

True and spurious articles in Germanic and Romance*

XAVIER VILLALBA

Abstract

Recent analyses of the qualitative binominal NP construction *that idiot of a doctor/el idiota del médico* (e.g. Den Dikken and Singhapreecha 2004, Den Dikken 2006) make the strong claim that a spurious (in)definite article is involved, and that the NPs involved have an impoverished functional structure. In contrast with this view, we will show that in Romance, no evidence exists for an alleged spurious article, and that the apparently syntactic restrictions on the size of the NPs involved have to do with a referential restriction imposing that the subject of the construction be specific, which in turn derives from the topic interpretation associated with such a position. This pragmatic analysis will be shown to account in a simple and elegant way for a variegated set of data, and to extend straightforwardly to a related nominal quantificational construction, the *lo-de* construction.

1. Introduction

In this article we consider a pretty well-studied construction: *comparative qualitative binominal noun phrases* (QBNP) or *N of a N* construction (see among others Napoli 1989, Español-Echevarría 1997, 1998, Hulk and Tellier 2000, Doetjes and Rooryck 2001):¹

- (1) a. a jewel of a village
- b. *el idiota del médico*
 the idiot of-the doctor

The goal of this article is to show that the analysis of QBNPs put forward in Den Dikken (2006), where it is argued that this construction restricts their components to NumP projections, and involves a spurious article, doesn't extend to Romance. Rather, it will be shown that the informational status of the elements involved is crucial for explaining apparently bizarre syntactic restrictions.

The structure of this article is the following. In section 1, we will present Den Dikken's (2006) analysis of comparative QBNPs. In section 2, the problems will be discussed of extending Den Dikken's (2006) analysis to Romance. In section 3, a new proposal will be put forward taking into account the role of information packaging, which will be shown to predict a complex set of referential restrictions. In section 4, this pragmatic analysis will be shown to extend straightforwardly to a related nominal quantificational construction, the *lo-de* construction. Finally, section 5 will address the main conclusions of the article.

* This paper has benefited from numberless discussions with Anna Bartra, to whom I am greatly indebted for thoughtful insights, and Cartesian doubts. The research underlying this work has been supported by grants HUM2006-13295-C02-01/FILO (MCyT/FEDER), BFF2003-08364-C02-01 (MCyT/FEDER), and 2005SGR 00753 (Generalitat de Catalunya) awarded to the Centre de Lingüística Teòrica (UAB).

¹ A related construction exists, *attributive QBNPs* in Den Dikken (2006) terms:

- (i) an idiot of a doctor

Leaving aside the comparative interpretation, there is a reading where the property of being an idiot is ascribed to the doctor in his or her capacity of a doctor, so that he or she is an idiotic *doctor*, but not necessarily an idiotic *person*. We refer the reader to Den Dikken (2006) for a detailed comparison of the two constructions. Since we will not consider the attributive construction in this article, we will use the label QBNPs to refer to *comparative* QBNPs for the sake of simplicity.

2. Qualitative binomial noun phrases

In his recent book *Relators and Linkers* (Den Dikken 2006), Marcel den Dikken offers the most complete and satisfactory analysis of QBNPs (see also Napoli 1989, Español-Echevarría 1997, 1998, Hulk and Tellier 2000, Doetjes and Rooryck 2001). Here we have some examples from different languages:

- (2) a. a jewel of a village
 b. *die idioten van een doktoren* (Dutch; Den Dikken 2006: 170)
 those idiots of a doctors
 c. *quell' ignorante del dottore* (Italian; Napoli 1989: 203)
 that ignoramus of-the doctor
 d. *el idiota del médico* (Spanish)
 the idiot of-the doctor

These DPs are called *comparative* QBNPs, because a comparison is established between the subject of the predication—in the English example, *village*—and the predicate—in the English example, *jewel*. The example in (2a) can thus be paraphrased as “the village is *like* a jewel”.

Let us consider the properties of QBNPs in some detail (2.1), and then the structure and derivation that Den Dikken argues for (2.2).

