DEFINITE, EXPLETIVE AND SILENT ARTICLES: [+REF] ELEMENTS HEADING THE DP

Inma Taboada

University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)

1. Introduction: Definite *vs.* Expletive Articles

When we think of a definite article, we usually think of the form *el/la* in Spanish, *the* in English, *le/la* in French. However, these forms can be either definite articles or expletive articles. Traditional grammars of Spanish (R.A.E. 1973, Alarcos Llorach 1994) only mention definite articles, and they define them as just a feature holder. They claim that the definite article determines the noun in the sense that it carries the gender and number morphemes, and they have to match with those present in the noun. This definition works perfectly for expletive articles. However, they do not mention the fact that sometimes this definite article specifies the noun; it limits the scope of the noun. This would be the main difference between definite and expletive.

Abney (1986, 1987) claims that determiners are functional elements since they fulfil all the features he uses to describe functional elements:

1. they belong to a **closed class** (*el/la/los/las* in Spanish, *the* in English, *-a* in Basque);
2. they are **morphologically dependent** on the noun they accompany

    (1) a. l'amie   b. lagun*a*
             the-friend   friend-the

3. they **allow only one complement**

    (2) a. el cigarro y la pipa   b. *el cigarro y   pipa
            the cigarette and the pipe   the cigarette and pipe

4. they are **inseparable from their complements**

    (3) a. LA MANTEQUILLA puse en la nevera
            the butter   put in the fridge
            'THE BUTTER I put in the fridge'
        b. *MANTEQUILLA puse la en la nevera
             butter   put the in the fridge
            '*BUTTER I put the in the fridge'

5. they have **no semantic meaning,** they lack descriptive meaning since they mark grammatical or relational features, rather than picking out a class of objects.

(4) a. me gusta el   café   b. *me gusta café
         me like   the coffee   me like   coffee
         'I like the coffee/I like coffee'   'I like coffee'

According to Abney, and especially to this last feature, determiners can spell-out the definiteness of the NP they are heading, but they may also be present in a DP with non-specific interpretation, just as an expletive element which needs to be present in the sentence when a bare NP is not grammatically allowed, as in (4b).

Bernstein (1991b) points out that there exist two types of nominal head movement inside the Romance DP. The first one corresponds to Rumanian DPs (Dobrovie-Sorin 1987), where the noun syntactically adjoins to the left of the determiner, because the article is enclitic to the noun:

(5)   băiat-ul
        boy the

The second case of syntactic and LF N-to-D movement has been proposed by Longobardi (1990). This second type of movement is the one that allows the noun to assume its referential function, the one concerning word order relationships among adjectives, internal and external arguments, and nouns. In their way towards D°, nouns need some intermediate landing sites where they can check different features. This is a third type of movement proposed in Cinque (1994), where a syntactic N-movement is forced by the checking of strong morphological features of the noun, such as Number or Gender, overtly present in the different Romance languages. Departing from this point, many authors have proposed several functional projections to the structure. Mallén (1989, 1990a, 1990b) argues for a QP/Nominal INFL Phrase; Bernstein (1991b, 1992, 1993), for a Number Phrase, and Bernstein (1993) for a Word Marker Phrase (WMP); Picallo (1991), for a NumP and Gender Phrase; Valois (1991a), for NumP and Case Phrase; Delfitto and Schroten (1991) and Cinque (1994), for an Agreement Phrase (AGRP), and Ishikawa (1997) for an Affix Phrase.

2. The silent article *art*

2.1. Bare NPs

In Spanish, as well as in other Romance languages, we can find bare NPs in several positions. This would not be a rare case if these bare NPs appeared in non-argument positions, such as appositions or vocatives (6-7), since NPs in argument positions must check a [R(eferential)] feature with D° in the derivation (Longobardi 1990, 1994); nonetheless, we will see that we can also find bare NPs in argument positions (8-9):

(6)   Ecuador, equipo revelación de la   temporada, pasó   a la   segunda ronda
        Ecuador team   revelation of the season   passed to the second   round

(7) Dime, reina, ¿dónde vamos?
     tell-me queen where go
     'Tell me, sweetie, where are we going?'

