

Predicate Focus Fronting in the Spanish Determiner Phrase

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Abstract

This article brings new evidence to the fore supporting the hypothesis that the architecture of the DP domain mirrors that of the sentence, particularly concerning the topic-focus articulation. To fulfill this task an Spanish nominal construction (the *lo-de* construction) is analyzed on a pair with comparative qualitative binominal noun phrases. A wide bulk of evidence is presented that these constructions have a subject-predicate configuration, and involve predicate raising to a Focus Phrase, yielding a partition of the sentence where the predicate is focus, and the subject, a background topic. This proposal provides an accurate explanation of a wide range of mostly unattested data, particularly concerning the wide and complex set of referential restrictions involved in the *lo-de* construction and in Spanish QBNPs. Moreover, it is argued that the 'exclamatory flavor' of the *lo-de* construction results from the combination of a degree quantificational structure with the definiteness value of the highest Det head. This proposal is argued to offer a simple solution to the restriction of this construction to factive predicates.

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1 Introduction

Since the very beginning of the inclusion of functional categories in the articulation of the sentence, many scholars have argued for the existence of a strong parallelism between internal DP structure and CP structure (see Brame (1982) for the original insight, and Abney (1986); Giusti (1993); Ritter (1991); Szabolcsi (1994) for different developments). Basically, it is commonly accepted that at least a distinction exists in the DP domain between two domains, in parallel to the TP-CP: a lower one linked to morphological properties of the noun –number, and gender, basically; see Giusti (1993); Picallo (1994); Ritter (1991)–, and a higher one linked to referential and, we will argue, force properties –see Aboh (2004a,b); Haegeman (2004); Giusti (1996); Longobardi (1994).

The goal of this article is to bring new evidence to the fore for such a fine-grained architecture of the DP domain, which takes into account (i) the information structure articulation, (ii) the encoding of exclamative force, and (iii) the syntactic properties of the so-called Spanish neuter determiner *lo* in correlation with gradable predicates. In order to fulfill this task, we will consider one type of the Spanish nominal *lo-de* (see Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a,b)):

- (1) Me sorprendió lo caro de la casa
to.me surprised LO expensive.MASC of the house.FEM
'It surprised me how expensive the house was.'

This construction shows a series of striking properties that make it unique in the Romance landscape, so that we will describe it in some detail. This task will be conducted in section 2 in parallel to Spanish comparative qualitative binominal noun phrases (henceforth QBNPs), a subtype of the *N of a N* construction (see Español-Echevarría (1997, 1998); García and Méndez (2002); Villalba (2007b); for other languages, one can consult with much profit Bennis et al. (1998); Corver (2003); den Dikken (1998, 2006); den Dikken and Singhapreecha (2004); Doetjes and Rooryck (1999); Hulk and Tellier (2000); Moro (1997); Napoli (1989)): ¹

- (2) Conocí al granuja del alcalde.
 knew.I to-the crook of-the mayor
 'I met that crook of a mayor.'

After discussing the main properties of both constructions, section 3 will present evidence for the topic-focus articulation in Spanish *lo-de* construc-

¹ A related construction exists, *attributive qualitative binominal noun phrases* in den Dikken (2006) terms:

- (i) un idiota de médico
 an idiot of doctor
 (ii) una mierda de libros
 a shit of books

Formally, this Spanish attributive variant shows a bare nominal in subject position – *médico* 'doctor' (i) and *libros* 'books' (ii)–, and allows number disagreement between the subject and the predicate (ii). Moreover, it allows lexically frozen attributes which do not agree with the subject:

- (iii) una bazofia de arroz
 a distaste of rice
 (iv) un asco de ponencias
 a disgust of talks

Crucially for our analysis, the present construction allows the independence of the attribute, contrary, to our *lo-de* construction:

- (v) La bazofia le sentó mal.
 the distaste to.him feel bad
 'He digested badly that distasteful food.'
 (vi) *Lo caro le sorprendió.
 LO expensive to.him surprised

Since we will not consider this attributive variant in this article, we will use the label QBNPs thoroughly to refer to *comparative* QBNPs for the sake of simplicity (the reader is referred to den Dikken (2006); Doetjes and Rooryck (1999) for a detailed comparison of the two constructions).

tion and QBNPs: the predicate is interpreted as focus, whereas the subject is interpreted as background information, in sharp contrast with Germanic QBNPs. In accordance with these empirical findings, in section 4 we will defend an analysis of the *lo-de* construction involving focus fronting of the predicate to a dedicated position within the DP, and we will extend it to Spanish QBNPs. Furthermore, we will consider the exclamative flavor of the *lo-de* construction as deriving from the conjunction of two semantic factors: the presence of a null operator over degrees, and the inherent definiteness of the neuter article *lo*. Finally, section 5 closes the article with the main conclusions.

2 The Spanish *lo-de* construction

In this section we will review the basic properties of the *lo-de* construction, and will show that a clear parallel can be traced with Spanish QBNPs in relevant respects:

- there is a subject-predicate relation
- *de* is not a true preposition
- the predicate is quantified to a high degree
- the subject must be a specific nominal
- the construction is an island for extraction

We will consider each property in detail in the following paragraphs. However, before proceeding, we will devote a few words to individuate the *lo-de* construction in the wide and intricate set of Spanish nominal constructions headed by the neuter article *lo* (see Bosque and Moreno (1990), and Leonetti (1999) for two surveys).

