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Last names, Agreement and the structure of DPs

José Camacho



UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS CHICAGO



Dedicated to the memory of Pieter Muysken



https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/files/2020/11/muysken_veldwerk_ecuador_2016.jpg



Roadmap

1. Distribution of plural last names
 1. Phi-feature mismatches
 2. Interpretation
2. Agreement and plurality
 1. A null plural N
 2. Similarity with N-N compounds
 3. Deriving readings
3. Crosslinguistic variation



Plural last names

Distribution of plural last names

- Plural last names must appear with a determiner:
 1. Los Sánchez llegaron a su casa.
the.PL Sánchez.PL arrived.PL to their home
'The Sanchez (family) arrived home.'
 2. *Sánchez llegaron a su casa.
Sánchez.PL arrived.PL to their home

Distribution of plural last names -morphology

- Plural morphology is determined by two properties:
 1. The morphophonological shape of the last name
 2. Subtle semantic differences

Distribution of plural last names -morphology

1. The morphophonological shape of the last name

For last names ending C, PL=SG

For last names ending in V, PL=SG or -es

a. El/Lo-s Cortés
the.SG/the-PL Cortes ‘The Corteses’

b. Lo-s Velasco/Velasco-s
the-PL Velasco/Velasco-PL ‘The Velascos’

Plural last names are plural

- Importantly, whether the last name is plural or not, phi-features on the verb are plural
 - a. *Los Velasco lleg-ó ayer ($*D_{PL} \leftrightarrow V_{SG}$)
 - b. *El Velasco(s) llegar-on ayer ($*D_{SG} \leftrightarrow V_{PL}$)
 - c. **Los Velasco/Velasco-s llegar-on ayer**
'The Velascos arrived yesterday'

Plural last names are plural –Distributive predicates

Stubbornly distributive predicates (anaphora, distributive *each*, etc., Schwarzschild 2011) test for semantic plurality

1. a. Lo-s Velasco siempre piensan en sí mismo-s.
the-PL Velasco.SG always think.PL in themselves-PL ‘The Velasco always think about themselves.’

b. En una competición, lo-s Velasco pueden levantar 100 kilos cada uno.
in a competition, the-PL Velasco-PL can lift 100 kilos each one
‘In a competition, the Velascos can lift 100 kilos each.’

c. Lo-s Velasco son grande-s.
the.PL Velasco.SG be.PL large-PL
‘The Velasco are large.’

Interpretive differences (Subtle semantic differences)

- *los Velasco* (no PL marking) → Group reading most salient (“the Velasco family”)

a. Lo-s Velasco llegar-on ayer.

the-PL Velasco.SG arrived-PL yesterday ‘The Velasco family arrived yesterday.’



- *los Velascos* (PL marking) → Individual reading (“the Velasco family members”)

b. Lo-s Velasco-s llegar-on ayer.

the-PL Velasco-PL arrived-PL yesterday ‘The Velasco family members arrived yesterday.’



Last names vs. common nouns

- This pattern only happens with last names, common nouns show full agreement and don't alternate interpretations depending on phi-feature values
 1. Lo-s niño-s/*niño llegaro-n
the-PL child-PL/child.SG arrived-PL
 2. *Lo-s comité decidiero-n aprobar la propuesta
the-PL committee.SG decided.PL to approve the proposal

Preliminary generalizations

1. The DP is plural, regardless of the morphology on the last name
 - a. The DP obligatorily agrees with the verb in plural
 - b. The DP is possible with distributive predicates
 - c. The last name does not drive agreement with the verb
2. If the last name is plural → distributive interpretation
3. If the last name is singular → a) group (of individuals) interpretation or b) individuals
4. This pattern only happens with proper last names, not with common names

Agreement/plurality of the DP

Where does plurality come from?

The singular last name (*los Velasco*) triggers plural agreement on the verb

Los Velasco llegaro-n

the-PL Velasco arrived-PL “The Velascos arrived”

This means that S-V agreement is not determined by N, but by another category.

