

# Expressivity in Spanish

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## Abstract

This chapter focuses on a set of expressive constructions in Spanish, with special reference to Rioplatense Spanish, a dialect spoken in Argentina. A Kaplanian perspective on meaning is adopted, according to which representational and expressive meanings are modeled in separated dimensions. The representational dimension is analyzed with the usual tools of possible world semantics, whereas expressive meanings are formally captured by relating linguistic expressions to sets of contexts, which ultimately provide *use-conditions* under which expressive correctness is evaluated. Syntax plays a crucial role in the derivation of *use-conditions*, whose calculus depends on different syntactic manipulations (e.g., expletivization or expressive agreement/movement) that connect grammar to contextual factors. Adjective expressives in prenominal position (e.g. *maldito* ‘damn’), mixed expressives in postnominal position (e.g., *un libro de mierda* ‘a shitty book’), epithets (e.g., *el idiota de Andrés* ‘that idiot Andrés’), slurs (e.g., *Andrés es sudaca* ‘Andrés is South-American<sub>PEJORATIVE</sub>’), expressive intensifiers (e.g., the degree prefix *re-* or the size adjective *alto/a* ‘tall’ in prenominal position) and different types of honorifics (e.g., *don Andrés* ‘HON Andrés’, *la señora abogada* ‘the Mrs. lawyer’) are discussed, then, under this syntactic-semantic approach.

**Keywords:** expressivity, epithets, adjective expressives, expressive intensifiers, honorifics, Rioplatense Spanish

## 1 Introduction

This chapter introduces a fragment of the grammar and the semantics of expressivity in Spanish, with special reference to Rioplatense Spanish. Before advancing into the many expressive constructions the language has, it would be useful to theoretically frame the forthcoming pages. Following the functionalist tradition from Bühler (1934) to Jakobson (1960), I assume that the myriad of phrases and sentences human languages produce serve to different communicational purposes. Representing the world we live in is perhaps the most primitive

language function (see [Foolen, 1997](#) for an overview). In contemporary formal semantics the representational function of language is modeled with the tools of possible world semantics. For a Spanish sentence like *llueve* ‘it rains’, we model its meaning or *truth-conditions* as the set of worlds in which it rains. Now, consider the following tango line, in which the speaker expresses certain emotional state related to the fact that the addressee is a funny person:

- (1) Pucha que sos divertido!  
 expressive that are.2SG funny  
 ‘Damn! You are funny!’ [*Garufa* (tango), 1928]

Truth-conditionally, this sentence is evidently equivalent to the following one, in which the expressive is absent:

- (2) Sos divertido.  
 are.2SG funny  
 ‘You are funny.’

Put differently, the two sentences denote exactly the same set of worlds, those in which the addressee is funny. Yet, despite having the same truth conditions, they do not have the same *use-conditions*. Following now the formal tradition initiated by [Kaplan \(1999\)](#) (see also [Potts 2005](#); [McCready 2010](#); [Predelli 2013](#); [Gutzmann 2015, 2019](#)), I will say that use-conditions are modeled as *sets of contexts*, not sets of world. For an example like (1), the use-conditions would roughly correspond to those *contexts* in which the speaker is in a certain emotional state with respect to the meaning of the proposition that the addressee is funny. One important observation, particularly stressed by Potts’ (2005) seminal work on conventional implicatures, is that truth-conditions and use-conditions do not interact to each other; i.e., they are computed in parallel meaning dimensions. Here, I will use Potts’ metalogical operator  $\bullet$  to separate truth-conditions from use-conditions. Therefore, in our example (1), the denotation of the entire sentence can be represented as follows, where the material at the left of the bullet corresponds to the truth-conditional meaning and the material to the right, to use-conditions (HES = High Emotional State and  $s_c$  = the speaker of the context):

- (3)  $\llbracket$ Pucha que sos divertido $\rrbracket =$  the addressee of the context is funny  $\bullet$   
 $\text{HES}(s_c, p)$

Paradigmatic cases of bidimensional expressive words included in Potts’ original taxonomy are expressive adjectives (e.g., *damn* or *fucking*) or epithets (e.g., *that bastard Chuck*), which typically introduce negative evaluations by the speaker, and honorifics, which, in contrast, are used to communicate the speaker’s respect for the argument of the honorific (e.g., the Spanish honorific *don/doña* as used in *doña Ana* ‘Mrs Ana’ or *don Juan* ‘Mr. Juan’). Mixed words, which encode both truth and use-conditional meaning, like individual or group slurs, are not part of this taxonomy for reasons having to do with the

design of Potts’ logic. An extension of such logic is offered by [McCready \(2010\)](#) with the aim of precisely including such words. As McCready shows, mixed words pass Potts’ tests to detect parallel meaning dimensions. In this regard, compare a Spanish expressive adjective with a group slur:

- (4) a. No encuentro las putas llaves!  
 not find.1SG the fucking keys  
 ‘I don’t find the fucking keys!’
- b. Andrés no es sudaca.  
 Andrés is not South-American<sub>pejorative</sub>  
 ‘Andrés is not South-American<sub>pejorative</sub>.’

The example in (4a) has an expressive adjective in prenominal position. The meaning it introduces is insensitive to the presence of the sentential negation, a truth-conditional operator. Put differently, sentential negation does not affect the conventional implicature that the speaker is emotional about the fact that she cannot find the relevant keys. The same holds for a mixed word like *sudaca*, a slur-word for South-American people mainly used in Spain. Concretely, in this case, the negative operator denies that Andrés is a member of the set of South-Americans, but cannot scope over the conventional implicature that the speaker is being xenophobic. As we will see, not every word or construction that I will characterize as expressive passes this type of tests in such a clear way. This could imply either that some expressives are unidimensional or that the relevant tests fail for independent reasons. In absence of clear diagnostics, one must rely on somewhat arbitrary intuitions regarding meaning dimensions.<sup>1</sup>

Coming back to the nature of mixed words, one way to model the meaning of *sudaca* is encoding both truth-conditional and use-conditional meaning in its lexical entry. [Orlando and Saab \(2020b,a\)](#) model the expressive meaning as a stereotype, but this is not particularly important for the rest of this chapter. Here, I will be concerned with the two types of expressive lexical items just introduced: (i) pure expressives of the *damn*-type and (ii) mixed types, clearly illustrated by slur words. Following [McCready \(2010\)](#), I use the symbol  $\blacklozenge$  for representing mixed types. A simplified lexical entry for a slur like *sudaca* could be, then, represented as follows:

- (5)  $\llbracket \text{sudaca} \rrbracket = \text{South-American}(x) \blacklozenge \text{South-American Stereotype}(x)$

I assume that the Spanish lexicon contains at least these two types of expressive morphemes/words, but, of course, there could be other types. Therefore, part of the empirical task is finding reasons to classify a given expressive word in one of the two types, not always an easy task, as we will see.

To summarize, beyond its obvious representational force, human languages are also extremely powerful devices for communicating features related to the speaker’s profile. This profile refers to many aspects of the speaker’s emotional

<sup>1</sup>In addition, even Potts’ tests are far from being uncontroversial, in the sense that for many they just diagnose semantic presuppositions (see [Schlenker, 2003, 2007](#); [Sauerland, 2007](#)).

states but also of her placement in context. Thus, many expressive words in natural language conventionally express something about the discourse participants, their emotions or attitudes and their contexts. In Spanish, all the items listed below are expressive elements in the favored sense:

- Mixed expressives: many words conventionally characterize the speaker's context (e.g., *cerveza/birra* 'beer/beer<sub>informal</sub>', *sudamericano-sudaca* 'South-American / South-American<sub>pejorative</sub>', etc.).<sup>2</sup>
- Pure expressive modifiers: many words conventionally communicate emotional attitudes on the speaker's part regarding entities or situations (e.g., expressive adjectives like *puto* 'fucking', *bendito* 'blessed' or *maldito* 'damn' or propositional modifiers like *puta (madre)* 'fuck', *mierda* 'shit' or *maldición* 'damn').
- Epithets: many words must be characterized as mere insults, like the ones illustrated by qualifying binominals like *ese idiota de Andrés* 'that idiot Andrés'.
- Expressive intensifiers: many words serve to conventionally intensify the degree of gradable adjectives (e.g., *re bueno* 'very<sub>int.</sub> good', *buenísimo* lit. 'good<sub>superlative</sub>') or nouns (e.g., *alto auto* lit. 'tall car').
- Politeness/honorification: many words conventionally communicate respect (or even disrespect) to the addressee on the speaker's part (e.g., the *vos-usted* 'you<sub>informal</sub>/you<sub>formal</sub>' distinction in the pronominal paradigm and other forms of honorification, like the use of the honorific *don/doña*).

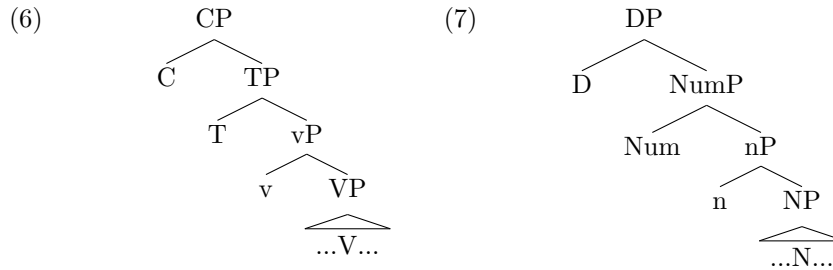
This list is non-exhaustive, but the data included are at the core of the content of this chapter. Now, beyond the obvious fact that all human languages have expressive words, we must also characterize their combinatorial properties in the syntax. In fact, it turns out that the syntax of expressivity shows some distinctive properties that set it apart from the syntax of the representational dimension of language. On the one hand, it seems that many of the phenomena that we can call *expressive* in the favored sense are detected at the left-periphery of sentences (CPs) and nominal phrases (DPs). To see this, let me assume the following minimal syntactic structures for CPs and DPs:

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<sup>2</sup>The term *context* as used here means something more than mere local context (i.e., the immediate context in which the speech takes place). There are words that place the speaker into their cultural / ideological dimension (in the Bajtinian sense):

- (i) Andrés es (un) puto/sudaca  
 Andrés is (a) homosexual<sub>pejorative</sub>/South-American<sub>pejorative</sub>  
 'Andrés is a f... / South-American<sub>pejorative</sub>.'

In these cases, the slur-words communicate that the speaker is in a context in which a homophobic or xenophobic stereotype is in force (see [Orlando and Saab 2020a](#)). Insofar as these words also characterize speakers and their contexts, the rubric of expressive words is also appropriated and I will use it in what follows.



In cartographic approaches to syntax, the sentence left periphery consists of many splits at the CP node and encodes information that connects grammar and discourse in specific ways. According to Rizzi (1997), the CP area is decomposed in the following functional projections:

$$(8) \quad [\text{ForceP ZP Force}^0 [\text{TopP XP Top}^0 [\text{FocP YP Foc}^0 [\text{FinP} \dots$$

The Force head encodes sentence type (types such as declarative, exclamative, interrogative, imperative, etc.); therefore, since it links certain formal properties of sentences to discourse conditions, it is at the heart of the grammar of expressivity. In Spanish, for instance, imperative sentences, which convey crucial information regarding the discourse participants, show a special grammatical mood and a special clitic-verb ordering (e.g., *hacélo* ‘do it’). Some exclamatives, which denote particular emotions on the speaker’s part, are uttered with its typical rising intonation and with overt wh-movement to the left periphery. And like English, indirect interrogatives are introduced with a special complementizer in embedded clauses (i.e., *si* ‘whether’). This is just a short list of the type of syntactic activity one can find at the left periphery of sentences. On the DP side, Gutzmann (2019) has proposed that the D head can be a locus for formal expressive features. The postulation of such features allows Gutzmann to explain argument extension effects (see section 2) and certain distinctive properties of the grammar of degree intensifiers in German (see section 3).

Yet, the grammar of expressivity is much more than certain syntactic activity at the left periphery. In Saab (2022a), I argue in detail that some expressive constructions require a kind of *syntactic recycling*, which essentially consists of merging material in “expletive” positions. This manipulation creates a *non-representational syntax*. The idea is that syntax provides different Merge positions, some of which are predicative and some of which are not, i.e., syntax also provides expletive positions. This recycling of certain words in non-predicative position straightforwardly accounts for the different distribution of some words, which work as mixed items in predicative position but as pure expressives in non-predicative ones (e.g. slurs vs. epithets).

Importantly, this idea of syntactic manipulation is different from Corver’s (2016) thesis, according to which the expression of emotion in language requires *syntactic deviation*, i.e., the generation of deviant structures at the PF level that directly affect the appraisal system, a cognitive system modeled in terms

of subjective valences. This view would account for the use of the so-called spurious indefinite *een* ‘a’ in Dutch, which, among other noticeable anomalies, can combine with plural NPs (see [Bennis et al., 1998](#)).

