Predicate focus fronting in the Spanish determiner phrase

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Received 17 December 2007; received in revised form 4 July 2008; accepted 4 July 2008

Abstract

This article brings new evidence to the fore supporting the hypothesis that the architecture of the DP domain mirrors that of the sentence, particularly concerning the topic–focus articulation. To fulfill this task an Spanish nominal construction (the lo-de construction) is analyzed on a pair with comparative qualitative binominal noun phrases. A wide bulk of evidence is presented that these constructions have a subject–predicate configuration, and involve predicate raising to a Focus Phrase, yielding a partition of the sentence where the predicate is focus, and the subject, a background topic. This proposal provides an accurate explanation of a wide range of mostly unattested data, particularly concerning the wide and complex set of referential restrictions involved in the lo-de construction and in Spanish QBNPs. Moreover, it is argued that the ‘exclamatory flavor’ of the lo-de construction results from the combination of a degree quantificational structure with the definiteness value of the highest Det head. This proposal is argued to offer a simple solution to the restriction of this construction to factive predicates.

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Keywords: Topic; Focus; DP-structure; Subject–predicate relation; Degree quantification; Definiteness; Factivity; Exclamativity

1. Introduction

Since the very beginning of the inclusion of functional categories in the articulation of the sentence, many scholars have argued for the existence of a strong parallelism between internal DP structure and CP structure (see Brame, 1982 for the original insight, and Abney, 1986; Giusti, 1993; Ritter, 1991; Szabolcsi, 1994 for different developments). Basically, it is commonly accepted that at least a distinction exists in the DP domain between two domains, in parallel to the TP–CP: a lower one linked to morphological properties of the noun – number, and gender, basically; see Giusti (1993), Picallo (1994), Ritter (1991) – and a higher one linked to referential and, we will argue, force properties—see Aboh (2004a), Aboh (2004b), Haegeman (2004), Giusti (1996), Longobardi (1994).

The goal of this article is to bring new evidence to the fore for such a fine-grained architecture of the DP domain, which takes into account (i) the information structure articulation, (ii) the encoding of exclamative force, and (iii) the

* A version of this paper was presented at the congress "DP Internal Information Structure: Topic, Focus and Other Illocutionary Forces" (Utrecht, 2006). We thank the audience for their comments. We also thank two anonymous reviewers for Lingua for their comments and suggestions, our colleagues Josep M. Brucart, M. Teresa Espinal, and Avel · ina Sufer for fruitful discussions, and the guest editors of the volume, Enoch Aboh, Norbert Corver and Marjo van Koppen, for their support, suggestions, and patience. The research underlying this article was partially supported by grants HUM2006-13295-C02-01/FILO (MEC and FEDER), and 2005SGR-00753 (DURSI). Usual disclaimers apply.

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doi:10.1016/j.lingua.2008.07.010

Please cite this article in press as: Villalba, X., Bartra-Kaufmann, A., Predicate focus fronting in the Spanish determiner phrase. Lingua (2009), doi:10.1016/j.lingua.2008.07.010
syntactic properties of the so-called Spanish neuter determiner *lo* in correlation with gradable predicates. In order to fulfill this task, we will consider one type of the Spanish nominal *lo-de* (see Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba, 2006a, b):

(1) Me sorprendió *lo caro* de la casa.
    ‘It surprised me how expensive the house was.’

The *lo-de* construction shows a series of striking properties that make it unique in the Romance landscape, so that we will describe it in some detail. This task will be conducted in section 2 in parallel to Spanish comparative qualitative binominal noun phrases (henceforth QBNPs), a subtype of the *N of a N* construction (see Español-Echevarría, 1997, 1998; García and Méndez, 2002; Villalba, 2007b; for other languages, one can consult with much profit Bennis et al., 1998; Corver, 2003; den Dikken, 1998, 2006; den Dikken and Singapreeca, 2004; Doetjes and Rooyck, 1999; Hulk and Tellier, 2000; Moro, 1997; Napoli, 1989)\(^1\):

(2) Conocí al granuja del alcalde.
    ‘I met that crook of the mayor.’

After discussing the main properties of both constructions, section 3 will present evidence for the topic–focus articulation in Spanish *lo-de* construction and QBNPs: the predicate is interpreted as focus, whereas the subject is interpreted as background information, in sharp contrast with Germanic QBNPs. In accordance with these empirical findings, in section 4 we will defend an analysis of the *lo-de* construction involving focus fronting of the predicate to a dedicated position within the DP, and we will extend it to Spanish QBNPs. Furthermore, we will consider the exclamative flavor of the *lo-de* construction as deriving from the conjunction of two semantic factors: the presence of a null operator over degrees, and the inherent definiteness of the neuter article *lo*. Finally, section 5 closes the article with the main conclusions.

2. The Spanish *lo-de* construction

In this section we will review the basic properties of the *lo-de* construction, and will show that a clear parallel can be traced with Spanish QBNPs in relevant respects:

\(^1\) A related construction exists, *attributive qualitative binominal noun phrases* in den Dikken’s (2006) terms:

(i) un idiota de médico
    an idiot of doctor

(ii) una mierda de libros
    a shit of books

Formally, this Spanish attributive variant shows a bare nominal in subject position – *médico* ‘doctor’ (i) and *libros* ‘books’ (ii) – and allows number disagreement between the subject and the predicate (ii). Moreover, it allows lexically frozen attributes which do no agree with the subject:

(iii) una bazofía de arroz
    a distaste of rice

(iv) un asco de ponencias
    a disgust of talks

Crucially for our analysis, the present construction allows the independence of the predicate nominal, contrary, to our *lo-de* construction:

(v) Le sentó mal la bazofía (de arroz).
    ‘He digested badly the distasteful food.’

Since we will not consider this attributive variant in this article, we will use the label QBNPs thoroughly to refer to *comparative QBNPs* for the sake of simplicity (the reader is referred to den Dikken (2006); Doetjes and Rooyck (1999) for a detailed comparison of the two constructions).

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there is a subject–predicate relation;

- *de* is not a true preposition;

- the predicate is quantified to a high degree;

- the subject must be a specific nominal;

- the construction is an island for extraction.

We will consider each property in detail in the following sections. However, before proceeding, we will devote a few words to individuate the *lo-de* construction in the wide and intricate set of Spanish nominal constructions headed by the neuter article *lo* (see Bosque and Moreno, 1990, and Leonetti, 1999 for two surveys).

### 2.1. Individuating the quantificational *lo-de* construction

Different constructions can be obtained in Spanish with the genderless article *lo* plus an adjective.\(^2\) For the purposes of this article, one major distinction should be traced between our quantificational *lo-de* construction (3) — *qualitative lo* in Bosque and Moreno (1990) terms — and the partitive construction in (4) — *individuating lo* in Bosque and Moreno (1990) terms:

(3) Me asusta lo peligroso de la empresa.
    to.me frightens LO dangerous of the.FEM enterprise

    ‘It frightens me how risky the enterprise is.’

(4) Lo interesante del libro es el primer capítulo.
    LO interesting of.the book is the first chapter

    ‘The interesting part of the book is the first chapter.’

As the translations make clear, whereas the former involves a degree quantification over the scale denoted by the adjective predicated of the subject, the latter refers to a part of the subject which can be characterized by the property denoted by the adjective.

One main empirical evidence separating these two *lo* constructions concerns degree modification. On the one hand, whereas the partitive construction admits the relative superlative reading induced by *más* ‘more’, the one we are interested in does not. Hence, the following *lo* phrases can only be interpreted partitively, which is fine with the context in (5a), but leads to awkwardness in (5b):

(5) a. Lo más pequeño de la casa es el dormitorio.
    LO more small of the.FEM house is the bedroom

    ‘The smallest part of the house is the bedroom.’

b. ≠ Lo más caro de la casa me impresionó.
    LO more expensive of the.FEM house to.me impressed

    ‘#The most expensive part of the house impressed me.’

On the other hand, the behavior of each construction reverses when the high degree modifier *muy* ‘very’ is used:

(6) a. *Lo muy pequeño de la casa es el dormitorio.
    LO very small of the.FEM house is the bedroom

    ‘The high degree of smallness of the house is the bedroom.’

b. Lo muy caro de la casa me impresionó.
    LO very expensive of the.FEM house to.me impressed

    ‘The high degree of expensiveness of the house impressed me.’

---

\(^2\) *Lo* has been mainly characterized by traditional grammarians as a Neuter Article, contrasting with masculine *el* and feminine *la*. (Alcina and Blecua, 1975, 568) describe it as “El lo neutro y átono que forma sistema con los artículos concordados”. More recently, Pomino and Stark (2006) convincingly argue, in a feature geometry framework that there is no “neuter” gender in contemporary Spanish, and that “neuter” corresponds to a geometry where no individuation or discreteness can be obtained.
From the translations, one easily appreciates that \textit{muy} 'very' forces the quantificational reading of the \textit{lo} construction, which fits in with the context in (6b), but does not with the one in (6a). \footnote{The quantifier could be viewed as redundant in the structure or even incompatible with the high degree value of the phrase. We come back to this structure in 4.2.}

Once we have settled the main distinction among the \textit{lo} constructions nominalizing an adjective in Spanish, in the remaining of the article we will concentrate on the quantificational construction in (3).

