

Non-bare proper names in Rioplatense Spanish¹

Ana Aguilar-Guevara

anaaguilar@filos.unam.mx

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

Carolina Oggiani

oggiani.carolina@gmail.com

Universidad de la República, Uruguay/ Sistema Nacional de Investigadores

1. Introduction

Data

In Spanish bare common nouns in argument position are usually not allowed and therefore a determiner is necessary (Laca 1999):²

- (1) **El hombre** / ***Hombre** se fue a trabajar.
the man man went to work
'The man went to work.'

In contrast, proper personal nouns typically occur bare in argument position:

- (2) **Carlos** se fue a trabajar.
Carlos went to work
'Carlos went to work.'

In Rioplatense Spanish (RS) –a variety spoken in Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and its surroundings–, definite articles and proper personal names can co-occur in informal registers:

- (3) **El Carlos** se fue a trabajar.
the Carlos went to work
'Carlos went to work.'

This phenomenon (*DefArt+PropName*, from now on) has been explained in terms of familiarity or salience of the entity referred to by the proper name (Bernstein, 2019; Camacho, 2019; Saab, 2021; Espinal, to appear).

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² See Oggiani (2020) for an analysis of some nominals in Rioplatense Spanish that can appear bare in certain argument positions and under specific lexical constraints.

Puzzle

Assuming the referentialist approach (based on Kripke, 1980), where a proper name points to an entity directly, without providing a description of that entity (cf. Kaplan 1989; Soames 2002; Jeshion 2015; Saab & Lo Guercio 2018, among many others):

- what is the need of signaling familiarity or saliency by means of the definite article, if the felicitous use of a proper name somehow implies that the referent holding the name is familiar or salient (Ziff, 1960; Lewis 1979)?
- how do we account for the presumed type mismatch between the usual denotation of the definite article (<et, e>) and that of proper names (<e>)?

Aims

- To show that DefArt+PropName conveys expressive content, namely *affective proximity* towards the referent.
- To propose, following Tsiakmakis & Espinal (2022), that the definite article in DefArt+PropName is a semantic expletive denoting an identity function.
- To propose that DefArt+PropName are so-called big nominals containing interactional structure above the DP, in the sense of Ritter & Wiltschko (2020) and Wiltschko (2021).

2. Co-occurrence of the definite article and proper names

DefArt+PropNames have been identified in languages of several families (Caro Reina & Helmbrecht, 2022). In Romance languages, it is a widespread phenomena (Brugger 1993; Longobardi 1994; 2008; Gomesi y Massam, 2009; Camacho, 2019; Bernstein, Ordóñez y Roca, 2018, 2019, 2021; Saab, 2021; Caro Reina 2022; Espinal to appear):

Italian (Longobardi, 1994)

- (4) **Il Gianni** mi ha telefonato.
the Gianni me have phoned
'Gianni called me up.'

Central Catalan (Bernstein, Ordóñez y Roca, 2018)

- (5) **El Joan** ha arribat tard.
El Joan has arrived late
'Joan arrived late.'

Balearic Catalan (Bernstein, Ordóñez y Roca, 2018)

- (6) a. **en Joan, n'Andreu**
the Joan the Andreu
b. **na Maria, n'Anna**
the María, the Anna

Peninsular Spanish (Camacho, 2019)

- (7) a. **La Julia** comió aquí.
the Julia ate here
'Julia ate here.'

Rioplatense Spanish (Saab, 2021)

- (8) Esta tarde voy a ver al **Juan**.
this evening go to see to-the Juan
'I'm going to see Juan this evening.'

All these authors have explained the presence of the definite article arguing that the individual denoted by the proper name is familiar or salient. In what follows, we take these ideas as a point of departure and reformulate them in terms of *affective proximity*, a speaker-oriented meaning belonging to the expressive dimension.