(8) Ayer   compré flores
     yesterday bought flowers
     'I bought flowers yesterday'

(9) Anoche   llegaron visitantes inesperados
     last night arrived visitors   unexpected
     'Unexpected visitors arrived last night'

We are going to show that this fact depends not only on the position they oc-cupy, but also on the type of noun present in the DP. Chierchia (1998) proposes his Nominal Mapping Parameter,[1] a semantic typology of languages depending on the fact that a language can choose its NPs to denote only kinds, only predicates or either one or the other. Chierchia claims that NPs denote predicates of type <e,t>, whereas DPs denote arguments of type <e>; therefore, an NP must be embedded in a DP in order to occupy an argument position. Nevertheless, as we have already mentioned, it is the language that chooses what its NPs denote. The typology is as follows:

(10) Nominal Mapping Parameter:
      a. [+arg., –pred.] (e.g. Chinese)
           i. generalized bare arguments
           ii. all nouns are mass nouns
           iii. no plural morphology
           iv. generalized classifier system
      b. [–arg. +pred] (e.g. French)
           i. no bare nominals in argument position
           ii. count and mass nouns
           iii. morphological plural
      c. [+arg., +pred.] (e.g. English)
           i. bare mass nouns and plural count nouns in argument position
           ii. no bare singular count nouns in argument position
           iii. plural morphology
      d. [–arg. –pred.] (do not exist)

Paying attention to Chierchia's Nominal Mapping Parameter, we find that Span-ish, like English, belongs to group C, [+arg., +pred.], although we will see that they vary in their distribution, as we have already mentioned, depending on their position in the sentence and on the type of noun.

---

[1] For a complete discussion against Chierchia's Nominal Mapping Parameter see Munn and Sch-mitt (1999a, 1999b). They present evidence against this classification for Brazilian Portuguese.

2.2. Types of nouns

We need to distinguish first between proper and common nouns. The first difference between them is that, in Spanish, as in many other Romance languages[2] proper nouns do not need a determiner; in Longobardi's (1990, 1994) terms, they are referential in themselves, this is, they can check the feature [R] present in Dº by raising to this position, without the necessity of an article. On the other hand, common nouns are not referential in general, although we must make another distinction here: mass nouns and plural count nouns vs. singular count nouns.

(11) a. He   visto Bilbao
         have seen Bilbao
         'I've seen Bilbao'

     b. He   comprado leche
        have bought   milk
        'I've bought mik'

     c. *He   comprado lápiz
         have bought   pencil
         '*I've bought pencil'

     d. He   comprado lápices
        have bought   pencils
        'I've bought pencils'

As we can see in these examples, the only noun that cannot appear without a determiner is the singular count noun in (11c). All the others are able to check their referentiality without needing the presence of the article or any other determiner. Traditional grammars (R.A.E. 1973, Abad Nebot 1977, Alonso 1982, Alarcos Llorach 1984, Gili Gaya 1985) usually comment on the fact that singular nouns without determiners represent classes, but they do not refer to individual entities. We can translate this into Longobardi's (1990, 1994) terms, by saying that the Nº position refers to universal concepts, whereas the Dº position determines the particular designation of the whole DP delimiting the broad reference made by the noun. This last claim implies that the Dº position possesses a [R] feature that must be checked in all DP arguments. According to Longobardi (1990, 1994) proper nouns are [+R] in Italian, therefore they must raise to Dº in order to check this feature; nonetheless, common nouns are [–R], they do not need to move, or they cannot move, to check [R], thus, the article is needed on the derivation.

Following Longobardi (1990, 1994), we can consider that, in Spanish as well as in Italian, proper nouns contain the [R] feature, and, since it is a strong [+R], it triggers the movement of the proper noun to Dº:
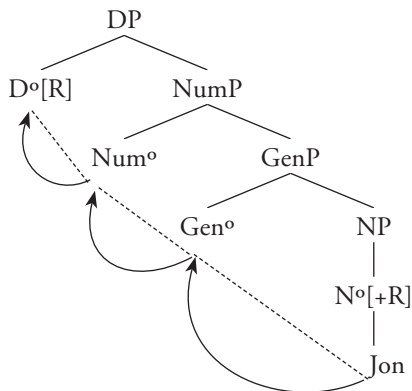
---

[2] We can find some counterexamples like Catalan, since although it is a Romance language, in Catalan the use of the article with person proper nouns is obligatory, which in these terms would mean that proper nouns in Catalan do not contain the [+R] feature, therefore they cannot check the [R] feature present in Dº:

i. va   arribar el Joan   (Catalan)
   past arrive   the Joan
   'Joan arrived'

Some other counterexamples are some dialects of Spanish, as well as some dialects of Portuguese and Galician:

i. llegó el Juan   (Spanish)   ii. chegou o   Xan   (Galician)
   arrived the Juan   arrived the Xan
   'Juan arrived'   'Xan arrived'

