

## Measure Phrases, superlatives and $\phi$ -feature mismatch in Spanish

**1. Romance Superlatives.** Romance superlatives are expressed by a definite determiner and the comparative morpheme “more”. The superlative DP generally shows  $\phi$ -feature concord: [NP<sub>[ $\alpha$ ]</sub> D<sub>[ $\alpha$ ]</sub> ADJ<sub>[ $\alpha$ ]</sub>]. This pattern is shown in (1) with data from Spanish (the same occurs in Romanian, French and Italian, i.e. Croitor and Giurgea 2016; Loccioni 2018).

- (1) [la niñ-a]<sub>NP</sub> es [la]<sub>D</sub> más [maj-a]<sub>ADJ</sub> (SP)  
The.F.SG child-F.SG is the.F.SG more nice-F.SG

‘The girl is the nicest’

There is a subset of cases in which  $\phi$ -features on the ADJ are preserved but the D is invariable. Only ADJ and NP agree: [NP<sub>[ $\alpha$ ]</sub> D<sub>[ $\beta$ ]</sub> ADJ<sub>[ $\alpha$ ]</sub>]. These are Modal Superlatives (MS), i.e. *the A-est possible* (Larson 2000; Romero 2013; Mendia 2017; Loccioni 2018, 2019). In SP, the definite neuter *lo* is used (2). **However, only Spanish allows for the mismatch between the ADJ and the NP (3a):** [NP<sub>[ $\alpha$ ]</sub> D<sub>[ $\beta$ ]</sub> ADJ<sub>[ $\gamma$ ]</sub>]. In other Romance, i.e. Italian, this configuration is ruled out: (3b).

- (2) La niñ-a está **lo** más maj-a posible (SP)  
The.F.SG child-F.SG is<sub>estar</sub> the.NT more nice-F.SG possible

‘The girl is the nicest possible’ or ‘The girl is as nice as possible’

- (3) a. La niñ-a { es/ \*está } **lo** más maj-**o** del pueblo (SP)  
The.F.SG child-F.SG is<sub>ser</sub> is<sub>estar</sub> the.NT more nice-M.SG of.the town  
b. \*La ragazz-a è **il** più carin-**o** della città (IT)  
The.F.SG child-F.SG is the.M.SG more nice-M.SG of.the city

‘The girl is the nicest person in the whole town’

**I argue that Non-Agreeing Superlatives (NAS) are MP-partitives: [*lo* SUP Adj] is a Measure Phrase (MP) with a *de*-PP adjoined. I further show that NAS have a nominal distribution.**

**2. NAS vs. MS.** Unlike MS, the adjective in NAS does not agree in  $\phi$  with the subject of predication (3a). Also, while MS are compatible with copula *estar* (2), NAS are not (3a). This follows if MS are adjectival (Loccioni 2019) but NAS are nominal: \*[*estar* NP] (Roy 2006). Crucially, adding the modal adjective *possible* to (3a) results in ungrammaticality (4). Lastly, while MS do not license NPIs in the comparison class (Loccioni 2018), NAS do (5). NPIs in superlatives can only be licensed by a definite D (Herdan and Sharvit 2006): NAS involve a definite D, but MS do not.

- (4) \*La niñ-a es **lo** más maj-**o** posible del pueblo

- (5) Ella es **lo** más { \*list-a/ list-**o** } que hemos conocido ninguno  
she is the.NT more smart-F.SG smart-M.SG that have.1PL met any

‘The girl is the smartest person that any of us has ever met’ (NANS  $\rightarrow$  NPIs)

**3. NAS as MP-partitives.** NAS pattern like both partitives (*3 metros de NP* ‘3 meters of NP’) and [MP+*de*+A/NP] (*3 metros de largo/largura* ‘3 meters of long/lenght’). NAS are compatible with strong pronouns inside the *de*-PP, are not islands for extraction and [*lo* SUP Adj] can be A-bar moved (6). The same is shown for partitives (7) and [MP+*de*+A/NP] (8).

- (6) a. **lo** más bonit-**o** de es-as b. [De la carta]<sub>1</sub>, leí [**lo** más bonit-**o** t<sub>1</sub>]  
the.NT more pretty-M.SG of that-F.PL of the letter read the.NT more pretty-M.SG  
‘The prettiest of these.F’ ‘The letter, I read the prettiest (part) of’

- c. [**lo** mas bonit-**o**]<sub>1</sub>, leí [t<sub>1</sub> de la carta]  
the.NT more pretty-M.SG read of the.F.SG letter.F.SG

Lit. ‘The prettiest, I read of the letter’ (*The prettiest part of the letter is what I read*)

