15 Indefiniteness and Specificity

MANUEL LEONETTI

1 Introduction

The syntax and the semantics of indefinite noun phrases (henceforth, INPs) have been studied extensively over the last few decades. As a consequence, the grammatical properties of indefinite determiners in Spanish are now much better known than just 50 years ago: a quick look at the contents of the recently published *Nueva gramática de la lengua española* (RAE 2009) shows how much progress has been made with respect to previous grammatical descriptions. With the aim of presenting the most significant advances in our understanding of the grammar of INPs, this chapter deals with three different topics.

Section 2 is devoted to bare nouns (i.e., those nominal expressions lacking a determiner, such as *actriz de teatro* 'theater actress' in *Ella era actriz de teatro* 'She was a theater actress'). The reasons why bare nouns (henceforth, BNs) will be discussed in this chapter are the following: on the one hand, they systematically receive indefinite-like readings in Spanish, as also occurs in the other Romance languages, and, on the other hand, they have been studied with the same basic theoretical tools that are relevant for INPs (scope, semantic types and type-shifting, information structure), and have been traditionally assimilated into the class of indefinite expressions (see Longobardi 2001 for an up-to-date version of the idea). In a few words, the grammar of Spanish BNs is intimately connected to the grammar of INPs, though the two classes of expressions show different properties.

The remaining two topics are as follows. Section 3 includes a brief overview of research on the indefinite article and other indefinite determiners. The discussion is limited to a couple of significant points, given that most of the relevant issues for indefinites are addressed in Chapter 16 of this book. Finally, Section 4 deals with specificity. After a review of different aspects of the *specific/non-specific* distinction, some syntactic phenomena are discussed where specificity has revealed itself to be a key notion for grammatical description.

2   Nouns without determination

The problem of the grammatical behavior of nouns without determination had already been addressed in certain classical works on Spanish grammar (cf. Alonso 1967; Alarcos 1978; Lapesa 1975), but it was only in the 1990s, with the interesting exception of Sánchez de Zavala (1976), that the topic was revisited under the influence of modern approaches to syntax and semantics (see Bosque 1996; Laca 1990, 1996, 1999; and also Dobrovie-Sorin and Laca 2003 for an excellent survey of bare nouns in Romance languages). The main goal of this section is to briefly discuss the most productive contributions of recent research and to summarize what we have learnt from it.

2.1   The semantics of bare nouns

It is usually assumed that BNs, at least in languages with articles and determiners like Romance languages, are property-denoting expressions (see McNally 1995; Laca 1996, 1999; Espinal 2010; Espinal and McNally 2011). Thus, in (1a) *actriz de teatro* denotes the property of being a theater actress, and in (1b) *azúcar* denotes the property of being sugar.

(1)   a.   Ella era actriz de teatro.
           'She was a theater actress.'
      b.   Hace falta azúcar.
           'We need sugar.'

This means that BNs are nonreferring expressions (i.e., they cannot be used to refer to singular or plural individuals). Their semantic type is the same that corresponds to predicative expressions, $<e, t>$. It is the presence of determiners that turns them into referring or quantified expressions. A number of facts relate to this basic feature (see Laca 1996, 1999 for details), as described below.

First, BNs – at least mass singulars and bare plurals – are always grammatical as nominal predicates; as shown in (2a–c), singular count nouns can be predicates when they denote roles, jobs or professional activities, but not otherwise (cf. (2d), from Bosque 1996: 58); see Zamparelli (2008) for an analysis of bare predicate nominals in Romance languages.

(2)   a.   Era *escritor*.
           'He was a writer.'
      b.   La nombraron *reina del carnaval*.
           'They appointed her queen of the carnival.'
      c.   Aspira a *director de orquesta*.
           'He aspires to become a conductor.'
      d.   La mariposa es *(un) *lepidóptero*.
           'The butterfly is a lepidopter.'

Second, being nonreferential and nonquantificational expressions, BNs are "non-delimited" (i.e., unable to denote closed sets of entities). They cannot provide the delimitation or the culmination that telic contexts require, which makes the examples in (3), from RAE (2009: 1148–1149), ungrammatical (though the situation is not the same with bare singular count nouns, for instance in *Encontraron aparcamiento en cinco minutos* 'They found a parking place in five minutes'):

(3) a. *Leyó informes en dos horas. (Cf. Leyó los informes en dos horas)
'S(he) read reports in two hours.'
b. *Una vez pintados cuadros, . . . (Cf. Una vez pintados los cuadros, . . .)
'Once pictures were painted, . . .'

Third, BNs in Spanish are systematically assigned a narrow scope reading, while INPs may take variable scope (wide or narrow) with respect to operators (as already noted in Carlson 1977 for English). In (4), from Laca (1996: 253), the noun *profesores* can be understood only as being under the scope of negation, but not as denoting a number of professors that did not attend the meeting (McNally 1995; Laca 1996, 1999; Bosque 1996).

(4) A la reunión no asistieron profesores.
'The meeting was not attended by any professor.'

This is a classical argument for distinguishing BNs from INPs, as it shows that BNs do not behave like quantified nominals.