- (9) die etters van een jongens  
 those jerks of a boys  
 ‘those jerk boys’

Although the approaches to the grammar of expressivity briefly discussed here are not *prima facie* incompatible with each other, in the sense that there is no reason to think that languages cannot exploit the different expressive strategies just presented, some analytical decisions must be taken when facing particular empirical domains. For instance, for a case like (10), in which the epithet *gallina* does not agree with the determiner in gender features, a solution both along the lines of the deviation or the recycling theories seems plausible. Yet, as we will see in section 2.3, there are reasons to conclude that *gallina* is not the head of the DP in which it occurs and cannot, consequently, be the concord controller, favoring, then, an analysis less radical than the deviation approach and more along the lines of the theory of syntactic recycling.

- (10) [el gallina de Juan]<sub>i</sub> dice que lo<sub>i</sub> amenazaron.  
 the.M.SG chicken.F.SG of Juan.M.SG says that CL.M.SG threatened  
 ‘That chicken Juan says that they threatened him.’

At any rate, the main aim of this chapter is descriptive, so in what follows, I will avoid in-depth theoretical discussions. As advanced, the description corresponds to a fragment of the grammar of Spanish in general, but with many references to a particular dialect spoken in the Río de la Plata area, in Argentina. Importantly, Rioplatense Spanish must not be confused with Argentinian Spanish, a term that, according to [Vidal de Battini \(1964\)](#), covers at least five dialectal sub-areas. Here, and for obvious space restrictions, I will only cover fragments of the Rioplatense region, which as noted by Vidal de Battini, includes the Buenos Aires province, the city of Buenos Aires, the provinces of Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, La Pampa, areas of La Patagonia colonized by population coming from Buenos Aires, and, finally, important areas of Uruguay.

The chapter is structured in the following way. In section 2, I describe three strategies of expressive modification in the nominal domain, namely: (i) pronominal expressive adjectives (section 2.1), (ii) postnominal expressive nominals (section 2.2) and (iii) epithets (section 2.3). In turn, in section 3, I focus on some complex strategies of expressive intensification, which involve interactions at the left periphery of CPs and DPs. The grammar of politeness/honorification is the theme of section 4, in which I briefly discuss the *vos/usted* address system in Rioplatense Spanish (section 4.1) and dwell in more detail on the syntax of the nominal honorifics *don/doña* and *señor(a)* (section 4.2). In the concluding section, I summarize the content of the chapter, stressing what I think are its most relevant findings, and offer a provisional list of further expressive phenomena that should be added to the the research agenda of the theory of expressivity.

## 2 Expressive modification in the nominal phrase

In this section, I address three types of expressive modifiers in the nominal domains, namely: (i) pre-nominal expressive adjectives (EAs), which essentially correspond to the well-studied pure expressives of the *damn* type in English (e.g., *las putas llaves* ‘the fucking keys’), (ii) nominal expressives, like *un libro de mierda* ‘a shitty book’, which occur in post-nominal position and have a mixed semantic behavior, and (iii) epithets, which exclusively modify pronominal indexes inside the internal structure of DPs. The three types are clearly distinguished by their syntactic distribution and their semantic behavior. In this last respect, the pure expressive behavior of EAs and epithets shows that they are expressive expletives in the sense of the recycling theory mentioned in the introduction, i.e., lexical items merged in the functional spine of DPs. On the contrary, postnominal expressives are generally merged inside the nP level and, consequently, encode not only use-conditions but also truth-conditions, although they have pure expressive uses, as well. Finally, EAs pattern alone in producing what Gutzmann (2019) has called *argument extension*, i.e., the fact that they can be interpreted in positions in which they are not syntactically merged. I suggest that this derives from the fact that EAs are late merged during the syntactic computation, after the semantics of their syntactic sisters has been determined at LF.

### 2.1 Pre-nominal expressive adjectives

Many Spanish adjectives can occur pre and post-nominally. Here are some relevant examples:

- (11) a. una artista famosa  
an artist famous  
b. una famosa artista  
a famous artist  
‘a famous artist’
- (12) a. las ovejas blancas  
the sheep white  
b. las blancas ovejas  
the white sheep  
‘the white sheep’
- (13) a. un hombre pobre  
a man poor  
b. un pobre hombre  
a poor man  
‘a poor man’

As noted by Demonte (2008) and others, adjective position in Spanish triggers many interpretative differences not always easy to describe. In her own words,

In Spanish, a language in which adjectives appear pre- and post-nominally, there are systematic (although sometimes not easily describable) interpretive differences associated with the position of adjectives in the nominal domain.

[Demonte, 2008: 71]

In effect, the choice of the pre or postnominal position is not semantically innocuous. For instance, *blancas* is a restrictive modifier in (12a), with a typical intersective semantics (i.e., the semantic value of *ovejas blancas* results from the intersection of the set of sheep and the set of white things). Yet, in prenominal position there is no intersective semantics; the adjective denotes a stereotypical property of *sheep*, so *las blancas ovejas* denotes just the set of sheep, without any color restriction (see Bello 1988). In turn, *pobre* in (13a) is a restrictive adjective but a purely evaluative modifier in (13b) with an indubitable negative valence. Finally, the combination noun+adjective in (11a) results, again, in a restrictive semantics; in this case, the prenominal order triggers a mandatory specific interpretation for the entire indefinite DP (see Bosque, 1996). It seems, then, that Spanish and Romance in general use the prenominal position for introducing non-at issue commentaries (e.g., *blancas ovejas*), purely evaluative meanings (e.g., *pobre hombre*), or certain specific discourse features (e.g., *famosa artista*). In other words, semantic restriction is confined to (certain) postnominal positions.

Consider now the following minimal pair:

- (14) a. ese profesor puto  
that professor homosexual<sub>pejorative</sub>  
'that f... professor'
- b. ese puto profesor  
that fucking professor  
'that fucking professor'

The radical contrast between the pre and postnominal adjective position in the case of the adjective *puto* is easy to pinpoint: in (14a), it is used as a slur word, but as a pure expressive adjective (EAs) in (14b). The English translation makes the difference evident. Other EAs in Spanish are *maldito* 'damn' (e.g., *el maldito profesor* 'the damn professor') and *bendito* 'blessed' (e.g., *el bendito profesor* lit. 'the blessed professor'). Like EAs in English (e.g., *fucking*, *damn*, *bloody*), this use of the adjective *puto* does not contribute any meaning to the truth-conditional dimension, it only contributes the speaker's dislike of the professor. I will represent this type of expressive meaning with the frowny face, as in (15) and, as far as I know, the few expressive adjectives that



Spanish has in the prenominal domain only encode a negative valence:<sup>3</sup>

(15)  $\ominus$ (the professor)

The semantic behavior of expressive adjectives is somewhat unexpected from a compositional point of view. It does not result from the syntactic-semantic combination of *puto* and *profesor*, since it is the entire individual-denoting DP what is semantically modified. In fact, the semantic connection can be still much more flexible, as in (16), in which the speaker’s dislike is directed against the whole situation being denoted by this particular sentence and not, say, against the cake.

- (16) a. El perro se comió la puta torta.  
the dog CL ate the fucking cake  
‘The dog ate the fucking cake.’  
b.  $\ominus$ (the dog ate the cake)

This is a paradigmatic illustration of the phenomenon of *argument extension*, i.e., the apparent mismatch between syntax and semantics whereby some expressives seem to affect a syntactic constituent other than the one they directly modify (Potts, 2005, p. 166; see also Gutzmann 2019; Bross 2021; Lo Guercio and Orlando 2022). The fact that expressive adjectives show argument extension makes them completely different from the entire set of pre and post-nominal adjectives in the examples in (11)-(13), in which semantic modification matches syntactic combination. Of course, as noted, there are also important differences between this set of adjectives, in which *pobre* is purely evaluative but *famosa* is descriptive. In the interests of brevity, let us focus just on the descriptive ones (DAs) of the *famosa* type and their sharp differences with EAs of the *puto* type.

According to Potts (2005), EAs in English do not have a distinctive syntax, so argument extension effects have to be considered as a true case of a compositional failure. Gutzmann (2019), instead, notices several syntactic differences between EAs and DAs in German and English and proposes a particular syntactic derivation for EAs based on a version of the Agree model (Wurmbrand 2012, 2014; Zeijlstra 2012). Regardless of particular solutions to the argument extension puzzle, Spanish EAs do have a particular syntactic distribution as well, which does not allow for an assimilation to the syntax of DAs (and other more well-known adjectival types). First, and as already illustrated, EAs can only occur in prenominal position. As shown by the contrast in (14), *puto* is a purely expressive adjective in prenominal position, but a slur for homosexuals in postnominal position.<sup>4</sup> DAs, instead, do not lose their core meaning when occurring in prenominal position. The following pair of examples makes the

<sup>3</sup>This is not the case with postnominal expressives (see section 2.2) or epithets (cf. see section 2.3).

<sup>4</sup>Resnik (2013) claims that EAs can have postnominal uses and gives the following examples:

- (i) a. De nuevo trajo esa (maldita) moto (maldita).  
of new brought.3SG that (damn) motorcycle (damn)

point even clearer. In an example like (18b), *putos* in post-nominal position is just absurd.

- (17) a. una misteriosa carta  
       a mysterious letter  
       b. una carta misteriosa  
       a letter mysterious
- (18) a. los putos libros  
       the fucking books  
       b. # los libros putos  
       the books f...

Second, while DAs in Spanish admit the superlative form in pre-nominal position, EAs do not:<sup>5</sup>

- (19) a. el más fino vino del país  
       the most fine wine in the country  
       ‘the finest wine in the country’  
       b. # las más malditas llaves  
       the most damn keys

Third, DAs, but not EAs, admit degree modifiers:

- (20) a. la muy/poco/demasiado astuta abogada  
       the very/little/too clever lawyer.F  
       ‘the very/not too/ too clever lawyer’  
       b. \* las muy/poco/demasiado putas llaves  
       the very/little/too fucking keys  
       ‘the very/not too/too fucking keys’

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‘Once again, (s)he brought that (damn) motorcycle (damn).’

- b. No aguanto más este (puto) clima (puto).  
 not tolerate.1SG more this (fucking) weather (fucking)  
 ‘I cannot tolerate this (fucking) weather (fucking) anymore.’

(Resnik, 2013, 56)

I accept these postnominal uses, although they are less natural as pure expressives than the prenominal ones. In order to be properly interpreted as expressives, they require additional expressive strategies. For instance, they are much more natural with demonstrative articles, which, as is well-known, have expressive flavors. Yet, the most important difference between the pre and post-nominal uses is that only the prenominal ones show argument extension. For instance, the sentence (16) is extremely infelicitous if the EA is in postnominal position, and the reason seems to be connected to the fact that an example like this is particularly felicitous in a context in which the expressive scopes over the entire proposition. Therefore, I tend to think that the postnominal uses Resnik notes are of a different sort, perhaps related to a metaphorical process involving an adjective in restrictive position.

<sup>5</sup>Comparative forms are incompatible with all prenominal adjectives.

Yet, EAs, in particular *puto*, can be modified by expressive intensifiers like *re-*, at least in Rioplatense Spanish (see section 3):<sup>6</sup>

- (21) a. las re putas llaves  
 the INTENSIFIER fucking keys  
 ‘the EI fuckings keys’  
 b. ?? las re benditas/malditas llaves  
 the INTENSIFIER blessed/damn keys

Fourth, DAs, but not EAs, admit adverbial modification:

- (22) a. el tristemente célebre autor de la novela  
 the sadly famous author of the novel  
 ‘the sadly famous author of the novel’  
 b. el sorpresivamente largo título de su nuevo libro  
 the surprisingly long title of her new book  
 ‘the surprisingly long title of her new book’  
 (23) a. \*las tristemente putas llaves  
 the sadly fucking keys  
 ‘the sadly fucking keys’  
 b. \*el sorpresivamente puto auto  
 the surprisingly fucking car  
 ‘the surprisingly fucking car’

Fifth, EAs cannot be coordinated, while DAs can:

- (24) a. el feroz y absurdo ataque a la libertad de expresión  
 the fierce and absurd attack to the liberty of speech  
 ‘the fierce and absurd attack on freedom of speech’  
 (25) a. \*las putas y malditas llaves  
 the fucking and damn keys

Finally, EAs, unlike DAs, cannot occur as predicates in copular sentences:

- (26) a. La carta es misteriosa.  
 the letter is mysterious  
 ‘The letter is mysterious.’  
 b. \*La carta es maldita.  
 the letter is damn  
 \*‘The letter is damn.’

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<sup>6</sup>Modification by the degree word *muy* ‘very’ is not impossible, but it requires to be reinterpreted as an intensifier. Thus, *muy* gives a felicitous result in cases like (20b) only under this intensification reading.

The following table summarizes the different distribution of EAs and DAs in Spanish:

	DAs	EAs
can occur in the post-nominal position	yes	no
compatible with the superlative form	yes	no
compatible with degree modification	yes	no
compatible with adverbial modification	yes	no
can be coordinated	yes	no
can be used predicatively	yes	no

Table 1: DAs vs. EAs.

These facts provide strong evidence that EAs and DAs significantly differ in their syntactic distribution. It seems that EAs are structurally poor and do not permit the typical syntactic combinations of regular adjectives. Next, we should wonder how this structural deficiency connects to the two characteristic properties of EAs, namely (i) its null semantic import at the truth-conditional level, and (ii) argument extension. But before advancing on the semantic side, let us provide some additional details on the syntactic analysis of EAs in Spanish.