Proposal: A null NP carries a plural feature



General idea

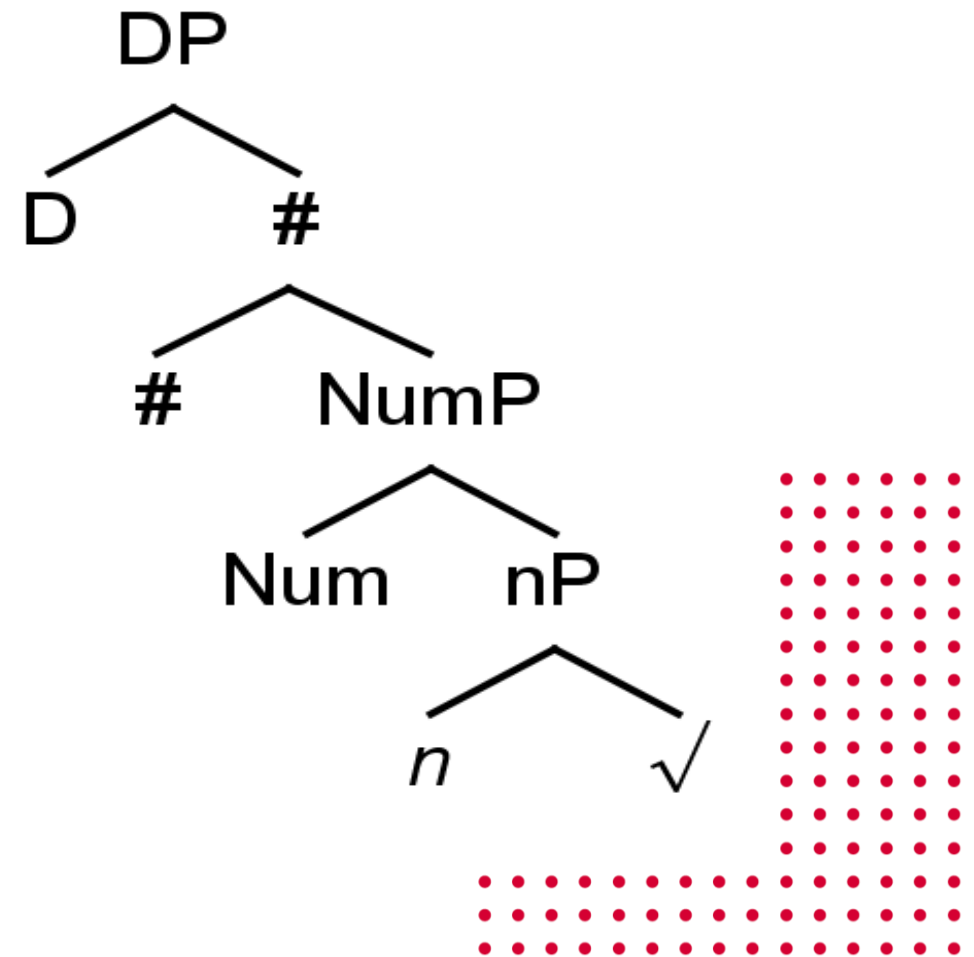
The structure of plural last names is similar to that of N-N compounds, overt plural agreement tracks the head of the structure:

- The first N for compounds
- The null N for last names

DP structure (Distributed Morphology)

Nominals involve:

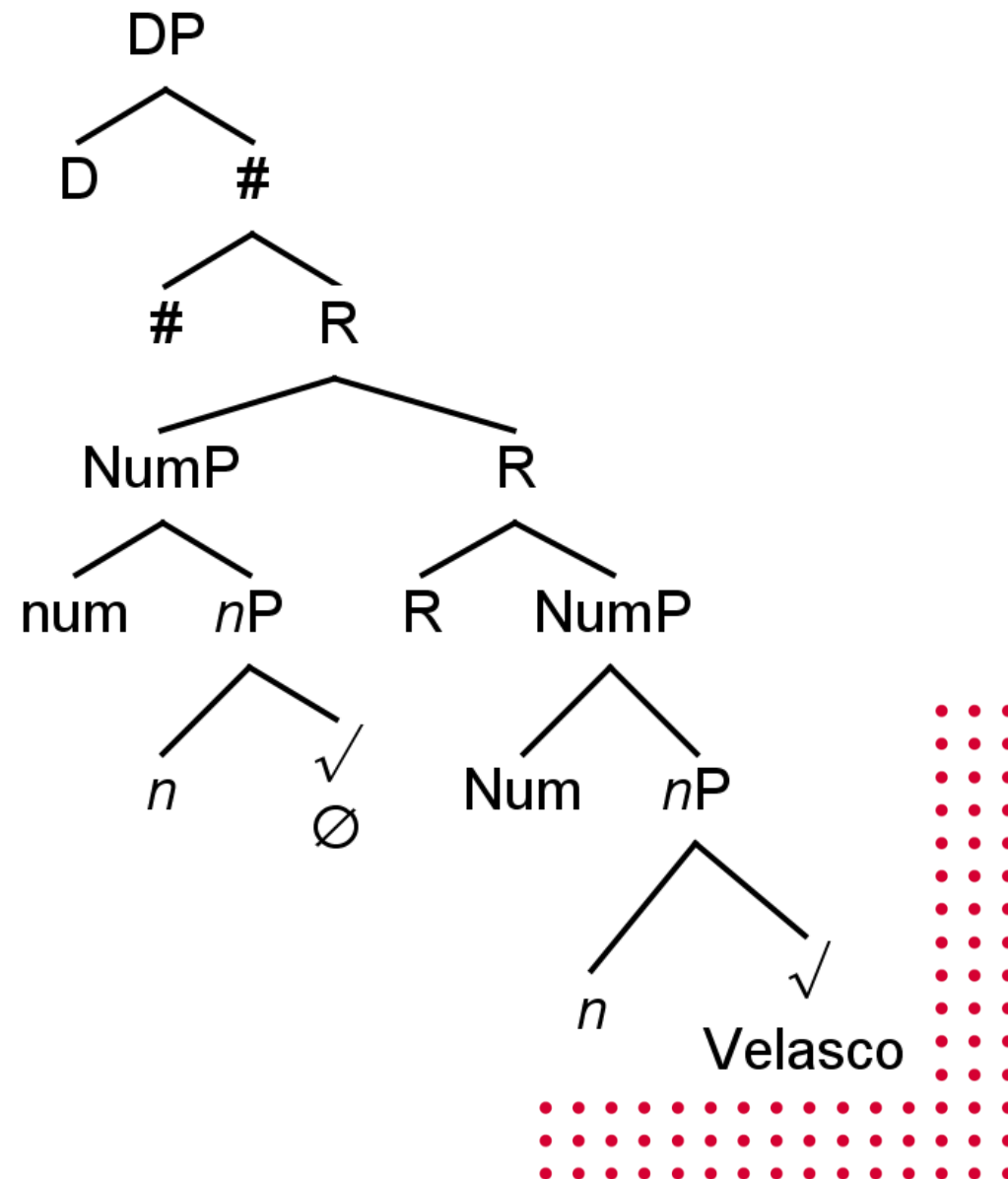
- a category-neutral root
- a nominalizer (*n*, cf. Marantz 1997, Embick & Marantz 2008)
- a NumP (Ritter 1988, Picallo 1991)
- A higher # head related to counting/plurality (Borer 2005)