2.1 *Individuating the quantificational lo-de construction*

Different constructions can be obtained in Spanish with the genderless article *lo* plus an adjective.² For the purposes of this article, one major distinction should be traced between our quantificational *lo-de* construction (3)

² *Lo* has been mainly characterized by traditional grammarians as a Neuter Article, contrasting with masculine *el* and feminine *la* ((Alcina and Bleca, 1975, 568) describe it as “El lo neutro y átono que forma sistema con los artículos concordados”, whereas Fernández-Ramírez (1986) avoids using the term "neuter" and points to the semantic and syntactic properties of this item. More recently, Pomino and Stark (2006) convincingly argue, in a feature geometry framework that there is no "neuter" gender in contemporary Spanish, and that "neuter" corresponds to a geometry where no individuation or discreteness can be obtained).

–*qualitative lo* in Bosque and Moreno (1990) terms– and the partitive construction in (4) –*individuating lo* in Bosque and Moreno (1990) terms:

- (3) Me asusta lo peligroso de la empresa.
 to.me frightens LO dangerous of the.FEM enterprise
 'It frightens me how risky the enterprise is.'
- (4) Lo interesante del libro es el primer capítulo.
 LO interesting of-the book is the first chapter
 'The interesting part of the book is the first chapter.'

As the translations make clear, whereas the former involves a degree quantification over the scale denoted by the adjective predicated of the subject, the latter refers to a part of the subject which can be characterized by the property denoted by the adjective.

One main empirical evidence separating these two *lo* constructions concerns degree modification. On the one hand, whereas the partitive construction admits the relative superlative reading induced by *más* 'more', the one we are interested in doesn't. Hence, the following *lo* phrases can only be interpreted partitively, which is fine with the context in (5a), but leads to awkwardness in (5b):

- (5) a. Lo más pequeño de la casa es el dormitorio.
 LO more small of the.FEM house is the bedroom
 'The smallest part of the house is the bedroom.'
- b. # Lo más caro de la casa me impresionó.
 LO more expensive of the.FEM house to.me impressed
 '#The most expensive part of the house impressed me.'

On the other hand, the behavior of each construction reverses when the high degree modifier *muy* 'very' is used:

- (6) a. * Lo muy pequeño de la casa es el dormitorio.
 LO very small of the.FEM house is the bedroom
 '*The high degree of smallness of the house is the bedroom.'
- b. Lo muy caro de la casa me impresionó.
 LO very expensive of the.FEM house to.me impressed
 'The high degree of expensiveness of the house impressed me.'

From the translations, one easily appreciates that *muy* 'very' forces the quantificational reading of the *lo* construction, which fits in with the context in (6b), but doesn't with the one in (6a).

Once we have settled the main distinction among the *lo* constructions nominalizing an adjective in Spanish, in the remaining of the article we will concentrate on the quantificational construction in (3).

A second important methodological and empirical distinction concerns the contrast between our *lo-de* construction, and an apparently synonymous clausal construction (see Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a,b), Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999), and Leonetti (1999)):

- (7) Me sorprendió lo cara que era la casa.
 to.me surprised LO expensive.FEM that was the house.FEM
 'It surprised me how expensive the house was.'

However, despite their similarity, we follow Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a,b) and assume that enough empirical evidence exists for a separated analysis –cf. Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999). Just for illustration, we mention two clear-cut cases. First, the *lo-de* construction displays a clear nominal and dependent behavior, whereas the clausal construction has the degree of independence that one expects of a sentence, patterning with degree wh-exclamative sentences:

- (8) a. * ¡Lo caro de la casa!
 LO expensive of the.FEM house
 b. ¡Lo cara que es la casa!
 LO expensive.FEM that is the.FEM house
 c. ¡Qué cara que es la casa!
 how expensive.FEM that is the.FEM house

The second major difference we will consider is the fact that the *lo-de* construction is restricted to individual-level predicates (see 2.2), whereas the clausal one admits any gradable predicate, regardless of its aspectual properties. As a consequence, besides the contrast regarding the range of adjectives admitted (9), a second related restriction affects the *lo-de* construction, namely the impossibility of nominalizing prepositional phrases (10) nor adverbs (11), which are systematically treated as stage-level predicates:

- (9) a. Me sorprendió lo frágil/*lleno del vaso.
 to.me surprised LO fragile/full of-the glass
 'The degree of fragility/fullness of the glass surprised me.'
 b. Me sorprendió {lo frágil que era/lo lleno que estaba} el vaso.
 to.me surprised LO fragile that was/LO full that was the glass

'It surprised me how fragile/full the glass was.'

- (10) a. *Me sorprendió lo en su punto de la sopa.
to.me surprised LO in its point of the.FEM soup
'It surprised me the exact cooking point of the soup.'
- b. Me sorprendió lo en su punto que estaba la sopa.
to.me surprised LO in its point that was the.FEM soup
'It surprised me how exactly the cooking point was of the soup.'
- (11) a. *Me sorprendió lo bien de Juan.
to.me surprised LO well of Juan
'The degree of well-being of Juan surprised me.'
- b. Me sorprendió lo bien que está Juan.
to.me surprised LO well that is Juan
'It surprised me how well Juan was.'

In accordance with these data, and the evidence reported in Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a,b), we won't attempt to integrate this construction in our analysis of the *lo-de* construction, and we refer the reader to the above mentioned references for a proposal.

2.2 *There is a subject-predicate relation*

Even though the DP and the AP in the *lo-de* construction do not agree in gender and number –a point which we turn back on in 4.2–, there is ample empirical support for considering that they form a subject-predicate relation. First of all, it is plainly evident that the following entailments follow, suggesting that the property denoted by the adjectives *alto* 'tall/high' and *inútil* 'useless' is predicated of the DPs *la casa* 'the house' and *sus esfuerzos* 'his/her efforts', respectively:

- (12) a. lo alto de la casa \Rightarrow la casa es alta
LO high of the house the house is high
- b. lo inútil de sus esfuerzos \Rightarrow sus esfuerzos son inútiles
LO useless of his/her efforts his/her efforts are useless

A similar pattern is found in QBNPs:

- (13) el idiota del alcalde \Rightarrow El alcalde es un idiota.
the idiot of-the mayor the mayor is an idiot
'that idiot of a mayor' \Rightarrow 'The mayor is an idiot.'

