

## DESUBJECTIVIZING DISCOURSE THROUGH THE USE OF THE PERIPHRAISIS HABER QUE + INFINITIVE IN SPANISH

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**Abstract:** *The present investigation analyzes the use of a construction traditionally described as impersonal: the periphrasis haber que + infinitive. This is a variable phenomenon in Spanish grammar, studied as a meaningful choice, based on the cognitive conceptualization of salience. The construction conveys a meaning of duty, obligation, recommendation or convenience, via which the speaker accepts the situation described as unavoidable. Its use is analyzed in texts of the Corpus Interaccional del Español, which comprises a wide range of genres and communicative situations. It is hypothesised that the meaning conveyed by haber que + infinitive contributes to shaping a communicative style based on the desubjectivity cognitive dimension*

**Keywords:** *desubjectivization, impersonals, periphrasis, salience, syntax, variation.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION. MORPHOSYNTACTIC VARIATION AND ITS SOCIAL NATURE

This investigation analyzes the periphrasis *haber que + infinitive* as a variable phenomenon which shapes a communicative style based on the desubjectivity cognitive dimension.

Traditional sociolinguistic approaches centre on the role of the speaker as a user, but the relationship between an individual speaker and usage still needs to be explored in depth. Since syntactic variants are considered to be elements that contribute to displaying meanings and personal and social identities, their cognitive background is perfectly suited to studying morphosyntactic variation.

Through many investigations, it has been demonstrated that the appropriate way to explore the internal relationship between usage and speakers is a cognitive approach. The confluence of cognitive linguistics and sociolinguistics has become evident in recent times, as these approaches share many basic methods for the study of variation (Dirven, 2005: 39). Cognitive linguistics employs empirical methods to analyze variation by considering social dimensions—social implying empirical and empirical implying social (Kristiansen & Dirven 2008: 2–3). Also, the cognitive linguistics paradigm is based on the analysis of meaning and use, so it seems natural to broaden analytical scope to include all areas of human communication where meaning plays a relevant role, such as morphosyntactic variation. Variation implies that each form has its own meaning derived from its cognitive properties. This aligns with most modern approaches to syntactic variation, which assume that any change in a form will result in a change in its meaning (Aijón Oliva & Serrano 2013; Serrano 2011a; Serrano 2016).

The expressive choices made by speakers entail ways of conceptualizing reality through discourse. The meanings conveyed by morphosyntactic variants are distributed across the social spectrum in terms of communicative styles (Aijón Oliva, 2019; Aijón Oliva & Serrano, 2016; Serrano, 2011a, 2016). Such a meaningful approach to variation clearly matches Lavandera's seminal proposal, according to which syntactic choices have the power to create different communicative styles, whereby speakers can actively construct types of discourse (1984: 13–15). The social perspective of morphosyntactic variants derives from the distribution of meanings across different socially situated categories, such as the socioprofessional affiliations of speakers, age, sex/ gender etc.

### 2. THE PHENOMENON OF DESUBJECTIVIZATION IN SPANISH AND ITS COGNITIVE BASIS

The present investigation focuses on a construction traditionally described as impersonal: the periphrasis *haber que + infinitive* in its most frequent present tense verbal form: *hay que*. It is a variable phenomenon of

**To cite this article:** Serrano, M.J. (2022). "Desubjectivizing discourse through the use of the periphrasis *haber que + infinitive* in spanish". *Revista de Lingüística y Lenguas Aplicadas*, 17, 129-141. <https://doi.org/10.4995/rlyla.2022.16547>

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Spanish grammar that is studied as a meaningful choice based on the cognitive conceptualization of *salience* (Aijón Oliva, 2019: ch.1; Aijón Oliva & Serrano, 2013: 26–31; Serrano, 2011a, 2016). The term *meaningful choice* seeks to encapsulate the notion that, when a speaker chooses a variant, he/ she is also choosing its meaning. Thus, all variants are invested with a particular meaning that emerges in discursive interaction. It is hypothesised that the variant under study is a *desubjectivizing* resource used in different kinds of texts by the participants who use it.

Desubjectivization in Spanish derives from the study of a phenomenon traditionally termed *impersonality* from a cognitive viewpoint (basically, from the conceptualization of *salience*), as explained below. In section 2.1. I review previous research on impersonality as a variable phenomenon. In 2.2. I explain how the different degrees of salience entailed by desubjectivizing variants give rise to different meanings.

## 2.1 Variation and impersonality

Construction of the phenomenon traditionally called *impersonality* in Spanish can be achieved through a range of grammatical choices. A predicate that may be fulfilled with an indefinite group of referents without establishing a concrete link with any of them, or even with any other entity in discourse, can be considered *impersonal* (Blevins, 2003; Gast & Van der Auwera, 2014: 126). Another definition of an impersonal structure is a clause in which the agent of an action has been ellided, or the subject has not been formulated (Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española, 2010 § 41.4.1).