Finally, as in other Romance languages – with the interesting exception of Portuguese – BNs in Spanish can only receive existential (weak) readings: they are interpreted as denoting a nonspecified amount of individuals or stuff. Generic readings where a whole class or kind is denoted are, on the contrary, excluded, as shown in (5) (but see Longobardi 2001 for a different point of view).

(5) a. En los océanos se están extinguiendo *(los) tiburones.
'Sharks are becoming extinct in the oceans.'
b. Detestaba *(las) aglomeraciones.
'S(he) hated overcrowding.'
c. *Trajes de neopreno siempre tienen cremalleras.
(cf. Un traje de neopreno siempre tiene cremalleras)
'Wetsuits always have zippers.'

As Dobrovie-Sorin and Laca (2003: 263) rightly point out, the same principle that excludes generic readings for BNs in Spanish must be responsible for the ban against "quasi-universal" or definite interpretations of BNs. In (6) bare plurals cannot be interpreted as denoting the students of a certain university or the farmers in a certain area; however, such definite readings are available for bare plurals in the English versions.

(6) a. Se acerca el fin del semestre. *Estudiantes están agotados.
         'We are reaching the end of the term. Students are exhausted.'
     b. No había llovido en tres meses. *Agricultores estaban inquietos.
         'It hadn't rained for three months. Farmers were worried.'

The contrast with Germanic languages, which allow both existential and generic/definite readings in BNs, has been widely discussed in recent literature (from the pioneering work of Carlson 1977 to Longobardi 2001 and Dobrovie-Sorin and Laca 2003). Carlson's original proposal for English assumes that BNs are to be analyzed as names of kinds, but the idea cannot be extended to Romance languages in view of the constraint against generic readings. This favors an alternative unified account of Romance BNs in terms of property denotation, if we accept that existential readings are the natural output of the inferential operation of existential closure on property-denoting nominals. An adequate explanation is still needed for the Romance–Germanic contrast, but such an issue falls beyond the limits of this chapter.

2.2   *Semantic incorporation*

If BNs denote properties in Spanish, their occurrence in argument positions calls for a mode of semantic composition that should be different from the canonical operation of saturation, as property-denoting expressions would not be able to saturate argument slots. McNally (1995) and van Geenhoven (1998) claim that a special mechanism of *semantic incorporation* is needed. The basic intuition here is that, at some level of semantic representation, BNs are fused with the predicate with which they combine to give rise to some sort of complex predicate: they are absorbed or semantically incorporated by the predicate as the restriction of its internal argument, and their existential properties are contributed by the governing predicate. This explains why semantically incorporated nominals do not have quantificational force of their own and show narrow scope with respect to operators and quantifiers. Another way to state this is to claim that the bare nominal counts as a sort of predicate modifier or qualifier. There are different proposals on how to define semantic incorporation (or pseudo-incorporation) (cf. Farkas and de Swart 2003). In any case, it is certainly useful to assume that some notion of semantic incorporation can play a prominent role in any account of BNs in Spanish.

Semantic incorporation explains how BNs combine with basic predicates and why they are neither referential nor quantificational expressions. In addition, it can be related to a widely acknowledged property of BNs, in particular bare count singulars: they can be used as complements of verbs and prepositions if they yield "appropriately classificatory" predicates, i.e., predicates denoting culturally stable, frequent, stereotypical types of events (see Bosque 1996: 43–45 and de Swart and Zwarts 2009 for the widespread correlation between BNs and stereotypical meanings). In Espinal's and McNally's (2011) terms, the resulting

predicate has to denote a "characterizing property" of the subject, not necessarily prototypical or institutionalized; a property is characterizing if it is sufficiently relevant in a context to distinguish individuals that have the property from individuals that do not. Thus, the examples in (7), from Espinal and McNally (2011), obey this condition, while the examples in (8) do not contain typical characterizing properties and are odd (but notice that acceptability judgments are strongly context-dependent: the examples would be fine in a context where carrying a pencil or having some tortilla are considered as characterizing or classificatory properties):

(7) a. Lleva sombrero.
         'S(he) wears a hat.'
     b. Tiene apartamento.
         'S(he) has an apartment.'

(8) a. ?Lleva lápiz.
         '(S)he carries a pencil.'
     b. ?Tiene tortilla.
         '(S)he has a tortilla.'

Stereotypical interpretations, frequently giving rise to idiomatic readings, are salient also in BNs following prepositions, as in (9), and in nominal predicates, as in (10).

(9) *a casa* 'to home'
     en clase 'in class'
     por teléfono 'by phone'
     de permiso 'on leave of absence'
     con cuchara 'with a spoon'
     en barrica de roble 'in oak barrels'
     en prisión 'in jail' (cf. *en la prisión* 'inside the jail,' not necessarily as a prisoner)

(10) *ser modelo* 'to be a (professional) model'
     ser payaso 'to be a (professional) clown' (cf. *ser un payaso*, either identificational or meaning 'to behave like a clown', from Bosque 1996: 67)

This kind of special reading arises in environments where bare singulars are integrated in some predicative expression – a preposition in (9), a verb in (10) – and occur in competition with ordinary nominals. It is reasonable to think of them as interpretive results of semantic incorporation. Cross-linguistic variation in this area is not easy to account for, since we are frequently dealing with idiom formation phenomena. Furthermore, semantic incorporation can shed light on a number of syntactic constraints on BNs, as will be shown below.

