

Semantics of *lo*-headed degree constructions in Spanish

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Since Spanish does not have neuter nouns, in this language, the neuter definite article *lo* can be used to express entities that have no gender, such as sets (1a), propositional content (1b) or properties (1c).

1.

a) No traje **lo que le pidió su tío**.

He did not bring **what his uncle asked for**.

b) ¿Supiste **lo de Viviana**? Se va a divorciar.

Did you hear **about Viviana**? She is getting a divorce.

c) **Lo bonito** de una canción de Silvio Rodríguez es su fea voz.

The beautiful part of a Silvio Rodriguez song is his ugly voice.

This is known as the referential use and has been already explained through definiteness theory (García Rodríguez 2018). It has been proved that phrases headed by this particular use of *lo* behave as definite phrases. This means they can be found in the seven definiteness contexts proposed by Hawkins (1978), Schwarz (2006, 2013) and García Fajardo (1994): anaphore, bridging, immediate situation, global situation, genericity and particular previous states representation. As a consequence of this, this kind of phrases express unicity and presupposition and it is a valid conjecture that its referents are definite individuals.

However, this particle can be used to denote quantities (Bosque & Moreno Cabrera 1990) or degrees, as well (2b).

2.

a) No duermo **lo suficiente** para sentirme descansada.

I do not sleep **enough** to feel rested.

b) Dormiré **lo necesariamente mal** para que mi gato se quede en la cama.

I will sleep **as bad as necessary** for my cat to stay in bed.

c) No es **lo bastante guapo** para mi gusto.

He is not **handsome enough** for my taste.

These two uses differ in their behavior. Syntactically, the referential use of *lo* can combine with relative sentences (1a), prepositional phrases (1b) and adjectival phrases (1c). The degree use can only combine with adjectival phrases whose heads or modificational adverbs have to show a strong notion of *sufficiency*.

Semantically, for example, while the referential use (3a) can be replaced with a pronoun such as *eso* (*that*), the same cannot be done for the *degree* use (3b).

3.

a) No traje **eso**.

He did not bring **that**

b) ? Dormiré **eso** para que mi gato se quede en la cama.

? I will sleep **that** for my cat to stay in bed.

This shows a lack of referentiality for definite entities and signals that the degree use cannot be explained using standard definiteness theory in the same way that it been done for the referential use.

However, this does not mean this phrases stop being definites, its behaviour shows otherwise. For example, these phrases have elliptical capacities. As regular definite phrases do (Aguilar-Guevara 2014), degree *lo*-headed phrases can introduce referents that may be recovered from an adverbial phrase serving as substitute for the complete verbal phrase. This can be seen in 4.

4.

a) No duermo **lo suficiente** para sentirme descansada **y tampoco Juan**.

I do not sleep **enough** to feel rested **and neither does Juan**

b) Dormiré **lo necesariamente mal** para que mi gato se quede en la cama **y también mi mamá**.

I will sleep **as bad as necessary** for my cat to stay in bed **and so will my mom**.

This, joined with the counterargument presented before that stated these phrases cannot be substituted by a pronoun, demonstrates that degree *lo*-headed phrases show a behaviour that seems to be in a liminal space between definite particles and modificational particles.

My hypothesis is that, while in examples such as the ones on 1, *lo* refers to definite entities, in cases as 2, *lo* operates at a degree level and it is used to denote an ideal quantity or degree on a given context, i.e. *lo suficiente* in 2a expresses a specific amount of sleep that happens to be the optimal for the speaker to feel rested. This can be interpreted as definiteness since there is a notion of presupposition for a given scale, i. e., the scale of sleeping time standardized for, let us say, a healthy adult. In any case, the question remains: how can we relate this known definite article *lo* to definiteness theory if it is not operating on individual entities?

In order to give an answer to this question, I propose a compositional semantics analysis for these phrases in which the interpretation of this particle can be found, by using Frege's Principle of compositionality as an axis. This principle entails the assumption that the meaning of a complex expression is a function of the meanings of its parts considering the rules used to combine them. My plan is to elaborate a morphosyntactic and semantic characterization for these phrases, using a corpus created from examples recolected from Twitter. I believe this project would open a path to a better understanding of the *lo* particle with a degree use and it would also add new information to the understanding of this neuter definite article on a language with no neuter nouns.

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