First, I assume that they are syntactic expletives, i.e., simple syntactic constituents merged in the inflectional spine of the DP structure. This assumption is good for three reasons: (i) expletives are syntactically simple entities, a fact that explains the structural deficiency of EAs noted above, (ii) expletives do not contribute to truth-conditions, although some do have use conditions, and (iii) expletives cannot be used predicatively (see (26b)). For concreteness, let us assume that EAs, as other expletives, are merged in the inflectional domain of the nominal spine, namely NumP, as shown below:

(27) *puto profesor*: [<sub>DP</sub> D [<sub>NumP</sub> **puto** [<sub>nP</sub> n [<sub>NP</sub> profesor ]]]]

DAs of many kinds are instead merged in the nP domain and are, therefore, relevant at the truth-conditional level. Prenominal adjectives as the ones introduced in (11)-(13) are also merged at the nP level. Evidence for this ordering comes from the fact that EAs precede this set of adjectives:<sup>7</sup>

(28) a. *Estoy cansado de escuchar de esa puta famosa artista.*  
 am.1SC tired of hear.INF of that fucking famous artist

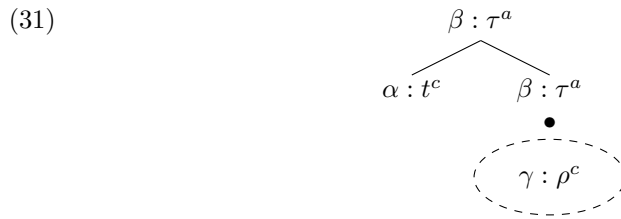
<sup>7</sup>Yet, above EAs we can have intentional adjectives. Placing an EA above an intentional adjective is more deviant, but perhaps not totally degraded:

- (i) a. *el supuesto maldito asesino*  
 the alleged damn murderer  
 ‘the alleged damn murdered’  
 b. ?? *el maldito supuesto asesino*  
 the damn alleged murderer

This is expected, I think, since intentional adjectives must be located high in the functional spine, probably above NumP, in order to scope over the relevant extended projection of the nP.

- ‘I’m tired of hearing about that fucking famous artist.’
- b. \*Estoy cansado de escuchar de esa famosa **puta** artista.  
am.1SC tired of hear.INF of that fucking famous artist
- (29) a. Tus **malditas** blancas ovejas no paran de pastar en mi  
your damn white sheep not stop of graze.INF in my  
terreno.  
land  
‘Your fucking white sheep don’t stop grazing on my land.’
- b. \*Tus blancas **malditas** ovejas no paran de pastar en mi  
your white damn sheep not stop of graze.INF in my  
terreno.  
land
- (30) a. Ese **bendito** pobre hombre está sufriendo.  
that blessed poor man is suffering  
‘That blessed poor man is suffering.’
- b. \*Ese pobre **bendito** hombre está sufriendo.  
that poor blessed man is suffering

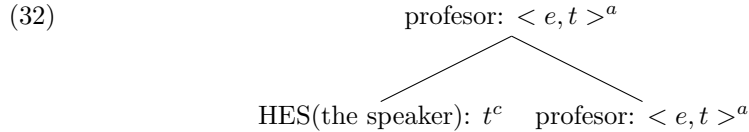
With these syntactic considerations in mind, we can turn our attention to the semantic side. Recall that we must account for the two perplexing properties of EAs, namely (i) its null semantic import at the truth-conditional level, and (ii) argument extension. In this respect, I will follow the proposal in [Lo Guercio and Orlando \(2022\)](#) and assume that EAs introduce use-conditions through the rule of **Isolated CI**, as formulated in Potts ([Potts, 2005, 66](#)):<sup>8</sup>



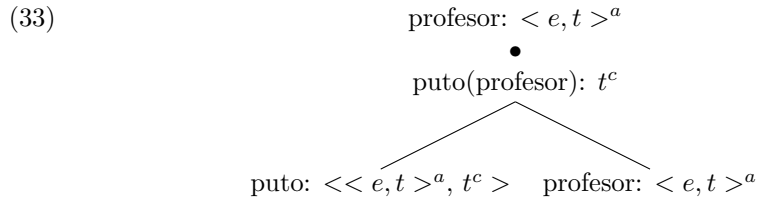
The rule passes the meaning of the expressive’s sister unaltered and adds the conventional implicature that the speaker is in an heightened emotional state at

<sup>8</sup>I use Potts’ rules and representations, but this is not crucial. For those readers unfamiliar with Potts’ logic, the most important fact to have in mind is the introduction of a new semantic type for conventional implicatures, which is annotated as the superscript  $\sigma^c$  on standard semantic types. Truth-conditional types, introducing at-issue content, are, in turn, annotated with the superscript  $\sigma^a$ . Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, the bullet  $\bullet$  is used to separate the two meaning dimensions. To illustrate, for an expressive lexical item of the  $\langle e^a, t^c \rangle$  type, we formally express that the item at hand takes an item denoting in  $e$  at the truth-conditional dimension and adds a proposition at the conventional implicature dimension. As we will see, this is indeed the semantic type of epithets (cf. section (2.3)) and honorifics like *don/doña* (cf. section 4.2).

@. The crucial property of this rule is that there is no functional combination. For a case like (27), the result of applying Isolated CI to the structure is roughly as illustrated below (HES = heightened emotional state):



In Lo Guercio and Orlando (2022), argument extension follows, then, from a set of pragmatic inferences enriching the basic, unspecific content that the expressive adds semantically.<sup>9</sup> This way to look at the meaning of EAs departs from Potts (2005), for whom EAs are conventional implicature operators that take as input at-issue meanings and deliver the same at-issue meanings adding a conventional implicature expressing the speaker’s dislike. In this case, there is indeed functional combination between the EA and its sister. This rule is called **Conventional Implicature Application** (Potts, 2005, 64). Its result for the previous example *puto profesor* can be represented as follows:



Evidently, CI application results in argument extension for a myriad of cases in which the speaker’s emotion does not target the syntactic sister of the expressive (e.g., (16)), a fact that raises the obvious compositionality issue commented above. Now, Lo Guercio and Orlando’s solution solves the problem but at the cost of introducing a semantic axiom which is non-compositional in nature. The rule simply stipulates that a branching node in the syntax can have a non-branching semantics. A more parsimonious approach to the problem would introduce cyclic considerations for this particular syntactic-semantic derivation. For instance, it seems plausible to think of EAs as being introduced in another cycle of the syntactic derivation, i.e., EAs are late merged in the derivation. If this is the case, then, the Isolated CI rule would be the superficial reflex of a late merger derivation in the syntax. I cannot provide the details of such an approach here. The reader can consult Lo Guercio and Saab (2024).

## 2.2 Postnominal expressive NPs/DPS

Spanish also makes productive use of post-nominal expressive NPs/DPs, always introduced by the dummy preposition *de* ‘of’. For convenience, I will call all

<sup>9</sup>In a sense, this view generalizes the analysis Potts makes for cases like *this is fantastic fucking news*, in which the expressive does not seem to take any functional argument at all.

these constructions *expressive nominals* (ENs). The following list illustrates typical examples in Rioplatense Spanish:

- (34) a. un departamento *de mierda/porquería*  
 an apartment of shit/dirt  
 ‘a shit of an apartment’  
 b. un libro *de puta madre*  
 a book of whore mother  
 ‘an awesome book’  
 c. ese formulario *del orto*  
 that form of.the ass  
 ‘that fucking annoying application form’  
 d. un guitarrista *del carajo*  
 a guitar-player of.the hell  
 ‘a hell of a guitar player’

There are two obvious differences with the reduced set of EAs discussed in the previous section. First, as already noticed, these modifiers are expressive NPs (e.g., *mierda*) or fossilized DPs (e.g., *el orto*) and, second, they occur post-nominally. Beyond these initial and easily detectable differences, there is another set of properties that distinguish both types of expressives and raise important analytical questions. One crucial property of ENs is that, unlike EAs, they do not show argument extension. So, in a sentence like (35a), the EN can only be interpreted as modifying its preceding noun and not, say, the entire proposition:

- (35) a. Leí un libro de puta madre.  
 read.PST.1SG a book of whore mother  
 ‘I read a book of EN.’  
 b. a (☺(great book))  
 c. # ☹(I read a great book.)

These differences between EAs and ENs correlate with their different semantic import. As noted, EAs do not add any semantic content to the truth-conditional dimension (i.e., *las putas llaves* denotes whatever *las llaves* denotes at the truth-conditional level). This is not the case when we consider the semantic contribution of ENs. In the following example, negation, a truth-conditional operator, clearly scopes over the EN:

- (36) Ana no es una guitarrista de puta madre, es solo buena.  
 Ana not is a guitar-player of whore mother, is just good  
 ‘Ana is not an awesome guitar player, she is just good.’

The example below, in addition to illustrate that the EN does not project over the *believe* predicate, also shows that its expressive meaning can be clearly

detached of the speaker subjectivity. Put differently, the EN is not necessarily speaker-oriented (indeed, the speaker can disagree with respect to Ana’s evaluation of the relevant book):

- (37) Ana cree que Paula compró un libro de mierda.  
 Ana believes that Paula bought a book of shit  
 ‘Ana believes that Paula bought a shitty book.’

There is, however, the remaining issue whether, in addition to contribute to the truth-conditional level, ENs also add a subjective meaning in a parallel meaning dimension, i.e., are ENs mixed expressives? In many cases, exemplified here in examples like (35a), a certain speaker emotional disposition is also being communicated. If such disposition is *semantically* communicated, then we would have at least one good reason to classify some concrete instances of ENs as mixed or hybrid expressives. This is not the case in examples like (37), in which *mierda* seems to be used as a uni-dimensional evaluative. Yet, things are more complicated when other cases are considered. For instance, here is a real life example said by a person trying to send WhatsApp messages, who does not manage to do it in a normal way because of her long nails:

- (38) Pará! Tardo en escribir con estas uñas del orto.  
 stop delay.1SG in writing with these nails of.the ass  
 ‘Wait! It takes me a while to write with these fucking nails.’

Note that I translate this EN use as a pure EA in English, which seems to be the most adequate equivalent in this case. Not surprisingly, an argument extension reading expressing the speaker’s annoyance with her slow writing is not only plausible, but favored, as well. For these pure expressive uses, it seems reasonable to extend the analysis I suggested for EAs in the previous section and to propose that some EN uses are derived by late merging the expressive nominal expression. This late merge step triggers, then, a conventional implicature at a parallel dimension of meaning. For the remaining cases, I will remain neutral regarding the mixed or uni-dimensional nature of ENs; I only contend that those uses must be modeled as having truth-conditional content. To the best of my knowledge, ENs have not been discussed in the previous relevant literature, so any conclusion should be taken as provisional. At any rate, we can safely conclude that the following table reflects many of the essential distributional and semantic differences between EAs and ENs:<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>The assimilation I made here among all the postnominal expressives must be taken carefully. Some, like *del orto*, are more like pure expressives. In addition, *del orto* or *de puta madre* are used in some peculiar idioms involving copular verbs. For instance, *estar del orto* lit. ‘to be of the ass’ or *estar de puta madre* lit. ‘to be of whose mother’ means that I am in a terrible mood or that I feel awesome, respectively. You can also use *de puta madre* as a predicative to indicate that something is awesome and that one is emotionally affected by that, like in *La cena estuvo de puta madre* lit. ‘The dinner was of whose mother’. Other bare NP expressives do not have these uses in the verbal domain. In the case of *de mierda*, predicative uses are marginal, like in *??el libro es de mierda* lit. ‘the book is of shit’. Evidently, further research is needed in the domain of ENs.



	EAs	ENs
occur in post-nominal position	no	yes
argument extension	yes	no
at-issue content	no	yes

Table 2: EAs vs. ENs (excluding pure expressive uses).

## 2.3 Epithets

### 2.3.1 Epithets as expressive pronouns

Typically, epithets in Romance occur in two different syntactic environments. They can be used without any overt argument or with a (putative) argument preceded by the preposition *de* ‘of’:<sup>11</sup>

- (39) a. El idiota llegó tarde.  
the idiot arrived late  
‘The idiot arrived late.’  
b. El idiota de Andrés llegó tarde.  
the idiot of Andrés arrived late  
‘That idiot Andrés arrived late.’

As the translations show, English also has the two uses, with the difference that the argument of the epithet is transparently a DP, not a PP. According to Potts (2005), epithets modify full overt DPs or empty pronouns under exactly the same underlying structure (see (40a)). Semantically, epithets introduce conventional implicatures by CI Application (see (33)). Concretely, they take an *e* denoting expression at the truth-conditional dimension and return the same meaning at that level adding a conventional implicature in which the target of the epithet is evaluated by the speaker (see (40b)).