A second important methodological and empirical distinction concerns the contrast between our \textit{lo-de} construction, and an apparently synonymous clausal construction (see Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba, 2006\textit{a, b}; Gutiérrez-Rexach, 1999; Leonetti, 1999):

\begin{align}
(7) & \text{Me sorprendió lo cara que era la casa.} \\
& \text{to.me surprised LO expensive.FEM that was the house.FEM} \\
& \text{‘It surprised me how expensive the house was.’}
\end{align}

However, despite their similarity, we follow Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006\textit{a, b}) and assume that enough empirical evidence exists for a separate analysis—contra Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999). Just for illustration, we mention two clear-cut cases. First, the \textit{lo-de} construction displays a clear nominal and dependent behavior, whereas the clausal construction has the degree of independence that one expects of a sentence, patterning with degree wh-exclamative sentences:

\begin{align}
(8) & \text{a. * ¡Lo caro de la casa!} \\
& \text{LO expensive of the.FEM house} \\
& \text{b. ¡Lo cara que es la casa!} \\
& \text{LO expensive.FEM that is the.FEM house} \\
& \text{c. ¡Qué cara que es la casa!} \\
& \text{how expensive.FEM that is the.FEM house}
\end{align}

The second major difference we will consider is the fact that the \textit{lo-de} construction is restricted to individual-level predicates (see 2.2), whereas the clausal one admits any gradable predicate, regardless of its aspectual properties. As a consequence, besides the contrast regarding the range of adjectives admitted (9), a second related restriction affects the \textit{lo-de} construction, namely the impossibility of nominalizing prepositional phrases (10) nor adverbs (11), which are systematically treated as stage-level predicates:

\begin{align}
(9) & \text{a. Me sorprendió lo frágil/*lleno del vaso.} \\
& \text{to.me surprised LO fragile/full of the glass} \\
& \text{‘The degree of fragility/fullness of the glass surprised me.’} \\
& \text{b. Me sorprendió \{lo frágil que era\,lo lleno que estaba\} el vaso.} \\
& \text{to.me surprised LO fragile that was/LO full that was the glass} \\
& \text{‘It surprised me how fragile/full the glass was.’}
\end{align}

\begin{align}
(10) & \text{a. * Me sorprendió lo en su punto de la sopa.} \\
& \text{to.me surprised LO in its point of the.FEM soup} \\
& \text{‘It surprised me the exact cooking point of the soup.’} \\
& \text{b. Me sorprendió lo en su punto que estaba la sopa.} \\
& \text{to.me surprised LO in its point that was the.FEM soup} \\
& \text{‘It surprised me how exactly the cooking point was of the soup.’}
\end{align}
In accordance with these data, and the evidence reported in Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a, b), we would not attempt to integrate this construction in our analysis of the lo-de construction, and we refer the reader to the above mentioned references for a proposal.

2.2. There is a subject–predicate relation

Even though the DP and the AP in the lo-de construction do not agree in gender and number – a point which we turn back on in 4.2– there is ample empirical support for considering that they form a subject–predicate relation. First of all, it is plainly evident that the following entailments follow, suggesting that the property denoted by the adjectives alto ‘tall/high’ and inútil ‘useless’ is predicated of the DPs la casa ‘the house’ and sus esfuerzos ‘his/her efforts’, respectively:

\[
\begin{align*}
(12) & \quad \text{a. } \text{lo alto de la casa } \Rightarrow \text{la casa es alta} \\
& \quad \text{LO high of the house the house is high} \\
& \quad \text{b. } \text{lo inútil de sus esfuerzos } \Rightarrow \text{sus esfuerzos son inútiles} \\
& \quad \text{LO useless of his/her efforts his/her efforts are useless}
\end{align*}
\]

A similar pattern is found in QBNPs:

\[
\begin{align*}
(13) & \quad \text{el idiota del alcalde } \Rightarrow \text{El alcalde es un idiota} \\
& \quad \text{the idiot of the mayor the mayor is an idiot} \\
& \quad \text{‘that idiot of a mayor’ } \Rightarrow \text{‘The mayor is an idiot.’}
\end{align*}
\]

Secondly, the relation between the DP and the AP is constrained lexicosemantically, as in other nonverbal predicative constructions. As we have seen at the beginning of this section, the lo-de construction cannot be constructed with stage-level predicates, but rather only with individual-level predicates (see paragraph below 3.3.2 for a solution to this contrast):

\[
\begin{align*}
(14) & \quad \text{a. } \text{*Me sorprendió lo lleno de aquel plato.} \\
& \quad \text{to.me surprised LO full of that dish} \\
& \quad \text{b. } \text{*Me sorprendió lo enfermo de tu hermano.} \\
& \quad \text{to.me surprised LO ill of your brother}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
(15) & \quad \text{a. } \text{Me sorprendió lo frágil de aquel plato.} \\
& \quad \text{to.me surprised LO fragile of that dish} \\
& \quad \text{b. } \text{Me sorprendió lo inteligente de tu hermano.} \\
& \quad \text{to.me surprised LO intelligent of your brother}
\end{align*}
\]

Crucially, this behavior is faithfully reproduced in Spanish nonverbal exclamatives, which display a clear subject–predicate pattern (see Vinet, 1991 for the original insight concerning French exclamatives, and Hernanz and Suñer, 1999 for similar observations concerning Spanish):

\[
\begin{align*}
(16) & \quad \text{a. } \text{¡Enfermo, tu hermano!} \\
& \quad \text{ill your brother} \\
& \quad \text{b. } \text{¡Extraño, tu hermano!} \\
& \quad \text{strange your brother}
\end{align*}
\]
Whereas the stage-level predicate *enfermo* ‘ill’ is impossible, the individual-level *extran˜o* ‘strange’ is perfect in this construction.\(^4\)

Finally, one must observe that the DP behaves syntactically as the typical subject of a predicative adjective in two respects. On the one hand, it cannot be a strong pronoun: \(^5\)

\[
\begin{align*}
(17) & \quad a. \text{ *Me sorprendió lo alto de ella} \\
& \text{to.me surprised LO tall of her} \\
& b. \text{ *Hablé con el granuja de él.} \\
& \text{talked.I with the crook of him}
\end{align*}
\]

as strong pronouns (see Rigau, 1988, and Picallo, 1994), due to their contrastive or emphatic value, are restricted in discourse neutral contexts and when referring to inanimate entities.

On the other hand, the subject cannot be a bare plural:

\[
\begin{align*}
(18) & \quad a. \text{ *Son capas} \quad \text{casas.} \\
& \text{are expensive.FEM.PL houses} \\
& b. \text{ *Juzgó acusados culpables.} \\
& \text{judged accused.PL guilty.PL} \\
& c. \text{ *No me extrañó lo caro de casas.} \\
& \text{not to.me struck LO expensive of houses} \\
& d. \text{ *No hablé con los idiotas de alcaldes.} \\
& \text{not talked with the idiots of mayors}
\end{align*}
\]

Summing up, even though an additional pragmatic factor is probably involved in this pattern (see 3), the clear parallel with respect to copulative sentences and secondary predication structures suggests that the following empirical generalization holds:

**Generalization 1.** The *lo-de* construction and QBNPs involve a subject–predicate relationship.

### 2.3. *De* is not a true preposition

When we consider the internal structure of the *lo-de* construction, it turns out that standard constituency tests fail for the apparent Prepositional Phrase headed by *de*, just as happens with QBNPs. First of all, the *de* +DP sequence can neither be subject to *wh*-movement (19) nor focalized (20) –as costumary, we mark the focalized constituent with small caps:

\[\quad \text{[X. Villalba, A. Bartra-Kaufmann/Lingua xxx (2009) xxx–xxx]}
\[\quad \text{[Please cite this article in press as: Villalba, X., Bartra-Kaufmann, A., Predicate focus fronting in the Spanish determiner phrase. Lingua (2009), doi:10.1016/j.lingua.2008.07.010]}
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\[\quad \text{[126]}
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\[\quad \text{[145]}
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\[\quad \text{[146]}
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\[\quad \text{[147]}
\]

\[\quad \text{[4] This fact can be tested with adjectives like *bueno* ‘good’ that allow both individual-level (‘nice’) and stage-level interpretations (‘gorgeous’):}
\]

\[\quad \text{(i) *Bueno, tu prima!} \\
\text{good your cousin.FEM} \\
\text{‘A nice person, your cousin. (ironically)’}
\]

\[\quad \text{In (i) only the former meaning can be obtained, not the colloquial stage-level one.}
\]

\[\quad \text{[5] In the case of QBNPs, the presence of strong pronouns is disfavored. It is not totally forbidden, as acknowledged by the following two examples}
\]

\[\quad \text{from the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española, but here the pronoun seems to take an anaphoric o}
\]

\[\quad \text{exhaustive listing value:}
\]

\[\quad \text{(i) *Y la tonta de ella, que eso es lo que es, tonta...} \\
\text{and the.FEM fool.FEM of her that this is LO that is fool.FEM} \\
\text{Almudena Grandes, *Los aires difíciles,* 2002}
\]

\[\quad \text{(ii) y no ha vuelto a mover un dedo, el tonto de él.} \\
\text{and not has turned to move a finger the fool of him} \\
\text{Pedro Zarraluki, *La historia del silencio,* 1994}
\]
These data result from the fact that de is not a true preposition in these constructions, nor is it forming a maximal projection with the DP (see Kayne, 2004, 2005a for a general approach to the role of apparent prepositions).

A second piece of evidence supporting this conclusion is the impossibility of the de +DP sequence of being neither pronominalized by a possessive pronoun (21) nor gapped (22):

(19) a. *¿[De qué casa] te extrañó lo caro t?
   of what house to.you struck LO expensive.MASC
   b. *¿[De qué alcalde] conociste al granuja t?
   of which mayor knew.you to.the crook

(20) a. *DE LA CASA me extrañó lo caro t
   of the house to.me struck LO expensive.MASC
   b. *DEL ALCALDE conoció Juan al granuja t
   of the mayor knew Juan to.the crook

Since Ps can be argued to select the NP and to be semantically involved in the assignment of a θ-role, and given the fact that ‘de’ in our construction is not a thematic selector and therefore does not form a constituent with the DP, we can raise the following empirical generalizations:

Generalization 2. Neither in the lo-de construction nor in QBNPs is de a true preposition.

Generalization 3. Neither in the lo-de construction nor in QBNPs does the de +DP sequence form a constituent.

2.4. The predicate is quantified to a high degree

As already pointed out by Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a), Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006b), Bosque and Moreno (1990), Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999), Leonetti (1999), the adjective in the lo-de construction must denote a
property amenable to degree quantification, so that adjectives like impossible ‘impossible’ or español ‘Spanish’ yield ungrammatical results (23), in sharp contrast with clear gradable adjectives like caro ‘expensive’ or maleducado ‘rude’ (24):\textsuperscript{6}

   to.me struck LO impossible of the solution
b. *No soportó lo español de su tono.
   not stand LO Spanish of his/her tune

(24) a. Me extrajo lo caro de la casa.
   to.me struck LO expensive of the house
b. No soportó lo maleducado de su tono.
   not stand LO rude of his/her tune

Moreover, in the lo-de construction the property denoted by the gradable adjective is to be taken to a high degree. So then, the sentences in (24) can be paraphrased as follows:

(25) a. The high degree of expensiveness of the house struck me.
 b. (S)he could not stand the high degree of rudeness of his tune.