2.1. The empirical bases of Den Dikken's analysis of QBNPs

The first key property of QBNPs concerns the presence of the indefinite article preceding the subject of the predication:

- (3) a jewel of *a* village

Den Dikken argues that the properties of this element are not those typical of a true article, so that it should rather be considered a *spurious article*. His main empirical evidence concerns number agreement. Even though English only allows singular nouns after this element, Dutch does allow plural nouns as well. Crucially, the singular article *een* ‘a’ must be inserted regardless of the number of the following noun (Den Dikken reports similar facts from several German dialects):

- (4) a. *die idiot van een doktor* (Dutch; Den Dikken 2006: 169)
 that idiot of a doctor
 b. *die idioten van een doktoren* (Dutch; Den Dikken 2006: 170)
 those idiots of a doctors

On these grounds, Den Dikken claims that the indefinite article in Germanic QBNPs should be considered spurious (a point that we will challenge in 3).

The second major property of QBNPs is, according to Den Dikken (2006), the set of structural restrictions imposed to the subject. First, the subject shows number disagreement with respect to the whole DP (4a), and does not agree with the verb (4b):

- (5) a. *die twee ramp(*en) van een feiten* (Dutch)
 those two disaster(s) of a facts
 b. *Die ramp van een feiten ?komt/*komen zeer ongelegen.* (Dutch)
 those disaster of a facts comes/come very inconvenient

This behavior leads Den Dikken to argue that the subject of QBNPs must be big enough to contain a Number Phrase, independent of that of the whole DP.

Second, the subject cannot host material arguably located in a high position within the (extended projection of the) DP, namely quantifier phrases, as the ungrammaticality of the

following examples suggests:²

- (6) a. **die ramp(en) van (een) alle feiten* (Dutch)
 those disaster(s) of a all facts
 b. **die ramp van (een) ieder feit* (Dutch)
 those disaster of an every fact

his restriction, Den Dikken claims, shows that the subject must be clearly smaller than a full DP, and together with the evidence regarding agreement, he concludes that the subject must be a Number Phrase (henceforth I will refer to this proposal as the *NumP Hypothesis*).³

2.2. The structure and derivation of QBNPs

On the bases of the empirical evidence reviewed in the previous section, Den Dikken (2006) assumes that both the subject and the predicate are Number Phrases (NumP) mediated by a *Relator*, lexicalized by *a*—which should then be considered a *spurious* article:⁴

- (7) [_{RP} [_{NumP} village] [_R R(=*a*) [_{NumP} jewel]]]

Here, the Relator is considered a functional head necessary for articulating the subject-predicate relation, along the lines set forth in Kayne (1994), Den Dikken (1998), Bennis et al. (1998), among others.⁵

This structure feeds predicate inversion in the following way. First, a functional projection is created headed by the nominal copula *of* (a *linker* in den Dikken's terms). Second, the relator *a* incorporates to F for checking some formal feature—the author considers its exact nature irrelevant—, and later on the predicate NumP *jewel* raises to Spec,FP, again for feature-checking purposes. This yields the following structure:⁶

- (8) [_{FP} [_{NumP} jewel]_j [_F LINKER(=*of*)+RELATOR(=*a*)_i [_{RP} [_{NumP} village] [_R t_i t_j]]]]

Finally, this FP is selected by a nominal functional head—in the case at hand, one headed by the indefinite article *a(n)*:

- (9) [_{DP} *a* [_{FP} [_{NumP} jewel]_j [_F *of*+*a*_i [_{RP} [_{NumP} village] [_R t_i t_j]]]]]]

Den Dikken extends this analysis to Romance QBNPs as well, but noting the mysterious appearance of a *definite* spurious article as the relator. Consider thus the representation of the Italian *quello ignorante del dottore*:

- (10) [_{DP} *quello* [_{FP} [_{NumP} ignorante]_j [_F *de+el*_i [_{RP} [_{NumP} dottore] [_R t_i t_j]]]]]

² Den Dikken (2006) argues that a similar rationale applies to the impossibility of having *wh*-extraction of the subject or of its being a *wh*-phrase *in situ* (Den Dikken's examples (65b,e)):

- (i) a. *[What/Which sentence] does Brian think that is a wonder of (a) *t*?
 b. *[Who] thinks that is a wonder of what?

We will turn to these examples in 4.2, where their ungrammaticality will be argued to follow from informational restrictions.

³ Den Dikken extends this conclusion to the predicate, as well, but we will not be concerned with the internal structure of this element in the present article.

⁴ It must be emphasized that, for Den Dikken (2006), relators are abstract functional heads that can be lexicalized by several elements: Tense, *be*, *of*, *a*, etc.