2.3   *The distribution of bare nouns*

2.3.1   Constraints on positions   BNs typically exhibit a more limited distribution than full NPs. The main constraint operating on BNs in Spanish concerns preverbal subjects, and was clearly formulated in Suñer (1982: 209) as the *Naked Noun Constraint*. It states that an unmodified BN cannot be a subject in preverbal position. The constraint affects both singular common nouns and plurals, as shown in the examples in (11):

(11)   a.   *Gato estaba durmiendo
        'Cat was sleeping.'
    b.   ??Gatos maullaban en el jardín.
        'Cats were meowing in the garden.'

Bare plurals and mass nouns may appear as postverbal subjects under certain conditions, as in (12):

(12)   a.   En el jardín maullaban gatos.
        'In the garden there were meowing cats.'
    b.   A veces sobraba comida.
        'Sometimes food was left over.'

With nonstative predicates, the constraint can be circumvented: (a) when bare plurals are modified, as in (13); (b) when they are contrastively focused or topicalized, as in (14); and (c) when they are coordinated, as in (15):

(13)   a.   *Gatos hambrientos* maullaban en el jardín.
        'Hungry cats were meowing in the garden.'
    b.   En ocasiones *preguntas curiosas* interrumpen la explicación.
        'Sometimes curious questions interrupt the explanation.'

(14)   a.   GATOS maullaban en el jardín.
        'It was cats that were meowing in the garden.'
    b.   *Gatos* sí entran, en el jardín (pero *perros* normalmente no).
        'Cats enter the garden (but dogs usually do not).'

(15)   Gatos y perros vagaban por el jardín.
    'Cats and dogs were roaming in the garden.'

The data raise at least two basic questions. The first is why unmodified nouns cannot appear in preverbal subject position. The second is how to account in a unified way for other, similar restrictions concerning indirect objects, at least in European Spanish (*Ella prestó su coche a amigos* 'She lent her car to friends'), certain stative verbs that exclude BNs as arguments (*Me gustan naranjas* 'I like oranges'; cf. *Me gustan las naranjas*), and perfective contexts (*Nos comimos paella* 'We ate paella,'

with the clitic *nos*, an 'ethical' dative, acting as a perfective marker; cf. *Comimos paella*), among others. This second question is dealt with in Section 2.3.2.

The first question addresses the motivation for the *Naked Noun Constraint*. Formal syntactic accounts usually attempted to derive the constraint from the general requirement of proper government for empty categories, assuming that BNs are preceded by an empty determiner that cannot be licensed in preverbal subject position. These accounts, however, can hardly be extended to cover other distributional restrictions and are not related to the semantic properties of BNs either. Alternative semantic proposals based on the interaction of BNs with sentential contexts look more promising. One such proposal, originally presented in Suñer (1982) and developed in Laca (1996, 1999) and Dobrovie-Sorin and Laca (2003), relies on the topic nature of preverbal subject position in so-called Null Subject Languages (for instance, Spanish and Italian, where postverbal subjects are always in focus). Assuming that BNs are property-denoting expressions, the classical *Naked Noun Constraint* results from the incompatibility of topic positions – in particular, sentence-internal topics – with nonreferential nominals. Topics usually require nominals with independently established reference, but BNs lack it as they receive their existential import from the predicate. Contrastive and Informative Foci, on the contrary, are perfectly compatible with property-denoting nominals (see Cohen and Erteschik-Shir 2002 for an approach to English bare plurals based on information structure): this explains why the examples in (11) are anomalous, while (12) and (14) are acceptable. However, yet to be explained are the questions of (a) why contrastive topics may admit bare plurals, as in (14b), and (b) why bare singulars obey much stronger constraints than bare plurals: this is a systematic asymmetry, probably due to the fact that the two classes should actually be assigned different semantic types, or even different syntactic structures, due to the crucial role of plural morphology (Farkas and de Swart 2003; Dobrovie-Sorin et al. 2005; Espinal 2010). In any case, the incompatibility of BNs with preverbal subject position follows from their incorporated status: it is well known that incorporation usually involves objects and certain internal subjects (with unaccusative verbs), but not external arguments.

Any valuable account of the constraints on preverbal subjects and indirect objects should be able to explain why the insertion of modifiers – typically restrictive modifiers – can rescue strings that are otherwise unacceptable, as shown by the following contrasts:

(16) a. *Gente no merece consideración.
        'People don't merit consideration.'
     b. Gente así no merece consideración.
        'People like these don't merit consideration.' (RAE 2009: 1151)

(17) a. *Regaló sus muebles a amigos.
        'S(he) gave her/his furniture to friends.'
     b. Regaló sus muebles a amigos que los cuidaran.
        'S(he) gave her/his furniture to friends that could take care of it.'