3. Assessing the meaning of DefArt+PropNames

3.1 DefArt+PropNames convey affective proximity

A DefArt+PropName, in contrast with its corresponding bare version, expresses that the speaker is affectively close to the referent holding the name in question:

- (9) a. **María** vino a mi fiesta.
b. **La María** vino a mi fiesta.
'María went to my party.' (≈ with whom I have a close bond)

Affective proximity vs. non-affective proximity

- (10) Carla is the speaker's new roommate/Tinder date/boss.

Hoy conocí a **Carla** / **#la Carla**
today met to to Carla / the Carla
'Today I met Carla for the first time.'

- (11) Hoy viene a mi casa **Julia** / **#la Julia**, una prima de mi padre que nunca vimos.
today comes to my house Julia / the Julia, a cousin of my father that never saw
'Today Julia, one of my father's cousin that we never met, is coming home.'
- (12) Context: the speaker is reporting that yesterday he went to a dance play and that Ludmila, his best friend, and Marta, a classmate of Ludmila, danced there.

La verdad, **la Ludmila** / **#la Marta** fue la que bailó mejor.
the truth the Ludmila / the Marta was the that danced best.
'The truth is that Ludmila was the one who danced the best.'

Only the speakers's affective proximity is relevant

- (13) X: Fui a la casa **del Carlos** y no me abrió la puerta. ¿Podés creerlo?
I went to the house-of-the Carlos and not me open the door. Can believe-it
'I went to Carlos's house and he didn't open the door. Can you believe it?'
- Y: Es que no sé quién es **Carlos** / **#el Carlos** / "el Carlos".
is that not know who is Carlos / the Carlos / el Carlos
'I don't know who Carlos is.'
- (14) Cecilia has to cancel a meeting at work because her husband cannot look after their baby.
- X: Perdón, tengo que cancelar. **El Joaquín** está enfermo y no puede quedarse con el bebé.
'Sorry, I have to cancel. Joaquín is sick and can't take care of the baby'
- Y: ¡Qué macana! ¡Que se mejore **Joaquín** / **#el Joaquín**!
Oh bummer that gets better Joaquin / the Joaquín
'Oh bummer! Hope Joaquín gets better.'
- (15) a. ¿Te acuerdas de **la Marta**, mi ex?
remember of the Marta, my ex girlfriend
'Do you remember Marta, my ex?'
- b. #¿Te acuerdas de **la Marta**, tu ex?
remember of the Marta, my ex girlfriend
'Do you remember Marta, your ex?'

3.2. Affective proximity as an expressive meaning

We claim that the presence of the definite article in DefArt+PropNames does not contribute to the truth conditions of the proposition, and that it is sensitive to use conditions.

- (16) **La María** vino a mi fiesta.
the Maria came to my party
'María went to my party'
Non-truth conditional inference: the speaker has a close bond with María

Tests to characterize secondary expressive meanings (Potts, 2005; Tonhauser, 2011; Gutzman, 2019):

Atissuenes

- (17) X: **La María** vino a mi fiesta.
the Maria came to my party
'María came to my party.'
- Y: #No es verdad. Ustedes ni se conocen.
not is true you not-even each-other know
'That's not true. You don't even know each other.'

Projection

- (18) a. No es verdad que **la María** vino a mi fiesta (NEGATION)
not is true that the María came to my party
'It is not true that María went to my party.'
- b. Es posible que **la María** haya venido a mi fiesta. (MODAL)
is possible that the María has come to my party
'It is possible that María has come to my party.'
- c. Si **la María** vino a mi fiesta, yo no me enteré. (CONDITIONAL)
if the María came to my party I not noticed
'If María went to my party, I didn't notice it'.

The inference that the speaker has a close bond with María holds.

Non-displaceability

- (19) En 1986 **la María** usaba lentes.
In 1986 the María wore glasses
'In 1986 María used to wear glasses.'
- a. \Rightarrow the speaker has a close bond with María at the moment of uttering the sentence.
b. \nRightarrow the speaker had a close bond with María back in 1986.