⁵ To do justice to Den Dikken (2006) proposal, it must be said that one of his main points is demonstrating that this general structural pattern of predication mediated by a Relator is shared by QBNPs (*a jewel of a village*) and *attributive* QBNPs (*an idiot of a doctor*), with a crucial difference regarding the relative position of the subject and the predicate: whereas the former involve a subject-relator-predicate structure plus *predicate inversion*—that is, raising of the predicate NumP over the subject—, the later are in an underlying predicate-relator-subject configuration.

⁶ We make abstraction of the presence of a null predicate SIMILAR that Den Dikken (2006) argues for, since it is irrelevant for the issues discussed in the present article.

Here the only difference is the realization of the relator as the (masculine singular) definite article *el* ‘the’, instead of the (masculine singular) indefinite article *un*, which leads to ungrammaticality:

- (11) **quell’ignorante d’un dottore*
that-ignoramus of-a doctor

So then, we can summarize Den Dikken (2006) account of QBNPs in three main points: (i) the existence of a spurious (in)definite article, (ii) the size restriction on the subject to NumP—the *NumP Hypothesis*—, and (iii) the existence of predicate inversion. Whereas, we agree with the later point, which we will not discuss, we will show in 3 that the NumP Hypothesis, and the existence of a definite spurious article in Romance, which is just a corollary of it, cannot stand scrutiny when Romance QBNPs are considered in some detail.

3. From Germanic to Romance: Problems for the NumP hypothesis

Den Dikken (2006) extends his analysis of QBNPs to Romance, so that he claims that in Romance languages like Spanish, QBNPs must have a spurious article as well, even though it is realized as the *definite* article. This allows him to maintain that the subject and the predicate must also be (at most) NumPs in Romance QBNPs, which permits a unified analysis for this construction. Yet, successful as it seems for Germanic QBNPs, this analysis runs into trouble when extending to Romance. In this section, we will first review strong direct and indirect evidence that undermines both Den Dikken’s claim that a spurious definite article exists in Romance QBNPs, and the hypothesis that the subject must be a NumP in this construction.

3.1. Typological variation

As Den Dikken (2006) acknowledges in a footnote, he has no answer for the fact that the spurious article must be indefinite in Germanic, but definite in some Romance languages (Spanish, and Italian; also Catalan, Galician, and Portuguese), and necessarily null in others (French; also Romanian). Consider:

- (12) a. *quell’ignorante del dottore* (Italian)
that ignoramus of-the doctor
b. *el idiota del médico* (Spanish)
the idiot of-the doctor
- (13) a. *cet imbecile de/*d’un/*du médecin* (French; Den Dikken 2006: 301)
that imbecile of/of-a/of-the doctor
‘that imbecile of a doctor’
b. *afurisitul de copil/de copitul/de un copil* (Romanian; Visan 2003: 8)
bloody-the of child/of child-the/of a child
‘that bloody child!’

Whatever the source is of so variable a paradigm, we must concede that Den Dikken’s parametric generalization—indefinite spurious article in Germanic vs. definite spurious article in Romance—is, at best, an incomplete description of the facts.

To make things worse, consider in this respect the behavior of possessives in Spanish versus Italian and Catalan:

- (14) a. *el idiota de su primo* (Spanish)
the idiot of his cousin
b. *quella carogna del tuo dottore* (Italian; Napoli 1989: 203)
that scoundrel of-the your doctor

- c. *l'idiota del seu cosí* (Catalan)
the-idiot of-the his cousin

Den Dikken considers that the possessive appears somewhere below Num, and the definite article is spurious. Yet, note that neither Italian nor Catalan allow prenominal possessives without the *true* definite article:

- (15) a. **una carogna de tuo dottore* (Italian)
a scoundrel of your doctor
b. **l'idiota de seu cosí* (Catalan)
the-idiot of his cousin
- (16) a. *È *(il) tuo dottore.* (Italian)
is the your doctor
b. *És *(el) seu cosí.* (Catalan)
is the his cousin

Conversely, Spanish does not admit the definite article in the same context:

- (17) a. **el idiota del su primo* (Spanish)
the idiot of-the his cousin
b. *Es (*el) su primo.* (Spanish)
is the his cousin

Standardly, this contrast has been associated with the weak character of Spanish possessives, which must raise to the head of the DP, becoming a special kind of article (see among others Giusti 2002, Picallo and Rigau 1999). Notwithstanding, the NumP hypothesis cannot explain this behavior, and forces us to assume that in Italian/Catalan the definite determiner is spurious in (16b-c), and that QBNPs mysteriously license a possessive without article in these two languages. Subsequently, the NumP hypothesis forces us to assume that, against all evidence, possessives must be analyzed in a completely different way in QBNPs than in any other construction in these two languages.

