

## Introducing expressives through equations Implications for the theory of nominal predication in Romance\*

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**Abstract** This paper offers a new theory of binominal constructions in Spanish (e.g., *el idiota de Andrés* ‘That idiot Andrés’, *una mierda de departamento* ‘a shit of an apartment’). I use what I call *Potts’ Criterion* as a way to detect whether or not a given term has predicative force at the truth-conditional level. The observation is that epithets do not have such a predicative import in binominal constructions of the relevant type, a clear indication that these binominals do not involve predicational underlying structures of the type proposed in Den Dikken 2006 and most, if not all, mainstream approaches to binominals in Romance. I then propose that the syntactic and semantic connection between epithets/expressives and their related DPs/NPs is a particular type of equation between those DPs/NPs and an underlying indexical term, denoting in individuals or in properties depending on the relevant construction.

**Keywords:** expressivity, epithets, predication, equations, Spanish

### 1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to offer an explicit syntactic and semantic analysis of binominal constructions of the *Det epithet of DP* type (e.g., *el idiota de Andrés* ‘that

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idiot Andrés’), with the aim of sustaining two main theses:

1. Syntactic recycling: there is a grammar of expressivity that requires syntactic manipulation, which essentially consists of merging material in “expletive” positions. This manipulation creates a *non-representational syntax*.
2. Equations: Epithets are part of the syntax of “expressive” pronouns, i.e., mere syntactic indexes feeding assignment functions plus an expressive dimension. The semantic connection between the expressive pronoun and the *of*-DP is equation, not predication, against the received view.

Thesis #1 receives confirmation from the behavior of epithets in binominal environments. As we will see, a brief comparison between the occurrence of the same expressive word, e.g., *idiota*, in binominal vs. predicative environments clearly shows that the relevant word loses its predicative force in the binominal context. I argue that this follows if the expressive word is recycled and merged in positions that nullify the truth-conditional dimension. In this respect, expressivity is not about expressive words alone, but also about expressive syntax. This particular thesis crucially impacts on the proper analysis of binominal constructions in Spanish and Romance. As is well-known, according to the received view, binominals are seen as subject-predicate structures with an associated property ascription semantics (Den Dikken 2006 and many others). On this approach, the “preposition” *de* ‘of’ is the nominal counterpart of the verbal copula *ser* ‘to be’. This, however, is in frank contradiction with the empirically sustained idea that epithets are recycled in non-predicative positions. I resolve this potential inconsistency by abandoning the predicate raising analysis of binominals in Romance. Concretely, I propose that the semantic link between the referential expression headed by *de* and the expressive pronoun that includes the epithet is equation, not property ascription, as stated in Thesis #2.

My argumentation is structured in the following steps. First, in section 2, I introduce Potts’ criterion, according to which true expressives fail to have predicative force at the truth-conditional level and argue that epithets, indeed, fail to have it. In section 3, I describe five syntactic and semantic properties of the *Det epithet of DP* construction, which ultimately justify the present proposal. Section 4 contains the main assumptions regarding the semantics of expressivity and the syntax and semantics of pronouns. Then, in section 5, I present my equative syntax and semantics for Spanish binominals and show how the five crucial properties previously introduced are accounted for. The analysis is also adapted to explain the behavior of binominals of the *Det expressive of NP* type (e.g., *una mierda de departamento* ‘a shit of an apartment’) in section 6. The final picture results in two types of semantic equations: equations for individuals (instantiated by the *Det epithet of DP*

construction), and equations for properties (instantiated by the *Det expressive of NP* construction), each of which introduces a different type of expressive word and is associated with a different type of indexical term (pronoun vs. empty noun). Some concluding remarks are given in the final section.

## 2 Preliminaries: expressivity and predication

According to Potts' (2005) logic, expressives and epithets form a natural class: they denote functions that take an at-issue denotation as argument and return the denotation of such an argument plus a conventional implicature dimension (CI):

- (1) a. Sheila's damn dog is on the couch.  
b. That bastard (Chuck) arrived late.

The difference between them boils down to the denotation domain of the input argument:

- (2) a. *Damn*:  $\langle \langle e^a, t^a \rangle, t^c \rangle$   
b. *Bastard*:  $\langle e^a, t^c \rangle$

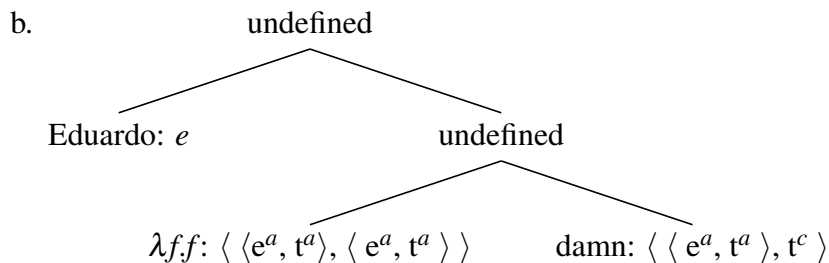
A direct consequence of this view is stated by Potts as follows:

“All predicates that appear in copular position must necessarily *fail to be expressive*, because they provide no argument for the copular verb (nor a functor that could apply to it).”

[Potts 2007: 194, my emphasis]

Assuming that the copula introduces an identity function of the relevant predicative type, pure expressives fit this expectation straightforwardly (although see Lo Guercio & Orlando 2022 for another approach with harmless consequences).

- (3) a. Eduardo is damn.



Epithets do not fit the expectation in the same way. An epithet as *bastard* can, indeed, occur in predicative position, although it is easy to show that in that position it fails to be an expressive and projects its meaning into the at-issue dimension:

- (4) a. Andrés is a bastard.  
b. Andrés is *not* a bastard.

Whatever the meaning of *bastard* is when occurring in post-copular position, it falls under the scope of negation. This type of facts calls for an ambiguity approach for epithets. In Orlando & Saab 2020b and Saab & Orlando 2021, we put forward the thesis that the relevant ambiguity is syntactic, but this is to some extent orthogonal to the present concerns. My concern here is to determine how qualitative binominal constructions containing epithets behave with respect to Potts' criterion. Concretely, the relevant question is whether or not the epithet fails to be expressive when occurring in binominal constructions:

- (5) [DP el *idiota* de Andrés ] llegó tarde.  
the idiot of Andrés arrived late  
'That idiot Andrés arrived late.'