A common feature of impersonal structures is the use of third-person verbal forms. Insofar as this person can be considered a *non-person* (Benveniste, 1997 (1991): 164), its non-deictic but rather anaphoric reference makes an impersonal interpretation possible. Personal pronouns always entail the notions of *speaker* and *hearer* (Benveniste, 1997 [1991]: 183) (see Aijón Oliva & Serrano, 2013: 68–69). Hence, the third person is suitable for the construction of impersonal clauses (Siewierska & Papastathi, 2011). In other languages, impersonal utterances are classified as *R-Impersonals* (Siewierska, 2011: 57–58) and *Human impersonal pronouns* (Gast & Van der Auwera 2014: 121).

The most frequent variants for expressing impersonality in Spanish are as follows (Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española, § 41.5–41.14):

- a. Plural third-person verbal forms: *Dicen que va a llover* ('[They] say that it is going to rain'); *Llaman a la puerta* ('[They] are calling at the door').
- b. Passive-reflexive constructions with *se*: *Se divulgó la noticia* ('The news was made public').
- c. Impersonal constructions with *se*: *Se vive bien en Madrid* ('People live well in Madrid', lit. 'It is lived well in Madrid').
- d. The modal periphrasis *haber que + infinitive*. It is mandatorily formulated in the third-person: *Hay/habría/habrá que poner la lavadora* ('The washing machine has to be put on').

According to the theoretical approach followed in the present investigation, these forms are meaningful ways to construct impersonal or defocusing meanings in Spanish. Thus, they cannot be considered synonymous, but rather different facets of desubjectivization.

## 2.2 Varying degrees of the salience of variants

Differences in meaning among morphosyntactic variants are based on the inherent degree of salience associated with each one. *Salience* is a cognitive conceptualization that implies that the referent of any entity is accessible or easily recoverable within discourse; therefore, its formulation is not necessary. Referents that are known or predictable under the attention focus of speakers or participants are considered salient (Croft & Cruse, 2004: 46–50; Langacker, 2009:112). Although it is usually related to the *known* or *given* status of information, it is more than a mere discursive notion; rather, it constitutes a mental process whereby a referent is accessible or under the focus of attention of the participants. Cognitive salience is also defined as *perceptibility*, *autonomy* and *accessibility* (see Aijón Oliva, 2019: Ch.1). Salience has proved to be a very useful notion for establishing the meanings generated by syntactic variants, and it has made it possible to adequately analyze variation in Spanish subject and object pronouns (e.g. Aijón Oliva, 2018, 2019; Aijón Oliva & Serrano, 2013; Serrano, 2018a; Serrano, 2018b).

The periphrasis *haber que + infinitive* has traditionally been considered an impersonal resource (Bravo & García Fernández, 2016; Gili Gaya, 1980); however, that has not been studied in depth. Even though its subject is *zero*, it can be used to give instructions or make recommendations to the listener: *Hay que cuidarse, señor Paco* (lit. 'There has to take care of oneself, Mr. Paco'). For that reason, Gómez Torrego (1992: 37) includes periphrasis among the "syntactic

impersonal” group. The *Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española* (2010 § 28.2.2.d) also notes that this modal periphrasis usually conveys a situation taken for granted by the participants, primarily by the speaker. Periphrasis conveys a meaning of duty, obligation, recommendation or convenience, whereby the speaker accepts the expressed situation as unavoidable (Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española, 2010 § 28.2.2.d). The presence of a verbal person, even if it is the third person of *haber* ‘to have’ in its impersonal construction, allows the pragmatic inference of an agent who should accomplish the duty or be the recipient of the recommendation or advice.

In Example 1, the periphrasis indicates that *somebody* has to carry out an action, specifically that ‘[somebody] has to modify the way in which media and agencies communicate with the public’.

1. **Hay que** modificar la forma en que los medios y las grandes agencias se comunican con el público pero, por el momento, son muy pocos los que se han atrevido a hacerlo. (CCEC<Var18>)

‘The way in which media and agencies communicate with the public **has to be modified**, but at this moment there are very few people who dare to do it.’

On the basis of the gradual possibility of inferring an agent, the most frequent desubjectivizing choices can be placed along a continuum. In Figure 1, below, these choices are ordered according to the gradual salience of their referents. It can be hypothesized that a referent with greater salience makes the inference of an agent clearer and, consequently, the construction becomes less desubjectivizing. In contrast, a less salient referent conveys a more desubjectivizing meaning.



Figure 1. Continuum of desubjectivizing variants according to the pragmatic possibility of inferring an agent.

The following excerpts illustrate how an agent may be inferred in each desubjectivizing construction.