Proper last names

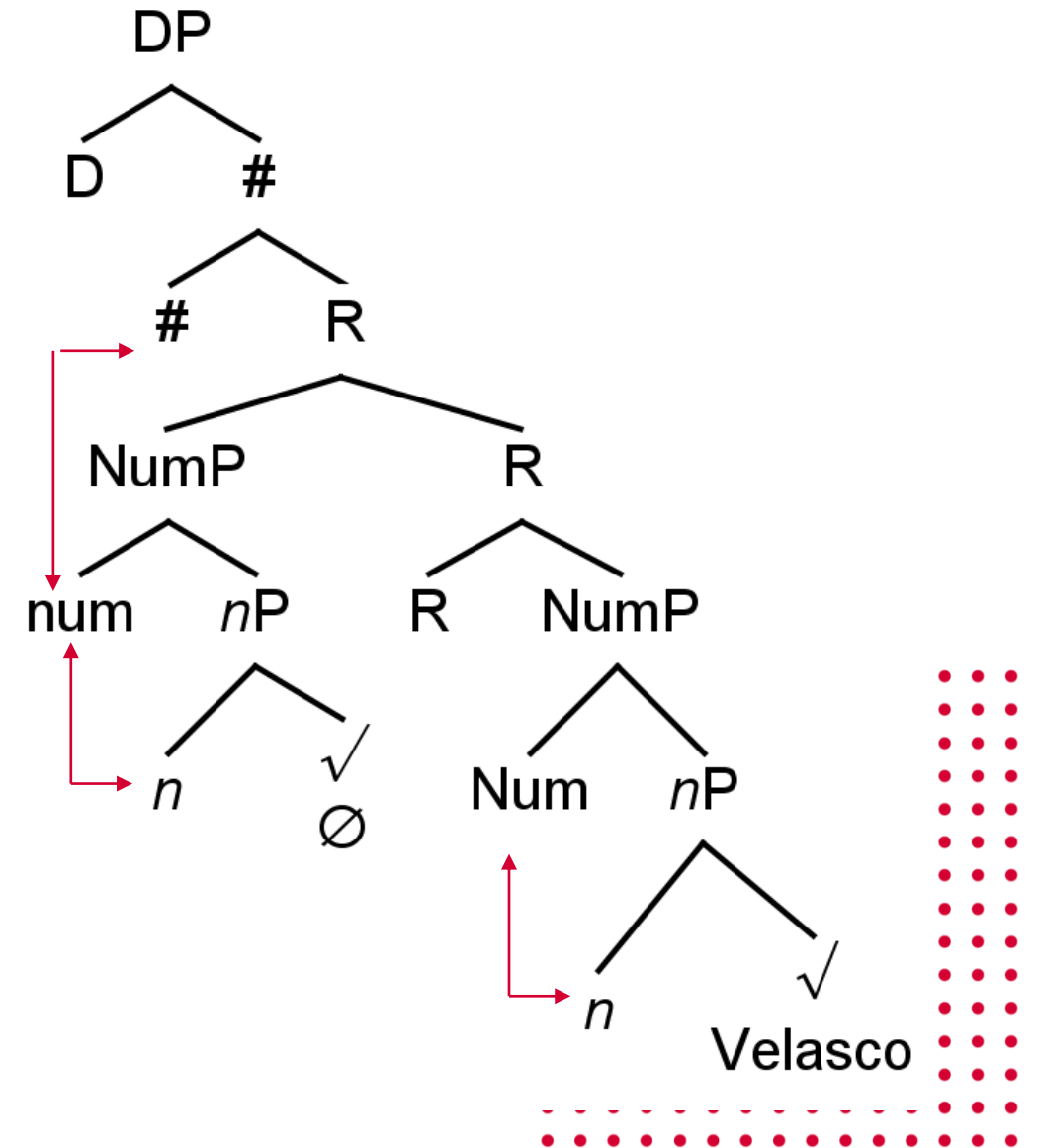
Proper last names include:

- A null nominal related to the last name
- A relational head, R (cf. den Dikken 2006, more on this later)