Well, based on the received view on Romance binominal constructions it should. As is well-known, perhaps the most conspicuous theory of qualitative binominal constructions in Romance and beyond comes from Den Dikken's (2006) theory of predication, according to which in binominals like those in (5) the syntactic-semantic dependency between the epithet and the DP preceded by *de* 'of' is predication:

*"At the outset of this exercise, let me point out that what unites all qualitative binominal noun phrases is that they are characterized by the fact that the first noun phrase ascribes a property to the noun phrase that follows it. On the assumption [...] that property ascription, in general, is structurally represented in the form of a predication structure, with the ascriber of the property being the predicate and the ascribee the subject, this leads us to the postulation of a syntactic structure underlying all QBNPs according to which there is a predicational relationship between the two noun phrases."*

[Den Dikken 2006: 164-165, my emphasis]

Den Dikken's (2006) theory of predicate inversion assumes the existence of two functional heads intimately related to the realization of copulas across languages: (i) relators and (ii) linkers.

- (6) a. [RP [XP subject] [R' relator [YP predicate ]]]  
 b. [FP [XP predicate]<sub>j</sub> [F' linker+relator<sub>i</sub> [RP [NP subject] [R' *t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub> ]]]]*

The latter are the main responsible for the operation of predicate inversion since they are the triggers of predicate and subject movement, as shown in examples like (7b) in which the presence of the copula *to be* is directly correlated with the inversion of the predicate:

- (7) a. Imogen considers Brian (to be) the best candidate.  
 b. Imogen considers the best candidate \*(to be) Brian.

- (8) [FP [XP The best candidate]<sub>j</sub> [F' to be<sub>i</sub> [RP [NP Brian] [R' *t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub> ]]]]*

The received view on binominal constructions in Romance is that there is a similar derivation for cases like *el idiota de Andrés* (although not identical, see for different implementations Suñer Gratacós 1990, Español-Echevarría 1998, Villalba 2007, González-Rivera 2011):

- (9) a. [RP [XP Andrés] [R' relator [YP idiota ]]]  
 b. [FP [XP idiota]<sub>j</sub> [F' de+relator<sub>i</sub> [RP [NP Andrés] [R' *t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub> ]]]]*

This is precisely a point of disagreement between the received view and my own opinion here. Semantically speaking, whenever an epithet occurs in the binominal scheme its predicative force vanishes. A brief comparison with group slurs shows the point clearly (see Orlando & Saab 2020a, 2020b and Saab & Orlando 2021). The examples in (10) sharply contrast with those in (11) in that only in the former there is truth-conditional classification at issue, by means of which Andrés is classified as pertaining to the set of homosexuals and Ana, to the set of sex workers. The common part in both sets of examples has to do with the expressive dimension, which in this case amounts to the communication of stereotypes for homosexuals and sex workers intimately related to homophobic and misogynistic worldviews:<sup>1</sup>

- (10) a. Andrés es puto.  
       Andrés is homosexual<sub>pejorative</sub>  
       ‘Andrés is a *f...*’  
 b. Ana es puta.  
       Ana is prostitute<sub>pejorative</sub>  
       ‘Ana is a *b...*’

<sup>1</sup> I apologize for mentioning slur words and epithets in examples (10) and (11). In what follows, I avoid even mentioning these words by replacing them for *p...*

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- (11) a. el puto de Andrés...  
the epithet of Andrés  
'that *f*... Andrés...'  
b. la puta de Ana...  
the epithet of Ana  
'that *b*... Ana ...'

Here are some relevant questions I would like to answer on the pages to come:

- A. How may any word become expressive in the relevant sense? Or how did the original slurs in the examples in (11) lose their original predicative force and ended up communicating a mere stereotype with an associated negative valence?
- B. What is the exact syntactic and semantic relation between the epithet and the R-expression preceded by the preposition *de*?
- C. What is the preposition *de* for in the relevant set of constructions?

Reasonable answers to the previous questions (and others you may have in mind) should shed light on the mechanics that underlies the grammar of expressivity. Of course, unveiling the expressive machinery is one forced step in the way to understanding why is that human languages are so powerful expressive devices. As we will see, a proper analysis of Spanish epithets / expressives has large empirical and theoretical consequences regarding the syntax and semantics of predication in the nominal domain, the internal structure of DPs and the way in which is advisable to model expressive contents in the semantics.

### 3 The empirical landscape: The *det epithet of DP* construction

Before advancing my answers to the previous questions, let me first briefly describe the behavior of the *det epithet of DP* construction with respect to the following distributional facts: (i) putative agreement / concord mismatches between the epithet and the constituents syntactically and semantically related to it, (ii) the putative operation of predicate inversion, (iii) nominal ellipsis possibilities, (iv) the constituency relations of the preposition *de*, and (v) the pronominal behavior of epithets. Space restrictions prevent full discussion of these facts and others I will not comment here. For further discussion on these and other facts, I refer the reader to Suñer Gratacós 1990, Español-Echevarría 1998 and Saab 2004, 2008, among others.

### 3.1 Property #1: Agreement / Concord mismatches

Binominals trigger many agreement/concord mismatches both internal to the DP and external to it (e.g., verb-subject agreement, and other anaphoric agreement patterns not discussed here). The crucial fact is this: the epithet is not the trigger of agreement/concord processes. *Prima facie*, the trigger seems to be the referential target preceded by *de*. This connects, of course, to the question of where the real head of the construction is. Note first that a subset of epithets seems to trigger gender concord mismatches between the relevant epithets and their modifiers. Thus, in the following examples all the epithets are feminine but the articles are masculine in accordance with the gender of the R-expression preceded by *de*:<sup>2</sup>

- (12) el            *gallina*        / *rata*        / *bestia*        de Andrés  
 the.M.SG chicken.F.SG / rat.F.SG / beast.F.SG of Andrés.M.SG  
 ‘that chicken / rat / beast Andrés’

In contradistinction, number agreement is always mandatory:

- (13) los            *gallinas*        / *ratas*        / *bestias*        de Andrés y        de Pablo  
 the.M.PL chicken.F.PL / rat.F.PL / beast.F.PL of Andrés and of Pablo  
 ‘those chickens / rats / beasts Andrés and Pablo’

In addition, it also looks as if it were the *of*-phrase the one that triggers concord/agreement with modifiers external to the entire DP. A clear case is provided by reflexive anaphors, which always require agreement in gender and number with their subject:

- (14) el            *gallina*        de Andrés        se odia a        sí mismo /  
 the.M.SG chicken.F.SG of Andrés.M.SG SE hates DOM himself /  
 \*sí misma.  
 \*herself  
 ‘that chicken Andrés hates himself.’

