not say.PRS.SUBJ.2SG that my lecture
estuvo interesante porque serían puras mentiras.
 be_{ESTAR.PST.PFV.3SG} interesting because be_{SER.COND.3PL} pure lies
 ‘It’s good that you don’t say my lecture was interesting, because that would be all lies.’
- (13) Spanish Web 2018, esTenTen18; Chilean domain .cl
 Todo **el bautizo estuvo maravilloso**. Lo pasamos súper.
 all the baptism be_{ESTAR.PST.PFV.3SG} wonderful it go.PST.PFV.1PL super
 Salió todo perfecto.
 go.PST.PFV.3SG everything perfect
 ‘The whole baptism was wonderful. We had a great time. Everything went perfect.’
- (14) Spanish Web 2018, esTenTen18; Argentinian domain .ar
 Gracias por todos los momentos vividos, **la boda**
 thanks for all the moments experienced the wedding
estuvo maravillosa, los chicos más que felices,
 be_{ESTAR.PST.PFV.3SG} wonderful, the guys more than happy
 todos lo disfrutamos mucho [...]
 all it enjoy.PST.PFV.1PL a lot
 ‘Thank you for all the moments we had, the wedding was wonderful, the guys (were) more than happy, we all enjoyed it very much.’
- (15) Spanish Web 2018, esTenTen18; European Spanish domain .es
El concierto estuvo increíble, y acabó con
 the concert be_{ESTAR.PST.3SG} amazing and end.PST.PFV.3SG with
 todos los músicos que participaban en el mismo [...]
 all the musicians who take.part.PST.IPFV.3PL in the same
 interpretando juntos una emotiva bendición irlandesa
 performing together a moving benediction Irish.
 ‘The concert was amazing, and all the musicians who took part in it ended up performing together a moving Irish benediction.’
- (16) Spanish Web 2018, esTenTen18; European Spanish domain .es
 [...] hoy es el cumpleaños de mi niño [...]
 today be_{SER.PRS.3SG} the birthday of my child
 se-graduó y **el acto en la universidad**
 SE-graduate.PST.PFV.3SG and the ceremony at the university

estuvo **precioso.**be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG beautiful

‘Today is my child’s birthday [...], he graduated and the ceremony at the university was beautiful. [The dean made a great speech about the university].’

They all contain three elements:

- an event noun that heads the subject DP, i.e. an eventive subject: *fiesta* ‘party’, *partido* ‘game’, *conferencia* ‘lecture’, and other similar nouns denoting mostly ‘social events’ are the ones usually mentioned in the literature (see, for example, Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez 2015: 965, 994; Leonetti & Escribano 2018: 144, and cf. section 3 *infra*).
- a (non-stage-level) adjective as non-verbal predicate, that can be either:
 - a maximal-degree (a.k.a. *elative*) adjective (a.o. *tremendo* ‘awful, tremendous’, *terrible* ‘terrible’, *horrible* ‘horrible’, *maravilloso* ‘wonderful’, *espectacular* ‘spectacular’, *excelente* ‘excellent’, *magnífico* ‘superb’, *increíble* ‘amazing’, *impresionante* ‘impressive’),
 - an aesthetic adjective (a.o. *bonito* ‘beautiful’, *feo* ‘ugly’, *precioso* ‘beautiful, gorgeous’, *lindo* ‘beautiful, cute, nice’, *hermoso* ‘beautiful, lovely’)
 - or another kind of evaluative (normally from the subclass of *personal judgement predicates*) (a.o. *bueno* ‘good’, *agradable* ‘pleasant’, *raro* ‘weird, odd’, *interesante* ‘interesting’, *emocionante* ‘moving’, *divertido* ‘fun’, *aburrido* ‘boring’).

[All these subclasses are included in the evaluative adjectives’ group. See Moreno-Quibén 2022: 99 and references therein, and also Umbach 2021 on the diversity within evaluative adjectives].
- a form of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’), instead of, as previously said, *ser* (‘be_{SER}’), which is the unmarked copula in these cases for (at least) standard European Spanish.

This kind of sentences is used in contexts where the speaker is trying to convey, plainly speaking, her/his impressions or judgements about an event in which she/he has been directly involved as a participant (at least as witness or perceiver). Therefore, it can be said that: (i) the speaker has had access to a specific situation s_e , where she/he has acquired the information on which she/he bases her/his assertion, (b) that situation is in fact directly identified with the event denoted by the eventive subject, call it e_l , so that ($s_e \approx e_l$) –as suggested by Leonetti & Escribano (2018: 144-145)–, (c) the predication event e_i ($\approx P(e_l)$) is then anchored to the specific situation s_e ($\approx e_l$) by the inclusion relation, so that the predication is connected to that situation by partial coincidence.

It may seem somewhat redundant to say that a predication about an event is related to that event, but what we are trying to do here is to maintain some independence between (i) the event itself, which is the one that is assimilated to the specific situation in which the speaker acquires the information on which she/he bases his assertion, and (ii) the predication about the event, i.e. the attribution of a property to the event, which is only necessarily dependent on the speaker's involvement in that

event when it is realised by means of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') rather than *ser* ('be_{SER}'). This is to say that, for instance, with (14), the speaker is not only committing (her/him)self to the fact that the wedding was wonderful ($e_i \approx P(e_i)$), but also to the fact that she/he has direct evidence about the truth of her/his assertion (evidential commitment: $e_i \subset s_e$), by virtue, in this case, of her/his direct involvement with the wedding itself ($s_e \approx e_i$), as the discourse context clearly shows.

We must insist that this kind of interpretation only occurs when the copula used is *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}'). The contrast shown below is related to this fact:

- (17) Las fiestas del Partido Comunista fueron (siempre) muy divertidas,
 the parties of Party Communist be_{SER}.PST.PFV.3PL always very fun
 aunque yo nunca llegué a ir.
 although I never get.PST.PFV.1SG to go
 'The Communist Party parties were always very fun, although I never got to go.'
- (18) Las fiestas del Partido Comunista estuvieron (??siempre)
 the parties of Party Communist be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3PL always
 muy divertidas, (#aunque yo nunca llegué a ir).
 very fun, although I never get.PST.PFV.1SG to go
 'The Communist Party parties were always very fun, although I never got to go.'

Whereas a kind interpretation of the subject is allowed in (17), it is dismissed in (18). In the latter case, the parties are supposed to be specific events in which the speaker who utters (18) was involved, so to which she/he attended, and thus the continuation provided, which explicitly states that the speaker was not to that parties, comes out as odd.

All these observations are valid for all Spanish varieties, and have been explained from different perspectives, as we have shown. There is, however, a group of data that has never, to the best of our knowledge, been addressed before: examples such as (19) or (20) are attested in certain American Spanish varieties (see sections 3.1 and 3.3), but are consistently rejected by the European Spanish speakers consulted (see n. 5 *infra*), hence it seems that there is geolectal variation regarding the elements that can be licensed as subjects in the structures studied here.

- (19) Siguen bajo el lodo - El Diario; Mexican domain .mx
La tormenta estuvo horrible porque subió mucho
 the storm be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG horrible because rise.PST.PFV.3SG a lot
 el agua [...]
 the water
 'The storm was horrible because the water rose so high.'
- (20) Twitter; Mexico
 Les dije que el incendio estuvo feo. Así
 them tell.PST.PFV.1SG that the fire be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG ugly. This way
 ayer toda la ciudad porque quemaron el bosque.
 yesterday all the city because burn.PST.PFV.3PL the forest

‘I told them that the fire was bad. The whole city [was] like this yesterday because they burned the forest.’
[Along with a photograph with a big cloud of smoke over the city].

The subjects in (19) and (20) are, thus, in some relevant sense, different from those in the preceding examples. The main goal of this paper is to empirically describe this phenomenon and to approach it in a well-suited manner. For this purpose, we have collected a database that allows us to make some generalisations.

3. Beyond ‘typical’ events: syntactic variation in *estar*-sentences. The database

Trying to clarify to what extent there is variation in the type of structures discussed here required, in the first place, a preliminary study that would allow us to confront our own intuitions about the variety of standard European Spanish³ (and the judgements of some Peninsular Spanish speakers, see n. 5 *supra*) with data from other varieties before undertaking the compilation of a database (sections 3.2 and 3.3). We did such a preliminary study using Twitter as our data-source (section 3.1). But, having identified the subject as a parameter of variation, it was essential, even before that, to compile a list of event nouns that went beyond those normally cited in the literature on copulas (which are those that are consistently acceptable across all varieties).

In this sense, we have assumed an extensive conception of the class, which would include all those elements that respond positively to the test of (21), widely used to identify event nouns (see, among many others: Bosque 1999: §1.5.2.4; Bosque 2016; Resnik 2010; Fábregas 2010: 56; Fábregas 2020: 186-187; Bekaert & Enghels 2015: 50; Bekaert & Enghels 2019: 123; Gross & Kiefer 1995; Huyghe 2011; Haas & Gréa 2015), which can be simply defined as the class of nouns denoting second-order entities with their own temporal development (see Lyons 1977 and Ježek 2016: §4.2.2.2).

