Wh-relatives as alternative set definers in infinitive contexts: restrictive vs. non-restrictive

1. **Goal.** This talk provides an account of why Spanish infinitives can be licensed by wh-relative operators only if the relative clause is defining (DR), but infinitival non-defining relative (NDR) clauses are ungrammatical. We will argue that in infinitive contexts, the wh-element must quantify over a set of non-defined, possible alternatives in order to bind the situation pronoun (SitPron) in the defective T of the infinitive, and only DR are able to do so, for NDR clauses denote a singleton set, with just one possible alternative.

2. **The data.** In Spanish, wh-relative elements are allowed in infinitival embedded domains if the clause is defining. These sentences must have a root modal reading —either an obligation or a possibility one— (Hernanz 1999), something that does not follow from the normal licensing conditions of these structures, as the inflected versions can lack it (2). On the other hand, NDR clauses are never allowed with infinitival sentences (3)a, contrasting with its finite counterpart (3)b.

   (1) Busco un libro que leer.
   (2) Busco un libro que leí.
   (3)a. *El libro, el cual leer, está en casa.
   b. El libro, el cual leí, está en casa
   “I’m looking for a book I can read.”
   “I’m looking for a book I read”

3. **Analysis. // 3.1. The role of C and T in finite clauses and their defectivity in infinitives.** I will assume that in finite clauses, T has to be anchored by C, thus giving a reference to it. I formalize this as T containing a situation variable SitPron (which other authors have called [±T], [±Fin] or [±COINC]). However, in infinitive clauses, the defectiveness of C makes this anchoring impossible, and another way of satisfying the pronoun is needed. We claim that in the sentences in (1) the infinitive’s SitPron is satisfied because it is interpreted as a variable under the scope of the wh-element. Following standard assumptions on wh-movement, we will argue that wh-elements are operators that quantify over propositional alternatives, giving rise to a Hamblin (1973) set. The wh-operator takes the SitPron of the infinitive under its scope, and in doing so, it becomes bound and T is interpreted as the range of possible alternative situations. In other words, the wh-operator gives the required reference to the SitPron of the defective T, for it treats it as a variable under its scope.

3.2. **The root modal reading under wh-movement.** We will argue that the modal reading that arises in these contexts is required because, as the sentence is non-veridical, the infinitive can just be interpreted as a hypothetical, possible situation. In other words, since the situation is not instantiated in time (there is no tense), the wh-operator can just quantify over a set of possible, alternative situations.

3.3. **The impossibility of infinitival NDR clauses.** As shown above, the infinitive SitPron needs to be read as a variable to denote the open set of possible alternatives. We will claim that, unlike DR clauses, NDR denote a singleton set just denoting the antecedent described by the relative clause (Demirdache 1991). As they cannot denote an entire range of possible alternatives, they cannot define the SitPron of the infinitival T as its variable. As it remains unbound, (3)a is ungrammatical.