Secondly, the relation between the DP and the AP is constrained lexicosemantically, as in other nonverbal predicative constructions. As we have seen at the beginning of this section, the *lo-de* construction cannot be constructed with stage-level predicates, but rather only with individual-level predicates (see paragraph below 3.2.4 for a solution to this contrast):

- (14) a. *Me sorprendió lo lleno de aquel plato.
to.me surprised LO full of that dish
b. *Me sorprendió lo enfermo de tu hermano.
to.me surprised LO ill of your brother
- (15) a. Me sorprendió lo frágil de aquel plato.
to.me surprised LO fragile of that dish
b. Me sorprendió lo inteligente de tu hermano.
to.me surprised LO intelligent of your brother

Crucially, this behavior is faithfully reproduced in Spanish nonverbal exclamatives, which display a clear subject-predicate pattern (see Vinet (1991) for the original insight concerning French exclamatives, and Hernanz and Suñer (1999) for similar observations concerning Spanish):

- (16) a. *¡Enfermo, tu hermano!
ill your brother
b. ¡Extraño, tu hermano!
strange your brother

Whereas the stage-level predicate *enfermo* 'ill' is impossible, the individual-level *extraño* 'strange' is perfect in this construction.

Finally, one must observe that the DP behaves syntactically as the typical subject of a predicative adjective in two respects. On the one hand, it cannot be a strong pronoun:³

³ In the case of QBNPs, the presence of strong pronouns is disfavoured. It is not totally forbidden, as acknowledged by the following two examples from the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española, but here the pronoun seems to take an anaphoric or exhaustive listing value:

- (i) Y la tonta de ella, que eso es lo que es, tonta...
and the.FEM fool.FEM of her that this is LO that is fool.FEM
Almudena Grandes, *Los aires difíciles*, 2002
- (ii) y no ha vuelto a mover un dedo, el tonto de él.
and not has turned to move a finger the fool of him
Pedro Zarraluki, *La historia del silencio*, 1994

- (17) a. * Me sorprendió lo alto de ella.
to.me surprised LO tall of her
b. ?? Hablé con el granuja de él.
talked.I with the crook of him

as strong pronouns (see Rigau (1988), and Picallo (1994)) are restricted in discourse neutral contexts and when referring to inanimate entities.

On the other hand, the subject cannot be a bare plural:

- (18) a. * Son caras casas.
are expensive.FEM.PL houses
b. * Juzgó acusados culpables.
judged accused.PL guilty.PL
c. * No me extrañó lo caro de casas.
not to.me struck LO expensive of houses
d. * No hablé con los idiotas de alcaldes.
not talked with the idiots of mayors

Summing up, even though an additional pragmatic factor is probably involved in this pattern (see 3), the clear parallel with respect to copulative sentences and secondary predication structures suggests that the following empirical generalization holds:

Generalization 1 The *lo-de* construction and QBNPs involve a subject-predicate relationship.

2.3 *De is not a true preposition*

When we consider the internal structure of the *lo-de* construction, it turns out that standard constituency tests fail for the apparent Prepositional Phrase headed by *de*, just as happens with QBNPs. First of all, the *de*+DP sequence can neither be subject to *wh*-movement (19) nor focalized (20) –as customary, we mark the focalized constituent with small caps:

- (19) a. * ¿[De qué casa] te extrañó lo caro t?
of what house to.you struck LO expensive.MASC
b. * ¿[De qué alcalde] conociste al granuja t?
of which mayor knew.you to.the crook

- (20) a. *DE LA CASA me extrañó lo caro *t*
of the house to.me struck LO expensive.MASC
- b. *DEL ALCALDE conoció Juan al granuja *t*
of-the mayor knew Juan to.the crook

These data result from the fact that *de* is not a true preposition in these constructions, nor is it forming a maximal projection with the DP (see Kayne (2004, 2005a) for a general approach to the role of apparent prepositions).

A second piece of evidence supporting this conclusion is the impossibility of the *de*+DP sequence of being neither pronominalized by a possessive pronoun (21) nor gapped (22):

- (21) a. Me extrañó lo inocente de Juan.
to.me struck LO innocent of Juan
'I was astonished by Juan's naiveté.'
- b. *Me extrañó lo inocente suyo.
to.me struck LO innocent of.his
'I was astonished by his naiveté.'
- c. Hablé con el idiota de Juan.
talked.I with the idiot of Juan
'I talked with that fool of Juan.'
- d. *Hablé con el idiota suyo.
talked.I with the idiot of.his
'I talked with that fool of him.'
- (22) a. *Me extrañó lo mezquino de su interés, pero no lo
to.me struck LO mean of his/her interest but not LO
desmesurado.
immoderate
- b. *Conociste al idiota del alcalde, pero no al
knew.you to-the idiot of-the mayor but not to-the
corrupto.
corrupt

On the grounds of the evidence presented in this subsection, we can raise the following empirical generalizations:

Generalization 2 Neither in the *lo-de* construction nor in QBNPs is *de* a true preposition.

Generalization 3 Neither in the *lo-de* construction nor in QBNPs does the *de*+DP sequence form a constituent.