- (40) a. 

```

graph TD
  DP1[DP] --- NP1[NP]
  DP1 --- DP2[DP]
  NP1 --- D[D]
  NP1 --- NP2[NP]
  D --- the[the]
  NP2 --- idiot[idiot]
  DP2 --- Andrés_empt[Andrés/∅]

```
- b. 

```

graph TD
  Andrés_ea[Andrés: e^a] --- dot((•))
  dot --- idiota_t_c[idiota(Andrés): t^c]
  idiota_t_c --- idiota_ea_t_c[idiota: < e^a, t^c >]
  idiota_t_c --- Andrés_ea[Andrés: e^a]

```

<sup>11</sup>Most epithets are associated to negative valences. They can correspond to mere individual insults mostly related to intellectual or physical properties (e.g., *el boludo de Andrés* ‘that asshole Andrés’, *el panzón de Andrés* ‘that paunchy Andrés’), but also to group insults corresponding to stereotypes of nationality, sexual orientation or social class, among many other social dimensions (e.g., *ese sudaca de Andrés* ‘that South-American<sub>pejorative</sub> Andrés’, *ese puto de Andrés* ‘that f.. Andrés’, *ese villero de Andrés* ‘that SOCIAL-CLASS EPITHET Andrés’ and so on). Yet, unlike EAs, there are also positive epithets like *ese ángel de Andrés* ‘that angel Andrés’ or *ese genio de Andrés* ‘that genius Andrés’.

(adapted from Potts 2005: 173)

Since Potts also proposes that EAs and their arguments are interpreted by CI Application, epithets and EAs form a natural class. Yet, epithets, unlike EAs, do not trigger argument extension (Gutzmann, 2015; Lo Guercio and Orlando, 2022; Lo Guercio and Saab, 2024). The following minimal pair shows two things: (i) both epithets and EAs scope-out and are speaker-oriented, but (ii) only EAs trigger argument extension. In effect, in (41a) *idiota* can only affect Pablo as the target of the speaker’s attitude, whereas in (41b), the EA can target the embedded proposition, which is indeed the favored reading in this case.

- (41) a. Ana cree que nadie tolera al idiota de Pablo.  
 Ana believes that no-one tolerates DOM.the idiot of Pablo  
 ‘Ana believes that no one tolerates that idiot Pablo.’  
 b. Ana cree que nadie quiere comer la puta torta.  
 Ana believes that no-one wants eat.INF. the fucking cake  
 ‘Ana believes that no one wants to eat the fucking cake.’

In sum, with respect to scoping-out and speaker-orientation, epithets behave like EAs. Yet, both types differ with respect to the crucial property of argument extension. Recall that, according to Lo Guercio and Orlando (2022), the meaning of a [EA+noun] combination is derived through Isolated CI plus a set of pragmatic inferences. And I suggested that Isolated CI can be the superficial reflex of the fact the EAs are late merged during the syntactic derivation. In this respect, epithets, instead, behave more like ENs in that they semantically combine with their semantic argument. Yet, they are not mixed terms and do not add any content to the truth-conditional level. The basic differences between ENs, EAs, and epithets are reflected in the following table.

	EAs	ENs	Epithets
occur in the post-nominal position	no	yes	no
argument extension	yes	no	no
truth-conditional content	no	yes	no

Table 3: Epithets, EAs and ENs

Beyond this first descriptive approximation, epithets are particularly complex both in their syntactic distribution and semantic contribution. A first problem is that a simple sequence as *Det+epithet* is ambiguous. To make the ambiguity clear let us consider the case of slur words like *puto/a* ‘f..’ in examples like (42), which can also be used as epithets, as illustrated in (43):

- (42) a. Andrés es puto.  
 Andrés is homosexual<sub>pejorative</sub>  
 ‘Andrés is a f..’  
 b. Ana es puta.  
 Ana is prostitute<sub>pejorative</sub>  
 ‘Ana is a b..’

- (43) a. el puto de Andrés...  
the epithet of Andrés  
‘that *f...* Andrés...’  
b. la puta de Ana...  
the epithet of Ana  
‘that *b...* Ana ...’

In the examples in (42), the slurs are mixed terms. At the truth-conditional level, these terms denote sets (of homosexuals or prostitutes). This meaning is absent in the epithetic uses in (43), which only preserve the expressive dimension. As already noted, [Orlando and Saab \(2020a\)](#) model such meanings as stereotypes (see section 1). These observations serve to the purposes of framing the ambiguity of cases like the following ones, first noted in [Orlando and Saab \(2020b\)](#):

- (44) a. El puto llegó tarde.  
the epithet/slur arrived late.  
‘The epithet/slur arrived late.’  
b. La puta llegó tarde.  
the epithet/slur arrived late  
‘The epithet/slur arrived late.’

The two readings are quite intuitive: either the subject DP is interpreted as an epithet or as a slur. Under the reading as an epithet, the subject DP in both examples has no classificatory force and is read as a mere insult. [Orlando and Saab \(2020b, 2021\)](#) propose that the ambiguity has a structural source. Concretely, under the epithet reading, the expressive word occurs in expletive position, Spec,NumP, modifying a pronominal index, i.e., epithets have an underlying pronominal syntax. Slurs, instead, are the head of the nominal projection, as expected for any predicative noun.

- (45) a. *el puto* as slur: [DP D [NumP [nP n [NP **puto** ]]]]  
b. *el puto* as an epithet: [DP D [NumP **puto** [nP index ]]]

There is, then, an interesting similarity between epithets and EAs in the sense of the theory of syntactic recycling introduced in section 1, namely: they are recycled in structural positions in which their content cannot be truth-conditionally relevant. Now, epithets combine functionally with individual denoting expressions; concretely, with pronouns. In effect, as [Dubinsky and Hamilton \(1998\)](#) have shown for English, epithets behave as antilogophoric pronouns and, as such, are no subject to Principle-C of binding theory. An antilogophoric context is one in which the attributive content of the epithet is not evaluated by its antecedent or, put differently, the antecedent of the epithet cannot be the perspective-bearer (cf. [Dubinsky and Hamilton 1998: 689](#)). If this is on the right track, we predict that in an antilogophoric environment in which Principle-C is also active, only the epithetic reading must be available. And this is correct:

in the following example, *el puto* can only have an epithetic interpretation, in which there is no set denotation at the truth-conditional level. The reading under which the relevant nominal phrase denotes the set of homosexuals is inaccessible. This is because under the slur reading the relevant DP is an R-expression, not a pronoun, and consequently, ruled out by Principle-C of binding theory, since the antecedent *Andrés* or *él* in the matrix clause incorrectly binds the DP containing the slur:

- (46) Aun cuando yo pueda perdonarlo, Andrés<sub>*i*</sub>/él<sub>*i*</sub> me demostró que \*Andrés<sub>*i*</sub>/el puto<sub>*i*</sub> no se lo merece.  
 ‘Even though I can forgive him, Andrés<sub>*i*</sub> showed me that \*Andrés<sub>*i*</sub> / the epithet<sub>*i*</sub> doesn’t deserve it.’

This is not the unique distributional difference between slurs and epithets. Let us briefly comment on other five relevant properties that disambiguate the two structures under consideration.

First, epithets admit (certain) degree modification. For instance, *muy* ‘very’ can modify epithets, but not slurs, which are pure nominal heads. For this reason, the adding of a degree modifier like in (47) blocks the slur reading completely:

- (47) El muy puto llegó tarde.  
 the very f... arrived late  
 ‘That complete f... arrived late.’

Second, as already noted, in the binominal construction there is no chance to interpret the expressive word as a slur:

- (48) el puto de Andrés...  
 the epithet of Andrés  
 ‘that f... Andrés...’

Third, only slurs, which are the head of their extended nominal projection, can be subject to nominal ellipsis of the usual type, in which the entire NP or nP is elided. This is not the case with epithets, which can never be part of a NP-ellipsis derivation ( $\langle \dots \rangle =$  ellipsis site):

- (49) a. el puto de al lado y el  $\langle$ puto $\rangle$  de arriba  
 the slur of to.the side and the slur of upstairs  
 ‘the f... next door and the one living upstairs...’  
 b. \*el puto de Andrés y el  $\langle$ puto $\rangle$  de Pablo  
 the epithet of Andrés and the epithet of Pablo

Note, in addition, that in (49a) the presence of a restrictive modifier in the antecedent and in the elliptical structure prevents the epithetic reading. This is part of a general pattern. As shown below, restrictive adjectives can only be combined with slurs, not with epithets, which are not set-denoting expressions and cannot, consequently, be restricted by other intersective modifiers:

- (50) a. el puto inteligente de arriba  
the slur intelligent of upstairs  
‘the intelligent f. . . living upstairs’  
b. \*el puto inteligente de Andrés  
the epithet intelligent of Andrés

Finally, according to the analysis in (45b), epithets are nominal phrases merged in the extended projection of a pronominal index; consequently, they are not the nominal heads of the relevant DPs. This was confirmed by the ban of nominal ellipsis, illustrated in (49b). Now, another crucial piece of evidence in favor of this analytical option comes from the fact that epithets, besides initial appearances, are not true agreement or concord controllers. This is confirmed by epithets that mismatch in gender features with the determiner:

- (51) a. el gallina  
the.M.SG chicken.F.SG  
‘the chicken’  
b. el bestia  
the.M.SG beast.F.SG  
‘the beast’  
c. el cabeza  
the.M.SG head.F.SG  
‘the head’

None of these examples can be interpreted with the regular truth-conditional meaning of the nouns *gallina*, *bestia* or *cabeza*, i.e., they are pure epithets. As mentioned in section 1, this is the type of facts that are amenable to an analysis along the lines of Corver (2016), according to which certain forms of expressivity require departure from the rules of grammar. Yet, on the analysis in terms of syntactic recycling, there is not any concord mismatch here because the epithet is not the concord controller, but the empty pronominal *is*. In sum, under closer inspection superficial deviations from the rules of grammar can be syntactic illusions.

The following table summarizes the set of distributional differences between slurs and epithets discussed so far:

	Epithets	Slurs
Antilogophoric effects	yes	no
Principle-C effects	no	yes
(Some) degree modification	yes	no
Compatible in binominals	yes	no
Compatible with NP-ellipsis	no	yes
Restrictive modification	no	yes
Agreement/concord controller	no	yes

Table 4: Epithets vs. slurs.

### 2.3.2 Binominals

As already noted, in Potts’ approach the epithet and its argument combine directly by CI Application, regardless of the empty or overt realization of the argument. I have adopted the idea that CI Application is the relevant interpretation axiom, but I did not provide any relevant detail. If we applied Potts’ analysis to Spanish, then we would have the following rough representation for a case like *el idiota de Andrés*:

$$(52) \quad \llbracket \text{el idiota de Andrés} \rrbracket = \text{Andrés} \bullet \text{idiota}(\text{Andrés})$$

This analysis departs from mainstream approaches to binominals in Spanish and Romance, according to which the relation between *idiot*a and *de Andrés* is property ascription, i.e., truth-conditional predication (Suñer Gratacós, 1990 for a first theory in Spanish and Den Dikken, 2006 for a general theory for Germanic and Romance). On this analysis, *el idiota de Andrés* is syntactically derived by moving the predicate *idiot*a over the *de*-DP which works as the subject of the predicational structure.

$$(53) \quad [ \text{el} [ \text{idiot}a ]_i [ \text{de Andres } t_i ] ]$$

As I have already shown, this analysis misses the generalization that in the binominal construction the expressive word does not contribute any classificatory force. Consider the following minimal pair containing the word *animal*. In the copular sentence in (54a), the word can be interpreted in two ways: either we are talking about a living being or we ascribe Andrés to the stereotype of animals. Instead, in the binominal construction in (54b), only the stereotype reading is available.

- (54) a. Andrés es (un) animal.  
           Andrés is (an) animal  
           Reading 1: ‘Andrés is an animal.’ (i.e., a living being)  
           Reading 2: ‘Andrés is a (stereotype) of an animal.’  
       b. el animal de Andrés  
           the animal of Andrés  
           ‘That animal Andrés’ (only reading 2)

The difference between slurs and epithets, as we have already seen, boils down to their merge position, namely, only slur words are merged in predicative position, in the lexical domain of sentences. Epithets, as other expressives, are merged in the high functional domain of pronominal DPs. Crucially, on this analysis, epithets are CI operators whose argument is a pronominal index. Recall the basic analysis proposed in (45b) and let us add the *of*-phrase to the simple epithet structure:

$$(55) \quad [ \text{el idiota} [ (\text{de Andres}) \textit{index} ] ]$$

This analysis implies that the dependency between the epithet and the *of*-phrase is indirect. In reality, the *de*-phrase is connected to the structure through the formal and semantic dependency it establishes with the pronominal index. In [Saab \(2022a\)](#), I have proposed that such semantic relation is equation. Simplifying, the index and the *of*-phrase are syntactically mediated through a functional head that semantically relates the two expressions and return the index if an equative presupposition is satisfied. On this view, the entire DP ends denoting a mere pronominal index at the truth-conditional dimension and a conventional implicature at the expressive dimension:

- (56)  $\llbracket \text{el idiota de Andrés} \rrbracket = g(\text{index}) \bullet \text{idiot}(\text{Andrés})$   
 Presupposition:  $\{\text{index} = \text{Andrés}\}$

Evidence in favor of the equative analysis comes from the fact that the identity introduced via presupposition generalizes to other two binominal schemes. First, some expressive nouns like *mierda* ‘shit’ or *porquería* ‘dirt’ (see the previous section) can occur pre-nominally in a binominal scheme, in which the complement of the *de*-phrase is a bare NP. In this case, there is an equation between whatever property the indexical phrase makes salient and the property that the bare NPs *libro* or *departamento* denote.