Finally, anaphoric resolution always seems to be determined by the *of*-phrase, as well:

<sup>2</sup> Importantly, there is also another related construction in which some of these epithets agree in gender with the determiner (e.g., *la rata / bestia de Andrés* ‘the.F.SG rat.F.SG / beast.F.SG ...’). The meaning of these variants sharply contrasts with the unagreement variants. For instance, *el rata de Andrés* communicates that Andrés pertains to the stereotype associated to greedy people, whereas *la rata de Andrés* conveys that he pertains to the stereotype of bad people. Space limitations prevent a full discussion of these variants (see Saab & Carranza 2021 for detailed discussion and some additional references).

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- (15) [el gallina de Andrés]<sub>i</sub> dice que lo<sub>i</sub> / \*la<sub>i</sub>  
the.M.SG chicken.F.SG of Andrés.M.SG says that CL.M.SG / \*CL.F.SG  
amenazaron.  
threatened  
'That chicken Andrés says that they threatened him.'

### 3.2 Property #2: No "Predicate Raising" alternation

For those who believe that these binominals arise as a result of predicate inversion with the "predicate" *idiota* crossing its subject *Andrés* (Den Dikken 2006, Suñer Gratacós 1990, Español-Echevarría 1998, among many others), it is at least curious that there is no counterpart with subject raising:

- (16) a. [el idiota de Andrés] llegó tarde.  
the idiot of Andrés llegó tarde  
b. \*[el Andrés de idiota] llegó tarde.  
the Andrés of idiot arrived late

Compare with indubitable instances of predicate raising (Moro 2000):

- (17) a. Andrés es (un) idiota.  
Andrés is (an) idiot  
b. (un) IDIOTA es Andrés.  
(an) idiot is Andrés

### 3.3 Property #3: The epithet-ellipsis ban

The epithet is not an eligible candidate for nominal ellipsis. In effect, any attempt to delete the expressive noun gives ungrammatical results (see Suñer Gratacós 1990, Saab 2004, 2008 and 2010; angled brackets stand for ellipsis sites):

- (18) a. \*el gallina de Andrés y el < gallina > de Pablo  
the chicken of Andrés and the chicken of Pablo  
Intended: 'that chicken Andrés and that chicken Pablo'  
b. el burro de Andrés y el < burro > de Pablo  
the donkey of Andrés and the donkey of Pablo  
Impossible: 'that donkey Andrés and that donkey Pablo'  
Possible: 'Andrés's donkey and Pablo's'



### 3.4 Property #4: *of* forms a constituent with the second DP

Unlike what Bennis, Corver & Den Dikken (1998) observed for the Dutch *van* in a related set of constructions, the preposition *de* ‘of’ forms a constituent with the DP that follows it. Two considerations militate in favor of this claim. First, as shown by examples like those in (13), two *of*-phrases can be conjoined in plural environments, a clear indication that we are dealing with two PPs and not two putative copulas:

- (19) los idiotas *de* Andrés y *de* Pablo  
 the idiots of Andrés and of Pablo  
 ‘those idiots Andrés and Pablo’

Moreover, the entire *of*-DP must also be used as a fragment in short replies for echo-questions. Assuming with Merchant (2004) that fragments are derived via movement of the fragment constituent plus deletion of the rest of the sentence, the consequence is that the *of*-DP phrase is a constituent:

- (20) A: el idiota de QUIÉN?                      B: de ANDRÉS  
 the idiot of who                                      of ANDRÉS

### 3.5 Property #5: Implicit *of*-DP

These binominal phrases also have an implicit counterpart in which the *of*-phrase remains implicit:

- (21) el gallina ‘the chicken’, el idiota ‘the idiot’, el burro ‘the donkey’, el boludo ‘the asshole’, el hijo de puta ‘the son of bitch’, etc.

Crucially, in cases in which the *of*-DP phrase remains implicit, the entire DP behaves as a pronoun not as an R-expression, along the lines originally proposed by Jackendoff (1972) and contradicting Lasnik’s (1976) approach. More specifically, according to Dubinsky & Hamilton (1998) epithets are antilogophoric pronouns subject to the following condition:

- (22) Antilogophoricity constraint for epithets: An epithet must not be anteceded by an individual from whose perspective the attributive content of the epithet is evaluated.

[Dubinsky & Hamilton 1998: 689]

On this account, the fact that epithets and R-expressions give rise to unacceptability judgments has different reasons, namely, a deviation of the restriction in (22) and of the Principle-C of binding theory, respectively:

(23) John<sub>i</sub> says that \*John<sub>i</sub> / #the idiot<sub>i</sub> / he<sub>i</sub> is crazy.

As Dubinsky & Hamilton (1998) shows, the discourse conditions can be manipulated in order to avoid the effects of (22), while maintaining the conditions for a principle-C scenario. In this type of situation, only R-expressions give rise to ungrammaticality, as expected. Epithets in Spanish give exactly the same results, as shown in Saab 2004:

- (24) a. Aun cuando yo pueda perdonarlo, Andrés<sub>i</sub> me demostró que \*Andrés<sub>i</sub>/el muy hijo de puta<sub>i</sub> no se lo merece.  
'Even though I can forgive him, Andrés<sub>i</sub> showed me that \*Andrés<sub>i</sub> / that son of a bitch<sub>i</sub> doesn't deserve it.'
- b. Por la cantidad de errores que cometió durante su clase, Ana<sub>i</sub> hizo que los alumnos pensarán que \*Ana<sub>i</sub>/la muy idiota<sub>i</sub> ni siquiera es capaz de enseñar.  
'Due to the amount of mistakes she made during her class, Ana<sub>i</sub> made the students think that \*Ana<sub>i</sub> / that complete idiot<sub>i</sub> is not even capable of teaching.'