2.4 The predicate is quantified to a high degree

As already pointed out by Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a,b); Bosque and Moreno (1990); Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999); Leonetti (1999), the adjective in the *lo-de* construction must denote a property amenable to degree quantification, so that adjectives like *imposible* 'impossible' or *español* 'Spanish' yield ungrammatical results (23), in sharp contrast with clear gradable adjectives like *caro* 'expensive' or *maleducado* 'rude' (24):⁴

- (23) a. *Me extrañó lo imposible de la solución.
to.me struck LO impossible of the solution
b. *No soportó lo español de su tono.
not stand LO Spanish of his/her tune
- (24) a. Me extrañó lo caro de la casa.
to.me struck LO expensive of the house
b. No soporto lo maleducado de su tono.
not stand.I LO rude of his/her tune

Moreover, in the *lo-de* construction the property denoted by the gradable adjective is to be taken to a high degree. So then, the sentences in (24) can be paraphrased as follows:

- (25) a. The high degree of expensiveness of the house struck me.
b. (S)he could not stand the high degree of rudeness of his tune.

Two immediate consequences follow. First, since the construction is semantically equivalent to a definite description, it comes without surprise that the degree to which the subject instantiates the property denoted by the predicate be semantically presupposed. Therefore, the following sentences are perceived as contradictions rather than as implicature cancellations:

- (26) a. Lo caro de la casa podría llegar a sorprender,
LO expensive of the house might arrive to surprise
#aunque en realidad la casa no es cara.
although in reality the house not is expensive

⁴ It goes without saying that *español* 'Spanish', as all ethnic adjectives, can be coerced into a gradable reading when interpreted as a bunch of prototypical properties. We disregard such a reading.

- b. Lo maleducado de su tono me molestaría #si su
 LO rude of his/her tune to.me upset if his/her
 tono fuera realmente maleducado.
 tune were really rude

Second, the adjective in this construction can be modified by a very restricted set of degree quantifiers, namely those pointing at a high/low value in the scale denoted by the adjective. Mid-scale modifiers are rejected:

- (27) a. Sorprendió lo muy/poco elaborado de su propuesta.
 struck LO very/little elaborated of his/her proposal
 b. *Sorprendió lo algo/bastante elaborado de su propuesta.
 struck LO very/little elaborated of his/her proposal

In connection with this restriction, note the behavior of the *lo-de* construction regarding superlatives. Whereas absolute superlatives are fine (28) –even though they are far from being a widespread phenomenon: only three tokens in the corpora of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española (RAE)–, relative superlatives (29) are invariably incompatible with the intended quantificational reading, and must be interpreted partitively (see above section 2), as the translation shows:

- (28) a. ¿Se da cuenta el procesado de lo absurdísimo de su
 SE gives account the prosecuted of the extremely.absurd of his
 error?
 error
 [1965, ALFONSO SASTRE, M.S.V. o La sangre y la ceniza,
apud Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual, RAE]
 b. propiedad única del águila, la cual, desde lo altísimo
 property unique of the hawk the which from LO
 de las nubes, ve al cordero en la tierra?
 very.high of the clouds sees to.the lamb in the earth
 [1605, Francisco López de Úbeda, *La pícara Justina*, *apud* Cor-
 pus Diacrónico del Español, RAE]
 c. Sólo distinguían lo numeroso de los bultos, lo
 only distinguish LO numerous of the baggages LO
 hermosísimo de muchas señoras
 extremely.beautiful of many ladies
 [1646, Baptista Remiro de Navarra, *Los peligros de Madrid*, *apud*
 Corpus Diacrónico del Español, RAE]

- (29) a. Me sorprendió lo más alto del edificio.
to.me struck LO more high of-the building
'The highest part of the building surprised me.'
- b. Me sorprendió lo más elaborado de su propuesta.
to.me struck LO more developed of his/her proposal
'The most developed part of his/her proposal surprised me.'

The gradability requirement extends to Spanish QBNPs as well, so that the nominal predicate must be gradable. The sentences in (30) are odd as QBNPs, and they are only possible as standard nominal NPs with a possessive complement, namely with the awkward reading 'your brother's policeman' and 'your neighbor's judge':

- (30) a. # El inglés de tu hermano es sin duda muy granuja.
the English of your brother is without doubt very crook
- b. # La favorita de tu vecina no es nada pesada.
the favorite of your neighbor not is nothing boring

Crucially, neither *inglés* 'English' nor *favorita* 'favorite' are gradable:

- (31) a. * Tu hermano es muy inglés.
your brother is very English
- b. * Tu vecina fue muy favorita.
your neighbor was very favorite

As for the high degree of the property denoted by the nominal predicate, the data are less categorical, but are totally compatible with the ones found in the *lo-de* construction. Take for instance the following contrast:

- (32) a. El granuja del alcalde es sin duda muy granuja.
the crook of.the mayor is without doubt very crook
- b. El granuja del alcalde es aún más granuja de lo que pensaba.
the crook of.the mayor is even more crook of LO that think
- c. # El pesado de tu vecino no es nada pesado.
the bore of your neighbor not is nothing boring

Whereas (32a) is perceived as a tautology, and (32b) confirms that the 'degree of crookness' of the mayor was certainly high with respect to some standard or expectation, (32c) is clearly interpreted as a contradiction.

Therefore, the data presented in this subsection allows us to raise the following empirical generalization:

Generalization 4 *lo-de* and QBNPs are incompatible with non-high/low syntactic degree quantification

2.5 *The subject must be a specific nominal*

As observed by Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a,b), there is a referentiality constraint affecting the subject of the *lo-de* construction. Consider the case of nonspecific indefinite DPs (33a), bare plurals (33b), and NPI and monotone decreasing quantifiers (33c):

- (33) a. *No me sorprenderá lo caro de una casa cualquiera.
not to.me will.surprise LO expensive of a house any
- b. *No me extrañó lo caro de casas.
not to.me struck LO expensive of houses
- c. *No me extrañó lo caro de ninguna
not to.me struck LO expensive of none.FEM
casa/pocas casas.
houses/few.FEM.PL houses

Interestingly, this behavior is fully reproduced in QBNPs (see Villalba (2007b)):

- (34) a. *No hablaré con el idiota de un alcalde cualquiera.
not will.talk with the idiot of a mayor any
- b. *No hablé con los idiotas de alcaldes.
not talked with the idiots of mayors
- c. *No hablé con el idiota de ningún alcalde/los idiotas de
not talked with the idiot of none houses/the.PL idiots of
pocos alcaldes.
few.PL houses

Without entering now into the factor underlying this referentiality restriction –we will turn back to the issue in 3–, we can state the following provisional generalization:

Generalization 5 The subject of the *lo-de* construction and of QBNPs must be specific.