3.2. The internal variation

However, the NumP hypothesis must face an even worse scenario, for language-internal variation in Romance QBNPs is equally reluctant to a simple treatment. First, the subject in QBNPs can be headed by an indefinite article under certain conditions—a fact originally pointed out by Napoli 1989 for Italian, and acknowledged in a footnote by Den Dikken (2006):

- (18) a. *el idiota de un vecino que conocí ayer* (Spanish)
the idiot of a neighbor that met yesterday
b. *el fatuo de un famosísimo actor*
the fatuous of a very.famous actor

Under Den Dikken's assumptions, this would lead us to admit that the *indefinite* spurious article is available in Romance as well, alternating with the *definite* one. Yet this conclusion is bad news for his analysis in two respects: on the one hand, the presumed parametric approach to the Germanic-Romance contrast in QBNPs becomes untenable; on the other hand, the distribution of definite and indefinite articles in this construction suspiciously parallels the conditions regulating the alternation of *true* definite and indefinite articles in Romance DPs in general.

Second, in the very same context a bare plural is possible, while retaining the comparative interpretation (i.e. the examples are no instances of *attributive* QBNPs):

- (19) *los idiotas de vecinos que conocí ayer* (Spanish)
the idiots of neighbors that met yesterday

Again, this would imply that *null* spurious articles are available in Romance languages like Spanish, Catalan, or Italian.

3.3. Agreement

Another unexplained fact concerning the presumed spurious article in Romance concerns agreement. Whereas, the typical spurious article *een* in Dutch shows no agreement with the noun, the (in)definite article in the subject agrees in gender and number:

- (20) a. *el idiota de un vecino que conocí ayer* (Spanish)
 the idiot of a neighbor that met yesterday
 b. *los idiotas de unos vecinos que conocí ayer*
 the.PL idiots of a.PL neighbors that met yesterday
 c. *la idiota de una vecina que conocí ayer*
 the.F idiot.F of a.F neighbor.F that met yesterday
 d. *las idiotas de unas vecinas que conocí ayer*
 the.F.PL idiot.F.PL of a.F.PL neighbor.F.PL that met yesterday
- (21) a. *el idiota del vecino* (Spanish)
 the idiot of-the neighbor
 b. *los idiotas de los vecinos*
 the.PL idiots of the.PL neighbors
 c. *la idiota de la vecina*
 the.F idiot.F of the.F neighbor.F
 d. *las idiotas de las vecinas*
 the.F.PL idiot.F.PL of the.F.PL neighbor.F.PL

Were the article spurious like Dutch *enn* ‘a’, why should it agree with the noun? In other words, if the disagreement pattern cannot help us identify (definite) spurious articles in Romance, what should?

3.4. Quantifiers

Striking direct evidence against Den Dikken’s claim that the subject must be a NumP in Romance QBNPs follows from the presence of material that is standardly considered to be generated above NumP.

One significant case is the presence of *partitive/specific* quantifiers:⁷

- (22) *los idiotas de algunos/muchos (de los) alumnos*
 the.M.PL idiots of some.M.PL/many.M.PL of the.M.PL students

Here quantification is restricted to a specific set of students available from the context, either if we mark it explicitly by means of the partitive marker *de* ‘of’ or not. Crucially, when the quantifier cannot obtain this partitive/specific interpretation, the construction becomes ungrammatical:

- (23) a. **los idiotas de algunos alumnos cualesquiera* (Spanish)
 the.M.PL idiots of some.M.PL students whichever

⁷ I will assume thorough the text Enç’s (1991: 21) definition of specificity, and her claim that partitivity entails specificity: “specificity involves linking objects to the domain of discourse in some manner or other. One acceptable way of linking is through this assignment function, by relating objects to familiar objects. Another acceptable way of linking is the subset relation, which we have observed in covert and overt partitives.”

- b. **los idiotas de algunos alumnos que conozcas*
 the.M.PL idiots of some.M.PL students that know.SBJ.2SG

Here, the presence of the modifier *cualquiera* ‘any’, and the relative clause in subjunctive mood (SBJ) force the nonspecific reading of the quantifier, yielding an ungrammatical result. Therefore, the contrast between (22) and (23), not only goes against the claim that quantifiers cannot appear in the subject of QBNPs—and, hence, against the claim it is a NumP—but also suggests that the restrictions limiting the presence of quantifiers in this position ask for a semantic approach, rather than for a syntactic one (a point that we will develop in 4.2).