### 3.6 Interim summary

Here are some preliminary but important observations we should keep in mind:

- i. The agreement / concord (Property #1) and the ellipsis facts (Property #3) definitively show that the epithet is not the head of the construction. Given the particular distribution of the *of*-DP phrase, one is tempted to believe that the N inside this DP is the true head of the entire construction. Yet, there is this "annoying" preposition *de* which makes the hypothesis *prima facie* hard to accept.
- ii. Property #4 clearly shows that the preposition *de* cannot be a copular element (against Den Dikken and others). Its function in the phrase must be related to the formal licensing of the second DP (i.e., to Case licensing).
- iii. Property #5 on implicit *of*-DPs and the pronominal nature of epithets open the analytic space and force us to seriously consider the hypothesis that the true head of the construction must be looked for in the internal syntax of pronouns.

## 4 Assumptions

### 4.1 Expressive semantics

I follow here the tradition initiated by Kaplan (1999), formally implemented in Potts 2005 and McCready 2010, according to which expressive meanings can be properly captured by logical tools (see also Gutzmann 2015). Concretely, I assume that binominals must be modeled by a bidimensional semantics. Scoping-out and speaker orientation are two crucial diagnostics for detecting expressive meanings. As the following two examples show, the expressive meaning projects outside the truth-conditional operators and the homophobic attitude is attributed to the speaker:

(25) Ana cree que el p... de Andrés llegó tarde.  
 Ana believes that the epithet of Andrés arrived late  
 ‘Ana believes that that F... Andrés arrived late.’

(26) Ese no es el p... de Andrés.  
 that not is the epithet of Andrés  
 ‘That is not that F... Andrés.’

For the particular case of epithets, I claim that they make no contribution at the at-issue or truth conditional dimension (or alternatively, that they denote the identity function), but they do contribute to the expressive meaning dimension by taking an individual as input argument and returning an expressive meaning, whose specific content I will discuss later:

(27) el p... de Andrés  
 the epithet of Andrés  
 ‘that F... Andrés’

(28)  $\llbracket p... \rrbracket^{w,g}(\llbracket \text{Andrés} \rrbracket^{w,g}) = \text{Andrés} \bullet P(A)$

For the particular case of slurs, I assume with McCready (2010) that they make contributions both at the at-issue or truth conditional dimension and to the expressive meaning dimension (the diamond symbol is used here as in McCready for hybrid terms).

(29) Andrés es p...  
 Andrés is homosexual<sub>pej.</sub>  
 ‘Andrés is a F...’

$$(30) \quad \llbracket p \dots \rrbracket^{w,g}(\llbracket \text{Andrés} \rrbracket^{w,g}) = \text{Andrés is homosexual} \blacklozenge P(A)$$

Therefore, after McCready 2010, Potts' idea that expressives cannot occur in predicative position must be reformulated along the following lines:

- (31) Potts' Criterion: All predicates that appear in copular position must have predicative force at the truth-conditional level, independently of the question whether or not other ornamental meanings at the expressive dimension are at play.

Now, when we again compare slurs to epithets occurring in binominal environments (see (10) and (11)), we see that Den Dikken's (2006) and other approaches according to which *de* 'of' is the nominal counterpart of *ser* 'to be' cannot be on the right track. Only slurs "fail" to be pure expressives in the previous favored sense, i.e., only slurs have predicative force at the truth-conditional level.

## 4.2 Pronouns and assignments

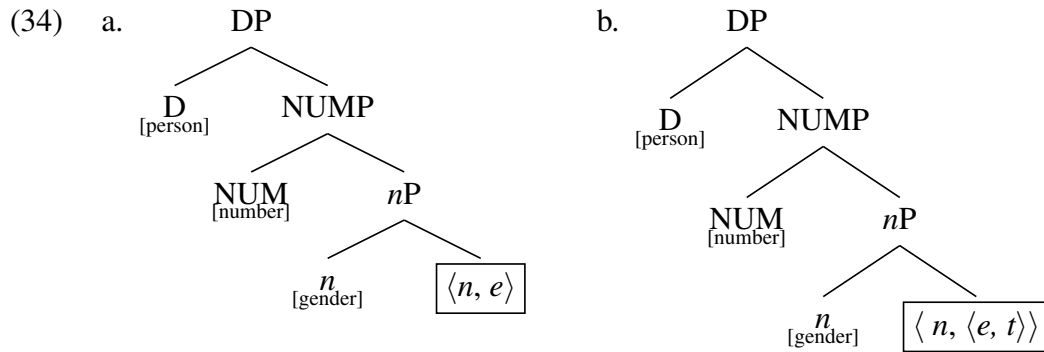
I assume that pronouns are headed by indexes whose semantic interpretation is obtained through the Pro-forms and Trace Axiom:

- (32) Pro-forms and traces (P&T): If  $\alpha$  is pro-form or trace,  $i$  is an index, and  $g$  is an assignment whose domain includes  $i$ , then  $\llbracket \alpha_i \rrbracket^g = g(i)$ .  
[Heim & Kratzer 1998: 292]

Indexes are structured as ordered pairs of numbers and any semantic type, as stated in the following definition:

- (33) Variable assignment: A partial function  $g$  from indices to denotations (of any type) is a (variable) assignment iff it fulfills the following condition:  
For any number  $n$  and type  $\tau$  such that  $\langle n, \tau \rangle \in \text{dom}(g)$ ,  $g(n, \tau) \in D_\tau$ .  
[Heim & Kratzer 1998: 292]

I also adopt the idea that indexes can come ornamented with formal features in their extended projections. Spanish is a language that provides particular evidence for at least two types of indexes: (i) individual indexes and, (ii) property indexes. Assuming that formal ornamentation includes person, number and gender, we can represent the syntactic structure of these two types of indexes as follows:



Syntactic ornamentation with  $\phi$ -features triggers presuppositions in the semantics, modeled here as partial identity functions (see Heim & Kratzer 1998, Heim 2008, Kratzer 2009 and references therein).