- (21) Only nominal constituents whose lexical head is an event noun can serve as subjects of the verbal complex *tener lugar* (eng. *to take place*; fr. *avoir lieu*).
- (22) {El partido / la fiesta / la boda / la salida / la subida / la tormenta / el temblor / The match / the party / the wedding / the exit / the ascent / the storm / the tremor / el incendio / el accidente / la guerra / la batalla / ...} tuvo lugar [...].
/ the fire / the accident / the war / the battle / ... took place [...].

In addition to nouns such as *fiesta* ‘party’, *partido* ‘game’, and *conferencia* ‘lecture’, other names such as *tormenta* ‘storm’, *guerra* ‘war’, *batalla* ‘battle’, *incendio* ‘fire’, *accidente* ‘accident’, etc. had to be included in our list because of their

³ We utilise the expression *standard European Spanish* as a cover term for the set of linguistic general uses which written speech tends to reflect. It is worth to note that Spanish Web 2018 (that serves as the main source of data for this study) contains on-line texts of different registers and text types, but all of them corresponding to forms of written speech. The use of this term implies that the generalisations made later on about European Spanish are not necessarily applicable to all its different (sub)dialects.

compatibility with *tener lugar* ‘to take place’. These nouns are, as we will definitely see below, the ones behind geolectal variation in the grammaticality/acceptability of the structures studied.

3.1. Preliminary queries and ‘innovative’ use of *estar* with event nouns

For this first phase of the study, we decided to use the social network Twitter (now X) to conduct a series of pilot queries. The aim of these queries was to check whether there is clear evidence of geolectal variation concerning the structure studied, so that sequences such as (19) or (20) are present in certain varieties but not in others.

In our Twitter searches, we included: (a) a large number of eventive nouns that pass the test of (21), partially listed in Table 1 *infra*; (b) different forms of the copula *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’). Then, we manually checked for the required adjectives’ subclasses in the non-verbal predicate position (see section 2.3). Furthermore, we only took into consideration those results whose geographical origin can be established based on the geolocation indicated by the users or on explicit indications in the tweet itself. (Obviously, there is a margin of error in assigning a geolectal variety to Twitter users even on the basis of these indications, but we believe that such a margin of error is acceptable for our purposes)⁴.

These tentative queries indicated the presence, widespread in all varieties, of structures such as those in (11)-(16), to which the following examples can be added:

- (23) Twitter; Santiago, Chile
 A: A seguir viviendo la fiesta de #Santiago2023 y alentando
 A: to keep.INF living the party of #Santiago2023 and encouraging
 a-l Team ParaChile!
 to-the Team ParaChile
 ‘Let’s keep enjoying the #Santiago2023 party and encouraging Team ParaChile!’
 B: Gracias Presi, **la fiesta estuvo preciosa!**
 B: thanks President, the party be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG beautiful
 ‘Thanks President, the party was beautiful!’
- (24) Twitter; Spain
 Muchas gracias, Hugo! **El partido ha estado**
 many thanks Hugo the game have.AUX.PRS.(PFV).3SG be_{ESTAR}.PST.PTCP
precioso, muy entretenido y eso siempre ayuda 😊
 beautiful very entertaining and that always help.PRS.3SG 😊

⁴ As mentioned above, the main objective of our Twitter searches was to obtain some preliminary evidence that the phenomenon being discussed here exhibits geolectal variation. Twitter itself does not constitute a corpus, although it can be used as a basis for its construction (cf. Estrada Arráz & de Benito Moreno 2016 and Ruiz Tinoco 2021), albeit with particularly relevant limitations for the study of very specific structures such as the one considered here. Spanish Web 2018 offers, in this sense, obvious advantages (see section 3.2). Twitter has therefore been used exclusively to collect some examples of uses of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) with eventive subjects that do not seem to be widespread across all Spanish dialects. Some of these examples are used throughout the text to illustrate the structures under consideration.

‘Thank you very much, Hugo! The game was beautiful, very entertaining and that always helps [emoticon].’

But, more interestingly, our queries confirmed the acceptability, for the speakers of some American varieties, of structures like those exemplified above in (19) and (20), although rejected by the speakers of European Spanish that we have consulted⁵. (25)-(29) are clear examples of such geolectally marked structures.

(25) Twitter; Bogotá, D.C., Colombia

La tormenta estuvo impactante.
 the storm be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG impressive
 ‘The storm was impressive / striking.’
 [Along with a video showing a heavy downpour.]

(26) Twitter; Río Negro, Argentina

Linda? Linda es la trompada que hay
 nice nice be_{SER}.PRS.3SG the punch that haveAUX.(IMPERSONAL).3SG
 que dar-les a los que dicen que **la tormenta**
 to give-them to the who say.PRS.3PL that the storm

⁵ We conducted an informal judgement experiment (cf. Schütze & Sprouse 2013: 30-31) on ten speakers of European Spanish, specifically from the North and Central Peninsular varieties, non-linguists with a high educational level. It consisted of exposure to sentences like those in (20), (25), (27), along with similar ones drawn from our final dataset from the corpus study described in sections 3.2 and 3.3. These sentences were presented, randomly ordered, together with structures of the type in (11)-(16) and with other structures where the copulas *ser* (‘be_{SER}’) and *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) were employed in uses which are widespread across all Spanish varieties (e.g. *Eladio está muy alegre* ‘Eladio is_{ESTAR} very happy’ or *La noche fue muy larga* ‘The night was_{SER} very long’). Speakers were asked to answer the following questions about each sentence: (i) do you find this sentence acceptable, odd, or unacceptable? (ii) would you use this sentence? (YN question) and (iii) do you understand this sentence? (YN question).

The results were strong. On the one hand, all the sentences that followed the pattern shown in (11)-(16) were deemed to be acceptable by the speakers consulted, except for the sentence *La boda estuvo preciosa* (‘The wedding was_{ESTAR} beautiful’), which three speakers rated as odd. However, all the speakers said that they would (likely) use it. On the other hand, all sentences with subjects analogous to those in (20), (25) or (27) were rated as odd or, for the most part, as unacceptable. Moreover, speakers indicated in all cases that they would not use them. So, we can say that, at least for these speakers, the structures we will immediately label as innovative are anomalous. This fact is taken here simply as an indication that these structures are alien to standard European Spanish. However, of course, it does not allow us to affirm undeniably that these structures do not appear in any of the dialects that make up European Spanish. As one of the reviewers points out, the use of questionnaires targeting different regions would be of great help in determining whether this is the case or not. Also, collecting acceptability judgements by a formal experimental procedure, with a larger and more representative sample (with speakers of the various European dialects), would allow us to make more nuanced statements. This is beyond our scope, but constitutes a promising line for future research.

estuvo "linda"
 be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG nice
 ‘Nice? Nice is the punch that should be given to those who say that the storm was “nice”.’

- (27) Twitter; México
 Sinceramente **el** **sismo estuvo** **terrible,**
 honestly the seism be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG terrible
 me espanté muchísimo pero todo bien.
 me scare.PST.PFV.1SG very much but everything fine
 ‘Honestly, the quake was terrible, I was really scared, but everything [was] fine.’

- (28) Twitter; Ciudad de México, México
 Y **el aterrizaje estuvo** **feo,** varios pasajeros
 and the landing be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG ugly several passengers
 le reclamaron a-l piloto, todo x q rebotó
 him complain.PST.PFV.3PL to-the pilot all because bounce.PST.PFV.3SG
 y fren[ó] brusco.
 and brakePST.PFV.3SG abrupt
 ‘And the landing was awful, several passengers complained to the pilot, all because he bounced and braked abruptly.’

- (29) Twitter; Nuevo León, México
 Me duele todo el cuerpo por la caída del sábado 🤪 jaja pero **la caída**
 me hurt.PRS.3SG all the body from the fall of Saturday 🤪 haha but the fall
estuvo épica.
 be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG epic
 ‘My whole body hurts from Saturday’s fall [emoticon], but the fall was epic!’