(12) Proper noun:

```
                        DP
                      /    \
              Do[R]        NumP
               ↑↺          /    \
                    Numo        GenP
                     ↑↺         /    \
                         Geno        NP
                          ↑↺          |
                              No[+R]
                                 |
                                Jon
```

As we have seen in examples (11b) and (11d), mass nouns and plural count nouns seem to behave exactly like proper nouns. They can appear as bare NPs. However, there exists a crucial difference between proper nouns and these common nouns: definiteness. Proper nouns are definite by definition, whereas bare common nouns, as we have already said following traditional grammars, represent classes, but they cannot refer to individual entities. This can be considered a reason for singular count nouns to be unable to appear without a determiner heading them. We have to notice that if the definite article is present together with the mass noun or the plural count noun, the DP will be definite, and they will refer to a determined quantity in the case of mass nouns, as we can see if we compare examples a and b in (13) or to a determined group of items in the case of plural count nouns, as shown in examples (14 a&b):[3]

(13) a. He comprado leche   b. He comprado la leche
        have bought   milk   have bought   the milk
        'I've bought milk'   'I've bought the milk'

(14) a. He comprado flores   b. He comprado las flores
        have bought   flowers   have bought   the flowers
   'I've bought flowers'   'I've bought the flowers'

2.3. The silent article *art*

Now, we can consider two different structures for bare mass or plural NPs; first, we can think that, since they look like proper nouns, they can contain the same [R] feature:

---

[3] Note that I am only using direct objects in these examples. The argument position they occur in is important, therefore I will devote future sections to the analysis of bare NPs in subject position.

(15)
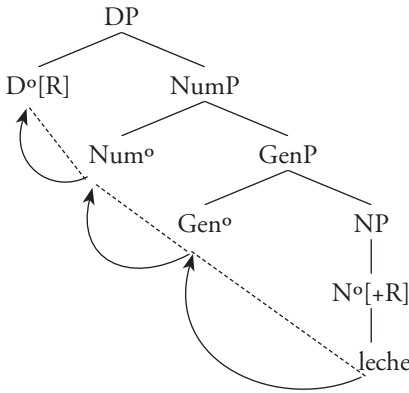
Nevertheless, this referentiality, understood in Longobardi's terms (1990, 1994), must be some kind of definiteness; thus, since these mass and plural count nouns always have an indefinite sense, they cannot check [R] in Dº. We can now consider the second option we have. All bare common nouns are indefinite, this is [–R], by definition, despite their distribution in the sentence. Therefore, there must exist some element that checks the [R] feature present in Dº in the derivation. I argue that this element is the silent article *art* which will check [R], which must be present in order for the derivation to converge:
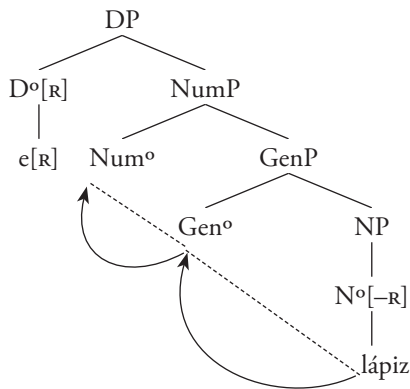
(16)
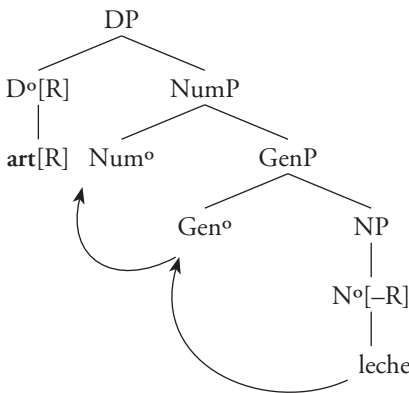
If we assume the existence of this silent article *art* we can explain the existence of bare NPs in Spanish and some other languages, such as English, although, their distribution in the sentence is different.