(35) The  $n$  Head

- a.  $\llbracket \text{female} \rrbracket = \lambda x: \text{Female}(x). x$   
 b.  $\llbracket \text{male} \rrbracket = \lambda x: \text{Male}(x). x$

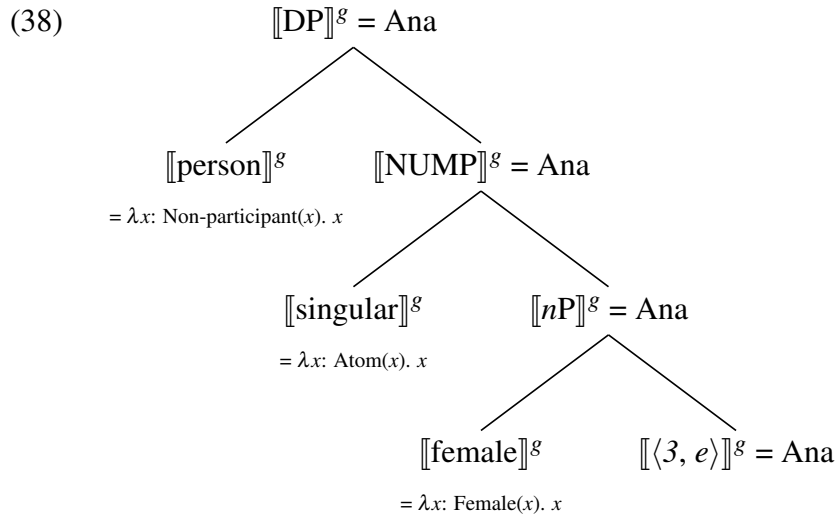
(36) The NUMBER Head

- a.  $\llbracket \text{singular} \rrbracket = \lambda x: \text{Atom}(x). x$   
 b.  $\llbracket \text{plural} \rrbracket = \lambda x: \text{Plural}(x). x$

(37) The D Head

- a.  $\llbracket \text{1person} \rrbracket = \lambda x: \text{Participant}_{\text{Speaker}}(x). x$   
 b.  $\llbracket \text{2person} \rrbracket = \lambda x: \text{Participant}_{\text{Hearer}}(x). x$   
 c.  $\llbracket \text{3person} \rrbracket = \lambda x: \text{Non-participant}(x). x$

Let us then assume an instance of the pronoun *she* heading the index  $\langle 3, e \rangle$ . If the context is appropriate and provides, say, the assignment  $g(\langle 3, e \rangle) = \text{Ana}$ , then the interpretation of the full pronominal structure would proceed as indicated in the following tree:



## 5 An equative syntax and semantics for binominal constructions

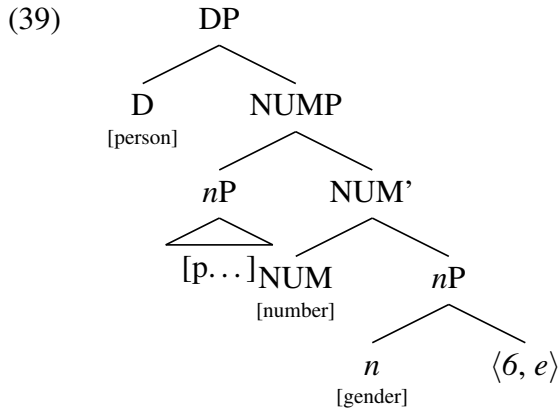
In this section, I first present the relevant ingredients of my analysis and, second, I show how it accounts for the properties that characterize the *det epithet of DP* construction discussed in section 3.

### 5.1 Expressive pronouns

The first step is to give some precise form to Thesis #1, repeated below:

1. Syntactic recycling: there is a grammar of expressivity that requires syntactic manipulation, which essentially consists of merging material in “expletive” positions. This manipulation creates a *non-representational syntax*.

As a concrete implementation of this idea, I propose that epithets are *expressive pronouns* merged in the high functional layer of a given pronominal expression, concretely, they are merged as specifiers of NUMP (see Saab 2004, 2008). By assumption, this  $\phi$ -position is expletive at the truth-conditional dimension:



Therefore, in such a syntactic position, epithets have no predicative force at the truth-conditional level; they only denote a stereotype in an expressive dimension of meaning and an associated negative (or positive) valence (Saab & Carranza 2021, Orlando & Saab 2020a, 2020b and Saab & Orlando 2021). Formally, we define a stereotype as a set of propositions contextually restricted by C:

$$(40) \quad \llbracket \text{Stereotype} \rrbracket^{g,w} = \lambda p. \exists P_{\langle e,t \rangle} [P \in C \wedge p = \lambda w. P(\text{Kind})(w)]$$

To understand the idea, let us compare again slurs and epithets. Following the spirit of McCready 2010, I conceive of slurs as hybrid terms denoting at both the truth-conditional and expressive dimension of meaning. At the truth-conditional level a slur as  $p\dots$  denotes that the subject of predication pertains to the set of homosexuals and, at the expressive dimension, it communicates that the individual at hand is part of the homosexual stereotype which is at force in a given homophobic community:

$$(41) \quad \llbracket p\dots \rrbracket^{g,w} = \lambda w. \lambda x. x \text{ is homosexual in } w \blacklozenge \lambda x. \lambda p. \exists P_{\langle e,t \rangle} [P \in C \wedge p = \lambda w. P(\cap p\dots)(w)] \wedge x \leq \cap p\dots$$

Now, a slur occurring in non-predicative position (for example, the specifier of NUMP) loses its original predicative force and ends up communicating the stereotype plus the valence alone:

$$(42) \quad \llbracket p\dots \rrbracket^{g,w} = \emptyset \bullet \lambda x. \lambda p. \exists P_{\langle e,t \rangle} [P \in C \wedge p = \lambda w. P(\cap p\dots)(w)] \wedge x \leq \cap p\dots$$

Combining the syntax for epithets illustrated in the tree in (39) with the denotation in (42) results in the following interpretation for the crucial NUMP node:

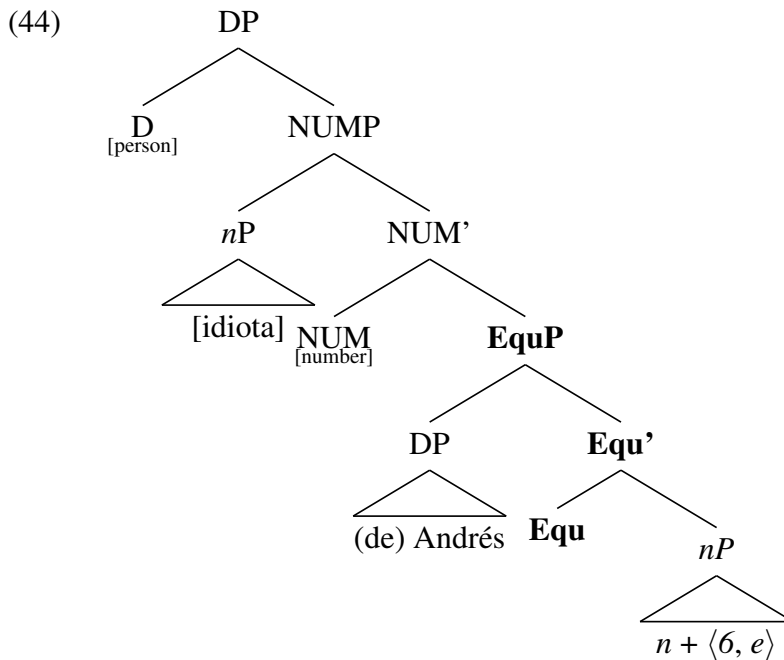
$$(43) \quad \llbracket \text{NUMP} \rrbracket^{g,w} = g(\langle 6, e \rangle) \bullet \lambda p. \exists P_{\langle e,t \rangle} [P \in C \wedge p = \lambda w. P(\cap p\dots)(w)] \wedge g(\langle 6, e \rangle) \leq \cap p\dots$$

## 5.2 Equations

So far, we have seen that epithets occur in non-predicative positions, concretely, as specifiers of NUMP (but the exact position is not entirely crucial). In that position, epithets only mean something in an expressive dimension of meaning. In particular, they communicate stereotypes by means of which a class is defined by a set of stereotypical properties. The obvious next question is now how the *of*-phrase in the *det epithet of DP* construction is connected to the syntax of epithets proposed so far. As I already advanced in the Thesis #2 repeated below, the connection is done through an equative syntax and semantics.

2. Equations: Epithets are part of the syntax of “expressive” pronouns, i.e., mere syntactic indexes feeding assignment functions plus an expressive dimension. The semantic connection between the expressive pronoun and the *of*-DP is equation, not predication, against the received view.

As a way to concretely implement this thesis, I assume that there is a functional head, called *EquP* for convenience, active in the syntax of the relevant construction, which syntactically relates the index and the *of*-phrase, as shown in the following tree:



The denotation of the  $\text{Equ}^0$  head would be as follows:

$$(45) \quad \llbracket \text{Equ} \rrbracket : \langle e, \langle e, e \rangle \rangle = \lambda x. \lambda y: x = y.x$$



That is to say, I model the equation as an identity presupposition between the index and the R-expression. As in the case of the rest of the heads in the extended projection of the nominal index, the equative presupposition is conceived of as a partial identity function. Thus, if the presupposition is met, the EquP node will end with the following denotation:

$$(46) \quad \llbracket \text{EquP} \rrbracket^{g,w} = g(\langle 6, e \rangle) = \text{Andr s}$$

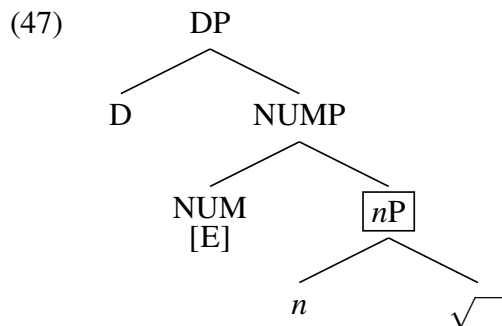
The rest of the semantic derivation until the DP node proceeds routinely.

### 5.3 Deriving the five properties

In subsection 3.1, I illustrated the so-called *ad-sensum agreement* effects through examples (12)-(15). Now, according to the analysis proposed in the tree in (44), there is no need to stipulate any *ad sensum* agreement operation; the nominal head, the one that projects and controls agreement / concord, is the empty *n* head / the index and its extended projection (including NUM and D). On this proposal, then, there is no particular processes of agreement / concord; what we see is just regular agreement / concord.<sup>3</sup>

In the same vein, there is no place for any putative predicate raising alternation as discussed in subsection 3.2. The prenominal position in Spec,NUMP in trees like (39) or (44) is in a sense designated for expressive words, not, say, proper names like the ungrammatical (16b). Put differently, a predicate raising alternation is underivable.

The epithet-ellipsis ban (see subsection 3.3 and the examples in (18)) also follows under the present analysis. As shown in detail in Saab 2008, 2010, 2019, *nP*-ellipsis in Spanish only targets the *nP* layer when selected by the NUM head encoding an [E]-feature (Merchant 2001). Epithets cannot be the target of nominal ellipsis under any circumstance.



<sup>3</sup> Given the analysis proposed in (44), the expectation is that the apparent mismatch in concord properties only affects gender and not, say, number, since the phrase in Spec,NUMP is a defective extended nominal projection that excludes NUM or any other higher head above the *n* head. As the contrast between the examples in (12) and (13) shows, this expectation is empirically fulfilled.

A crucial aspect of my proposal has to do with the nature of the preposition *de* that in mainstream analyses is taken as the nominal counterpart of verbal copulas. This is inconsistent with the behavior of the construction under Potts' Criterion (i.e., with the fact that the epithet does not have predicative force at the truth-conditional level), but also with the syntactic distribution of the preposition briefly illustrated in the examples (56) and (57), which leads me to the conclusion that the preposition is a case marker, perhaps, inserted at PF (not a crucial point, as far as I can tell). This is precisely what the parentheses indicate in (44).

Finally, regarding the fact that the *of*-DP can remain implicit, this follows from the antilogophoric syntax already discussed, in which the EqP was simply not merged during the derivation. In effect, as we have seen in 3.5, epithets pertain to the class of pronominal expressions, whose particular structure is given in (39).

## 6 Other binominal constructions, other equations

Consider binominal constructions of the following type, in which the N involved in the construction is indeed an expressive, arguably, of the hybrid or mixed type:<sup>4</sup>

- (48) a. [Este departamento de mierda] tiene cucarachas.  
           this apartment of shit has cockroaches  
       b. [Esta mierda de departamento] tiene cucarachas.  
           this shit of apartment has cockroaches  
           'this shit of an apartment has cockroaches.'

