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4 Interrogative constructions with *santo*, *cuento*, and *cuenta*: Rejection and mirativity

Abstract: This paper has as its aim to study the functioning and origin of the locutions with a causal meaning *a santo de qué*, *a qué santo*, *a cuento de qué*, *a qué cuento* and *a cuenta de qué*. These phrases introduce marked interrogative constructions, so they imply negative evaluation by the speaker, that is, they constitute a grammatical sign of the negative implication of the causal question in which they are inserted. The data from all the examples supplied in the CDH and CORPES corpora for the forms *a santo de qué*, *a qué santo*, *a cuento de qué*, *a qué cuento* and *a cuenta de qué* are analyzed, and an account of the main functional characteristics of the mentioned structures is given. Although the constructions studied have many points in common with the marking of mirativity –above all, the reference to some new information that contradicts the speaker's expectations– they do not express surprise, but rather mark rejection by the speaker.

Keywords: interrogative construction, rejection, grammaticalization, analogy, mirativity

1 Introduction

In Spanish, the possibility of using adverbial locutions with a causal meaning has been raised. Such phrases introduce marked interrogative constructions, insofar as they imply a negative assessment by the speaker. RAE/ASALE (2009: 1662) points out that the expressions *a santo de qué* 'why on earth', *a cuento de qué* 'why on earth', and *a cuenta de qué* 'why on earth' lead rhetorical interrogative constructions, whether direct or indirect, and all three of them suggest the lack of justification for something:

(1) ***A santo de qué*** *nos exigen a los militares lealtad a regímenes desleales con el ideal, con la tierra y con la raza*
'Why on earth do they demand from us, the military, loyalty to regimes that are disloyal to the ideal, to the country and to the race'

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(2) *– ¿Y* ***a cuento de qué*** *esas prisas?*
'– And why on earth that hurry?'

(3) *¿Y* ***a cuenta de qué*** *lo de mirar a las ventanas del hotel Roma?*
'And why on earth should we look towards the windows of the Roma hotel?'

The previous examples found in RAE/ASALE show questions in which the speaker considers that loyalty should *not* be demanded, that there ought to be *no* rush and that he/she should *not* look wards the windows.

We should add to the above the constructions *a qué santo* 'why on earth' and *a qué cuento* 'why on earth', whose functioning and meaning are similar:

(4) *Bueno, no sé* ***a qué santo*** *la Sapo estaría aquel día con nosotras porque no la invita nadie. 2009*
'Well, I don't know why on earth la Sapo would be with us that day because no one invites her.'

(5) *sabemos que tus amos se han ausentado, y deseamos saber dónde están. . . pero sin engaño [. . .]*
'We know that your masters have been absent, and we wish to know where they are. . . but without cheating [. . .]'
No hay engaño. . . yo no tengo por qué engañar. . . ¿Pero ***a qué cuento*** *quieren saber los gachupines dónde están mis amos? 1906*
'There is no cheating. . . There's no reason for me to cheat. . . But why on earth do the guys want to know where my masters are?'

While Example 4 implicitly reveals the speaker's rejection to the presence of *la Sapo* at the meeting, Example 5 conveys the notions of annoyance and rejection to the interlocutor's desire to know the masters' whereabouts.

Thus, the five above-mentioned constructions are arguably syntactic marks that unveil the rhetorical intention with which they are uttered, in addition to which they grammatically signal the negative implication of the causal question where they appear. This negative implication must be understood as a rejection to a given previous content precisely marked by the construction itself. We likewise need to bear in mind, though, that the rejection is transmitted in an intensified way; rather than being a mere assertion of annoyance, it conveys an emotional and expressive content emanating from the speaker.

Despite these types of interrogative phrases with a negative implication being far from uncommon both in Romance languages and in any other linguistic

environment,[1] it becomes interesting to highlight the presence of three nouns in Spanish –*santo* 'saint', *cuento* 'tale', and *cuenta* 'account'– which fail to show neither the causal meaning nor the negative one transparently. Such marked interrogative phrases may not be exceptional, but the way in which they occur is indeed quite specific to each language.

This paper has as its aim to study the functioning and origin of the locutions with a causal meaning *a santo de qué, a qué santo, a cuento de qué, a qué cuento*, and *a cuenta de qué*. The data obtained from all the examples supplied in the CDH and CORPES corpora[2] for the forms *a santo de qué, a qué santo, a cuento de qué, a qué cuento* and *a cuenta de qué* will be analyzed to that end. Section 2 centers on examining the information obtained from the examples, thus seeking to describe the main functional characteristics of these structures. After placing the emphasis on the main features related to the origin and development of the different adverbial locutions that convey a causal meaning[3] in Section 3, Section 4 will revolve around the possibility of understanding the rejection implied in these constructions as an example of mirativity. The paper will come to an end with a few brief conclusions.

2 Data analysis

The five constructions under study are formally fixed, since they allow neither the presence of determiners modifying the possible noun nor the introduction of

1 The expression most commonly used in Catalan to express rejection seems to be *per quins set (or cinc) sous?!* 'why on earth'. As for Romanian, the lack of resemblance to Spanish constructions does not stop the utilization of *le ce* 'why on earth' to imply the existence of a negative attitude or response –in contrast to the neutral register associated with the causal interrogative *de ce* 'why'. Portuguese can use not only *por que carga de água?* but also *por que raio?* (both) 'why on earth' with a causal value and a negative implication. French also boasts a variety of colloquial constructions with a negative implication, among them *en quel honneur?* and *à quoi bon? (*both) 'why on earth'. In turn, Italian resorts to phrases such as *perché mai?, per quale motivo?, a che pro?, a che scopo?* or *con che coraggio?* (all are translated as) 'why on earth' to quote but a few. Similarly, taking the cue of languages like English or German, which often use vulgar or taboo terms as a mark of rejection (*what the devil?/was zum Teufel?*), Romance languages offer this possibility too:*¿por qué diablos?, de ce dracu?, pourquoi diable?, perché diavolo?, por que diabos?* or *per què diables?* illustrate this practice.

2 The CDH corpus consists of 355,740,238 records and covers a set of texts framed within a period going from the 12th century to the year 2000. Even though the dating of the examples included in the corpus may be questionable at times, I have preferred to always keep the dates presented in the corpus. The CORPES XXI corpus (version 0.92) contains ca. 312 million forms, coming from both written texts and transcriptions of oral ones.

3 Sections 2 and 3 are based on Cifuentes 2023.

changes in the set of preceding or following prepositions; and the interrogative pronoun must always be *qué*. The meaning also appears fixed in a joint causal value, without considering the partial meaning of the elements that make up the construction. The grammaticalization thus becomes clear.