As noted above, they are characterised by the presence of a group of eventive subjects that seem to be unacceptable in standard European Spanish in similar structures. Therefore, this group of subjects must differ in some way from the group of eventive subjects that do fit in European Spanish (and in all the other varieties, as the Twitter data show); hence, a distinction within the domain of event nouns is needed. How the relevant distinction may be defined will be discussed later in section 4, but it is enough for the time being to list a few tokens of each group:

Table 1. Event-location nouns vs Event-process nouns

Event-location nouns		Event-process nouns	
<i>gala</i> ('gala')	<i>banquete</i>	<i>salida</i> ('exit')	<i>accidente</i>
<i>feria</i> ('fair')	('banquet')	<i>subida</i> ('ascent')	('accident')
<i>festival</i>	<i>recepción</i>	<i>ascenso</i> ('climb')	<i>caída</i> ('fall')
('festival')	('reception')	<i>descenso</i>	<i>choque</i> ('crash')
<i>concierto</i>	<i>funeral</i> ('funeral')	('descent')	<i>colisión</i>
('concert')	<i>entierro</i> ('burial')	<i>aterrizaje</i>	('collision')
<i>representación</i>	<i>velatorio</i> ('wake')	('landing')	<i>guerra</i> ('war')
('performance')	<i>partido</i> ('match',	<i>despegue</i> ('take-	<i>batalla</i> ('battle')
<i>fiesta</i> ('party')	'game')	off')	<i>conflicto</i>
<i>boda</i> ('wedding')	<i>combate</i> ('fight')	<i>persecución</i>	('conflict')
<i>bautizo</i>	<i>conferencia</i>	('chase')	<i>ataque</i> ('attack')
('baptism')	('lecture')	<i>tormenta</i> ('storm')	<i>asedio</i> ('siege')
<i>comunión</i>	<i>debate</i> ('debate')	<i>nevada</i>	<i>asalto</i> ('assault')
('communion')	<i>charla</i> ('talk')	('snowfall')	[...]
<i>celebración</i>	<i>clase</i> ('class',	<i>sismo</i> ('seism')	
('celebration')	'lesson')	<i>temblor</i> ('tremor')	
<i>cóctel</i> ('cocktail	[...]	<i>incendio</i> ('fire')	
party')			

Event-location nouns are the ones which are accepted in the subject position across all Spanish varieties, whereas event-process nouns cannot head subjects in all of them. The occurrence of event-process nouns as subjects of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') in the indicated structure is therefore considered here as an innovative use of the copula (see section 2.2)⁶, given that (i) it does not entail any comparison within-the-individual nor any stage-level-like interpretation, (ii) it holds the subjective/perspectival meaning that only evidential and innovative uses of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') show, (iii) it is, as we will see, confined to certain varieties. Moreover, the term *innovative* seems in this case to be also consistent with the fact that this usage implies a semantic *weakening/bleaching* of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') (see section 5), and therefore a broadening of the contexts, previously reserved for *ser* ('be_{SER}'), in which it can be inserted. It likely belongs to the cluster of innovative uses whose progressive spread is conditioned by extra-linguistic factors (De Jonge 1993, Gutiérrez 1994, Cortés-Torres 2004, Díaz-Campos & Geeslin 2011, Malaver 2012, Juárez-Cummings 2014, Bessett 2015) and which are not, therefore, used by all speakers of any given dialect where they appear, although this will not be explored here. This, in turn, would be related to the historical process of *encroachment* of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') into the domain of *ser* ('be_{SER}'), which is attested from the earliest texts of medieval Spanish and continues its progression up to the present day, with various phases in which the progressive grammaticalisation of the copula takes place (Vañó-Cerdá 1982: 234-314, Malaver 2009: 220-223, 303-308, Batllori & Roca 2011: 73-92, Sanchez-Alonso 2018: 216-267).

Further details about the geographical distribution of this innovative use are given later in 3.3, based on our corpus study. Our Twitter queries have, nonetheless, significantly helped us both (i) to establish the partition reflected in Table 1 and (ii) to outline the list of event nouns used to build our final database; in addition to meeting their initial purpose, which is to serve as basic evidence of geolectal variation.

⁶ Moreno-Quibén (2020: 145-152) offers an excellent exposition of those contexts that clearly tell apart innovative and non-innovative uses of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}').

3.2. The database: sources and methodology

Given the positive results obtained on Twitter, we decided to address the creation of a database by extracting corpus data. Working with a corpus allowed us, at this stage, greater flexibility in our queries, thanks to lemmatisation, and gave us the advantage of operating on a fixed dataset, whose scope and limitations can be made explicit. The corpus used was Spanish Web 2018 (esTenTen18), a lemmatised and tagged corpus of contemporary Spanish held in Sketch Engine (Kilgariff et al. 2014, <http://www.sketchengine.eu>). It contains 16.9 billion words and belongs to the ‘TenTen’ family of corpora (Jakubíček et al. 2013). Spanish Web 2018 comprises on-line texts of various text types and registers, ranging from blogs to newspapers and institutional webpages and including academic journals, sports reports, club pages, company reports, personal home pages, etc. (Kilgariff & Renau 2013). The corpus has large samples of data from nineteen different national web domains (.ar, .bo, .cl, etc.) assigned to the corresponding countries on both sides of the Atlantic. As in the case of Twitter and the geolocation of tweets, it is not possible to ensure that all the documents associated with a domain have actually been produced by speakers of the corresponding variety –leaving aside the abstraction involved in making an equivalence between countries and geolectal varieties⁷–, but we consider that this drawback does not invalidate the possibility of taking as evidence the overall results obtained, at least to prove the consistent presence of the innovative uses studied in certain varieties⁸.

Since the viability of structures with subjects headed by event-location nouns was sufficiently clear⁹, we decided to restrict our corpus to structures containing event-

⁷ Such equivalence is clearly inaccurate in some cases. It is possible to define, according to different criteria, geolectal areas that surpass national boundaries. E.g., the Rioplatense area, including a large region of Argentina, but also part of Uruguay (Elizaincín 2022). Or the area corresponding to Andean Spanish, which comprises regions of Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela. Along the last two countries we may also find distributed the area usually called Continental Caribbean (Malaver 2022, Orozco 2022). As in these cases, most countries allow for internal geolectal divisions. And different features related to different linguistic levels overlap and intersect in ways that allow for very different divisions. In any case, the characteristics of the corpus itself do not allow to attribute each example to a specific location (according to the speaker's origin). Of course, it would be desirable, in future research, to resort to data sources that allow a much more precise geolectal characterisation of the extent of the phenomenon. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for his remarks in this regard. This reviewer suggests, among other things, addressing the corpora analysis of regional newspapers (see also n. 5), which we think shall be a fruitful way to proceed in the future.

⁸ The Spanish Web 2018 corpus does not provide sociolinguistic or demographic information (age, educational level, etc.) on the authors of the texts. As one reviewer notes, such factors may play an important role in the acceptability of innovative structures, but they go beyond the scope of the present article.

⁹ Obviously, a more in-depth study of their distribution could be carried out, which could be interesting in three respects. Firstly, while it is true that the combination of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) with eventive subjects of this class and maximal-degree, personal judgement or aesthetic adjectives seems to be possible in all varieties, their spread is certainly not homogeneous. Secondly, it remains to be seen to what extent this type of subject can be merged, in the different innovative varieties, with dimensional or other types of adjectives (e.g.

process nouns, and thus we set up a sample of them. We started from a prior list based on the previous literature on event nouns (see section 4). Later on, we considered the absolute frequency of their members in the corpus used, as well as the most frequent nouns observed in the Twitter queries, and we finally arrived at a sample of 18 event-process nouns¹⁰. The decision to start from a predetermined list of event-process nouns is justified by the impossibility of identifying event nouns automatically with the Sketch Engine tool.

We have used the tool Concordance to carry out our searches, designing the relevant strings using CQL (*corpus query language*). Following the canonical order of copulative structures: (i) the corresponding lemmatised event-process noun (from the list given in n. 10) is placed first in the string, (ii) followed by the copula, also lemmatised, and (iii) finally, after two optional positions –which make it possible to retrieve instances in which a quantifier, for example, *muy* (‘very’) or *un poco* (‘a little’), modifies the adjective–, the adjective tag, without further specification. An example is given in (30), where the string used in the case of *guerra* (‘war’) is replicated.

(30) [lemma="guerra"][lemma="estar"][]{}{0,2}[tag="A.*"]

non-dimensional property adjectives) that can be considered non-evaluative. This situation is the one that arises for event-process subjects in our corpus study (see 3.3) and has already been noted in the literature (cf. Moreno-Quibén 2022: 178) for the Mexican and Central American varieties, with some isolated examples. The queries carried out on Twitter also point out in this direction, since examples such as (i)-(ii) have been recovered.

- (i) Twitter; Guatemala
 La fiesta estuvo larga, el pelo lo dice todo.
 the party be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG long the hair it say.PRS.3SG all
 ‘The party was long, the hair says it all.’
- (ii) Twitter; Costa Rica
 La Misa estuvo corta... D; Raro.
 the mass be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG short [?] rare
 ‘The mass was short. Rare.’

Finally, one could ask to what extent the interaction with verb tenses (and particularly with outer aspect and the perfective/imperfective distinction) generates effects similar to those studied by Leonetti & Escribano (2018) with respect to evaluative behavioural (or dispositional) adjectives in European Spanish, which seems to be the case for the European Spanish variety, since perfective aspect significantly improves examples of this kind. The question then would be if this effect also holds for innovative varieties.

¹⁰ The final sample of 18 nouns is the following: *salida* (‘exit’), *movimiento* (‘movement’), *guerra* (‘war’), *tormenta* (‘storm’), *tempestad* (‘tempest’), *chubasco* (‘squall’), *chaparrón* (‘downpour’), *aguacero* (‘downpour’), *ciclón* (‘cyclone’), *huracán* (‘hurricane’), *sismo* (‘seism’), *temblor* (‘tremor’), *tornado* (‘tornado’), *vendaval* (‘gale’), *incendio* (‘fire’), *crecida* (‘[river] swelling’), *inundación* (‘flood’), *riada* (‘flood’).

We also conducted some other searches in esTenTen18 (e.g. with the noun *accidente* ‘accident’), which did not yield sufficient data to process them in an analogous way, but which have also been considered in drawing conclusions about the overall picture.