- (57) a. No voy a leer esa mierda de libro.  
 not go.1SG to read.INF that shit of book  
 ‘I am not going to read that shit of a book.’  
 b. Vivo en una porquería de departamento.  
 live.1SG in a shit of apartment  
 ‘I live in a shit of an apartment.’

The equative relation also extends to binominals that relate propositions, like illustrated in the following examples, in which the expressive word is a variety of an EN, concretely, an abstract expressive noun, like *boludez/pelotudez* ‘bullshit’ or *hijaputez* lit. ‘motherfuckness’, translated as ‘wickedness’ (see [Saab, 2022b](#)):

- (58) a. esa boludez de que Andrés canta bien  
 that bullshit of that Andrés sings well  
 ‘that bullshit that Andrés sings well’  
 b. esa hijaputez de denunciar maestros  
 that wickedness of denouncing teachers  
 ‘that wickedness of denouncing teachers’

Generalizing each case, we acknowledge three schemes, whose main difference is the syntactic category of the complement of the *de*-phrase: DPs, NPs and CPs. So, in summary, the three types of equations Spanish uses in these type of expressive constructions can be represented as follows:

- (59) a. det + epithet + of + DP

- b. det + EN + of + NP
- c. det + abstract EN + of + CP

Semantically, each of these categories extensionally correspond to expressions denoting in  $e$ ,  $\langle e, t \rangle$  or  $t$ , respectively. We have, then, three different kinds of nominal indexes associated to these three semantic types. The final picture is one in which binominals end up introducing equations for individuals, properties or propositions.

- (60)
- a.  $\langle e, \text{index} \rangle = e$
  - b.  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, \text{index} \rangle = \langle e, t \rangle$
  - c.  $\langle t, \text{index} \rangle = t$

### 3 Expressive intensification

Expressive content is massively attested in the realm of gradable constructions. For instance, the speakers of different languages have at their disposal strategies to intensify degrees of gradable expressions and, at the same time, linking this intensification to some sort of emotion. Following [Gutzmann and Turgay \(2015\)](#), I call this type of elements *expressive intensifiers* (EI). In English, for instance, EI like *fucking* or *goddamn* serve to the end of boosting degrees:

- (61) Rufus is {fucking, goddamn} tall. ([Morzycki 2011](#), 401, ex. (1))

As shown in [Morzycki \(2011\)](#), in English expressive intensifiers can co-occur with degree words:

- (62) Rufus is {really, pretty, incredibly, too} {fucking, goddamn} tall.  
([Morzycki 2011](#), 402, ex. (2a))

This does not generalize to all languages that also have EIs. In this respect, [Gutzmann and Turgay \(2015\)](#) note that, unlike English, EIs do not co-occur with degree words in German:

- (63)
- a. \*Die Party ist **sau sehr** cool.  
the party is EI very cool
  - b. \*Die Party ist **sehr sau** cool.  
the party is very EI cool
- ([Gutzmann and Turgay 2015](#), 193, ex. (24))

In this section, I focus on two types of EIs in Rioplatense Spanish, namely: (i) the prefix *re-*, and (ii) the prenominal adjective *alto/a* ‘tall’, as used by the youngest generations of this dialect. There is good evidence to conclude that these constructions exploit expressive features encoded at the left periphery of DPs.



### 3.1 Rioplatense *re-*

#### 3.1.1 Adjectival *re-*

In Rioplatense Spanish, the prefix *re-* is the most used EI and, unlike other kinds of EIs in the language, it has many perplexing properties both in terms of syntactic distribution and semantic behavior (see Kornfeld, 2010, 2012a,b; Kornfeld and Kuguel, 2013). In these sections, I briefly discuss some of these properties. When attached to adjectives, like in (64a), *re-* seems to work as the German IEs in the sense that: (i) it is semantically hybrid (a truth-conditionally degree modifier and an expressive intensifier) (cf. (64b)), and (ii) it cannot co-occur with other degree words like *muy* ‘very’ in any imaginable ordering (cf. (65)) or comparatives (cf. (66b)):

- (64) a. Ana es *re astuta*.  
Ana is EI clever  
‘Ana is IE clever.’  
b. Informally: the degree of Ana’s cleverness is above the standard ♦  
the speaker is emotional about this degree
- (65) a. \* Ana es *re muy astuta*.  
Ana is EI very clever  
b. \* Ana es *re muy astuta*.  
Ana is EI very clever
- (66) a. Ana es *más astuta que Paula*.  
Ana is more clever that Paula  
‘And is cleverer than Paula.’  
b. \* Ana es *más re astuta que Paula*.  
Ana is more EI clever that Paula

The complex *re+astuta* in these examples can have also attributive uses in the nominal domain, both in pre- and postnominal position:

- (67) a. una *re astuta abogada*  
a.F.SG EI clever.F.SG lawyer.F.SG  
‘a EI clever (female) lawyer’  
b. una *abogada re astuta*  
a.F.SG lawyer.F.SG EI clever.F.SG  
‘a EI clever (female) lawyer’

Crucially, in a pronominal exclamative, in which a *wh*-degree phrase moves to the left periphery of DPs, the *re-* construction cannot be in the pronominal position:

- (68) a. \*? *Qué re astuta abogada!*  
what EI clever.F.SG lawyer.F.SG

- b. Qué abogada *re astuta*!  
 what lawyer.F.SG EI clever.F.SG  
 ‘What a IE clever (female) lawyer!’

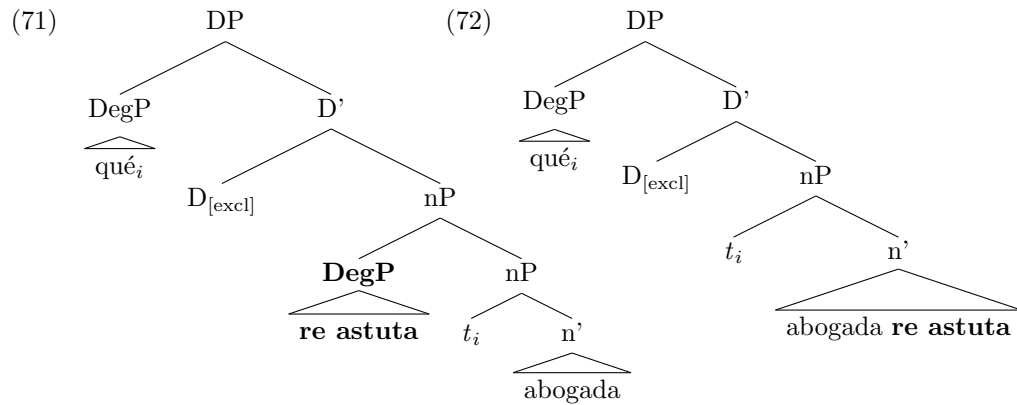
Note that the ungrammaticality of (68a) is not due to adjective position, but to the presence of the IE, since if *re-* is eliminated in (68a), the result is perfectly grammatical.

- (69) Qué *astuta* abogada!  
 what clever.F.SG lawyer.F.SG  
 ‘What a clever (female) lawyer!’

The facts in (68) suggest that in prenominal position, the entire *re-* phrase blocks *qué* wh-movement to the left periphery of the DP. This is a typical minimality effect, probably induced by the fact that *qué* and *re-* are degree expressions of the same type (Rizzi, 1990). In fact, the same holds with *muy*:

- (70) a. \*? Qué *muy astuta* abogada!  
 what very clever.F.SG lawyer.F.SG  
 b. Qué abogada *muy astuta*!  
 what lawyer.F.SG very clever.F.SG  
 ‘What a very clever (female) lawyer!’

Let us, then, assume that *re-* heads a DegP and that *qué* wh-movement is prevented by minimality, whenever the DegP headed by *re-* is in the way of wh-movement. The following trees represent the two scenarios in (68):



### 3.1.2 Adnominal *re-*

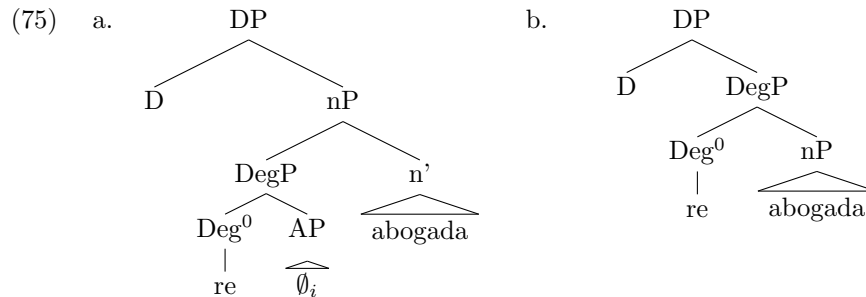
Now, the intensifier *re-* also has adnominal uses. Unlike English or German, which allow adnominal degree modification but in a restricted set of nominal environments, almost any noun, if not all, admits *re-* modification:

- (73) a. re fiesta  
 EI party  
 ‘EI party’ (i.e., a great party)
- b. re viento  
 re wind.M.SG  
 ‘EI wind’ (i.e., too much wind)
- c. re libertad  
 EI freedom  
 ‘EI freedom’ (i.e., too much freedom)
- d. re hombre  
 EI man  
 ‘EI man’ (i.e., a great/awesome man)
- e. re auto  
 EI car  
 ‘EI car’ (i.e., a great car)

Like in the adjectival use, adnominal *re-* also resists combination with a wh-exclamative (see also Kornfeld 2012b), a fact that leads to the conclusion that *re-* has a degree status in the adnominal uses, as well: *NOTA AL PIE JUICIOS*

- (74) a. \*? qué re fiesta!  
 what EI party
- b. \*? qué re abogada!  
 what EI lawyer
- c. \*? qué re guitarra!  
 what EI guitar

Following Morzycki (2009), but, in particular, the extension of Morzycki’s theory in Gutzmann and Turgay (2015), I will assume that adnominal *re-* heads a DegP. Now, since its enormous flexibility to combine with almost any type of noun (even with those for which is impossible to detect any gradable property), it is perhaps plausible that at least some adnominal uses project an indexical adjectival property, along the lines suggested in (75a). Compare with the tree in (75b):



I will not take any stance with respect to these or other possible analytical alternatives. In principle, the degree nature of adnominal *re-* is the crucial feature and any of the structures above would account for the patterns in (74). Instead, I will focus on the nature of the D head involved in the structure, of which I have said nothing so far. Kornfeld (2012b) notes that the combination *re+nP* resists combination with “true” definite articles. For instance, definite DPs with *re-* are out in environments that are clearly definite. Consider the following examples from Kornfeld (2012b):

- (76) a. \*El re auto de Juan nos dejó mudos.  
the.DEF.SG EI car of Juan CL.ACC.1PL left speechless  
b. \*Invitó también a su re amigo.  
invited.3SG too DOM DET.POSS EI friend  
c. \*El re calor nos mató.  
the EI heat CL.ACC.1PL killed.3SG

In clitic-left or -right dislocation constructions, which force the definite interpretation of the dislocated constituent, the addition of *re-* is ungrammatical too:

- (77) a. \*Lo escribió, el re artículo.  
CL.ACC.3SG wrote.3SG the EI paper  
b. \*El re artículo, lo escribió.  
the EI paper CL.ACC.3SG wrote.3SG

Yet, if instead of a topic, the relevant DP is focused, like in the following exclamative context, the result is perfect:

- (78) El re ARTÍCULO escribió!  
the EI paper wrote.3SG  
Intended: ‘Extraordinary paper he wrote!’

Other more neutral examples are also licit to the extent the obtained interpretation is indefinite. In the following two cases, *la re guitarra* o *el re artículo* are naturally paraphrased as ‘an extraordinary guitar/article’:

- (79) a. Me voy a comprar la re guitarra para que  
CL.DAT.1SG go.1SG to buy.INF the EI guitar for that  
mueras de envidia.  
die.SUBJ.2SG of envy  
‘I’m going to buy the IE guitar so you can die of envy.’  
b. No escribí el re artículo, solo uno aceptable.  
not wrote.1SG the IE paper just one acceptable  
‘I did not write the IE paper, just an acceptable one.’

