

Information structure and the distribution of Spanish bare plurals*

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Suñer's (1982) *Naked Noun Constraint* explains the ban on bare nouns in preverbal subject position in Spanish as the result of the incompatibility between bare nouns and Topic positions. In this paper this proposal is assumed and placed inside a general hypothesis that derives the distributional facts concerning Spanish bare plurals from the interplay of semantic incorporation – the basic licensing mechanism for bare nouns – and information structure. Bare plurals are excluded as preverbal subjects because subjects are topical by default and block semantic incorporation. Bare plurals may occur as dislocated, external topics because in this case the requirement of semantic incorporation is satisfied in a sentence-internal position and contrast is inferred to obtain an adequate address for information update.

1. The Naked Noun Constraint

The constraint against bare nouns in preverbal subject position is no doubt the most important formal condition in the grammar of bare nouns in Spanish and in most Romance languages. Suñer's *Naked Noun Constraint* (1982: 209), reproduced in (1), is the first explicit formulation of the condition for Spanish, and can be taken as the starting point of the following discussion:

- (1) An unmodified common noun in preverbal position cannot be the surface subject of a sentence under conditions of normal stress and intonation.

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The *Naked Noun Constraint* (from now on, NNC) rightly excludes examples like (2) and (3), usually considered ungrammatical sentences in Spanish:

- (2) **Niños jugaban en la calle.*
 Children play-PST-3PL in the street
 ‘Children were playing in the street’
- (3) **Turistas llegaron a la ciudad.*
 Tourists arrive-PST-3PL to the city
 ‘Tourists arrived in the city.’

Interestingly, Suñer’s formulation of the NNC mentions some factors that are related to information structure, namely “conditions of normal stress and intonation”. This is important for the generalization to hold, since it is a well known fact that a special intonation contour that marks the preverbal subject as contrastive Focus (cf. (4a)) or as a dislocated Topic (cf. (4b)) can make sentences like (2) or (3) acceptable:¹

- (4) a. *TURISTAS llegaron a la ciudad.*
 Tourists-FOC arrive-PST-3PL to the city
- b. *Turistas, llegaron (pero no demasiados).*
 tourists arrive-PST-3PL (but not too.many)

Thus, an adequate formulation of the NNC has to attribute a significant role to notions like Topic and Focus. Suñer (1982) in fact suggested that information structure – in particular, the topical nature of preverbal subjects in Null Subject languages like Spanish and Italian – was behind all aspects of the constraint. I believe that Suñer’s analysis is well grounded, and has revealed itself as being more solid than other alternative proposals based on purely configurational notions. The idea that information structure has crucial effects on the grammar and the interpretation of bare plurals has gained a central place in contemporary research and has been explicitly developed in Cohen and Erteschik-Shir (2002) for English, Salem (2010) for Arabic, and Laca (1990), (1996), Dobrovie-Sorin and Laca (2003) and Laca (this volume) for Romance languages.

In line with such perspective, in this paper I intend to take up and develop Suñer’s proposals on bare plurals in Spanish. My main goal will be to defend the crucial role of the notions Topic and Focus for an account of the NNC. I will also put forward some proposals concerning theoretical issues like (a) to what

1. See Laca (1999), RAE (2009) and Leonetti (2012) for an overview of the constraints on the distribution of Spanish bare nouns. I will not deal with the role of coordination in licensing bare nouns as subjects (see Märzhäuser this volume for discussion).

extent information structure underlies the grammar of bare nouns, and (b) what the place of information structure is with respect to other licensing mechanisms that are relevant for bare nouns.

In what follows I will rely on a number of basic assumptions that have become more or less standard in the recent literature. First, I assume that bare nouns in Spanish are simple NPs (or NumPs, as suggested in Dobrovie-Sorin, Bleam & Espinal 2005 for bare plurals): they are not preceded by an empty determiner. Second, as regards to their semantics, bare nouns are not quantificational expressions, but property-denoting expressions of $\langle e, t \rangle$ type (cf. McNally 1995; van Geenhoven 1998; Laca 1996, this volume, Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; Cohen & Erteschik-Shir 2002; Carlson 2003; Espinal 2009; Espinal & McNally 2011; among others). Thus being predicative expressions, they need a special operation to license their occurrence in argument positions: following the work of the previously mentioned authors, I assume that such operation is *semantic incorporation*, in some of its versions. The idea of semantic incorporation is concerned with the properties of the nominals that “form a particularly tight unit with the predicate they are arguments of...” (Farkas & de Swart 2003:ix). It makes it possible to interpret bare nouns as predicate modifiers or qualifiers, combined with the lexical predicate they depend on as the restriction of one of its arguments. Different approaches to semantic incorporation have been proposed, but a detailed discussion of their consequences for the analysis of bare nouns in Spanish is beyond the scope of this paper. I will remain neutral as to the precise version of semantic incorporation that is best suited for bare plurals in Spanish (see van Geenhoven 1998 and Farkas & de Swart 2003 for two well-known proposals). The relevant point here is that semantic incorporation is, in any case, constrained by syntactic configurations and by information structure: it is banned from certain positions, which explains the constraints on the distribution of bare nouns. The existential reading that characterizes bare plurals – the only one they can receive in Spanish – is a consequence of incorporation as well, as it is the verb, or the relevant lexical predicate, that contributes existential force to the nominal (through an ‘existential type-shift’ operation, in Cohen and Erteschik-Shir’s model). It is widely assumed that true generic (i.e. kind-denoting) readings are impossible in Romance bare nouns² – with the exception of Portuguese. Some extra interpretive

2. Quantificational genericity may give rise to a certain type of generic readings for preverbal bare plurals in Italian, according to Longobardi (2001). Arguments for a presuppositional/generic-like interpretation for bare plurals in Spanish are given in Pérez-Jiménez and Moreno-Quibén (2002) as well, but the crucial data have to do with bare plurals inside the background in focus structure, instead of true presuppositionality, in my view. These issues fall out of the limits of this paper.

device is needed to derive generic readings (a covert type-shift that takes place under strict conditions, according to Cohen & Erteschik-Shir 2002): Spanish lacks such a device, while English makes use of it when bare plurals occur in Topic positions. All in all, the analysis of bare plurals as property-denoting expressions offers sound explanations for most aspects of their grammar and interpretation. It is important to point out that the discussion here will be limited to bare plurals: bare singulars (including mass nouns) are subject to stricter grammatical restrictions, and topicality and focus structure are not relevant for them in the same way they are for plural count nouns.

The analysis is organized as follows. Section 2 deals with the arguments that support an account of the distribution of Spanish bare plurals in terms of information structure. In 2.1., two potential problems for an account of the NNC based on topicality are introduced: one is the occurrence of bare plurals as dislocated topics, and the other one is the unacceptability of bare plurals as non-topical preverbal subjects. In 2.2. I advance a proposal concerning a distinction between two kinds of topics, external/marked and internal/unmarked, and the consequences it has on the grammar of bare plurals: the distinction allows us to maintain Suñer's view of the NNC. An attempt is made in 2.3 to integrate the discussion into a wider perspective: the typically contrastive reading of dislocated bare nouns is presented as a systematic effect in the interpretation of non-referential expressions as external topics. This effect is crucial for the licensing of bare nouns in Topic positions. 2.4 is devoted to the role of focus in the use of Spanish bare plurals: the analysis leads towards an explanation of the second apparent counterexample to the NNC – the unacceptability of bare plurals as non-topical preverbal subjects. In 2.5 a general view of the interplay of semantic incorporation and information structure is sketched, with the aim of clarifying how the division of labor between them works. Finally, Section 3 presents some conclusions and open questions.

2. The role of information structure

2.1 Topics and bare nouns

2.1.1 *The constraint on preverbal subjects is derived from topicality*

The NNC raises questions like the following ones, which any account of the grammar of bare nouns in Spanish (and Romance) should try to address:

- a. Why do bare nouns have to obey a condition that holds for preverbal subjects only, and does not affect other positions?
- b. Why is there an extra condition related to modification?
- c. Why should stress and intonation be relevant factors?

Questions (a), (b) and (c) define the empirical domain I am interested in. Suñer (1982) offered valuable answers for the three of them. Let us first consider question (a), which addresses the crucial issue of the underlying motivation for the NNC. Questions (b) and (c) will be taken up later, in Section 2.4. According to Suñer (1982:225), the origin of the NNC is “a conflict between the function of an unmodified noun and the function of preverbal subject”: on the one hand, unmodified nouns, being non-referential expressions, do not have “enough ‘weight’ to appear in preverbal position”; on the other hand, preverbal subjects in Spanish constitute the ‘theme’ of the sentence, and thus require a referentially autonomous expression. Suñer (1982:225) concludes that “Naked nouns never appear as subjects in preverbal position because these nouns cannot be interpreted as the theme of the sentence”. This gives us an intuitively appealing account of the NNC, and a reasonable answer to question (a): the constraint does not hold in positions different from preverbal subject because they are not default thematic³ positions. I believe the idea is still the best option we have to obtain a principled explanation of the ungrammaticality of the sentences in (2) and (3).