3.5. Demonstratives

As Den Dikken (2006) himself acknowledges in a footnote, his analysis cannot explain the presence of demonstratives within the subject, which are standardly assumed to be generated over NumP:

- (24) *el idiota de ese primo tuyo* (Spanish)
 the idiot of that cousin of.yours

The author is cautious enough to avoid suggesting the existence of a spurious demonstrative, but he has to admit that his hypothesis that the subject is a NumP cannot account for this datum.

Note, to end this section, that example (24) has another alternative where the definite article and the (postnominal) demonstrative coexist (on this construction in Spanish see Brugè 2002, Roca 1997):

- (25) *el idiota del muermo ese de tu vecino*
 the idiot of-the bore that of your neighbor

3.6. Interim conclusions

From the solid bulk of evidence just considered, it becomes clear that the analysis proposed by Den Dikken (2006) for Germanic QBNPs cannot be extended to Romance. Rather, we must conclude that the subject of QBNPs is not a NumP in Romance, neither there is such thing as a definite spurious article.

In the following section, a semantic approach will be pursued, which will be shown to account for the preceding empirical evidence in a simpler and more principled way, taking into account the informational role of the subject and the predicate in Romance QBNPs.

4. A new proposal: Information Packaging within the DP

Since Romance QBNPs do not fit the analysis involving a spurious article advocated for by Den Dikken (2006), we offer a different line of research where the empirical generalizations we have arrived at in 3 follow from an informational restriction on the subject of QBNPs. Namely, we will argue that the predication relation involved in this construction is restricted to specific DPs. Furthermore, it will be shown that this approach receives independent empirical support from a Spanish nominal construction—the *lo-de* construction; see Bartra-Kauffman and Villalba (2006a, b)—that crucially involves predicate inversion, and parallels most properties of QBNPs.

4.1. Referentiality restrictions in Romance QBNPs

As shown in 3.4, even though the subject of Romance QBNPs admits the presence of quantifiers, they must receive a partitive/specific interpretation. In this subsection we will qualify in more detail this generalization, taking into account a wider set of quantifiers.

4.1.1. Universal quantifiers

In the case of universal quantifiers, a clear contrast exists between specific and nonspecific ones. So, nonspecific *todo* ‘every’ and *cualquier* ‘any’ are impossible, whereas specific *todos* ‘all’ and *ambos* ‘both’ are fine:

- (26) **el idiota de todo/cualquier alcalde*
 the idiot of every/any mayor
- (27) a. *los idiotas de todos los alcaldes*
 the.M.PL idiots of every.M.PL the.M.PL mayors
 b. *los idiotas de ambos alcaldes*
 the.M.PL idiots of both mayors

4.1.2. Monotone increasing and monotone decreasing quantifiers

When considered under the perspective of the generalized quantifier theory, nonuniversal quantified phrases in QBNPs display a regular behavior: monotone increasing quantifiers (28) are fine, whereas monotone decreasing (29a) and nonmonotone quantifiers (29b) yield ungrammatical results.

- (28) *los idiotas de algunos/muchos/varios alcaldes*
 the.M.PL idiots of certain/many/several mayors
- (29) a. **los idiotas de menos de cuatro/pocos alcaldes*
 the.M.PL idiots of less of four/few mayors
 b. **los idiotas de entre cuatro y seis alcaldes*
 the.M.PL idiots of between four and six mayors

Interestingly, monotone increasing quantifiers are most easily interpreted partitively (30) in clear contrast with monotone decreasing (31a) and nonmonotone ones (31b):

- (30) *los idiotas de algunos/muchos/varios de los alcaldes*
 the.M.PL idiots of certain/many/several of the.M.PL mayors
- (31) a. **los idiotas de menos de cuatro/pocos de los alcaldes*
 the.M.PL idiots of less of four/few of the.M.PL mayors
 b. **los idiotas de entre cuatro y seis de los alcaldes*
 the.M.PL idiots of between four and six of the.M.PL mayors

If we tie partitivity to a specific or referential interpretation (Enç 1991), we can conclude that the behavior of non-universal quantifiers reproduces that of universal ones quite faithfully.

