

## A [person] restriction on the Definiteness Effect in Spanish

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There is a long standing tradition that the Definiteness Effect (DE, Milsark 1974) should receive a purely semantic/pragmatic explanation (Zucchi 1995, McNally 1997, Keenan 2003, among several others). Additionally, for some researchers (for instance, McNally 1997), an account of the DE should include an explanation for the list-readings that we find with specific nominals inside existential sentences (1b). McNally 1997 explains them in a uniform way. According to her, the DE arises from the requirement of a novel discourse referent to support the truth of the existential assertion; however, this requirement can be overridden if the existential sentence is presupposed to be true. This is established in condition (i)=(McNally 1997: (327)):

- (i) If an existential sentence is presupposed to be true in the context in which is uttered, its re-introduction into the context is not accompanied by the instantiation of any discourse referent.

Condition (i) correctly predicts list-reading sentences like (1b) in the right context (generally after questions, with raising intonation, with no prepositional phrase—Milsark 1974, Rando and Napoli 1978, Safir 1985, Hannay 1985, Abbot 1992, McNally 1997, among others). However Spanish do not accept sentences like (1b), with the verb *haber*, which is the verb used in Existential Construction (**EC**)—cf. (2a) and (2b). Sentences like (2b) do not have a list-reading, they are plainly ungrammatical. This is a potential problem for (i).

I contend, however, that the reason for the ungrammaticality of (2b) is syntactic, and that Condition (i) can be maintained. The internal nominal of *haber*-sentences receives accusative case, as can be shown by the cliticization in (3), which means that Spanish EC with *haber* have a small *vP*, which Case-checks the nominal. I propose that the small *v* in Spanish has only [number] and no [person]. This predicts a ban on nominals with [person] in Spanish EC, given Chomsky's 2000 suggestion that only complete probes can value the [case] feature of the goal. The underlying assumption is that only nominals that are both specific and animate are marked with [person], that is, [1p], [2p] and some [3p] nominals: they are precisely the nominals banned from *haber*-sentences (4). Thus, the ungrammaticality of (2b) comes from the fact that *Juan* cannot value its Case.

This account predicts that nominals that are not marked with [person], although unacceptable in purely existential sentences (5), will produce list-readings in other Spanish *haber*-sentences. The prediction is borne out (6)—see also Suñer 1982 for several other examples taken from text corpora. Interestingly, it is possible to obtain a list-reading with [person] nominals if we change the verb *haber* to *estar* (7). The verb *estar* is the non-expletive counterpart of *haber* (as we can see in (9)) and both can be translated with “to be”. However, with *estar*, the nominal cannot be cliticized (10), which means that there is no *vP* (or it does not have  $\phi$ -features); therefore, the nominal must value its Case by agreeing with T. In the right context, Condition (i) can apply, giving rise to list-readings as in (7).

A remaining problem is why (2) cannot be rescued by using the preposition A (8a), as any specific and animate object in Spanish (8b) (Differential Object Marking). But this is, in fact, evidence in favor of the analysis, if we assume that with all transitive verbs in Spanish the small *v* has only [number] and no [person]. In this way, no [person] nominal would be allowed to value its Case against small *v*. Under Bošković's 2005 version of the phase, if a nominal cannot check its Case inside *vP*, it must move out to avoid being spell-out with an unvalued feature, creating a new specifier of *vP* to escape. We can assume that this is what happens in Spanish: [person] nominals move throughout [Spec, *vP*] to an additional head, which gives them Dative Case (so we explain the A). This is not available in *haber*-sentences because they have no external argument—they are subjectless (Suñer 1982)—therefore it is unable to have specifiers to be used as escape-hutch. This means that the incompleteness of small *v* is not a marginal aspect of *haber*-sentences, but a core property of Spanish *vP*.

- (1) a. —Is there any taxi driver in this town?  
 b. —Well, there is John.
- (2) a. —Hay algún taxista en este pueblo?  
 Is there any taxi driver in this town?  
 b. —\* Bueno, hay Juan  
 Well, there is John.
- (3) a. Hay dos hombres en la fiesta  
 is-there two men in the party  
 There are two men in the party  
 b. Los hay  
 CL-PLU-ACC is-there
- (4) a. Lo/La había en la habitación  
 CL-MAS/CL-FEM had in the room  
 b. \*Me/\*Te/\*Nos había en la habitación  
 Me/Te/Us had in the room  
 There was me/you/us in the room
- (5) \* Hay la piscina en este hotel
- (6) a. —Hay algo que hacer en este hotel?  
 Is there something to do in this hotel?  
 b. —Bueno, hay la piscina.  
 Well, there is the pool.
- (7) a. —Hay algún taxista en este pueblo?  
 Is there any taxi driver in this town?  
 b. —Bueno, está Juan  
 Well, is John.  
 Well, there is John
- (8) a. \* Bueno, hay a Juan  
 Well, there is to John  
 b. María besó a Juan  
 Mary kissed to John  
 Mary kissed John
- (9) a. Hay dos hombres en la fiesta  
 is-there two men in the party  
 There are two men in the party  
 b. Dos hombres están en la fiesta  
 two men are in the party  
 Two men are in the party
- (10) a. Dos hombres están en la fiesta  
 two men are in the party  
 Two men are in the party  
 b. \* Los están  
 CL-PLU-ACC are

## References

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