Two immediate consequences follow. First, since the construction is semantically equivalent to a definite description, it comes as no surprise that the degree to which the subject instatiates the property denoted by the predicate be semantically presupposed. Therefore, the following sentences are perceived as contradictions rather than as implicature cancellations:

(26) a. A Juan le sorprende lo caro de la casa, #pero en to Juan to.him surprises LO expensive of the house but in realidad la casa no es cara.
   reality the house not is expensive
b. Me molestó lo maleducado de su tono, #aunque en to.me upset LO rude of his/her tone although in realidad su tono no es maleducado.
   reality his/her tone not is rude

Second, the adjective in this construction can be modified by a very restricted set of degree quantifiers, namely those pointing at a high/low value in the scale denoted by the adjective. Mid-scale modifiers are rejected (as (27a) shows, high degree can also apply to the lower extreme of a scale):

(27) a. Sorprendió lo muy/poco elaborado de su propuesta.
   struck LO very/little elaborated of his/her proposal
b. *Sorprendió lo algo/bastante elaborado de su propuesta.
   struck LO some/quite elaborated of his/her proposal

In connection with this restriction, note the behavior of the lo-de construction regarding superlatives. Whereas absolute superlatives are fine (28) – even though they are far from being a widespread phenomenon: only three tokens in the corpora of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española (RAE) – relative superlatives (29) are invariably incompatible with the intended quantificational reading, and must be interpreted partitively (see above section 2), as the translation shows:

\textsuperscript{6} It goes without saying that español ‘Spanish’, as all ethnic adjectives, can be coerced into a gradable reading when interpreted as a bunch of stereotypical properties. We disregard such a reading.
The gradability requirement extends to Spanish QBNPs as well, so that the nominal predicate must be gradable.

Hence, the sentences in (30) are odd as QBNPs:

(30) a. ¿Se da cuenta el procesado de lo absurdísimo de su error? 
   SE gives account the prosecuted of the extremely.absurd of his error
   [1965, ALFONSO SASTRE, M.S.V. o La sangre y la ceniza, *apud* Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual, RAE]

b. propiedad única del águila, la cual, desde lo altísimo de las nubes, ve al cordero property unique of-the hawk the which from LO very.high of the clouds sees to.the lamb in la tierra? in the earth
   [1605, Francisco López de Úbeda, *La pícara Justina, apud* Cor-pus Diacrónico del Español, RAE]

c. Sólo distinguían lo numeroso de los bultos, lo hermosísimo only distinguish LO numerous of the baggages LO extremely.beautiful of many ladies de muchas señoras
   [1646, Baptista Remiro de Navarra, *Los peligros de Madrid, apud* Corpus Diacrónico del Español, RAE]

The gradability requirement extends to Spanish QBNPs as well, so that the nominal predicate must be gradable.

Hence, the sentences in (30) are odd as QBNPs:

(30) a. Me sorprendió lo más alto del edificio.
   to.me struck LO more high of-the building ‘The highest part of the building surprised me.’

b. Me sorprendió lo más elaborado de su propuesta.
   to.me struck LO more developed of his/her proposal ‘The most developed part of his/her proposal surprised me.’

Crucially, neither *inglés ‘English’ nor *favorita ‘favorite’ are gradable:

   your brother is very English

b. *Tu vecina fue muy favorita.
   your neighbor was very favorite

As for the high degree of the property denoted by the nominal predicate, the data are less categorical, but are totally compatible with the ones found in the *lo-de* construction. Take for instance the following contrast:

   the crook of.the mayor is without doubt very crook

b. El granuja del alcalde es aún más granuja de lo que pensaba.
   the crook of.the mayor is even more crook of LO that think

c. #El pesado de tu vecino no es nada pesado.
   the bore of your neighbor not is nothing boring
Whereas (32a) is perceived as a tautology, and (32b) confirms that the ‘degree of crookness’ of the mayor was certainly high with respect to some standard or expectation, (32c) is clearly interpreted as a contradiction.

Therefore, the data presented in this subsection allows us to raise the following empirical generalization:

**Generalization 4.** *lo-de* and QBNPs are incompatible with non-high/low syntactic degree quantification.

### 2.5. The subject must be a specific nominal

As observed by Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a, b), there is a referentiality constraint affecting the subject of the *lo-de* construction. Consider the case of nonspecific indefinite DPs (33a), bare plurals (33b), and NPI and monotone decreasing quantifiers (33c):

(33) a. *No me sorprenderá lo caro de una casa cualquiera.*
   not to.me will.surprise LO expensive of a house any

b. *No me extrañé lo caro de casas.*
   not to.me struck LO expensive of houses

c. *No me extrañé lo caro de ninguna casa/pocas casas.*
   not to.me struck LO expensive of none.FEM casa/pocas casas.
   houses/few.FEM.PL houses

Interestingly, this behavior fully reproduces in QBNPs (see Villalba, 2007b):

(34) a. *No hablaré con el idiota de un alcalde cualquiera.*
   not will.talk with the idiot of a mayor any

b. *No hablé con los idiotas de alcaldes.*
   not talked with the idiots of mayors

c. *No hablé con el idiota de ningún alcalde los idiotas de pocos alcaldes.*
   not talked with the idiot of none.FEM alcaldes/los idiotas de pocos alcaldes.
   houses/plural.FEM.PL idiots of few.PL houses

Without entering now into the factor underlying this referentiality restriction—we will turn back to the issue in 3—we can state the following provisional generalization:

**Generalization 5.** The subject of the *lo-de* construction and of QBNPs must be specific.

### 2.6. The construction is an island for extraction

Another property that makes *lo-de* constructions and QBNPs similar is islandhood, which can be easily appreciated in the following examples, which correspond to *wh*-movement and focalization respectively (on islandhood in Predicate Inversion constructions, see den Dikken (1998, 2006)):

(35) a. *¿En qué asunto te extrañé lo mezquino de su interés t?*
   in what matter to.you struck LO mean of his/her interest

b. *¿De qué ciudad conociste al granuja del alcalde t?*
   of what city met.you to.the crook of the mayor

(36) a. *EN COBRAR me extrañó lo mezquino de su interés t*
   in get.paid to.me struck LO mean of his/her interest

b. *DE BARCELONA conoció Juan al idiota del alcalde t*
   of Barcelona knew Juan the fool of the mayor
Extraction from the subject position is totally banned in both constructions, for reasons that will be discussed in depth in section 4. We can, thus, state the following provisional empirical generalization:

**Generalization 6.** The lo-de construction and QBNPs are islands for extraction.

### 3. Information structure in the lo-de construction

Following a suggestion in Lagae (1994), den Dikken (2006); den Dikken and Singhapreecha (2004) claim that information packaging in QBNPs conforms to the standard pattern found in Predicate Inversion constructions, namely the subject is the focus, whereas the predicate is old information. So then, they extend the informational pattern in (37b) to DP structures like the ones in (38) –we respect their glosses:

\[
\begin{align*}
(37) & \quad \begin{aligned}
& \text{a. John} \underbrace{\text{OLD}}_{\text{old information}} \text{ is } \underbrace{\text{my best friend}}_{\text{new information}} \\
& \text{b. My} \underbrace{\text{best friend}}_{\text{old information}} \text{ is John} \underbrace{\text{NEW}}_{\text{new information}} \\
& \text{[(den Dikken and Singhapreecha, 2004, ex. 10)]}
\end{aligned}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
(38) & \quad \begin{aligned}
& \text{a. un drôle de type} \\
& \text{a. funny DE guy} \\
& \text{b. une pizza de chaude} \\
& \text{a. pizza DE hot-AGR} \\
& \text{[(den Dikken and Singhapreecha, 2004, exs. 20-21)]}
\end{aligned}
\end{align*}
\]

Yet, as we will show in this section, the lo-de construction and Spanish comparative QBNPs do not display such a pattern, but rather the converse one –for the sake of clarity, let us rephrase the new–old distinction in the traditional focus-background partition:

\[
\begin{align*}
(39) & \quad \begin{aligned}
& \text{a. lo} \underbrace{\text{capo}}_{\text{focus}} \text{ de } \underbrace{la casa}_{\text{background}} \\
& \text{‘the degree of expensiveness of the house’} \\
& \text{b. el} \underbrace{idiota}_{\text{focus}} \text{ de } \underbrace{su hijo}_{\text{background}} \\
& \text{‘that idiot of his/her son’}
\end{aligned}
\end{align*}
\]

We sustain our proposal on the empirical evidence presented in the following subsections. First, we will show that the subject of neither the lo-de nor QBNPs behaves as focus with respect to standard tests. Then, we will bring empirical support for its backgrounded nature in close parallel with dislocation, a well-studied backgrounder strategy.

#### 3.1. The subject is not focus

Let us consider the evidence suggesting that the subject is not focus neither in the lo-de construction nor in Spanish QBNPs.

##### 3.1.1. Impossibility of DPs associated with focus particles

One typical identifier of contrastive focus is the particle only. So then, in the following sentence this particle signals the scope of the focus (see Rooth, 1985, 1992; for an alternative view see Vallduvi, 1992):

\[
\begin{align*}
(10) & \quad \begin{aligned}
& \text{a. Mary had a} \underbrace{\text{lamb}}_{\text{focus}} \text{ only.} \\
& \text{b. Only} \underbrace{\text{Mary}}_{\text{focus}} \text{ had a lamb.}
\end{aligned}
\end{align*}
\]
When we extend this test to the *lo-de* construction, it turns out that the subject DP cannot be associated with *sólo* 'only':

(41) a. *Te extrañó lo alto de sólo aquella niña.* to.you struck LO tall of only that.FEM girl

   b. *Me sorprendió lo caro de sólo aquella casa.* to.me struck LO expensive of only that.FEM house

This is exactly what we found in Spanish QBNPs as well:

(42) a. *¿Recuerdas al burro de sólo aquel médico?* remind.you to.the donkey of only that doctor

   b. *Hablé con el granuja de sólo aquel alcalde.* talked.I with the crook of only that mayor

Therefore, the behavior of particles associated with focus like *only* points to the conclusion that the neither subject of the *lo-de* construction and nor that of QBNPs are (contrastive) focus (compare den Dikken and Singhapreecha, 2004).