2.6 *The construction is an island for extraction*

Another property that makes *lo-de* constructions and QBNPs similar is islandhood, which can be easily appreciated in the following examples, which correspond to *wh*-movement and focalization respectively (on islandhood in Predicate Inversion constructions, see den Dikken (1998, 2006)):

- (35) a. *¿[En qué asunto] te extrañó lo mezquino de su interés *t*?
 in what matter to.you struck LO mean of his/her interest
 interest
- b. *¿[De qué ciudad] conociste al granuja del alcalde *t*?
 of what city met.you to.the crook of the mayor
- (36) a. *EN COBRAR me extrañó lo mezquino de su interés *t*
 in get.paid to.me struck LO mean of his/her interest
- b. *DE BARCELONA conoció Juan al idiota del alcalde *t*
 of Barcelona knew Juan the fool of the mayor

Extraction from the subject position is totally banned in both constructions, for reasons that will be discussed in depth in section 4. We can, thus, state the following provisional empirical generalization:

Generalization 6 *The lo-de construction and QBNPs are islands for extraction.*

3 Information structure in the *lo-de* construction

Following a suggestion in Lagae (1994), den Dikken (2006); den Dikken and Singhapreecha (2004) claim that information packaging in QBNPs conforms to the standard pattern found in Predicate Inversion constructions, namely the subject is the focus, whereas the predicate is old information. So then, they extend the informational pattern in (37b) to DP structures like the ones in (38) –we respect their glosses:

- (37) a. John_{OLD} is my best friend_{NEW}
 b. My best friend_{OLD} is John_{NEW}
 [(den Dikken and Singhapreecha, 2004, ex. 10)]

- (38) a. un drôle de type
 a funny DE guy
 b. une pizza de chaude
 a pizza DE hot-AGR
 [(den Dikken and Singhapreecha, 2004, exs. 20-21)]

Yet, as we will show in this section, the *lo-de* construction and Spanish *comparative* QBNPs do not display such a pattern, but rather the converse one –for the sake of clarity, let us rephrase the new-old distinction in the traditional focus-background partition:

- (39) a. lo caro_{FOCUS} de la casa_{BACKGROUND}
 'the degree of expensiveness of the house'
 b. el idiota_{FOCUS} de su hijo_{BACKGROUND}
 'that idiot of his/her son'

We sustain our proposal on the empirical evidence presented in the following subsections. First, we will show that the subject of neither the *lo-de* nor QBNPs behaves as focus with respect to standard tests. Then, we will bring empirical support for its backgrounded nature in close parallel with dislocation, a well-studied backgrounding strategy.

3.1 *The subject is not focus*

Let us consider the evidence suggesting that the subject is not focus neither in the *lo-de* construction nor in Spanish QBNPs.

3.1.1 *Impossibility of DPs associated with focus particles*

One typical identifier of contrastive focus is the particle *only*. So then, in the following sentence this particle signals the scope of the focus (see Rooth (1985, 1992); for an alternative view see Vallduví (1992)):

- (40) a. Mary had a lamb_{focus} only.
 b. Only Mary_{focus} had a lamb.

When we extend this test to the *lo-de* construction, it turns out that the subject DP cannot be associated with *sólo* 'only':

- (41) a. *Te extrañó lo alto de sólo aquella niña.
to.you struck LO tall of only that.FEM girl
b. *Me sorprendió lo caro de sólo aquella casa.
to.me struck LO expensive of only that.FEM house

This is exactly what we found in Spanish QBNPs as well:

- (42) a. *¿Recuerdas al burro de sólo aquel médico?
remind.you to-the donkey of only that doctor
b. *Hablé con el granuja de sólo aquel alcalde.
talked.I with the crook of only that mayor

Therefore, the behavior of particles associated with focus like *only* points to the conclusion that the neither subject of the *lo-de* construction and nor that of QBNPs are (contrastive) focus (cf. den Dikken and Singhapreecha (2004)).

3.1.2 Impossibility of focused *wh*-in situ

Further evidence for the non-focus status of the subject DP in the *lo-de* construction comes from the behavior of *wh*-in situ. It is a well-known fact that *wh*-elements appearing in canonical positions within the sentence are interpreted as focus, as the felicity of the pair-list answer shows:

- (43) A: Who bought what?
B: Mary bought a book, John a CD, and Caroline a DVD.

Moreover, in Spanish, where the rightmost VP position is associated with informative focus, it happens that *wh*-elements *in situ* must appear in precisely this rightmost position (44a) vs. (44b), and can only be followed by a right-dislocate (44c) (see Etxepare and Uribe-Etxebarria (2005); Ordóñez (1997)):

- (44) a. ¿Quién le regaló el libro a quién?
who to.him/her gave the book to who
b. *¿Quién le regaló a quién el libro?
who to.him/her gave to who the book
c. ¿Quién se lo regaló a quién, el libro?
who to.him/her it gave to who the book

When we extend this test to the *lo-de* construction, we find out that *wh*-elements *in situ* cannot appear in the subject position:

- (45) a. *¿A quién le extrañó lo alto de qué casa?
to who to.him/her struck LO high of which house
b. *¿Quién consideraba vergonzoso lo obsceno de qué libros?
who considered shameful LO obscene of which books

Once more, QBNPs exhibit the very same behavior:

- (46) a. *¿A quién engañó el granuja de qué alcalde?
to who deceived the crook of which mayor
b. *¿Quién se encontró con el granuja de qué alcalde?
who SE met with the crook of which mayor

On the grounds of this evidence, we can reassure our claim that neither the subject of the *lo-de* construction nor that of QBNPs is focus.