Perspective dependence

- (20) Luis me dijo que **la María** lloró toda la noche.
Luis me told that the María cried all the night
'Luis told me that María cried all night long.'
a. ⇒ The speaker has a close bond with María.
b. ⇏ Luis has a close bond with María.

Descriptive ineffability

- (21) X: ¿Por qué estás tan contenta?
why are so happy?
'Why are you so happy?'

Y: Porque **la María** vino a mi fiesta.
because the María came to my party
'Because María went to my party.'

Y': 😞 Porque una persona muy cercana a mí llamada María vino a mi fiesta.
Because a person very close to me called María came to my party
'Because a very close person that I know, who is called María, came to my party.'

4. Towards a syntax-semantics proposal for DefArt+PropNames

Strategy

- **Point of departure:** the article in DefArt+PropNames is an expletive (Longobardi 1994).
- **Plan:** to adopt a contemporary approach to expletives and to the syntax of DPs in order to account for the data above.

4.1. The expletive definite article

Longobardi (1994) characterizes definite articles preceding proper names as determiners with no semantic import that satisfy a syntactic purpose: to license a nominal expression in argument position.

Espinal (to appear) and Tsiakmakis & Espinal (2022) propose that this article:

- i. is a semantic expletive (as opposed to a purely syntactic expletive), and it has a denotation.
- ii. lacks a iota operator semantics and instead it denotes an identity function of type $\langle e, e \rangle$.

We assume that the article in DefArt+PropNames is an expletive:

$$(22) \quad \llbracket \text{la} \rrbracket = \lambda x_e. x_e$$

$$\llbracket \text{María} \rrbracket = m_e$$

$$\llbracket \text{la} \rrbracket (\llbracket \text{María} \rrbracket) = \lambda x_e. x_e(m)$$

$$\llbracket \text{la María} \rrbracket = m_e$$

Crucially, in what follows we elaborate on Tsiakmakis and Espinal (2022, p.23)'s observation that “expletive categories tend to develop additional meaning components that are computed beyond grammar, at the level where speech act information is encoded”.³ We will propose that this meaning enrichment is derived through the *interactional spine* (Wiltschko, 2014; Wiltschko & Heim 2016; Wiltschko 2017, 2021). .

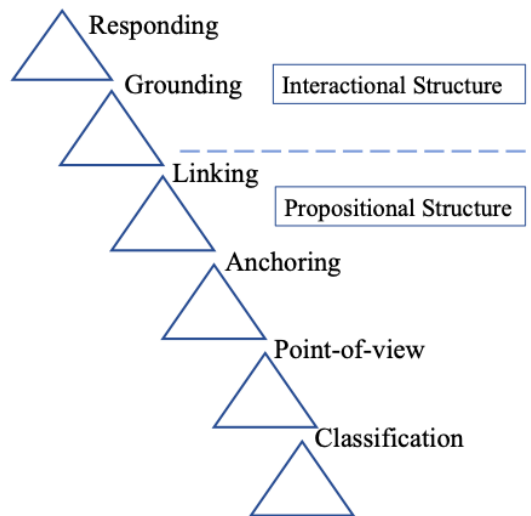
4.2 The Interactional Spine Hypothesis (Wiltschko, 2014; Wiltschko & Heim 2016; Wiltschko 2017, 2021)

The Universal Spine Hypothesis

- i. The point of departure is the heuristic that there is a universal structure regulating the relation between the form, meaning, and distribution of units of language (Wiltschko, 2014).

³ Other examples of semantic expletives displaying meaning enrichment are polydefinites in Greek and negation in Catalan (Espinal to appear; Tsiakmakis & Espinal 2022).