3.1.2. Impossibility of focused wh-in situ

Further evidence for the non-focus status of the subject DP in the *lo-de* construction comes from the behavior of wh-in situ. It is a well-known fact that wh-elements appearing in canonical positions within the sentence are interpreted as focus, as the felicity of the pair-list answer shows:

(43) A: Who bought what?

   B: Mary bought a book, John a CD, and Caroline a DVD.

Moreover, in Spanish, where the rightmost VP position is associated with informative focus, it happens that wh-elements *in situ* must appear in precisely this rightmost position (44a) vs. (44b), and can only be followed by a right-dislocate (44c) (see Etxepare and Uribe-Etxebarria, 2005; Ordoñez, 1997):

(44) a. ¿Quién le regaló el libro a quién? who to.him/her gave the book to who

   b. *¿Quién le regaló a quién el libro?* who to.him/her gave to who the book

   c. ¿Quién se lo regaló a quién, el libro? who to.him/her it gave to who the book

When we extend this test to the *lo-de* construction, we find out that wh-elements *in situ* cannot appear in the subject position (a fact that fits in with the islandhood properties of the construction; see 2.6):

---

7 An anonymous reviewer points out that focus elements do not fit well inside DPs and PPs. We agree that this proof cannot establish a net cutting point. There is, nevertheless, a sharp contrast between the *lo-de* construction and other prepositional complements:

(i) ¿Un arroz con sólo langostas
   a rice with only lobster

(ii) ¿Un recuerdo de sólo los momentos agradables
    a memory of only the times nice

Even though (i) and (ii) are not spontaneous habitual phrases, they are certainly better than (41) and (42) in the text.
Once more, QBNPs exhibit the very same behavior:

\[(46)\]
\[a. \quad \ast \text{¿A quién engañó el granja de qué alcalde?} \\
\text{to} \quad \text{who deceived the crook} \quad \text{of} \quad \text{which mayor} \\
\b. \quad \ast \text{¿Quién se encontró con el granja de qué alcalde?} \\
\text{who} \quad \text{SE met with} \quad \text{the crook} \quad \text{of} \quad \text{which mayor}
\]

On the grounds of this evidence, we can reinforce the claim that neither the subject of the \textit{lo-de} construction nor that of QBNPs is focus.

3.1.3. Backward pronominalization

It is a clear fact about coreference relations in Spanish that the antecedent must precede the pronoun, so that, as a rule, backward pronominalization is impossible:

\[(47)\]
\[a. \quad \text{Su}_i \text{ jefe vio a Juan}_i. \\
\text{his boss saw to Juan} \\
\b. \quad \ast \text{Su}_i \text{ procesamiento deprimió al alcalde}_i. \\
\text{his prosecution depressed to-the mayor} \\
\c. \quad \ast \text{Su}_i \text{ hijo nunca ha necesitado a Juan}_i. \\
\text{his son never has needed to Juan}
\]

Interestingly, if we right-dislocate the antecedent, the sentences become fine:

\[(48)\]
\[a. \quad \text{Su}_i \text{ jefe lo vio, a Juan}_i. \\
\text{his boss him saw to Juan} \\
\b. \quad \text{Su}_i \text{ procesamiento lo deprimió, al alcalde}_i. \\
\text{his prosecution him depressed to-the mayor} \\
\c. \quad \text{Su}_i \text{ hijo nunca lo ha necesitado, a Juan}_i. \\
\text{his son never him has needed to Juan}
\]

Let us follow Cecchetto (1999) and Villalba (1998, 2000), and assume the right-dislocate to occupy a lower position in the VP-area. That will entail that c-commanding relations cannot explain the difference between (47) and (48), for the DP does not command the possessive pronoun in neither. The answer advanced by Villalba (1999) resorts to the informational status of the antecedent: whereas it is focus – hence it is a new referent – in (47), it is a topic – hence an old/accommodated referent – in (48). As a consequence, the case of (presumed) backward pronominalization involves a previously introduced referent, which may count as the discourse antecedent for the pronoun (see Williams, 1994 for a similar insight, concerning sentences like \textit{His, boss saw Johni}). Support for such a move comes from the following examples, where the explicit mention of the referent \textit{Juan} allows the possessive pronoun to \textit{indirectly} corefer with a following instance of this referent:

\[(49)\]
\[a. \quad \ast \text{Su}_i \text{ jefe vio a Juan}_i. \\
\text{his boss saw to Juan} \\
\b. \quad \text{Juan no vio a su}_i \text{ jefe, pero su}_i \text{ jefe sí que lo}_i \text{ vio, a Juan}_i. \\
\text{Juan not saw to his boss but his boss yes that him say to Juan}
\]

If this line of analysis is correct, a clear prediction can be made concerning the informational status of the subject of the \textit{lo-de} construction: if it were a nonfocal constituent, a previously introduced referent would be available as the
antecedent of the pronoun, yielding an instance of apparent backward pronominalization. The prediction seems correct under the light of the following examples:

(50) a. Parece que el Etna vuelve a echar lava. Su erupción pone de manifiesto lo peligroso [el seems that the Etna turns to throw lava its eruption puts of evidence LO dangerous of-the volcán]i, vulcano
b. Su colapso demostró lo precario de [la red eléctrica]i, its collapse demonstrated LO precarious of the.FEM network electric.FEM

This is even clearer in the case of QBNPs:

(51) a. Su procesamiento deprimió al corrupto [el alcalde]i, his prosecution depressed to-the corrupt of-the mayor
b. Su insistencia benefició a la pesada de [María]i, her insistence benefited to-the.FEM bore.FEM of María

Taken as a whole, the empirical evidence discussed in this subsection allows us to state the following generalization:

**Generalization 7.** Neither he subject of the lo-de construction nor that of QBNPs are focus.

### 3.2. The subject is a background topic

The data presented so far in this section allows us to conclude that the subject of the lo-de construction is not focus. We will advance that it should better be analyzed as a background topic – a *tail* in Vallduví (1992) terms. In order to show this, we will consider the properties of a construction we independently know to be associated with background status, namely *clitic right-dislocation* (see Erteschik-Shir, 2007; Grosz and Ziv, 1998; Mayol, to appear; Vallduví, 1992; Villalba, 2000, 2007a; Ziv, 1986), and then we will proceed to display that the referential restriction applying to right-dislocates are the same we find in the subject position of the lo-de construction.

#### 3.2.1. An excursus on clitic right-dislocation

As a matter of fact, the most typical function of clitic right-dislocation is to reintroduce as a current topic a previously mentioned referent – hence the appropriateness of the term *background* topic.\(^8\) Consider for instance the following example from one of the radio shows by the Marx Brothers:

(52) a. GROUCHO: Let me take a look at that diamond!
b. MRS. VANDERGRAFF: But the diamond is lost. It’s gone!
c. GROUCHO: Well, how do you expect me to find it if I don’t know what it looks like. Why didn’t you come to me before it was stolen? What you’re trying to do is lock the barn door after the horse is stolen. When did you last see your horse?
d. MRS. VANDERGRAFF: But I didn’t lose a horse. I lost a diamond!
e. GROUCHO: Well, that was your first mistake. You should have lost a horse. A horse would be much easier to find.
f. MRS. VANDERGRAFF: Now what about the diamond?


The gist of the dialogue is the continuous shift between two topics: the diamond, which is the main concern of Mrs. Vandergraaff, and a totally invented horse introduced by Groucho on the basis of a nonreferential mention within an idiomatic expression.

\(^8\) Clitic right-dislocation can fulfill other discourse functions as well. See Grosz and Ziv (1998); Mayol (to appear); Villalba (2007a) for a review.
Now, consider how this nice example of topic-shift is build in a topic-marking language like Catalan, where the reintroduction of a previously mentioned topic is marked by means of clitic right-dislocation.9

(53)  a. GROUCHO: Escolti, deixi'm fer-li una ullada, a aquest diamant!
    b. SENYORA VANDERGRAFF: Però si el diamant s’ha perdut. Ha volat!
    c. GROUCHO: Escolti, i com espera que el trobi si no sé ni quin aspecte té? Per què no em va venir a veure abans que el robessin? Això que vol fer ara és com tancar la porta de la quadra després que han robat el cavall. Quan va veure el seu cavall per última vegada?
    d. SENYORA VANDERGRAFF: No n’he perdut cap, de cavall. He perdut un diamant!
    e. GROUCHO: Doncs aquest fou el seu primer error. Hauria d’haver perdut un cavall. Un cavall seria molt més fàcil de trobar.
    f. SENYORA VANDERGRAFF: I què me’n diu, del diamant?


In (53f), Mrs. Vandergraff changes the topic from the imaginary horse to the previously mentioned and still active diamond, and to do so the translator resorts to clitic right-dislocation. Since the topic introduced by the right-dislocate corresponds to an active referent, and is considered as background information, one expects it to be formally marked as such, namely to be typically a specific DP or, a fortiori, a definite one, along the lines suggested in Heim (1982). As a matter of fact, only specific nominals are allowed as right-dislocates, with a strong preference for definites. Hence, none of the nonspecific quantified phrases – i.e. those rejected as subjects of the lo-de construction, see 2.5– are expected to be amenable to clitic right-dislocation. This expectation is confirmed in full.

Consider, for instance, the case of excess quantifiers, which, as discussed at length in Bosque (1994), are inherently nonspecific, as shown by their incompatibility with standard marks of specificity, like modifiers forcing a particular reading or partitivity:

(54) a. *demasiados libros en concreto
too many books in particular

b. *excesivos de los libros
too many of the books

As expected, excess quantifiers cannot be right-dislocated:

(55) a. A: María puede tener mucho dinero, pero no tiene demasiados libros.
    María may have much money but not has too many books

b. B: Pues yo creía que sí que los tenía. Además, tiene una casa inmensa.
    well I thought that yes that them.PL had furthermore has a.FEM house huge

c. A: *Si, he estado allí, pero no los tiene, demasiados libros.
    yes, have.I been there but not them.PL has too many books

To reinforce our argument, we will point the reader toward partitive QPs, which are known to have a preferred specific interpretation (see Enc, 1991; Brucart and Rigau, 2002). The immediate prediction will be that the harder for a QP to obtain a partitive reading, the worse its performance will be as a background topic either in a right-dislocation. This prediction is totally borne out, as the following QPs show that can hardly receive a partitive reading:

---

9 This construction is far less common in Spanish, which resorts to other mechanisms, such as deaccenting or prosodic movement (see Villalba, 2007a; Zubizarreta, 1998).
All these are well-known phenomena pointing toward a tight association between specificity and right-dislocation, and consequently the possibility of being a background topic. In the following paragraph we extend these insights to the nominal domain to explain the referential restrictions operating on the subject of the \textit{lo-de} construction.

