

Syntax of proper nouns with a definite article in Spanish.
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Languages diverge on the whether person proper names can be introduced by a determiner. Thus, there are languages such as Catalan, Brazilian Portuguese or Greek in which the proper name generally co-appears with the definite article: La María (cat.), o João (Brazilian Port.), ο Giannis (gr.). Languages like English never allow such possibility in any of its varieties: *the John, *the Mary. Spanish does not show a uniform behavior in this regard. In Standard Spanish the use of the article is considered inappropriate in most cases; the standard varieties permit examples such as La Callas or La Caballé. Likewise, in the Spanish spoken in Argentina it is used with referents especially known or popular (Diego, Adolfo, a soccer player and a president, respectively) and in certain variants of Argentine Spanish and in Castilian Spanish it can be used with feminine proper names (La Juana, La Luisa), but not for the masculine. Finally, in the popular language of many areas the use of the article is not uncommon (el Manolo, la Clara; see RAE-ASALE 2009: §12.7ñ).

In this paper we show that the presence of the definite article with proper nouns is an indication that there is a complex syntactic structure with certain null categories between the determiner and the noun (also Camacho 2021). The proposal receives support in country proper names. In Spanish it is possible to say both Argentina and La Argentina. In this example, we consider that the construction hides an elided term (indicated in capital letters) that empty term requires the presence of the article: La [REPUBLICA] Argentina.

The reasoning extends to cases such as La Callas or La Caballé assuming an elided term identified as a title: the [TITLE] Callas. The analysis is also applied to the aforementioned cases of variation, to equivalent cases such as the names of letters (La LETRA hache), rivers (El RÍO Ebro), etc. and to the emphatic use of the definite article (Esta es LA solución; the solution = the ONLY solution). In addition, a parallelism is established between the use of personal articles in languages such as Catalan and with the syntax of titles, which entails a complex nominal structure (see Bernstein, Ordóñez and Roca 2020). In short, the analysis that we offer allows us to account for the cases of intra and interlinguistic variation in the use and interpretation of defined and referential elements and it offers additional support for a structure of nominal constructions (with various levels of projections).