Dobrovie-Sorin (2000) reformulates the essence of the proposal in more precise terms, as shown in (5), building on the assumption that bare nouns denote properties:

- (5) Topic NPs cannot denote properties.

Dobrovie-Sorin and Laca (2003: 255) exploit this principle to derive both the NNC in the Romance domain and the contrast with respect to English, a language where the constraint is absent: as English does not allow free inversion and is not a Null Subject language, we may assume that preverbal subjects in English occupy their position by virtue of strictly grammatical principles, independently of information structure, and are not necessarily topics. Thus they do not exclude the occurrence of bare nouns. In Cohen and Erteschik-Shir (2002), it is the constraint in (5) that forces the covert type shift responsible for generic readings when the preverbal subject position is topical in English. This is an indication that an account of the NNC based on topicality is quite productive and seems to be on the right track. On the one hand, it allows us to reduce a particular constraint to general, well-motivated, independently justified principles. On the other hand, it can deal with data from crosslinguistic variation, if adequately complemented by certain additional assumptions. Furthermore, an approach built on notions like Topic and

3. Suñer’s use of the terms *theme/themeatic* is equivalent to my use of the terms *topic/topical* in what follows. *Topic* has to be understood as *sentence topic*, and not as *discourse topic*. A topic will be a linguistic expression denoting the entity or entities that the sentence is about.

Focus leads us to a natural answer to question (c) above concerning stress and intonation as licensing factors for bare nouns, and provides a nice way to unify several facts under the domain of Information Structure.

2.1.2 *Two problems with topicality*

At this point, we expect that such an account is compatible with other aspects of the grammar of Spanish bare plurals. However, as Casielles (2004) and Laca (this volume) point out, a major problem for the solution advocated by Suñer (1982) and Dobrovie-Sorin and Laca (2003) is the existence of Dislocation (or Topicalization)⁴ constructions where bare nouns occur in initial (or final)⁵ positions marked as topics. The relevant examples are in (6) ((6b) is from Laca, this volume):

- (6) a. *Monedas, tengo.*
 Coins have-PRS-1SG
 ‘Coins, I’ve got’
- b. *Obispos, asistieron (pero se retiraron*
 Bishops attended-PST-3PL (but CL leave-PST-3PL
de inmediato).
 right away
 ‘As for bishops, some attended (but they left right away)’

The problem, as Laca puts it, is the following: if the idea that bare plurals denote properties has to be maintained – and it seems indeed worth maintaining –, some explanation is due for the fact that bare nominals are banned from the preverbal subject position while being perfectly acceptable as dislocated topics. A general concept of *Topic* seems clearly insufficient to understand why topical subjects behave differently from dislocated topics. It is important to bear in mind that bare plurals maintain their usual existential interpretation in topic positions.

Dislocation of bare plurals is not the only counterargument for an account of the NNC based on topicality. A second serious problem is posed by the occurrence

4. In the following I will only use the term *Dislocation*, and not *Topicalization*, since I believe that Spanish actually lacks English-style Topicalizations (cf. *Julia I couldn’t reach*). In this point I depart from the proposal put forward by Laca (this volume). I assume that the construction illustrated in (6) is akin to Clitic Left Dislocation, with just one superficial difference: the resumptive pronominal element that the topic is linked to inside the sentence is a null anaphoric element. Leonetti (2011) and Laca (this volume) include a discussion of this poorly studied aspect of Spanish preposing constructions.

5. My analysis concerns (Clitic) Left Dislocation exclusively. The occurrence of bare plurals in (Clitic) Right Dislocation (as in *Nunca ponen, películas de los 60* ‘They never show them, films from the sixties’) will not be considered in this paper.

of non-topical preverbal subjects in all-focus,thetic, sentences: these should allow for bare plurals, being outside the limits of the constraint in (5), but in this case unmodified bare plurals are excluded as well, as has traditionally been observed (cf. Bosque 1996; Laca 1999; RAE 2009). The problem is twofold: on the one hand, there must be a reason why unmodified bare plurals are not acceptable, in spite of being in accordance with the constraint on topicality; on the other hand, the role of adnominal modifiers must be clarified. The examples in (7) show how modifiers play a role in licensing the occurrence of preverbal nominals:

- (7) a. *Turistas* *(*curiosos*) *llegaron* *a la ciudad*.
 Tourists curious arrive-PST-3PL to the city
 ‘Curious tourists arrived in the city’
- b. *Científicos* *(*prestigiosos*) *han* *asegurado*
 Scientists prestigious have-PRS-3PL claimed
que el calentamiento es real.
 that the warming be-PRS-3SG real
 ‘Prestigious scientists have claimed that (global) warming is real’

The data in (7) suggest that the NNC is still at work even when preverbal subjects are non-topical. This raises the suspicion that the NNC has to do with the grammatical relation *subject*, and not with topics. If this is true, a topicality-based account has to be rejected. Reconciling the facts in (7) with a reduction of the NNC to principles of information structure probably requires giving an answer to question (b) above that derives the role of adnominal modification from the interaction between bare nominals and Focus structure, as Suñer (1982:227) already suggested. I will try to address this issue in Sections 2.2 and 2.4 below.

The major problems for a topicality-based account of the NNC are the two facts I have just presented: the occurrence of bare nouns as dislocated topics, and the unacceptability of unmodified bare nouns even in non-topical preverbal subjects. The rest of this section will be devoted to dealing with these two issues: dislocated topics (2.2, 2.3) and non-topical subjects (2.4).

2.2 Two kinds of topics

2.2.1 Preverbal subjects and dislocated phrases

The natural strategy one might adopt in order to face the problem of bare plurals as dislocated topics is to derive the differences in the behavior of bare plurals from some difference between the two topical positions involved. The most obvious difference is the sentence-internal position of preverbal subjects versus the sentence-external position of dislocated phrases. The distinction holds irrespectively of the precise syntactic characterization we might choose for the

two positions. Let's assume, quite simply, that preverbal subjects rise to Spec, IP – the canonical subject position –, while dislocated topics are generated in some higher position adjoined to IP or CP. There has been an intensive debate in the last twenty years concerning the nature of preverbal subjects in Null Subject languages, and more precisely the possibility that preverbal subjects could be analyzed as dislocated phrases. I believe there are good reasons to take subjects and dislocated topics as different entities both from a syntactic and a semantic point of view (see Goodall 2002; Sheehan 2006: Chapter 2 and Ortega-Santos 2008: Chapter 3 for extensive discussion). If this is correct, we should expect that subjects and dislocated topics impose different interpretive conditions upon the phrases they host. The relevant question is how the contribution to interpretation of the two positions is best described.

Following Dobrovie-Sorin (2000:177), among others, I consider preverbal subjects to be unmarked topics in languages like Spanish – in sentences that express categorical judgements –, and dislocated phrases as external, detached, marked topics. As Dobrovie-Sorin notes, detached or marked topics are external to the minimal sentential domain, and are related to it by means of an anaphoric link with some pronominal element. Unmarked topics, in contrast, are integrated in the minimal sentential domain and usually related to some argumental slot of the predicate. As a consequence, unmarked topics undergo the usual compositional processes triggered by syntactic rules inside sentences, but external/detached topics do not enter semantic composition in the same way.

2.2.2 *The licensing of bare nouns as dislocated topics*

The problem of how bare nominals are licensed when occurring as detached topics is addressed in Laca (this volume). More precisely, she suggests an answer to the question of how the existential type-shift responsible for existential readings is triggered in detached positions, i.e. when the bare nominal does not compose directly with the predicate. Laca argues that the type-shift on the verbal predicate is triggered by the resumptive element placed in the argument position – to be exact, by the empty nominal of semantic type $\langle e,t \rangle$ that we should postulate for constructions like the ones in (6).⁶ Leaving technical details aside, I think that the basic assumption underlying Laca's proposal is just what we need to account for the occurrence of property-denoting expressions in sentence-external positions: the idea is simply that detached bare plurals are licensed because they establish an

6. The resumptive element corresponds to the partitive clitics that other Romance languages like Catalan, French and Italian display in dislocation constructions. Modern Spanish lacks overt partitives.

anaphoric link with an element in the associated sentence that occupies a position where a bare plural would be acceptable.

Additional support for this informal stance comes from the conditions on the left dislocation of bare plurals in Spanish. A superficial look at the contrast between (3) and (4b) could lead us to take left dislocation as a sort of licensing mechanism for sentence-initial bare nouns. However, closer inspection shows that it is not. Left dislocation is not able to rescue bare nouns that would be unacceptable in other positions. The relevant data involve left-dislocated subjects. Laca (1996: 259) points out that dislocation of bare subjects is only possible with unaccusative verbs, like *entrar* ‘enter’, *nacer* ‘be born’, and *llegar* ‘arrive’, as in (8)–(9).