3.2.2. Deriving the referential restrictions of the \textit{lo-de} construction

We have just seen on the basis of clitic right-dislocation that the very nature of background topics imposes a strong restriction on their formal realization, namely they must be specific. Crucially, as has been pointed out in 2.5, this is precisely the constraint acting over the subject position in the \textit{lo-de} construction, with major consequences for the distribution of determiners and quantifiers in this position. Let us consider the relevant examples in some detail.

Quantifiers in the subject position of the \textit{lo-de} construction display a straightforward pattern: nonspecific quantifiers are totally banned, whereas specific ones are fine. Consider, for instance, the case of nonspecific \textit{todo} ‘every’ and \textit{cualquier} ‘any’ in contrast with specific \textit{todos} ‘all’ and \textit{ambos} ‘both’:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(57)] a. *Me sorprendió lo caro de toda/cualquier casa.
\begin{itemize}
\item to.me surprised LO expensive of every.FEM any house
\end{itemize}

b. Me sorprendió lo caro de todas las casas/ambas casas.
\begin{itemize}
\item to.me surprised LO expensive of all.FEM the.FEM houses/both houses
\end{itemize}
\end{enumerate}

An even sharper contrast arises when we consider excess quantifiers like \textit{demasiado} ‘too many’ or \textit{excesivo} ‘excessive’:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(58)] *Le sorprendió lo caro de demasiadas/excesivas casas.
\begin{itemize}
\item to.him/her surprised LO expensive of too.many/too.many houses
\end{itemize}
\end{enumerate}

When quantifiers are considered showing a specific/nonspecific alternation, the prediction follows that the more specific the interpretation, the better the quantifier in the subject position of the \textit{lo-de} construction, just in parallel to the clitic right-dislocation cases considered in section 3.2.1. This prediction is confirmed in full. First of all, monotone increasing quantifiers (59a), which easily admit a partitive follow-up (59b), are fine:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(59)] a. Me sorprendió lo caro de algunos/muchos/??varios vinos.
\begin{itemize}
\item to.me surprised LO expensive of certain/many/several wines
\end{itemize}

b. Me sorprendió lo caro de algunos/muchos/varios de los vinos.
\begin{itemize}
\item to.me surprised LO expensive of certain/many/several of the wines
\end{itemize}
\end{enumerate}

In contrast, monotone decreasing quantifiers – (60a) – which cannot obtain a partitive interpretation – (60b) – yield ungrammatical results:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(60)] a. *Me sorprendió lo caro de menos de cuatro/pocos vinos.
\begin{itemize}
\item to.me surprised LO expensive of less of four/few wines
\end{itemize}

b. *Me sorprendió lo caro de menos de cuatro/pocos de los vinos.
\begin{itemize}
\item to.me surprised LO expensive of less of four/few of the wines
\end{itemize}
\end{enumerate}

\footnote{The quantifier \textit{varios} ‘several’ gives worse results due to the fact that it poorly supports the specific reading needed in this construction. We thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this fact to our attention.}
Finally, consider the more complex case of nonmonotone quantifiers, which seem to have a mixed behavior between monotone increasing and monotone decreasing ones. The more easily they allow a partitive reading, the better they fare as subjects of the *lo-de* construction:

(61)  
  a. *Me sorprendió lo caro de entre cuatro y seis vinos.
      to.me surprised LO expensive of between four and six wines
  
  b. ??Me sorprendió lo caro de entre cuatro y seis de los vinos,
     to.me surprised LO expensive of between four and six of the wines
  
  c. ? Me sorprendió lo caro de entre cuatro y seis de aquellos vinos portugueses
     to.me surprised LO expensive of between four and six of those wines Portuguese del Douro,
     of.the Douro

Thus, the evidence just reviewed points toward the strong referential constraint that the subject of the *lo-de* construction must be specific. When taken together with the behavior of clitic right-dislocation studied in section 3.2.1, one can advance the hypothesis that the same phenomenon is at stake, namely that the specificity constraint is imposed by the background topic nature of both right-dislocates and the subject of the *lo-de* construction.

### 3.3. Discourse contrastiveness

The discourse properties of the nominal and the adjectival phrase inside the *lo-de* construction can be checked providing the appropriate context:

(62)  
  a. Sabía que las casas en Barcelona no eran baratas, pero me sorprendió lo
     (extremadamente) caro de todas ellas.
     knew.I that the houses in Barcelona not were cheap but to.me surprised LO
     (extremely) expensive of all them
  
  b. Sabía que las casas en Barcelona eran caras, pero me sorprendió lo
     knew.I that the houses in Barcelona were expensive but to.me surprised LO
     #(extremadamente) caro de todas ellas.
       (extremely) expensive of all them

In (62a) the adjective *caro* ‘expensive’ of the the *lo-de* construction is not presupposed, so it can enter into a contrast relation with the preceding adjective *barato* ‘cheap’. In contrast, in (62b) the adjective *caro* ‘expensive’ of the *lo-de* construction is clearly presupposed, which makes contrast awkward. Here, the only possibility is adding a quantifying adverb like *extremadamente* ‘extremely’ to encode a contrast relationship with the standard degree of expensiveness denoted in the first conjunct.

#### 3.3.1. Bare plurals

Another significant piece of evidence comes from bare plurals supporting the generalization that the subject of the *lo-de* construction must be specific. It is a well-known fact that bare plurals can hardly be interpreted specifically (63a), but must get either a nonspecific reading (63b) – as indicated by the subjunctive (SBJ)/indicative (IND) alternation in the relative clause – or a generic one (63c):

(63)  
     found books in particular
  
  b. No encontró libros que le *gustasen/*gustan.
     not found books that to.him/her like.SBJ.3PL/like.IND.3PL
  
  c. No encontró libros (*en concreto), sólo revistas.
     not found books in particular only magazines
In accordance with the evidence presented so far, the prediction can be made that bare plurals will be impossible as subjects of the *lo-de* construction, which is borne out, even when a generic context is provided:

(64) a. *No me extrañó lo caro de casas.*
    not to.me struck LO expensive of houses

b. *A todo el mundo le puede sorprender lo caro de casas.*
    to all the world to-him/her can surprise LO expensive of houses

This fits in with the fact that bare plurals cannot be clitic right- dislocated with a specific interpretation:

(65) *La María les té, de casas.*
    the María them.FEM has of houses

    ‘Maria DOES have houses.’

Therefore, this datum gives additional support to the working hypothesis that the subject of the *lo-de* construction is a background topic.

3.3.2. Aspectual restrictions

One last piece of evidence concerns the aspectual restrictions of the predicate, and the way the affect the focus-background partition. Interestingly, as pointed out in Erteschik-Shir (1997, 2007), individual-level predicates, unlike stage-level ones, cannot be predicated of a implicit spatiotemporal topic – the eventive argument in Kratzer (1989) Neodavidsonian analysis:

(66) a. # A Dutchman was tall.

b. A Dutchman was injured.

In (66a), the property of being tall cannot be predicated of the subject because it is not a suitable topic – it is nonspecific – nor of an implicit spatiotemporal topic because the predicate lacks it. Henceforth, the subject of these predicates must be a suitable topic. This analysis gives a cue for the aspectual restriction affecting the *lo-de* construction discussed in 4.1, namely that only individual-level predicates are possible in this construction (we repeat the examples for the sake of reference):

(67) a. *Me sorprendió lo lleno de aquel plato.*
    to.me surprised LO full of that dish

b. *Me sorprendió lo enfermo de tu hermano.*
    to.me surprised LO ill of your brother

(68) a. Me sorprendió lo frágil de aquel plato.
    to.me surprised LO fragile of that dish

b. Me sorprendió lo inteligente de tu hermano.
    to.me surprised LO intelligent of your brother

Even though tentatively, we would like to link the observation by Erteschik-Shir (1997, 2007) to this aspectual contrast in the *lo-de* construction in the following way. Since the individual-level predicate needs an independent (background) topic – it lacks an eventive argument capable of doing the job – we expect that the subject nominal, which is the one that should bear this role, be a suitable topic, hence a specific nominal. This is, indeed, the situation we have been describing through this section.

As for the impossibility of having a stage-level predicate, two lines of analysis seem worth pursuing. On the one hand, one can speculate that the eventive argument needs a temporal element to be licensed, which the nominal *lo-de* construction cannot offer. On the other hand, it is tempting to derive this incompatibility from a conflict between the event argument and the subject nominal: whereas the *lo-de* construction forces a topic reading on the latter, the predicate forces a topic reading on the former. Unfortunately, we must leave this issue for a further research.
The coherence of the overall picture arising from the data reviewed in this section and the strong parallelism with respect to the robust independent evidence provided us by clitic right-dislocation with respect to a wide range of quantifiers allows us to safely make the following statement:

**Generalization 8.** The subject of the *lo-de* construction must be specific because it is a background topic.

In the next paragraph, we add QBNPs to the puzzle to obtain a more consistent and compelling set of supporting evidence.

