

Middle constructions, dative possessors and word order in Spanish

Middle constructions are stative, generic predicates denoting intrinsic properties of the verb's internal argument, which is necessarily determined and surfaces preverbally as the grammatical subject; this is due to this argument's status as a sentential topic (Sánchez López 2002). Although the participation of an implicit agent in the event is understood, it is impossible to introduce this argument explicitly by means of a *by*-phrase.

(1) *What happens?*

- a. (Que) *(Sus) cicatrices se ven fácilmente (*por Luis).
that his scars RFL see easily by Luis
'His scars are easy to see.'
- b. ?(Que) se ven sus cicatrices fácilmente.

When a relational noun occurs in these sentences, it can be internally or externally possessed by means of a possessive determiner (1), or a dative possessor (2), respectfully; the dative DP in these contexts tends to occur preverbally.

(2) *What happens?*

- a. (Que) a Marta_i se le_i ven [las cicatrices]_i fácilmente.
that Marta.DAT RFL 3SG.DAT see the scars easily
'Marta's scars are easy to see.'
- b. (Que) a Marta_i [las cicatrices]_i se le_i ven fácilmente.
- c. (Que) [las cicatrices]_i a Marta_i se le_i ven fácilmente.
- d. ?(Que) [las cicatrices]_i se le_i ven a Marta_i fácilmente.

The subjecthood of preverbal datives in Spanish has been discussed extensively; Masullo (1992) notes that negative quantified dative experiencers lose their quantificational scope when dislocated, therefore being interpreted referentially. The same applies to dative possessors in middle contexts. It seems sensible to propose two configurations for these sentences: one in which only the dative DP surfaces preverbally in subject position, presumably SpecTP, forcing the theme to remain inside the VP (3a), and another where both the dative DP and the theme occur preverbally, the latter in subject position, and the former being left-dislocated (3b).

- (3) a. [_{TP} A nadie_i [_{T'} se le_i ven [las cicatrices]_i fácilmente].
'Nobody's scars are easy to see.'
- b. *A nadie_i, [_{TP} [las cicatrices]_i [_{T'} se le_i ven fácilmente]
'Nadie's scars are easy to see.'

Inalienable possession between a dative argument and a relational noun has been analyzed in terms of control (Demonte 1988), predication (Vergnaud & Zubizarreta 1992), and possessor raising (Sánchez López 2007). Cuervo (2003), based on Pylkkänen (2008), notes that dative possessors pattern with datives in double object constructions, which are introduced by a low applicative head merging as the root's complement. Thus, she proposes the semantic derivation in (4) for a low applicative introducing dative possessors.

(4) APPL_{AT} (Possessor applicative):

$\lambda x.\lambda y.\lambda f_{\langle e,s,t \rangle}.\lambda e.f(e,x) \ \& \ \text{theme}(e,x) \ \& \ \text{in-the-possession}(x,y)$

The derivation for the sentence in (2a) is shown in (5), where the applicative head – spelled-out by the dative clitic *le*– relates the possessor in its specifier (*a Marta*) with the possessum in its complement position (*las cicatrices*); ApplP merges as the complement of the root, and T^o probes the dative DP –being the closest– to its specifier to check its EPP feature, and assigns nominative to the theme via Agree.

(5) [_{TP} [**a Marta**]_i se le_i ven [_{VP} ~~se~~ [_{√P} [ApplP [**a Marta**]_i [Appl' *le*_i [las cicatrices]]] $\sqrt{\text{ver}}$]]]

While (5) successfully accounts for (2a), the derivation where both the dative DP and the theme appear preverbally is subject to intervention effects, as shown in (6). Should the

possessor DP merge *in situ* outside the TP, an empty pronominal would have to sit in SpecAppIP to preserve the relationship of possession with the theme; this pronominal, being closer to T°, would then be probed to SpecTP, instead of the theme DP, bringing about an undesired word order. In other words, minimality would be violated.

- (6) **A Martai** [_{TP} [las cicatrices] [_{T'} se le_i ven [_{VP} ~~se~~ [_{VP} [AppIP [**pro?**][AppI' ~~le_i~~ [las cicatrices]]]]] ~~√_{ver}~~]]]

A possible way to overcome this challenge is to assume that nothing merges in SpecAppIP, and that the applicative head alone suffices to generate the possessor reading; however, that would go against the semantic definition of the low applicative of possession in (4). Instead, I provide evidence supporting an analysis along the lines of Barbosa's (2009) for preverbal subjects in Romance consistent null subject languages, namely, that these are clitic left-dislocations (CLLDs) coindexed with empty pronominals inside the sentence. For instance, the sentence in (6) allows recomplementation, reinforcing the idea that these preverbal DPs are extra-sentential.

- (7) a. Dice que a Marta, que las cicatrices, (que) se le ven fácilmente.
says that Marta.DAT that the scars that RFL 3SG.DAT see easily
b. Dice [_{CP} que [**a Martai**] [_{CP} que [las cicatrices]_k [_{CP} que/∅ [_{TP} **pro_i** [_{T'} se le_i ven [_{VP} ~~se~~ [_{VP} [AppIP [**pro_i**][AppI' ~~le_i~~ [**pro_k**]]]]] fácilmente]]]]]]]

When the dative DP contains a negative quantifier (3a), this argument originates in SpecAppIP, raises to SpecTP to check its EPP feature, and subsequently undergoes A'-movement, for these quantificational expressions belong to a subset that do not require contrastive Focus (Martins 1994; Uriagereka 1995).

- (8) [_{CP} **A nadie_i** [_{TP} ~~a nadie_i~~ [_{T'} se le_i ven [_{VP} ~~se~~ [_{VP} [AppIP [~~a nadie_i~~][AppI' ~~le_i~~ [las arrugas]]]]] fácilmente]]]]]

On the other hand, when the dative DP occurs preverbally, with a theme containing a negative quantifier, the latter would also move to an A' position skipping over the null possessor in SpecTP, as sketched in (9).

- (9) a. Dice que a Marta que ninguna cicatriz (*que) se le ve fácilmente.
says that Marta.DAT that no scars that RFL 3SG.DAT see easily
b. Dice [_{CP} que [**a Martai**] [_{CP} que [ninguna cicatriz]_k [_{C'} ∅ [_{TP} **pro_i** [_{T'} se le_i ve [_{VP} ~~se~~ [_{VP} [AppIP [**pro_i**][AppI' ~~le_i~~ [ninguna cicatriz]]]]] fácilmente]]]]]]]

Evidence for the raising of these quantificational expressions to an A' position is the fact that it triggers proclisis in languages like Asturian, where this phenomenon is attested in contexts where phrases undergo A'-movement, such as *Wh*-questions (10c).

- (10) a. A Marta véense-y les engurries fácil.
Marta.DAT see.RFL-3SG.DAT the wrinkles easy
b. Diz que a Marta que ninguna engurria se-y ve fácil.
c. A Marta, ¿qué se-y ve?

To conclude, an analysis of preverbal subjects and dative DPs as CLLDs avoids the minimality conflict in (6) while, at the same time, supports classic proposals about the position of preverbal subjects in Spanish, including Contreras (1976), Olarrea (1996) or Ordóñez & Treviño (1999).

References

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