(8) *Gatos, sí entran, en el jardín.*
 Cats yes enter-PRS-3PL in the garden
 ‘As for cats, some do enter in the garden’

(9) *Niños, nacían todos los días.*
 Babies be.born-PST-3PL all the days
 ‘As for babies, some were born every day’

Dislocation is actually possible with verbs that allow for bare plurals as postverbal subjects, including unergative and transitive verbs:

(10) *Estudiantes sí suelen llamar.* (Cf. *Suelen llamar estudiantes*)
 Students yes use.to-PRS-3PL call
 ‘Students, some use to call, actually’

(11) *Estudiantes, sí participan, en esta comisión.*
 Students yes participate-PRS-3PL in this committee
 (Cf. *En esta comisión participan estudiantes*)
 ‘Students, some do participate in this committee, actually’

(12) *Extranjeros, el examen, sí lo han aprobado.*
 Foreigners the exam yes it have-PRS-3PL passed
 (Cf. *El examen, sí lo han aprobado extranjeros*)
 ‘Some foreigners did pass the exam, actually’

Dislocation is impossible in the cases in which bare plurals are excluded, for independent reasons, both as preverbal and postverbal subjects (for instance, because the predicate lacks an incorporating version and excludes the occurrence of bare nouns as arguments), as shown in the following examples: (13a) and (14a) are excluded because (13b–c) and (14b–c) are ungrammatical as well.

(13) a. **Estudiantes, creo que están preparados.*
 Students think-PRS-1SG that be-PRS-3PL ready
 ‘Students, I think they are well prepared.’

- b. **Estudiantes están preparados.*
students be-PRS-3PL ready
- c. **Están preparados estudiantes.*
be-PRS-3PL ready students
- (14) a. **Naranjas, creo que han subido de precio.*
oranges think-PRS-1SG that have raised of price
'Oranges, I think that they are more expensive now.'
- b. **Naranjas han subido de precio.*
oranges have-PRS-3PL raised of price
- c. **Han subido de precio naranjas.*
have-PRS-3PL raised of price oranges

The generalization is that bare plurals as dislocated subjects give acceptable results only when they are acceptable as postverbal subjects (Laca 1996:260; Contreras 1996:148). The acceptability of bare plurals as dislocated topics is, thus, entirely dependent on their acceptability in sentence-internal positions. This is in accordance with Laca's proposal on the role of the empty resumptive element as the trigger of existential type-shift.

2.2.3 *Internal and external topics impose different constraints*

Once we have a reasonable informal account of the conditions that allow for dislocated bare nominals, i.e. the conditions that allow for the occurrence of semantically incorporated expressions in detached positions, the main issue still is the nature of the asymmetry between internal, unmarked topics (preverbal subjects)⁷ and external, marked topics (left dislocated phrases). Both kinds of topics are perfectly compatible with any kind of definite and referential DPs, but they differ as soon as bare nouns and certain inherently weak indefinites – in particular, negative indefinites and elements like *poco* 'few' – are considered. Table 1 represents the major differences concerning these two prototypical instances of non-referential nominals:⁸

7. Under the term *internal topics* I include preverbal subjects (at least, in Null Subject languages) as well as marked objects that can be taken as secondary topics in languages with Differential Object Marking or Object Scrambling (cf. Leonetti 2004, and Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011 for an extensive discussion of the effects of topicality in DOM). This use of the term is not equivalent to Laca's use of the same expression in Laca this volume.

8. See Rizzi (2005), Sheehan (2006) and Ortega-Santos (2008: Chapter 3), among others, for research on this issue.

Table 1. Differences between bare nouns and negative indefinites

	Preverbal subjects	Dislocated phrases
Bare nouns	*	√
Negative indefinites	√	*

The relevant data are in (15) for bare plurals and in (16) for negative indefinites:

- (15) a. **Niños extranjeros estudian aquí.*
 children foreign study-PRS-3PL here
- b. *Niños extranjeros, aquí, sí estudian.*
 children foreign here yes study-PRS-3PL
 ‘Some foreign children actually study here’
- (16) a. *Ningún niño extranjero estudia aquí.*
 no child foreign study-PRS-3SG here
 ‘No foreign child studies here’
- b. **Ningún niño extranjero, aquí, sí estudia.*⁹
 no child foreign here yes study-PRS-3SG

Table 1 describes a puzzling situation. Each of the positions imposes a constraint on a different kind of indefinite expression: preverbal subjects are incompatible with bare nouns but allow for negative quantifiers, while dislocation is incompatible with negatives but acceptable with bare nouns. The reason why dislocation is incompatible with negative indefinites and other weak quantifiers has been investigated in Arregi (2003) and Endriss (2009), and I will not discuss it here. However, it is interesting to note that negative indefinites are not interpreted as topics when they occur in the preverbal subject slot: the sentence in (16a), for instance, does not correspond to a categorical judgment. This implies that negative indefinites cannot be topics in any sense, and furthermore, that preverbal subjects are not always topical in Spanish, a fact that we have been aware of for a long time (cf. Suñer 1982). Given certain conditions, SV(O) sentences can correspond tothetic judgments with subjects inside the focus projection. The association of preverbal subjects with topics is, thus, only a default condition. It is important to bear this in mind in a comparison of the two positions in Table 1.

As for bare nouns, dislocation is clearly more permissive than the preverbal subject position. There must some other factor underlying the asymmetry between (15a), where the bare plural is unacceptable as preverbal subject, and (15b), where

9. Dislocation of direct objects allows us to perceive ungrammaticality more clearly, as in **A ningún niño extranjero, lo conocemos* ‘No foreign child, we know (him)’.

it is acceptable as left-dislocated topic. It is reasonable to assume that the two positions are associated with different interpretive features, and such features should provide the key to understand the data in (15)–(16). But what kind of features is required? Assigning just some kind of [+topic] feature to subjects and dislocated positions is obviously not very useful.

2.2.4 *Two proposals on subjects and topics*

There are at least two different ways to integrate these ideas into a precise hypothesis. One is based on the assumption that syntax encodes the relevant features in both subjects and dislocated topics. This is usually the standard position of formal syntacticians; Rizzi (2005) is a good representative of this stance, and Casielles (1999, 2004) constitutes an attempt to explain the behavior of Spanish bare plurals based on the encoding of certain information-structural features. The other way to deal with the asymmetry is based on a relaxation of such strong assumptions about encoded features, in favor of a more prominent role for inferential processes in utterance interpretation. This is the position I would favor. Let me briefly review Rizzi's and Casielles's proposals before sketching mine.

In minimalist syntax, movement is a last resort operation, and DPs are supposed to raise to the preverbal subject position to satisfy some need which could not be satisfied otherwise. Certain requirements of the interface systems are seen as the motivation for movement. Raising to subject position is thus associated with some special interpretive effect, and Rizzi (2005) considers “aboutness” as the basic property, shared with topics, that motivates movement to the subject position. “Aboutness” amounts to the prominence that makes the subject/topic the point of departure in the description of the event. External topics exhibit the same property, together with an additional constraint on their connection to the discourse background which is absent from subjects. To sum up, subjects are [+aboutness] and topics are [+aboutness, +D-linking]. According to Rizzi, this is enough to distinguish the interpretive effects triggered by the two positions. In my view, characterizing preverbal subjects by means of aboutness is not compatible with the existence of wide focus SV(X) sentences in Spanish and Italian. Rizzi is well aware of such cases, but describes them as sentences where the subject does not express contextually given information, instead of considering them as sentences where the subject cannot be the point of departure in the description of the event. Both things are true, actually. This renders a feature like [aboutness] an inadequate way to capture the motivation for movement to the subject position. In a few words, the problem with aboutness as a distinctive property of preverbal subjects is that it is not systematic. Some other feature should trigger movement – but this is not an issue that I can discuss here. Moreover, it is impossible to derive the diverging behavior of bare plurals from Rizzi's distinction.

Casielles (1999, 2004) puts forward a distinction between two kinds of topics. According to her, preverbal subjects correspond to ‘sentence topics’: they are restricted to discourse entities, and are not necessarily discourse-old. Detached topics correspond to what Casielles dubs ‘Background’: they are not restricted to discourse referents, but are necessarily discourse-old and unaccented. According to this view, there is no unified notion of ‘topic’. The two positions display different syntactic and semantic properties. Casielles claims that Spanish bare nouns are unable to move to any position outside VP: this derives both the NNC and the existential interpretation of bare plurals, assuming that the Mapping Hypothesis in Diesing (1992) is correct. As left dislocated phrases are supposed to be base-generated in a sentence-external position, bare plurals can occur as dislocated phrases because this does not contradict the constraint on movement from inside the VP. However, the proposal is still purely stipulative, and Casielles tries to cast it in terms of information structure. Her claim is that the NNC is a constraint on (internal) topics: subject raising in Spanish would be motivated by the checking of a [topic] feature, and bare plurals cannot check such feature because it is associated with the presence of determiners, which they obviously lack. On the other hand, dislocated bare plurals are simply non-topical: they represent background elements that have to escape from focus projection. The difference between subjects and dislocated elements is thus obtained.