According to the data obtained, these constructions are grouped together into two sets as captured in Table 1, separated by almost half a century: *a qué santo* and *a qué cuento* vs. *a cuenta de qué, a cuento de qué*, and *a santo de qué*. The difference also correlates not only with the form but also with their present-day success and frequency of use.

Table 1: Contrasted adverbial locutions.

	A santo de qué	***A qué santo***	***A cuento de qué***	***A qué cuento***	***A cuenta de qué***
1825–1851	0	2	0	1	0
1851–1875	0	3	0	0	2
1876–1900	11	4	1	2	3
1901–1925	4	0	0	1	0
1926–1950	17	0	1	0	1
1951–1975	33	10	16	0	4
1976–2000	37	10	37	0	16
2001–	73	8	71	1	38
	175	**37**	**126**	**5**	**64**

The data likewise prove that direct interrogatives appear more often than indirect ones, even though the occurrences of *a cuento de qué* and *a qué cuento* contradict the trend (see Table 2):

Table 2: Types of interrogatives.

	Direct interrogatives	**Indirect interrogatives**	
A santo de qué	126	49	**175**
A qué santo	32	5	**37**
A cuento de qué	60	66	**126**
A qué cuento	2	3	**5**
A cuenta de qué	48	16	**64**
	268	**139**	**407**

The possibility of finding examples of *a cuento de* and *a cuenta de* with an interrogative particle other than *qué* exists. Nevertheless, it seems clear that they don't act as a causal interrogative construction with a negative implication in such cases, but

rather as a complex preposition and an interrogative adverb, which incidentally lacks the negative implication of causal structures:

(6) *Casada con el director Carlos Rivas, que ahora la dirige en Hamlet, la metamorfosis –los sábados y domingos, en la sala Arriba de Rivas–, regala una perla de la intimidad familiar,* ***a cuento de cómo*** *es trabajar con el marido: 2011.*
'Married to the director Carlos Rivas, who now directs her in Hamlet, the metamorphosis –on Saturdays and Sundays, in the Arriba de Rivas theater– gives away a portrayal of family intimacy, about what it is like to work with her husband.'

(7) *Este dicho día sus mercedes ordenaron y mandaron que se le diesen a Francisco Díaz, racionero y organista de Avila, 10 ducados para ayuda a su camino de la mesa capitular y después se verá, de que se provea la prebenda,* ***a cuenta de quién*** *ha de ser. 1600–1713.*
'This day, your graces ordered and commanded that 10 ducats be given to Francisco Díaz, distributor of rations and organist of Avila, to help him on his way to the chapter table and after the prebend is provided, we will see on account of whom it must be.'

A mention equally deserves to be made of the potential occurrence of questions that constitute non-sentential units, and even only the interrogative construction, with no link to any syntactic group whatsoever, in direct as well as indirect interrogatives, as captured in Table 3:[4]

(8) *y me pregunto* ***a santo de qué*** *su odio contra mí. 1981.*
'and I wonder where on earth his hatred against me comes from.'

(9) *Fue él quien a mi vuelta del primer viaje a Nueva York me acusó de abandono del hogar y de adulterio. No yo, ¿****a santo de qué****?, fue él quien consiguió las pruebas y se hizo con los documentos que demostraban mi culpabilidad. 1994.*
'It was he, when I returned from my first trip to New York, who accused me of desertion and adultery. Not me, why on earth? He was the one who obtained the evidence and got hold of the documents which proved me guilty.'

4 When it comes to *a qué cuento*, the shortage of attested examples prevented us from finding documentation in this regard. Nonetheless, everything seems to suggest the same likelihood of operation as in the other elements, both in this aspect and regarding the rest of references to *a qué cuento* that we mention but do not exemplify.

(10) *!. . . yo la creía incasable. . . si hubiese sospechado lo contrario. . . ¿Casarse? ¿**A qué santo**? ¿No estaba tan bien así? ¡Me he llevado chasco! no seré el solo. 1852.*
'!. . . I thought she was unmarriageable. . . if I had suspected otherwise. . . Getting married? Why on earth? Wasn't she so well like that? I really feel let down! I won't be the only one.'

(11) *¿**A cuento de qué** tanta negatividad? 2006*
'Why on earth so much negativity?'

(12) *¡Válgame!. . . ¿pero eso **a cuenta de qué**? 1896.*
'My goodness!. . . but that, why on earth?'

Table 3: Non-sentential constructions.

	Only the interrogative construction	Non-sentential units	
A santo de qué	59	15	**74**
A qué santo	15	5	**20**
A cuento de qué	34	13	**47**
A qué cuento	–	–	
A cuenta de qué	25	7	**32**
	133	**40**	**173**

The constructions can appear either coordinated to other adverbial locutions or headed by a discursive connector:

(13) *¿Por qué y **a santo de qué** viene que demos el nombre de Griego a un barrio que por historia añeja es el más filipense de Madrid? 1951.*
'Why and on what account are we supposed to name as Greek a neighborhood that, due to ancient history, is the one most closely linked with King Felipe in Madrid?'

(14) *– ¿Por qué lo digo? Por todo. ¿A qué me vine yo a Coslada? ¿Pero **a santo de qué**? 1956.*
'–Why do I say it? For all. Why did I come to Coslada? But why on earth?'

(15) *– ¿Y **a cuento de qué** viene eso ahora? 2002.*
'– And what on earth is all that about?'

(16) *¿Pero **a cuenta de qué** habrían llevado a cabo un sacrificio –si aquello lo fue– en presencia 2020.*
'But why would they have made a sacrifice –if that was one– in the presence of.'

It is particularly interesting to highlight that the construction sometimes appears between exclamation marks instead of question marks. The consequent change of intonation results in strengthening the rejection meaning implied in the question over that of the question itself. This seems to prove the intensifying emotional and expressive value referred to above, which becomes recognizable by not admitting emotional reinforcements such as *diablos (devils), carajo (fuck)* or *coño (fuck)*, among others. In any case, a phonetic analysis can provide evidence that the intonation differs because, if the constructions are represented between exclamation marks, they carry a differentiated intonation with them; instead, when appearing between question marks, non-neutral interrogatives may be formally marked by the intonation: the latter not only serves to define the interrogative grammatical modality but also to decisively guide utterance interpretation (Escandell 1999: 3944):

(17) *¡**A santo de qué** voy a agarrar yo allá un catarro intestinal! 1958.*
'Why on earth am I going to catch an intestinal catarrh there!'

(18) *LINA ¡Que yo tiro de la alarma de incendios? ¡Pero bueno! ¡Y eso **a cuento de qué**! 2003.*
'LINA. That I pull the fire alarm? Oh well! And that, why on earth!'

(19) *– Así se escribe la historia –dijo Ruiz–. ¡**A qué santo** iba a querer Aparicio que ese mequetrefe, leyera eso frente a su cuerpo! 1961.*
'– This is how history is written, said Ruiz. Why on earth would Aparicio want that good-for-nothing to read that in front of his body!'

