

Discovering and explaining bare singulars in Latin American varieties of Spanish: *Twitter* and experimental linguistics

Since the mid-1990s, and building on Poesio (1994), *short weak definites* (SWDs) have continuously gained scholarly attention. By way of example, witness the American English SWD (1), where morphologically definite *the hospital* – as demonstrable by sloppy readings with VP-ellipsis, semantic number neutrality, and anaphoric defectiveness – does not meet standard requirements of semantic definiteness, i.e., uniqueness and/or familiarity (cf. Carlson et al. 2005, 2006; Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts 2013). Instead, Carlson et al. (2006) show SWDs to share all properties of semantically (pseudo-)incorporated *bare singulars* (BSs), among which morphological number restrictions, lexical restrictions, and semantic enrichment. Given this, it comes as no surprise that there is inter-varietal, intra-varietal lexeme-conditioned, as well as inter-linguistic variation between SWDs and BSs. This is shown, for instance, by British English ([2], *apud* Carlson et al. 2005), which contrasts with American English (1).

- (1) *Sam was sent to **the** hospital.* (American English)
 (2) *Sam was sent to \emptyset hospital.* (British English)

Article languages differ as to whether they prefer SWDs or BSs, even though both options are generally systemically anchored in a given article language (Leonetti 2019). Spanish, for instance, is usually considered to only exceptionally allow BSs (cf., e.g., [3]), while SWDs appear to be the ‘default option’ (cf. [4] and Laca 1999: 919).

- (3) *Pedro va a \emptyset misa.* ‘Pedro goes to the service’ (Spanish)
 (4) *Pedro tiene que ir (***a** | **a=l**) hospital.* ‘Pedro has to go to (the) hospital’ (Spanish)

The aim of the contribution is twofold.

Aim 1: Firstly, I empirically show that several Latinamerican varieties of Spanish allow for more BSs than hitherto recognized: both the Río-de-la-Plata area as well as (especially) Colombia are BSs hotspots (for the former, cf. also Oggiani 2021, who, however, pursues a purely introspective methodology). This – especially for Colombia – new finding is based on the analysis of 6,206 nominals extracted from *Twitter*, as well as on that of acceptability judgments obtained from 226 L1-speakers from Spain, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, and Colombia, which were collected in an experimental study designed with the help of *OnExp2*. In particular, and backed by the statistically significant results of an inferential mixed linear regression analysis performed in *R*, this blended empirical approach furnishes evidence that Colombian and Río-de-la Plata Spanish allow a number of BSs not licensed in other varieties of Spanish. By way of example, witness Colombian *ir a cine* ‘lit. go to movies’ and *ir a teatro* ‘lit. go to theater’ in (5) and Argentinian *ir a peluquería* ‘lit. go to hairdresser’ in (6), both of which are original *Twitter* examples.

- (5) *Aguantaría ir a \emptyset cine hoy con este clima exótico*
 ‘I could stand to go to the movies today in this exotic weather.’
 (6) *Ayer iba a ir a \emptyset peluquería [...] pero me dio paja*
 ‘Yesterday I was going to go to the hairdresser [...] but I was too tired to do it.’

Aim 2: The second aim of the talk is to put forward a first explanatory attempt for the wider availability of BSs in Colombian and Río-de-la-Plata Spanish. This is especially relevant in light of the fact that there has to date – and regardless of which particular language under study – not been made any progress as to “[t]he problem of variation between [SWDs and BSs]” (Leonetti 2019: 14). Theoretical linguistics is, in other words, not yet in the position to make educated predictions on the intra-varietal, cross-varietal, and cross-linguistic preference for SWDs or BSs, respectively. Given this, I formulate the idea that the wider availability of BSs in Colombian and Río-de-la-Plata Spanish is *one* means to compensate for restructuring tendencies in the domain of determiner case marking in these varieties. In

this context, note that Colombian Spanish allows for absence of differential object marking *a* (DOM, accusative) in contexts in which it would be mandatory in other varieties of Spanish (7). Río-de-la-Plata Spanish, in turn, allows for DOM accusative-*a* in contexts from which it would be banned in other varieties of this language (8).

- (7) *Agarraron* \emptyset_{Acc} *el muchacho este*. (Colombia, *El Cartel*; Caracol TV 2008; netflix.com)
'They caught this boy'
- (8) *La escuchó con mucha atención, a* Acc *la ópera*. (Argentina; Dumitrescu 1997)
'He listened to her very attentively, to the opera.'

Based on data such as (7), it can be concluded that in Colombian Spanish the sequence \emptyset + *definite article* + *noun* is more often syncretic for nominative and accusative than in other varieties of this language. Extension of BSs in Colombian Spanish (5) at the expense of SWDs of type (4) may thus well be a means to reduce instances of a third case syncretism of \emptyset + *definite article* + *noun*, this time for oblique case. Argentinian DOM-data such as *a la ópera* in (8), on the other hand, show that, in this variety, the sequence \emptyset + *definite article* + *noun* is more unequivocally nominative than in other varieties of Spanish. Therefore, one may argue that the extension of BSs in Argentinian Spanish (6) at the expense of SWDs of type (4) strengthens the unequivocal nominative status of \emptyset + *definite article* (+ *noun*), namely by further reducing the contexts in which this sequence would otherwise be *non-nominative*.

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