To explain why modifiers improve the acceptability of BNs, we should get a better understanding of how they contribute to determine information structure and context selection. As for the role of coordination, the grammatical status of (15) is surely due to the fact that coordination counts as a sort of quantificational mechanism.

In sum, the distributional constraints on BNs can be overridden when certain factors appear, such as plural morphology and coordination (acting as forms of quantification), restrictive modifiers, contrastive focus, and more generally the availability of a thetic interpretation for the sentence (in order to keep BNs under the projection of informative focus). At the moment, we lack a satisfactory unified account of all these factors.

2.3.2   Constraints on predicate types   The second question raised above concerns certain lexical classes of predicates. Stative predicates, in particular so-called *individual-level predicates* (see Chapter 22) seem to reject BNs as subjects and objects (Laca 1990; Bosque 1996), as shown in (18):

> (18)   a.   Me gustan *(las) naranjas.
>   'I like oranges.'
>   b.   Adora *(la) música clásica.
>   '(S)he adores classical music.'

An analysis based on semantic incorporation fits nicely with this kind of data: it is well known that individual-level predicates require independently introduced – i.e., topical–subjects (or objects, as in (18b)), thus rejecting incorporated nominals. The problem is how to obtain a precise characterization of the predicates that reject semantic incorporation. It is not entirely clear that the notion of *individual-level predicate* is the right one (see Laca and Dobrovie-Sorin 2003 and Cohen and Erteschik-Shir 2002 for some criticism). Much work is still needed on the relationship between lexical semantics and types of semantic incorporation, although research along the lines of Espinal (2010) and Espinal and McNally (2011) seems to be particularly promising.

3   Indefiniteness

3.1   *The indefinite article*

Most grammatical properties of indefinite determiners in Spanish are shared with the rest of the Romance languages and, generally, with all languages whose determiner system encodes the semantic distinction between definiteness and indefiniteness (in particular, those that possess an indefinite article). The core issues in a description of Spanish are the role of the indefinite article *un* and its plural form *unos*, the existence of epistemic and modal indefinites like *algún* 'some,' and the gradual conversion of a number of adjectives into indefinite determiners (*cierto* 'a

certain,' *otro* 'another,' *bastante* 'enough'). Here I will briefly review some recent contributions to the field (see Chapter 16 for general considerations on indefinite quantifiers).

The indefinite article shows the widest distribution of all indefinites: it can receive specific, non-specific, cardinal and generic readings (Leonetti 1999; RAE 2009: §15), and its meaning is limited to the absence of definiteness (i.e., the absence of a uniqueness/familiarity requirement). A language can be said to have fully developed an indefinite article when an indefinite determiner historically derived from the numeral 'one' is used to express generic readings, as in (19), and occurs in predicative nominals, as in (20):

(19) *(Una) persona educada sabe disculparse.
      'An educated person knows how to apologize.'

(20) Aquello fue *(un) milagro.
      'That was a miracle.'

Additional evidence that Spanish *un* is no longer exclusively a numeral can be found in contexts where a numerical or purely cardinal interpretation is excluded – unless *un* is focused (examples from RAE 2009: §15.3n):

(21) a. Has tenido una buena idea.
          'You've got a good idea.'
      b. Tengo un terrible resfriado.
          'I have a terrible cold.'

Some Romance languages have developed a partitive article from the preposition *de* 'of' (*del/della/dei/degli/delle* in Italian, *du/de la/des* in French), with an indefinite existential reading. Although there is no partitive article in Spanish, there are instances of a 'bare partitive' construction headed by *de*: as pointed out in Treviño (2010), *de* can give rise to an indefinite nominal when followed by *todo* 'all' or by a definite, as shown in (22):

(22) a. Había   de todo   en esa tienda.
          There was   of everything   in that store
          'There was everything in that store.'
      b. Te traje   del chocolate   que te gusta.
          I brought you   of the chocolate you like
          'I brought you (some of) that chocolate you like.'
      c. Con las lluvias, salieron   de esos animalitos.
          With the rains, got out   of those little animals
          'With the rains, (some of) those little animals got out.'

'Bare partitives' appear only in focus positions, as objects or subjects of unaccusative verbs, and obey syntactic constraints akin to those operating on BNs.

They receive only existential or weak readings, and are always assigned narrow scope.

A striking feature of the Spanish article system is the existence of a plural form of the indefinite article, *unos*. Recently the contrast between *unos* and *algunos* 'some' has been intensively studied (Gutiérrez-Rexach 2001, 2003; López-Palma 2007; Martí 2008, 2009). *Unos* exhibits a number of interesting properties: it cannot occur as a determiner in the subject of an individual-level predicate (cf. 23a)); it participates only in group predication, being excluded with distributive predicates (cf. 23b)); and it is typically non context-dependent and non discourse-linked (cf. 23c), where *unos* is not adequate to express that the sleeping persons are a subset of the set of passengers).

(23) a. En este ayuntamiento, {#unos/algunos} concejales son honestos.
          'In this town council, some councilors are honest.'
     b. {#Unos/Algunos}estudiantes se pusieron los pantalones.
          'Some students put their trousers on.'
     c. Murieron doce pasajeros. {#Unas personas/Algunas personas} estaban durmiendo en el momento del accidente.
          'Twelve passengers died. Some people were sleeping when the accident took place.'