The third-person *venden* in Example 2, from a written magazine, does not have a specific or personal referent, but it can be easily recovered as “the owners”, “the government” etc.

2. **Venden** la finca en la que Juan Ramón Jiménez escribió *Platero y yo*. (CCEC<Var18>)

‘[They] are selling the country house where Juan Ramón Jiménez wrote *Platero y yo*.’

Third-person plural constructions are usually constructed with adverbial or prepositional phrases which demarcate some human referents (see Aijón Oliva, 2019; Aijón Oliva, 2020). Such elements have been termed *space builders* (Fauconnier, 1984) or *locative subjects* (Fernández Soriano, 1999). It follows that in sentences like “*En su casa le llaman Juanito*” (‘In his home they call him Juanito’), the prepositional phrase ‘en su casa’ allows the inference of a human agent (i.e. ‘parents’, ‘family’, etc.). Since this inference can be made through syntactic elements, sentences constructed in the third person could be considered less desubjectivizing.

In Example 3, it is possible to infer that *someone* should not answer the question. Traditionally, this sentence would be classified as a *passive reflexive*, since the noun *pregunta* (‘question’) functions as the subject of the sentence. Passive reflexives are syntactic constructions intended to hide or not formulate the agent, even though it can be easily inferred: “Esa pregunta no se contesta *por entrevistado, por el público...*” (‘This question is not to be answered by the interviewee the audience...’). In many reflexive-passive sentences the agent is formulated: “El piso se vende *por los propietarios*” (‘The flat is being sold by the owners’).

3. Esa pregunta no se contesta ¿por qué? Porque es cuestionar lo que es una mujer maltratada, por lo tanto, esa pregunta no se contesta, no se contesta. (CCEC<Var18>)

‘This question is **not to be answered**. Why? Because it means questioning what is an abused woman, therefore, such a question will not be answered, is not to be answered.’

In contrast, in Example 4, constructed with the impersonal particle *se*, recovering a syntactic subject is not possible; hence, a possible agent is expected to be more diffuse.

4. **Se** vive bien con cualquier cosa que una ame (CCEC<Var18>)

‘It is lived well with anything one loves.’

Adverbial and prepositional phrases may also coappear with constructions with impersonal *se*: “*En Madrid se vive bien*” (‘*In Madrid it is lived well*’). However, as the particle *se* does not by itself allow inferring an agent, the interpretation of the sentence will be more desubjectivizing than passive-reflexive and third-person utterances.

As for the *hay que* + infinitive desubjectivizing variant, even though an agent cannot be formulated and it is less clearly inferred than other desubjectivizing constructions, the deontic meaning does allow the inference of an agent. Thus, its use provides an additional clue to the content, which makes it possible to prefigure an ideal subject or agent, which may include the speaker.

5. Cuando ves que los usuarios agradecen lo que se ha hecho, reconforta y mucho. Incluso también se agradecen los comentarios negativos, *hay que* aprender de ellos. (CCEC<Var18>)

‘When you see that users show their gratitude for all that has been done, it encourages [you] a lot. [You] are even grateful for negative comments, [you] must learn something from them’.

The presence of adverbial and prepositional phrases in *hay que* sentences is also possible: “*En Madrid hay que pagar por aparcar en el centro*” (In Madrid, city-centre parking has to be paid for). Notwithstanding, these elements do not function as *space builders* or *locative subjects*, but rather as proper adverbial or prepositional phrases, since they cannot be reformulated with human references without creating ungrammatical sentences: “*En Madrid hay que pagar por aparcar en el centro*”> \*Los madrileños *hay que pagar por aparcar en el centro*” (\*‘From Madrid people have to pay for parking in the city centre’).

I therefore start from the assumption that the periphrasis *haber que* + infinitive has an inherent meaning derived from the cognitive salience of its inferred or presupposed agent and appears in different communicative settings in order to perform discourse desubjectivization.

### 3. METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS

The analysis is based on the *Corpus Interaccional del Español* (310, 759 words), which comprises a wide range of genres and communicative situations. The corpus has a number of subsections: spontaneous conversations (79,544 words), oral and written mass media texts (171,258 words), oral and written advertisements (36,658 words) and texts from social media (23,299 words).

From the oral and written mass media texts and social media sections of the corpus, we gathered 355 examples of the periphrasis *haber que* + infinitive in its present verbal form, i.e. *hay que* + infinitive. The analysis has both quantitative and qualitative facets. For the former, percentages of occurrences and crosstabulations between them are calculated using the statistical package *Rbrul* (Johnson, 2009).