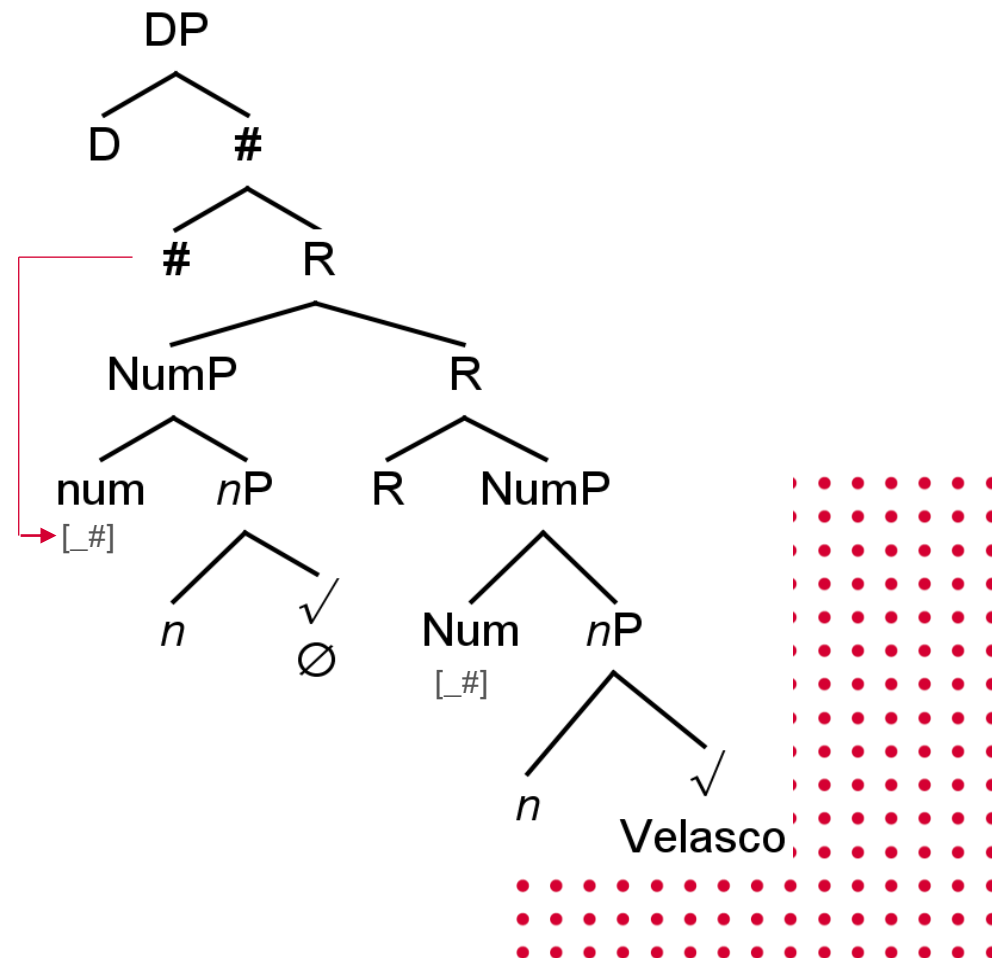
Agreement patterns

- Independent NumPs ensure possible number mismatches
- The higher NumP is the closest target for D/#
- Possible agreement combinations:
 - $D_{[SG]}$ $Num_{[SG]}$ $Num_{[SG]}$
 - $D_{[PL]}$ $Num_{[PL]}$ $Num_{[SG]}$
 - $*D_{[SG]}$ $Num_{[PL]}$ $Num_{[PL/SG]}$
 - $*D_{[SG]}$ $Num_{[SG]}$ $Num_{[PL]}$