### 3.3.3. Completing the picture: QBNPs

Interestingly, the empirical tests that led us to assign the subject of the *lo-de* construction the status of background topic reproduce in full for the subject position of Spanish QBNPs (see Villalba, 2007b). First, consider the contrast between inherently nonspecific and specific quantifiers (cf. (57)):

(69) a. *Consiguió conocer al idiota de todo/cualquier alcalde managed know the idiot of every/any mayor

   b. Consiguió conocer a los idiotas de todos los managed know the.M.PL idiots of every.M.PL the.M.PL mayors/both alcaldes/ambos alcaldes. mayors

Second, the subject position of QBNPs is banned as well for excess quantifiers, which we have shown to be inherently nonspecific (cf. (58)):

(70) *Conoció a los idiotas de demasiados/excesivos alcaldes. knew to the.M.PL idiots of too many too many mayors

Third, the strong preference for quantifiers allowing partitivity readings is reproduced in full in the subject position of QBNPs (cf. (59)–(61)):

(71) a. Conoció a los idiotas de algunos/muchos/varios alcaldes. knew to the.M.PL idiots of certain many/several mayors

   b. Conoció a los idiotas de algunos/muchos/varios de los alcaldes. knew to the.M.PL idiots of certain many/several of the mayors

(72) a. *Conoció a los idiotas de menos de cuatro/pocos alcaldes. knew to the.M.PL idiots of less of four/few mayors

   b. * Conoció a los idiotas de menos de cuatro/pocos de los alcaldes. knew to the.M.PL idiots of less of four/few of the mayors

(73) a. * Conoció a los idiotas de entre cuatro y seis alcaldes. knew to the.M.PL idiots of between four and six mayors

   b. * Conoció a los idiotas de entre cuatro y seis de los alcaldes. knew to the.M.PL idiots of between four and six of the mayors

Finally, bare plurals are also impossible (cf. (64)):

(74) a. *No hablé con los idiotas de alcaldes. not talked with the idiots of mayors

   b. En este país es inútil hablar con los idiotas de alcaldes. in this country is useless talk with the.PL idiots of mayors
Therefore, we can straightforwardly extend our generalization regarding the subject of the lo-de construction to QBNPs:

**Generalization 9.** The subject of the lo-de construction and of QBNPs must be specific because it is a background topic.

### 4. A new proposal: lo-de as a DP-internal predicate focus-fronting construction

In sections 2 and 3 we have established a quite complex and solid set of empirical generalizations that we extract and summarize here for the sake of reference:

1. The lo-de construction and QBNPs involve a subject–predicate relationship.
2. Neither in the lo-de construction nor in QBNPs is de a true preposition.
3. Neither in the lo-de construction nor in QBNPs does the de +DP sequence form a constituent.
4. lo-de and QBNPs are incompatible with non-high/low syntactic degree quantification
5. The lo-de construction and QBNPs are islands for extraction.
6. Neither the subject of the lo-de construction nor that of QBNPs are focus.
7. The subject of the lo-de construction and of QBNPs must be specific because it is a background topic.

In this section, we pursue an analysis of the lo-de construction capable of accounting for this systematic set of properties. The crucial points of our proposal are the following. First, the lo-de construction and QBNPs involve a subject–predicate structure mediated by a functional projection, along the lines suggested by Bennis et al. (1998); den Dikken (1998, 2006); Kayne (1994). Second, the quantificational value of the lo-de construction relies on a nominal DEGREE head hosting a null degree operator in its specifier. Moreover, this element, which is argued to be absent in QBNPs, will be responsible for the lack of agreement between the subject and the predicate, for it will count as a closer checking goal for the uninterpretable phi-features of the adjective. Third, in both constructions the predicate moves to a DP-internal focus position. Finally, the exclamative flavor of the lo-de construction will be derived from the movement of the degree operator to the left periphery of the DP, resulting in the combination of definiteness and degree quantification that is typically associated with exclamatives. Let us flesh out the proposal in detail.

#### 4.1. The subject–predicate relation

As a point of departure, the lo-de construction and Spanish QBNPs involve a small clause XP headed by an abstract functional category – a relator according to den Dikken (2006) – that articulates the subject–predicate relation, and is the equivalent of INFL inside a nominal projection (see Kayne, 1994 for the seminal idea and Bennis et al., 1998; Corver, 2000; den Dikken, 1998, 2006 for refinements and developments). So then, the lo-de construction lo caro de la casa lit. ‘LO expensive of the house’, and the QBNP el idiota del alcalde ‘that idiot of a mayor’ will have the following initial structures:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(75) a.} & \quad [\text{XP} [\text{DP} \text{la casa}] [\text{X} [\text{AP car}]]] \\
\text{b.} & \quad [\text{XP} [\text{DP} \text{el alcalde}] [\text{X} [\text{DP idiota}]]]
\end{align*}
\]

As originally proposed in Kayne (1994), and subsequently in den Dikken (1998, 2006), the mediation of X is necessary for complying with the Linear Correspondence Axiom. Moreover, X places subject and predicate in the required configuration for the predication relation to hold successfully – see among others Williams (1980); Stowell (1983); Rothstein (2001); Kayne (1983). Hence it is at this point of the derivation when the lexicosemantic and syntactic restrictions imposed on the construction come into play (see 2.2). Furthermore, if we take the parallel

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11 Restrictions cannot be “purely” lexicosemantic, since the simple modification structures un plato lleno ‘a full dish’, el hermano cansado ‘the tired brother’ are fine. Therefore, we would like to suggest that X is responsible of the selection. As den Dikken (2006) argues, X is the nominal counterpart of be (void copula). Therefore, void copulas would only allow for individual level predicates. We leave the exploration of this idea for the future.

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seriously between the relator X and inflectional head(s) in the sentence domain, the configuration in (75) seems the
most suitable for agreement to take place between the subject and the predicate. However, it is evident that, whereas
QBNPs behave as expected (76a), and display gender and number agreement, the lo-de construction shows a striking
disagreement pattern (76b):

(76) a. las idiotas de tus hermanas
the.FEM.PL fool.FEM.PL of your.PL sister.FEM.PL
b. lo listo/*listas de tus hermanas
LO clever.MASC.SG/clever.FEM.PL of your.PL sister.FEM.PL

In order to explain the divergent agreement pattern of the lo-de construction, we will crucially rely on the role of
high degree quantification, and more precisely on the presence of a null degree operator. However, since this aspect of
the analysis will become paramount, we developed it in detail in a separate paragraph.

4.2. High degree quantification

As we have argued for extensively in 2.4, besides the subject–predicate relation, the lo-de construction requires
the adjective to be gradable, and involves high degree quantification. We formalize this fact by means of a null degree
operator (DegP), which selects the adjective (see Cresswell, 1976; Kennedy, 1999, among many others; cf.
the proposal in Corver, 2000, that places the DegP as a complement of the adjective): 12

(77) [XP [DP la casa] [X' X [DegP Deg [AP car—]]]]

Yet, we want to entertain the idea that the structure of the DegP in this structure is a bit more complex than in standard
degree modification configurations like una casa muy cara ‘a very expensive house’. Traditional Spanish grammarians –
see for instance, Alarcos (1970) – take the neuter article lo as a nominalizer which converts the adjective into a noun:

(78) lo Ñ [A alto] = lo[N alto]

An implementation of this idea is found in Contreras (1973); Rivero (1981), which insert the adjective under a N
head. However, as argued convincingly in Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999), such an analysis must face unsurmountable
technical and empirical difficulties. For example, it cannot explain the impossibility of the presumed noun to be
modified by nonrestrictive relatives, in contrast with deadjectival nominals: 13

(79) a. * Vió lo sucio, que era muy asqueroso.
    saw LO dirty that was very disgusting

   b. Vió la suciedad, que era muy asquerosa.
    saw the.FEM dirtiness that was very disgusting.FEM

Our proposal will, thus, pursue a different line of analysis, while retaining the original insight that the construction
nominalizes an adjective. In order to formalize this idea, we adopt from Kayne (2005b) the idea of a null DEGREE
noun as the head of the DegP. Moreover, this DEGREE noun hosts a null operator over degrees in its specifier, from
where it binds the degree variable of the adjective. Schematically:

(80) [DegP OP [Deg' DEGREE [AP car—]]]

12 From a semantic point of view, the proposed syntactic structure corresponds to the combination of a gradable adjective of type (d, \( e, t \)) with a
degree of type \( > d \), yielding a property \( e, t \). See Kennedy (1999).

13 Remember that we argue that the AP raises to the left of the subject DP. We predict, thus, that an apparent one-member lo +adjective phrase will
be out, since a non-constituent is left. As a consequence, cases such as the following can only be instances of the partitive construction:

   i) Lo bueno es que nadie sabía nada.
   LO good is that nobody knew nothing
   ‘The funny part of the situation is that nobody knew anything.’

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Lingua (2009), doi:10.1016/j.lingua.2008.07.010
Notably, this structure faithfully reflects the interpretation of the *lo-de* construction, as nominalizing a property held to a high degree:

(81) Me sorprendió lo caro de la casa.
     to.me surprised LO expensive of the house
     par.: ‘It surprised me the high degree of expensiveness of the house.’

This is in fact the interpretation of the Spanish neuter article *lo* that proposes Gutierrez-Rexach (1999), following previous insights by Ojeda (1982, 1993): ‘[The function denoted by the determiner *lo* in a degree relative clause selects the maximal degree in the denotation of a gradable property’ p. 43. Following this scholar, the null degree operator would correspond to a MAXIMALITY operator (see Rullmann, 1995 for the basic semantic notion, and Gutierrez-Rexach (1999) for the details of the application to the Spanish neuter article *lo*):^{14}

(82) *lo* caro \( \equiv \text{MAX}(\lambda d \lambda x. \text{Expens}e^i(d))(x) \)

Now that we have considered the semantic interpretation of the construction, we come back to syntax. On the syntactic side, we want to pursue the idea that the nominal nature of the null DEGREE is responsible of the typical disagreement pattern. Our way to flesh out this idea is the following. First, while the null operator lacks \( \phi \)-features altogether, the null nominal DEGREE is endowed with unspecified \( \phi \)-features. This difference is crucial in the probe-goal design of the feature-checking mechanism, which is standard in the Minimalist Program either in its original formulation (Chomsky, 2000, 2001) or in the crash-proof version (Frampton and Gutmann, 2000, 2002; López, 2005, 2007). The unspecified \( \phi \)-features of DEGREE will be active and function as a probe (83a). Then the probe finds the matching unvalued \( \phi \)-features of the adjective (83b). Finally, the unspecified \( \phi \)-features of DEGREE value those of the adjective (83c). As a consequence, the unspecified \( \phi \)-features of the adjective become inactive and invisible to further probing until Spell-out, when they are assigned the default morphological value, namely masculine singular, yielding a disagreement pattern with respect to the subject DP.^{15,16}

(83) a. DEGREE\( _{[\phi]} \rightarrow \ldots \)
    b. DEGREE\( _{[\phi]} \leftrightarrow A_{[\phi]} \)
    c. DEGREE\( _{[\phi]} \rightarrow A_{[\phi]} \)

Henceforth, the crucial difference between the *lo-de* construction and those involving degree modification and subject–predicate agreement – *una casa muy cara* ‘a very expensive house’ – would concern the value of the \( \phi \)-features of the degree element: unspecified in the case of the nominal DEGREE – hence active – absent in the case of the standard degree modifier – hence inactive. A direct issue of concern at this point is the behavior of QBNPs, which, as we have seen through the article, do show subject–predicate agreement:^{17}

(84) las FEM.PL idiotas de tus hermanas
    the.FEM.PL idiots of your sister.FEM.PL

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^{14} Another promising line of research is considering the denotation of the *lo-de* construction a trope– thanks to M. Teresa Espinal for bringing tropes to our attention. (Molmán, 2004, 746) defines this concept as follows: ‘Tropes are concrete instantiations of properties, such as the particular hostility of John’s gesture or the particular beauty that Mary manifests.’ Note that Molmán’s first example is a nice translation of the Spanish *lo hostil del gesto de Juan*. We leave this issue for a future research.