Periphrasis is used in diverse communicative settings by different kinds of participants acting as either speakers/ writers or addressees. The factors selected for analyzing *hay que* + infinitive are as follows:

- a. *Type of text* (Internet, blog, Facebook, Twitter, women’s magazines, general magazines, newspapers, TV and radio programmes). This classification seeks to encompass a wide range of oral and written settings. The purpose is not to define a number of fixed genres, but rather to observe different communicative situations in which the construction can be used.
- b. *The sex/gender of the speakers* (men, women, indefinite category). The linguistic differences between men and women have been addressed in many investigations. It can be hypothesized that the impersonal variant being discussed will be used unequally by male and female speakers.
- c. *The sex/ gender of hearers/ addressees* (men, women, indefinite category). Given that every communicative situation implies the presence of an interlocutor or audience, their sex/ gender will also constitute a potentially interesting co-varying factor in the analysis.

### 4. VARIATION OF HAY QUE + INFINITIVE ACROSS TEXTS AND PARTICIPANTS

#### 4.1 Distribution across texts

As periphrasis may enable the inference of a human agent, this construction should be expected more in highly interactive situations, especially in those where a speaker and a hearer or audience are (physically or otherwise)

present. This means that, when participants are interacting, the use of *hay que + infinitive* may prompt the inference of a human agent (see, for example, excerpts (6) and (7), below and corresponding discussions).

The highest frequency is obtained in TV programmes, followed by written texts (social media texts and newspapers) (Table 1) (see also Serrano, 2020).

Table 1. Percentages of use of *hay que + infinitive* across texts.

Type of text	<i>Hay que + infinitive</i> N (%)
Internet	9 (2.5%)
Blog	31 (8.7%)
Facebook	80 (22.5%)
Twitter	38 (10.7%)
Women's magazines	21 (5.9%)
General magazines	0
Newspapers	73 (20.6%)
TV	92 (26%)
Radio	11 (3.1%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>355</b>

In informative TV discourse, periphrasis appears in headlines advancing the content of reports. Its use makes the content function a recommendation or piece of advice in order to capture the audience's attention. In Example 6, the broadcaster makes a recommendation about passwords. The expected recipients of such advice are listeners to the programme; it can thus be inferred that it is the audience that should not use certain passwords.

[TV report]

6. Las contraseñas más usadas en 2017... y las que *hay que evitar* en internet

'The most used passwords in 2017 and... those that **have to be avoided** on the Internet.'

Periphrasis can also function as a way to instigate people to do an action in a friendly manner; in Example 7, the speaker suggests that people visit a Nativity scene. The utterance begins with a personal clause: "Pues ya saben [ustedes]" ("Well, you all know") and continues with an impersonal one with *hay que ver* ('you all have to see it'). The transition from a personal to a non-personal stance grants higher objectivity to the content, while keeping it accessible to the audience or hearers. It means that the scene is really worth a visit.

[TV magazine]

7. Pues ya saben, no hay excusas, *hay que* ver ese nacimiento (CCEC<Var18>)

'Well, you know, there aren't any excuses, **[you all] have to see** that Nativity scene.'

In oral interviews, the inferred agent of the periphrasis may be a specific person, including the speaker. Example 8 is part of an interview with a woman discussing her personal experience of maternity. The last sentence conveys a duty based on the speaker's experience, but she presents it as a general concern that the audience should take note of. By formulating the content in a desubjectivizing way, she is eluding responsibility for what she is saying.

[TV Oral interview]

8. Todo esto es lo que he tenido que oír por decir que al ser madre se pierde calidad de vida(...) Ha llegado ese momento (la maternidad) y ese momento te va a llegar y *hay que contarlo* (CCEC<Var18>)

'That is all I have had to hear for saying that, when you become a mother, you lose some quality of life (...) That moment (maternity) has arrived and that moment will come to you, and it **has to be talked** about.'

The use of periphrasis in oral texts makes it possible to project a duty or responsibility onto other people in order to make them feel guilty about something. In Example 9, a journalist uses *hay que + infinitive* in a magazine when requesting that a crime be investigated. The agents of the verb are unknown, but it is implied that they are the people who have to take on the duty or responsibility. The choice of a desubjectivizing construction reinforces the objectivity of the content.

[TV Oral magazine]

9. Para centrar el tema/ *hay que centrar* contenidos, está claro que *hay que buscar* culpables\ *hay que cambiar*\ *hay que buscar* culpables\ conclusión/ ¿ha pasado algo?/ ¿se ha hecho algo?/ ¿se ha abierto algún expediente?/ no\ no se ha hecho nada\ (CCEC<Var18>)

'To focus on the subject, [you] have to focus on subjects, it is clear that [you] have to look for those who are guilty, [you] have to change, [you] have to find those who are guilty ... But the conclusion is: has something happened? Has a case been filed? No, nothing has been done.'