However, the analysis seems to me problematic in several aspects, the basic one being that the semantic contribution that so-called ‘sentence topics’ and ‘background’ make is never treated explicitly. As a consequence, the exclusion of left-dislocated phrases from the category of topics is not convincing. Furthermore, the problem of preverbal subjects inside the projection of focus inthetic (all-focus) sentences is again left unresolved. In any case, there are two ideas from Casielles (1999, 2004) that we should retain as basic assumptions: (1) The NNC is related to topicality, as in Suñer (1982); (2) There are at least two kinds of “topic”: internal topics (i.e. subjects) impose stricter conditions on bare nouns than external topics (i.e. dislocations).

2.2.5 *The contrastive value of external topics*

Despite all the difficulties, I believe that it is possible to explain the asymmetry between subjects and dislocated topics while maintaining a topicality-based account of the NNC. My proposal is an attempt to take advantage of all the valuable contributions of previous research, adding some specific ideas about the effect of information structure on the interpretation of bare nouns. The key fact that has to be considered is the contrastive value that bare plurals show in left dislocations. Once more, the crucial observations about contrast were already explicit in Suñer (1982). Suñer (1982: 231) rightly points out that in examples like (17) bare nouns

appear as contrastive topics (the contrast is made explicit by the presence of the continuation ‘...pero sí agua’); moreover, all left-dislocated bare nouns must be contrastive. As she puts it (1982:236), “left-dislocated naked nouns are thematic but contrastive...naked nouns cannot be non-contrastive themes”.

- (17) *Petróleo no surgió, pero sí agua.*
 Oil not bubble.up-PST-3SG but yes water
 ‘Oil did not bubble up, but water did’

Suñer’s formulation of the NNC is specifically limited to noncontrastive patterns, and she claims that all the factors that help to circumvent the NNC (modification, coordination, focalization, dislocation) are related to contrastiveness.¹⁰ I am convinced that this a correct generalization, but it calls for an explanation

10. Casielles (2004:110) claims that dislocated bare nouns are not necessarily contrastive, against Suñer (1982), and gives two examples where, in her view, “the topic is discourse-old and does not contrast with any other topic”:

- (i) - *No tengo dinero. - No te preocupes. Dinero tengo yo.*
 Not have-prs-1SG money not you worry money have-prs-1SG I
 ‘I don’t have money’ ‘Don’t worry. Money, I have’
- (ii) -ⁱ*Vinieron niños a la función de anoche?*
 Come-PST-3PL children to the show of the.night
 ‘Did children come to the night show?’
- *Niños, vinieron a la función de la tarde*
 Children, come-PST-3PL to the show of the afternoon
 ‘Children, they came to the afternoon show’

Casielles (2004:110) states that there is contrast in the informative, focal part of the sentence, but not in the dislocated bare nouns *dinero* ‘money’ and *niños* ‘children’. I believe that the bare nouns behave in any case as contrastive topics, and that the contrast linked to informative focus is dependent on the set of alternatives evoked by the topic (see Section 2.3 for comments). As a reviewer points out, an argument for the contrastive nature of the topics in these examples can be found in the possibility of building adequate paraphrases containing what could be informally called “restrictive repetitions”, as in (iii–iv):

- (iii) *Dinero, lo que es dinero, tengo yo.*
 Money, what is money, have-PRS-1SG I
 ‘Money, as for that, I have some’
- (iv) *Niños, lo que se dice niños, vinieron a la función de tarde.*
 Children, what is said children, come-pst-3pl to the show
 of the afternoon
 ‘Children, actual children, did come to the evening show’

that sheds some light on the reasons why contrast is so important. The strict conditions imposed by preverbal subjects, compared to those associated to dislocation, stem from the fact that it is not possible to obtain contrastive readings of bare nouns, under normal conditions, in Spec, IP. This is surely a crucial fact to understand the NNC. Now it is worth going back to Suñer's observations about the role of contrast in the grammar of bare nouns, and try to find a principled account of the data by answering two central questions: (1) Why is dislocation more permissive than raising to subject? (2) Why do contrastive readings arise in dislocation?

As for the nature of dislocated, external topics versus internal topics (first question), the compatibility with bare plurals is clearly due to two facts: one is that dislocated bare nouns are licensed in sentence-internal positions, and the other is that the marked nature of dislocation, in comparison to internal, unmarked topics, has certain interpretive consequences. It has been observed by several authors (Arregi 2003; López 2009; Brunetti 2009a, b) that dislocated topics – more precisely, Romance Clitic Left Dislocation – are predominantly contrastive. The Spanish dialogue in (18), from Arregi (2003), provides some evidence for this:

- (18) Q: *¿Qué le diste a Juan?*
 What him give-PST-2SG to Juan
 'What did you give to Juan?'
 A: *Le di un libro.*
 Him give-PST-1SG a book
 'I gave him a book'
 A': *A Juan, le di un libro.*
 To Juan him give-PST-1SG a book
 'Juan, I gave him a book'

Two possible answers are presented in (18). The first one is neutral: reference to Juan is made by means of the clitic *le*. The second one includes the left-dislocation of *Juan* and it is marked. It counts as an indication that Juan is one among a list of individuals the speaker gave things to. Such list corresponds to the typical set of contextual alternatives that focus evokes. This implies that the left-dislocated phrase is interpreted as a contrastive topic. I want to stress that I neither intend

Further evidence for the existence of some kind of contrast is provided by the possibility of inserting adverbial modifiers like *justamente* 'precisely', *propiamente* 'properly' and *precisamente* 'precisely' (cf. *Dinero, precisamente, tengo yo*). It seems that in any case the topic allows the speaker to pick up an element from a contextual set that includes possible alternatives. I am grateful to the reviewer for these useful indications.

to claim that contrast is a necessary property of left dislocation, nor an encoded feature associated to the topic position. I only need to assume that (Romance) left dislocation is typically contrastive, in most contexts, and this is due to its marked status with respect to internal topics (see Section 2.3). Brunetti (2009a, b) gives a natural pragmatic account of the contrastive nature of Romance dislocation, which is a good answer to question (2) above ('Why do contrastive readings arise in dislocation?'). In her view, dislocation, being marked in comparison to other devices for topic marking, represents a shifting topic, and this evokes the possible alternatives to the topic, ultimately triggering a contrastive reading:

...since a link represents a topic shift, it always implies the existence of an alternative set, as a new topic is sorted among a set of possible ones in the relevant situational context... The contrastive interpretation of a link (...) comes as a consequence: the possibility to evoke an alternative set is a necessary condition to get a contrastive interpretation. (2009b: 767)

Preverbal subjects, under normal conditions, represent continuous topics, instead of shifting topics, and are not associated to contrastive interpretations. Evidence in favor of this conclusion comes from the behavior of preverbal indirect objects in sentences with psychological predicates, as in (19):

- (19) *A Juan le gustan esas películas.*
 To Juan him please-PRS-3PL those films
 'Juan likes those films'

It is widely accepted (cf. Fernández-Soriano 1999) that preposed indirect objects in sentences like (19) occupy the same position as preverbal subjects. The relevant observation is that preposed indirect objects are not usually associated with contrastive readings, which is just the opposite of what we expect from dislocation. Nothing forces contrast in the interpretation of preverbal subjects and indirect objects (although a contrastive reading, as Brunetti points out, is still possible if the context favors it).

Summarizing, marked topics differ from unmarked ones in at least two properties: marked topics are connected to sentence-internal positions by some resumptive element – such positions are crucial for the licensing of bare plurals, and they tend to receive contrastive readings due to their discourse function. The distribution of bare plurals as topics depends on a combination of these two properties.

Is this asymmetry between two kinds of topics encoded in the grammar? Only indirectly. Assuming that syntactic positions encode processing instructions, dislocation can reasonably be taken as a position/construction that signals a 'link', in Vallduví's (1992) terms, i.e. a position associated with an instruction to access a given address in the hearer's knowledge store, under which the information carried

by the sentence is entered. Such an instruction corresponds to the main distinctive property of topics, which we refer to as ‘aboutness’. It has to be obligatorily satisfied in the interpretive process,¹¹ so that any expression occurring as a ‘link’ must count as an address for information update, whether it is a prototypical topic (referential, familiar/specific, agentive) or not. In case the dislocated expression does not make a prototypical topic – which is the case of indefinites and bare nouns – some kind of inferential adjustment is triggered, as a part of the interpretive process, that solves the mismatch between the instruction and the linguistic expression: as a result of this reinterpretation/accommodation mechanism, the expression is assigned a reading that allows the hearer to comply with the instruction. I suggest that contrast appears as a contextual effect triggered by the need to satisfy the instruction associated with ‘links’ (more on this in 2.3).