^{15} A different technical solution is assumed that matching unspecified features can probe, but cannot value, those of the goal. Yet once matching takes place the features of the goal become inactive. One must then assume that these unvalued features do not cause the derivation to crash, but rather they receive the default realization (López, 2007).

^{16} We are leaving aside nontrivial technical details concerning noun–adjective agreement, for, as far as we can see, this is a neglected issue in the otherwise huge bibliography on agreement within the Minimalist Program, which probably cannot be separated from the fact that English lacks noun–adjective agreement. See, for instance, Chomsky (2000, 2001), Frampton and Gutmann (2000, 2002) and López (2005, 2007) for three divergent views on feature agreement and valuation, which leave this particular issue unattended.

^{17} On the agreement pattern in these and other related constructions, see Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a, b); Casillas-Martínez (2001); Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999); Hulk and Tellier (2000).
Our proposal is that the quantification involved in QBNPs is not encoded syntactically by means of a DEGREE head and a DegP, but rather is a lexically encoded – and hence highly idiosyncratic – evaluative property of the predicate. As discussed in the literature (see e.g. García and Méndez, 2002; Sunner, 1990; Hernanz and Sunner, 1999), not all nominals are suitable as predicates in QBNPs. Typical instances involve negative evaluative nominals like idiota ‘idiot’, bruja ‘witch’,gilipollas ‘asshole’, burro ‘silly’ (lit. ‘donkey’), whereas non-evaluative nouns like médico ‘doctor’ or político ‘politician’ are forbidden, yielding only the non-predicative reading – hence the strangeness of político ‘politician’ in this context:

(85) el médico/#político de tu hermano
the doctor/politician of your brother

‘your brother’s doctor/#politician’

Crucially, when a deprecatory morphological mark like -ucho or -astro is added or a marked negative lexical alternative is chosen, QBNPs become perfect. 18

(86) el medicucho/politicastro de tu hermano
the bad.doctor/bad.politician of your brother

If we link this behavior to the fact that what counts as a proper evaluative nominal has a cultural conditioning, one is naturally inclined to assign the quantificational flavor of QBNPs to the lexical properties of the predicate rather than to a particular syntactic configuration, in the case at hand, to the presence of a null DEGREE nominal and a null operator. Note for instance, the contrast between the masculine brujo ‘wizard’ and the feminine bruja ‘witch’. Whereas the latter allows typical QBNPs (87a), and one finds 10 occurrences in the Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual of the RAE, the former is awkward (87b), and it is unattested in the same corpus, because of the fact that it has no pragmatically attributable negative interpretation.

(87) a. la bruja de mi suegra
the.FEM witch of my mother-in-law

‘that witch of my mother-in-law’

b. # el brujo de mi suegro
the.MASC wizard of my father-in-law

‘that wizard of my father-in-law’

Hence, we are not assuming the presence of a DEGREE projection nor of a null degree operator in Spanish QBNPs. The second major syntactic consequence of the presence of the nominal DEGREE and the null operator concerns the exclamative interpretation of the lo-de construction and its selectional restrictions. We will turn to this point in 4.4, now we will consider the relative position of the subject and the predicate.

4.3. Predicate focus fronting

Let us consider the structure we are assuming for QBNPs. We have the subject–predicate structure build by means of the relator XP with the addition of the complex DegP:

(88) [XP [DP [a casa] [X [DegP OP [Deg DEGREE [Ap car−]]]]]]

At this point, we propose a major difference with respect to standard accounts of DP-internal Predicate Inversion like Bennis et al. (1998) and den Dikken (2006). As we have argued at length in section 3, there is strong compelling

18 Note that, in contrast with the lo-de construction, the difference has nothing to do with gradability, for neither nominal is gradable: *Juan es muy médico/medicucho ‘*Juan is very a doctor/a bad doctor.’
evidence to consider that the predicate is focus, in sharp contrast with the proposal that den Dikken (2006) assumes for QBNPs in particular and Predicate Inversion in general, which is based on the assumption that the predicate must raise to some $A$-position to become licensed through formal feature checking. Yet, one further refinement is in order, for we have shown that the $lo-de$ construction nominalizes the high degree to which a property holds of one individual. So then, when we utter

(89) Me sorprendió lo caro de la casa.

to.me surprised  LO expensive of the house

par.: ‘It surprised me the high degree of expensiveness of the house.’

We are not surprised by the fact that the house is expensive, but by its high degree of expensiveness. In other words, what is being focused is not the AP, but the nominal DEGREE. So then, we propose that it is the whole $DegP$ that moves to the specifier of a DP internal Focus Phrase, which we indentify with Kayne’s and den Dikken’s neutral $F$, for checking an interpretable focus feature – or, in other terms, to satisfy the Focus Criterion; see Brody (1990); Rizzi (1997) (see Bosque, 2001 for a similar intuition, and García and Méndez, 2002 for a different proposal for Spanish QBNPs based on modality). Previous to this movement, the nominal DEGREE head must raise to $X$ and then to $F$ – this complex head is lexically realized by the particle $de$ ‘of’, a linker in den Dikken (2006); den Dikken and Singhapreecha (2004) terms:

(90) $\left[ FocP \left[ DegP DP \left[ t_{DEGREE} \left[ X_{P} \right] \right] \right] \right] \left[ Foc FocP \left[ Foc X + Foc \left[ XP DP \ldots \right] \right] \right] \left[ Foc FocP \left[ Foc X + Foc \left[ TP \ldots \right] \right] \right]$

As a consequence, the structure gets partitioned in the following way, which mirrors the focus-presupposition partition of the sentence in Rizzi (1997):

(91) $\left[ FocP \left[ DegP \underbrace{FOCUS}_{FOCUS} \left[ Foc X + Foc \left[ XP DP \ldots \right] \right] \right] \right] \left[ Foc FocP \left[ Foc X + Foc \left[ TP \ldots \right] \right] \right]$

We are perfectly aware that this line of analysis entails the existence of pragmatically motivated movements in syntax, which argues against one of the basic tenets of the Chomskian program, namely the radical autonomy of syntax. Yet, without entering into architectural discussions, we feel that it makes perfect sense from a theoretical point of view to defend that the same mechanisms devised to express the informational-partition of sentence in terms of focus and topic – standardly, $FocP$ and $TopP$ – should be assumed for the DP as well, just like other functional layers (see Aboh, 2004a, b; Giusti, 1996; Haegeman, 2004 for different proposals along these lines; cf. Szendrői, 2004). Furthermore, moving to an empirical standpoint, our proposal does a god job in accounting for the main properties of the constructions under scrutiny, particularly islandhood (see 2.6) and the referential constraints on the subject (see 2.5). As for the islandhood of the $lo-de$ construction and QBNPs, it comes without surprise that extraction from the subject is impossible altogether, for topics are opaque domains for extraction. In other words, the ungrammaticality of (93) is parallel to that of the instances of extraction from a right-dislocate (94) in Catalan – see Villalba (1998), (Villalba, 2000, ch. 4): 20
As for the referential constraints on the subject, our proposal fares better than approaches based on structural restrictions like the one defended in Dikken (2006) for QBNPs, which resorts to the claim that the subject must be a Number Phrase, and not a full DP. Such a hypothesis makes the strong prediction that neither definite articles, nor demonstratives, nor quantifiers should be allowed in this position, which on the basis of the evidence presented in section 3, is simply incorrect for Spanish lo-de and QBNPs (see Villalba, 2007b for a similar point concerning Romance QBNPs in general).

Therefore, we are defending that the inverted predicate–subject configuration in the lo-de construction is not the result of Predicate Inversion as originally conceived by Bennis et al. (1998), but rather the consequence of the A′-movement of the complex DegP – the predicate DP in the case of QBNPs – which pied-pipes the predicate, to a DP-internal FocusP. An explanation of whether this contrast with Germanic QBNPs follows from an underlying syntactic or lexical property, we leave for a future research.

4.4. The exclamative force

We have considered the motivation, mechanics, and consequences of predicate fronting in Spanish QBNPs, now it’s time to take into account the selectional properties of the lo-de construction. First of all, it is a well-established fact (see Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba, 2006a, b for the original insight) that the lo-de construction must be selected by a restricted number of predicates with factive meaning. Consider some minimal pairs:

(95) factive predicates
   a. Le sorprendió lo caro de la casa.
      to.him/her surprised LO expensive of the.FEM house
      “It struck him/her the (degree of) expensiveness of the house.”
   b. Nos asombró lo rápido de la respuesta.
      to.us amazed LO quick of the.FEM answer
      “We were amazed by the (degree of) quickness of the answer.”
   c. Lamentó lo negativo de la respuesta.
      regretted LO negative of the.FEM answer
      “(S)he regretted the (degree of) negativity of the answer.”

