

## Spanish *unos* and the article hypothesis

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**1. Challenge 1** | Spanish has a plural determiner that doesn't allow for proportional readings: *unos* 'some' (Villalta 1994, Gutiérrez-Rexach 2001, Martí 2007). The challenge resides in the fact that non-proportional determiners in general do have a proportional use that surfaces when they are stressed. *Unos* is a noteworthy exception to this generalization:

(1) ? UNOS estudiantes son abogados. 'Some students are lawyers' (Gutiérrez-Rexach 2001)

Even though this behaviour of *unos* has often been described in the literature there has only been one attempt to explain **why** *unos* behaves this way: Martí (2007) opposes *unos* to *algunos* 'some' and hypothesizes that *alg-* adds a syntactic / semantic layer responsible for the availability of proportional readings. This however begs the question why only *unos* needs *alg-* for this (especially given that *algunos* is not unambiguously proportional).

**2. My proposal** | I claim *unos* functions as the default plural indefinite determiner in Spanish. Put more boldly: *unos* is the Spanish plural indefinite article. This explains why it does not allow for proportional readings; in as far as indefinite articles are grammaticalized markers of argumenthood they're expected not to give rise to derived interpretations (such as proportional ones). Note that singular indefinite articles are also unambiguously non-proportional: in (2) I show this for English (showing this for Spanish would be more difficult given that the Spanish numeral *one* and the singular indefinite article are homonyms).

(2) ?A student is a lawyer.

To further back up this claim I will show that *unos* underwent the same kind of grammaticalization process as the singular indefinite article.

**3. The grammaticalization of *unos*** | If *unos* underwent a grammaticalization process comparable to that of the singular indefinite article I expect to find (i) that *unos* lost part of its semantic content; (ii) that it became considerably more frequent, (iii) and that at the beginning of its grammaticalization process it marked highly persistent discourse referents (DRs). (i) and (ii) stem from the general literature on grammaticalization (e.g. Hopper & Traugott 1993) and (iii) stems from in-depth studies of the grammaticalization of indefinite articles (e.g. Blazer 1979, Stark 2002). Note that I leave aside other general characteristics of grammaticalization (phonetic erosion, syntactic freedom, ...) that are optional and less straightforwardly applicable to the Spanish singular indefinite article and *unos*.

I will now proceed to show that expectations (i)-(iii) are borne out. (i) Parallel to the numeral *one* that underlies the singular indefinite article, *unos* used to allow for proportional readings. A clear indication for this is its acceptability in the upstairs D position of partitives: sentences like (3) are attested only until roughly 1500 and have been claimed to be ungrammatical in present day Spanish by Villalta (1994) and Gutiérrez-Rexach (2001) (the historical data are based on a corpus study of 300 occurrences of *unos de los* in the complete CORDE corpus of the Real Academia Española).

(3) E ellas yendo se, fueron unos de los guardadores a la ciudad...

And while they left, some of the guards went to the city...

Note that I'm aware of the fact that *unos* does allow for partitive readings when followed by *otros*. In line with Gutiérrez-Rexach (2001) and Martí (2007) I however assume *unos...otros* got grammaticalized as a construction (a parallel case is found in French *les uns ...les autres* where *uns* only survives in this construction). (ii) The leap in frequency of the Spanish singular indefinite article takes place in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: the *Corpus del Español* of Mark Davies shows a clearcut difference in (normalized) frequency per million words of *un* between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century (from 367.8 to 3746.6). At the same time a similar leap is recorded for *unos* (from 19.0 to 418.2) (the same goes for other realizations of *un* and *unos*). (iii) An analysis of a convenience sample of 1000 occurrences of *unos* from 1200-1600 in the CORDE corpus seems to confirm prediction (iii). A more detailed study of the use of *unos* and bare plurals in the 16<sup>th</sup> century is currently being carried out.

Given the strong parallel between the grammaticalization process of *un* and *unos* and given the fact that both are unambiguously non-proportional it would seem plausible to assume that *unos* is the Spanish plural indefinite article. There is however one problem: Spanish allows for bare plurals. This brings me to the second challenge.