As for preverbal subjects in Spec, IP, my point is that there is no specific instruction encoded by the syntactic position. In a few words, preverbal subjects are not [+aboutness] or [+topic]. They are simply interpreted as aboutness (non-contrastive) topics by default, unless the context makes some alternative interpretation available, as in the already mentioned case ofthetic sentences with subjects inside the projection of focus. When subjects count as unmarked topics, this value is obtained by inference, and not imposed by syntax. No specific instruction drives the hearer towards a topic interpretation, and no specific instruction triggers the derivation of contrastivity (except when there is a marked intonational contour). This is the basic difference with respect to detached topics.

If this is correct, bare nominals should be excluded as preverbal subjects because they cannot be licensed by semantic incorporation in a position that typically signals the presence of a topic. As subject raising is optional in Spanish, the option of preverbal subjects is in competition with the alternative possibility of leaving the subject in postverbal position, which looks less costly in principle and poses no problems for semantic incorporation. When raising yields discourse-related effects, it is justified. But for bare nominals, staying in a postverbal position is definitely the preferred option: raising to Spec, IP seems an unmotivated move. This is nothing more than a refinement of Suñer’s (1982) position.

As already noticed, a problem for this point of view is the unacceptability of bare nouns as preverbal subjects even when they are non-topical. One could wonder why a sentence like (20a), with a definite preverbal subject, is perfect as athetic, all-focus utterance (in response to a question like *¿Qué ha pasado?*

11. The claim that grammatical instructions (‘procedural meaning’) have to be obligatorily satisfied is put forward in Escandell-Vidal and Leonetti (2011).

‘What happened?’), whereas its counterpart in (20b), which includes a bare plural as subject, is still ungrammatical, even in the absence of a preverbal topic:

- (20) a. *Los prisioneros han escapado.*
 The prisoners have-PRS-3PL escaped
 ‘The prisoners escaped’
- b. **Prisioneros han escapado.*
 prisoners have-PRS-3PL escaped

(20b) should be ruled out by some version of the NNC, but no topic position is involved (recall the discussion of example (7) in Section 2.1). The contrast in (20) – with athetic interpretation – suggests that *subject*, instead of *topic*, is the crucial notion underlying the NNC, against Suñer’s original proposal. But at least one reason forces us to maintain Suñer’s account, based on topicality: it seems the only reasonable way to motivate the NNC, i.e. the only way to explain why the constraint involves preverbal subjects. There is, in fact, one possible way out. I suggest that (20b) is excluded because raising to the preverbal position is costlier than staying in postverbal position, and does not have any interpretive import, nor does it yield any discourse-related effect – given that athetic reading could be obtained with VS order as well. Moreover, it shows a clash between the prominence of the subject argument and the pressure to integrate it into the wide focus domain. The clash would vanish if the subject were contrastive or correspond to narrow focus, but in that case there would be nothetic reading. I will return to the reasons why sentences like (20b) are ill-formed in Sections 2.4 and 2.5. At the moment, we can safely assume that they are not problematic for Suñer’s NNC.

2.3 Non-referential expressions as topics

In this section I intend to show that the contrastive interpretation of bare nouns in Romance left dislocation is just a particular instance of a more general phenomenon that occurs in marked topics. A wider perspective that takes into account the behavior of non-referential expressions in general can shed some more light on the behavior of dislocated bare nouns.

A well-established tradition of studies (cf. Erteschik-Shir 1997; Portner & Yabushita 2001) assumes that topicality and specificity are strongly related, in the sense that topicality tends to induce or favor specific readings in indefinite DPs, or even that topics have to be specific. However, it is quite easy to find natural examples of non-specific indefinite DPs in left dislocation, at least in Romance languages, as shown in (21)–(25):

- (21) Italian (Rizzi 2005)
Un libro, l’ho letto.
 A book it have-PRS-1SG read
 ‘A book, I’ve read’

- (22) Italian (Floridic 2006)
Così almeno qualcuno, lo farò contento.
 Thus at.least someone, him make-FUT-1SG happy
 ‘Thus I will make at least someone happy’
- (23) Catalan (Vallduví 2002)
Un gelat, me'l menjaria amb molt de gust.
 An ice-cream me it eat-COND-1SG with much of pleasure
 ‘An ice-cream, I would eat with pleasure’
- (24) Spanish (Leonetti 2011)
Alguna novela, el jurado (la) va a descartar.
 Some novel the jury it go-PRS-3SG to discard
 ‘Some novel, the jury will discard’

All indefinite DPs in the examples may receive a non-specific interpretation (example (21) is actually ambiguous between a specific and a non-specific reading, as pointed out in Rizzi 2005). It is intriguing how a non-specific indefinite can survive in a syntactic position that forces its interpretation as a link, i.e. as an adequate address for information update. The reason why indefinites often make poor topics is well known: they do not encode an instruction to identify an accessible referent. With indefinites, then, a new address has to be built. The conflict between the instruction associated to links and the semantics of indefinite DPs must be solved by pragmatically inferring an interpretation of the indefinite that is able to satisfy the requirement imposed by the topic. The two readings of *un libro* ‘a book’ in (21), for instance, represent two different ways to solve the conflict. It is worth analyzing them in some detail.

How is the specific reading obtained? The hearer is entitled to open a new card for a new referent, assuming that the speaker possibly has a particular book in mind. We tend to suppose that the speaker knows some identifying property that is unknown to the hearer. This creates the typical speaker–hearer asymmetry that is commonly found in specific indefinites: the hearer is presumably unable to identify the referent, but dislocation compels him/her to suppose that there is a certain property that the speaker is not making explicit and is restrictive enough to reduce the search for a referent to a particular individual. The set of books where the referent belongs may have been contextually specified: in this case, the information required to connect the topic to the previous discourse has already been provided – i.e. the set of books is available for the hearer too, and a partitive reading is naturally inferred; if the set has not been previously mentioned, the hearer tries to accommodate it, with the same result. The indefinite defines a partition on a given set, and the givenness of the set satisfies the salience constraint associated to the topic. The intuition that most grammatical

studies correctly reflect is that this partitive reading is the most obvious way to obtain an interpretation for a topical indefinite, which is perfectly correct.

How is the weak, non-specific reading licensed? Here it is important to take into account some discourse properties of (21). In its non-specific reading, (21) cannot be used in a neutral context or ‘out of the blue’ (as noticed in Floricic (2006:98) for some similar French examples). The crucial condition is that uttering (21) counts as a refusal of a previous contextual assumption like ‘You haven’t read any book’; such an assumption may appear explicitly or implicitly in the communicative context (for instance, (21) can be used as a response to a biased or loaded question such as ‘But... have you read a book this summer?’), or alternatively be accommodated by the hearer (for instance, when the speaker utters (21) just after having fulfilled his intention to read some book during the summer). As uttering (21) with this reading is a way of refuting a contextual assumption, its felicitous use is severely constrained. Notice that the non-specific topic is associated with a contrastive reading (‘one, but possibly no more’, or ‘one book, but possibly nothing else’). Contrast plays an important role in the occurrence of non-specific indefinites as dislocated topics, as with all kinds of expressions that make poor topics, bare nouns included.

Of course, some kind of contextual condition is operating on the use of (21) with the specific reading as well. If the speaker refers to a particular book from a given set, an obvious condition will be that the set be given or familiar. Moreover, at least a contextual assumption such as ‘As for the rest of books in the group, the speaker did not say anything, so probably (s)he did not read them’ will be manifest to the participants. This means that a contrast relation between the chosen book and the rest of the books will be implicitly communicated, so that *un libro* will be interpreted as a contrastive topic, as confirmed by the possible continuation in (25):

- (25) *Un libro, l’ho letto... ma gli altri, purtroppo...*
 A book, it have-PRS-1SG read but the others, unfortunately
 ‘A book, I’ve read, but the others...’

In a few words, each one of the readings implies a different way of fitting in the context. What is significant is that the felicity conditions for the non-specific reading are much stricter than in the other case, since the weak reading is echoing a previous assumption. Similar felicity conditions can be specified for the remaining examples. The relevant questions are two: one is how the non-specific indefinite DP can still count as a topic, and the other is why contrast is involved in the interpretation. The two questions are inextricably related.