In contrast with these oral texts where an agent is to a certain extent easy to infer, in written discourse the possible agent of the construction *hay que + infinitive* is usually more vague. This is due to the nature of these kinds of texts, where there is no specific audience, just a potential reader who is not present at all. As is known, newspapers and social media texts are written genres where the readers are ideal or *in absentia* (Calsamiglia & Tusón, 1999: 75). The use of the periphrasis *hay que + infinitive* in texts without a specific hearer or interlocutor makes it possible to displace the content of statements and utterances towards a broad and general scope, instead of focusing on a specific person or group of people.

In Example 10, a text from Facebook, periphrasis encourages mankind as a whole to pursue an action as a recommendation or piece of advice. Moreover, the utterance is constructed in the third person: "*a quien actúa con maldad, hay que desearle suerte*", which implies that everyone should be aware of people acting badly and thus follow the advice.

[Facebook text]

10. A quien actúa con maldad, *hay que* desearle suerte, tarde o temprano la va a necesitar. (CCEC<Var18>)

'He/ she who acts with bad intentions should be wished good luck, as sooner or later he/ she is going to need it.'

The meaning this form acquires is determined by the kind of text (a social media text), where there are usually no specific interlocutors present. This prompts the formulation of sentences or utterances with content that should be of general interest.

However, desubjectivizing constructions may also be used in combination with personal forms. The first sentence in Example 11, below, gives a general instruction: *Hay que amar siendo libre* ('One has to love being free'), and the following sentences explain this instruction, implying that the agent of the instruction could be anyone, including the speaker: *Yo no te necesito, Ø te prefiero, Ø te elijo...* ('I do not need you, I prefer you, I choose you'). The use of the first-person singular (the most subjective choice) takes on an impersonal pragmatic meaning: *yo* means 'me, you and anyone else', but it clearly contrasts with that of the more desubjectivized first clause.

[Facebook text]

11. *Hay que* amar siendo libre: yo no te necesito, te prefiero, te elijo. (CCEC<Var18>)

'One has to love being free: I do not need you, I prefer you, I choose you.'

The use of *hay que + infinitive* is very common in newspaper headlines and leads, inviting possible readers to read the article. The meaning of the periphrasis *hay que + infinitive* acts as an important persuasive resource in these contexts. Example 12 makes a recommendation that is considered to be of general interest, i.e. things that should not be done.

[Newspaper]

12. Los errores que no *hay que* cometer para poder tener un restaurante rentable. (CCEC<Var18>)

'Mistakes that must not be made in order to have a profitable restaurant.'

As shown, the meaning of this form always involves a human agent who should fulfil the duty, recommendation, instruction or advice. These values become more or less clear according to the whole utterance, and also to the kind of text and its audience.

The graph below (Figure 2) illustrates the use of *hay que + infinitive* in all kinds of texts. TV and social media (Facebook) achieve the highest percentages of periphrasis. As explained, it is used most frequently in interactive texts. An exception is radio texts, probably due to the few items obtained from the corpus.

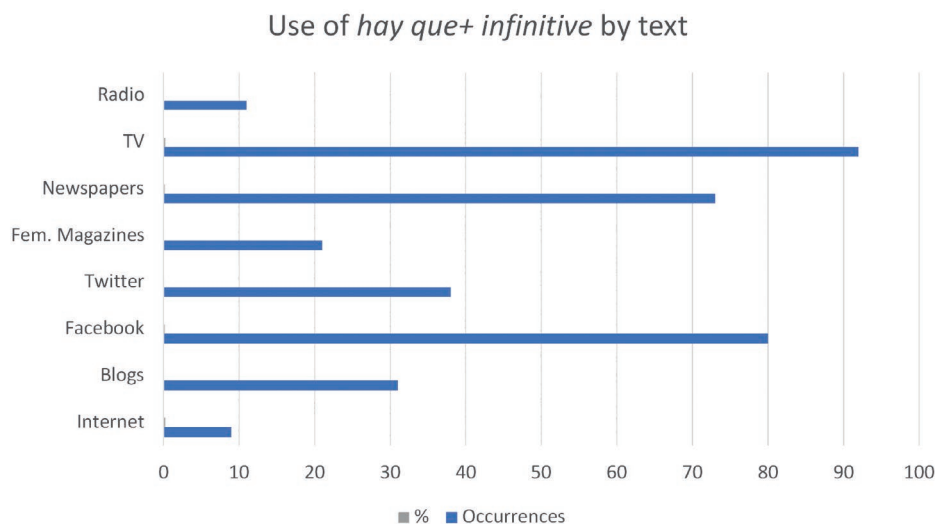


Figure 2. Use of *hay que + infinitive* across texts.