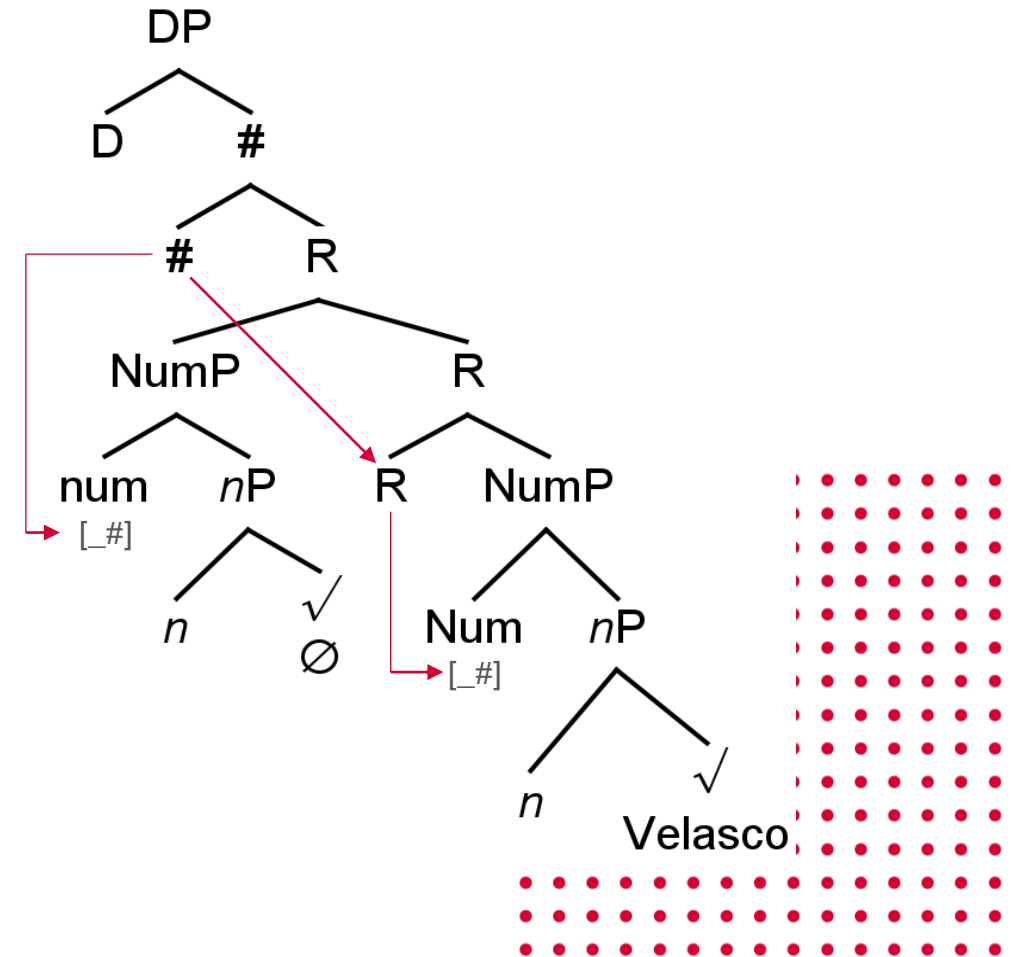
Impossible agreement

- Suppose Num is an interpretable but unvalued feature (cf. Pesetsky & Torrego, 2007)
- Valuation comes from a higher functional head #
- # values Num₁
 - Option a) Num₂ remains unvalued
 - [_#] → [SG] (default, last resort)
 - D_[SG] Num_[SG] Num_[SG]
 - D_[PL] Num_[PL] Num_[SG]



Impossible agreement

- Option b)
 - # values R (and possibly Num₁)
 - D_[SG] Num_[SG] Num_[SG]
 - D_[PL] Num_[PL] Num_[PL]



Parallelism with compounds

Agreement patterns in Spanish N-N compounds have a similar distribution:

Liceras et al. (2020), rating for Peninsular Spanish speakers:

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| a. | <i>hombre-lobo</i>
man. _{SG} -wolf. _{SG} | |
| b. | <i>hombre-s-lobo</i>
man. _{PL} -wolf. _{SG} | (3.8/5) |
| c. | <i>?hombre-s-lobo-s</i>
man. _{PL} -wolf. _{PL} | (2.4/5) |
| d. | <i>*hombre-lobo-s</i>
man. _{SG} -wolf. _{PL} | (2.1/5) |

Parallelism with compounds

Last names: [N_∅_[PL] Velasco_[SG]] ?[N_∅_[PL] Velascos_[PL]] *[N_∅_[SG] Velascos_[PL]]

Compounds: [hombres_[PL] lobo_[SG]] ?[hombres_[PL] lobos_[PL]] *[hombre_[SG] lobos_[PL]]

