


NP-Ellipsis Patterns in Spanish Binominals: A New Empirical Observation and its Theoretical Implications*

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Reception: June 13, 2025

Acceptance: September 11, 2025

Publication: February 27, 2026

Recommended citation: Saab, Andrés. 2026. NP-Ellipsis Patterns in Spanish Binominals: A New Empirical Observation and its Theoretical Implications. *Catalan Journal of Linguistics* 25(1): 117-152. <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/catjl.539>>

Abstract

In this contribution, I present new evidence against any attempt to unify pseudo-partitive/quantificational and qualitative binominals (e.g., *un grupo/montón de estudiantes* ‘a group/lot of students’, *una mierda de departamento* ‘a shit of an apartment’). The observation is that pseudo-partitive/quantificational nouns, unlike expressive nouns, license NP-ellipsis of the *de*-phrase (e.g., *A: Vinieron estudiantes?* ‘Did students come?’, *B: Un montón (de estudiantes)* ‘a lot (of students)’). Assuming that the codas of pseudo-partitive and quantificational nouns are NPs realized as primeval genitives (Pesetsky 2013), NP-ellipsis of the usual type is correctly predicted under well-known licensing and identity conditions. In turn, the *de*-phrase in qualitative binominals is the specifier of an Equative Phrase, which relates the *de*-NP to an empty nominal ranging over properties (Saab 2022a). As I show, NP-ellipsis is banned in such environments for principled reasons. Thus, the ellipsis pattern is accounted for if the relevant binominals have a different structural source for genitive marking.

Keywords: pseudo-partitives; quantificational binominals; qualitative binominals; nominal ellipsis; genitive case; Spanish

* I would like to thank the editors of this special issue for their invitation to submit this proposal and their constant guidance during the entire process. I am also grateful to two anonymous reviewers whose suggestions positively impacted on the final result. I have presented previous versions of this material at our *TALK* research seminar in Buenos Aires (<<https://talk-group.org/>>) and at the *HiTT Linguistic Group, Basque Research Group of Theoretical Linguistics* (online talk, June 2025). Many thanks to both audiences for good feedback. As usual, all errors are mine.

Resum. *Els patrons d'el·lipsi del SN en les construccions binominals de l'espanyol: una nova observació empírica i les implicacions teòriques que comporta*

En aquesta contribució, presento proves noves en contra dels intents d'unificar els binominals pseudopartitius/quantificatius i els qualitatius (p. ex., *un grupo/montón de estudiantes* 'un grup/munt d'estudiants', *una mierda de departamento* 'una merda de pis'). L'observació és que els noms pseudopartitius/quantificatius, a diferència dels noms expressius, legitimen l'el·lipsi del sintagma-*de* (e.g., *A: Vinieron estudiantes?* 'Van venir estudiants?', *B: Un montón (de estudiantes)* 'un munt (d'estudiants)'). Si assumim que les codex dels noms pseudopartitius i quantificatius són SN realitzats com a genitius primigenis (Pesetsky 2013), l'el·lipsi nominal del tipus habitual es prediu correctament sota condicions de legitimació i identitat ben conegudes. En canvi, el sintagma-*de* en els binominals qualitatius és l'especificador d'un Sintagma Equatiu, que relaciona el SN introduït per *de* amb un nominal buit que abasta propietats (Saab 2022a). Com mostro, l'el·lipsi del SN està prohibida en aquests entorns per raons fonamentades. Així, el patró d'el·lipsi queda explicat si els binominals rellevants tenen una font estructural diferent per al marcatge genitiu.

Paraules clau: pseudopartitius; binominals quantificatius; binominals qualitatius; el·lipsi nominal; cas genitiu; espanyol

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1. Introduction

At least in Romance, there are certain intriguing connections between (pseudo)-partitive, quantificational and expressive nouns. For instance, all of them participate in binominals environments in which genitive case seems to be involved through the insertion of the preposition *de*:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| (1) a. un grupo <i>de</i> estudiantes
a group of students
'a group of students.' | <i>pseudo-partitive binominals</i> |
| b. un montón <i>de</i> estudiantes ¹
a lot of students
'a lot of students.' | <i>quantificational binominals</i> |

1. The quantificational noun *montón* is present in most, if not all, Spanish dialects. Other quantificational nouns I will use in what follows (*bocha* or *pila*) are dialectal variants of quantificational nouns in Rioplatense Spanish. Judgments were recollected among colleagues, students and many other native Rioplatense speakers. The judgments were extremely robust among all the relevant nouns I checked for with almost no controversy among speakers, specially, when it comes to the difference between quantificational and qualitative nouns (see footnote 4 for a caveat on pseudo-partitive nouns).

- c. una mierda *de* departamento *qualitative binominals*
 a shit of apartment
 ‘a shit of an apartment.’

And all trigger unexpected patterns of agreement:²

- (2) a. Vinieron un grupo de estudiantes.
 came.3PL a group.SG of students
 ‘A group of students came.’
- b. Vinieron un montón de estudiantes.
 came.3PL a lot of students
 ‘Lot of students came.’
- c. Se derrumbaron una mierda de departamentos.
 se demolish.3PL a shit.SG of apartments
 ‘Some shitty apartments were demolished.’

In what follows, I will be specifically concerned with the contrast between quantificational and expressive binominals.³ As far as I can tell, true pseudo-partitives behave more like quantificational nouns than expressive ones, but there are additional complexities involving pseudo-partitives that I prefer avoid here in order to make the argument more transparent.⁴

Milner (1978) is one of the first attempts to unify (pseudo)-partitives and qualitative binominals on the basis of French evidence. A similar idea is found in Corver (1998), who proposes extending the predicate inversion analysis for qualitative binominals (see, among many others, Bennis et al. 1997 and den Dikken 2006) to

2. Demonte and Pérez Jiménez (2015) and Pérez Jiménez and Demonte (2017) are exhaustive studies on variable agreement in pseudo-partitive constructions in Spanish.
3. See Alexiadou et al. (2007, part III, chapter 2) for an exhaustive overview of the connection between pseudo-partitives and qualitative binominals.
4. Both pseudo-partitive and quantificational nouns alternate with “more nominal” counterparts in which the relevant nouns behave as the lexical heads of the extended projection of the DPs containing them (see Selkirk 1977 for a first observation in this respect). Put differently, there is a systematic ambiguity. For instance, in the case of quantificational nouns (e.g., *bocha* ‘ball’, *montón* ‘lot’, *pila* ‘pile’, etc.), a DP like *una pila de libros* ‘a pile of books’ is ambiguous between a quantificational reading (e.g., a lot of books) and a descriptive reading (a particular disposition of books). As shown in Saab (2006, 2010), the syntax of quantificational readings not only triggers the two properties of genitive marking and unexpected agreement illustrated in (1b) and (2b), respectively, but also blocks nominal ellipsis of the quantificational noun. This is accounted for if quantificational nouns do not head the extended projection of the main DP. Instead, in their descriptive readings, the same nouns *do* head the extended projection of the relevant DPs. In this scenario, the noun is elidable and control regular agreement. A similar pattern of systematic ambiguity is attested with true pseudo-partitive (e.g., *grupo* ‘group’, *parte* ‘part’, *mayoría* ‘most’), which also trigger unexpected agreement and genitive marking of the nominal coda, but the relevant readings are much more subtle to get. At any rate, even when the patterns are a bit opaque, these nouns behave like quantificational ones in the relevant ellipsis environments to be discussed in this paper. I will come back to the issue when discussing patterns of variable agreement in section 4.1.

pseudo-partitives (see also Pescarini 2024 for a recent attempt to connect partitivity and some qualitative binominals through predicate movement).⁵ Among the similarities between pseudo-partitive/quantificational nouns and qualitative nouns mentioned by Corver, he notes that both can function as complements of copular verbs, indicating their predicative nature (compare with a canonical adjectival predicate: *Es inteligente*. '(S)he is intelligent.'). The Spanish nouns under study here can also behave as complements of copular verbs:

- (3) a. *Eso es un grupo.*
 that is a group
 'That is a group.'
- b. *Eso es un montón.*
 that is a lot
 'That is a lot.'
- c. *Ese es una mierda.*
 that is a shit
 'That (guy) is (a) shit.'

He also mentions the fact that at least in English pseudo-partitive and qualitative nouns tolerate replacement by predicative proforms. The same is attested in Spanish, language in which predicative complements of true copular verbs admit the replacement by the so-called neuter and invariable *lo* 'it'. Thus, all the predicative complements in (3) can be replaced as follows:

- (4) *Sí que lo es.*
 yes that *it* is
 'Yes, it is.'