3.1.3 Backward pronominalization

It is a clear fact about coreference relations in Spanish that the antecedent must precede the pronoun, so that, as a rule, backward pronominalization is impossible:

- (47) a. *Su_i jefe vio a Juan_i.
his boss saw to Juan
b. *?Su_i procesamiento deprimió al alcalde_i.
his prosecution depressed to-the mayor
c. *Su_i hijo nunca ha necesitado a Juan_i.
his son never has needed to Juan

Interestingly, if we right-dislocate the antecedent, the sentences become fine:

- (48) a. Su_i jefe lo vio, a Juan_i.
his boss him saw to Juan
b. Su_i procesamiento lo deprimió, al alcalde_i.
his prosecution him depressed to-the mayor
c. Su_i hijo nunca lo ha necesitado, a Juan_i.
his son never him has needed to Juan

Let us follow Cecchetto (1999); Villalba (1998, 2000), and assume the right-dislocate to occupy a lower position in the VP-area. That will entail that c-commanding relations cannot explain the difference between (47) and (48), for the DP doesn't command the possessive pronoun in neither. The answer

advanced by Villalba (1999) resorts to the informational status of the antecedent: whereas it is focus –hence it is a new referent– in (47), it is a topic –hence an old/accommodated referent– in (48). As a consequence, the case of (presumed) backward pronominalization involves a previously introduced referent, which may count as the discourse antecedent for the pronoun (see Williams (1994) for a similar insight, concerning sentences like *His_i boss saw John_i*). Support for such a move comes from the following examples, where the explicit mention of the referent *Juan* allows the possessive pronoun to *indirectly* corefer with a following instance of this referent:

- (49) a. *Su_i jefe vio a Juan_i.
 his boss saw to Juan
 b. Juan_i no vio a su_i jefe, pero su_i jefe sí que lo_i vio, a
 Juan not saw to his boss but his boss yes that him say to
 Juan_i.
 Juan

If this line of analysis is correct, a clear prediction can be made concerning the informational status of the subject of the *lo-de* construction: if it were a nonfocal constituent, a previously introduced referent would be available as the antecedent of the pronoun, yielding an instance of apparent backward pronominalization. The prediction seems correct under the light of the following examples:

- (50) a. Su_i erupción puso de manifiesto lo peligroso d[el volcán]_i.
 its eruption put of evidence LO dangerous of-the vulcano
 b. Su_i colapso demostró lo precario de [la red
 its collapse demonstrated LO precarious of the.FEM network
 eléctrica]_i.
 electric.FEM

This is even clearer in the case of QBNPs:

- (51) a. Su_i procesamiento deprimió al corrupto d[el alcalde]_i.
 his prosecution depressed to-the corrupt of-the mayor
 b. Su_i insistencia benefició a la pesada de [María]_i.
 her insistence benefited to the.FEM bore.FEM of María

Taken as a whole, the empirical evidence discussed in this subsection allows us to state the following generalization:

Generalization 7 Neither the subject of the *lo-de* construction nor that of QBNPs are focus.

3.2 *The subject is a background topic*

The data presented so far in this subsection allows us to conclude that the subject of the *lo-de* construction is not focus. We will advance that it should better be analyzed as a background topic –a *tail* in Vallduví (1992) terms. In order to show this, we will consider the properties of a construction we independently know to be associated with background status, namely *clitic right-dislocation* (see Erteschik-Shir (2007); Grosz and Ziv (1998); Mayol (to appear); Vallduví (1992); Villalba (2000, 2007a); Ziv (1986)), and then we will proceed to display that the referential restriction applying to right-dislocates are the same we find in the subject position of the *lo-de* construction.

3.2.1 *An excursus on clitic right-dislocation*

As a matter of fact, the most typical function of clitic right-dislocation is to reintroduce as a current topic a previously mentioned referent –hence the appropriateness of the term *background topic*.⁵ Consider for instance the following example from one of the radio shows by the Marx Brothers:

- (52) a. GROUCHO: Let me take a look at that diamond!
b. MRS. VANDERGRAFF: But the diamond is lost. It's gone!
c. GROUCHO: Well, how do you expect me to find it if I don't know what it looks like. Why didn't you come to me before it was stolen? What you're trying to do is lock the barn door after the horse is stolen. When did you last see your horse?
d. MRS. VANDERGRAFF: But I didn't lose a horse. I lost a diamond!
e. GROUCHO: Well, that was your first mistake. You should have lost a horse. A horse would be much easier to find.
f. MRS. VANDERGRAFF: Now what about the diamond?

Barson, Michael (ed.) (1988). *Flywheel, Shyster, and Flywheel. The Marx Brothers lost radio show*. New York: Pantheon Books. pp. 275-276.