4.1.3. Excess quantifiers

As discussed at length in Bosque (1996), excess quantifiers such as *demasiado* ‘too many’ are inherently nonspecific, as shown by their incompatibility with standard marks of specificity, namely modifiers forcing a particular reading (32a) or partitivity (32b):

- (32) a. **demasiados libros en concreto*
 too.many books in particular
 b. **demasiados de los libros*
 too.many of the books

As expected, excess quantifiers are impossible in the subject of QBNPs:

- (33) **los idiotas de demasiados/excesivos alcaldes*
 the.M.PL idiots of too.many.M.PL/excessive.M.PL mayors

4.1.4. Bare plurals

A last piece of evidence comes from bare plurals supporting the generalization that the subject of QBNPs must be specific. It is a well-known fact that bare plurals cannot be interpreted specifically (34), but must get either a nonspecific reading (35a)—as indicated by the subjunctive (SBJ)/indicative (IND) alternation in the relative clause—or a generic one (35b):

(34) **Encontró libros en concreto.*
found books in particular

(35) a. *No encontró libros que le gustasen/*gustan.*
not found books that to.him/her like.SBJ.3PL/like.IND.3PL

b. *No encontró libros (*en concreto), sólo revistas.*
not found books in particular only magazines

Again, this behavior finds a clear parallel in QBNPs, where bare nominals are impossible altogether:

(36) **No hablé con los idiotas de alcaldes.*
not talk with the.M.PL idiots of mayors

4.2. The roots of the referentiality restriction: information structure in QBNPs

In the preceding section, we have provided strong evidence for the following empirical generalization:

(37) The subject of QBNPs in Romance must be specific.

The question now is trying to derive this generalization from some basic property of the construction at hand. The answer that we are going to defend involves the informational packaging of the construction, particularly the fact that the subject in Romance QBNPs is interpreted as a topic, with respect to its predicate, which is in turn interpreted as focus. Once this claim is solidly grounded in 4.2.1, we will have the last link of the chain, and a principled explanation for the empirical generalization in (37): the subject of Romance QBNPs must be specific in order to be properly interpreted as a topic. Then, we will offer a formalization of this idea in 4.2.2, and we will show how this analysis straightforwardly extends to a related Spanish construction, proving its predictive coverage, in 5.

4.2.1. Information packaging in Romance QBNPs

Den Dikken and Singhapreecha (2004) and Den Dikken (2006) make the strong claim that predicate inversion over a subject is always an instance of A-movement that forces an information partition where the predicate is topic (i.e. old/presupposed information), and the postcopular subject, focus (i.e. new/contrastive information), and extend this generalization to the DP-level, on the basis of QBNPs:

(38) that idiot_[TOPIC] of a doctor_[FOCUS]

We will show that in Romance languages the opposite situation holds: predicate inversion is an instance of A'-movement to a DP-internal Spec,FocusP (see Aboh 2004, Giusti 1996), which renders the subject DP part of the background:

(39) *l'ignorante*_[FOCUS] *del* *dottore*_[TOPIC] (Italian; *idem* for Catalan/Galician/Spanish)
the-ignoramus of-the doctor

Empirical evidence for such an analysis is presented in the next paragraph, and a detailed analysis is offered in 4.2.2.

In Romance QBNPs, the inverted predicate is interpreted as focus with respect to the topic DP. Let us consider first the evidence that the predicate is interpreted as focus. One typical test

involves contrast. Consider for instance a dialogue like (40), where the inverted predicate receives strong contrastive stress to obtain a corrective reading (we exemplify the tests with Spanish, but similar data obtain in Catalan, Galician and Italian; French and Romanian lack QBNPs with definite article, as discussed in Hulk and Tellier 2000 and Visan 2003, respectively):⁸

- (40) Este alcalde tiene muchas caras. Ayer conocí al IDIOTA del alcalde y hoy conoceré al IGNORANTE del alcalde.
 ‘This mayor has many faces. Yesterday I met that idiot of a mayor and today I will meet that ignoramus of a mayor.’

Concerning the topical nature of the subject, note that typically, focus elements are disallowed in this position, like *wh-in situ*—see also footnote 2 for a similar restriction in Germanic—, and DPs associated with *sólo* ‘only’:

- (41) a. **No hablaste con el idiota de qué médico.*
 not talked.2SG with the idiot of which doctor
 b. **No hablaste con el idiota de sólo aquel médico.*
 not talked.2SG with the idiot of only that doctor

With this evidence in mind, we can offer now an explanation for the otherwise surprising referentiality restrictions imposed on the subject of Romance QBNPs discussed thoroughly in 4.1, and exemplified for the ease of reference in (42): since the subject of QBNPs must be interpreted as background, only discourse salient referents are allowed in this position.