These strings do not prevent the occurrence of stage-level adjectives as non-verbal predicates, so the results were further manually annotated to indicate the type of adjective: it was signalled whether the adjective was stage-level (SL) or not (\neg SL). Additionally, in cases where the adjective was not stage-level, subclass information was added (1. aesthetic, 2. maximal-degree, 3. other evaluatives, 4. dimensional, physical properties or other).

Examples with stage-level (perfective or quantized) adjectives as non-verbal predicates, as (31), were expected to appear in all different varieties –remember that these are cases where *estar* (*be_{ESTAR}*) does not alternate with *ser* (*be_{SER}*), but always appears, as in (3)-(4) *supra*.

- (31) **El incendio está activo** cerca del municipio [...]
 the fire *be_{ESTAR}*.PRS.3SG active near the town
 ‘The fire is active near the town.’

However, in non-innovative varieties¹¹ (paradigmatically, in the European variety), it would be expected that this type of cases would comprise practically all of the total, since the structures with ‘ \neg SL’ would be excluded. Conversely, a greater weight of cases with a ‘ \neg SL’ adjective indicates a greater strength of the innovative structures in the varieties in question.

3.3. Results

The data set shown in Table 2 corresponds to those varieties for which more than 10 valid sequences were recovered, thus excluding domains for which the number of total examples was lower. It therefore gives a picture of the extension of the innovative structure (% \neg SL) in six (national) domains that are in fact the most widely represented in Spanish Web 2018 (the source of our database)¹².

Table 2. Frequency of innovative uses across Spanish domains

	\neg SL	% \neg SL	SL	%SL	Total N
Argentinian domain .ar	29	43.28	38	56.72	67
Mexican domain .mx	17	36.96	29	63.04	46
Chilean domain .cl	4	28.57	10	71.43	14
Colombian domain .co	2	11.11	16	88.89	18
Cuban domain .cu	1	8.33	11	91.67	12
European domain .es	2	2.06	95	97.94	97

Taking the percentages obtained as a point of reference, it can be stated with certainty that both in the Mexican variety and in the varieties used in Argentina and Chile, the presence of innovative structures (with non-stage-level adjectives) in which

¹¹ From now on, we refer to innovative and non-innovative varieties exclusively in terms of the structures studied here.

¹² 1) European Spanish domain .es – 17.51%, 2) Argentinian domain .ar – 8.78%, 3) Mexican domain .mx – 7.23%, 4) Colombian domain .co – 3.24%, 5) Chilean domain .cl – 3.14%, 6) Cuban domain .cu – 1.22% (see [esTenTen – Spanish corpus from the web | Sketch Engine](#)).

eventive subjects of the event-process type appear is highly significant (Argentinian – 43%, Mexican – 37%, Chilean – 29%). The Mexican variety has been repeatedly pointed out as innovative with respect to the usage of copulas (i.a., Cortés-Torres 2004, García-Márkina 2013, Juárez-Cummings 2014). Argentinian and Chilean varieties, on the contrary, are not usually classified as innovative, although studies on them in this respect are very scarce. In this sense, the data obtained represent a novelty in that they reflect that, at least with respect to the structure examined here, these varieties do show a clear innovative tendency. The data for Argentinian Spanish are particularly striking, in that they reflect a very strong presence of examples like (32).

- (32) Spanish Web 2018, esTenTen18; Argentinian domain .ar
Esa tormenta estaba muy fea, a 200
 that storm be_{ESTAR}.PST.IPFV.3SG very ugly to 200
 metros de mi casa, era oscura [...]
 metres from my house be_{SER}.PST.IPFV.3SG dark
 ‘That storm was very bad, 200 meters from my house, it was dark.’

Other varieties (notably, Central American varieties spoken in countries such as Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panamá or El Salvador, and the ones spoken in Ecuador and Bolivia) call for further research, since the corpus data are simply insufficient. The cases of Peruvian, Uruguayan, Colombian, Venezuelan, and Cuban Spanish are somewhat different, since, despite the scarcity of data, the weight of innovative examples is, if we also consider the searches carried out on Twitter, at least significant, and we have collected examples like the ones in (33)-(34).

- (33) Twitter; Venezuela
 Eso es en Damasco, allá **la guerra está**
 that be_{SER}.PRS.3SG in Damascus there the war be_{ESTAR}.PRS.3SG
horrible y gente muere literalmente de hambre [...]
 horrible and people die.PRS.3SG literally of hunger
 ‘That’s in Damascus, there the war is horrible, and people are literally starving to death.’
- (34) Spanish Web 2018, esTenTen18; Uruguayan domain .ur
 Tienen razón con lo que dicen, fue
 Have_{ESTAR}.3PL reason with what say_{PRS}.3PL, be_{SER}.PST.PFV.3SG
 una época en que **la guerra estaba cruda** [...]
 a time in which the war be_{ESTAR}.PST.IPFV.3SG harsh [...]
 ‘They are right in what they say, it was a time when war was harsh.’

In short, the most evident contrast that emerges from our results is the one existing between, on the one hand, Mexican and Southern Cone (Chilean and Argentinian) Spanish and, on the other hand, standard European Spanish. While the former have percentages of between 25. and 45. innovative uses, the latter only shows a percentage of 2.06 innovative uses out of the total, a marginal presence that could be due to spurious reasons as the ones we mentioned *supra* and that, at any rate, points to the non-innovative character of standard European Spanish in this matter. Thus, we can affirm that the structures in which event-process nouns appear with *estar*

(‘be_{ESTAR}’) and a non-stage-level adjective are characteristic of the above-mentioned varieties as opposed to standard European Spanish –the almost total absence of these structures in the European Spanish subcorpus and the judgements of the speakers consulted (cf. n. 5) are taken here as significant evidence of this fact.

Another interesting point has to do with the adjectival predicate. As we explained above, the copulative sentences with event-location subjects, treated in the literature on standard (European) Spanish as evidential uses of *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’), systematically contain evaluative adjectives (maximal-degree, aesthetic or personal judgement adjectives). Other (sub)classes that can be considered non-evaluative, paradigmatically dimensional adjectives or those of physical properties (see n. 9), cannot appear in these sentences, so that (35) would be presumably perceived as notably odd by a European Spanish speaker. In contrast, some of our data show that innovative sentences with *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’), with event-process subjects, do admit this type of adjectives (36)-(37).

- (35) <https://www.noroeste.com.mx/culiacan/culiacan-de-noche-BCNO64113>,
Mexican domain .ar
La fiesta estuvo larga en el Satay, cerraron hasta las
the party be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG long at the Satay close.PST.PFV.3PL until the
4 de la mañana y la gente seguía muy prendida [...]
4 of the morning and the people continuePST.IPFV.3SG very excited
‘The party was long at the Satay, they closed at four in the morning and people
were still very excited.’
- (36) Spanish Web 2018, esTenTen18; Mexican domain .mx
Un día de lluvias un amigo y su novia se fueron a-l río
one day of rains a friend and his girlfriend REFL go.PST.PFV.3PL to-the river
San Juan, pero **la crecida estaba muy fuerte** y los
San Juan but the swelling be_{ESTAR}.PST.IPFV.3SG very strong and them
arrastró río arriba.
sweep.PST.PFV.3SG river upwards
‘One rainy day a friend and his girlfriend went to the San Juan river, but the
[river] swelling was very strong and swept them upstream.’
- (37) Spanish Web 2018, esTenTen18; Colombian domain .co
El aguacero estuvo eterno, duró casi toda la
the downpour be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG eternal, last.PST.PFV.3SG almost all the
bajada por-lo-que no pudimos andar muy rápido.
descent so-that not could.3PL walk very fast
‘The downpour was eternal, it lasted almost the whole way down, so we
couldn’t walk very fast.’

Thus, innovative varieties do not only admit a wider range of subjects in the structures under examination, but also a wider range of adjectives. These facts would require a more detailed treatment considering the specific characterisation of each of the subclasses of adjectives involved, but a treatment based on argument augmentation by a cover experiencer would be feasible for some cases (cf. section 2.2). Regardless, we are here particularly concerned with subjects as a variation parameter, i.e., with the

types of subjects admitted in the structure studied across Spanish varieties. Thence, we will now develop the proposed distinction within the domain of event nouns, to examine to what extent this can contribute to an adequate explanation of the phenomenon under examination.

4. Towards an explanation: the necessary distinction within the domain of event nouns

As stated, the variation patterns attested clearly involve two different kinds of event nouns which show different behaviours with respect to the structures analysed in the (standard) European Spanish variety. What we call *event-process nouns* seem to be excluded from the structure studied in standard European Spanish, but they appear in the same structure, without apparent restrictions, in the American varieties mentioned above, as shown by the corpus study carried out. What we call *location-event nouns* appear in this structure both in European Spanish and in all the American varieties.