Note that it is also possible to find the constructions *a santo de, a cuento de*, and *a cuenta de* in the declarative modality, that is, without the interrogative particle *qué*. In such cases, they function as complex prepositions, though, to which must be added that the complex prepositions do not imply any type of negative response from the speaker in any of these examples. Although they do seem to endow the entire predication with a certain emotional charge of negative value, its impact is much lower than the one conveyed via an interrogative modality:

(20) *Fíjese que esta tarde me enfadé con él* ***a santo de*** *los sombreros, porque el sombrero que él quería ponerse a mí me parece. . . 2009.*
'Note that this afternoon I got angry with him due to the hats, because the hat that he wanted to wear seems to me. . .'

(21) *Y entonces la Guirra le soltó una estupidera tan completita, que hasta la madre del tendero, tan de antiguo muerta que ni misas le decían ya, saltó al tenderete de maldiciones seguidas de alegatos,* ***a santo de*** *que si el hombre se quedaba con los repartos "pa que la señora criara. . .1941–1961.*
'And then La Guirra unleashed such a complete stupidity that even the shopkeeper's mother, dead so long ago that they didn't even say masses for her anymore, jumped into the stall with curses followed by allegations, related to whether the man kept the deliveries "for the lady to raise. . .'

(22) *¡Y todo este hablar salió* ***a cuento del*** *pleito que tratan entre sí de sustentar dos hermanos propios carnales! 1920.*
'And all this talk originated in the lawsuit that two brothers by whole blood are trying to sustain with each other!'

(23) *Todo esto* ***a cuento de*** *que hoy hay comida con Telmo Orbe. 2020.*
'All this because today we have lunch with Telmo Orbe.'

(24) *– ¿Desayuno* ***a cuenta de*** *los contribuyentes, inspector?*
– Desayuno ***a cuenta de*** *tu puta madre. 2018.*
'– Breakfast on taxpayers' account, inspector?
– Breakfast on your fucking mother's account.'

(25) *Y achacábanle,* ***a cuenta de*** *que lo consentía, los rumores que este hombre iba cada día introduciendo con levantar la ciudad y ponerla en arma sin saberse la causa ni la razón de estos solevamientos; 1621–1630.*
'And he was blamed, because he consented to it, for the rumors that this man was introducing every day about raising the city and putting it in arms without knowing either the cause or the reason for these uprisings;'

Now then, it deserves to be highlighted that although the complex preposition *a santo de* is documented after the interrogative construction, the time difference acquires far more relevance in *a cuento de* and *a cuenta de*. And the complex preposition appears prior to the adverbial locution, as Table 4 shows:

Table 4: Adverbial and prepositional uses[5].

	A cuento de		*A cuenta de*		*A santo de*	
	Adverbial locution	**Prepositional locution**	**Adverbial locution**	**Prepositional locution**	**Adverbial locution**	**Prepositional locution**
13th c.	0	1+0	0	5+3	0	0
14th c.	0	0	0	0	0	0
1401–1450	0	7+0	0	0	0	0
1451–1500	0	1+0	0	9+0	0	0
1501–1550	0	0	0	14+0	0	0
1551–1600	0	2+2	0	210+5	0	0
1601–1650	0	1+0	0	283+2	0	0
1651–1700	0	0	0	35+0	0	0
1701–1750	0	0	0	34+0	0	0
1751–1800	0	0	0	32+0	0	0
1801–1850	0	0+1	0	30+0	0	0
1851–1875	0	1+0	2	16+0	0	0
1876–1900	1	0+2	3	60+1	11	0
1901–1925	0	2+0	0	38+5	4	1+1
1926–1950	1	9+0	1	44+3	17	1+1
1951–1975	16	3+1	4	66+4	33	0
1976–2000	37	0+7	16	373+3	37	0
2001–	71	55	38	680+28	73	2+0
	126	95 (66+29)	64	1983 (1929+54)	175	6 (4+2)

Despite the analyses carried out, the consideration of the 5 constructions under study as interrogative adverbial locutions becomes controversial. Doubts exist on whether *a santo de qué, a cuento de qué*, and *a cuenta de qué* should be regarded as adverbial locutions (even though it seems clear that *a qué santo* and *a qué cuento* function as interrogative adverbial locutions of a causal nature), since it could be understood that *a santo de*, *a cuento de*, and *a cuenta de* act/behave as complex prepositions. The syntactic analysis of *por qué* turns out to be controversial: while some authors consider it an adverbial locution similar to the interrogative adverbs of other languages (e.g. *why* in English or *warum* in German), others claim that it must be seen as a prepositional phrase (RAE 2009: 1660). It is my contention that we should raise the same polemic in relation to the three constructions examined. After all, *a santo de*, *a cuento de*, and *a cuenta de* may show prepositional examples —as collected during the process of data analysis.

5 The two rows of numbers in the prepositional locution column indicate the combinatorial analysis with a nominal group and the one with a sentence, in that order.

3 Historical development

The data contained in Table 1 show the constructions grouped together into two sets, separated by almost half a century (*a qué santo* and *a qué cuento* vs. *a cuenta de qué, a cuento de qué*, and *a santo de qué*). This difference likewise finds a correlation in their shape, as well as their current success and frequency of use.

On the other hand, the formal and significant affinities between the various constructions force us to take into account the interference relationships that may have arisen between them, as far as use is concerned. The concept of *analogy* has to do with the influence that some forms are able to exert on others seeking to extend certain patterns or schemes, or to eliminate/remove certain irregularities (Elvira 2010: 31). In other words, this is a process where a linguistic form evolves to resemble another due to an indirect association mediated by some higher-order pattern or generalization (Blevins & Blevins 2009: 4). However, the analogical extension does not simply consist in a formal affinity (Elvira 1998: 151). It may become strengthened by the presence of common semantic or functional features among the elements experiencing the formal influence; expressed differently, as Itkonen (2005:13) would put it: analogy relates to a specific context in which it is used. The idea that analogy relies on both form and meaning arises as a fundamental cognitive principle which plays a key role not only in the acquisition of language but also in its changes (De Smet and Fischer 2017: 241).

Traugott and Trousdale (2013: 38) referred to analogical thinking as an important factor when it comes to increasing productivity or schematicity. Analogy allows us to modify constructions, but also leads –via analogical thinking– to build more abstract types or schemes, as a cognitive principle inside the speaker's brain. The ability to combine (items) and categorize requires analogical thinking. In effect, analogical thinking and reasoning precede many changes, as they involve the recognition by the speaker of similarities between two constructions; hence the capacity to trigger numerous changes.