- (42) a. **el idiota de todo/cualquier médico*
 the idiot of every/any doctor
 b. *los idiotas de todos los/ambos médicos*
 the idiots of every the/both doctors

Only specific QPs (42b) can refer to a salient discourse participant, a fact that we are fully aware from their ability to be (clitic) left-dislocated, a typical backgrounding strategy—see Cinque (1983, 1990), Villalba (2000), among others:

- (43) a. **A todo/cualquier médico no lo conocerás.*
 to every/any doctor not him will.know
 b. *A todos los/ambos médicos no los conocerás.*
 to all the/both doctors not them will.know

To sum up, the informational partition of Romance QBNPs does not conform to the patterns established by Den Dikken (2006) for Germanic, but rather demands the opposite distribution. Schematically:

	subject	predicate
Germanic	focus	topic
Romance	topic	focus

With this much in mind, we can now move to the detailed proposal for Romance QBNPs.

4.2.2. Analysis

In agreement with the data in 3, we assume the following underlying structure for QBNPs, where the subject DP *el médico* ‘the doctor’ stands in a predication relation with the predicate DP *idiota* ‘the idiot’:

⁸ Since the *de*+DP sequence does not form a constituent (see 4.2.2 and 5.1.2), ellipsis is hard to obtain with QBNPs, which makes the repetition of *del alcalde* ‘of the mayor’ necessary, and gives the sentence a somewhat redundant and emphatic flavor.

(44) [_{RP} [_{DP} el médico] [_{R'} R [_{DP} idiota]]]

The articulation of the small clause is done by means of the Relator head R à la Kayne.

Now the Focus head is merged, which bears a [foc(us)] feature, probing and attracting the predicate DP:

(45) [_{FocP} [_{DP} idiota] [_{Foc'} R+Foc(=de) [_{RP} [_{DP} el médico] [_{R'} t_R t_{DP}]]]]

Since we consider movement of the predicate to Spec,FocP to be a typical A'-movement in Romance (contra Den Dikken and Singhapreecha 2004), the inverted DP becomes an A'-intervener, which explains the well-known fact that QBNPs are islands for extraction (see Den Dikken 1998, 2006):

(46) *¿[De qué pueblo]_i conoció al idiota del alcalde t_i?
 of which village met to.the idiot of.the mayor

Moreover, once in the Spec,FocP the uninterpretable phi-features of the predicate DP can probe the interpretable phi-features of the DP subject: matching and agree hold, valuation of the phi-features of the predicate DP takes place, and we obtain the typical concordant pattern described in 3.3, and repeated here for the ease of reference:

- (47) a. *el idiota del vecino* (Spanish)
 the idiot of-the neighbor
 b. *los idiotas de los vecinos*
 the.PL idiots of the.PL neighbors
 c. *la idiota de la vecina*
 the.F idiot.F of the.F neighbor.F
 d. *las idiotas de las vecinas*
 the.F.PL idiot.F.PL of the.F.PL neighbor.F.PL

Finally, the D head is merged and the final DP is constructed. Again, the uninterpretable phi-features of the D head probe the interpretable phi-features of the subject DP, without the intervention of the inverted predicate, which has become inactive after the agree operation. Valuation takes place, and the determiner ends up agreeing with both the subject and the predicate, as show in (47).

5. Extending the analysis: Spanish *lo-de* construction

In this section, we will extend the information-based approach developed in 4.2 to an independent nominal construction: the Spanish *lo-de* construction. We will follow Bartra-Kauffman and Villalba (2006a, b), and show that this Spanish construction shares the basic properties with respect to QBNPs, specially concerning predicate inversion (5.1). Then, we will show that the *lo-de* construction displays the same referential restrictions on the subject of the DP-internal predication that we have found in QBNPs (5.2).

5.1. Basic properties of the *lo-de* construction

5.1.1. Predication structure

Syntactically, the *lo-de* construction is headed by the so-called “neuter article” *lo*, which combines with a gradable nonagreeing adjective, which in turn establishes a predication relation with a DP:

- (48) *Me sorprendió lo caro de la casa.*
 to.me surprised LO expensive.MASC of the house.FEM
 ‘I was surprised by how expensive the house was.’