More recently, but from a different perspective, Pesetsky (2013) made a similar suggestion in favor of unifying different types of binominals, including the ones relevant to this study. I will review Pesetsky's suggestion in detail in the next section since his theory of genitive case is precisely under inspection here. As we will see, it seems that at least the quantificational/pseudo-partitive binominals are amenable to his primeval genitive analysis. Yet, against his own suggestion, this analysis does not extend to qualitative binominals, advising against any unification. The novel argument involves unobserved patterns of NP-ellipsis. Concretely, only

5. Corver's own words make the point clear: "Den Dikken's formal analysis of the *N of a N* construction can, technically speaking, be easily extended to pseudopartitives." [Corver 1998: 230]. Yet, the patterns discussed by Corver are not a perfect counterpart of the patterns to be discussed here. The core examples he uses involve measure nouns like *bottle* in English or Dutch. I am not convinced to include these nouns into the set of what, following Brucart (1997), I call here *pseudo-partitive or quantificational* nouns (e.g., *grupo*, *montón*, *bocha*, *pila*, etc.). As far as I can tell, measurement nouns like the Spanish *botella* and related ones do not have the same distribution as *grupo* or *montón* regarding, for instance, patterns of variable agreement.

pseudo-partitive and quantificational nouns license NP-ellipsis of the nominal coda. Thus, in an example like (5), the quantificational noun *bocha* ‘ball’ or the pseudo-partitive *grupo* ‘group’ in B’s answer allows ellipsis of the genitive *de estudiantes* (<...> = ellipsis site; E-site):

- (5) A: Vinieron muchos estudiantes?
 came.3PL many students
 ‘A: Did many students come?’
- B: Una bocha / un grupo < de estudiantes >.
 a ball a group of students
 ‘B: A lot/group.’

The same result is impossible when there is a qualitative noun involved. In the following example, the mixed expressive noun *mierda* ‘shit’ cannot license ellipsis of the *of*-phrase *de departamento*; the only available interpretation is *a shitty thing*, not *a shitty apartment*, in La Boca.⁶

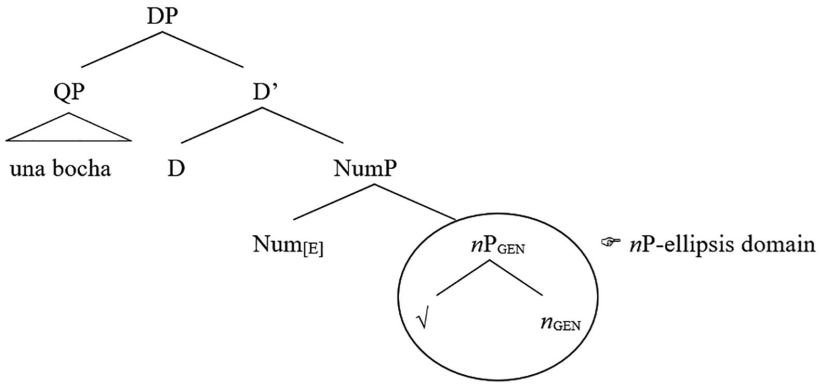
- (6) una mierda de departamento en San Telmo y una mierda en La Boca
 a shit of apartment in San Telmo and a shit in La Boca
 Impossible interpretation: ‘a shit of an apartment in San Telmo and a shit (of apartment) in La Boca’

In this study, I would like to defend the thesis that pseudo-partitive/quantificational and expressive nouns do not share the same underlying syntax. More specifically, as I have already advanced, the nominal codas of pseudo-partitive/quantificational nouns are primeval genitives in the sense of Pesetsky (2013); i.e., these nouns are borne as genitive in the NP domain by virtue of the combination between little *n* and a bare root. For Pesetsky, such a combination is lexical. Here, I will assume that it is syntactic. But regardless of this assumption, the basic underlying syntax I propose here feeds the environment for NP-ellipsis, which according to most views is ellipsis of the *nP*-domain licensed by the Num head through the presence of a formal [E]-feature (see Merchant 2001 on ellipsis licensing through an [E]-feature, and Saab 2019 for an overview of nominal ellipsis). Simplifying somewhat, the relevant configuration has the following formal ingredients:⁷

6. San Telmo and La Boca are neighborhoods in the city of Buenos Aires.

7. In occasions, I use NP instead of *nP*+root. Also, notice that I label quantificational/pseudo-partitive phrases as *QP* just to distinguish them from qualitative binominals. At any rate, I assume that all are phrases of the DP type.

(7)



Beyond the presence of genitive marking, this syntactic scenario is identical to other regular *nP*-ellipsis domains, which are also licensed by Num:⁸

- (8) a. el libro de Borges y el de Cortázar
 the book of Borges and the of Cortázar
 ‘Borges’ book and Cortázar’s’

b. $[_{DP} D [_{NumP} Num_{[E]} [_{nP} [de Cortázar]_i <[_{nP} \dots libro t_i \dots] >]]]$

Indeed, (5B) alternates with the following answer, in which B uses the quantifier *muchos* ‘many’ instead of the quantificational construction *una bocha*:

- (9) A: Vinieron muchos estudiantes?
 came.3PL many students
 ‘A: Did many students come?’

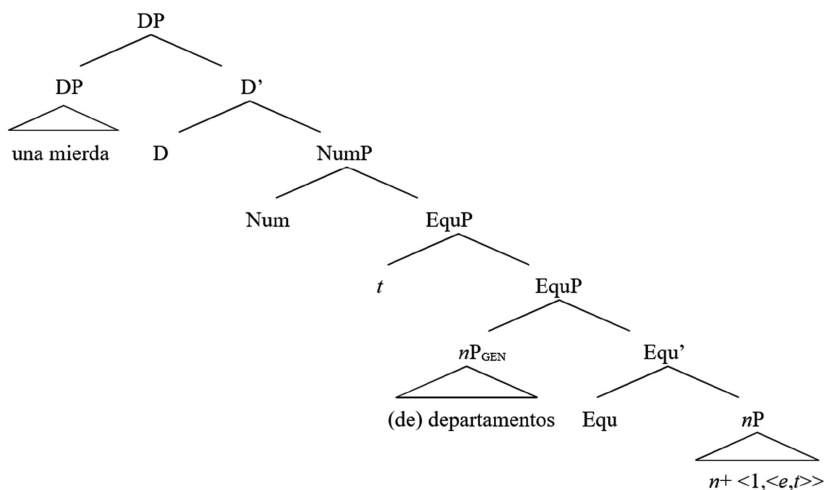
B: Sí, muchos < estudiantes >.
 yes many students
 ‘B: Yes, many.’

Here too, an [E]-feature on Num licenses the ellipsis of the *nP* complement, which in this case is nominative. This is just a standard case of NP-ellipsis, licensed by Num and identified by a perfectly identical nominative *nP* in the antecedent. As I will show, besides initial appearances, the case mismatch observed between the *nP* antecedent in (5A) and the E-site in (5B) follows also as a case of perfect identity.

8. With Ticio (2003) and Saab (2008, 2019), I am assuming that those remnants that are generated within E-sites move to the left to some position in the extended projection of DPs (see (8b)), but this is not crucial (see Benz et al. 2024 for a recent criticism to evacuation analyses for ellipsis remnants).

Now, qualitative binominals have a different underlying syntax, in which the *de*-phrase is generated as the specifier of what I have called an *Equative Phrase* (EquP) headed by a functional head that relates the *de*-phrase and an empty noun in the complement position of the said equative head (Saab 2022a):⁹

(10)



This syntactic scenario leaves no room for NP-ellipsis of the nP_{gen} in Spec,EquP. This is enough to account for the different behavior under NP-ellipsis pseudo-partitive/quantificational and expressive nouns have. Yet, the approach does not uniformly account either for the observed pattern of genitive syncretism (see (1)) or the apparent agreement mismatches (see (2)). I will argue that there is still a set of shared properties that both constructions have that allow for a plausible account of these similarities. In this paper, I develop the argument in detail. In the next section, I start by introducing the primeval genitive conjecture in Pesetsky (2013) and discuss the prediction that follows from it regarding nominal ellipsis in binominal constructions in Romance. In section 3, I focus on the contrast between (5B) and (6B) showing that the prediction only holds for pseudo-partitive/quantificational binominals, but not for qualitative binominals. I argue in favor of the analyses in (7) and (10) comparing my approach with some alternative analyses based on ellipsis licensing, in particular, I focus on an alternative according to which the source of the difference is not in the structures involving each *de*-phrase but in the ability of expressive or pseudo-partitive nouns to license NP-ellipsis through the presence of an [E]-feature. In section 4, I reconsider the unexpected

9. An anonymous reviewer wonders what prevents filling in the D head position in (10). I assume that this follows from a version of the *Double Comp Filter*, which prevents simultaneous realization of the specifier and the head position of the same projection.

agreement patterns in (2) under the light of the relevant syntactic analyses and propose a (perhaps, minimal) modification of Pesetsky's theory of case assignment to account for the pattern of syncretism in genitive marking seen in (1).