Our findings reveal that the first accredited constructions are the currently less usual variants —namely: *a qué santo* and *a qué cuento*— during the first half of the 19th century. The other three constructions emerged almost 50 years later, in the second half of the 19th century. The popularity of *a santo de qué* was greater from the very beginning, although it apparently coincides with *a cuento de qué* in the 21st century, *a cuenta de qué* seeming to be less successful:

(26) *¿**Á qué santo** ese púdico alboroto Con que en su casa la discordia siembra? 1828.*
'Why on earth that discreet fuss with which he sows discord in his house?'

(27) *qué sentido tiene la expresion de "que hay piedra que le derribe del brazo"; ni* ***á qué cuento*** *viene la oscurísima é impertinente alusion al mal poema 1833.*
'what is the meaning of the expression "that there is a stone knocking him off the arm"; nor why on earth the extremely dark and impertinent allusion to the bad poem'

(28) *Pues, ¿****a cuenta de qué*** *hemos de juntarnos con franceses que no nos dejan hacer lo que nos sale de dentro, sino que hemos de ir al remolque de sus señorías? 1873.*
'Well, why on earth do we have to get together with Frenchmen who don't let us do what comes out of our inner selves, and instead we have to go along with what their lordships say?'

(29) *contraviniendo la ley de Naturaleza. . . ¿y* ***a santo de qué****? vamos a ver. . . Eso sí, por encima de todo la Naturaleza. 1885.*
'contravening the law of Nature. . . and why on earth? let's see. . . Needless to say, above all, Nature.'

(30) *¿****a cuento de qué*** *está tu abuelo en este mundo feo y malo? El pobre no sirve ya 1888.*
'Why on earth is your grandfather in this ugly and bad world? The poor thing is already useless.'

In my view, the negative implication conveyed through these constructions reflects the "division of pragmatic labor" concept developed by Horn (1984)[6] and later included by Levinson in his M principle (2004: 136):[7] *what is said in an abnormal way is not normal*; or expressed differently, if a marked expression is used, the most common interpretation –a neutral causal (or final) interpretation, in this

6 The use of a marked (relatively complex or verbose) expression when the possibility to utilize (simpler or less cumbersome) alternative unmarked expressions exists tends to be interpreted as delivering a marked message (one that the unmarked alternative could not have transmitted).

7 *Speaker's maxim*: it indicated an abnormal, non-stereotypical situation by resorting to marked expressions which contrast with the ones that you would use to describe the corresponding normal, stereotypical situation.

Recipient's corollary: What is said in an abnormal way indicates an abnormal situation, or marked messages indicate marked situations, more precisely:

Where *S* has said "p" with a marked expression M, and an unmarked alternative expression *U* exists which contains the same denotation *D* which the speaker might have employed in the same sentence-frame instead. Then, where *U* would have I-implicated the stereotypical or more specific subset *d* of *D*, the marked expression *M* will implicate the complement of denotation *d*, namely: *đ* of *D*.

case– needs to be avoided. The locution's marked character evidently stems from the noun of origin of the different constructions, as well as from its actual structure, since *a qué* usually implies purpose rather than cause.

I contend that the origin of the construction can be linked to the interrogative construction *a qué*, a very common one of which we find 12,656 examples in the CDH, for instance, from the origins of Spanish, and with abundant examples dated as early as the 15th century:

(31) *¿**A qué**·m' descubriestes las telas del coraçón? / A la salida de Valencia mis fijas vos di yo / con muy grand ondra e averes a nombre. / Cuando las non queriedes, ya canes traidores, / ¿por qué las sacávades de Valencia, sus honores? / ¿A qué las firiestes a cinchas e a espolones? 1140 [s. XIV].*
'Why did you reveal the webs of the heart to me? I gave you my daughters when leaving Valencia / with great honor and plenty of assets. / When you didn't want them, already traitorous dogs, / why did you take their honors from Valencia? / Why did you wound them with girths and spurs?'

(32) ***A qué** aprouecha el exorzismo. 1252–1270 [principios del s. XIV].*
'What is exorcism for?'

The use of the construction in the examples above obviously conveys a notion of purpose, rather than cause, thus seeming to match the meanings of the constructions we have been dealing with so far.[8] The ideas of cause and purpose have frequently appeared very closely related to each other, even to the extent of becoming confused sometimes (Ferrater Mora 1999: 270). We all know Aristotle's classification of cause into four types: efficient –the principle of change; material– the one from which something arises or through which it comes to be; formal –the idea or the paradigm that also resembles the essence, since "it is before it was"; and final – the reality towards which something tends to be.

Thus, various causes concur –and not only one– in the production of something. However, despite all four causes playing a role in the production process, the final cause seemingly prevails to a certain extent, insofar as it is the "good" of the thing and, as such, can be considered the good *par excellence* (Ferrater Mora 1999: 271).

8 Nonetheless, Galán (1999: 3636) includes *a santo de qué* within the rhetorical interrogatives that convey a negative implicature, under the heading of *final nexuses*. For Galán (1999: 3630), causality implies "before" and purpose corresponds to "after", which means that the agent may interpret the action as a 'motive' (something due to which they act) or as an 'incentive' (something for which they act).

As said above, the uses of the construction *a qué* convey a final meaning. Nevertheless, the possibility exists to identify different uses in the 18th century: the construction appears with the verb *venir (to come)* and an inanimate subject – which prevents it from expressing a purpose (since the latter implies the will of an agent)– and the verb means something similar to 'happen, occur.' The incompatibility of purpose with an inanimate subject joined to the conceptual relationship existing between cause and purpose usually leads to interpreting the question as referring to the cause or reason for what happened. Furthermore, a rejection by the speaker implicitly appears in these cases: a question is always asked about the cause of a specific event that has occurred, and the fact that the question refers precisely to that event suggests an attitude of rejection on the part of the speaker:

(33) ***A qué viene*** *alabar de piadoso al León, que mató al Profeta, porque no tocó al cadaver, y perdonó al jumento, non comedit Leo de cadavere, nec laesit asinum. 3. Reg. 13. 28. 1703.*
'Why praise the pious Lion, who killed the Prophet, because he did not touch the corpse, and spared the donkey? Leo de cadavere, nec laesit asinum. 3. Reg. 13. 28.'

(34) *¿**á qué viene** este texto para convencer aquel aserto? 1732.*
'Why does this text come to confirm that assertion?'

(35) *Pues si no lo he dicho, ni pensado nadie, ¿**a qué viene** essa enumeración de dignidades, y interrogación declamatoria subseguida a ella? 1745.*
'Well, if I have not said it, and no one has thought about it, what is the use of this enumeration of dignities, and the declamatory interrogation following it?'