5.1.2. Constituency

Bartra-Kauffman and Villalba (2006a, b) observe that when the internal structure of *lo-de* is considered, constituency tests fail for the apparent PP headed by *de*, just as happens with QBNPs. The *de*+DP sequence neither can be subject to *wh*-movement (49) nor focalized (50):

- (49) a. *¿[*De qué*]_i *te extrañó lo caro* t_i?
 ‘What surprised you the expensiveness of?’
 b. *¿[*De qué alcalde*]_i *conociste al idiota* t_i?
 ‘What mayor did you meet that fool of?’
- (50) a. *[*DE LA CASA*]_i *me extrañó lo caro* t_i.
 ‘Of the house, I was astonished by the expensiveness.’
 b. *[*DEL ALCALDE*]_i *conoció Juan al idiota* t_i.
 ‘*Of a mayor, Juan met that fool.’

Following Den Dikken (2006), we take this behavior to indicate that *de* is not a true P in these constructions, nor is it forming a maximal projection with the DP.

5.1.3. Islandhood

Another property that makes *lo-de* constructions and QBNP similar is islandhood, as can be easily observed in the following examples, which correspond to *wh*-movement:

- (51) a. *¿[*En qué asunto*]_i *te extrañó lo mezquino de su interés* t_i?
 ‘Which matter did the meanness of his/her interest in astonish you?’
 b. *¿[*De qué pueblo*]_i *conoció Juan al idiota del alcalde* t_i?
 ‘Which village did Juan meet that fool of a mayor of?’

On the basis of these data, we can conclude that the Spanish *lo-de* construction can be analyzed along the lines suggested by Den Dikken (2006) for QBNPs, and assumed in 4.2.2, namely as involving predicate inversion. Now, it is time to turn our attention to the referentiality restrictions affecting the subject in this Spanish construction, which will be shown to parallel the ones found in QBNPs.

5.2. The referentiality restriction

As observed by Bartra-Kauffman and Villalba (2006a, b), there is a referentiality constraint affecting the subject of *lo-de*. Consider the case of nonspecific indefinite DPs (52a), bare plurals (52b), and NPI and downward entailing quantifiers (52c):

- (52) a. **No me sorprenderá lo caro de una casa cualquiera.*
 ‘I will not be surprised by the expensiveness of any house.’
 b. **No me extrañó lo caro de casas.*
 ‘I was not surprised by the expensiveness of houses.’
 c. **No me extrañó lo caro de ninguna casa/pocas casas.*
 ‘I was not surprised by the expensiveness of no house/few houses.’

These authors do not offer an explanation for this behavior, but it obviously parallels the facts discussed in 4.1, and fall under the analysis proposed in 4.2: the informational partition within the *lo-de* construction is exactly parallel to that of QBNPs, namely the inverted predicate is focus and the subject forms part of the background. Again, the standard tests confirm that the subject DP cannot be focus, since it cannot be a focused *wh*-element in situ nor be associated with the focus particle *sólo* ‘only’ (we repeat the QBNPs examples for the ease of comparison):

- (53) a. **Te extrañó lo alto de qué niña.*
 to.you struck LO tall of which girl

- b. **No hablaste con el idiota de qué médico.*
 not talked.2SG with the idiot of which doctor
- (54) a. **Te extrañó lo alto de sólo aquella niña.*
 to.you struck LO tall of only that girl
- b. **No hablaste con el idiota de sólo aquel médico.*
 not talked.2SG with the idiot of only that doctor

These data confirm our previous description of the QBNPs data: the predicate is interpreted as focus, whereas the subject is interpreted as background information. This particular information packaging gives us a better understanding of the quantificational restriction applying in the *lo-de* construction: the subject must be specific, for it is a topic.

6. Conclusions

We have shown that Romance QBNPs do not fit the analysis involving a spurious article advocated for by Den Dikken (2006). Instead, we have proposed a different line of research where the predication relation involved in this construction is restricted to specific DPs, which accounts for the apparently syntactic restriction on the form and interpretation of subjects of QBNPs. Particularly, it has been argued that the information packaging of Romance QBNPs (subject=topic, predicate=focus) reverses the one advocated by Den Dikken (2006) and Den Dikken and Singhapreecha (2004). Furthermore, it has been shown that this approach receives independent empirical support from the Spanish *lo-de* construction—see Bartra-Kauffman and Villalba (2006a)—, which crucially parallels most properties of QBNPs.

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Centre de Lingüística Teòrica
Departament de Filologia Catalana
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
08193 Cerdanyola del Vallès Barcelona
Xavier.Villalba@uab.es