In what follows, I argue that examples like (48b) provide particular evidence for the hypothesis that the syntactic and semantic dependency between the expressive and the *of*-NP is also equation but not between two individuals but between two properties instantiated by the bare NP *departamento* and an empty noun of the  $\langle e, t \rangle$  type. Put differently, the pronominal syntax underlying the *det expressive of NP* construction contains an indexical empty noun as the one illustrated in the tree in (34b).

<sup>4</sup> That these expressives are hybrid can be demonstrated by their behavior under truth-conditional operators like negation, which clearly scopes over the meaning of *mierda*:

- (i) a. No compré una mierda de libro.  
           not bought.1SG a shit of book  
       b. No compré un libro de mierda.  
           not bought.1SG a book of shit  
           'I did not buy a shit of a book.'

### 6.1 Property #1: Agreement / Concord mismatches

Note first an important trait of this type of expressive: the expressive and the determiner agree in gender and number (e.g., *una mierda de departamento*). The second property to bear in mind is that it seems that for many speakers, including me, there is also number mismatches between the *det+expressive* and the NP *departamentos*:

- (49) esta mierda de departamentos  
 this.F.SG shit.F.SG of apartment.M.PL  
 ‘these shitty apartments’

Now, it is *departamentos* the noun that seems to control agreement (there is some speaker variation here):

- (50) Se demolieron esa mierda de departamentos  
 SE.PASS demolished.3PL this.F.SG shit.F.SG of apartment.M.PL  
 ‘These shitty apartments were demolished.’

For plausible reasons having to do with the resistance to call the prepositional phrase *de departamentos* “the head of the NP”, the Spanish tradition speaks here of *ad sensum* agreement again.

### 6.2 Property #2: The predicate inversion illusion

At first sight, this construction seems to provide evidence for a predicate inversion analysis, since for some expressives there is the option to appear before or after the *of*-phrase:

- (51) a. un departamento de porquería/mierda  
 an apartment of shit  
 b. una porquería/mierda de departamento  
 a shit of apartment  
 ‘a shit of an apartment’

Yet, as shown in Di Tullio & Saab (2006), other expressives strongly reject the “inversion”:

- (52) a. un departamento de morondanga  
 an apartment of shit  
 ‘a shitty apartment’

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- b. \*una morondanga de departamento  
a shit of apartment  
'a shit of an apartment'

And others cannot occur in post-nominal position:

- (53) a. una bosta de departamento  
a shit of apartment  
'a shit of an apartment'  
b. \*un departamento de bosta  
an apartment of shit  
Intended reading: 'A shitty apartment'

### 6.3 Property #3: The expressive-ellipsis ban

Like in the case of epithets, the expressive noun is not an eligible candidate for nominal ellipsis. Any attempt to delete the expressive noun gives ungrammatical results:

- (54) \* una mierda de departamento y una ⟨mierda⟩ de casa  
a shit of apartment and a shit of house

The genitive phrase itself cannot be elided either, a fact that indicates that the genitive noun cannot be the head of the construction:<sup>5</sup>

- (55) \* una mierda de departamento en San Telmo y una mierda ⟨ de  
a shit of apartment in San Telmo and a shit of  
departamento ⟩ en La Boca  
apartment in La Boca  
Intended: 'a shit of an apartment in San Telmo and a shit one in La Boca'

### 6.4 Property #4: *of* forms a constituent with the second NP

The preposition *de* 'of' forms a constituent with the *of*-NP. In effect, like in the case of the *det epithet of DP* construction, coordination and fragment answer tests certificate this claim.

<sup>5</sup> According to Pesetsky (2013), all nouns are born as genitive (as stated in his *primeval genitive* hypothesis). This opens the possibility that the noun *departamento* in examples like (48b) really heads the entire construction. Yet, as argued in the body of the text, this would predict legitimate instances of nominal ellipsis of the genitive phrase, since nominal ellipsis always targets the NP layer, regardless of the case features in the antecedent and the elided nouns.

(56) una mierda de departamento y de oficina  
 a shit of apartment and of office  
 ‘a shit of an apartment and office’

(57) A: una mierda de QUÉ?                      B: de DEPARTAMENTO  
       a shit of WHAT                                of apartment

### 6.5 Property #5: Implicit *of*-NP

Finally, the genitive phrase can also remain implicit. So, if after watching a bad movie, one says:

(58) Qué mierda!  
       what shit  
       ‘What a shit!’

the hearer understands that the expressive applies to the relevant movie. Of course, in the same scenario, the speaker has the option of not leaving the predicative noun implicit, as in:

(59) Qué mierda de película!  
       what shit of movie  
       ‘What a shit of a movie!’

Similarly, if one says:

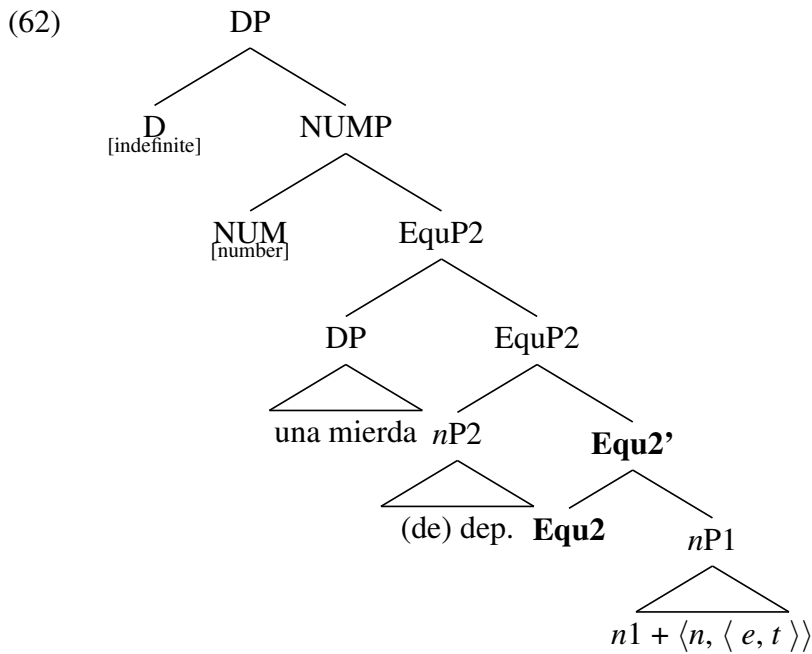
(60) Ese profesor es una mierda.  
       that professor is a shit  
       ‘That professor is a shit.’

the hearer must make explicit in her mind what is the implicit property the speaker had in her own mind, since the professor could be *una mierda* in many respects. For instance, the relevant professor could be just a bad professor (i.e., she is *a shit* as a professor) or a bad person (i.e., she is *a shit* as a person.). Indeed, the speaker, again, has the option of making this perfectly explicit, like in:

(61) Ese profesor es una mierda de profesor / de persona.  
       that professor is a shit of professor / of person  
       ‘That professor is a shit as a professor / person.’