Non-specific indefinites as topics are a particular case of the general schema that Krifka (2007) proposes for contrastive topics, reproduced in (26), where the topic contains a subordinate focus-structure:

- (26) [_{Topic} [_{Focus} NP]]

In (26), the NP is a focal expression inserted in a topic position. The subordinate focus-structure activates a set of contextual alternatives, and contrast makes its appearance. It is precisely contrast that allows indefinites to survive as topics. A very similar idea is suggested in Erteschik-Shir (1997:121): she states that generic indefinites (cf. *A dolphin is intelligent*) are licensed by contrast inside a restrictive set available from the context or inferable (for instance, {dolphin, whale, sea lion...}), and such restrictive set is the entity that counts as topic (it is obtained from background material). Thus, even if a non-specific nominal is not an adequate address for information update *per se*, contrast licenses its use as a topic. The case of non-specific indefinites is particularly interesting here because it is quite close to the case of bare nouns, but it is actually all indefinite expressions that trigger contrastive readings when used as topics. This conclusion is in line with the results of recent research on the problem of weak/narrow scope readings of topical indefinites in Hungarian and German linguistics (cf. Kiss 2003; Kiss & Gyuris 2003; Gyuris 2002, 2009; Umbach 2004; Endriss 2009 for German; Giurgea & Remberger 2011 for Romance languages). Kiss (2003), for instance, argues that non-referential contrastive topics in Hungarian denote properties, and the sentence predicates about the property by considering individual instantiations of it. The individuation of the property is obtained through the contrast with other semantic objects of the same type. The property defines a set that counts as an adequate address for predication. The idea can perfectly be applied to dislocated bare plurals in Spanish and other Romance languages.

The conclusion is that, when used as dislocated topics, indefinite DPs and bare plurals undergo the same kind of interpretive process. Specifically, every time we place in a topic position some expression that can hardly count as an aboutness topic (not only non-specific indefinites or quantifiers, but also bare nominals, predicative adjectives or infinitives), a contrastive reading has to be obtained. It looks as if contrast works as a last resort licenser of the construction whenever a non-prototypical topic is inserted. But contrast is not only crucial for topics, as we shall see.

2.4 Bare plurals and focus

Topicality plays a major role in the grammar of Spanish bare nouns, but the notion of *focus*¹² deserves careful examination as well. Focus is important at least in two respects: on the one hand, it is the key notion in accounting for well-known counterexamples to the NNC; on the other hand, focus is necessary to understand the behavior of Spanish bare plurals even in postverbal positions. I will limit myself to some basic observations, with the aim of showing that, if we leave lexical factors

12. The definition of *focus* I assume is taken from Krifka (2007:18): “Focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions”.

aside, the distribution of bare plurals is the result of the interplay of semantic incorporation and information structure.

As for the first issue, the counterexamples to the NNC, it is essential to distinguish two varieties of Spanish. Spoken Spanish (in the European variety, at least) bans any occurrence of bare plurals in preverbal subject position. This is not often explicitly stated in Spanish grammars (but see RAE 2009: §15.12 b, f, g). Written Spanish, on the other hand, allows for bare plurals as preverbal subjects under certain conditions, in particular in news headlines; most examples of modified bare plurals in initial position that appear in the literature pertain to literary or journalistic language, and would hardly be used by any speaker in spontaneous conversation (see Sáez Rivera, this volume). Spoken Spanish is thus much more restrictive than written Spanish: it forbids the occurrence of bare nouns as preverbal subjects independently of their topical or focal status (as already noticed above – a problem for Suñer’s account of the NNC). Written Spanish represents the grammatical system predicted by Suñer’s NNC. Some typical examples of preverbal bare plurals found in the literature (Lapesa 1974) are reproduced here:

- (27) *Mujeres atendían a los enfermos.*
 Women assist-PST-3PL to the sick
 ‘Women assisted the sick’
- (28) *Poderosas razones me obligaron a obrar así.*
 Powerful reasons me oblige-PST-3PL to act so
 ‘Powerful reasons obliged me to act like this’
- (29) *Hombres de calidad estudian el asunto.*
 Men of quality study-PRS-3PL the matter
 ‘Men of quality are studying the matter’

Examples like these are typically excluded from spontaneous use and, as pointed out in Suñer (1982:228–236), contain focal subjects. They should be taken asthetic structures. Bare plurals are acceptable because they are not topical: thus, the examples conform to Suñer’s formulation of the NNC. According to Suñer, the crucial factor that overrides the ban on preverbal positions is contrastivity in all cases: adnominal modification (cf. the contrasts in (7)) gives rise to contrastive environments, since the presence of modifiers triggers a set of contextual alternatives that contrast with the explicit information in the DP, and linked to contrastive environments are also the rest of grammatical mechanisms that allow us to circumvent the NNC (coordination, enumerations, clefting, ‘focus-attractors’ like *solo* ‘only’ and *incluso* ‘even’, and emphatic stress in focalization). I take this to be a correct generalization. As contrast is a contextual effect of focus, it happens to be true that focus is the basic factor underlying

all apparent counterexamples to the NNC.¹³ The question is why the contrast induced by focus is able to make bare plurals survive in hostile environments. I suggest a tentative answer in Section 2.5.

Focus and contrast are relevant for the occurrence of postverbal bare plurals too, as noted above and already pointed out in Bosque (1996), Laca (1996) and Garrido (1996), among others. While bare plurals are by default semantically incorporated into the predicate when they occur as internal arguments (objects, and subjects of unaccusative verbs) inside the projection of focus, they obey stricter conditions for semantic incorporation when they occur as external arguments (typically, agentive and experiencer subjects): this is not unexpected, since external arguments are notoriously recalcitrant to becoming part of wide focus, and to integrating into complex predicates, unless certain conditions hold. When integration into wide focus is blocked – for reasons that we still don't understand well, a narrow focus reading is required that can indicate that a set of contextual alternatives is relevant, and contrast is introduced. The following paradigms are illustrative (the second one is inspired in similar data mentioned in Salem (2010)):

- (30) a. **Extranjeros han aprobado el examen.*
 Foreigners have-PRS-3PL passed the exam
 'Foreigners passed the exam.'
- b. *Han aprobado el examen (hasta) [extranjeros]_F*
 Have-PRS-3PL passed the exam till foreigners.
 'Even some foreigners passed the exam.'
- c. #*Han aprobado extranjeros el examen.*
 have-PRS-3PL passed foreigners the exam
- d. *Han aprobado extranjeros, el examen.*
 have-PRS-3PL passed foreigners the exam
 'FOREIGNERS passed the exam.'
- e. *El examen, lo han aprobado extranjeros.*
 The exam it have-PRS-3SG passed foreigners
 'The exam, foreigners have passed it'

13. The only exception has been mentioned quite often in the literature (RAE 2009: §15.12e): preverbal bare nouns modified by elements like *así* 'so', *como esto* 'like this' and similar expressions are interpreted as topics, in categorical sentences. This possibility to obtain topical bare plurals by nominal modification is illustrated in (i).

- (i) *Individuos *(así) no merecen ningún aprecio.*
 Individuals so not deserve-prs-3PL no appreciation
 'This kind of individuals deserve no appreciation'

- (31) a. **Mujeres han ganado este premio.*
 Women have-PRS-3PL won this prize
 ‘Women have won this prize’
- b. *Han ganado este premio (solo/también) [mujeres]_F*
 have-PRS-3PL won this prize only/too women
 ‘Only/also women have won this prize’
- c. #*Han ganado mujeres este premio.*
 have-PRS-3PL won women this prize
- d. *Han ganado mujeres, este premio.*
 have-PRS-3PL won women this prize
 ‘WOMEN have won this prize’
- e. *Este premio, lo han ganado mujeres.*
 This prize it have-PRS-3PL won women

In (30)–(31), *aprobar el examen* ‘pass the exam’ and *ganar este premio* ‘win this prize’ are transitive predicates and their subjects show the characteristic properties of external arguments. Whereas the (a) examples are excluded by the ban on bare nouns as preverbal subjects (under conditions of normal stress and intonation), the remaining examples are acceptable, except the ones in (c), which are in some sense odd. The contrast is due to focus structure: the (b), (d) and (e) examples force narrow focus on the postverbal subject and make a set of contextual alternatives associated with it easily available, but the (c) examples display a VSO order, with the corresponding wide focus reading and the absence of contrast on the subject. VSO sentences, though well formed, are more difficult to contextualize, in the absence of explicit clues. It is the availability of contrast in (b), (d) and (e) that makes the difference for bare plurals. The question, once more, is why contrast is important. Furthermore, contrast reappears in another fact already noticed in RAE (2009: §33.1k): adnominal modifiers must be inserted not only to license bare plurals as preverbal subjects, but also quite often with bare plurals as postverbal subjects, as in (32), from Garrido (1996), and (33), from RAE (2009: §33.1k).

- (32) *Trataron de salvarlo médicos #(famosos).*
 Try-PST-3PL to save him doctors famous
 ‘Famous doctors tried to save him’
- (33) *¿Y qué quiere que digan ahora personas*
 And what want-PRS-3SG that say-PRS-3PL now people
 *(*de esa calaña*)?
 of that ilk
 ‘And what should people of that ilk say now?’