Since it seems relevant to establish a clearer definition for the two different types of event nouns, we must address some of the well-established divisions. A crucial one deals with the morphosyntactic makeup of event nouns and the study of nominalizations (deverbal nouns). In principle, the morphosyntactic complexity of event nouns seems to be at least orthogonal to the issue under discussion, since at a glance we can see that the two sets of nouns identified contain both underived¹³ and deverbal event nouns¹⁴ (here indicated with small caps):

(38) EVENT-LOCATION NOUNS

fiesta ('party'), *gala* ('gala'), *ceremonia* ('ceremony'), *concierto* ('concert'), *feria* ('fair'), *boda* ('wedding'), *partido* ('match', 'game'), *clase* ('class', 'lesson'), *conferencia* ('conference', 'lecture'), *congreso* ('conference', 'congress') [...] // *BAUTIZO*₀ ('baptism'), *COMBATE*₀ ('fight'), *ENTIERRO*₀ ('burial'), *DEBATE*₀ ('debate'), *CHARLA*₀ ('talk') [...] // *FESTEJO* ('celebration', 'party'), *REPRESENTACIÓN* ('performance'), *CELEBRACIÓN* ('celebration'), *RECEPCIÓN* ('reception'), *DISCUSIÓN* ('discussion'), *DESPEDIDA* ('farewell'), *VELATORIO* ('wake'), *REUNIÓN* ('meeting') [...].

(39) EVENT-PROCESS NOUNS

tormenta ('storm'), *aguacero* ('downpour'), *tempestad* ('tempest') [...], *huracán* ('hurricane'), *ciclón* ('cyclone'), *tornado* ('tornado') [...], *incendio* ('fire') [...], *guerra* ('war'), *batalla* ('battle') [...], *golpe* ('hit', 'bang', 'crash'), *accidente* ('accident'), *caos* ('chaos') [...] // *ASALTO*₀ ('assault', 'robbery'), *ATAQUE*₀ ('attack'), *ACOSO*₀ ('bullying', 'hounding'), *REPARTO*₀ ('distribution') [...] // *LLEGADA* ('arrival'), *SALIDA* ('exit'), *ATERRIZAJE* ('landing'), *CAÍDA* ('fall'), *DESTRUCCIÓN* ('destruction'),

¹³ And also nouns for which a relation with a verb is quite obscure or not synchronically recoverable, even if there exist a morphological relation from a diachronic point of view (*partir* < *partido*, *partida*).

¹⁴ A 0 subscript is used when the nouns are, as they have been called in the literature, zero-nominals or nominalizations, a label that is fairly adequate to describe the straightforward relation of this nouns with their related verbs, even if the existence of a zero-nominalizer has been dismissed by some authors (Fábregas 2016: 112ff., following Borer 2013).

CONSTRUCCIÓN ('construction'), *INVASIÓN* ('invasion'), *RUPTURA* ('rupture'), *ASESINATO* ('murder') [...].

But the matter is in fact more puzzling than expected, partly because deverbal nominalizations are quite frequently ambiguous, and partly because the morphological simplicity of underived event nouns does not make them equatable to result nouns, nor even makes them a homogeneous class –as assumed by Grimshaw (1990) and Alexiadou (2001) and criticized by Resnik (2010: 24-26)–. These two facts need to be considered because there is actually a sensible constraint on when and which derived and underived nominals can appear with *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') in the non-innovative varieties of Spanish.

Grimshaw (1990: 45) states that “[event] nouns can and do take obligatory arguments”, and expands on a three-way distinction between *complex-event nominals* (CENs; e.g. *destruction* or *observation*), *result nominals* (RNs; e.g. *construction*) and *simple-event nouns* (SENs; e.g. *trip*), offering some defining traits and tests to distinguish between them in English (Grimshaw 1990: 45-59, 63-67)¹⁵. Finally, the relevant division made by Grimshaw (1990: 47) is the one between: (a) nouns that take arguments (and have an event structure) –the latter called AS-nominals (e.g. Alexiadou 2001, Borer 2013)–; (b) nouns that do not take arguments (and lack an event structure); thus equaling RNs and SENs (both inside the second group), and without exploring any possible syntactic differences between them. As Grimshaw (1990: 49) puts it: “Even nouns that denote events behave like result nominals unless they have an event structure which provides them with an internal event analysis”, so that SENs lack any event structure and hence they behave like RNs in all respects.

This type of reasoning, which is in fact what underlies much of the later literature, simply overlooks the distinctive features of so-called *simple-event nouns* as opposed to result nominals. Thus, it leads to a situation in which it is impossible to explore further distinctions within the domain of underived event nouns, or in which such distinctions can only be introduced in conceptual, to some extent vague, terms. As could be expected, the literature on event nominals has barely looked into underived event nouns, as Resnik (2010) and Huyghe et al. (2017: 118) explicitly notice. But the phenomenon that we are trying to explain leads us to explore the domain partition that the construction examined here reveals, which clearly puts aside simple-event nouns from RNs and affects these ones and complex-event nouns.

The intuition that we will try to develop basically goes as follows: the *event-location nouns* (henceforth, ELNs) in (38) all constitute *locations* in a non-trivial sense in which we cannot say the same about the *event-process nouns* (henceforth, EPNs) in (39), a fact that is closely related to the core nature of the two types of event nouns. In this sense, what is posited here is that this distinction overlaps with the previously recognized distinction between CENs/AS-nominals and SENs/RNs. The assumption that the latter are in some sense equivalent between them (SENs = RNs) is misleading: RNs must be considered aside of underived event nouns, since they do not denote events, but first-order entities, and lack their own temporal development.

¹⁵ These tests include, among others, modification by *frequent* or *constant*, the obligatory nature of the object when an agentive *by*-phase is present, pluralization, and the possibility of directly applying aspectual modifiers like *in an hour* or *for several weeks*.

Therefore, we would have a two-part division of the event nouns domain, that, crucially, does not depend on the morphological complexity of the nouns involved. This does not imply, as we suggested at the beginning, that the lexical/morphosyntactic complexity underlying the various occurrences of nouns that are ambiguous between different classes is not relevant to the distinction drawn. In fact, we are going to assume that: (i) nouns that exhibit a complex argument structure computable in aspectual terms¹⁶ always belong to the class of EPNs; while (ii) nouns whose argument structure (be it complex or not) is not operative in aspectual terms, and they belong either to the class of ELNs (if they denote events) or to the class of RNs (or, in more general terms, object- or entity-denoting nouns, which denote entities including *places* in the usual sense)¹⁷.

An apparent exception to (ii) must be made: the case of those simple nouns (e.g. *sismo*, *tempestad*, *guerra*) which, lacking argument structure (AS), in the narrow sense we are dealing with, seem to denote processes in the same manner as the nouns in (i), and which stand as the real conundrum all the way round. The latter will be considered here as part of the EPNs class (39), being simple, underived, EPNs. What all EPNs have in common is, primarily, that they have some ‘aspectual density’¹⁸, and, secondarily, that they do not constitute *locations* inherently [-L]. In contrast, ELNs constitute locations [+L].

If we assume that the slice of aspectual meaning of derived EPNs is a functional content related to some aspectual projection (being it AspP(Q), Init and/or ProcP, vP or some similar XP), or even simply a meaning atomic component like CAUSE (and other additional functional shells or features in some cases), then it is reasonable to

¹⁶ It has been suggested that they embed an aspectual/aktionsart phrase of some kind in their extended projection (cf. Alexiadou 2001, Sleeman & Brito 2010 or Borer 2013, a.o.)

¹⁷ This class includes all result/participant nominalizations, therefore, object/entity deverbal nouns, that normally pick up some of the arguments in the AS of their base verbs (cf. Melloni 2011, Fábregas 2016). Not all of them can be easily seen as the results of the action denoted by the verb, e.g. *administración* (‘administration’, when it means, roughly, ‘the team of people who manage something’) or *iluminación* (‘lighting’, when it means ‘the system or objects used to illuminate a place’).

¹⁸ Regarding AS and aspectuality, within the derived EPNs, the complete range of aspectual classes or event types can be found (see Borer 2013: 77-79 and Resnik 2010: 47). Underived EPNs (*guerra*, *tormenta*, *terremoto*, *accidente*, *batalla*, etc.) seem to fall under the categories of activities and achievements, thus excluding accomplishments, so that this complex event type is not possible (against Resnik 2010: 197-199) for this kind of EPNs – a similar observation is made by Wang (2013: 247) for Mandarin Chinese event nouns. Thus, underived EPNs reject the possibility of containing different types of subevents, a fact that certainly has to do with their independence from a verbal root. Even so, the process meaning of underived EPNs, which is the main reason to group them with derived EPNs, should be somehow captured. To this end, we can draw on the concept of internal causation (normally applied to internally caused change-of-state verbs; see Alexiadou 2014). At this point we also depart from Resnik (2010: 199), who states that *accidente* ‘accident’, *huracán* (‘hurricane’), *incendio* (‘fire’), etc. are unrelated to any cause. This is not actually a strong disagreement with respect to the facts involved, since Resnik is interpreting the concept of *causation* in terms of external causation or even agency or volitionality. But we can assume it is in fact internal causation (which does not entail necessarily agency) what underived EPNs always entail, whereas underived ELNs are obviously encoded without any causal component which made them become part of the process’ domain.

affirm that underived EPNs inherently have some similar meaning component within them, namely an internal causal component associated to a vP-like or ProcP projection, similar to the one proposed by Sleeman (2009, and see also Sleeman & Brito 2010) for what they call process nominals, or, again, simply a meaning atomic equivalent component. This meaning component is rather to be taken as an instance of internal causation in the domain of simple nouns (see n. 18), that set them up as dynamic processes. We could then say that they are not only event-denoting, but namely process-denoting. Thus, we can explain that they do have an aspectual structure, not corresponding to an AspP of any type¹⁹, but related to the internal-cause component considered, which is the component that gives rise to the dynamic/process reading of simple, underived EPNs. In such a way, pending the definite implementation, technical details, and further commitments about the syntax-lexicon-morphology interface –on which we will simply not elaborate–, we can better understand how the class of EPNs is joined together, despite the differences between derived and underived nouns pertaining to the class: they all have a process component.