The contrast is actually less stable than one could at first sight assume, and there are contextual factors (contrast, world knowledge, insertion of modifiers) that can blur the difference with respect to *algunos*. However, the data offer a valuable testing ground for hypotheses on how contextual restrictions operate on indefinites. One of the basic intuitions about *unos* is that it seems to reject discourse connections with previously established information: this is why it is usually odd in partitive constructions (#unos de ellos vs. *algunos de ellos* 'some of them'), even with covert partitive readings. An adequate analysis should succeed in connecting such constraints to the fact that *unos* tends to express collective or group interpretations, blocking the access to the atoms that constitute the group.

3.2   Some Spanish indefinite determiners

Many languages exhibit so-called 'epistemic indefinites.' Epistemic indefinites are determiners that trigger modal inferences about the speaker's epistemic state (Tovena and Jayez 2006): some of them signal that the speaker is unable or unwilling to identify a referent (this is the case of Spanish *algún* 'some') (see Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito 2010), some of them indicate that the identification is irrelevant or indifferent (as in 'free choice' indefinites like *cualquier* 'any'), and others signal that the speaker is able to identify the referent (for instance, *cierto* 'a certain'). Recent work on these items usually deals with their semantic contribution in terms of constraints they impose on their domain of quantification. According to Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito (2010), *algún*, for instance, requires that at least two individuals in its domain be possibilities; as a

consequence, it does not tolerate singleton sets. The contrast between *un* and *algún* can be derived from this constraint:

(24) a. Juan compró un libro que resultó ser el más caro de la librería.
          'John bought a book that happened to be the most expensive in the bookshop.'
      b. #Juan compró algún libro que resultó ser el más caro de la librería.
          'John bought some book that happened to be the most expensive in the bookshop.'

With *algún*, the speaker indicates that any individual in the domain of quantification may be the one that satisfies the existential claim, which is incompatible with the uniqueness imposed by the relative clause in (24a). On the other hand, the indefinite article *un* is fine in (24b) because it does not impose specific conditions on its domain and can combine with a singleton set. The unmarked nature of *un* explains the variety of readings it can be assigned.

So-called 'specific indefinites' trigger different constraints. *Cierto* 'a certain' conveys the assumption that someone is able to identify the referent of the INP but, being indefinite, it communicates also that the hearer may not possess the information needed for such a task. As claimed in Eguren and Sánchez (2007), *cierto* is an "imprecise" identifier: it can be adequate both when the speaker is unable to fully identify a specific referent, and when (s)he is able to do it, but unwilling to be more informative, and even when the referent is known to speaker and hearer, but the speaker wants to avoid a more precise mention. A sentence like (25) could be used in all three cases. Thus, *cierto* cannot be said to encode epistemic specificity (see Section 4.1), but just some kind of identifiability.

(25) Supo que cierto colega le había mentido.
      '(S)he knew that a certain colleague had lied.'

Cierto is originally an adjective, and nowadays it behaves as an indefinite determiner in some cases and still as an adjective in others (cf. *una cosa cierta* 'a true thing'). The same gradual conversion from adjective to determiner has been observed in words like *otro* 'another,' *varios* 'several,' *bastante* 'enough,' *demasiado* 'too much,' *numerosos* 'manifold,' *determinados* 'determinate,' *diferentes* 'different' (the case of *otro* has been carefully studied in Eguren and Sánchez 2003). The process has not reached the final stage in every case: some of these elements can be used as pronominals and can head partitive constructions, thus behaving like proper indefinite determiners (for instance, *otro* and *varios*), while some others cannot (*cierto* and *numerosos*; cf. **Conozco cierto* 'I know a certain', **cierta de las actrices* 'a certain of the actresses'). The study of this gradual incorporation of quantitative adjectives into the class of determiners can shed new light on what it means to be an indefinite. It is important to recall that several Spanish indefinites – in particular, cardinal numerals and 'vague' indefinites like *muchos* 'many,' *pocos* 'few,' and *demasiados* 'too many' – share a number of grammatical properties with

adjectives: they make natural predicates in copulative sentences, can occur in typically adjectival positions inside NPs (as in *mis tres hermanos* 'my three brothers'), and some of them accept adjectival suffixes (*pocos* 'few' > *poquísimos* 'very few').

4   Specificity

4.1   *The specific/non-specific distinction*

The notion of 'specificity' was first introduced in the 1960s to account for certain cases of logical ambiguities involving INPs and intensional verbs or operators. A sentence like *John wants to marry a Norwegian girl* is usually said to show two different readings: in one of them, the speaker refers to a particular Norwegian girl whose existence is assumed and whose identity can possibly be determined; in the other one, the speaker is not making reference to a particular individual, but just to any potential referent that could satisfy the condition of being a Norwegian girl. The first reading is the specific interpretation, and the second one is a good representative of the non-specific interpretation. A classical way to deal with this ambiguity in formal semantics is to treat it as a scope ambiguity, due to the interaction of the indefinite article with the intensional verb *want*: when the indefinite, treated as a quantifier, has wide scope with respect to the intensional element, the specific reading obtains, and when the relative scope is inverted the reading is non-specific (cf. Quine 1956).