#### 4.2 Distribution according to the social features of participants. Sex/ gender of speakers and addressees

The sex/ gender of both the speaker and hearer or reader is also important for explaining the variation in desubjectivizing constructions. Gendered ways of speaking are prompting a fast-growing and continuously evolving body of research (Serrano, 2011b: 61–78). As pointed out by Cameron (2011: 261), it is not only the form and content of what is said, but also the social and communicative style resulting from it, that need to be analyzed. In fact, the linguistic-communicative aspect of gender is currently a promising subject in the social sciences (Brannon, 2010; Gauntlett, 2008; Germon, 2009; Talbot, 2010).

Previous research has demonstrated that each gender group follows a different communicative pattern regarding the use of subject and object variants in Spanish (Aijón Oliva & Serrano, 2013, 2016). Findings for these variants have been connected with the shaping of different communicative styles. In the analyzed texts, men and women participate as speakers or writers, but it is also possible to isolate a category labelled *unknown*, which include those cases in which the sex/ gender of the participant speaking or writing cannot be determined. These results are in accordance with the nature of the texts being analyzed; most of them are from genres such as Facebook or Twitter, magazines or blogs, where the sex/ gender of the participant is not made public or is impossible to determine. For example, there are many social media posts that are written anonymously and constructed to imply an indeterminate number of addressees. In this case, it is not possible to determine whether the post has been written by a man or a woman, as it has been shared publicly. Anonymity has been considered to reduce social accountability and is claimed to promote gender equality (Herring & Stoerger, 2014: 569–571).

The construction under study occurred at considerable rates among both men and the indefinite category (Table 2). According to the data, women do not use this desubjectivizing resource as frequently as do other categories.

Table 2. Percentages of *hay que + infinitive* by sex/ gender of the speaker or writer.

Sex	<i>Hay que + infinitive</i>
Men	182 (51.2%)
Women	56 (15.7%)
Indefinite	117 (33.1 %)
<b>Total</b>	<b>355</b>

In Excerpt 13, below, a man authoring a newspaper lead makes a recommendation about social peace by using *hay que + infinitive*.

[Male, newspaper]

13. *Hay que* trabajar por la paz social. *Hay que* volver al diálogo (CCEC<Var18>)

‘[You] have to work for social peace. [You] have to come back to dialogue.’

To better examine the usage of the variants under study according to sex/ gender, I crosstabulated the type of text and the sex/ gender of the speaker/ writer. Percentages show the participation of men and women to be mainly on TV and in feminine magazines. Women exhibit a relevant score in the radio genre. The percentages in feminine magazines are very close in women and men. The indefinite participants’ ratio is higher in social media (Facebook) and newspapers.

Therefore, the results show a relationship between men and the TV genre, women and the radio genre, and the indefinite category and social media (Facebook) (Table 3).

Table 3. Crosstabulation of the sex/gender of the speaker/writer and text type.

	Internet	Blogs	Facebook	Twitter	Women’s magazines	Generic magazines	Newspapers	TV	Radio	Total
Men	11 (2.7)	2 (0.45)	31 (6.9)	44 (9.8)	55 (12.3)	21 (4.7)	25 (5.6)	247 (55.5)	9 (2.1)	445
Women	3 (1.7)	12 (6.7)	16 (8.9)	12 (6.7)	25 (13.9)	8 (4.4)	14 (7.8)	49 (27.3)	40 (22.3)	179
Indefinite	4 (1.3)	26 (8.7)	122 (41.2)	26 (8.7)	30 (10.1)	6 (2.02)	68 (22.9)	0	14 (4.7)	296
Total	18 (1.9)	40 (4.3)	169 (18.3)	82 (8.8)	110 (11.9)	35 (3.8)	107 (11.6)	296 (32.1)	63 (6.8)	920

The crosstabulation shows that men are the most frequent category in TV programmes (55.5%). This genre also contains the most instances of *hay que + infinitive* (see Table 1 and Figure 2). This explains the high percentages of periphrasis among male speakers. Excerpt 14, below, was uttered by a broadcaster talking about a recent crime. He starts by using the desubjectivizing particle *se*, but then alludes to the people who should investigate the crime through periphrasis.

[Male, TV programme]

14. No es tanto que *se* busque un culpable\ como saber qué ha ocurrido/ Creo que *hay que* empezar a buscar culpables\ *hay que* cambiar\ *hay que* tener en cuenta... \ *hay que* buscar culpables\ (CCEC<Var18>)

‘It is not as important to find the culprit as to know what happened. I think [you] have to start looking for guilty people\ [you] have to change \ [you] have to keep in mind... \ [you] have to look for guilty people.’

The desubjectivizing meaning provided by this form may coappear with subjectivizing constructions like *yo creo* (“I think”) (15). Besides the use of the first-person singular *yo*, the speaker assigns some duties to other people by using “*hay que admitir...*” (“[you] have to accept...”), “*hay que tener en cuenta*” (“[you] have to keep in mind”) and “*hay que buscar el consenso*” (“[you] have to seek a consensus”). By avoiding specifying the agent, these clauses desubjectivize the sequence.