Crucially, the use of the “definite” article is perfect in obligatory indefinite environments, for instance, as complements of existential sentences, which, as is well-known, are incompatible with definite complements.<sup>12</sup> Changing the definite for the indefinite is perfectly possible as well, although the change in meaning is subtle or very hard to determine. Of course, without *re-*, only the use of the indefinite is felicitous, as shown by the contrast between (80a) and (80b):

- (80) a. Hay la/una re fiesta hoy.  
 there.is the/a EI party today  
 ‘There is the/a EI party today.’ (i.e., There is an extraordinary party today.)
- b. Hay una fiesta hoy.  
 there.is a party today  
 ‘There is a party today.’
- c. \*Hay la fiesta hoy.  
 there.is the party today

If the complement of the existential is headed by a bare [-count] noun, then the indefinite is also deviant without *re-*:

- (81) a. Hay el/un re viento.  
 there.is the/a EI wind  
 ‘There is the EI wind.’ (i.e., There is too much wind.)
- b. \*Hay el/un viento.  
 there.is the/a wind

Note now that, whenever the definite article is stressed or the indefinite is accompanied with exclamative intonation, the result is perfectly grammatical in all cases and the reading we obtain is expressive intensification, as expected:

- (82) a. Hay LA fiesta hoy.  
 there.is the party today  
 ‘There is THE party today.’ (i.e., There is an extraordinary party today.)
- b. Hay EL viento.  
 there.is the wind  
 ‘There is THE wind.’ (i.e., too much wind)
- (83) a. Hay una fiesta hoy...!  
 there.is the party today  
 ‘There is a party today!’ (i.e., There is an extraordinary party today.)

---

<sup>12</sup>I am grateful to Matías Verdecchia for pointing out this fact to me.

- b. Hay un viento...!  
 there.is the wind  
 ‘It’s too windy!’

Similarly, meteorological predicates like *hace calor/frío* can be quantified with *re-* even when their internal bare nouns are not referential. Both the use of the indefinite or the definite article are possible here, but only if *re-* is added to the structure:

- (84) a. Hace el/un re calor/frío.  
 make.3SG the/a IE heat/cold  
 ‘It’s really/very hot/cold.’  
 b. \*Hace el/un calor/frío.  
 make.3SG the/a heat/cold  
 ‘It’s really/very hot/cold.’

Again, if the definite is stressed or the indefinite is accompanied with a particular rising intonation, typical of certain type of exclamative sentences, the sentences in (84b) become felicitous:

- (85) a. Hace EL calor acá.  
 make.3SG the heat here  
 ‘It’s really hot here.’  
 b. Hace un frío...!  
 make.3SG a cold  
 ‘It’s very cold!’

This set of facts point out to the conclusion that Spanish has both spurious indefinite and definite articles (see, among many others, Kornfeld 2010; Di Tullio 2004), which are typically associated to expressive constructions of different sorts, typically, exclamatives, intensification or both. This is not an isolated property of the Spanish grammar. As advanced, Gutzmann and Turgay (2015) noticed a very similar IE construction in colloquial German (and see Zhang, 2020 for similar facts in Mandarin). These intensifiers have two crucial properties, which serve to distinguish them from regular degree modifiers, namely (i) they have adnominal uses (86), which are fully ungrammatical with non-expressive degree modifiers, and (ii) they can occur preceding the definite article, a possibility also banned for regular degree modifiers. In this regard, contrast *totale* and *sau* with the non-expressive degree modifier *sehr* ‘very’:

- (86) a. Du hast gestern die totale / \*sehr Party verpasst.  
 you have yesterday the EI / very party missed  
 ‘Yesterday, you missed the EI party.’  
 b. Du hast gestern sau / \*sehr die coole Party verpasst.  
 you have yesterday EI / very the cool party missed  
 ‘Yesterday, you missed EI/\*very a cool party.’

(Gutzmann and Turgay, 2015, 189, exs. (12)-(13))

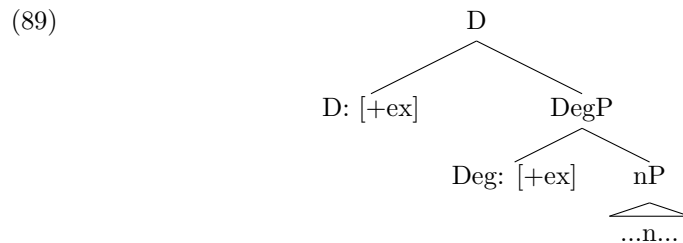
In the adnominal uses, the EI can also precede the definite article, as in the examples in (87), but the interpretation is indefinite:

- (87) a. total die Schrottkarre  
 EI the junker  
 ‘EI a junker’  
 b. total die Villa  
 EI the villa  
 ‘EI a villa’  
 (Gutzmann and Turgay, 2015, 207, exs. (67b) and (68b))

Gutzmann and Turgay (2015) and Gutzmann (2019) propose that the facts are accounted for if D syntactically composes with the EI via movement of the EI. Such a movement is motivated because the D head encodes a formal [expressive] feature. In contrast, Spanish does not have overt movement of *re-* to the D position:

- (88) a. \*re el auto  
 EI the car  
 b. \*re la fiesta  
 EI the party

Yet, in view of the facts previously discussed in this section, I would like to suggest that Spanish *re-* also involves certain expressive activity at the left periphery of DPs through the presence of an exclamative or expressive feature in the D head itself. I would indeed use Gutzmann and Turgay’s strong [expressive] feature, annotated as [+ex]. I claim that whenever *re-* has also an [+ex] feature, Agree between D and Deg alone licenses the D head; otherwise, focus or intonation would license D at PF (e.g., *EL auto, un auto...!*):



In Colloquial German, this Agree relation requires, in addition, a step of movement, probably triggered by an [EPP] feature on D or, as proposed by Gutzmann and Turgay, a weak variant of [ex], annotated as [★ex] (see Gutzmann and Turgay, 2015, 219).

### 3.2 Rioplatense *alto/a*

The youth generations of Rioplatense use the size adjective *alto* ‘tall’ to intensify certain dimensions of nominal head. The adjective shows the regular gender and number concord patterns and is obligatory prenominal.<sup>13</sup>

- (90) a. *alta* *fiesta*  
tall.F.SG party.F.SG  
‘EI party’  
b. *altas* *fiestas*  
tall.F.PL party.F.PL  
‘EI parties’  
c. #*fiesta* *alta*  
party.F.SG tall.F.SG  
d. #*fiestas* *altas*  
party.F.PL tall.F.PL
- (91) a. *alto* *auto*  
tall.M.SG car.M.SG  
‘EI car’  
b. *altos* *autos*  
tall.M.PL car.M.PL  
‘EI cars’  
c. #*auto* *alto*  
car.M.SG tall.M.SG  
d. #*autos* *altos*  
car.M.PL tall.M.PL

In these two cases, *alto* intensifies the degree of a property, in a way such that the examples can be paraphrased as *extremely good party* or *extremely good car*. In other cases, the adjective intensifies a quantity like in the following examples:

- (92) a. *alto* *ruido*  
tall.M.SG noise.M.SG  
‘EI noise’ (i.e., too much noise)  
b. *alto* *viento*  
tall.M.SG wind.M.SG  
‘EI wind’ (i.e., too much wind)

---

<sup>13</sup>For space reasons, in this section, I only discuss the adjective *alto/a* ‘tall’, but it is worth-mentioning that, in many respects, it forms a natural class with a reduced set of other adjectives not always shared by the same speakers for idiolectal or crono-lectal reasons. This set includes adjectives like *terrible* ‘terrible’, *tremendo* ‘tremendous’, *zarpado* ‘awesome, a lot of’, *reverendo* lit. ‘reverend’, etc. The most detailed analysis of this class of adjectives can be found in a series of papers by Gabriela Resnik (see Resnik 2013, 2016, 2022).



Beyond the concord facts in (90)-(91), there are some other indications that *alto* is a true adjective and *re-* is a degree adverb; for instance, *re-* can modify *alto* as other degree modifiers like *muy* ‘very’.<sup>14</sup>

- (93) re/muy alta      fiesta  
 EI/very tall.F.SG party.F.SG  
 ‘EI party’

It also perfectly combines with wh-exclamatives, like other similar adjectives:<sup>15</sup>

- (94) a. qué alta fiesta!  
 what tall party  
 ‘what a great party!’  
 b. qué gran fiesta!  
 what great party  
 ‘what a great party!’

This leads me to the conclusion that *alto/a* does not project a DegP in the syntax, but a mere adjectival projection.

Another important difference with *re-* is that, although combination with the definite article is also unnatural, *alto/a* does not force the indefinite reading of the definite article, even in existential contexts:

- (95) \*Hubo la alta fiesta.  
 there.was the.DEF tall party  
 (96) \*Ahí, venden el alto auto.  
 there sells the.DEF tall car

If the article is absent, the sentences become felicitous, as expected. Now, as noted by Resnik (2013), *alto/a* also licenses singular bare [+count] NPs in argument position, a totally unexpected pattern in Spanish (see Resnik, 2013, 58).

- (97) a. Ana escribió alto artículo.  
 Ana wrote tall paper  
 ‘Ana wrote TALL paper.’ (i.e., a great/extraordinary paper)

<sup>14</sup>In this respect, we disagree with the judgments in Resnik (2013), although some clarification is in order. In principle, as Resnik argues, it could be the case that for some speakers the combination between *alto/a* and certain degree modifiers feels a bit degraded given the relative character of the adjective, which tends to be interpreted as indicating the maximal degree of a certain property. Yet, this is different from the strong ungrammaticality between *re-* and other degree modifiers discussed in the previous section (cf. (65)), in which the incompatibility is due to the complementary distribution of two degree expressions. This is an important difference, since I do not think that *alto/a* and other related adjectives are degree expressions.

<sup>15</sup>Here, again, we do not share Resnik’s judgment, although I do not deny that some speakers could feel the combination a bit redundant, perhaps for the reasons adduced in the previous footnote.

- b. \*Ana escribió artículo.  
Ana wrote paper

Compare with (98), in which the ban of bare singular [+count] nouns in argument position is observed:

- (98) a. \*Ana leyó viejo artículo.  
Ana read old paper  
b. \*Ana leyó artículo.  
Ana read paper

Even when *alto/a* does not behave as a DegP in the syntax, it has some important similarities with wh-exclamatives. For instance, Resnik also observes that the nominal phrases including *alto/a* are naturally fronted in indubitable exclamative environments, in which subject inversion, as in other focus extractions, is mandatory:

- (99) a. Alto ASADO cocinó Juan!  
tall barbacoa cooked Juan  
'What a barbacoa did Juan cook!'  
b. Alta FIESTA organizó Ana!  
tall party organized Ana  
'What a party did Ana organize!'

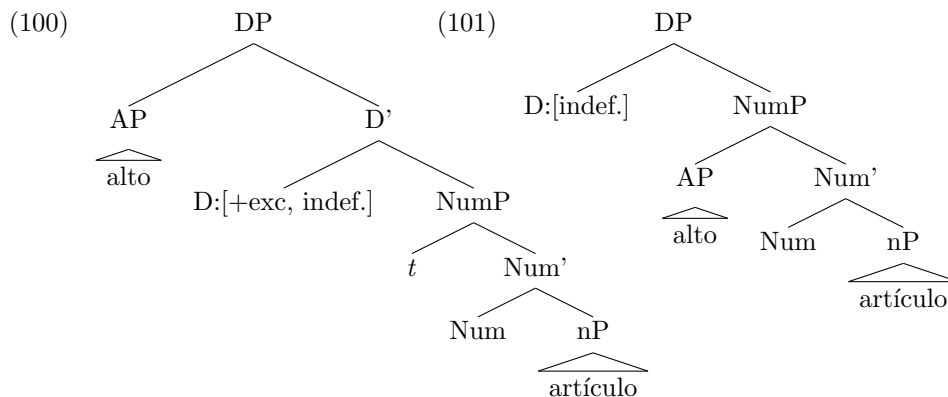
Therefore, I would like to suggest that *alto/a* has the option to move to the Spec,DP position of a sort of expressive D head, perhaps the same [+excl] D that triggers internal wh-movement. This movement blocks the phonetic realization of the indefinite exclamative D head, as in regular wh-exclamatives (compare English *What a nice book!* with Spanish *Qué (\*un) lindo libro!*) and induces the emotive reading these constructions have.<sup>16</sup> Under this analysis, *alto/a* can remain in situ as in (100) or move to Spec,DP as in (101)

<sup>16</sup>Laura Kornfeld (pers. comm.) points out to me that in some Argentinian variants, it is possible to get expressive intensification by merely leaving the exclamative *qué* in situ. Interestingly, since in this case *qué* does not move to Spec,DP, the indefinite article is overtly realized. Here is a public Instagram post from an Argentinian user:

- (i) el viernes hacemos una QUÉ fiesta.  
the Friday make.1PL a WHAT party  
'This Friday, we organize an EI party.'

([https://www.instagram.com/virgijones/p/COQDDzH0kHy/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/virgijones/p/COQDDzH0kHy/?img_index=1))

I take this phenomenon as robust evidence in favor of the analysis in terms of fronting for *alto/a* and *qué* suggested in the text.



The most salient differences between *re-* and *alto/a* can be seen in the following table:

	adnominal <i>re-</i>	<i>alto/a</i>
prenominal	yes	yes
projects or heads a DegP	yes	no
induces minimality	yes	no
can move to Spec,DP	no	yes
indefinite reading of the definite article	yes	no

Table 5: *Adnominal re-* vs. *alto/a*

## 4 Expressivity and politeness

So far, I have discussed a series of phenomena that require a sort of multidimensional approach to meaning. I have followed the spirit of Kaplan (1999)'s original proposal as modeled by Potts (2005), according to which expressive meanings are calculated as propositions in a parallel dimension of meaning in which use conditions are computed. Expressive adjectives, epithets and certain intensifiers, and the grammar in which they all participate, can be conceived of under this multidimensional view.<sup>17</sup> Certain address systems and the different grammars of honorification attested in many languages are also amenable to a multidimensional approach. In this section, I first briefly discuss the *voseo* system of Rioplatense Spanish and, then, I focus on the adnominal honorifics *don/doña* and *señor/a*, which show some striking similarities with the behavior of epithets and EAs.