Rivero (1975) introduced the term "specificity" in the domain of Spanish linguistics, and applied the notion to both definite and indefinite NPs, thus showing that it is independent of definiteness. In the minimal pairs in (26a) and (26b), it is the mood on the verb inside the relative clause that marks the two relevant interpretations, as in other Romance languages: the indicative signals that the nominal is specific, and the subjunctive indicates a non-specific interpretation. The mood contrast had already been mentioned in Quine (1956) to distinguish *relational* (specific) and *notional* (non-specific) readings.

(26) a. Me interesa ver una guía que {tiene/tenga} mapas.
          'I am interested in seeing a guide that contains maps.'
      b. Me interesa ver la guía que {tiene/tenga} mapas.
          'I am interested in seeing the guide that contains maps.'

Rivero noticed that the *specific/non-specific* distinction is relevant not only in modal contexts like the one in (26) but in extensional contexts too. In (27), a classical example where the INP *un médico* 'a doctor' cannot interact with the scope of any sentential operator, there is still an ambiguity.

(27) Me lo ha dicho un médico, y yo me lo creo.
      'A doctor told me, and I believe it.'

In fact, in (27) the speaker may want to refer to a particular individual (on the specific construal), or just to indicate what kind of person talked to him/her (on the non-specific reading, much more natural in this context). The ambiguity seems to depend on whether it is the descriptive content of the INP that is salient, or rather it is the speaker's intention to refer to an individual that has a crucial role in the interpretation. At least two problems are raised by examples like (27), as discussed below.

First, in intensional contexts the main difference between the two readings involves existential import, as existential generalization is only guaranteed in the specific interpretation – in (26a), it is licit to infer that there is a guide that the speaker is interested in seeing, but not in (26b); in extensional contexts, on the other hand, the contrast cannot involve existence anymore because existential generalization applies in both readings, and a new characterization of the *specific/non-specific* distinction is called for, introducing the possibility that the distinction is pragmatic rather than semantic.

Second, relative scope cannot be invoked as the logical mechanism underlying the ambiguity in (27). This leaves us with two options: either we keep the original view of specificity as a scope phenomenon – and in such a case (27) must represent something different from specificity – or we include (27) under a broader notion of specificity that has to be redefined. I assume that the second option is the most interesting one. The problem is that there has been no uniform definition of specificity in recent research (see Leonetti 1999; von Heusinger 2001, 2002, 2007; Farkas 2002; Gutiérrez-Rexach 2003 for an overview of the problem).

Farkas (2002) distinguishes three different uses of the term *specificity*: epistemic, scopal, and partitive. Specificity defined as the use of a nominal by the speaker with "a referent in mind" represents the so-called "epistemic" view. According to this, a specific use of an INP is based on the speaker's knowledge or certainty about the referent. This may be true of many specific uses of indefinites, especially in extensional contexts, but it is not a necessary condition for a specific interpretation. Moreover, it is the speaker's intention to refer to a particular individual that should be decisive for specificity, instead of his/her mental state. An epistemic approach, then, is not valid as a general characterization of specificity (but see Gutiérrez-Rexach 2003: §3 for an attempt to offer a formal treatment). Scopal specificity makes reference to a hallmark of specific indefinites: their tendency to take scope over anything else in the sentence. This semantic property is actually independent from epistemic specificity, and again does not cover all cases of alleged specific use. Finally, partitive specificity (as defended in Enç 1991) appears when the referent of an INP is chosen from a contextually given set. It is not equivalent to the other two kinds and cannot work as a general characterization either, since partitive indefinites can be non-specific and have narrow scope; it is, however, quite close to epistemic specificity and definiteness, given that the three notions are finally related to familiarity.

Now the question is whether a unified notion of specificity is available that can capture the family resemblances that connect the three kinds of specific interpretation. A promising approach toward a unified definition can be found in von

Heusinger (2001, 2002, 2007). According to him, specificity indicates that an expression is referentially anchored to another argument expression in the discourse, its referent being functionally dependent on the referent of the other expression.

In any case, the varieties of specific and non-specific readings are contextual side-effects of more basic semantic properties of INPs and cannot support the hypothesis that indefinite determiners are semantically ambiguous. It seems more adequate to maintain a monosemic approach to the semantics of indefinites, together with a view of specificity as a phenomenon that belongs to the semantics–pragmatics interface. As will be clear below, the role of syntax is limited to constraining the inferential specification of the optimal reading for INPs.