**4. Challenge 2** | Spanish allows for bare plurals in argument position but they don't seem to introduce standard DRs:

(4) Al principio, Juan quería restaurar muebles, pero terminó vendiéndolos.

In the beginning, Juan wanted to restore pieces-of-furniture, but he ended up selling **them**.

According to Laca (1996, 1999) *–los* in (4) cannot be interpreted as referring back to pieces of furniture that Juan wanted to restore but only to furniture in general. This is a challenging piece of data because it requires teasing apart acceptability in argument position and introduction of DRs.

**5. My proposal** | Despite the fact that Laca's claim about the interpretation of (4) would strengthen my case for the articlehood of *unos*, corpus data force me to accept that bare plurals can introduce DRs – see e.g. (5). I do take Laca's intuition seriously though and claim that bare plurals introduce DRs that are low in salience (i.e. that are **non likely to** be picked up later in the discourse). This allows me reconcile Laca's intuitions with examples such as (5) and to maintain a correspondence between acceptability in argument position and introduction of DRs. The question that imposes itself then is whether I can maintain that *unos* is a plural indefinite article. I will argue that I can. In order to do so I will show that *unos* and the bare plural are in complementary distribution: the default choice for unmarked plural NPs is the bare plural unless the DR that is introduced will be picked up later in the discourse. At first sight this might seem to lead to predictions that are difficult to falsify but in the next paragraph I will show that fairly strong judgements follow.

(5) En la fabricación hubo **problemas técnicos**, uno de **ellos** era la construcción de la torre...

In the fabrication there-were technical problems, one of them was the construction of the tower...

**6. Discourse salience** | Given that DRs in the scope of negation cannot be picked up bare plurals are expected to be the only option in the scope of negation. Put differently: in the scope of negation bare plurals are preferred over *unos*. This prediction is borne out (cf. Martí 2007 who claims *unos* is a PPI).

(6) A la reunión no asistieron unos profesores. (\*no>(alg)unos) 'Some professors didn't attend the meeting'

Under the assumption (see Zagona 2002) that the preverbal subject position in Spanish is a topic position it follows that discourse referents that are introduced by NPs / DPs occurring in this position are likely to be picked up later in the discourse. Given that bare plurals only introduce discourse referents that are low in salience I predict full DPs to be preferred over bare plurals in this position. This prediction is borne out (cf. e.g. Delfitto & Schroten 1991):

(7) \*(Unos) políticos han ocupado el palacio. '(Some) politicians have occupied the palace.'

**7. The analysis** | These facts can easily be accounted for by a unidirectional production OT analysis. The only assumptions I have to make are that salience can be part of the input and that DRs introduced by bare plurals are marked for low salience. The two constraints I need are \*ART 'don't use articles' (ranked lowest) and FSAL 'mark salience' (ranked highest). Note that the preferences discussed above are not part of the analysis and that they needn't be: they follow from the properties of the preverbal subject position and negation.

In order to account for the unacceptability of bare singulars the extra constraint FDR 'mark discourse referents' has to be introduced above \*ART: given that bare singulars cannot introduce discourse referents (salient or not) the singular indefinite article will be preferred over bare singulars (see also de Swart & Zwarts 2007).

**References** | Blazer, E.D., 1979, *The historical development of articles in Old French*, PhD dissertation, University of Texas | Delfitto D. & J. Schroten, 1991, Probus 3. | Gutiérrez-Rexach, J., 2001, Probus 13. | Laca, B., 1996, 'Acerca de la semántica de los plurales escuetos del español, Madrid: Espasa Calpe. | Martí, L., 2007, *Natural Language Semantics* [online first] | Stark, E., 2002, *Journal of Semantics* 19. | Swart, H. de & J. Zwarts, 2007, *Lingua*. | Hopper, P. & E. Traugott, 1993, *Grammaticalization*, CUP. | Villalta, E., 1994, *Plural indefinites in Spanish and distributivity* [unpublished manuscript]. | Zagona, K., 2002, *The syntax of Spanish*, CUP.