[Male, TV programme]

15. Desde luego yo creo que *hay que admitir* que son posiciones distintas\ para evitar eso\ yo creo que\ *hay que tener* en cuenta todo eso en cualquier caso sobre este tema *hay que buscar* el consenso\ (CCEC<Var18>)

‘I think it has to be admitted that these are distinct positions. To avoid this, I think that everything about this topic has to be taken into account. A consensus has to be reached.’



It should be highlighted that participants in Facebook texts are not always unknown, nor are they necessarily deliberately anonymous. Therefore, in many cases, it was not possible to identify the participant who created the post. The unknown category, having the most assiduous participation in Facebook texts, provides explanations for the use of periphrasis in this kind of communicative setting.

The writer, when anonymous in these texts using *hay que + infinitive* with its prototypical value of duty or obligation, does not run the risk of being interpreted as impolite by the audience. It will rather be taken as a recommendation or advice that is convenient for them. The instigation can occur without threatening the reader's image and, therefore, becomes a general recommendation or duty that everyone should abide by (see Ex. 16).

[Indefinite, Social network (Facebook)]

16. A veces *hay que* tomar decisiones que duelen al corazón pero tranquilizan el alma. Sabes cuál es la decisión que tienes que tomar, ¿no? (CCEC<Var18>)

‘Sometimes [you] **have to make** decisions that hurt the heart but calm the soul. You know which decision you should take, don't you?’

Thus, the use of the periphrasis may be related to the indefinite gender category and, to a certain extent, to men.

Furthermore, it could also be interesting to examine the sex/ gender of addressees. As expected, quantification indicates the non-gendered nature of most of the utterances in the corpus, as regards the audience. The indefinite category, the one with the largest number of occurrences, showed the highest percentage of *hay que + infinitive* (Table 4).

Table 4. Percentages of *hay que+ infinitive* according to the sex/ gender of the addressee.

	<i>Total</i>
Men	6 (1.7%)
Women	46 (13%)
Indefinite	303 (85.3%)
	355

This quantification agrees with previous results obtained; *hay que + infinitive* appears not only when the speaker is unknown or unspecified, but also when the addressee is unspecified (Serrano, 2020). An obligation or duty meaning is suitable for communicative conditions in which imposition or instigation targets an anonymous or nonspecific person. In such contexts, duty or obligation is interpreted as supposedly shared or universally convenient.

In Example 17, a man in a TV debate is speaking about a seismic wave, expressing a general duty through periphrasis. The obligation targets an unknown audience, although it is possible to infer that he is actually addressing a politician or a political party.

[Male, TV programme]

17. Existe riesgo considerable (de movimiento sísmico) en La Restinga y para nosotros poder tomar decisiones pues *hay que* ponderar ese riesgo (CCEC<Var18>)

‘There exists a considerable risk [of seismic activity] in La Restinga and it is up us to make decisions, well, the risk **has to be weighed**.’

In any case, the choice of periphrasis provides a more desubjectivizing meaning than other possible personal forms that could have been used in the same utterance, e.g. “*Tenemos que ponderar*” (‘*We have to weigh*’), “*Tienen que ver*” (‘*You all have to see*’).

## 5. DESUBJECTIVIZATION AS THE CREATION OF COMMUNICATIVE STYLES

As suggested in Section 1, the construction of a theory of linguistic variation and style starts from the assumption that linguistic choices are based on cognition, which is the key to explaining them (Aijón Oliva, 2019; Aijón Oliva & Serrano, 2013: 141). Recent developments in the relationship between communication—understood

as taking place in different situations (including media settings)—and style have recognized that “there has been a broadening of the allowable databases for studying style in sociolinguistic theory” (Bell, 2016: 405). There is an awareness of the functional and indexical implications of linguistic forms. Speakers can infer how linguistic form may modify the communicative content of an utterance, which in turn may contribute to the shaping of a communicative style (Rampton, 2006: 303).

From the results obtained from the qualitative and quantitative analyses of the *hay que + infinitive* construction, how communicative styles are performed can be outlined on the basis of objectivity/ subjectivity, considered as a gradual dimension. Linguistic content can be grammatically construed in a more objective or more subjective manner (Langacker, 2006:16; Uehara, 2006: 78). Objectivity and subjectivity are notions usually applied to the interpretation and analysis of events and/or utterances according to a cognitive framework (Athanasiadou et al., 2006: 76).

In a discourse-oriented view of linguistics, subjects are participants endowed with psychological and sociological attributes that allow them to design linguistic strategies and pursue communicative goals (Angermuller et al., 2014: 138).