2. Genitive marking in Russian paucals: Pesetsky (2013)

2.1. The primeval genitive conjecture

In his analysis of Russian case morphology, Pesetsky (2013) reaches the conclusion that nominals are born with genitive case. This is stated in the form of the following conjecture:

“Primeval genitive” conjecture:

- (11) N_{GEN} categorizes a Russian root as a noun (in the lexicon).
[Pesetsky 2013: 9]

The idea is even more general and connects basic cases to part-of-speech categories:

Reduction of the Russian cases to part-of-speech categories:

- (12) Genitive = N Nominative = D
Accusative = V Obliques = P
[Pesetsky 2013: 7]

Then, a mechanism of case calculation explains how primeval cases are overwritten in the course of a given syntactic derivation. For instance, the fact that in most cases we do not “see” genitive on the head of NPs is because, being the complement of D, NPs are assigned nominative by the D head. I will not be concerned with the precise circumstances under which this occurs. What is important for my purposes here is that there are instances under which we *do* see the primeval genitive realized on the N head. The so-called paucal numerals (and non-numerals) in Russian block nominative assignment by the D head and allows for the NP projection to show its primeval genitive form. According to Pesetsky, in some particular environments, primeval genitive on nominals correlates with absence of number marking on the N head. Consider the minimal pair in (13):

- (13) The paucal funny behavior in Russian DPs:
- a. No paucal (or nonpaucal numeral) (nominative environment)
No mismatches
èt-i posledn-ie krasiv-ye stol-y
these-NOM.PL last-NOM.PL beautiful-NOM.PL table-NOM.PL
'these last beautiful tables'

- b. With paucal (genitive environment)

Case mismatch, number mismatch

èt-i posledn-ie dva krasiv-yx stol-a
 these-NOM.PL last-NOM.PL two-M.NOM beautiful-GEN.PL table-GEN.SG
 ‘these last two beautiful tables’

[Pesetsky 2013: 1]

As (13a) shows, nonpaucal modifiers behaves “well” in terms of concord/agreement; in this example, all modifiers agree in case and number with the plural noun. The presence of the paucal numeral in the example (13b) triggers a different, perhaps unexpected, pattern in which now the postpaucal modifier is marked with genitive case, not nominative, and the nominal head is also genitive but unmarked for number (sg in this case covers both true singular and numberless markings). Paucal numerals are basically those expressing dual, trial and quadral semantics:¹⁰

- (14) Paucal + N-gen.sg

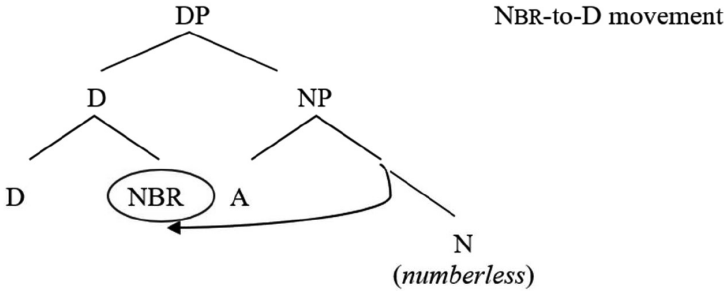
- a. dva stol-a
 two table-GEN.SG
 ‘two tables’
- b. tri dnj-a
 three day-GEN.SG
 ‘three days’
- c. četyre stakan-a
 four glass-GEN.SG
 ‘four glasses’

[Pesetsky 2013: 20]

Simplifying, Pesetsky accounts for the correlation between absence of number marking and genitive case along the following lines. First, as I have already noted, the nouns in (13b) or (14) are not singular, but numberless. Plural marking in these cases is periphrastic, i.e., a complex form resulting from combining the noun and the paucal, which is responsible for encoding plural semantics. Second, assume that paucal modifiers move from their base position to the D position, creating what Pesetsky calls “undermerge” position, i.e., a classical head adjunction configuration. In this scenario, the adjoined numeral counts as the complement of the D head and, consequently, receives nominative case. As a side effect, the NP is not the complement of the lower D anymore, the assigner of nominative, a precondition for case assignment. Then, nominative cannot overwrite the primeval genitive, which is overtly realized on N and the modifiers in the NP projection. In (15), there is a simplified tree including the basic ingredients of Pesetsky’s proposal:

10. See Pesetsky’s monograph for cases of non-numeral paucals.

(15)



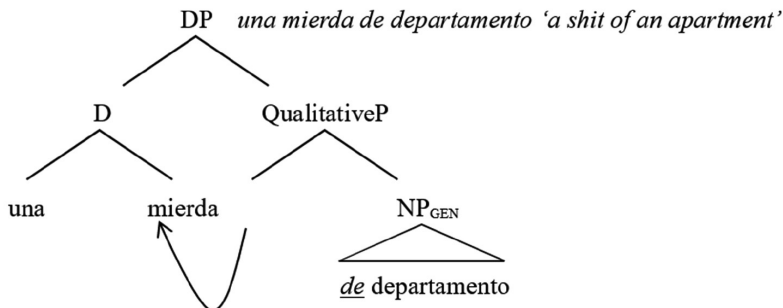
[Pesetsky 2013: 102]

Pesetsky also suggests that the primeval genitive conjecture could generalize to binominals in Germanic and Romance languages. In his own words:

The kinds of elements sometimes classified as “linkers” may have a similar character (Collins 2003; Den Dikken and Singhapreecha 2004; Baker and Collins 2006; Den Dikken 2006). For example, the nominal-internal raising studied by Den Dikken and his colleagues that triggers the occurrence of English *of* and its counterparts in constructions like *that idiot of a doctor* or French *une pizza de chaude* ‘a hot pizza’ (lit. ‘a pizza of hot’) might indeed serve simply as a host for the moved element, as suggested in the works cited. Alternatively, one might imagine a connection more analogous to that proposed here for the presence of Ngen morphology when Russian Quant raises to D. For example, *une pizza de chaude* might involve raising of N to D, with the requirements of D in this construction blocking the overwriting of N• (*de*) by D•. (Pesetsky 2013: 102)

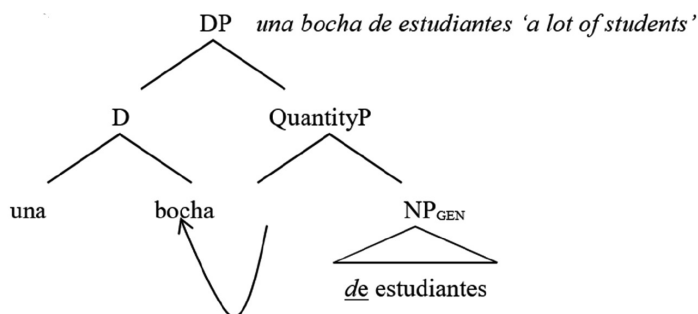
Pesetsky’s theory applied to the Spanish *Det+expressive+of+NP* construction, instantiated in cases like *una mierda de departamento* ‘a shit of an apartment’ (see, for instance, (1c)), makes sense of the idea that the *of-phrase* can be, after all, the lexical head of the entire DP. Let us assume that some expressives move to the D position creating a head-complement configuration, which, as a side effect, protects the NP layer of being nominative. In addition, it seems that Spanish is a language in which genitive is phrasal (not word-level, like in Russian), so *de* is realized as a property of the phrasal NP. As illustration, consider (16) in which the qualitative noun moves to the D position blocking nominative assignment to the NP complement:

(16)



And, with some adjustment, a similar analysis would extend to pseudo-partitive/quantificational binominals:

(17)



A priori, an advantage of this analysis is that it makes sense of genitive marking and the unexpected patterns of agreement in (2), repeated below:

- (18) a. Vinieron un grupo de estudiantes.
 came.3PL a group.SG of students
 'A group of students came.'
- b. Vinieron un montón de estudiantes.
 came.3PL a lot of students
 'Lot of students came.'
- c. Se derrumbaron una mierda de departamentos
 se demolish.3PL a shit.SG of apartments
 'Some shitty apartments were demolished.'

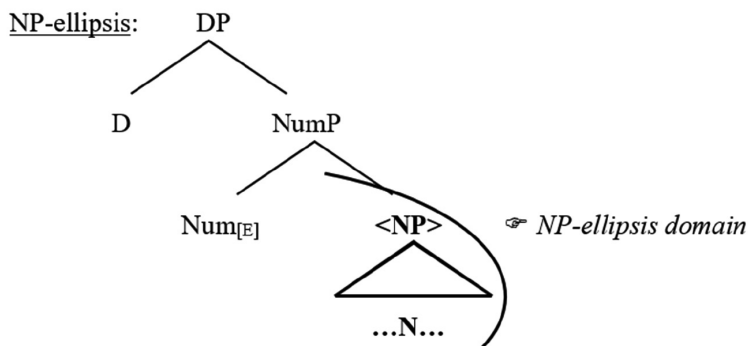
Put differently, under Pesetsky's analysis, a genitive NP can head the entire extended projection of, say, a nominative or accusative DP, consequently, controlling verbal agreement. Evidently, such an analysis would be an alternative to the mainstream predicative raising approach for binominals cited in Pesetsky's quotation but also to the equative analysis in Saab (2022a,b), illustrated in (10). I will not discuss why I think that the equative analysis is superior to the predicate raising analysis in any detail (see Saab 2022a,b for arguments to that effect).¹¹ Yet, I still must adjudicate between the primeval genitive analysis and the equative one. Ideally, empirical considerations should help us to indicate the best theoretical alternative. In this respect, I think that NP-ellipsis, understood as surface anaphora in Hankamer and Sag's (1976) sense, can be used as an empirical tool in the domain of genitive marking in general and of Romance binominals in particular.