It equally becomes necessary to address a number of documented constructions from much earlier period, where the purpose becomes a final cause and the constructions combine with the structures *a honor de* and *a honra de (in honor of)*:

(36) *Et porque nuestra voluntat es que en el nuestro tiempo non se minguen nin se pierdan los derechos de Dios por mingua de la nuestra justicia, mas que crescan cada dia a servicio del e **a onra de** sancta eglesia e de nos, 1255.*
'And because our will is that in our time God's rights do not diminish or be lost due to the decrease of our justice, but rather that they increase every day for the service and honor of the holy church and of us,'

(37) *E en aquella montaña fizo el Arçobispo dos iglesias, la una a honra de Sancta María Magdalena, e la otra* ***a honra de*** *Sant Miguel; 1430.*
'And the Archbishop built two churches on that mountain, one in honor of Saint Mary Magdalene, and the other in honor of Saint Michael.'

(38) *Al octauo dia saldras fuera & faras tu sacrificio* ***a onor de*** *mercurio. 1256.*
'On the eighth day you will go outside and make your sacrifice in honor of Mercury.'

(39) *por mandamiento de nuestro senor el Rey, fazemos fuero et carta* ***a honor de*** *Dios et de nuestro senor el Rey de Leon et de Castiella. 1234–1275.*
'By command of our lord the King, we make a charter in honor of God and of our lord the King of León and Castile.'

Already since the Middle Ages, it was very common for these constructions to appear alongside God, the Virgin, and various saints, thereby expressing the final reason for the action described. However, one can find some interesting interrogative constructions combined with *santo (saint)* in Correas:

(40) *¿****A onor de ké santo****?*
Kuando no agrada hazer alguna kosa. 1627.
'In honor of which saint?
When you don't like to do something.'

(41) *¿****A honra de qué santo****?*
Cuando no se tiene por bien hacer algo. 1627.
'For the honor of which saint?
When it's not considered good to do something.'

The final cause of the action linked to a saint seems to favor negative uses or rejection:

(42) ***A buen santo*** *lo enkomendáis.* ***A buen santo*** *lo enkomendastes.*
Es más usado por ironía. 1627.
'You entrust it to a good saint. You entrusted it to a good saint
It is more used for irony purposes.'

Thus, according to Correas, the 17th century often witnessed the use of interrogative causal constructions which express a final cause implying a rejection of what is said, as attested by the example below:

(43) *– ¡Ay, qué apariencia de cocina! ¡Levántate de ahí! ¡Maldito seas! –dijo la vieja–. ¿Cómo tienes esta olla sin hervir? ¿**A qué santo** la dejé yo encomendada? 1604.*
'– Oh, see what the kitchen looks like! Get up from there! Screw you! –said the old woman. How do you have this pot without boiling? To which saint did I entrust it?'

Nonetheless, as Correas likewise pointed out, these constructions seem to relate to humorous and ironic uses involving a certain degree of rejection, as illustrated in the previous example. Numerous occurrences appear to give proof of these humorous uses:[9]

(44) *¿cómo no tiene pelo blanco en toda la barba ni alguno negro en la cabeza? Y si es tan mozo como parece, ¿para qué depone de cosas tan antiguas? Díganos en qué Jordán se baña o **a qué santo** se encomienda, para que le pongamos candelitas cuando lo hayamos menester. 1604.*
'How come he has neither white hair in all his beard nor any black hair in his head? And if he is as young as he seems, why does he shy away from such old things? Tell us in which Jordan he bathes or to which saint he commends himself, so that we can put little candles for him when we need it.'

(45) *Y pues desta arte a todos los destruye,/¡**qué Santo** tan propicio tiene, o Santa,/ el que los pleytos y abogados huye! 1605.*
'And then he destroys everyone in this way,/what a propitious Saint he has,/ who flees from lawsuits and lawyers!'

In my opinion, various structures converge at the origin of *a qué santo* to shape the causal value with an implied rejection conveyed by the construction. We must firstly start from the Christian tradition according to which God is the first cause of everything and saints become necessary interveners for events whose help can be requested to achieve success in certain actions. Furthermore, the possibility exists to use *encomendar x a un santo* (*entrusting x to a saint*) in a humorous sense if the result is seen as contradicting the expectations. These humorous structures present various variations in form, such as *a buen santo, a honra de santo,* and *a honor de santo* –and they may apparently behave as interrogative constructions too. An idea of annoyance seems to be suggested in them all. These constructions date back to the 17th century.

9 The Dictionary of Authorities provides the following definition of *encomendarse a buen santo* 'commending oneself to a good saint': Phrase with which it is implied that someone has somewhat miraculously escaped from some danger, or has achieved something for which they had little hope.

One more step was taken in the 18th century, given that the interrogative constructions of purpose headed by *a qué* –highly common for centuries– began to show causal meanings when combined with the verb *venir (to come)* and an inanimate subject, by means of which the speaker asks about the cause of an event which has already occurred while simultaneously rejecting it.

One last influence which may relate to the origin of this construction is the perception of vulgar or taboo terms within interrogative constructions as rejection marks. The emphatic presence of these elements commonly suggests the speaker's rejection of what is being asked:

(46) *Ya le toma el enemigo./¿Y* ***a qué diablos*** *me llama? 1600.*
'The enemy already takes him. / And what the hell are you calling me for?'

(47) *– ¿Pues* ***para qué diablos*** *–dixo Sancho– las tengo de besar? Béselas la madre que las hizo, o Barrabás, que no tiene mocos; 1614.*
'– Well, why the devil –said Sancho– do I have to kiss them? May the mother who made them kiss them, or Barabbas, who does not have a runny nose.'

(48) *– Por Dios, señor nuestro amo –replicó Sancho–, que vuesa merced se queja de bien pocas cosas. ¿****A qué diablos*** *se pudre de que yo me sirva de mi hacienda, que ninguna otra tengo, ni otro caudal alguno, sino refranes y más refranes? 1615.*
'– By God, our master –replied Sancho– your grace complains about very few things. Why the hell does it bother you that I use my estate, since I don't have any other, nor any other wealth, except for proverbs and more proverbs?'

Therefore, the euphemistic consideration of *santo (saint)* in interrogative constructions (as opposed to vulgar or taboo terms) as well as the humorous use of *santo* suggesting annoyance and the causal construction *a qué viene (how come?/why on earth)* with an inanimate subject may have converged in the origin of the interrogative causal locution *a qué santo*, which simultaneously expresses a rejection of the event occurred to which the question alludes. The construction seems to allow for uncommon uses, such as those conveying a negative implication, in a simple way, insofar as it is formally marked (by the noun *santo*, and by the originally final structure *a qué*).