Therefore, the existence of this silent article allows us to unify the structure of DPs in argument positions containing common nouns in Spanish, which can never appear without an article, either silent or visible, since now we can easily account for the structure of complete definite DPs:

(17)

```
                    DP
              ┌──────┴──────┐
          D°[ʀ]          NumP
            │         ┌────┴────┐
          e[ʀ]     Num°       GenP
                          ┌─────┴─────┐
                        Gen°          NP
                                       │
                                     N°[−ʀ]
                                       │
                                     lápiz
```

2.4. Proper nouns

Longobardi (1994) claims that proper nouns are referential in nature; thus, they do not need any overt article in order to check the [Ref] feature present in the DP, they can raise themselves to D° in order to check it. Nevertheless, with this approach, we can say that in languages such as Italian or standard Spanish, the silent article *art* is present and this is the element that checks their referentiality. However, in other languages such as Catalan, Portuguese, and some dialects of Spanish, we can find the expletive article.

3. Conclusion

As we have seen in these sections, I argue for the necessity of an article in every DP, therefore I argue for the existence of three different types of articles. First, we have seen that there exists an expletive article which appears in the DP in languages such as Spanish, with singular count nouns in argument position, although it does not need to check definiteness, only referentiality.[4] Secondly, we have seen that the silent article *art* must be present in DPs with mass nouns and plural count nouns when they have an indefinite interpretation, since, although indefinite, they must check their [+Referential] feature. And finally, we have the traditional definite article, the article that really checks both definiteness and referentiality, and it can appear with mass and count nouns, as we can see in table (18):

(18)

	XXX-features	Definiteness [± Def]	Referentiality [± R]
Definite	✓	✓	✓
Expletive	✓	—	✓
Silent *art*	✓	—	✓

---

[4] This is the type of article present in DPs with proper nouns in Catalan.

4. References

Abad Nebot, F., 1977, *El artículo: sistema y usos*. Madrid, Aravaca.

Abney, S., 1986, «Functional Elements and Licensing», *GLOW Newsletter* 18.

—, 1987, *The English Noun Phrase in its Sentential Aspect.* Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Alarcos Llorach, E., 1984, *Estudios de gramática funcional del español*. Madrid, Gredos.

—, 1994, *Gramática de la lengua española*. Madrid, Espasa-Calpe.

Alonso, A., 1982, *Estudios lingüísticos: temas españoles*. Madrid, Gredos.

Bernstein, J., 1991b, «DPs in French and Walloon: Evidence for Parametric Variation in Nominal Head Movement», *Probus* 3(2), 101-126.

—, 1992, *On the Syntactic Status of Adjectives in Romance*. Annual LSA Meeting, Philadelphia.

—, 1993, *Topics in the Syntax of Nominal Structure across Romance.* New York, CUNY.

Cinque, G., 1994, «On Evidence for Partial N-Movement in the Romance DP», *Paths Towards Universal Grammar*. J. K. Guglielmo Cinque, Jean-Yves Pollock, Luigi Rizzi and Raffaella Zanuttini. Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press**:** 85-110.

Chierchia, G., 1998, «Reference to Kinds across Languages», *Natural* Language *Semantics* 6, 339-405.

Delfitto, D. and J. Schroten, 1991, «Bare Plurals and the Number Affix in DP», *Probus* 3(2), 155-185.

Dobrovie-Sorin, C., 1987, «A propos de la structure du groupe nominal en Roumain», *Rivista di Grammatica Generativa* 12, 123-152.

Gili Gaya, S., 1985, *Curso superior de sintaxis española*. Barcelona, Biblograf.

Ishikawa, M., 1997, «Feature Checking, Chain Linking, and the Distribution of Noun Phrases in Spanish», *Hispania* 80(3), 556-68.

Longobardi, G., 1990, *N-Movement in the Syntax and in LF.* Università di Venezia.

—, 1994, «Reference and Proper Names: A Theory of N-Movement in Syntax and Logical Form», *Linguistic Inquiry* 25(4), 609-665.

Mallén, E., 1989, *The Internal Structure of Determiner Phrases,* Cornell University.

—, 1990a, «Clitic Movement inside Noun Phrases», *Studia Linguistica* 44, 1-29.

—, 1990b, «Genitive Clitics and Nominal INFL», *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 35(3), 237-263.

Munn, A. and C. Schmitt, 1999a, *Bare Nouns and the Morpho-Syntax of Number*. LSRL 29, University of Michigan.

— and —, 1999b, *Against the Nominal Mapping Parameter: Bare Nouns in Brazilian Portuguese*. NELS 29.

Picallo, C., 1991, «Nominals and Nominalization in Catalan», *Probus* 3(2), 279-316.

R.A.E., 1973, *Esbozo de una nueva gramática de la lengua española*. Madrid, Espasa-Calpe.

Valois, D., 1991, *The Internal Syntax of DP and Adjective Placement in French and English*. NELS 21, GLSA.