(96) non-factive predicates
   a. *Sospeché lo caro de la casa.
      suspected LO expensive of the.FEM house
   b. *Esperaba lo rápido de la respuesta.
      waited LO quick of the.FEM answer
   c. *Temía lo negativo de la respuesta.
      feared LO negative of the.FEM answer

This sharp contrast concerning selectional restrictions faithfully reproduces the behavior of exclamative sentences (see Elliott, 1971, 1974; Grimshaw, 1979 for the main facts in English):
fcntlive predicates

a. Le sorprendió lo cara que era la casa.
   “It struck him/her how expensive the house was.”

b. Nos asombró lo rápida que fue la respuesta.
   “We were amazed by how quick the answer was.”

c. Lamentó lo negativa que fue la respuesta.
   “(S)he regretted how negative the answer was.”

non-factive predicates

a. * Sospechó lo cara que era la casa.
   suspected LO expensive.FEM that was the.FEM house

b. * Esperaba lo rápida que fue la respuesta.
   waited LO quick.FEM that was the.FEM answer

c. * Temía lo negativa que fue la respuesta.
   feared LO negative.FEM that was the.FEM answer

Yet, one must take into account that the lo-de construction does not have to be selected by a predicate with an exclamatory meaning. Consider some examples of nonexclamatory factive predicates selecting lo-de complements from the Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española:

a. hasta con cierto orgullo se acepta lo absurdo de la situación
   ‘even with a certain prouderness SE accepts how absurd the sit-
   uation is’ Pérez Tamayo, Ciencia, paciencia y conciencia, 1991

b. pero más difícil aún es reconocer lo vergonzoso de esta situación.
   ‘but more difficult even is recognize LO shameful of this sit-
   uation is.’ ‘Grave Disminución de Recursos Gubernamentales en
   el Sector’, Excélsior, 25/07/2000

c. Repentinamente se da cuenta de lo peligroso de la situación y decide huir.
   suddenly SE gives account of LO dangerous of the situation and decides run.away
   ‘Suddenly (s)he realizes how dangerous the situation is and de-cides to run away.’ Guillermo
   Schmidhuber de la Mora, María Ter-rones, 1985

d. Ahí fui consciente de lo duro de la sanción, ¿de lo injusto de la sanción!
   there was conscious of LO hard of the sanction of LO unfair of the sanction
   ‘Then I realized how hasty the penalty was, how unfair!’ Diego
   Armando Maradona, Yo soy el Diego, 2000

As we will argue below, this kind of examples run against assuming a specialized [exclamative] feature for the lo-de construction.

A second obvious property of the lo-de construction is its nominal behavior, which, we will argue, is linked to its presuppositional nature. One clear test of the nominal character of the construction is clefting, which is fine with DPs but impossible with sentences. What we found is that the lo-de construction can be clefted (100a), contrary to what we find with sentential arguments (100b), and the sentential lo-que construction (100c):

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Now its time to link the factive and the nominal nature of the lo-de construction. Our technical solution will follow original insights by Aboh (2004a, b); Haegeman (2004), who argue that the highest DP-field host the force features of the whole DP in a parallel fashion to Force Phrase in the CP left-periphery as proposed by Rizzi (1997). Yet, we will argue that a satisfactory technical can be pursued without committing ourselves to the existence of a ForceP in the DP domain, but rather deriving its effects from the combination of two independent syntactic properties: degree quantification and definiteness. Let us consider the derivation stepwise.

First, the head D merges:

\[ \text{D: } \text{lo}\text{-caro de la casa que me sorprendió.} \]

It was the (degree of) expensiveness of the house that surprised me.’

\[ \text{lo}\text{-cara que era la casa que me sorprendió.} \]

was LO expensive that was the.FEM house that to.me surprised

\[ \text{la casa fuera tan cara que me sorprendió.} \]

was the.FEM house were so expensive that to.me surprised

At this point, we propose that the null maximality operator must raise to Spec,DP to have wide scope over the generalized quantifier provided by the definite D head (note that the apparent masculine morphology is the default marking in spanish and does not mean any agreement operation the D head and the adjective):

\[ \text{lo}\text{-cara que era la casa que me sorprendió.} \]

Evidence that the degree operator must have the widest scope is provided by (Gutiérrez-Rexach, 2001, 175) and (Villalba, 2004, 15). Consider, for instance the interaction of degree wh-exclamatives with universal quantifier all:

\[ \text{How expensive all the books are!} \]

In this sentence the degree operator must have wide scope over the universal quantifier, namely it can only be interpreted as (104a), but not as (104b):\[ ^{21} \]

\[ \text{How expensive each book is!} \]

Note that a sentence like (103) would be appropriate in a situation where several books are evaluated against a scale of expensiveness, and all of them happen to be far beyond our expected or reasonable price for a book. However, it is not necessary for all the books to be equally priced: it makes perfect sense to have, say, five extremely expensive books but with different particular prices. The issue then is determine how the interpretation obtains that a maximal value is involved, since there are several values considered, which obviously cannot all be maximal. Intuitively, the solution comes from the consideration of the different prices not individually but grouped, namely it is the interval containing all the 10 prices that is evaluated, and not the position of each of them on the scale. What is more noteworthy is that the unavailable reading in (104b) corresponds to an exclamative sentence with a distributional quantifier like each, which we know that must have wide scope over the distributor. Henceforth, we predict a contrast between (103) and (104):\[ ^{22} \]

\[ ^{21} \text{For similar examples and remarks see Gutiérrez-Rexach (1996, 2001); González (2008); see also Kennedy (1999); Beck (2000); Heim (2000) for the grounds of the semantic representation.} \]

\[ ^{22} \text{One anonymous reviewer does not consider this sentence ungrammatical. Notwithstanding, our native consultants do perceived the contrast described in the text, with different degrees of strength.} \]
The wide scope reading required by the quantifier *each* blocks the consideration of the prices as a group and imposes an evaluation of each price individually, with the corresponding clash with the uniqueness requirement of a maximal degree.\footnote{Note that the explanation of this contrast cannot rest on the referential status of the quantifiers involved, for both *cada* ‘each’ and *todos* ‘all’ (cf. *todo* ‘every’) are inherently specific, but on the clash between the semantic requirements of exclamatives and those of the universal distributive quantifier.}

 Turning back to the *lo-de* construction, the consequences of the raising of the operator to the Spec,DP are the following. First, from a morphological point of view, the operator cannot value the \( \phi \)-features of the [+definite] D, and the other possible goals – DEGREE and the adjective – are unspecified for these features. Consequently, the D will be realized as the unmarked definite morpheme, namely, the neuter determiner *lo*. From a semantic point of view, the degree operator and the [+definite] feature of D in the left periphery of the DP are two features involved in the interpretation of the exclamative sentences. Following the view of the exclamative sentence-type developed by Portner and Zanuttini (2005); Zanuttini and Portner (2003), where it is claimed that ‘exclamativity’ is not directly encoded in syntax, but it is the result of two independent semantic properties: wh-movement and factivity. The differences are more apparent than real between their characterization of the exclamative sentential force and our proposal for the *lo-de* construction. In the latter, the null degree operator does the job of the wh-element, in a totally parallel fashion to the null relative operator in the nominal exclamatives analyzed in Portner and Zanuttini (2005).

 Second, even though we do not resort to a factive operator as they do, the presuppositional value of factivity obtains from the definite value of the whole DP together with the degree quantification. Specifically, the *lo-de* construction is a definite description of a (particularized) property, so it comes as no surprise that it comes associated with existential presupposition. On the other hand, we follow Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999) in attaching a maximality operator to the denotation of the neuter article *lo*. Crucially the definition of the maximality operator provided by Rullmann (1995) incorporates a iota operator to reflect the fact that the operator singles out just one entity, be it an individual ((('e'))) or a degree ((('d'))) (107).

 Then, it seems plausible to pursue the idea that the *lo-de* construction is a nominal construction which obtains its exclamatory meaning from the combination of degree quantification and definiteness, and not necessarily from some [exclamative] feature. This position makes more sense when the context of occurrence of this construction is considered. First of all, unlike clear exclamative constructions, the *lo-de* construction cannot appear in root contexts, as pointed out by Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a, b), which suggests it lacks exclamative illocutionary force:
Secondly, and more important, even though we dispense with the [exclamative] feature, we can still account for the fact that this construction is selected by factive verbs, even though not necessarily those that convey an exclamatory meaning (see exs. (97)–(99)). Since definiteness presupposes givenness, the definite feature combined with factive exclamative selecting verbs provides an interpretation parallel to that of factive exclamative CPs, but indirectly.

To sum up, the close exclamatory meaning of the \textit{lo-de} construction can be explained as the result of the combination of two independent properties, namely degree quantification, and definiteness. This proposal offers a straightforward solution to the selectional requirements just reviewed, without committing ourselves to a syntactic exclamative typing mechanism, which would be hardly tenable for a nominal structure without a propositional content.

5. Conclusions

In this article we have brought new evidence supporting the hypothesis that the architecture of the DP domain mirrors that of the sentence, particularly concerning the topic–focus articulation. We have arrived at these conclusions from the analysis of the Spanish nominal \textit{lo-de} construction, which has been described in detail on a pair with comparative qualitative binominal noun phrases. We have argued that the existence of a gender featureless determiner in Spanish gives rise to unique constructions in Romance. Among them, the \textit{lo-de} construction had received less attention both in traditional and in formal grammatical descriptions. It has been defended on the light of a number of proofs showing that this construction has a subject–predicate configuration, and that involves predicate raising over the subject to a Focus Phrase, yielding a partition of the sentence where the predicate is focus, and the subject, a background topic. In fact, the movement of the DegP has as a consequence a DP splitted into two areas: one with new information and the other one with background information. Therefore, our proposal is compatible both with a cartographical and a feature-based framework. Moreover, this proposal – which sharply contrasts with that defended for Germanic and Romance QBNPs by den Dikken (2006); den Dikken and Singhapreecha (2004) – provides an accurate explanation of a wide range of previously undiscussed data, particularly concerning the wide and complex set of referential restrictions affecting the subject of both constructions. Moreover, it has been argued that the exclamatory meaning of the \textit{lo-de} construction follows straightforwardly from the combination of a degree quantificational structure, and the definiteness value of the highest Det head, offering a simple solution to the restriction of this construction to factive predicates.

References


Please cite this article in press as: Villalba, X., Bartra-Kaufmann, A., Predicate focus fronting in the Spanish determiner phrase. Lingua (2009), doi:10.1016/j.lingua.2008.07.010

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