A third fact, actually related with this processual nature, can be explained straightforwardly: the contrast shown in (16) follows naturally from the description outlined here.

- (40) a.* x {causó / provocó} {una fiesta / la carrera / la boda / la conferencia
 x caused / provoked a party / the race / the wedding/ the lecture
 / ...}.
 / ...
 b. x {causó / provocó} {una tormenta / un incendio / el accidente / la guerra
 x caused/provoked a storm / a fire / the accident / the war
 / ...}.
 / ...

[x : x is at least a CAUSER –in the sense used in Alexiadou (2014: 885, 892; 2015: 9-11), standing for natural forces and causing events, but can also be, under certain circumstances, an AGENT or ORIGINATOR, e.g. *Los EEUU provocaron deliberadamente aquella Guerra en Oriente Próximo* (‘The US deliberately provoked that war in the Middle East’)].

(40a) is ruled out because the ELNs merged as complements lack any causal component against which x can be interpreted. (40b), on the other way round, is allowed because x can be identified as the causer of the complement EPNs –this characterisation partially echoes the distinction drawn by Gross & Kiefer (1995) between controlled and uncontrolled event nouns (see also Huyghe 2011: 12).

¹⁹ The question of whether underived EPNs allow or not for aspectual modifiers has been obscured by the homogeneous treatment of all underived event nouns as a group. Normally, underived EPNs, as ELNs, reject aspectual modifiers such as *durante tres días* (‘for three days’), but examples like *la guerra durante tres lustros entre China y Japón* (‘the war for fifteen years between China and Japan’), *la batalla campal durante seis horas* (‘the pitch battle for six hours’) or *el caos durante los últimos dos días en la ciudad de Madrid* (‘the chaos for the past two days in the city of Madrid’) are not systematically regarded as ungrammatical by Spanish speakers. Obviously, punctual EPNs such as *accidente* (‘accident’) or *golpe* (‘crash’) do not allow for this kind of modifiers.

Regarding the [+L] feature, whose value is different in either case, we propose that it is at the basis of the distinction, what is clearly mirrored in the following tests, which are, to the best of our knowledge, applied here jointly for the first time and draw a clear dividing line between the two groups of event nouns (but see Fábregas 2010 and Huyghe 2011 for similar ideas that foreshadow our way of dealing with the distinction).

- (41) < y ASISTIR A z >
- a. Joy asistió a {la fiesta / el partido de fútbol / mi conferencia}.
 Joy attend.PST.PRF.3SG the party / the match of football / my lecture
 ‘Joy attended the party / football match / lecture.’
- b. Ray asistió a {el incendio / una tormenta / tu aterrizaje}.
 Ray witness.PST.PRF.3SG the fire / a storm / your landing
 ‘Ray witnessed the fire / a storm / your landing.’

The verb *asistir* (*a*) has, among other meanings, those corresponding in English to (i) ‘attend (to)’ and (ii) ‘witness’, as illustrated by the corresponding translations of (41a) and (41b). In the latter case, the verb cannot be interpreted as ‘attend to’, but exclusively with the meaning of ‘witness’, so that the event in question appears as a process of which the subject has been a witness. In (41a), however, the more direct interpretation is that in which the subject has attended an event by going to a particular place, a fact which can clearly be related to the locative nature of the events involved.

- (42) < y {estar / encontrarse} en z >
- a. Marina {está / se encuentra} en {la recepción / el velatorio /
 Marina be_{ESTAR}.PRS.3SG / stand.PRS.3SG in the reception / the wake /
 un festival / ...}.
 a festival / ...
 ‘Marina is/stands at/in the reception / a wake / a festival.’
- b. # Marina {está / se encuentra} en {el aguacero / el accidente
 Marina be_{ESTAR}.PRS.3SG / stand.PRS.3SG in the downpour / the accident
 / un incendio / ...}.
 / a fire / ...
 ‘Marina is/stands at/in the downpour / the accident / the fire.’

On the other hand, in the structure of (42) only the ELNs (42a) can serve as locations, while the EPNs in (42b) make the sequences markedly anomalous, so that speakers systematically reject them. The addition in (42b) of expressions such as *el lugar de* (‘the place of’) significantly improves their acceptability. This is not necessary, however, for (42a), a fact which is to be related to the locative component of ELNs. They can, in themselves, serve as real locations.

Location, therefore, appears to be a defining property of ELNs—which has been claimed for all event nouns in the literature about the Spanish copulas at least since Leonetti (1994)—. At this point, we can wonder if object/entity nouns are not identical to ELNs in that respect. We can say that objects/entities and the type of events ELNs stand for, both *occupy* spaces in a substantive way, but the question of whether object/entity nouns bear the [+L] feature remains open. It is enough for now to distinguish ELNs from EPNs with respect to location or *situatedness*. Their

relationship with space and time is a crucial matter in the individuation of (the category of) events, both from a metaphysical and from a purely linguistic point of view, as is reflected in the overview literature (e.g. Lyons 1977, Schneider n.d., Casati & Varzi 2023). In this respect, Casati & Varzi (2023: §1.1) make the following remark:

[T]here are differences in the way objects and events are said to relate to space and time. Ordinary objects have relatively clear spatial boundaries and unclear temporal boundaries; events have relatively unclear spatial boundaries and clear temporal boundaries.

For the distinction that we are pursuing, we would need to say that not all events, when linguistically encoded, have indeed *unclear* spatial boundaries. Put as simply as possible, and avoiding any further discussion, EPNs encode events that occur in time and space, while ELNs encode events that *occur* in time but *occupy* space. Thus, both have clear temporal boundaries, but EPNs have (relatively) unclear spatial boundaries, while ELNs have *clear* spatial boundaries. This is, obviously, not a matter related to the actual properties of events, but to the way in which we conceptualise them.

ELNs, then, can constitute locations, while EPNs do not, since they are dynamic processes with *unclear spatial boundaries*. In a certainly mysterious manner, this in turn relates to the way in which such events can be qualified, a question we will address in the next section.

5. Discussion

The distinction outlined in the previous section between ELNs and EPNs is, in our view, crucial to build up an explanation for the data collected. Recall that, as seen in section 3, the following generalisation can be made: while subjects headed by both kinds of event nouns are acceptable (to some extent) in the copulative structures with *estar* in innovative varieties (notably, Mexican, Argentinian and Chilean Spanish); standard European Spanish excludes subjects headed by an EPN in this syntactic context (e.g. *tormenta* ‘storm’ or *guerra* ‘war’).

As we are assuming that the distinction between the two classes of nouns is common to all Spanish varieties, geolectal variation must then be explained on the basis of the features or requirements of other elements present in the construction –the adjectival predicate or the copulative verb *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) in itself– which could be sensitive to that distinction within the nominal domain. Therefore, the properties of the different classes of adjectives participating in the innovative construction in different varieties, and the properties of the copula *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) in innovative vs non-innovative varieties need to be explored.

In this sense, we will now review the different types of proposals in the literature that attempt to explain the existence of the innovative structure with *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’), and its coexistence with the non-innovative structure. The goal will be to determine which of these types of approaches can accommodate the additional variation data shown in this article based on properties of eventive subjects, perhaps with the addition of auxiliary hypotheses, so that a consistent theory of copulative variation can be formulated.

Aspectual approaches (see section 2.1) explain the distribution of the Spanish copulas *ser* ('be_{SER}') and *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') in terms of the lexical aspect properties of adjectival predicates and/or copulas. To sum up, stage-level predications (with *estar*) are characterised by being spatio-temporally situated, whereas individual-level predications (with *ser*) lack a spatio-temporal articulation or dimension of their own, although they can be externally delimited by, for example, verb tense, grammatical aspect or adverbial modification. In these proposals, adjectival predicates are also characterized (usually from a lexicalist point of view) as individual-level and stage-level predicates (*alto* 'tall' vs *enfermo* 'ill'), so that there must be a matching between the copulas and the adjectival predicate's aspectual properties. One way to deal with those cases in which individual-level adjectives are combined with *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') instead of *ser* ('be_{SER}') in the framework of these theories is by resorting to the concept of *aspectual coercion*. In this way, the copula *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') would force the interpretation of such adjectives as stage-level predicates. However, this type of approach does not allow us to account for the additional meaning described above of innovative structures of the type <*estar* + individual-level adjective>, which is not linked to stage-levelhood (see Malaver 2009). Moreover, the coercion mechanism should be shaped so as to allow the variation to be modelled in an accurate, fine-grained way (see on this point Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez, 2020: 236-237).