For compounds, it is generally assumed that PL is attached to the head:

hombreslobo vs. *cat-women*

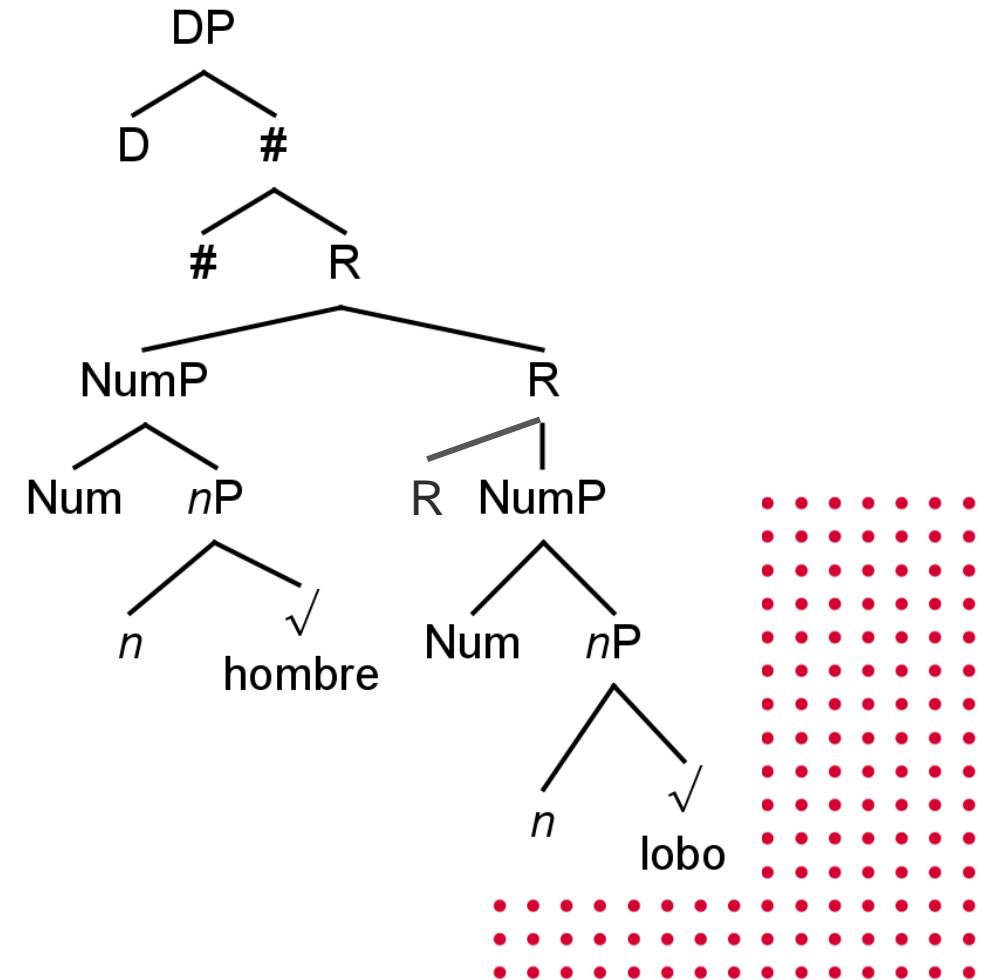
This supports the proposed structure for last names

Compound structure

Compounds have a similar structure and derivation (but cf. Harley 2009)

Preference for a) *hombres-lobo* and *los Velasco* (vs. b) *hombres-lobos* and *los Velascos*)

- a) involves a single agreement operation and default insertion
- b) involves two separate agreement operations and insertion rules



Compounds vs. last names

Compounds and last names differ in several ways

- Compounds form a single morphological word
- Lexical Integrity applies to compounds
 - Specifically, plurality on the second N is semantically inert
 - The meaning of *hombresl-lobo* = the meaning of *hombresl lobos*
- Last names are not semantically opaque:
 - The meaning of *Los [∅_[PL] Velasco]* ≠ the meaning of *los [∅_[PL] Velascos]*

Compounds vs. last names

Lexical Integrity can be modelled as an additional nominalization above # (ignoring R for now):

1. D [_{#P} [_{*nP*} *n* [_{Num} *hombre*] [_{Num} *lobo*]...]]
2. D [_{#P}... [_{Num} \emptyset] [_{Num} *Velasco*]...]]