2.2. NP-ellipsis and the primeval genitive

As I have already noted, the primeval genitive conjecture entails that all nominals are born as genitives. The paucal patterns are important because, according to Pesetsky, they allow us "to see" the primeval genitives, since they block nominative assignment (or other higher assignments). Here, I would like to suggest that nominal ellipsis is an ideal environment to test some aspects of the primeval genitive conjecture. Preliminarily, let me define NP-ellipsis as the ellipsis operation that deletes the NP-domain in the extended projection of a given DP. There are good reasons to assume that the operation is licensed by the Num head (Saab 2004a,b, 2008, 2010). Let us adopt the idea that ellipsis licensing is possible whenever a given lexical or functional head encodes a formal feature triggering the ellipsis of the complement that contains the relevant head; this is the so-called [E]-feature after Merchant (2001, 2004). The basic representation of an NP-ellipsis environment is given below (NP = n + root):

11. Different implementations of the predicate raising analysis for Spanish binominals can be found in Suñer (1990), Español-Echevarría (1998), Villalba (2007) and González-Rivera (2011). Saab (2004a,b, 2008) and Di Tullio and Saab (2006) propose alternative analyses to the predicate raising approach. More recently, Saab and Carranza (2021) and Saab (2022a,b) offer a more articulated syntax and semantics of qualitative binominals in a multidimensional semantic framework (Potts 2005; Gutzmann 2015, 2019; and McCready 2010). A multidimensional semantics for epithets in Spanish is also offered in Estigarribia (2017, 2020).

(19)

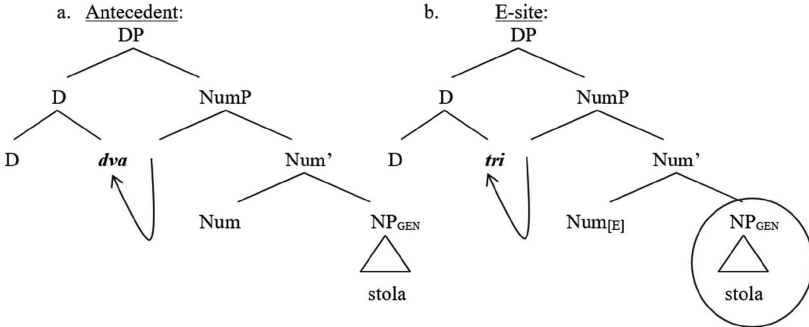


In addition, the E-site must be recovered through an identity dependency with a suitable antecedent in the linguistic context. I assume here that identity is calculated in the narrow syntax, before morphology, and essentially refers to formal features and lexical roots combined in certain identical ways in the antecedent and the E-site (i.e., it is lexical-syntactic identity), although the argument remains the same if identity is semantically calculated. Now, the primeval conjecture applied to the paucal case makes a concrete prediction, namely, if the language has NP-ellipsis of the type illustrated in (19), then NPgen-ellipsis should be licensed. I have preliminary tested whether this type of “genitive” NP-ellipsis is allowed in Russian and it seems that it is. Here is a relevant example provided by Vera Gribova in personal communication:

- (20) Mne nuzhny eti dva stola, a emu
 me.DAT are.needed.PL these.NOM two.NOM table-GEN.SG and him.DAT
 nuzhny te tri < stola >.
 are.needed.PL those.NOM three.NOM table-GEN.SG
 ‘I need these two tables, and he needs those three.’
 [Vera Gribova, personal communication]

In (20), the E-site is licensed by Num[E] and recovered by an identical NPgen in the antecedent. I minimally modify Pestesky’s analysis in (15) and assume that the numeral cliticizes on D from the Spec,NumP position, but there are alternatives. The analyses for the antecedent and the E-site are offered in (21):

(21)



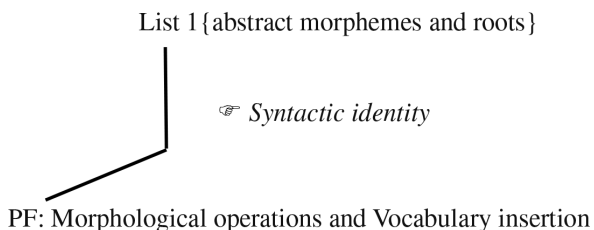
Now, Pesetsky's primeval conjecture (plus the theory of NP-ellipsis in (19)) also predicts number and case mismatches between antecedents and nominal E-sites. This is born out. Consider the following example:

- (22) Te krasivye stoly mne ochen' nravjatsja. A
 those.NOM beautiful.NOM tables.NOM me.DAT very please.PL while
 te dva < stola > ne nravjatsja.
 those.NOM two.NOM tables.GEN NEG please.PL
 'I really like those beautiful tables. But I don't like those two.'
 [Vera Gribanova, personal communication]

In this example, *stoly* in the antecedent is plural and nominative but the noun *stola* in the E-site is numberless and genitive. As argued in Saab (2004a) and subsequent work (see Saab 2019 for extensive discussion), number mismatches are predicted in low ellipses of the nominal domain because the Num head, i.e., the ellipsis licenser, is outside the ellipsis domain. Different patterns of nominal ellipsis in Romance languages and beyond robustly confirm that number features are not computed for identity purposes, in the sense that antecedents and E-sites can mismatch in singular and plural number. The Russian case is interesting because it adds to the picture a superficial plural / numberless mismatch. As for the case mismatch observed above, there are a couple of morphosyntactic solutions to explore.¹² Assuming a Distributed Morphology architecture of grammar (Halle and Marantz 1993 and much subsequent work), I propose that identity is calculated in the narrow syntax before morphology where other formal operations and vocabulary insertion take place. This means that identity only calculates abstract morphemes and roots in the syntax. On this view, ellipsis reduces to an operation of vocabulary insertion blocking under syntactic identity (see Saab 2022c), as schematized below:

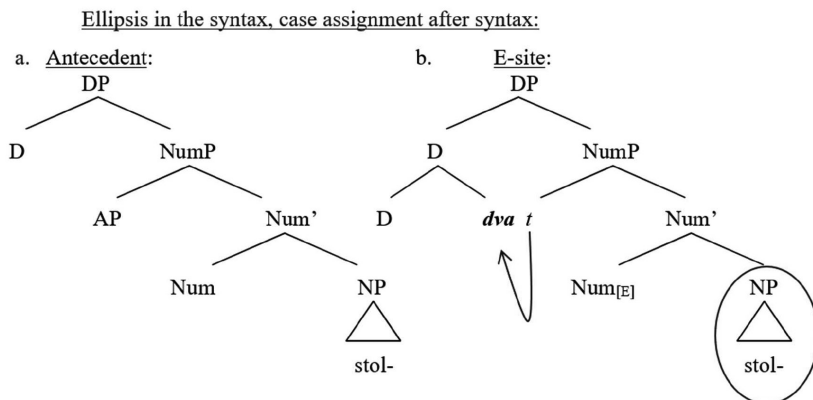
12. Of course, a semantic identity condition straightforwardly predicts this type of formal mismatches.

(23)



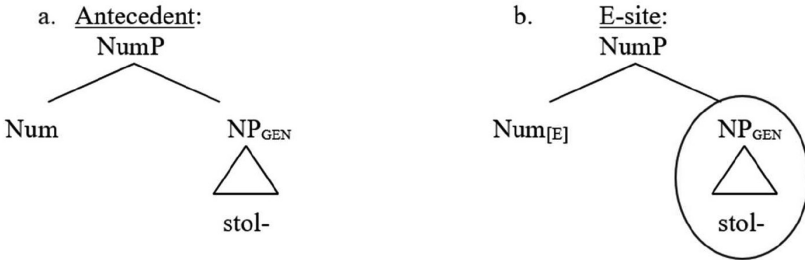
Even in this framework, there are still two alternative analyses that can account for case mismatches. On the one hand, it could be that case features are assigned at PF on the basis of the structural information that is the output of syntax (see Embick & Noyer 2001 and McFadden 2004). Under this solution, as the trees in (24) illustrate, case features are not present in the syntax and, consequently, irrelevant to the identity calculus:

(24)



Alternatively, case features are assigned in the syntax, but ellipsis identity is calculated during the syntactic computation once the ellipsis licenser, the Num[E] head, is introduced, i.e., before D assigns nominative. On this view, case features in the antecedent and the E-site are perfectly identical since both NPs are genitive at this point of the syntactic derivation. After the introduction of the D head, the antecedent gets its case feature overwritten as nominative, but this is harmless since the E-site has been already marked as identical to its antecedent. The relevant step, in which identity is satisfied, is illustrated in (25):

(25)

Derivational ellipsis, case assignment in the syntax:

In sum, it seems that there is preliminary evidence in favor of Pesetsky's conjecture. Of course, in-depth investigation is needed in the realm of paucal modifiers and NP-ellipsis in Russian, a task I cannot undertake here. My focus is on whether NP-ellipsis can indeed be used as a diagnostic tool in the empirical domain of Spanish binominals as a way to confirm or disconfirm Pesetsky's suggestion in the quotation already commented.