The gist of the dialogue is the continuous shift between two topics: the diamond, which is the main concern of Mrs. Vandergraff, and a totally invented horse introduced by Groucho on the basis of a nonreferential mention within an idiomatic expression. The fragment begins with the continued topic *that*

⁵ Clitic right-dislocation can fulfill other discourse functions as well. See Grosz and Ziv (1998); Mayol (to appear); Villalba (2007a) for a review.

diamond –note the presence of the demonstrative. The replies by Mrs. Vandergraff and Groucho still take the diamond as the topic, which is referred to by means of a definite DP (52b) and a pronoun (52c). It is at this point when Groucho introduces a new topic: the horse. Obviously, this operation is totally unwarranted on pragmatics grounds –which is the source of the joke–, for it treats a totally new element as if it were part of the common ground –note that it is introduced as a definite, and hence familiar, DP. As a consequence, Mrs. Vandergraff’s reply (52d) denies its status as a topic, and attempts to turn to the original topic, the diamond. Yet, Groucho reintroduces the topic again, but in the correct fashion: by means of the indefinite DP *a horse* in (52d). Finally, Mrs. Vandergraff insists on her main interest: the diamond. Now, consider how this nice example of topic-shift is built in a topic-marking language like Catalan, where the reintroduction of a previously mentioned topic is marked by means of clitic right-dislocation.⁶

- (53) a. GROUCHO: Escolti, deixi’m fer-li una ullada, *a aquest diamant!*
 b. SENYORA VANDERGRAFF: Però si el diamant s’ha perdut. Ha volat!
 c. GROUCHO: Escolti, i com espera que el trobi si no sé ni quin aspecte té? Per què no em va venir a veure abans que el robessin? Això que vol fer ara és com tancar la porta de la quadra després que han robat el cavall. Quan va veure *el seu cavall* per última vegada?
 d. SENYORA VANDERGRAFF: No n’he perdut cap, *de cavall*. He perdut un diamant!
 e. GROUCHO: Doncs aquest fou el seu primer error. Hauria d’haver perdut un cavall. Un cavall seria molt més fàcil de trobar.
 f. SENYORA VANDERGRAFF: I què me’n diu, *del diamant?*

Barson, Michael (ed.) (1989). *Groucho i Chico, advocats: els guions radiofònics dels germans Marx*. Translation by Màrius Serra. Barcelona: Columna. p. 288. [Italics added]

In (53f), Mrs. Vandergraff changes the topic from the imaginary horse to the previously mentioned and still active diamond, and to do so the translator resorts to clitic right-dislocation. Since the topic introduced by the right-dislocate corresponds to an active referent, and is considered as background information, one expects it to be formally marked as such, namely to be typically a specific DP or, *a fortiori*, a definite one, along the lines suggested in Heim (1982). As a matter of fact, only specific nominals are allowed as right-dislocates, with a strong preference for definites. Hence, none of the nonspecific

⁶ This construction is far less common in Spanish, which resorts to other mechanisms, such as deaccenting or prosodic movement (see Villalba (2007a); Zubizarreta (1998)).

quantified phrases –i.e. those rejected as subjects of the *lo-de* construction, see 2.5– are expected to be amenable to clitic right-dislocation. This expectation is confirmed in full. Consider, for instance, the case of excess quantifiers.

As discussed at length in Bosque (1994), excess quantifiers are inherently non-specific, as shown by their incompatibility with standard marks of specificity, like modifiers forcing a particular reading or partitivity:

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

As expected, excess quantifiers cannot be right-dislocated:

- (55) a. A: María puede tener mucho dinero, pero no tiene demasiados
 María may have much money but not has too.many
 libros.
 books
 b. B: Pues yo creía que sí que los tenía. Además,
 well I thought that yes that them.PL had furthermore
 tiene una casa inmensa.
 has a.FEM house huge
 c. A: *Sí, he estado allí, pero no los tiene, demasiados
 yes, have.I been there but not them.PL has too.many
 libros.
 books

To reinforce our point, we will point the reader toward partitive QPs, which are known to have a preferred specific interpretation (see Enç (1991); Brucart and Rigau (2002)). The immediate prediction will be that the harder for a QP to obtain a partitive reading, the worse its performance will be as a background topic either in a right-dislocation. This prediction is totally borne out, as the following QPs show that can hardly receive a partitive reading:⁷

⁷ Bare plurals behave in a strictly parallel fashion:

- (i) *Juan (las) tiene dos, casas.
 John them.PL them has two houses

Yet, things are a bit more complicated for independent reasons. Clitic right-dislocation of bare plurals is possible in languages like Catalan, French or Italian, as in the following Catalan example:

- (ii) La Maria en té dues, de cases.
 the Maria of.it has two of houses

- (56) a. * Juan tiene pocos libros, pero María no los tiene, pocos
 Juan has few books, but María not them has few.PL
 libros: tiene una biblioteca inmensa.
 books has a.FEM library huge
- b. ?? Juan tiene entre cuarenta y cincuenta libros, pero María
 Juan has between forty and fifty books, but María
 no los tiene, entre cuarenta y cincuenta libros: tiene
 not them has between forty and fifty books has
 una biblioteca inmensa.
 a.FEM library huge

All these are well-known phenomena pointing toward a tight association between specificity and right-dislocation, and consequently the possibility of being a background topic. In the following paragraph we extend these insights to the nominal domain to explain the referential restrictions operating on the subject of the *lo-de* construction.

3.2.2 Deriving the referential restrictions of the *lo-de* construction

We have just seen on the basis of clitic right-dislocation that the very nature of background topics imposes a strong restriction on its formal realization, namely they must be specific. Crucially, as has been pointed out in 2.5, this is precisely the constraint acting over the subject position in the *lo-de* construction, with major consequences for the distribution of determiners and quantifiers in this position. Let us consider the relevant examples in some detail.

Quantifiers in the subject position of the *lo-de* construction display a straightforward pattern: nonspecific quantifiers are totally banned, whereas specific ones are fine. Consider, for instance, the case of nonspecific *todo* 'every' and *cualquier* 'any' in contrast with specific *todos* 'all' and *ambos* 'both':

- (57) a. * Me sorprendió lo caro de toda/cualquier casa.
 to.me surprised LO expensive of every.FEM/any house

'Maria has TWO houses.'