It was already explained in the previous section that the construction *a qué cuento* is the second one documented in the CDH corpus. The fundamental problem lies in the fact that the low number of occurrences –only five– does not seem to suffice for an in-depth analysis. However, and considering that 4 of the five documented examples present a combination with the verb *venir* (*to come*), the hypothesis about its origin that the current data lead me to pose points at the convergence of different factors: (a) the possible influence of *a qué santo* and vulgar construc-

tions such as *a qué diablos*; (b) the role played by the construction *a qué viene*, which transmits a negative implication; and finally, (c) the possibility of understanding *cuento* in a euphemistic and humorous way, since the meaning of *cuento* as 'purpose' can be interpreted with other negative values of the noun, including 'fib, deceit, gossip or, mess.' In addition, we should not forget either that the first two examples appear in negative structures, which is why the negation contributes to the rhetorical interpretation of the construction as conveying annoyance:

(49) *qué sentido tiene la expresion de "que hay piedra que le derribe del brazo"; ni* ***á qué cuento*** *viene la oscurísima é impertinente alusion al mal poema que sobre Adónis escribió en griego la antigua Praxila, 1833.*
'What sense does the expression "that there is a stone that knocks him off the arm"; nor why on earth the incomprehensible and impertinent allusion to the bad poem that the old Praxila wrote in Greek about Adonis,'

(50) *Ni él se explicaba para qué era aquello, ni* ***a qué cuento*** *venía en el problema de su educación. 1883.*
'Not even he could understand what that was for, nor what on earth it had to do with the problem of his education.'

Similarly, we find the construction *ir/venir con el cuento (tell a tale)* since the early 19th century, where the interpretation of 'fib, deceit, gossip, entanglement' becomes highly common:

(51) *pero puede* ***irse con el cuento*** *á otro que no haya visto Gaviotas. 1802.*
'but you can go with the tale to someone else who hasn't seen Seagulls.'

The three remaining elements (*a santo de qué, a cuento de qué,* and *a cuenta de qué*) are documented at a later date and practically at the same time; hence why the relationships between them could have been evident.

The case of *a cuenta de qué* is peculiar, since a long tradition exists of using *a cuenta de* as a complex preposition, prior to its emergence in the 19th century, as shown in Table 4. Consequently, the first reason justifying the appearance of the interrogative phrase is the previous and habitual existence of the complex preposition *a cuenta de* (RAE-ASALE 2014):

> 1. loc. prepos. En compensación, anticipo o a cambio de. *Quédate con el coche a cuenta de lo que te debo.*
> '1. prepositional locution. In compensation, advance or in exchange for. Keep the car on account of what I owe you.'

Cuenta already had the meaning of "the reason for each thing" sometimes in Nebrija and Covarrubias, and the dictionary of Authorities defines *cuenta* as "Computation, calculation, or reason for something, which is done with arithmetic operations of adding, subtracting, multiplying or dividing", thus making the causal interpretation seem straightforward. It also needs to be borne in mind that the earliest uses presented combinations with *venir (come)* and *ser (be)*, which may have favored an increased interference with the occurrences of *venir a cuento (to be relevant)*:

(52) *Ni qué falta hacían en el mundo vuestros heréticos discursos, ni* ***a cuenta de qué*** *venía esa endiablada Constitución. . . 1875.*
'Neither was there a need in the world for your heretical speeches, nor what on earth that devilish Constitution was needed for. . .'

(53) *No comprendía Maximiliano* ***a cuenta de qué*** *era aquello; 1885–1887.*
'Maximiliano did not understand what on earth that was about;'

Likewise, although *a cuento de qué* may have been constructed through the influence of *cuento (fib), venir/estar a cuento (to be applicable)*, and *ir/venir con el cuento (tell a tale)*, we must remember that few uses of *a cuento de* as a complex preposition exist (see Table 4), which suggests a high degree of interference with the prepositional uses of *a cuenta de*:[10]

(54) *Aunque parezca que no, viene esto* ***a cuento de*** *que el paje, después de haber almorzado ya veía las cosas con otra serenidad y discurría más acertadamente sobre lo que le estaba pasando. 1849.*
'Although it may not seem like it, this has to do with the fact that the page, after having had lunch, already saw things with a different serenity and reasoned more accurately about what was happening to him.'

(55) *Viene esta advertencia* ***a cuento de*** *que Cleopatra, así que se vio en Madrid, 1884.*
'This warning relates to the story that Cleopatra, as soon as she saw herself in Madrid,'

We must additionally consider that only one use of *a cuento de qué* is attested in the 19th century, which leads to assume that interferences with *a cuenta de qué* were

10 We previously pointed out above that Nebrija referred to 'cuenta' as one of the meanings of *cuento*. This is confirmed by the Dictionary of Authorities: "In the old days it was interchangeable with Cuenta".

more than possible. On the other hand, and despite the low frequency of use, *a qué cuento* might have influenced the locution too:

(56) *– Y verdaderamente, chico, ¿**a cuento de qué** está tu abuelo en este mundo feo y malo? 1888.*
'– And really, boy, why on earth is your grandfather in this ugly and bad world?'

(57) *Con los ojos llenos de ese suave azul fresco y tonificador, los tiros del parapeto no se conciben, no se sabe **a cuento de qué** se disparan. 1930.*
'With eyes full of that soft fresh and invigorating blue, shots from the breastwork are inconceivable, no one knows why on earth they are fired.'

As for *a santo de qué*, to my view, its origin was probably determined not only by the locution *a qué santo* but also by the interferences with *a cuento de qué* and *a cuenta de qué*. The relationship between *a qué cuento* and *a qué santo* comes into play here as well. It seems worth considering, for example, that the prepositional locution *a santo de* is likely to have appeared in the 20th century,[11] which may also prove the previous influence exerted by all these elements:

(58) *para averiguar el porqué se habían suprimido los repiques **á santo de** su devoción, al mostrarle algo que sacaba bajo su almohada, 1903.*
'to find out why the chimes related to his devotion had been suppressed, by showing him something that he took out from under his pillow,'

(59) *Pues muy sencillo; **a santo de** que los barceloneses que les atrapara la lluvia desprovistos de paraguas. . . 1916.*
'Well, very simple; due to possibility of Barcelonians being caught by the rain without umbrellas. . .'

11 Despite the existence of previous constructions, the comparative meaning contradicts the causal one, which is why they were disregarded:

Como a santo de su ley, ó por algun temor, él tambien se guardaua; 1667.
As a saint of his law, or for some fear, he also guarded himself;.
Como á santo de milagro me sacan por las aldeas, y luego al punto que salgo, 1850.
They take me out through the villages like a miraculous saint, and then right when I leave,

Curiously enough, the construction *a santo de qué* will enjoy the most success as a causal interrogative structure in every century, which suggests that it probably determined the extension in the use of the other constructions:

(60) *Pero si no hay quien la apee de una fidelidad que no viene al caso. ¡Fiel a mí!, ¿**a santo de qué**? ¡Te aseguro que me ha hecho cavilar más esa sosona! 1885.*
'But if there is no one to relieve her of a fidelity that is irrelevant. Faithful to me!, why on earth? I assure you that that bland woman has made me think more deeply!'