3. Testing the primeval conjecture in Spanish binominals

As advanced, it seems that pseudo-partitive/quantificational binominals, but not qualitative binominals, license NPgen-ellipsis. Recall the sentences (5) and (6), which constitute our initial minimal pair:

(26) A: Vinieron muchos estudiantes?
 came.3PL many students
 'A: Did many students come?'

B: Una bocha / un grupo < de estudiantes >.
 a ball a group of students
 'B: A lot/group.'

(27) una mierda de departamento en San Telmo y una mierda en La Boca
 a shit of apartment in San Telmo and a shit in La Boca
 Impossible interpretation: 'a shit of an apartment in San Telmo and a shit (of apartment) in La Boca'

In this section, I show that further inquiry into the relevant patterns confirms that any attempt to unify the syntax of the two constructions under study here is implausible. Before discussing the relevant patterns of NP-ellipsis, which ultimately would allow us to adjudicate among the analyses in competition, I first offer some initial assumptions about the operation of NP-ellipsis (see 3.1) and then, I argue that (26B) is indeed a standard case of NP-ellipsis (see 3.2).

3.1. Nominal anaphora in Spanish

Consider the following string:

- (28) las de al lado
 the.F.PL of to.the next
 ‘the ones next door’

As discussed at length in Saab (2019, 2022d), there are at least two basic readings involved here. On one reading, the speaker is just talking about the (*female*) *people next door*. Indeed, this is the default reading in an out-of-the-blue context. Yet, with enough linguistic information, one can also obtain a substantially different reading:

- (29) Me gustan estas flores pero prefiero las <flores>
 CL.DAT.1SG like.3PL these.F flowers but prefer.1SG the.F.PL <flowers>
 de al lado.
 of to.the next
 ‘I like these flowers, but I prefer the ones next door.’

More broadly, grammar makes available two types of nominal silences: nominal ellipses of various sizes and *silent nouns* denoting various kinds of general concepts (e.g., *human, thing, place*, etc.; see Kayne 2005). Thus, interpreting a relevant DP headed by an empty noun merely reduces to a sort of *lexical competence*. In turn, as argued in the previous section, NP-ellipsis requires more work of anaphoric recovery: at least, looking for a *linguistic antecedent* on the basis of which the content of the elided nominal phrase is recovered.

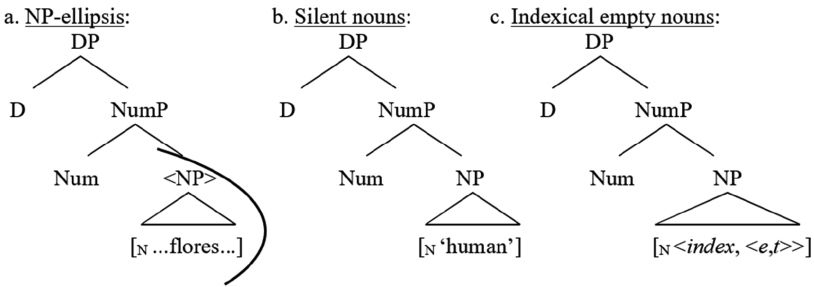
In addition, there is a subset of empty nouns that require more than mere lexical competence but cannot be derived by ellipsis. In this respect, consider the same initial string but now enriched with more contextual information, including an *act of demonstration*:

- (30) [*context: pointing out to a set of flowers*]
 Me gustan las de al lado.
 CL.DAT.1SG like.3PL the.F.PL of to.the next
 ‘I like the ones next door.’

As argued in Saab (2019, 2022d), examples like this are not derived by NP-ellipsis, or any other related process of grammatical deletion. There is an empty noun here, but one that does not express any particular concept, so its meaning cannot be merely resolved on grounds of lexical competence. These empty nouns are, then, *mere indexes for properties*, i.e., a type of pronominal expression. The underlying representation of an indexical empty noun is substantially different from that of a silent noun. I conjecture that *indexical empty nouns are literal indexes feeding assignment functions*.

The three types of empty nominal gaps I have briefly introduced here can be analyzed along the following lines:

(31)



Each type of silent nominal is distinguished by a set of properties, discussed at length in Saab (2019, 2022d). Table #1 resumes those properties.

Table 1. Some properties of NP-ellipsis, silent nouns and indexical empty nouns

	NP-ellipsis	Silent nouns	Indexical empty nouns
Have complex internal structure?	yes	no	no
May have argument structure?	yes	no	no
Is subject to anaphoric recovery?	yes	no	yes
Require a linguistic antecedent?	yes	no	no
Lexically restricted to denote a particular nominal property or concept?	no	yes	no

In what follows, I will briefly comment on some of these properties, in particular, those that involve manipulating the internal structure of a given nominal silence. Let us start by assuming the following well-known assumption (see Saab 2008 and references therein):

(32) Uniformity Assumption (UA):

Ceteris paribus, the syntactic dependencies in contexts of ellipsis between the remnant constituent and the ellipsis site (Case, agreement, dislocation, thematic assignment, etc.) are obtained in the same way as in non-elliptical sentences.

Some criteria to detect presence or absence of internal structure involve at least these three subdomains clearly connected to the UA: (i) the presence of argument structure effects, (ii) the possibility for (sub)-extraction out from elliptical sites, and (iii) the presence of matching effects (category selection, Case-assignment and so on). Let me briefly discuss each property in turn.

3.1.1. *Presence of argument structure effects*

The idea has its inspiration in Panagiotidis' (2002, 2003a,b) theory of empty nouns, according to which they lack argument structure entirely. Kornfeld and Saab (2004) use the theory to show that some nominal gaps *do* have argument structure and that empty nouns can coexist with true ellipses (related to some process of grammatical deletion). For instance, in the following set of examples, each elided noun is present in the E-site and assigns their corresponding theta-roles to the relevant remnants:

(33) Argument structure: Spanish NP-ellipsis (OK)

- a. los estudiantes de química y los de física...
 the.M.PL students of chemistry and the.M.PL of physics
 'the students of chemistry and the (students) of physics...'
- b. la matanza de los leones
 the.F.SG killing of the.M.PL lions
 y la de los tigres...
 and the.F.PL of the.M.PL tigers
 'the killing of the lions and the (killing) of the tigers...'
- c. la destrucción del puente
 the.F.SG destruction of.the.M.SG bridge
 y la de la ciudad...
 and the.F.SG of the.F.SG city
 'the destruction of the bridge and the (destruction) of the city'
- d. el rumor de que llegaste temprano y
 the.F.SG rumor of that arrive.PST.2SG early and
 el de que nunca llegaste...
 the.M.SG of that never arrive.PST.2SG
 'the rumor that you arrived early and the (rumor) that you never arrived...'

Compare with *one* anaphora in English, a case of empty indexical noun, that only allows adjuncts as modifiers of the indexical empty noun:¹³

(34) Argument structure: English silent noun *one* (*)

- a. I bought the car from England and Sam bought the one from Spain.
- b. *I met the king of England and Sam met the one of Spain.
 [Lakoff 1970: 629, ex. (7)]

3.1.2. *(Sub)-extraction out from elliptical sites*

NP-ellipsis has internal structure and, all things being equal, it should allow for the same syntactic dependencies that are attested in non-elliptical NPs. For instance, sub-extraction from an elliptical NP should be legit. And it is, as the following examples from Hungarian, Greek and Spanish show:

13. This is not without controversy. See Payne et al. (2013) and Saab (2019) for discussion.

(35) Hungarian NP-ellipsis:

Hallottam riportot több miniszterrel. Nem emlékszem,
 heard interview.ACC many minister.WITH not remember.1SG
 melyik miniszterrel_i hallottam [hosszút <[_NP riportot t_i]>].
 which minister.WITH heard long.ACC interview.ACC
 ‘I heard an interview with many ministers. I don’t remember which minister
 I heard a long one with.’

[Lipták & Saab 2010]

(36) Greek NP-ellipsis:

Tis istoriasi dha ton palio [proedhro __], kai...
 the history.GEN 1SG.saw the.M old.M chair.M and
 ‘I saw the former chair person(masc) of the history department, and...’
 ... tis glossologias tha dho tonkenurio.
 the linguistic.:GEN FUT.1SG.see the.M new.M (lit.)
 ‘of linguistics, I’ll see the new(masc) (one).’