(23)



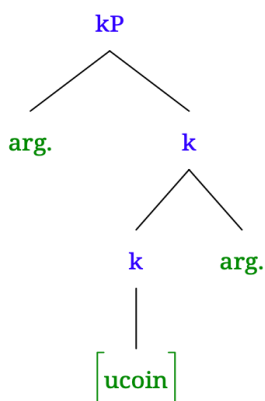
ii. This structure consists of a number of layers each associated with a function that can affect the interpretation of units of language.

iii. The universal layers correspond to language-specific grammatical categories but not in a univocal way, that is to say, a certain category can be associated to one layer in one language, but to another layer in another language.

iv. The spine models both the language used to convey thoughts and the language used to regulate interaction between interlocutors, namely propositional vs. interactional meanings.

v. The spinal layers are conceived as phrases with the same internal structure (24), a head, a complement and a specifier, so that the head is a transitive function relating the complement and the specifier by means of the coincidence feature [*ucoin*]. When valued positively [+*ucoin*], the argument in complement position coincides with the argument in specifier position, and otherwise when valued negatively [-*ucoin*]:

(24)



The Interactional Spine

i. The interactional spine consists of two interpretive function layers. The *grounding* layer is where the shared knowledge between interlocutors is modeled. The *responding* layer is to manage the moves that serve to synchronize the interlocutors' knowledge states.

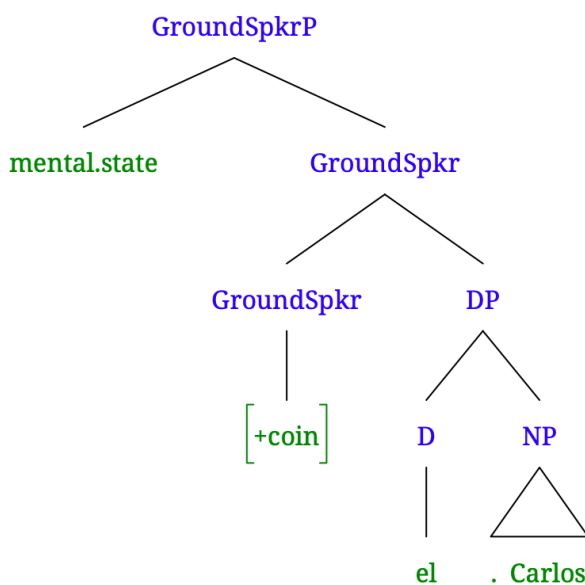
ii. The *grounding* layer is the function that relates utterances to the mental representations of the speaker's or the addressee's thoughts about the world, i.e., it relates the propositional content to the knowledge states of the interlocutors so they can be communicated.

iii. *Grounding* consists of two phrases: $Ground_{Spkr}P$ where propositional content is related to the speaker's mental state, and $Ground_{Adr}P$ where propositional content is related to the addressee's mental state.

4.3 Our proposal

DefArt+PropNames convey affective proximity by virtue of its relation with the interactional spine, in particular, by means of relating the speaker's mental state with the propositional content throughout the positive valuing of the [ucoin] heading $Ground_{Spkr}P$:

(25)



4.4. Discussion

Advantages of this proposal

- We can account for the observation that DPs like *Carlos* and *el Carlos* are truth-conditionally identical but different regarding their use conditions.
- We can account for the observation that *el Carlos* conveys the non-propositional meaning of affective proximity.
- We preserve the notion of expletive definite article, which has proved to be useful for a number of related phenomena (e.d. names of places in Spanish like *(el) Perú*, and inalienable constructions like *Lucio levantó la mano* ‘Lucio raised his hand’).
- We avoid postulating an additional lexical entry for the definite article conveying affective proximity.
- We give room for other possible expressive meanings conveyed by non-bare proper names across languages (p.e. pejorative meanings in Mexican Spanish).
- We have identified a (syntactic, pregrammatical) domain for the generation of the enriched interpretations attributed to semantic expletives.

5. Summary

- We have shown that DefArt+PropNames express affective proximity.
- We adopt the proposal that the definite article in this construction is a semantic expletive.
- We propose that affective proximity arises by virtue of DefArt+PropNames interplaying with the interactional spine, in particular, by means of relating the speaker's mental state with the propositional content of the construction (the referent holding the proper name) throughout the positive valuing of the [*ucoin*] heading the *Ground*_{Spkr.P}.

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