### 6.6 Analysis: equations for properties

I propose that in the *det expressive of NP* construction expressives are DPs merged as nominal modifiers of indexical empty nouns, a position where, by assumption, a hybrid semantics is licensed. The presence of an *of*-phrase is again due to the syntactic activity of an Equative Phrase that syntactically and semantically connects an empty noun to the genitive *nP*. The expressive DP is headed by a D with an unvalued D feature which is valued with the dominating D through Agree and subsequent movement to its specifier, a step I omit here (see Saab & Carranza 2021).



Now, the denotation for this alternative  $\text{Equ}2^0$  is as defined in (63):

$$(63) \quad \llbracket \text{Equ}2 \rrbracket : \langle f, \langle f, f \rangle \rangle = \lambda f. \lambda h : f = h.f$$

With these ingredients in mind, it is easy to write the correct semantics for the lower  $\text{Equ}2$  node as indicated below:

$$(64) \quad \llbracket \text{Equ}2 \rrbracket^{g,w} = g(\langle 1, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle) = \lambda x. \text{Apart.}(x)$$

These considerations are enough to account for the five properties that characterize the *det expressive of NP* construction. Again, like in the case of epithets, agreement/concord is determined by the extended projection of the empty noun, not by the expressive DP. The difference with the *det epithet of DP* construction is that here the expressive does form a constituent with its determiner giving rise to internal concord between them, as in examples like (49) introduced in subsection 6.1.

As for the inversion illusion facts briefly commented in subsection 6.2, they are the byproduct of plain absence of inversion. In reality, there are two clearly different syntactic trees: one in which the expressive forms a complex DP in the specifier of *nP* (see example (51b)) and another one in which the expressive projects a plain *nP* preceded by the preposition *de* (see example (51a)). This second one gives rise to the ordering in which the expressive appears in postnominal position, within a regular *nP* structure. The ellipsis ban presented in 6.3 follows from the same reasons as epithets. The expressive DP cannot guarantee ellipsis of the expressive noun because such a DP does not meet the discourse conditions that license nominal ellipsis, but also because the expressive itself is a fake nominal, both from a semantic and syntactic point of view. The fact that the preposition *de* forms a constituent with its *nP* is also derived for the same reasons as in the cases of epithets and does not require more comments (see subsection 6.4). Finally, the empty noun analysis explains why there is a counterpart of the relevant construction in which the *nP* remains implicit without any further ado (see subsection 6.5). Indeed, these cases nicely illustrate why we really need empty nouns underlying this aspect of the grammar of expressivity in the nominal domain.

## 7 Conclusions

Let us conclude by providing some preliminary answers to our initial questions:

- A. How may any word become expressive in the relevant sense? Or how did the original slurs in the examples in (11) lose their original predicative force and end up communicating a mere stereotype with an associated negative valence?

My answer to this question was already advanced in the introduction:

1. Syntactic recycling: there is a grammar of expressivity that requires syntactic manipulation, which essentially consists of merging material in “expletive” positions. This manipulation creates a *non-representational syntax*.

The idea is that syntax provides different Merge positions, some of which are predicative and some of which are not, i.e., syntax also provides expletive positions. A subset of lexical items with predicative force are also licensed in expletive positions. To the extent that those items also denote in an expressive dimension of meaning (e.g., by denoting, say, a stereotype in that dimension with an associated valence), we say that in expletive positions the truth-conditional dimension is lost and only the expressive dimension survives. Of course, the best candidates to occur in expletive positions are a subset of already expressive words for which the

expressive dimension is constantly salient (e.g., *el idiota de Andrés, una mierda de departamento*).

This idea of syntactic manipulation is different from Corver's (2016) thesis that the expression of emotion in language requires *syntactic deviation*, i.e., the generation of deviant structures affecting the appraisal system. According to Corver, this would explain some funny properties of Dutch expressives, as, for instance, the use of the so-called spurious indefinite (e.g., *die etters van een jongens*, 'those jerk boys' where the singular *een* is used with the plural noun *jongens*; see Bennis, Corver & Den Dikken 1998). One could be tempted to explain the unagreement facts of binominals in Spanish also as cases of syntactic deviation. Yet, I provided reasons to think that there is no syntactic deviation at all in the Spanish case. Syntax just proceeds with generating structures by means of Merge in different syntactic positions, some of which are simply non-representational. One keeps wondering whether cases like the spurious indefinite in Dutch cannot be reduced to this type of syntactic manipulation. There is a possibility, for instance, that *een* is not a spurious determiner after all, but part of the extended projection of an empty noun (in a similar vein to what Kayne's 2005 has proposed for cases like *a few books*).

The second relevant question was:

- B. What is the exact syntactic and semantic relation between the epithet and the R-expression preceded by the preposition *de*?

With respect to it, I have also advanced my answer stating that:

2. Equations: Epithets are "expressive" pronouns, i.e., mere syntactic indexes feeding assignment functions. The semantic connection between the expressive pronoun and the *of*-DP is equation, not predication.

Both epithets and mixed expressives participate in pronominal structures. In the case of the *det epithet of DP* construction, the epithet is part of the complex syntax of antilogophoric pronouns. In turn, the mixed expressive in the *det expressive of NP* construction is part of the complex syntax of a projecting empty noun. The syntactic correlate of what I just said is that the genitive coda is a DP in the case of the *det epithet of DP* construction, but an NP in the case of the *det expressive of NP* one. Antilogophoric pronouns are projections of mere individual indexes, whereas empty nouns are projections of mere property indexes. In both cases, semantic interpretation is determined under different assignment functions contextually provided.

And finally, recall our last question:

- C. What is the preposition *de* for in the relevant set of constructions?





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