[Merchant 2014: 12, ex. (43)]

(37) Spanish NP-ellipsis:

Yo sé de quién compraste dos fotos,
 I know.1.SG of who buy.PST.2SG two pictures
 pero no sé de quién_i compraste tres < fotos t_i>.
 but not know.1SG of who buy.PST.2SG three pictures

[Saab 2019: 536, ex. (25a)]

3.1.3. *Presence of matching effects*

Only true ellipsis preserves the same selectional properties as their non-elliptical counterparts. For instance, in the following two examples, the prepositional selection properties of the nouns *amor* and *insistencia* are preserved after ellipsis (*amor por*, *insistencia en*):

(38) El amor de Juan por los autos es
 the.M.SG love of Juan by the.M.PL car.M.PL is
 más grande que el mío por los libros.
 more big that the.M.SG mine by the.M.PL books
 ‘Juan’s love for cars is bigger than mine for books.’

(39) la insistencia de Juan en sus problemas y
 the.F.SG insistence.F.SG of Juan in his problems and
 la de Pedro en los suyos...
 the.F.SG of Pedro in the.M.PL his
 ‘Juan’s insistence on his problems and Peter’s insistence on his...’

[Saab 2019: 537, exs. (29) and (30)]

Case is also determined within nominal gaps. Thus, the elided deverbal noun *entrega* ‘delivery’ in (40) takes a dative complement headed by the dative marker *a* ‘to’.

- (40) La entrega de los libros de Cortázar
 the.F.SG delivery of the.M.PL books of Cortázar
 a María y la <entrega> de los libros de
 to María and the.F.SG delivery of the.M.PL books of
 Borges a Juan tienen que hacerse el mismo día.
 Borges to Juan have that do.INF:SE the.M.SG same day
 ‘The delivery of Cortázar’s books to María and the (delivery) of Borges’ books
 to Juan have to take place the same day.’
 [Saab 2019: 537, ex (31)]

The same is observed in English NumP-ellipsis. The following example shows that the preposition *on* can survive an elliptical site with an elided noun that selects the relevant preposition:

- (41) a. John’s dependency on drugs and Peter’s <dependency> on his mom...
 b. John’s dependency on drugs and mine <dependency> on my mom...
 [Saab 2019: 538, ex. (32)]

3.2. Patterns of NP-ellipsis in Spanish binominals

With the previous discussion in mind, we can now turn attention to (26B), repeated below, and ask how it fits in within the taxonomy of nominal empty anaphora offered in the previous subsection:

- (42) A: Vinieron muchos estudiantes?
 came.3PL many students
 ‘A: Did many students come?’
 B: Una bocha / un grupo < de estudiantes >.
 a ball a group of students
 ‘B: A lot/group.’

The relevant evidence points to the conclusion that the nominal gap in (42B) is indeed an instance of NP-ellipsis in the sense favored in this study. Consider the following example:

- (43) A: Hay muchos estudiantes de física?
 there.is many students of physics
 ‘Are there many students of physics?’
 B: No, pero de química hay una bocha.
 no but of chemistry there.is a ball
 ‘No, but there are a lot of chemistry.’

Here, the complement *de química* is sub-extracted from the E-site, showing both that there are argument and syntactic structure within the nominal gap. Let me assume that the remnant is generated within the thematic domain of the NP_{GEN}, where it receives its theta-role, and moves to some left peripheral position in the clause:

(44) [_{CP} de química ... [_{DP} una [_{NumP} bocha <[_{NPGEN} de estudiantes t]>]]]

Here is another example in which, in addition, we see the surviving locative preposition *a* ‘to’ in the focalized constituent sub-extracted from the E-site.

- (45) A: Hubo un montón de envíos de libros
 there.was a lot of shipments of books
 a Ecuador.
 to Ecuador
 ‘A: There were a lot of book shipments to Ecuador.’
- B: A COLOMBIA, hubo un montón.
 to Colombia there.was a lot
 ‘B: TO COLOMBIA, there were a lot.’

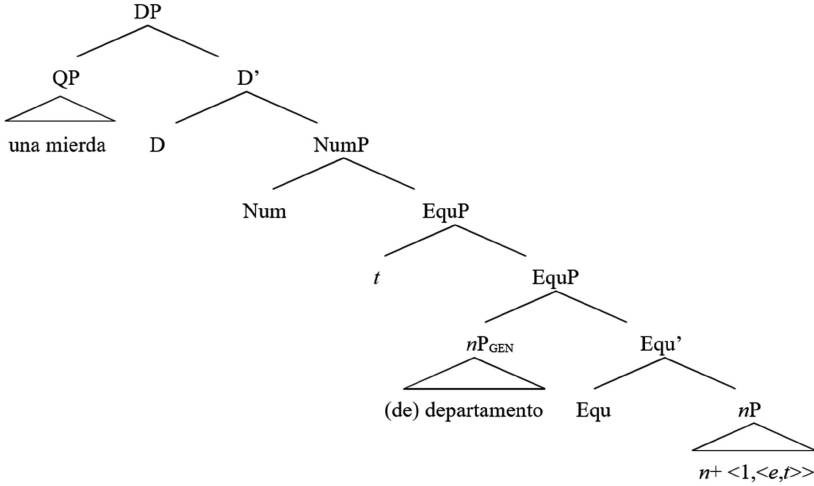
Therefore, it seems that the relevant nominal gaps have argument structure and respect the same selectional properties as their non-elliptical counterparts. In addition, it is also possible to extract material from the E-site. In sum, pseudo-partitive/quantificational binominals pass the basic tests to diagnose ellipsis.

As I have already advanced, this is not the case when it comes to qualitative binominals. Recall the example in (27) repeated below:

- (46) una mierda de departamento en San Telmo y una mierda en La Boca
 a shit of apartment in San Telmo and a shit in La Boca
 Impossible interpretation: ‘a shit of an apartment in San Telmo and a shit (of apartment) in La Boca’

The impossibility of eliding the *de-phrase* in qualitative binominals straightforwardly follows from the equative structure proposed in (10), repeated as (47):

(47)



According to Saab (2022a,b) qualitative binominals of various sorts are expressive constructions in Potts’s (2005) sense, i.e., constructions in which Gricean conventional implicatures are added to basic truth-conditional meanings in another semantic dimension. Yet, binominals are also indexical. Put differently, they are expressive pronominals. In the case of *una mierda de departamento* ‘a shit of an apartment’, the mixed expressive *mierda* contributes both expressive and representational meaning in the extended projection of an *nP* headed by a nominal index ranging over properties. With Heim and Kratzer (1998), I model indexes as ordered pairs of numbers and semantic types. In this case, the relevant semantic type is the property type (extensionally, $\langle e,t \rangle$). The genitive coda generated in *Spec,EquP* is in an equative relation with the index. Note that in such a position, the coda cannot be subject to ellipsis, since has no licenser. In principle, the indexical *nP* could be selected by a $\text{Num}_{[E]}$, but this is innocuous because the head of the *nP* is an atomic empty index. In other words, the *Det+expressive+of+NP* construction is essentially an indexical empty noun construction (see section 3.1). This means that whenever the genitive coda is absent the speakers should be able to resolve the value of the empty index by contextual means. This is borne out. For instance, if after watching a bad movie, one says:

(48) Qué mierda!
 what shit.F.SG
 ‘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 making the equation explicit as in the full qualitative binominal:

- (49) Qué mierda *de película!*
 what shit.F.SG *of* movie
 ‘What a shit of a movie!’

Similarly, if one says:

- (50) Ese profesor es *una mierda*.
 that.M.SG professor.M.SG is a.F.SG shit.F.SG
 ‘That professor is a shit.’

The hearer must make explicit in her mind what is the implicit property the speaker has 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.) or a bad lover (i.e., she is “a shit” as a lover). Indeed, the speaker, again, has the option of making this perfectly explicit, like in:

- (51) Ese profesor es *una mierda*
 that.M.SG professor.MASC.SG is a.F.SG shit.F.SG
de profesor / de persona / de amante.
 of professor / of person of lover
 ‘This professor is a shit as a professor/ a person /a lover.’

At any rate, the implicit property is inferred from whatever assignment function provides the contexts and cannot derive from any underlying E-site. This is the reason why in (46) there is no entailment that *una mierda en La Boca* must be read as a shit of *an apartment* in La Boca. The net prediction is that nominal gaps like those in (46), (48) or (50) respond negatively to ellipsis tests. This is born out. Compare the grammatical *una mierda en La Boca*, in which the PP is an adjunct with a true PP complement, like in (52), in which any attempt to elide *de profesor*, both with nominative (see (52a)) and genitive (see (52b)) antecedents, gives illicit results:

- (52) a.* un profesor de química y una mierda de física
 a professor of chemistry and a shit of physics
 b.* una mierda de profesor de química
 a shit of professor of chemistry
 y una mierda de física
 and a shit of physics

Here, not only is there no licit NP-ellipsis, but there is also no licit indexical empty noun. This is because, as already noted, empty nouns have no internal structure and, consequently, do not project any argument structure in the syntax. Compare with quantificational binominals in (53), which, as we already know, do license NP-ellipsis.