It seems clear that contrast is as relevant for preverbal subjects in (7) as it is for postverbal subjects in (32)–(33). This suggests that contrast is not exclusively

related to the NNC, but to some general requirement in the interpretation of bare plurals that must be connected to focus. Intuitively, contrast seems to lead the hearer to an optimization of the readings (s)he assigns to bare plurals in environments where bare plurals need something extra to get semantically incorporated to the predicate. This confirms that information structure is the main ingredient we have to combine with the basic mechanism of semantic incorporation to obtain a principled account of the use of bare nominals.

2.5 Information structure and the grammar of bare plurals

2.5.1 *Semantic incorporation of internal and external arguments*

As already pointed out in the previous sections, I am assuming (along the lines of Cohen & Erteschik-Shir 2002 and Laca 1996, this volume) that the behavior of Spanish bare plurals results from the necessity of semantic incorporation together with the conditions imposed by information structure. A sketchy presentation of these ideas could be the following.

Bare plurals in internal argument positions incorporate into the lexical predicate that selects them (a verb, a preposition...): this takes place by default, if the predicate tolerates such operation. Some predicates (mostly stative and Individual-Level predicates) exclude bare nominals as arguments because they are not able to compose with them through semantic incorporation and cannot license existential readings. This is a lexical property (see Cohen & Erteschik-Shir 2002; and Glasbey 2006 for discussion) that affects both internal and external arguments. The resulting mismatch is illustrated in the ungrammatical examples in (34)–(35): in this case ill-formedness cannot be rescued by repair mechanisms like modification and focalization, as noted in Bosque (1996), and is independent of information structure. Thus, the problem is not reducible to the NNC.

(34) **Delfines son inteligentes.*
Dolphins be-PRS-3PL intelligent

(35) **Juan adora paellas.*
Juan adore-PRS-3SG paellas

Information-structural notions like ‘topic’ and ‘focus’ do not play any role as far as bare internal arguments are concerned: internal arguments may be a part of the background, or a part of wide focus, or receive narrow focus, and they are acceptable in all cases. Bare plurals as external arguments should semantically incorporate as well, but they tend to occur in syntactically prominent positions that may obstruct incorporation and the consequent formation of complex predicates. It is at this level that information structure becomes crucial, i.e. when semantic incorporation is not a straightforward operation. If the external argument occurs in an unmarked topic position, it cannot be integrated into a complex predicate: bare plurals are excluded

by the NNC just because semantic incorporation is banned (unless the language is equipped with a last resort type-shift mechanism that forces a generic (strong) reading of bare plurals, as in English). If the topic position is a marked one, as in Romance left dislocation, semantic incorporation takes place in the internal (post-verbal) position the topic is linked to through some resumptive element. Dislocated bare plurals maintain their existential interpretation, and contrast is inferred as a way to comply with the requirements of the detached topic position (i.e. being a suitable address for information update).

In case the external argument is not a topic, it may be a constituent of the background or be focal, and here the conditions for the survival of bare plurals become very strict. The data in (30)–(31) show that bare external arguments are fully acceptable only when they receive a narrow focus reading. Their acceptability decreases when they are “pressed” into the background or into a wide focus. Some support for this generalization comes from examples like (36a–b), inspired in equivalent Arabic sentences from Salem (2010: 1481), where a bare plural subject is inside the background of an interrogative sentence, in (36a), and inside the domain of wide focus – or the background –, in (36b).

- (36) a. *¿Qué ganaron chicas?
 What win-PST-3PL girls
 ‘What did girls win?’
 b. #Ganaron chicas las carreras.
 Win-PST-3PL girls the races

Both examples are ill-formed, because the bare plural is not in focus (in particular, under narrow focus). There is a clear contrast with respect to sentences where the bare plural is a narrow focus or a contrastive focus (for instance, when it occurs in sentence final position, as in *Las carreras, las ganaron chicas*). Salem (2010) concludes that bare nouns in Arabic are licensed by focus. I would adapt the generalization to Spanish and claim that bare plurals are licensed by narrow focus when they represent external arguments.

2.5.2 *Why narrow focus is relevant*

One may wonder why the above mentioned condition should hold and affect external arguments only. I believe this is not an unexpected situation, after all. There are two factors that justify the role of focus in the distribution of external arguments.

On the one hand, the condition reflects a basic asymmetry between subjects and non-subjects (or, more precisely, external and internal arguments) with respect to focus: focus on external arguments is more marked than focus on internal arguments, possibly due to a default association between subjects and topics. For bare

nominals, markedness in the assignment of focus means that external arguments cannot be included in the projection of unmarked, informative focus, and tend to associate with the marked realization of focus usually called *identificational focus* or *contrastive focus* (see Skopeteas & Fanselow 2010 for a cross-linguistic study of the aforementioned asymmetries). If prominent arguments require a marked realization of focus, the data concerning Spanish bare plurals are not an isolated fact anymore: they look like an instance of a general and systematic tendency. The incompatibility of external arguments with wide focus and background could be analyzed as an effect of a mismatch involving the prominent nature of external arguments, on one hand, and the “compression” of a number of constituents inside a unified informative domain on the other.

The second reason why the role of narrow focus is motivated has to do with the difference between bare nominals and the rest of nominal expressions (DPs). To sum up the difference, it boils down to this: whereas most definite and indefinite DPs may occur in a variety of syntactic slots regardless of the informational organization of the sentence, bare plurals occurring in positions where semantic incorporation is not straightforward – i.e. the positions occupied by external arguments – need an extra factor to optimize their interpretation, this factor being contrast, and contrast is triggered when the NP receives narrow focus. Recall that contrast is always present in dislocated bare plurals, and it is the common feature of the three well known devices that allow us to override the NNC – coordination/enumeration, adnominal modification, and focalization. Contrast is an essential component of the grammar of Spanish bare plurals, as Suñer (1982) rightly pointed out. My perspective simply tries to support Suñer’s observation by showing when and why it is required.

The *when* question has already been given a simple answer. Contrast is required in two cases: (1) when a bare plural must be interpreted as a topic (a ‘link’); (2) when semantic incorporation has to operate from prominent syntactic positions, for external arguments and for other ‘salient’ arguments (indirect objects, marked objects in languages with DOM or object scrambling...). To sum up, contrast appears as a repair mechanism every time a bare plural is inserted in a position where a special price has to be paid in order to integrate into a complex predicate. It is involved in the licensing of both topical and focal bare plurals.

I believe this adequately captures a series of facts that had not been previously connected. On the one hand, it explains why the effects of modification, coordination and association with focus had always been signaled in preverbal subjects (sometimes in indirect objects too), but not in internal arguments. On the other hand, it helps to understand why the classical observation about unaccusative and unergative verbs – unaccusatives typically accept bare plurals as

inverted subjects, unergatives do it only under certain conditions – finds a parallel in another well-established observation about focus structure with both classes of verbs – inverted subjects of unaccusatives tend to be part of wide focus, whereas those of unergatives tend to correspond to narrow focus.

The *why* question requires a longer discussion. My tentative answer can be cast in relevance-theoretic terms (cf. Sperber & Wilson 1986). Suppose a bare plural occurs as the direct object of a verb. It is neither a referential expression nor a quantified expression. It has to be interpreted as a predicate modifier, thus integrated into a complex predicate. How does the bare plural contribute to the overall interpretation, and to the relevance of the utterance? We assume that it contributes a property that has to combine with the matrix predicate. Semantic incorporation is the operation that gives rise to the integration of the bare plural into a complex predicate, and it proceeds smoothly if the nominal corresponds to an internal argument.

Now suppose that a bare plural occurs as the external argument of a verb. Its contribution is again a property that has to combine with the predicate, but in this case semantic incorporation is obstructed by the prominence of the argument. The logic of the ensuing interpretive mechanism is the following one:

- A marked operation has a special cost and triggers the search for some rewarding extra effects that can justify it – an assumption that underlies the idea of the balance between processing effort and contextual effects in Relevance Theory. Such effects are obviously related to the nature of property-denoting nominals.
- If we try to figure out what kind of reason may motivate a marked use of a property-denoting expression, contrast comes to our minds as a reasonable candidate. It will be necessarily contrast among different properties. In (31), for instance, *mujeres* ‘women’ contributes to the overall interpretation by inducing a contrast with respect to *hombres* ‘men’; in (30), *extranjeros* ‘foreigners’ is contrasted to *gente de aquí* ‘local people’. How successful the use of a bare plural may be depends on the contextual accessibility and the informative consequences of the set of alternatives to be considered in the interpretive process. Optimal relevance is achieved when the available set of alternatives satisfies the need for rewarding benefits created by a costly operation. If cognitive effects are obtained (in Relevance-theoretic terms), then semantic incorporation is justified and the bare plural is acceptable.
- Contrast is activated when the bare plural receives narrow focus. This is the reason why focus is systematically among the acceptability factors of bare plurals as external arguments.