(61) *A doña Lupe le pareció la amonestación muy impertinente y descortés, porque ¿**a santo de qué** venía el hablar de pecados ajenos, teniendo tantos propios 1885.*
'Doña Lupe found the warning very impertinent and discourteous, because what on earth was the point of talking about other people's sins, having so many of their own?'

All these relationships can be seen reflected in Figure 1:

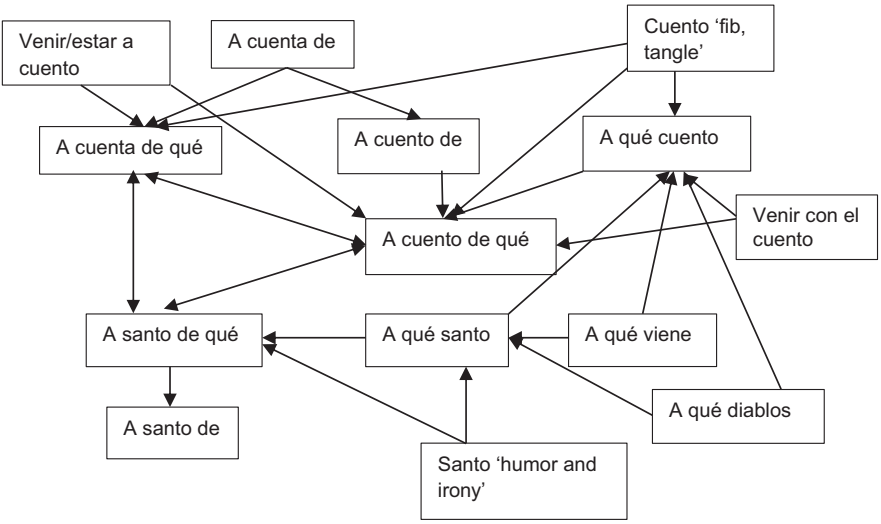

Figure 1: Motivation relationships.

4 Mirativity, rejection, and counterexpectations

The question we must ask ourselves is whether the five constructions we have been considering constitute a manifestation of mirativity. It is well known that some languages have grammatical miratives which encode the speaker's surprise; however, many others encode mirativity by means of other grammatical categories. Any language owns ways to express mirative meanings, but that does not mean it has grammatically encoded mirativity (Aikhenvald 2004: 207; 2012: 474); hence Aikhenvald's distinction between grammatical mirativity (grammatically encoded)[12] and mirativity strategies (extensions from categories not essentially mirative to mirative values)[13] which seems to fit the case of Romance languages.

Mirativity has to do with marking information as new or surprising (De Lancey 1997, 2001) and consequently serves to react before an unexpected stimulus. The mirative construction accounts for an epistemic situation subjected to an evaluative expression by the speaker; more precisely, speakers convey an affective evaluation about some newly acquired knowledge contrasting or opposed to their previous cognitive assumptions. In other words, the information acquired by speakers goes against their expectations: it is something that has surprised them –a characteristic property of the mirative meaning, as seen above. Therefore, surprise entails an assessment by the speaker according to which a situation did not develop as expected. Undoubtedly, a construction is marked as contradicting the speaker's expectations in the five constructions under study, and the type of locution used marks precisely such counter-expectation.

Needless to say, the expression of surprise cannot exist without a violation of expectations (Mocini 2014: 153). For that reason, mirativity has usually been considered a semantic notion implying counter-expectations which can thus be analyzed as a modal negative notion. Surprise arises as a dialogic response to a discovery of something that contravenes a previous belief or assumption, i.e. thanks to a discrepancy between what is expected and what actually happens. Only things that we witness or believe to be true can surprise us, and, conversely, we cannot be surprised by states, events, or actions that we neither know about nor have witnessed (Peterson 2013: 11).

Various studies have gradually refined the definition of mirativity. Thus, mirative marking may belong to information that is new not only to the speaker but also

12 For example, in languages such as Turkish, Albanian, or Quechua, the grammatical encoding of surprise can take place via a verbal morpheme; in other languages, it is expressed by means of verbal complexes –this happens in Magar– or using some independent particle, as Guarani does; several Jukunoid African languages also use certain pronouns to express surprise.

13 For example, the use of future, conditional, and perfect tenses in Spanish.

to the addressee (Hengeveld & Olbertz 2012: 488), and even add a third subject to these two: the main character of a narrative (Aikhenvald 2012: 437).

Celle and Lansari (2015) specified the possibility for different types of mirative meanings to exist depending on the origin of the surprise, although the situation is seen as conceived in an incongruent way to the reality considered by the conceptualizer in all of them. The most widespread typology of mirative meanings is the one proposed by Aikhenvald (2012: 437), who distinguishes five of them: a) sudden discovery, sudden revelation, or realization; b) surprise; c) unprepared mind; d) counter-expectation, and e) new information. Despite all these values conveying a reaction towards a certain piece of information or event, authors such as Mexas (2016) highlight that only the first notion would constitute the core of mirativity, the other four (values) being linked to mirativity through a secondary derivation occurred in specific contexts.

In principle, then, the meaning of the five proposed constructions might seem to approximately match the mirativity values. However, another issue needs to be addressed: if the beginnings of mirativity led to the problem of its separation from evidentiality (Aikhenvald 2004: 195; 2012: 436), its consolidation as a category in Romance or Germanic languages –and in the Indo-European family as a whole– is related to its differentiation from exclamation. This acquires special relevance in the constructions examined because of their nature as direct and indirect interrogative constructions, even though, as already mentioned above, they appear between exclamation marks on some occasions.

Exclamations, which stand out as the most representative manifestation of expressive meaning (Porroche 2015: 189), are grammatical forms which express a variety of affective responses of the speaker when faced with a certain situation, one of them being surprise. In fact, surprise is a semantic feature of exclamative sentences (Aikhenvald 2012: 462), and the emotion of surprise may be conveyed in many ways, just as it can carry a positive or negative affect. For Hengeveld and Olbertz (2012: 490), exclamative constructions (identified with ponderative exclamatives) transmit an illocutionary concept and express the speaker's evaluation about a presupposed (rather than asserted) propositional content, whereas mirativity reflects a modal distinction, does not constitute a type of sentence, and is not necessarily linked to the speaker; instead, it forms part of the propositions which are stated or questioned rather than presupposed. Thus, while exclamatives express emotional meanings, including surprise, mirativity provides an assertion with a modal component (Torres 2013: 140): the speaker's beliefs relevant to the assertion, or expressed differently, beliefs clashing with the discovery of the facts that constitute the assertion. It is this shock that triggers surprise, which means that, unlike what happens in exclamatives, the surprise is 'derived' (Torres 2013: 14). Ponderative exclamatives describe the purpose that speakers want to achieve with

their expression; by contrast, mirativity is a semantic concept that modifies the propositional content of a linguistic expression (Olbertz 2009: 79).