- (53) a. algunos profesores de química
 some professors of chemistry
 y un montón de física
 and a lot of physics
 ‘some professors of chemistry and a lot (of professors) of physics’
- b. un montón de profesores de química
 a lot of professors of chemistry
 y un montón de física
 and a lot of physics
 ‘a lot of professors of chemistry and a lot (of professors) of physics’

In summary, the ellipsis facts discussed in this subsection show (i) that pseudo-partitive/quantificational binominals, but not qualitative binominals, license licit instances of NP-ellipsis, and (ii) that qualitative binominals contain an indexical empty noun as part of their underlying syntax.

3.3. *Alternatives to qualitative binominals*

An important conclusion from the previous section is that pseudo-partitive/quantificational binominals give positive results regarding the NP-ellipsis test. Now, as is well known, positive results in implicational correlations use to be a good reason to conclude that some analysis is empirically confirmed or, as a minimum, has a high degree of plausibility. This is not the case when the results are negative, which is what we observed with respect to qualitative binominals. This makes the conclusion about the equative analysis in (47) much more provisory. This is so because there could be independent reasons that block NP-ellipsis in qualitative binominals. For instance, it still could be the case that the genitive codas in these binominals are primeval genitives, but ellipsis licensing fails. An alternative solution would claim that the problem with qualitative binominals is precisely in their non-quantificational nature. Sleeman (1993, 1996) has claimed that ellipsis remnants must indeed have some quantificational force. However, such an approach is too restrictive as witnessed by the existence of non-quantificational remnants (such as simple thematic PP remnants).

In turn, Giannakidou and Stavrou (1999) or Eguren (2010) propose different contrast conditions on remnants. This could explain simple cases like (54), in which there is no contrast:¹⁴

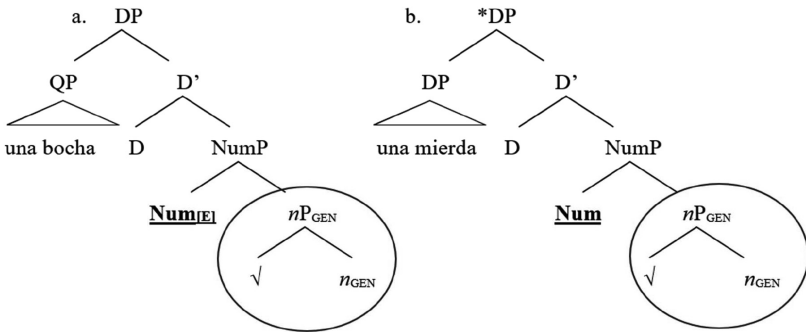
- (54) A: Contrataron a algún profesor?
 hired.3PL DOM some professor
 ‘A: Did they hire some professor?’

14. At any rate, reducing licensing to contrast is also too strong (see Saab 2008 and Saab & Lipták 2016).

B: * *Sí, a una mierda < de profesor >.*
 yes DOM a shit of professor
 ‘B: Yes, a shit (of a professor).’ [ok under an indexical empty noun reading]

Yet, examples like (46) or (52) above obey the putative contrast condition on remnants, but the results are still ungrammatical. A more promising alternative would be to stipulate that qualitative binominals do not have Num_[E] and, consequently, do not license NP_{GEN}-ellipsis. This difference between pseudo-partitive/quantificational and qualitative binominals is roughly illustrated in the following trees:

(55)

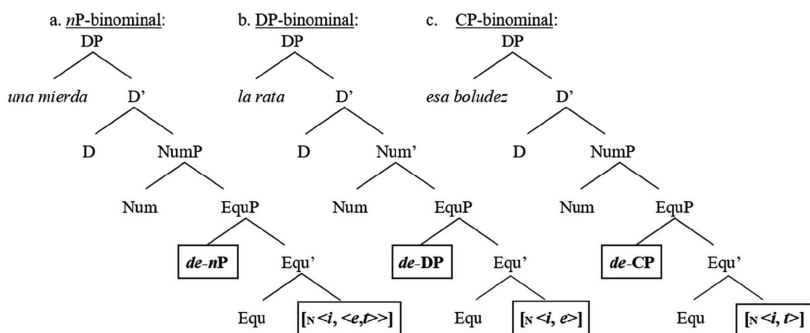


On this analysis, all the relevant binominals are primeval genitives, but only those associated with the relevant [E]-features license NP_{GEN}-ellipsis. I think this is an alternative worthwhile to explore since, if confirmed, would give further support to an extension of the primeval genitive conjecture beyond pseudo-partitive/quantificational binominals. However, from another perspective, such an approach would miss other generalizations. An important advantage of the equative analysis is that it can be straightforwardly extended to other grammatical categories and semantic types. In effect, equations in qualitative binominals also cover DPs of the *e* type (see (56b)) and CPs of the *t* type (see (56c)):

- (56) a. *una mierda de departamento* (equation: $\langle e, t \rangle = \langle e, t \rangle$)
 a shit of apartment
 ‘a shit of an apartment’
- b. *el idiota de mi profesor* (equation: $e = e$)
 the idiot of my professor
 ‘my professor, that idiot’
- c. *esa boludez de que Andrés canta bien* (equation: $t = t$)
 that bullshit of that Andrés sings well
 ‘that bullshit that Andrés sings well’

The problem is that neither (56b) nor (56c) are amenable to a primeval genitive analysis, since DPs or CPs receive non-primeval, derived genitive case (i.e., they pertain to a different grammatical category). Under the equative approach, the basic underlying structures are similar, since all contain the equative head projection. The trees in (57) illustrate each type of binominal within the equative configuration. Note the correlation between grammatical category and semantic type in each case (respectively, nP: $\langle e, t \rangle$, DP: e , CP: t ; $i = index$):

(57)



So, the idea that the primeval genitive analysis can generalize to the full set of qualitative binominals does not hold under closer inspection. It remains to be seen whether there is still room for a plausible explanation of why pseudo-partitive, quantificational and qualitative binominals present similar patterns of unexpected agreement and genitive marking.

4. Agreement and syncretism

4.1. Unexpected agreements

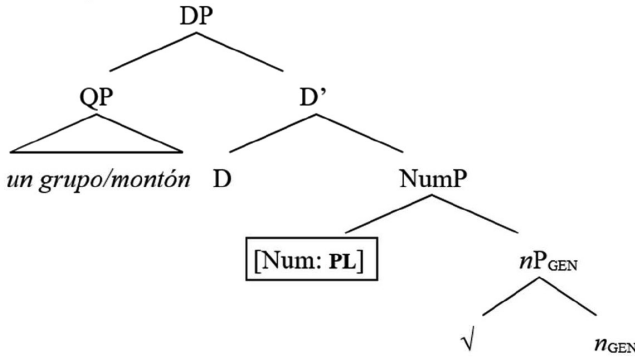
Consider again the agreement patterns:

- (58) a. Vinieron un grupo de estudiantes.
 came.3PL a group.SG of students
 ‘A group of students came.’
- b. Vinieron un montón de estudiantes.
 came.3PL a lot of students
 ‘Lot of students came.’
- c. Se derrumbaron una mierda de departamentos.
 se demolish.3PL a shit.SG of apartments
 ‘Some shitty apartments were demolished.’

According to the view defended here, there is no uniform syntax covering these three types of binominals. This raises the important question whether there is a plausible account for these putative cases of disagreement in subject-verb agreement. Fortunately, the answer is positive. Considering the previous discussion, it seems that a good, although still rough, analysis of pseudo-partitive and quantificational binominals in environments like (58a) and (58b) would be as illustrated in the following tree, in which the *nP* is a primeval genitive and the pseudo-partitive/quantificational phrases are in Spec,DP or some related position in the extended projection of DPs. Now, as it is clear, the controller of agreement is the Num head, which encodes a plural feature and not the QPs in Spec,DP.

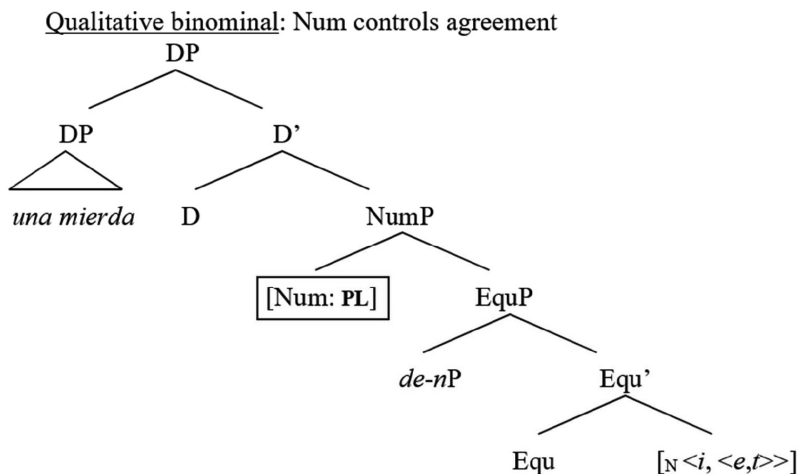
(59)

Pseudo-partitive/quantificational binominals: Number controls agreement



As for (58c), the analysis is essentially identical, since here too the controller of agreement is the Num head in the extended projection of the EquP and not the expressive phrase in Spec,DP.