4.2   Specificity-related phenomena

Ways of marking specificity in the grammar are usually classified in two groups: NP-internal, and NP-external or contextual (Leonetti 1999; Gutiérrez-Rexach 2003; RAE 2009). Among NP-internal devices, lexical properties of different kinds of determiners play a major role, together with adjective position, mood in relative clauses and Differential Object Marking (DOM). Adjective position and DOM will be treated in Section 4.2.1 and Section 4.2.2, respectively. Lexical properties of determiners have already been mentioned in Section 3.1 and Section 3.2. Though it is essentially correct to claim that *cierto* heads specific INPs, and that negative and free choice indefinites head non-specific INPs, it seems that (non)specificity appears as a side-effect of other basic features in the semantics of determiners (for instance, evidential or epistemic features). We will see that specificity has the status of a derived pragmatic effect in all the contexts mentioned here. As for mood in relative clauses, contrary to Rivero (1975), it is not a systematic way of differentiating specific and non-specific interpretations because relative clauses in indicative mood may occur inside non-specific INPs too (for instance, when assigned a generic reading), and subjunctive is associated with non-specific interpretations only in intensional contexts.

NP-external marks of specificity in Spanish are limited to clitic doubling in direct objects and certain aspects of word order (see Section 4.2.3 and Section 4.2.4, respectively). A general condition that has to be kept in mind in all cases is that specificity effects usually arise when formal marking is optional – and thus meaningful – but are absent when it is obligatorily triggered by some syntactic principle. The following sections discuss grammatical facts where (non)specificity certainly plays a role, but none of them can strictly be considered as devices for encoding specific or non-specific interpretations.

4.2.1   Adjective position   Adjective position works as a NP-internal mark of specificity in Spanish. Picallo (1994) and Bosque (2001) (see also RAE 2009: §13.14k–n, §15.9k) have demonstrated that adjectives in prenominal position inside INPs force specific readings (in the scopal and epistemic senses), while the postnominal

position is compatible with both specific and non-specific readings. In (28), the string *una interesante novela de Delibes* must be specific; the alternative order *una novela interesante de Delibes* is ambiguous.

> (28) Quiero leer {una interesante novela/una novela interesante} de Delibes.
> 'I want to read an interesting novel by Delibes.'

Elative adjectives, like *interesantísimo* 'very interesting', produce the same effects as prenominal adjectives. Both prenominal position and elative meaning preclude a restrictive interpretation of the adjective and force an explicative or appositive one; explicative modifiers operate on referentially autonomous nominals, and this makes the specific reading the only one compatible with the presence of those modifiers. Adjective position is just a trigger for the inferential specification of an optimal interpretation of the INP, and specificity appears as the result of such inferential processes.

4.2.2   Differential object marking   A second type of NP-internal device for specificity marking is Differential Object Marking. It is well known that Spanish uses the preposition *a* for distinguishing marked and unmarked direct objects; other languages resort to case morphology or object agreement. The insertion of *a* before the direct object is triggered by two basic features: animacy and specificity, the first one being the main factor (see Brugè and Brugger 1996; Torrego 1998; von Heusinger and Kaiser 2003; Leonetti 1999, 2004; Bleam 2006; López 2009; RAE 2009 for data). In (29), the object NP is animate, and the *specific/non-specific* distinction correlates with the presence or absence of *a*. Without the preposition, the speaker cannot be referring to a couple of particular nurses.

> (29) Necesitan (a) dos enfermeras.
> 'They need two nurses.'

However, the correlation is obscured by the fact that (29), with *a*, is still ambiguous between a specific and a non-specific reading. Many marked animate objects can receive non-specific readings (for instance, modified bare nominals and negative indefinites like *nadie* 'nobody'). Thus, *a* is not a true specificity marker because its insertion is mainly determined by animacy. Moreover, in certain contexts, Spanish DOM is associated with semantic effects different from specificity, as in (30), where individuation or discourse prominence is involved:

> (30) Estaba dibujando {a una niña/una niña}.
> '(S)he was {portraying/drawing} a child.'

In (30), the marked object refers to a child that exists in the real world, while the unmarked object refers to a child that pertains to the world of the drawing (in this case, the absence of *a* is due to the inanimate nature of the referent). What is the

semantic contribution of DOM, then? This is certainly not an easy question. Some abstract notion must underlie the interpretive facts in (29) and (30): it could be some notion tied to information structure and topicality, or to the affectedness of the object, or, rather, it could be a formal feature that makes object NPs "visible" to certain interpretive operations, as in López (2009: §5). Whatever the semantic role of DOM is, specificity – in any of its senses – seems to be just one of the possible contextual results of such an abstract notion, and it is not systematically correlated with *a*-marking.

4.2.3   Clitic doubling   While adjective position and DOM count as NP-internal marks of specificity, clitic doubling is a NP-external device. Clitic doubling is an important feature in a characterization of the grammar of Spanish clitics (see Chapter 21). While doubling with dative clitics is generalized in any variety of the language and has no semantic effects on the "associate" lexical nominal, doubling with accusative clitics, although strictly limited to pronouns in (standard) European Spanish, extends to other kinds of NPs (mostly definite NPs) in American varieties, and imposes certain semantic constraints on the "associate." It has been noticed since Suñer (1988) that doubling with accusative clitics in American dialects (in particular, the Porteño or Rioplatense variety spoken in Argentina and Uruguay) requires a specific interpretation of the indefinite object. The contrast in (31), from Suñer (1988), shows that clitic doubling is possible with specific INPs, but it is ungrammatical with non-specific INPs such as the one in (31b):

(31)   a.   Diariamente, la escuchaba a una mujer que cantaba tangos.
            'Daily, (s)he listened to a woman who sang tangos.'
        b.   (*La) buscaban a alguien que los ayudara.
            'They were looking for somebody who could help them.'