The theory of *evidential commitment* (Escandell-Vidal, 2018a, 2018b, 2019), to which we have referred in sections 2.2 and 2.3, elaborates on some of the assumptions on which aspectual theories rely, attributing to *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') a spatio-temporal anchoring meaning, as we have seen. To our knowledge, what this theory predicts is that, independently of the distinction between ELNs and EPNs, every event noun could be the subject in <*estar* + individual-level adjective> predications whenever it is possible to infer a situation in which the speaker has acquired the information on which she/he bases his assertion (recall that this meaning component arises as a consequence of the mismatch between the stage-level copula and the individual-level predicate). Then, sequences as the ones in (43)-(44), are predicted to be acceptable even in the (non-innovative) European Spanish varieties.

- (43) El incendio estuvo tremendo. (#/* in some varieties.)
 the fire be_{ESTAR}.PST.PFV.3SG tremendous
 'The fire was tremendous / awful.'
- (44) La tormenta está horrible. (#/* in some varieties.)
 the storm be_{ESTAR}.PRS.3SG horrible
 'The storm is (being) horrible.'
- (45) ¡Qué grande está este edificio! (#/* in some varieties.)
 how large be_{ESTAR}.PRS.3SG this building
 'How large is this building!'

Note that this theory cannot explain either why (45) is unacceptable/ungrammatical in non-innovative varieties, since the repair pragmatic strategy that introduces the evidential component is available in all varieties of

Spanish. The addition of some sort of constraints over the subjects within this kind of proposal is clearly needed.

From the point of view of modes-of-comparison theories, some authors have proposed an account for the syntactic variation related to examples like (45) (where the predicate is a dimensional adjective), acceptable in innovative Spanish varieties (paradigmatically, Mexican Spanish) and ungrammatical in non-innovative (e.g., European Spanish) varieties. According to Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez (2020), dimensional adjectives such as *grande* ('big') would contain, in the innovative varieties, a covert experiencer in their argument structure, which would be lacking in the non-innovative varieties (hence, argument augmentation is the locus of syntactic variation). When the covert experiencer is absent (non-innovative varieties), the only possibility is a *within-the-individual* comparison reading, i.e., a comparison between counterparts of the subject, so that the subject should allow for variation with respect to the property denoted by the adjective in order for the sentence to be acceptable/grammatical. When the covert experiencer is present (innovative varieties), it is the experiencer itself which provides the necessary counterparts to establish the required comparison *within-the-individual*, associated to *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') predications. Contrast between different alternatives is therefore guaranteed.

However, evaluative adjectives, particularly maximal-degree adjectives (*alucinante* 'amazing') and predicates of personal judgement (*difícil* 'difficult'), are generally assumed to have an experiencer argument in all varieties of Spanish (Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez 2015; Moreno-Quibén 2022)²⁰. The presence of this experiencer is on the basis of the evidential meaning of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') structures discussed above (section 2.2), where comparison between counterparts/stages of the subject is not a priori established. Then, again, all subjects are predicted to be allowed even in (non-innovative) European Spanish, since the mere presence of the covert experiencer would be sufficient for the comparison between potential counterparts of the experiencer introduced by the adjective to be established. Examples like (43) and (44), and all the previously given examples containing EPNs, should be acceptable in standard European Spanish, contrary to fact.

Our intuition is that, in non-innovative varieties, the subject is always accessed to establish the comparison in *estar*-sentences. Even when the adjectival predicate provides an experiencer to support the building up of the comparison between stages/counterparts of the experiencer, in non-innovative varieties there is always an alignment between counterparts of the experiencer and stages of the subject in *estar*-sentences. In the case of eventive subjects, only ELN provide such accessible stages. More specifically, ELNs provide, contrary to EPNs, a potential relation (which could be called 'accessibility' or 'involvement') between the experiencer and the event denoted by the ELN, which enables counterparts of the experiencer to align with counterparts of the subject. To put it more simply, non-innovative varieties only allow the combination of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') with eventive subjects if two conditions are met: (a) the adjectival predicate must possess a subjective dimension that introduces a

²⁰ Another potential problem is that aesthetic adjectives are in principle assumed to lack an experiencer argument in European Spanish (Moreno-Quibén 2022). Even if so, it seems to be a minor problem if we assume that, in cases such as (16), (23) or (24), aesthetic adjectives are, as it seems, simply used as personal judgement predicates, and a covert experiencer argument is in fact present in these cases.

covert experiencer in its argument structure (see Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jimenez 2024 for an explanation); (b) the eventive subject must be an ELN, whose locative meaning allows the *contrast* needed to be achieved; it is the experiencer (source of the evidential/perspectival meaning) what allows us to generate the counterparts which supply contrast; but the subject must, in turn, be able to support those counterparts. Ultimately, alternative situations of perception/experience, in which the subject-predicate relation would not hold, are grounded not only on the experiencer, but also on the subject properly.

This point may become clearer if we take some examples into consideration. In the case of an example such as *El jamón está muy bueno* ('The ham is_{ESTAR} very tasty'), the attribution of the property of *tastiness* to the ham is clearly related to the experiencer's expectations about the ham. On the basis of these expectations, potential counterparts of the subject are generated with recourse to the corresponding counterparts of the experiencer. Similarly, in cases such as *La fiesta estuvo divertida* ('The party was_{ESTAR} fun'), counterparts of the experiencer introduced by the adjective allow us to build the corresponding counterparts of the subject. However, this is not possible, we must insist, with any event noun as subject. Since events cannot have stages by themselves, we would need, in the case of non-innovative varieties, counterparts that are aligned in relation to (counterparts of) the experiencer. This is only possible with ELNs, which express events in which the experiencer is involved or participates. EPNs do not allow the participation/involvement of the experiencer in the event they denote (i.e., the event is inaccessible to the experiencer) so that the required alignment between the experiencer and the subject is not possible.

In short, *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') predications in non-innovative varieties always require the presence of counterparts/stages of the subject. When the subject is an event, it is necessary to generate these potential counterparts through a link between the experiencer and the event expressed: the experiencer must therefore be able to access (participate / be involved) in the event. (EPNs do not admit this possibility, unlike ELNs, due to the differences outlined in section 4). This requirement seems to be directly related with the presence of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') rather than *ser* ('be_{SER}'), as the contrasts in (46) suggest for non-innovative varieties.

- (46) a. El partido {fue / estuvo} {espectacular / bonito / intenso}.
 the match be_{(SER/ESTAR).PST.PFV.3SG} spectacular / beautiful / intense
 'The match was spectacular / nice / intense.'
- b. La guerra {fue / *estuvo} {espectacular / horrible / intensa}.
 the war be_{(SER/ESTAR).PST.PFV.3SG} spectacular / horrible / intense
 'The was was spectacular / horrible / intense.'

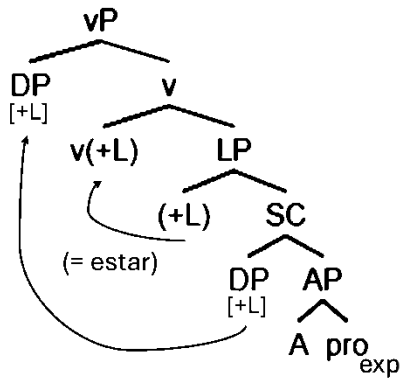
Our proposal in this paper is that the complete paradigm of syntactic variation concerning *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') copulative sentences can be explained only if it is assumed that, in non-innovative varieties, *ser* ('be_{SER}') and *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') are not merely the spell-out of a single verbal node reflecting only some syntactic-semantic properties of the structure below V (i.e. PredP) (as claimed recurrently in the papers by Gumiel Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez; see also Camacho 2015, Myler 2018). In a nutshell, to account for syntactic variation in the copulative domain, it must be claimed (a) that natural classes of adjectives have different argument structure in different

varieties (as claimed by Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez), and also (b) that *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') has different properties in non-innovative vs innovative varieties, which implies that *ser* ('be_{SER}') and *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') have different semantic-syntactic properties already in non-innovative varieties. To develop this idea, we will abandon the proposals based on the modes of comparison, although we believe that, ultimately, the basic ideas we develop here could be implemented within that type of proposal, with the necessary readjustments with respect to the syntax of the copulas.

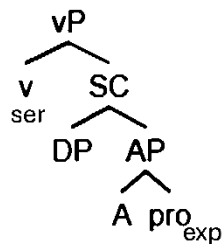
The idea that *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') has a more complex semantics than *ser* ('be_{SER}') has already been developed in the literature, linked to (i) its inherent properties (a.o., Luján 1981, Maienborn 2005, Silvagni 2017, Sanchez-Alonso 2018), or (ii) its syntactic properties (*estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') lexicalises an extra slice of syntactic structure, thus being more syntactically-semantically complex) (a.o., Romeu 2015, Zagona 2015, Gallego & Uriagereka 2016; and cf. Leonetti, Pérez-Jiménez & Gumiel-Molina 2015: 4-8 for a brief discussion of the issue).