(60)



In sum, there is after all a way to capture the agreement patterns in (58) as cases of regular agreement for each relevant binominal construction. Of course, without further ado, the proposal does not explain the fact that agreement is variable in some cases. For instance, an anonymous reviewer offers examples like those in (61), minimally adapted here:

- (61) a. Un montón de niños se negó / negaron a ir.
 a lot of children SE refuses / refuse to go.INF
 ‘A lot of children refuses/refuse to go.’
- b. La mayoría de los diputados estaba/estaban ahí.
 the majority of the delegates was/were there
 ‘The majority of delegates was/were there.’
- c. Una mierda de apartamentos se *derrumbó / derrumbaron ayer.
 a shit of apartments SE *collapsed.SG/collapsed.PL yesterday
 ‘Shitty apartments collapsed yesterday.’

Note that according to the reviewer’s judgment qualitative binominals do not seem to accept variable agreement, at least in this case. I tend to agree with the reviewer’s judgment, but things are much more complex in corpora. At any rate, as the reviewer notes, my proposal does not account for the singular agreement patterns in (61a) and (61b). Yet, recall that, as commented in footnote 4, I am assuming that variable agreement is determined by different structural sources. As I have proposed in Saab (2006), in the singular cases, nouns like *montón* are the true heads of the entire DPs consequently controlling agreement (see also Selkirk 1977). As observed in that work and in footnote 4, there is robust evidence for such structural ambiguity, also involving nominal ellipsis. Concretely, the disa-

greement pattern correlates with the impossibility of eliding the pseudo-partitive/quantificational noun. Thus, in the minimal pair in (62), the noun *grupo* can be elided but only under singular agreement, in which a case a group reading is made salient (Bruccart 1997):

- (62) a. Un grupo de senadores votó a favor de
 a group of senators voted.3SG to favor of
 la ley, pero uno <grupo> de diputados votó en contra.
 the law but a group of delegates voted.3SG in against
- b. *Un grupo de senadores votaron a favor de
 a group of senators voted.3PL to favor of
 la ley, pero uno <grupo> de diputados votaron en contra.
 the law but a group of delegates voted.3PL in against
 ‘One group of senators voted in favor of the law and one of delegates voted against.’

The same contrast is even sharper with quantificational nouns, in which there is a clearer meaning distinction depending on the agreement pattern. For instance, the noun *montón* correlates with singular agreement whenever there is a descriptive reading available for the said noun. Under this reading, NP-ellipsis targeting *montón* is perfectly felicitous:

Descriptive reading, singular agreement:

- (63) A: Se me cayó un montón de libros.
 se me fell.3SG a bunch of books
 ‘I dropped a bunch of books.’
- B: Y, a mí, se me cayó uno <montón> de revistas.
 and to me se me fell.3SG a bunch of magazines
 ‘And I dropped one (bunch) of magazines.’

Quantificational reading, plural agreement:

- (64) A: Se me cayeron un montón de libros.
 se me fell.3PL a lot of books
 ‘I dropped lot of books.’
- B: *Y, a mí, se me cayeron uno <montón> de revistas.
 and to me se me fell.3PL a lot of magazines
 ‘And I dropped lot of magazines.’

In sum, there is at least one good reason to postulate structural ambiguity in cases of variable agreement. It remains to be known whether alternative analyses in which variable agreement is not accounted for in terms of different structural differences can make sense of the patterns in (63) and (64). For instance, Pérez Jiménez and Demonte (2017) attribute variable agreement to the formal make up of partitive nouns, which can be ambiguous with respect to their agreement

properties. A proper comparison with this type of proposal is left for another occasion.

Interestingly, there seems to be no ambiguity with qualitative nouns in cases like (61c), leading to the conclusion that they cannot head the bigger DPs in which they are contained. Again, this is consistent with the analysis provided here. As I said, things are more complex when broader cases are considered, but the tendency seems to be quite strong.

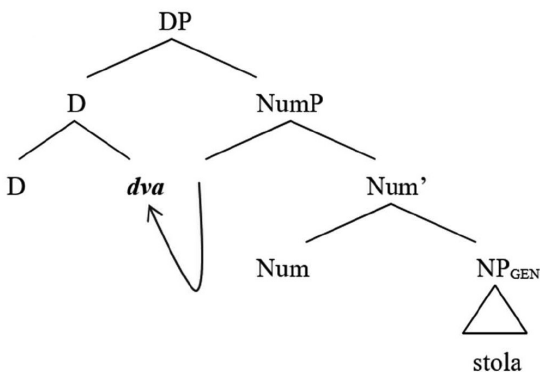
4.2. More on genitive marking

Finally, consider the pattern of genitive syncretism in (1), repeated below:

- (65) a. un grupo *de* estudiantes *pseudo-partitive binominals*
 a group of students
 ‘a group of students’
- b. un montón *de* estudiantes *quantificational binominals*
 a lot of students
 ‘a lot of students’
- c. una mierda *de* departamento *qualitative binominals*
 a shit of apartment
 ‘a shit of an apartment’

The two basic structures proposed here for pseudo-partitive/quantificational and qualitative binominals do not feed the configuration for genitive case assignment. There are ways of simply stipulating that in each binominal we obtain a type of undermerge configuration similar to Pesetsky’s proposal for Russian paucals. Recall my minimal modification of Pesetsky’s primeval genitive analysis in (21a).

(66)



Alternatively, one could exploit the obvious similarities between (59) and (60), in particular, the fact that in all cases the pseudo-partitive, quantificational and qualitative phrases are closer to the main D head than the genitive codas. Let me assume that D assigns nominative to a given nominal phrase by adding a [D]-feature to the nominal projection. Naturally, [D]-assignment is subject to locality constraints of the usual type. For instance, given two potential candidates for [D]-assignment, say, two nominal phrases, D assigns its [D]-feature to the closer candidate. Now, we assume that Candidate1 is closer to H than Candidate2 if both candidates are dominated by a projection of H and C1 *c*-commands C2. Both in (59) and (60), the QP and the DP containing the pseudo-partitive/quantificational and expressive phrases are closer to D than the primeval genitive in (59) and the derived genitive coda in (60) and, consequently, receive nominative by D. Therefore, in (59), the lower *n*P is realized as primeval genitive. In (60), depending on some assumptions we can see the *de-n*P as primeval or derived genitive. The qualitative binominals in (57b) and (57c) suggest that there are concrete instances of derived genitive in these environments, since, as I have already mentioned, they cannot be primeval in the relevant sense. How do they get genitive, then? One possibility is that Equ is a variety of little *n*, in which case it assigns genitive in its domain to the relevant candidates. As for (60), on this view, the *de-n*P, which is already primeval genitive, is trivially overwritten as genitive since it is dominated by another category of the nominal type (i.e., the Equ head).

5. Conclusion

The nominal ellipsis patterns in Spanish binominals discussed in the previous pages suggest that pseudo-partitive/quantificational binominals and qualitative binominals do not share the same underlying syntax. I have defended the thesis that (at least some) distributional aspects of pseudo-partitive and quantificational binominals can be accounted for under Pesetsky's primeval conjecture, according to which some nominal heads and the phrases they project can be realized as genitive whenever case assignment by D is blocked. As for qualitative binominals, the genitive codas are not the head of the main nominal projection, which is instead realized as an indexical empty noun with which the genitive coda establishes an equative relation.

Although many conclusions are still preliminary, I hope to have offered some new insights into the nature of genitive case and binominals in Spanish and beyond. Future research should include also partitives (e.g., *la mayoría de los estudiantes* 'most of the students') and qualitative binominals of the DP-type (e.g., *el idiota de Andrés* 'that idiota Andrés'), which can also occur without their genitive codas (e.g., *la mayoría* or *el idiota*). At first sight, such occurrences involve indexical empty nouns of the *e* type. Previous evidence in other empty category domains show that Spanish do not have an operation of DP-ellipsis (see Saab 2024). It remains to be investigated whether the language also lacks an operation of DPgen-ellipsis. Another issue to be investigated is how quantificational/partitive/qualitative nouns behave under pluralization and, if possible, what happens with variable agreement in those cases. Quantificational and pseudo-partitive binominals admit

pluralization (*montones de estudiantes* ‘lots of students’, *dos grupos de estudiantes* ‘two groups of students’, *dos pilas de libros* ‘two piles of books’, etc.), but things are subtler with qualitative nouns. In some cases, the plurality of the first noun does not block singular agreement with the genitive coda as in *cayó montones de agua lit.* ‘fell.sg lots.pl of water’ but in other it does, showing that the plural *montones* is not the head of the construction. Further investigation should show how pluralization, agreement and nominal ellipsis interact and whether new supporting evidence could be constructed on the basis of those interactions.¹⁵

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15. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out to me these pluralization facts.

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