<sup>17</sup>And under other multidimensional alternatives, of course. For instance, another prominent multidimensional approach uses expressive indexes, which relate individuals through different degrees of expressivity, instead of conventional implicatures, which are propositional in nature. One version of this type of expressivity theory can be found in Potts (2007). In McCready (2019), there is an in-depth development along these lines for register and honorification. At any rate, both under the propositional or the expressive index approach, honorific, register and address systems in general can be modeled as expressives in the favored sense of multidimensional semantics.

## 4.1 The Rioplatense *voseo*

Peninsular Spanish has four second person pronouns, two in the plural and two in the singular, distinguished for many social parameters affecting the speaker-addressee relation. The use conditions are extremely complex and I will not attempt to model the proper content of the relevant distinctions. For the purposes of this brief description, I will use labels as FORMAL / INFORMAL and the like.

- |       |                            |       |                                 |
|-------|----------------------------|-------|---------------------------------|
| (102) | a. tú<br>you.2SG.INFORMAL  | (103) | a. vosotros<br>you.2PL.INFORMAL |
|       | b. usted<br>you.2SG.FORMAL |       | b. ustedes<br>you.2PL.FORMAL    |

In the Rioplatense variety spoken in Buenos Aires, the informal *vos* is used instead the more generalized form *tú*. Finally, as in most American dialects, if not all, the Peninsular *vosotros* is lost and, consequently, the expressive opposition is lost, as well.

- |       |                                   |       |                    |
|-------|-----------------------------------|-------|--------------------|
| (104) | a. <i>vos</i><br>you.2SG.INFORMAL | (105) | ustedes<br>you.2PL |
|       | b. usted<br>you.2SG.FORMAL        |       |                    |

As for the formal *usted*, it historically derived from the third-person nominal construction *vuestra merced* ‘your grace’ and shows, then, third-person inflection in the entire paradigm (e.g., *usted/ella canta* ‘you<sub>formal</sub>/she sings’, *la vi a usted/ella* ‘I CL.SCC.F.3SG saw 2SG.FORMAL/HER’, and so on). According to Collins and Ordóñez (2021), *usted* is an imposter in the sense of Collins and Postal (2012). This view amounts to analyzing *usted* as a non-pronominal third-person DP, whose internal structure contains a second-person:

- (106) [DP D [ TÚ *usted*]]

(Collins and Ordóñez, 2021, 2)

One piece of evidence in favor of an imposter analysis comes from the fact that in Peninsular Spanish, *usted* does not trigger clitic doubling. If this is correct, *usted* could not be treated as a true pronoun, since strong pronouns do trigger clitic doubling in all dialects. Yet, the prediction is not borne out in Rioplatense Spanish, where clitic doubling with *usted* is mandatory, an indubitable indication of its pronominal nature.<sup>18</sup>

- (107) a. Ana lo respeta a usted.  
Ana CL.ACC.M.3SG.FORMAL respects DOM you.FORMAL  
‘Ana respects you<sub>FORMAL</sub>.’

<sup>18</sup>I will gloss the inflectional features of *usted* as 3SG and add FORMAL to the gloss to distinguish *usted* and its pronominal variants (e.g., *lo, los, las, las*) both from *vos* and from third person pronouns.

- b. \* Ana respeta a usted.  
 Ana respects DOM you<sub>FORMAL</sub>

Regardless of this dialectal difference, to which I will come back, in both dialects the contrast between *tú/usted* or *vos/usted* is expressive since it passes all the relevant expressive diagnostics. I illustrate this only with Rioplatense Spanish, but the same facts hold in Peninsular Spanish. In effect, in the following examples the formal/informal distinction that each pronoun introduces is (i) speaker oriented (for instance, in (108a) it is the speaker who is in an (in)formal relation with respect to the addressee, not the matrix subject), and (ii) it scopes out over different truth-conditional operators:

- (108) a. Ana cree que *vos/usted* no  
 Ana believes that 2SG.INFORMAL/3SG.FORMAL not  
*venís/viene* a la fiesta.  
 come.2SG/comes to the party  
 ‘Ana believes that you<sub>INFORMAL/FORMAL</sub> do/does not come to the party.’
- b. Ana no *te/lo* vio a  
 Ana not CL.ACC.2SG.INFORMAL/CL.ACC.M.3SG.FORMAL saw DOM  
*vos/usted*.  
 2SG.INFORMAL/3SG.FORMAL  
 ‘Ana did not see you<sub>INFORMAL/FORMAL</sub>.’
- c. *Te/lo* vio Ana a  
 CL.ACC.2SG.INFORMAL/CL.ACC.M.3SG.FORMAL saw Ana DOM  
*vos/usted*.  
 textsc2sg.informal3SG.FORMAL  
 ‘Did Ana see you<sub>INFORMAL/FORMAL</sub>?’
- d. Si *vos/usted* *estás/está* solo, sería bueno  
 if 2SG.INFORMAL/3SG.FORMAL are/is alone, would.be good  
 visitar-*te/lo*.  
 visit.INF=CL.ACC.2SG.INFORMAL/CL.ACC.M.3SG.FORMAL  
 ‘If you<sub>INFORMAL/FORMAL</sub> are/is alone, it would be good to visit you<sub>INFORMAL/FORMAL</sub>.’

The next question is how this contrast in the address system is encoded. In principle, one could take both items as mixed expressives, as in [McCready \(2019\)](#):<sup>19</sup>

- (109) a.  $\llbracket \text{usted} \rrbracket = g(i) \blacklozenge \text{Formal}(s_c, a_c)$   
 b.  $\llbracket \text{vos} \rrbracket = g(i) \blacklozenge \text{Informal}(s_c, a_c)$

Alternatively, we can follow the spirit in [Potts \(2007\)](#), for whom the [+/-formal] features are  $\phi$ -features that are combined with the pronominal index through functional application for expressive types (in the system in [Potts 2005](#), the relevant axiom would be CI Application, as defined in (33)).

<sup>19</sup>Although as observed in footnote 17, she adopts an expressive index approach to register and honorification.

- (110) a.  $\llbracket \text{Formal(usted)} \rrbracket = g(i) \bullet \text{Formal}(s_c, a_c)$   
 b.  $\llbracket \text{Informal(vos)} \rrbracket = g(i) \bullet \text{Informal}(s_c, a_c)$

As far as I can tell, it is not easy to adjudicate between these two types of approaches. Empirical evidence shows that *vos* and *usted* mismatch in  $\phi$ -features. As is well-known, switching from a form to another in the same discourse leads to deficient contexts. Consider, for instance, the following example in which the same speaker switches from *usted* to *vos*:

- (111) Usted                    es nuevo acá. De dónde sos?  
 you.3SG.FORMAL is new here. of where are.2SG.INFORMAL  
 ‘You<sub>FORMAL</sub> are new here. Where are you<sub>INFORMAL</sub> from?’

A discourse like this introduces some inconsistencies in the address system which are easy to pinpoint, namely, the speaker is being formal and informal with respect to the addressee. Now, there are cases in which the mismatch leads to ungrammaticality. For instance, *usted* cannot be the antecedent of an embedded *vos* subject which it c-commands, and viceversa:

- (112) a. \* Usted                    me                    dijo que (vos)  
 you.3SG.FORMAL CL.DAT.1SG said that (you.2SG.INFORMAL)  
 estás cansado.  
 are tired  
 intended: ‘You<sub>FORMAL</sub> told me that (you<sub>INFORMAL</sub>) are tired.’  
 b. \* Vos                            me                    dijiste que (usted)  
 you.2SG.INFORMAL CL.DAT.1SG said that (you.3SG.FORMAL)  
 está cansado.  
 is tired  
 Intended: ‘You<sub>INFORMAL</sub> told me that (you<sub>FORMAL</sub>) are tired.’

The same holds when there is a mismatch in the form of reflexive anaphors:

- (113) a. \* Usted                    te                            critica (a  
 you.3SG.FORMAL CL.REFL.2SG.INFORMAL criticizes DOM  
 vos                            mismo).  
 you.2SG.INFORMAL self  
 Intended: ‘You<sub>FORMAL</sub> criticizes yourself<sub>INFORMAL</sub>.’  
 b. \* Vos                            se                            criticás (a  
 you.2SG.INFORMAL CL.REFL.M.3SG.FORMAL criticize DOM  
 usted                            mismo).  
 you.3SG.FORMAL self  
 Intended: ‘You<sub>INFORMAL</sub> criticize yourself<sub>FORMAL</sub>.’

These facts cannot be explained just because of an inconsistency in register. The sentences are strongly ungrammatical, showing that the problem is a failure in the agreement system. Since the *vos/usted* opposition is formally encoded in

terms of person  $\phi$ -features, even when both forms signal the addressee, one could be tempted to reduce the ungrammaticality of the relevant examples to a person mismatch. The problem is that the [3P] feature in *usted* does not introduce any presupposition of a true third-person (i.e., a non-participant presupposition), so it does not look entirely implausible to see a sort of syncretism here, between *usted* and a true third-person singular pronoun. Under this analysis, the [3SG] feature would realize both a non-participant semantic feature and an honorific feature, in which case an analysis along the lines of (110) could have some plausibility. But even if this is correct, I do not see clear arguments to reject the mixed lexical entries in (109).

In sum, there is no robust evidence for treating the second-singular person pronouns in the Spanish paradigm as mixed terms or as containing a (in)formality operator scoping over a pronominal index. The picture is even more complex when one considers the Rioplatense address system in Uruguay. Bertolotti (2011) has shown that some Uruguayan systems are tripartite, including the pronoun *tú* ‘you.2SG.INFORMAL’, which inflects exactly like the *vos* verbal paradigm:

- (114) a. Usted                      canta.  
           you.3SG.FORMAL sings  
           ‘You<sub>FORMAL</sub> sings’  
       b. Tú                              cantás.  
           you.2SG.INFORMAL sing.2SG.INFORMAL  
           ‘You<sub>INFORMAL</sub> sing.’  
       c. Vos                             cantás.  
           you.2SG.INFORMAL sing.2SG.INFORMAL  
           ‘You<sub>INFORMAL</sub> sing.’

These examples are ordered in terms of their use conditions from the most distant uses to the most informal, intimate ones, although, as Bertolotti shows, use-conditions in the Uruguayan case are much more complex than I can show here. In some Uruguayan systems, in particular, in the area of Rocha, a fourth case is added, the standard *tú cantas*, which replicates the Peninsular and other Latin-American patterns. In this case, the verb inflects as expected for a *tuteante* form. This form is considered highly cult and educated. Therefore, in addition to specific issues concerning address meanings, considerations over global register must be added to the discussion in the Uruguayan case. For such a complex system, the brief comments made in this section are clearly insufficient. I think that for non-binary systems of this kind a good case for an expressive index approach can be made, along the lines of McCready (2019).

## 4.2 *Don/doña* vs. *señor(a)*

Honorifics like *don/doña* are triggers of conventional implicatures in a non-at-issue meaning dimension. Consider the following examples:

- (115) a. Don Luis llegó tarde.  
 HON.M Luis arrived late  
 ‘Mr. Luis arrived late.’  
 b. Doña María llegó tarde.  
 HON.F Maria arrived late  
 ‘Mrs. María arrived late.’

Like epithets, the honorific *don/doña* in modern Spanish is a pure expressive in Potts’ (2005) sense, i.e., functions that take an entity as argument and return the same entity at the at-issue level and a conventionally implicated proposition in a parallel meaning dimension. Evidence that this is the case is provided by standard scoping-out and speaker-orientation tests. In effect, as the following examples show, this honorific scopes out over truth-conditional operators and the meaning it projects is (at least, by default) speaker-oriented:

- (116) a. Ana cree que don Luis no viene a la fiesta.  
 Ana believes that HON.M Luis not comes to the party  
 ‘Ana believes that Mr. Luis does not come to the party.’  
 b. Ana no vio a don Luis.  
 Ana not saw DOM HON.M Luis  
 ‘Ana did not see Mr. Luis.’  
 c. Vio Ana a don Luis?  
 saw Ana DOM HON.M Luis  
 ‘Did Ana see Mr. Luis?’  
 d. Si don Luis está solo, sería bueno visitarlo.  
 if HON.M Luis is alone, would.be good visit.INF=HIM  
 ‘If Mr. Luis is alone, it would be good to visit him.’