The ban on bare nouns as preverbal subjects is thus reduced to the NNC (based on the effects of topicality) and to the resistance of external arguments to be included in the domain of wide focus. This approach is relatively simple: it does not require any extra syntactic machinery and is built on independently justified principles. It could seem that having two different principles operating is not the optimal solution, but I think that it has some advantages. The constraint that bans semantic incorporation of internal topics is quite robust, and holds systematically in all Spanish varieties (except perhaps in news headlines); the constraint on external arguments, on the other hand, is in some sense a ‘soft’ constraint, and can be circumvented by a series of well-known factors, all related to focus and contrast. Moreover, the first constraint is shared by spoken and written Spanish, whereas the second one is precisely responsible for the difference between the two varieties: written Spanish shows a certain tendency to allow for bare plurals as preverbal rhematic subjects, under certain conditions and maybe for stylistic reasons, that is absent from spoken Spanish. All in all, the combination of two different constraints, both related to information structure, seems to provide an adequate explanation of the data.

2.5.3 *Preverbal subjects of unaccusative verbs*

Unaccusative verbs pose a problem for my account that deserves some brief remarks. I rely on the clash between wide focus and prominent arguments to explain why even bare plurals as focal preverbal subjects are excluded in Spanish (Suñer’s NNC cannot cover these cases, as it is based on the topical nature of preverbal subjects). Nonetheless, this solution does not work for preverbal subjects that do not represent external arguments, as in the case of unaccusative predicates: the subject in (37), for instance, is a raised internal argument and should perfectly integrate into the domain of wide focus, but the sentence is ill-formed.

- (37) **Manchas reaparecieron.* (Cf. *Reaparecieron manchas*)
 Stains reappear-PST-3PL

Accounting for the ill-formedness of (37) in a way that is completely independent from the NNC and the constraint on external arguments under wide focus is clearly undesirable and uneconomical, as (37) simply looks as one more instance of the general phenomenon I am discussing. I believe that this is not a real counterexample for my proposal: in fact, it is covered by the NNC. Bare plurals are excluded as preverbal subjects of unaccusatives just because they cannot be interpreted as unmarked topics. The basic evidence for this assumption comes from the interpretive effects associated with the preverbal subject position of unaccusatives in Italian, as noticed in Pinto (1997). Pinto claims that preverbal

unaccusative subjects have to be interpreted as being D-linked – I consider D-linking as a particular kind of specificity. The generalization holds in Spanish, as shown in (38):

- (38) a. *Reaparecieron dos manchas.*
 b. *Dos manchas reaparecieron.*
 ‘Two stains reappeared’

Whereas the postverbal subject in (38a) can be interpreted as specific or as non-specific, its preverbal counterpart in (38b) can only be specific: a speaker would use (38b) to talk about a couple of particular stains, possibly included in a familiar set, already mentioned in discourse. It is important to recall that no clear effects of this kind appear with indefinite subjects of unergative predicates. I propose that the topical status of preverbal subjects with unaccusatives is behind the contrast in (38): raising to Spec, IP has the interpretive effect of forcing a topical reading of the subject, thus constraining the interpretation of indefinite DPs in favor of specificity/D-linking. Preverbal indefinite subjects of unergatives, on the other hand, may be topical or inside the projection of focus. Going back to the bare plural in (37), this implies that the anomaly is accounted for by the NNC: if the predicate is unaccusative and this forces a topical reading of the preverbal subject, then (37) is out because semantic incorporation is blocked by topicality. Thus, unaccusatives represent no longer a problem.

3. Conclusions

In the preceding sections I have tried to vindicate the basic ideas of Suñer’s (1982) approach to the NNC, in particular the central role attributed to topicality and to focus structure. Following the proposals in Cohen & Erteschik-Shir (2002) and Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca (2003), among others, I have argued that the reason why information structure underlies the constraints on the distribution of bare plurals in Spanish is that bare nouns must undergo semantic incorporation, which is partially determined by information structure: unmarked topics block it, whereas narrow focus may favor it under certain conditions. This approach makes it possible to connect Suñer’s insights with more recent research on the semantics of bare nominals.

My contribution gives support to Suñer’s proposal by accounting for the two main problems it has to face: the acceptability of bare plurals as dislocated topics, and the unacceptability of non-topical bare plurals as preverbal subjects (at least, when they are not modified). In order to explain how bare plurals may occur as dislocated topics (in Romance Left Dislocation), but not as unmarked topics

(in preverbal subjects), I have argued that it is crucial to distinguish between two kinds of Topic positions. The marked, external position hosts a nominal expression that is connected by resumption to a sentence-internal position – which guarantees semantic incorporation and the corresponding existential reading of bare plurals. Dislocation is associated with an instruction to interpret a phrase as a ‘link’. Bare plurals interpreted as links show a combination of existential reading and contrast, where contrast is a necessary ingredient for an existential bare nominal to count as an address for information update. Bare nouns behave in this respect like indefinite DPs and other non-referential expressions. The unmarked, internal Topic position, in contrast, is not associated with any specific instruction, so that nothing triggers contrast to ‘save’ the interpretation of a bare plural as a topic. Moreover, semantic incorporation is not possible, which gives us the essence of the NNC. The result is a neat asymmetry between the two Topic positions.

As for the second problem in Suñer’s account – why bare-plurals as non-topical preverbal subjects are mostly unacceptable, the solution I have suggested is again based on information structure. Since semantic incorporation is the essential piece for the licensing of bare nouns, information structure is relevant only in those cases where the success of semantic incorporation is not guaranteed. This is the case of external arguments, actually the only nominals that count as possible non-topical preverbal subjects. I have claimed that bare plurals are excluded in this case because they should be taken as parts of the wide focus domain – a situation usually rejected by external arguments, which require narrow focus instead. The clash is not open to repair mechanisms in spoken Spanish, but can be solved in written Spanish via an interpretation involving narrow focus and contrast, at least in certain contexts and varieties that should be analyzed in more detail. Focalization and adnominal modification, among other devices, are able to override the ban on bare plurals in initial position just because they provide the contextual alternatives and contrast required to optimizing the interpretation of bare nominals in a prominent position and make semantic incorporation a rewarding operation. The crucial consequence of this proposal is that the difficulties of having bare plurals as preverbal subjects even when they are not topical are no longer problematic for an account of the NNC based on topicality: obviously, the difficulties are not predicted by such account, but they are not a counterexample either, and can be explained on independent grounds, again by means of information-structural notions. The conclusion is that Suñer’s approach can, and must, be vindicated.

This view of the distribution of bare plurals in Spanish has, in my opinion, a number of positive outcomes.

- The burden of the explanation is on topicality and focus structure. This is a welcome result, since it provides a natural motivation for a constraint on the preverbal position which fits well in a framework where all the notions involved are independently justified and needed in any case. Moreover, the account also extends to constraints on postverbal subjects based on focus. In addition, it reduces the role of syntactic configurations to a minimum, and it is compatible with crosslinguistic variation.
- The proposal is based on a precise division of labor between semantic incorporation – the basic mechanism – and information structure – only relevant when syntax makes incorporation a costly operation. Syntax provides the structure and the constraints for interpretation, and general pragmatic principles drive the inferences needed to comply with such constraints. This modular approach makes the proposal quite economical and provides reasonable answers for questions such as (1) when and why contrast enters the picture (with both topics and foci) – thus substantiating several descriptive observations in previous works, and (2) why focalization and modification as repair mechanisms are always related to external arguments in the literature.
- A further interesting consequence of this perspective is that most alleged cases of ungrammaticality of bare nouns in Spanish do not result from violations of strictly syntactic principles, but emerge in the process of inferentially building the explicature of the utterance (i.e. the proposition explicitly communicated). Such cases are thus reinterpreted as anomalies arising from semantic incompatibilities. I have been using asterisks (*) for certain examples and hash symbols (#) for others, in order to mark different levels of (un)acceptability, but none of the anomalous examples I have discussed is actually ungrammatical in a strict sense. Once syntax sets the constraints for interpretation, the bulk of the explanation concerns the Semantics/Pragmatics interface and, eventually, the inferential resolution of semantic mismatches.

I would like to conclude by mentioning two issues that remain still open. One is related to crosslinguistic data: it is to be ascertained what kind of contribution this proposal may offer in a comparative analysis (for instance, inside the domain of Romance languages). The second one has a more limited range. It is unlikely that the proposal could be able to reduce each and every distributional fact concerning Spanish bare plurals to information structure – and in fact I already pointed out that the constraints posed by Individual-Level predicates fall out of the scope of this approach. However, the proposal could be illuminating in a more detailed study of adnominal modification in bare plurals in written Spanish, as well as in an investigation of the effects of tense, aspect and other grammatical elements on the behavior of bare nouns. This should be cleared up by future research.

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