For the sake of convenience, let us assume the configuration in (47) for *estar* in non-innovative varieties (*estar*¹), reminiscent of the analysis presented in Gallego & Uriagereka (2016: 134), whose authors claim that *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') equals *ser* + X, X being most likely a prepositional element. The functional layer they called XP becomes here the one that contains the [+L] feature (hence, LP), which is incorporated onto *v* and then lexicalised/spelled-out as *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}'), whereas the DP_[+L] moves to [Spec, *v*P] for feature checking. Similarly to Gallego & Uriagereka (2016), we assume that XP/LP is absent when *ser* is in play and that *ser* ('be_{SER}') is the "bare" realisation of *v* (48). Note that this kind of proposal can naturally address the co-occurrence of *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') with non-adjectival predicates (e.g. PPs, gerunds).

(47) *estar*¹ (with an experiencer-bearing adjective)



(48) *ser*



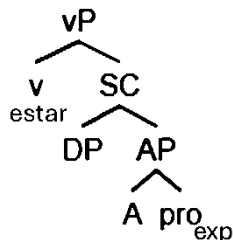
Hence, *estar*¹ equals *ser* + [L]. Obviously, in the structure of (47), if the event noun inside the DP is an EPN [-L], then the derivation crashes, reason why the version of (46b) which contains *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') is precluded in non-innovative varieties, as well as (43) and (44).

The abstract feature [+L]²¹ is in fact broadly similar to Clements' [+NEXUS] (1988) or to what has been alternatively called "situational dependency requirement" (Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti 2016, Leonetti & Escribano 2018) or "spatio-temporal anchoring" (Escandell-Vidal 2018a, 2018b; cf. Maienborn 2005, Sanchez-Alonso 2018 for similar ideas). Furthermore, in a way, its postulation is rooted in an intuition akin to those underlying the analysis by Bruccart (2012), who attributes to *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') an interpretable feature of terminal coincidence, and Zagona (2015), who explicitly talks about a locative ([uLoc]) feature; as well as by Gallego & Uriagereka (2016), as we have just seen.

If we assume that in non-innovative varieties *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') is always *estar*¹, then we can argue that the derivation will succeed whenever the predication is [+L], in the way we have depicted in (46) for ELNs, or by some other mechanism when, being the subject [-L] (so, an EPN), it is the predicate that bears the [+L] feature (e.g., participles, gerunds) or the predication as a whole (i.e., adjectives with an absolute/stage-level interpretation). But this point remains obviously to be further explored and developed. We would also need to assume, in any case, that all object-entity nouns denoting first-order entities are [+L], which would relate to their ability to constitute *locations* (in a broad sense including 'metaphorical' locations that ground the property they are attributed).

Let us now extend the proposal to innovative varieties. In the Spanish varieties where (43) and (44) are possible, the existence of counterparts/stages of the subject is simply unnecessary in the structures under consideration, and it is sufficient for the adjective to introduce an experiencer, regardless of the [\pm L] specification of the noun heading the subject. We could then think that the copula *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') that appears in the innovative structure is not the same as the one we represented in (47) (*estar*¹), but a *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') that has been reanalysed as a simple spell-out/lexicalisation of *v* (*estar*²), analogous, as far as we are concerned here, to *ser* ('be_{SER}') (49)²².

(49) *estar*² (with an experiencer-bearing adjective)



²¹ The actual existence of such a feature should be more robustly justified, but see section 4 for some examples suggesting that such a feature may be independently justified.

²² It would be interesting to explore the hypothesis that there is still a difference between *ser* and *estar*² regarding the functional structure with which each of them is associated, for independent reasons (as, e.g., the interaction between inner/lexical and outer/grammatical aspect, if it continues to be relevant to *estar*²). This question is beyond the scope of this paper.

This proposal, which considers the emergence in certain varieties of innovative *estar*², has several advantages. Firstly, it could help to explain the existence of *estar*-sentences like (50) and (51), with circumstantial/aspectual (*breve* ‘short’, *frecuente* ‘frequent’, *constante* ‘constant’, *habitual* ‘usual’, etc.) or modal adjectives (*posible* ‘possible’, *necesario* ‘necessary’, *imposible* ‘impossible’, *probable* ‘probable’, etc.) (Demonte 1999: 206-210, Gumiel-Molina, Pérez Jiménez & Moreno-Quibén 2024: 23-25) whose argument structure could hardly be claimed to include an experiencer (cf. Gumiel-Molina, Pérez Jiménez & Moreno-Quibén 2024: 32).

- (50) [Qué es la meningitis fúngica \[...\]\(elcomercio.pe\)](#); Peruvian domain .pe
 Por lo general, los dolores de cabeza están frecuentes en
 by the general the pains of head be_{ESTAR}.PRS.3PL frequent.PL in
 esta enfermedad.
 this disease
 ‘Headaches are usually frequent in this disease.’
- (51) Twitter; Honduras
 Veo esto y duele pero creo que est[á]
 see.PRS.1SG this and hurt.PRS.3SG but think.PRS.1SG that be_{ESTAR}.PRS.3SG
 necesario.
 necessary
 ‘I see this, and it hurts, but I think it is necessary.’

Secondly, it gives room for a more accurate treatment of the appearance of age adjectives in innovative structures, that cannot be easily explained by a theory exclusively based on argument augmentation, as recognized by Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez (2024: 32). However, all these potential applications should be properly developed, refining the analysis and making their consequences explicit in the outlined contexts.

A crucial advantage of such an analysis is that it draws on two different and independent (even if they do interplay) (micro)parameters of variation: (a) the argument structure of the subclasses of adjectives – presence/absence of a covert experiencer; (b) the syntax/semantics of the copula *estar* (‘be_{ESTAR}’) itself – *estar*₁ vs *estar*₂. This allows modelling the complex patterns of variation in the distribution of Spanish copulas across dialects in a more accurate and articulate way. As in the case of argument augmentation (Moreno-Quibén 2020: 209), the grammaticalization/reanalysis of *estar*₁ as *estar*₂ would be an ongoing gradual process; hence, an uneven spread of *estar*₂ across geolectal varieties and within them can be expected. And, certainly, *estar*₁ and *estar*₂ may be simultaneously available in the grammar of a single speaker.

The *double-estar* hypothesis would ultimately be related to the observations made since Silva-Corvalán (1986) on the possible neutralisation of copulas in innovative varieties (De Jonge 1993, Gutiérrez 1994, Alfaraz 2012, Bessett 2015), although with the caveat that, in our view, this process would be parallel to that of argument augmentation for natural classes of adjectives, which would be at the basis of the subjective/perspectival meaning of a relevant part of innovative copulative structures –those where the adjectival predicate involves a covert experiencer–. The

notions of *evidential*, *experiential*, *subjective*, and *perspectival* must, in any case, be more precisely defined in future research, establishing definite boundaries between them. The *bleaching* process undergone by *estar* ('be_{ESTAR}') should, moreover, be framed in a coherent theory of the (linguistic) history of the copula from the earliest times of Spanish (cf. Vañó-Cerdá 1982, Batllori & Roca 2011, Sanchez-Alonso 2018), bearing in mind that the feature [+L] would ultimately be a vestige of the primitive meaning of the Latin verb *stare* (see Pérez-Jiménez, Gumiel Molina & Moreno-Quibén 2018 for the idea that there is a romance *continuum* in the more or less strict syntactic-semantic restrictions of the copula from Catalan to American Spanish innovative varieties).

6. Conclusions and further investigations

In this paper we have shown that current work on variation in copulative sentences should pay attention to some aspects that have not been dealt with so far, namely the internal properties of event nouns. The examples extracted from the database have allowed us to show that the geolectal differences in this *innovative estar*-construction cannot be explained by looking only into the classes of adjectives, nor by a theory that dwells on a unitary analysis of the copula across dialects. It is essential to construct, in our view, explanations that also refer to the characteristics of the types of subjects, and that thus connect the constraints on them with the syntax/semantics of the copula and its changes/differences across dialects. This also opens the door to trace a relationship between the current situation and the diachronic evolution of the Spanish copulative system; and, furthermore, with the variation in the copulative systems of the Iberian and Italo-Romance languages.

This work has also made it possible to show some outstanding issues for further research, namely:

- Firstly, the *innovative* examples extracted and their relative frequency depict the Rioplatense area as a highly innovative area in this regard, which contrasts with other works that show that it is a non-innovative area regarding other copulative contexts. This point is to be empirically deepened considering a broader range of data both linguistically and extralinguistically, as we would expect that there is also variation between different groups of speakers. But the fact that there seem to be at least two (independent) parameters of variation involved in the distribution of copulas, would make it possible to argue that a given variety can be innovative in some cases but not in others. A much deeper analysis and comparison of dialectal data from different varieties is, in any case, needed.
- Secondly, it is essential to formalise and develop in a more precise manner the '*double-estar* hypothesis' that this work suggests. And to further explore its consequences and its tenability on empirical and theoretical grounds. Moreover, the semantic/pragmatic characterisation of copulative structures involving *estar* would crucially benefit from a better understanding of the

connections and limits between *evidentiality*, *experientiality*, *subjectivity* and *perspectivalness*.

- Thirdly, and in the light of the latest work published on the subject (see, among others, Escandell 2023, Gumiel-Molina, Moreno-Quibén & Pérez-Jiménez 2023, 2024 and this paper), it is necessary to review the concept of *innovative estar* which, until now, has been explained as a single phenomenon but seems, rather, to be part of a web of related phenomena.

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