This additional *n*-layer blocks interactions between the parts of the compound that don't project and the outside.

In the case of a last name, the non-projecting parts of the phrase (*Velasco*) can still interact with categories outside.

Distributive vs. group reading

Group reading: *Los Velasco son una gran familia*

‘The Velascos are a great family’

- \emptyset is semantically interpreted as a group of individuals → distributive tests
- The Xs are a “Velasco-kind”

Individual/distributive reading: *Los Velascos son personas interesantes*

‘The Velascos are interesting people’

- The Xs are Velasco individuals

On the category “R”

- In this proposal, R induces a structural asymmetry between the two NumPs
- This category is very close to Den Dikken’s (2006) Relator, which establishes a syntactic relationship between a subject and a predicate, without particular order of S-Pred
- A predication structure fits the predication analysis of plural last names (Kneale 1962, Geurts 1997a, b, Gray 2012, etc., but see Jeshion 2005, Saab & Lo Guercio 2018 for objections)
 - The X named “Velasco”
 - The X is “Velasco”

On the nature of the null category

- Evidence that \emptyset is not the same as in ellipsis cases
- Fábregas & Pérez Jiménez (2010) note that nominal ellipsis requires *uno* ‘one’ (vs. *un*), suggesting that what is crucial for ellipsis is the head hosting the word marker –o (cf. Bernstein 1993)
 - Los libro-s de Marta y uno/*un \emptyset de Miguel
the book of Marta and one/one of Miguel ‘Marta’s books and Miguel’s’
 - Llegaron los Pérez y *uno/un \emptyset Velasco
arrived the Perez and one/one Velasco ‘The Perezes arrive and a Velasco’

This suggests that last names involve a different null category (perhaps lower than the Word marker –o/-a)

A note on parametric variation

Spanish (-s marking speakers vs. -∅): similar to compound marking

Preferred: default marking, optionally overt agreement valuation on last name

Other languages (special thanks to an anonymous reviewer)

1) Los Velasco/Velascos

Spanish

2) I D'Alessandro/*D'Alessandri

Italian (D'Alessandro, Colantoni, p.c)

progetto pilota/ progett̃i-pilota 'pilot project'

3) The Kennedys/*Kennedy

English

ticket-booths/*tickets-booth

4) De Smitt-en en de Jansen-s 'The Smiths and the Joneses'

Dutch

nachtportier 'night doorkeeper' / *nachtportier-s* 'night doorkeepers' (Booij 1992)

Hungarian

A Kovács-o-k(PL) 'multiple unrelated "Kovács" '/
A Kovács-ék(ASS.PL) 'members of the K family'

Hungarian (special thanks to E. Dékány)

- N-N compounds are right-headed with both plural morphemes :
 - A fog-orvos-ék / *fog-ék-orvos
the tooth-doctor-ASSPL tooth-ASSPL-doctor 'Dentist and others'
- Bartos (1999, cited in DéKány 2012: 257), the regular plural scopes under the definite determiner, the associative plural scopes over the definite determiner.

The Xs that are a Kovács group

The group formed by Kovács



Summary

- **THE STRUCTURE OF PLURAL LAST NAMES INCLUDES:**

A null category as the subject of a Relator Phrase, whose predicate is the last name

When the null category is in Spec, RP, it is valued as plural by a higher # head

- The last name remains unvalued and surfaces as default, singular (*los Velasco*)

When the full RP is valued as plural, the null pro and the last name are valued as plural (*los Velascos*)

- This option results in a truly plural, individually distributed last name

Plural marking patterns are similar to those of N-N compounds in Spanish

Thanks!



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