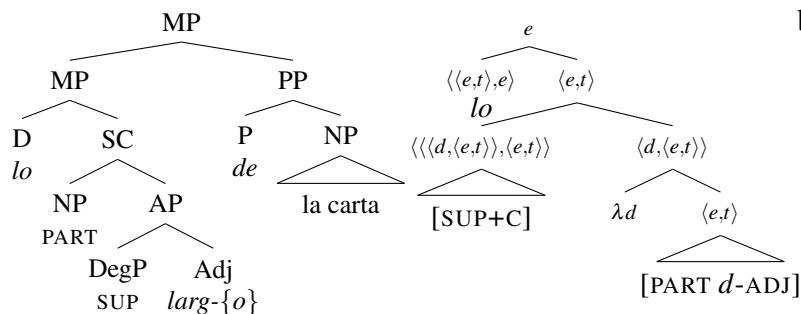
- (7) a. 3 metros de es-as    b. [de cuerdas]<sub>1</sub>, compré [3m t<sub>1</sub>]    c. [3m]<sub>1</sub>, compré [t<sub>1</sub> de cuerdas]  
 3 meters of that-F.PL    of ropes.F    bought 3m    3m    bought    of ropes.F  
 ‘3m of these.F’    ‘ropes, I bought 3m of’    ‘3m, I bought of ropes’
- (8) a. [de largo/ largura]<sub>1</sub>, tiene la mesa [3m t<sub>1</sub>]    b. [3m]<sub>1</sub> tiene la mesa [t<sub>1</sub> de largo/ largura]  
 of long/ length    has the table 3m    3m    has the table    of long/ length

Lit. ‘Long, the table is 3m’ (*the table is 3m long*)    Lit. ‘3m, the table is long’

**4.Syntax.** I propose that the [*lo* SUP Adj] is an MP that takes the *de*-PP as an adjunct as in (9) (cf. Eguren & Pastor 2014; Bhatt and Homer 2019): the MP is a small clause (SC) containing a null NP subject PART and the AP as predicate. The null N is supported by agreement: when the measure N is singular/null, agreement on the verb is singular. But when it is plural, *tres metros*, so is agreement. Lack of  $\phi$  is the result of failure to Agree (Preminger 2014): D searches for a goal but can only find the underspecified N<sub>PART</sub>. Though failed Agree does not lead to a crash,  $\phi$ -concord does not spread to the Adj: {-o} on the A and D as *lo* are spelled-out by default at PF.

**5.Semantics.** SUP takes the comparison class (Heim 1999), and then QRs leaving a type-*d* variable to combine with the gradable adjective ( $\langle d, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$ ). QR creates a  $\lambda$ -abstract that binds that degree variable. *lo* performs a maximalization function (Gutiérrez-Rexach 1999). The derivation is provided in (10). *de* is a partitive preposition  $\langle e, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$  (Pancheva 2006): it takes a definite description and combines with the MP.

- (9) NAS/partitives syntax    (10) MP semantics    (11) a.  $\llbracket \text{de}_{\text{part}} \rrbracket = \lambda x. \lambda y [y \sqsubseteq x]$   
 b.  $\llbracket lo \rrbracket = \lambda P_{\langle e, t \rangle}. \text{MAX}[.P(x)]$



- (12)  $\llbracket (10) \rrbracket =$  “the unique *x* such that  $x \in \text{PART}$  & such that *x* is more ADJ than any  $y \in \text{PART}$ ”.

**6.Other Romance.** The ungrammaticality of NAS correlates in other Romance languages with the impossibility to express [MP+*de*+A] as Spanish (8). First of all, these languages have a bare adjective followed by an MP (Italian (13)) or a [A+*de*+MP] created via predicate inversion (French (14), cf. Corver 2009). Second, Spanish NAS and MP-partitives behave as nominals – i.e. incompatibility with *estar* (2) and compatibility with *tener* ‘have’, which cannot combine with AP. This is not the case in Italian (13) and French (14). Third, A-bar extraction of the MP or subextraction from it are unacceptable (see Eguren & Pastor 2014). The acceptability of NAS is the result of the positive setting of a parameter governing the expression of MPs: [ $\pm$  MP+*de*+A].

- (13) \* Questo tavolo ha largo un metro    (14) \* Cette table a large d’un mètre  
 this table has wide one meter    this table has wide of one meter

‘This table has one 1m wide’ (IT)    ‘This table has 1m wide’ (FR)

**7.Outlook.** The proposal has implications for our understanding of partitives and MPs in Spanish, and Romance more generally. It also provides novel evidence for a uniform analysis of neuter MPs and other MP constructions in the language. The nominal distribution of NAS challenges Loccioni’s (2018) generalization that a non-agreeing D (e.g. *lo*) in superlatives entails the lack of a nominal layer. This bodes well with the prediction that DP-internal readings of superlatives (Pancheva and Tomaszewicz 2012) are ruled out across Romance.