The involvement of a participant in some willing or participant-imposed dynamic gives rise to deontic modality, which has to do with what is morally or legally obligatory and permissible. It is the opposite of epistemic modality. The former concerns what is necessary according to certain laws and rules, whereas the latter concerns what is necessary and possible, given certain knowledge and/or information (Charlow & Chrisman, 2016: 1-2; Suikkanen, 2018). In other words, deontic modality involves some kind of authority, usually stemming from the speaker (Palmer, 2001: 70). For these reasons, deontic modality may convey a certain degree of subjectivity, which seems to be more frequent than the objectivity traditionally associated with deontics (Lyons, 1977: 799; Vázquez Laslop, 1999: 7–9). It is connected with a function that takes the world as an argument and returns a set of propositions constituting a conversational background (Kratzer, 1991).

As we have demonstrated, the periphrasis *hay que + infinitive* allows the inference or presupposition of an agent. Thus, the style promoted by the periphrasis *haber que + infinitive* is desubjectivizing-deontic, indicating whether the content is obligatory or permissible according to some normative background (law, morality, convention etc.) (Nuyts, 2005; Van der Auwera & Plungian, 1998; Verstraete, 2005).

In the corpus analyzed, this style is performed most frequently in blogs and newspapers, as well as in social media—written genres where the deontic meaning does not focus on any specific person or interlocutor—but is rather presented as a duty that anyone should adhere to. See Example 18, from an opinion piece in a newspaper.

18. *Hay que* combatir el estigma que conlleva la soledad (CCEC<Var18>)

‘[You] **have to fight** the stigma that solitude entails.’

Furthermore, although the construction of a desubjectivizing-deontic style is not especially unequal according to sex/ gender, there is a slight tendency for men to use periphrasis more often. This style is more frequent when both the speaker/ writer and addressee(s) are indefinite. The absence of a specific speaker/ writer or audience, in turn, allows for the instigation or imposition to be mitigated (see Ex. 19).

19. Para controlar la hipertensión no *hay que* eliminar la sal de las comidas, sino el azúcar (CCEC<Var18>)

‘To control high blood pressure, it is not salt that **has to be eliminated** from meals, but sugar.’

Table 5 outlines the features of the communicative style performed by the periphrasis *hay que + infinitive* and its relationship to the factors of variation analyzed.

Table 5. Outline of the features of *hay que + infinitive*.

<i>Hay que + infinitive</i>
Relatively salient (an agent can be inferred).
Promotes a desubjectivizing meaning.
It is most frequently used in blogs, newspapers and social media texts.
It is used by gender-indefinite speakers and men.
It targets a gender-indefinite audience.
It creates a + desubjectivizing-deontic style.

Periphrasis, which contributes to the performance of a desubjectivizing-deontic style, is mainly present in written texts, such as blogs and newspapers, where it provides a meaning targeting a nonspecific audience. Also, the gender-indefinite category of speakers and writers, as well as men, is more prone to using *hay que + infinitive*.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

There are meaningful differences in the ways desubjectivization is performed by *hay que + infinitive* across texts and according to the sex/ gender of speakers. By means of the cognitive properties of salience, this construction increases desubjectivity in comparison with other impersonal variants, such as constructions with impersonal and passive-reflexive *se* (Serrano, 2018c; Serrano, 2018d).

This study has focused on its use across different communicative situations, as well as according to the sex/ gender of participants. Periphrasis was more frequent in written texts such as blogs and newspapers, where the absence of a specific audience makes it possible to perform a deontic meaning without being seen as impolite, as well as to pursue other communicative functions such as giving advice or making recommendations. The sex/ gender of participants was also found to be an important factor, with a stronger tendency to use periphrasis when the addressee is unknown or nonspecific, which provides further evidence that the use of *hay que + infinitive* allows the speaker to avoid focusing on any specific agent. The analysis indicates that, in the communicative situations analyzed, male speech is more inclined to make syntactic choices promoting desubjectivization, such as the periphrasis under study. Imposing a certain sense of objectivity on utterances is likely to be motivated by the desire to display a more advantageous self-image, which may in turn be due to a range of social and cultural factors.

The investigation has shown some interactional motivations for and effects of desubjectivizing syntactic choices, and how they can be explained through the underlying factors motivating their statistical and qualitative patterns of usage.

## FUNDING INFORMATION

This article is part of the research projects “Variación gramatical y construcción del significado en español: los objetos centrales y las construcciones desubjetivadoras”, funded by the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación (FFI2016-74825P), and “Formalización e integración de dimensiones estilísticas en el análisis de la elección gramatical en español. Los continuos del punto de vista y la modalidad del discurso” (PID2020-113474GB-I00), both funded by the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación/ Agencia Estatal de Investigación 10.13039/501100011033/.

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