A plausible Pottsian lexical entry for *don/doña* would be as follows:

- (117) Lexical entry for *don/doña*:  $[[\text{don/doña}] = \lambda x. \text{Respect}(c_{\text{speaker}}, x): \langle e^a, t^c \rangle$

Then, for an honorific phrase like *don Luis*, the semantic value we obtain results from adding a conventional implicature to the regular denotation of the proper name:

- (118)  $[[\text{don Luis}]] = \text{Luis} \bullet \text{Respect}(c_{\text{speaker}}, \text{Luis})$

This analysis aims at capturing scoping-out and speaker-orientation effects and it does it in the same way as other Potts’ expressives (concretely, those that fall under CI Application). Now, note that the behavior of *don/doña* is similar to the the behavior of epithets discussed in section 2.3 with respect to two properties: (i) it only combines with individual denoting phrases, concretely, proper names, and (ii) it does not induce any type of argument extension, i.e., the target of the speaker’s respect is always the individual denoted by the sister of the honorific. The first property explains why the following sentences are ungrammatical as a semantic type mismatch, i.e., *médico* or *abogada* denote in  $\langle e, t \rangle$  and cannot serve as arguments of the honorific operator:



- (119) a. \*Llegó el don médico.  
arrived the HON.M doctor
- b. \*La doña abogada envió el expediente a tiempo.  
the HON.FEM lawyer.F sent the expedient to time

That there is no argument extension is clear from the set of previous examples, although the following ones make the point even clearer, since for each example is impossible to associate the honorific with an argument other than the one it modifies syntactically:

- (120) a. Doña María habló con Paula.  
HON.F Maria talked with Paula  
'Mrs. María talked to Paula.'  
(not: 'María talked to Mrs. Paula.')
- b. María habló con doña Paula.  
Maria talked with HON.F Paula  
'María talked to Mrs. Paula.'  
(not: 'Mrs. María talked to Paula.')

So far, honorifics and epithets behave alike in the sense that both pattern as expected in terms of semantic compositionality. On the approach I favor here, this is a consequence that both are CI operators subject to CI application. EAs, instead, are subject to Isolated CI (see (31) in section 2.1), as the byproduct of being late merged in the syntactic derivation. However, Gutzmann (2019) suggests, although indirectly, that the difference between epithets and EAs could be the byproduct of their different category status:

It is very interesting that expressive adjectives show this split between where they are realized and where they are interpreted. This is especially surprising given the fact that expressive epithets like *bastard* in that *bastard Kresge* have semantically been analyzed in the same way as expressive adjectives. Why should this be? What is special about adjectives and their place inside the DP that they behave in this way, whereas nominal elements do not seem to behave in a similar way? [Gutzmann, 2019; 264-265]

The fact that *don/doña* also pertains to the nominal category seems to point out to the same conclusion. Yet, this could be a hasty conclusion. In the realm of honorification, Spanish also makes use of the noun *señor(a)*, which indistinctly combines with common nouns (121) or proper names (122) and adds the conventional implicature that the speaker respects the relevant lawyer or Ana:

- (121) La señora abogada llegó temprano.  
the Mrs lawyer.F arrived early  
'The HON attorney arrived early.'

- (122) a. La señora Ana llegó temprano.  
 the Mrs. Ana arrived early  
 ‘Mrs. Ana arrived early.’  
 b. Señora Ana, entre, por favor.  
 Mrs. Ana come-in please  
 ‘Mrs. Ana, please come in.’

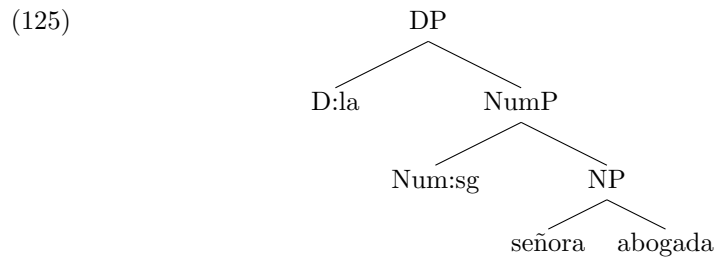
*Señor(a)* is also a Pottsian expressive, as shown by the fact that it exhibits typical scoping-out and speaker-orientation properties:

- (123) a. Ana cree que el señor abogado no viene a la fiesta.  
 Ana believes that the HON.M lawyer not come to the party.  
 ‘Ana believes that the HON lawyer does not come to the party.’  
 b. Ana no vio al señor abogado.  
 Ana not saw DOM.DET HON.MASC lawyer  
 ‘Ana did not see the HON lawyer.’  
 c. Vio Ana al señor abogado?  
 saw Ana DOM.DET HON.M lawyer  
 ‘Did Ana see the HON lawyer?’  
 d. Si el señor abogado está solo, sería bueno visitarlo.  
 if the HON.M lawyer is alone, would.be good visit.INF=HIM  
 ‘If the HON lawyer is alone, it would be good to visit him.’

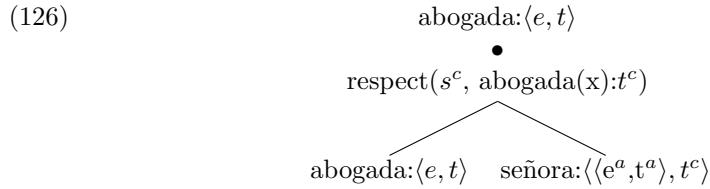
In effect, all the sentences above express that the speaker respects this or that individual, despite the fact that the expressive is embedded under an attitude verb, negation, a question or the antecedent of a conditional.

In the light of these facts, one may be tempted to provide an analysis for *señor(a)* similar to the one we proposed for *don/doña*, together with a syntactic analysis like the one in (125):

(124)  $[[señor(a)]] = \lambda x. \text{respect}(s^c, x): \langle \langle e^a, t^a \rangle, t^c \rangle$



If this were correct, CI Application would deliver the following result:

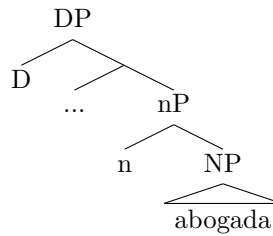


This analysis, however, misses an important point, namely that *señor(a)*, unlike *don/doña*, exhibits argument extension. Thus, the intuitive reading of (127) is not that the speaker respects the set of lawyers, but that she respects the particular lawyer denoted by the entire DP. Put differently, *señor(a)* is interpreted in a place different from the one in which it occurs. Evidently, compared to EAs, this type of argument extension is much more restricted in the sense that the speaker’s respect is directed to the individual denoted by the entire DP in which the honorific is included. It cannot be associated to the entire proposition or to another individual in the environment. The impossibility of other argument extension patterns seem to follow from pragmatic reasons, probably related to the proper content of the honorific, whose target is always an individual and not a proposition (one does not respect propositions), and the Gricean maxim of manner (see [Lo Guercio and Saab, 2024](#) for a more detailed discussion):

- (127) a. La señora abogada visitó a su cliente.  
           the HON lawyer visited DOM POSS client  
           ‘The HON lawyer visited her client.’  
 b. ☹(the lawyer)  
 c. # ☹(lawyer)  
 d. # ☹(her client)  
 e. # ☹(The lawyer visited her client.)

In order to explain this difference between *don/doña* and *señor(a)* distribution, I suggest that we extend the analysis for epithets and EAs given in section 2 to these two types of honorifics. Concretely, *don/doña*, like epithets, behave as a pure Pottsian expressive subject to CI application (or any similar functional axiom), whereas *señor(a)*, like EAs, is a late-merged modifier that gives rise to an isolated conventional implicature. Put differently, for DPs containing an EA or the honorific *señor(a)*, there is a first step in the syntactic derivation in which both are absent. Consider two nominal phrases like *la maldita abogada* ‘the EA lawyer’ and *la señora abogada* ‘the HON lawyer’. There is a first syntactic cycle in which both share the same underlying structure:

(128)

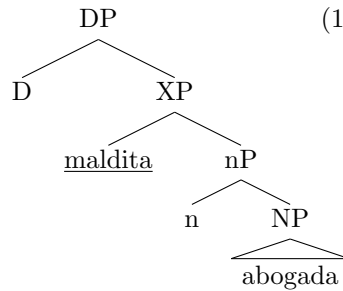


Once at LF, this DP is interpreted in the usual way:

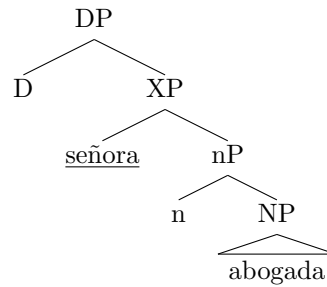
(129)  $\llbracket \text{la abogada} \rrbracket = \iota y[\text{abogada}(y)]$

Then, in another step of the cyclic derivation, *maldita* and *señora* are merged in non-predicative positions, i.e., above the nP level:

(130)



(131)



To the output of these syntactic structures, Isolated CI (or a similar mechanism for interpreting use-conditions) applies and delivers the already known expressive or honorific meanings.

## 5 Summary and further aspects of expressivity in Spanish

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed many expressive phenomena involving expressive modification, intensification and honorification. The data discussed permit to conclude that:

- EAs and the honorific *señor/a* are compatible with different degrees of argument extension readings, as a byproduct of being late inserted during the syntactic and semantic derivation.
- Epithets like *idiot* and the honorific *don/doña* are pure expressives that take an *e*-denoting expression as argument and return the same expression at the truth-conditional level and a conventional implicature at the expressive dimension. As they combine functionally with their arguments in the same cycle of syntactic and semantic derivation, they cannot produce any type of argument extension.

- Expressive intensification in Rioplatense Spanish involves mixed degree (*re-*) or adjectival phrases (*alto/a*) which are used to expressively intensify degrees, properties or quantities. The facts discussed confirm [Gutzmann and Turgay \(2015\)](#) and [Gutzmann \(2019\)](#)'s idea that some types of expressive intensification across languages require the postulation of expressive features at the left periphery of DPs. Languages vary as to how the different types of expressive intensifiers are linked to such an expressive feature (by Agree or movement, for instance).

Other facts introduced in the previous sections lead to more provisional conclusions. The expressive status of postnominal ENs (see section 2.2) or of the *vos/usted* opposition (see 4.1) needs further research to determine their mixed or pure expressive nature among other relevant open issues.

As usual, I have addressed only a minimal fragment of the grammar of expressivity in (Rioplatense) Spanish. Many other facts not discussed here should shed further light on many of the issues left open. Let me just mention a brief list of interesting phenomena that deserve to be in the research agenda of the theory of expressivity.

- I have said nothing about expressive morphology. Spanish is rich in expressive affixation. [Kornfeld \(2010\)](#), for instance, has detected many interesting differences at the phrasal and the word level in the domain of expressive intensification.
- The syntax and semantics of vocatives are extremely informative when it comes to adjudicating among different theories of expressivity. Some words lose their predicative import when used as vocatives (e.g., *Flaco, vení!* lit. 'Skinny, come!', in which *flaco* is just an informal vocative), a fact that seems to favor the recycling theory in [Saab \(2022a\)](#)). Other vocatives keep their truth-conditional force, but are ornamented with an honorific, expressive flavor (e.g., *Profesor, por favor, venga* 'Professor, please, come.')
- Several facts favor the idea that at least some forms of expressivity must be calculated not in the semantics, but at PF. For instance, [Bohrn \(2018\)](#) has studied the so-called *vesre talk* in Rioplatense Spanish, a colloquial strategy of syllable inversion that affects register. A speaker that says *féca* instead of *café* 'coffee' is communicating that she is in a highly informal context. Related to this, I have argued that it could be the case that for various biased words, use-conditions must be deduced entirely at PF (see [Saab 2021](#)). As mentioned in the introduction, that some forms of expressivity only arise at PF was already suggested in the literature, in particular, by [Corver \(2016\)](#). Perhaps, *vesre* talk, a sort of PF manipulation, is a good case for the radical deviation approach Corver has suggested.
- Corver himself has also conjectured that certain types of linguistic duplications, which are clearly expressive, can also be amenable to an analysis in

terms of grammatical deviation. Rioplatense Spanish, as many other languages, has many reduplicated structures with different expressive flavors (e.g., *Es re re astuta* lit. ‘Is EI EI clever’, but also *es ASTUTA ASTUTA* lit. ‘is CLEVER CLEVER’, i.e., she is REALLY clever). Rioplatense Spanish also has a type or anti-adjacent emphatic verbal duplication in which two copies of the same verb are licensed only if an XP intervenes between the two copies (e.g., *Está rico, está!* lit. ‘Is delicious, is’). I have studied this pattern from a purely morphosyntactic point of view and shown that there is no reason to think that the derivation of these sentences requires any deviation of the rules of grammar (see [Saab 2008, 2011](#), and [Saab 2017](#) for a general theory of verbal doubling in Romance).

- Perhaps, the so-called inclusive language in Spanish would require an approach along the lines proposed by Corver. In a version of the inclusive language, a new gender morpheme is added to the gender system (e.g., given the standard gender opposition *niño/niña* ‘boy/girl’, the speaker adds the form *niñe*, which is neutral with respect to gender specification or indicates that the referent has a non-binary identity). Of course, there are not native speakers of this gender system, but the phenomenon is extended, in particular in Buenos Aires. The reactions this way of speaking produces are clearly expressive both in terms of its social impact and in terms of perceptual reactions.

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