

## Bare singular nouns in Spanish

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**Background:** Chierchia's (1998) typological approach to bare nominal arguments proposed that bare nouns in Romance are defined by the binary features [-argumental, +predicative], which entails that they cannot occur in argument positions without a determiner. However, that bare mass and bare plural nouns are frequently attested in Spanish had been widely known even before Chierchia's proposal. More recently, Espinal and McNally's (2011) (henceforth E&M) work on bare nouns semantically unmarked for number (BSgs) has further questioned Chierchia's typology. E&M concentrate on BSgs in object position, which they take to be only syntactic arguments of the verb. They argue that their semantic contribution is that of a verb modifier, so sentences like (1) below are analyzed as cases of pseudo-incorporation:

- (1) *Llevamos falda.*  
wear.2plPRES skirt.  
“We are wearing a skirt.” / “We are skirt-wearing.”

For E&M, the availability of BSgs in Spanish is limited because they are only licensed by a subset of verbs that they call *have*-predicates and which denote a (rather abstract) relation of possession. This assumption leads to their strong claim that BSgs “are never licensed as subjects, not even of the passives of predicates that normally permit them” (E&M: 101).

**Proposal:** Contrary to E&M, I argue that (i) BSgs can indeed occur as subjects in Spanish, (ii) that there are cases of BSgs in object position where they are true semantic arguments of the verb (i.e. where they are not incorporated), and (iii) that these instances could actually be couched within Chierchia's typology by allowing for the existence of a covert determiner. The generic statement in example (2) below explicitly supports (i). Evidence in favor of (ii) comes from sentences (2-4), where an analysis based on pseudo-incorporation seems rather implausible because of the *weight* of the BSg, which is modified by a restrictive relative clause (RRC) and so, it cannot be an instance of an institutionalized activity (in the sense of Dayal (2003)). Furthermore, none of the matrix verbs in (2-4) can be characterized as belonging to the group of *have*-predicates introduced by E&M, so their approach does not seem applicable to these cases either.

- (2) *Gato que ronronea espera cariño.* [BSg subject, transitive verb]  
Cat that purr.3sgPRES expect.3sgPRES affection  
“Any cat that purrs expects affection.”
- (3) *Libro que es barato \*(lo) recomiendo.* [BSg object]  
Book that is cheap 3sg.CL recommend.1sgPRES  
“I recommend any cheap book.”
- (4) *No visité museo que me gustara.* [BSg obj, trans. verb, NPI]  
Not visit.1sgPAST museum that 1sg.CL like.SUBJV  
“I didn't visit any museum that I liked.”

Interestingly, when the BSg is modified by *cualquier* (the Spanish counterpart of free-choice “any”) in (2-3), or *ningún* (the counterpart of NPI “any”) in (4), the truth conditions of these sentences remain identical to those without an overt determiner:

- (2') *Cualquier* gato (*que ronronea*) *espera* *cariño*.  
 Any cat that purr.3sgPRES expects.3sgPRES affection  
 "Any cat that purrs expects affection."
- (4') *No* *visité* *ningún* museo (*que me gustara*).  
 Not visit.1sgPAST any museum that 1sg.CL like.SUBJV  
 "I didn't visit any museum that I liked."

The only difference is that, whenever the determiner is overt, the presence of the RRC is not obligatory (as the parentheses in (2') and (4') indicate). If the argument of the verb is a BSg instead, the presence of the RRC is a necessary condition for grammaticality:

- (5) \* *Gato* *espera* *cariño*.  
 cat expects.3sgPRES affection (Intended meaning: "Any cat expects affection")

In order to account for the data in (2-4) I propose the existence of a covert determiner  $\Delta$  in Spanish analogous to "any", whose presence is subject to two licensing conditions. First, it has to occur in a downward entailing context (DEC). And second, it is subtriggered by a RRC in the spirit of Dayal (1998). Furthermore, as (2') and (4') above showed,  $\Delta$  may receive either a free choice or an NPI reading depending on the precise DEC in which it occurs (exactly like English "any"). The proposed truth-conditions for (2) and (4) are provided in (6) and (7) below respectively:

- (6) [ $\Delta$  *gato que ronronea*] *recibe cariño*.  
 "Every cat that purrs receives affection."  
 $\forall x, s$  [ [cat(x,s) &  $\exists s'$  [s<s' & purr(x,s')]]  $\rightarrow \exists s''$  [s<s'' & receive(affection,x,s'')]
- (7) *No* *visité* [ $\Delta$  *museo que me gustara*].  
 "I didn't visit any museum that I liked."  
 $\forall x, s$  [ [museum(x,s) &  $\exists s'$  [s<s' & visit(x,I,s')]]  $\rightarrow \exists s''$  [s<s'' &  $\neg$ like(x,I,s'')]

Crucially, the need for clitic-doubling in (3) suggests that the BSgs in free-choice/generic statements like (2-3) have probably been left-dislocated to a topic position. In addition to the comma intonation that BSgs receive in these cases, a crosslinguistic argument in favor of this claim comes from topic-marking languages like Japanese, where a generic statement about an NP requires that it bear topic morphology. Since Spanish has no such marking, the BSg would have to obligatorily move to a topic projection in the left periphery in order to achieve the same effect. The impossibility for BSgs to occur in their base-generated position in non-NPI DEC's (except in the alleged incorporation cases noted by E&M) shows the obligatory nature of topicalization. The ungrammatical examples below illustrate this (where (8) shows a non-incorporated object BSg, and (9) has a BSg subject in the antecedent of a conditional):

- (8) \* *Compro* *libro que es barato*. (9) \* *Si* *gato que ronronea recibe cariño*...  
 buy.1sgPRES book that is cheap if cat that purrs receives affection...

If my analysis is correct, what appear to be non-incorporated BSgs in Spanish might actually be introduced by a covert determiner (thus respecting Chierchia's proposal). Note however that this determiner cannot be identical to the covert one he proposed, which would allow for (actually unattested) RRC-less BSgs. The nature of the requirement that *heavy* BSgs in free choice/generic statements be left-dislocated remains an open question to be accounted for.

**References:** Chierchia (1998). Reference to kinds across languages. *NLS* 6. Dayal (1998). Any as inherently modal. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 21. Dayal (2003). A semantics for pseudo incorporation. *Ms.* Espinal and McNally (2011). Bare nominals and incorporating verbs in Spanish and Catalan. *Journal of Linguistics* 47. Pires de Oliveira and Rothstein (2011). Bare singular noun phrases are mass in Brazilian Portuguese. *Lingua* 121.