Doubling with indefinites is actually scarcely attested even in Porteño, but it seems in any case excluded with prototypical non-specific expressions like negative and free choice quantifiers and BNs, which confirms Suñer's claim (see Gutiérrez-Rexach 2000 for a detailed analysis). Similar facts have been noticed in languages like Romanian. The constraint on specificity is absent only in American dialects of Spanish where doubling occurs without gender/number/case agreement between the clitic and the associate – varieties originated in language contact between Spanish and languages like Quechua and Aymara: in such cases, clitics have lost their original features and behave like simple object markers.

Clitic doubling and DOM share important properties: both are sensitive to animacy and definiteness/specificity factors, and both expand along the same diachronic path. This could suggest that the motivation for specificity constraints is again the same in the two phenomena. In Leonetti (2008) the hypothesis is advanced that the motivations are different. As already mentioned in Section 4.2.2, DOM does not encode a requirement for specific objects, but rather imposes some condition of discourse prominence that gives rise to specificity as a side-effect when

object marking is not compulsory, and therefore significant. In clitic doubling, specificity is again a side-effect, this time triggered by the necessary feature matching between the clitic and the associate nominal, as proposed in Suñer (1988). Since clitics are definite, the matching involves definiteness: the clitic imposes upon its associate the requirement of having a uniquely identifiable referent, and moreover, a familiar and discourse-salient one – the same kind of reference that pronominal clitics are assigned. This is why doubling occurs mostly with definite expressions. When indefinites are allowed to enter the doubling construction (as in Porteño), the only way they can obey the matching condition is by means of a specific interpretation, possibly built on a link to previous contextual information. Specificity in clitic doubling, thus, seems to be related to discourse-linking and familiarity.

4.2.4   Fronting constructions   Finally, fronting constructions are another NP-external grammatical device that can be relevant for specificity. One of them, in particular, counts as a marker of non-specific interpretation in Spanish. Quer (2002) first pointed out that there is a productive fronting construction in Spanish that (a) is not to be confused with Clitic Dislocation or Contrastive Focalization (see Chapter 28), and (b) accepts only certain kinds of INPs as fronted elements. He called it *Quantificational Q(uantifier)P(hrase)-Fronting*, and here I will keep using this terminology. The construction is illustrated in (32) and (33). Indefinites like *algo* 'something,' *alguien* 'someone,' *poco* 'few,' *bastante* 'enough,' and *nada* 'nothing' are perfect in QP-Fronting, while definites like *el libro* 'the book' are excluded – unless the construction is used in a context where the propositional content has been already mentioned – and even INPs like *un libro* 'a book' are odd.

(32)   a.   Algo debe saber.
            '(S)he must know something.'
       b.   A alguien encontrarás.
            'You will find someone.'

(33)   a.   #El libro habrá leído.
            '(S)he must have read the book.'
       b.   #Un libro habrá comprado.
            '(S)he must have bought a book.'

The question is why QP-Fronting should represent a 'definiteness constraint' context and why not all indefinites can be preposed. An adequate answer could be based on the fact that QP-Fronting is associated with the absence of an informational partition in the sentence: the fronted constituent is neither a topic nor a narrow focus (cf. Leonetti 2009). The crucial observation is that the set of indefinites that undergo QP-Fronting in a productive way is roughly equivalent to the set of indefinites that cannot be dislocated as topics. Moreover, they are by default non-specific. In fact, specific readings are anomalous in Fronting. An obvious way of connecting the data

seems to be by resorting to information structure: it is the ban against fronted topics in the construction that constrains the kind of nominals that can be preposed, allowing only those that do not involve the individuation of particular referents (i.e., those determiners or interpretations that are incompatible with independently established reference). This explains why most indefinites are acceptable when fronted (with non-specific readings), and at the same time, why the examples in (33) are odd, given that definite and indefinite articles are perfectly able to head topical phrases. According to this, QP-Fronting is not totally equivalent to a "definiteness effect" environment: it is a construction that excludes nominals that can make good candidates for topics, and as a consequence favors the insertion of purely cardinal indefinites with non-specific interpretations.

5   Conclusion

Three main topics have been covered in this chapter. The first is the grammar of bare nouns. An overview has been presented based on well-established assumptions about Spanish BNs: in particular, their behavior as property denoting semantically incorporated expressions, the absence of generic readings, and the constraints on their distribution. The second is the variety of Spanish indefinite determiners: the role of the indefinite article *un* and its plural form *unos*, and the existence of epistemic and modal indefinites like *algún* 'some' have been identified as the most salient features of the system. Finally, the third topic is specificity. After a brief presentation of the notion, some grammatical phenomena related to specificity have been discussed: adjective position, Differential Object Marking, clitic doubling, and fronting constructions. In all of them, specificity seems to appear as a side-effect of the interaction between the semantics of indefinites and the sentential context.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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