It clearly follows from all that has been exposed in the previous sections of this paper that the five constructions considered fundamentally relate to interrogation. Therefore, the question we should ask ourselves is whether mirativity can materialize in interrogative constructions. According to Olbertz (2009: 85–86), the mirative perfect is likely to be used in interrogatives: *¿y el hijo de la señora Anita no ha estado aquí?* 'and Mrs. Anita's son is not here?', since it exemplifies a rhetorical question to which the speaker knows the answer. Olbertz likewise points to similar examples proposed by De Reuse (2003: 88) in the Western Apache language, which suggests that mirativity and interrogation are reconcilable. Kornfeld (2019: 179) studied the mirative construction *no va y* + *verbo* 'does not go and + verb', whose origin she found in a rhetorical question. This author additionally claims that, the same as in other constructions derived from rhetorical questions (e.g. *¿qué vas a hacer?* 'what are you going to do?' or *¿qué me van a hablar de amor?* 'what are they going to tell me about love?', Di Tullio 2011, Kornfeld 2014), the phonological contour becomes blurred and the speakers use different strategies for graphic representation in writing (question or exclamation marks, ellipsis) –this also happens sometimes in the five constructions analyzed in this study. Finally, Piatti (2020) collected various examples of mirative constructions in interrogative structures, among them *¿en serio?* 'seriously?' or *¿sí?* 'yes?', in conversational contexts where the surprise derived from the counter-expectation seems clear. She similarly highlighted other examples where the speaker produces a mirative marking through the repetition –in an interrogative modality– of the addressee's words.

All the above leads us to conclude that no contradiction exists between mirativity and interrogative modality, neither in theoretical terms nor from a practical point of view (as attested by the aforementioned examples). Now then, do the five constructions examined imply mirativity strategies? Looking at the examples provided, it seems obvious that they are likely to contain the values of sudden discovery, unprepared mind, counter-expectation, and new information; however, I do not think one can speak about *surprise*. Not every information that contradicts expectations causes surprise: concessive or adversative constructions are illustrations thereof. Speakers do not use any of the constructions under study to transmit their surprise to the addressee in search of an answer. What they do is express disagreement or rejection towards the previous intervention, or towards a previous event. Being an intentional reactive content, the presence of a previous element to refer to becomes necessary (the content asked, regardless of whether it is explicit or implicit). Note that the reiteration of previous elements can generally serve argumentative opposition purposes (Brenes 2011: 118).

Surprise does not appear in the constructions analyzed; rejection –a different value– does instead, although it shares plenty of features with mirativity (counter-expectations, new information, sudden discovery, unprepared mind. . .). Surprise and rejection differ to a significant extent, though, and the intensification of rejection goes beyond mere surprise. Rejection marking frequently appears in languages too. By way of example, numerous vulgar elements are used inside interrogative constructions to mark rejection, not surprise, and also convey new information and counter-expectation meanings *(e.g. ¿por qué cojones dices eso?* 'why the fuck do you say that?'). The constructions with *santo, cuento*, and *cuenta* provide yet another way to mark rejection –but not surprise– in the interrogative modality.

5 Conclusions

The grammaticalized nature of the five constructions under examination stems from their being formally fixed: they allow neither the presence of determiners modifying *santo, cuenta*, and *cuento* nor the implementation of changes in the set of prepositions that precede (and follow) the noun, and the question must always be introduced by the constituent *qué.* The meaning equally appears fixed in a joint causal value, without considering the partial meanings of the elements that make up the construction.

Although the phrases examined may occur in direct and indirect interrogative constructions, they do so more often in direct ones. The position of the subject, when it appears, tends to be post-verbal, even though a preverbal position is possible as well. They make independent constructions –without a verb– possible, the most common type of structure being the one where the locution appears alone, without heading a sentence or nominal group.

The different locutions allow us to build marked partial interrogative constructions, implying that the speaker rejects or denies the asked content. As far as *a qué santo* and *a qué cuento* are concerned, these values coexist with the values of *santo* and *cuento* as nouns.

A qué santo and *a qué cuento* should be regarded as interrogative adverbial locutions of a causal nature when they appear grammaticalized with the rejection meanings considered, but doubts arise as to whether *a santo de qué*, *a cuento de qué*, and *a cuenta de qué* should be treated as adverbial locutions, since one could understand that *a santo de*, *a cuento de*, and *a cuenta de* constitute complex prepositions which combine with *que*. This controversial analysis still remains unsolved for the time meaning, although their consideration as adverbial locutions seems to be preferred.

Despite having varied frequency of use levels, all these locutions are still possible in the 21st century.

The origin of these five locutions dates back to the 19th century according to the data supplied by the corpus. However, two stages seemingly exist in their emergence which coincide with their formal structure: *a qué santo* and *a qué cuento* are documented approximately half a century earlier than the other three locutions.

The euphemistic perception of *santo* in interrogative constructions, as opposed to vulgar or taboo terms (*a qué diablos*), and the humorous use of *santo* indicating annoyance, as well as the causal construction *a qué viene* with an inanimate subject, may have converged in the origin of the interrogative causal locution *a qué santo*, simultaneously expressing the rejection of the previous event to which the question refers. As the construction is formally marked (by the noun *santo* and the originally final structure *a qué*) it seems to pave the way for uncommon uses, such as those conveying a negative implication.

A qué cuento appears in very few examples. Nonetheless, we have assumed an origin due to several factors: the influence exerted either by of *a qué santo* or by the construction *a qué viene*, with a negative implication; the possibility to understand *cuento* in a euphemistic and humorous way; and the presence of negation in the first uses to mark a rhetorical interpretation of annoyance.

The complex preposition *a cuenta de* seems to be at the origin of *a cuenta de qué*, to which the uses of *venir/estar a cuento* and the constructions with *cuento* should be added as other possible influences.

A cuento de qué could also have been influenced by the complex preposition *a cuento de*, which surely relates to *a cuenta de*. It is likewise worth highlighting the role played by the constructions with *cuento* understood as 'fib, tangle' and *venir/estar a cuento*, and, of course, by the presence of *a qué cuento*.

As for *a santo de qué*, its origin most probably has to do with *a qué santo*. Attention should additionally be paid in this respect to the use interferences that the similarity in terms of meaning and formal scheme between *a santo de qué, a cuenta de qué*, and *a cuento de qué* may have caused.

Although the constructions studied have many points in common with the marking of mirativity –above all, the reference to some new information that contradicts the speaker's expectations– they do not express surprise, but rather mark rejection by the speaker.

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