Crucially, the resumptive clitic must be the partitive one *-en-*, which is absent in Spanish. If the definite clitic is used instead, the sentence becomes ungrammatical:

- (iii) * La Maria les té, de cases.
 the Maria them.FEM has of houses
 'Maria DOES have houses.'

- b. Me sorprendió lo caro de todas las
 to.me surprised LO expensive of all.FEM the.FEM
 casas/ambas casas.
 houses/both houses

An even sharper contrast arises when we consider excess quantifiers like *demasiado* 'too many' or *excesivo* 'excessive':

- (58) *Le sorprendió lo caro de demasiadas/excesivas
 to.him/her surprised LO expensive of too.many/too.many
 casas.
 houses

When quantifiers are considered showing a specific/nonspecific alternation, the prediction follows that the more specific the interpretation, the better the quantifier in the subject position of the *lo-de* construction, just in parallel to the clitic-right dislocation cases considered in paragraph 3.2.1. This prediction is confirmed in full. First of all, monotone increasing quantifiers –(59a)–, which easily admit a partitive follow-up –(59b)–, are fine:

- (59) a. Me sorprendió lo caro de algunos/muchos/??varios
 to.me surprised LO expensive of certain/many/several
 vinos.
 wines
 b. Me sorprendió lo caro de algunos/muchos/varios de los
 to.me surprised LO expensive of certain/many/several of the
 vinos.
 wines

In contrast, monotone decreasing quantifiers –(60a)–, which cannot obtain a partitive interpretation –(60b)– yield ungrammatical results:

- (60) a. *Me sorprendió lo caro de menos de cuatro/pocos
 to.me surprised LO expensive of less of four/few
 vinos.
 wines
 b. *Me sorprendió lo caro de menos de cuatro/pocos de
 to.me surprised LO expensive of less of four/few of
 los vinos.
 the wines

Finally, consider the more complex case of nonmonotone quantifiers, which seem to have a mixed behavior between monotone increasing and monotone

decreasing ones. The easier they allow a partitive reading, the better they fare as subjects of the *lo-de* construction:

- (61) a. *Me sorprendió lo caro de entre cuatro y seis
to.me surprised LO expensive of between four and six
vinos.
wines
- b. ??Me sorprendió lo caro de entre cuatro y seis de
to.me surprised LO expensive of between four and six of
los vinos.
the wines
- c. ?Me sorprendió lo caro de entre cuatro y seis de
to.me surprised LO expensive of between four and six of
aquellos vinos portugueses del Douro.
those wines Portuguese of.the Douro

Thus, the evidence just reviewed points toward the strong referential constraint that the subject of the *lo-de* construction must be specific. When taken together with the behavior of clitic-right dislocation studied in paragraph 3.2.1, one can advance the hypothesis that the same phenomenon is at stake, namely that the specificity constraint is imposed by the background topic nature of both right-dislocates and the subject of the *lo-de* construction.

3.2.3 Bare plurals

Another significant piece of evidence comes from bare plurals supporting the generalization that the subject of the *lo-de* construction must be specific. It is a well-known fact that bare plurals can hardly be interpreted specifically (62a), but must get either a nonspecific reading (62b) –as indicated by the subjunctive (SBJ)/indicative (IND) alternation in the relative clause– or a generic one (62c):

- (62) a. *Encontró libros en concreto.
found books in particular
- b. No encontró libros que le gustasen/*gustan.
not found books that to.him/her like.SBJ.3PL/like.IND.3PL
- c. No encontró libros (*en concreto), sólo revistas.
not found books in particular only magazines

In accordance with the evidence presented so far, the prediction can be made that bare plurals will be impossible as subjects of the *lo-de* construction, which is borne out, even when a generic context is provided:

- (63) a. *No me extrañó lo caro de casas.
 not to.me struck LO expensive of houses
 b. *A todo el mundo le puede sorprender lo
 to all the world to-him/her can surprise LO
 caro de casas.
 expensive of houses

This fits in with the fact that bare plurals cannot be clitic-right dislocated with a specific interpretation (see fn. 7 for details):

- (64) *La Maria les té, de casas.
 the Maria them.FEM has of houses
 'Maria DOES have houses.'

Therefore, this datum gives additional support to the working hypothesis that the subject of the *lo-de* construction is a background topic.

3.2.4 Aspectual restrictions

One last piece of evidence concerns the aspectual restrictions of the predicate, and the way they affect the focus-background partition. Interestingly, as pointed out in Erteschik-Shir (1997, 2007), individual-level predicates, unlike stage-level ones, cannot be predicated of an implicit spatiotemporal topic –the eventive argument in Kratzer (1989) Neodavidsonian analysis:

- (65) a. # A Dutch was tall.
 b. A Dutch was injured.

In (65a), the property of being tall cannot be predicated of the subject because it is not a suitable topic –it is nonspecific–, nor of an implicit spatiotemporal topic because the predicate lacks it. Henceforth, the subject of these predicates must be a suitable topic. This analysis gives a cue for the aspectual restriction affecting the *lo-de* construction discussed in 4.1, namely that only individual-level predicates are possible in this construction (we repeat the examples for the sake of reference):

- (66) a. *Me sorprendió lo lleno de aquel plato.
 to.me surprised LO full of that dish
 b. *Me sorprendió lo enfermo de tu hermano.
 to.me surprised LO ill of your brother

- (67) a. Me sorprendió lo frágil de aquel plato.
to.me surprised LO fragile of that dish
- b. Me sorprendió lo inteligente de tu hermano.
to.me surprised LO intelligent of your brother

Even though tentatively, we would like to link the observation by Erteschik-Shir (1997, 2007) to this aspectual contrast in the *lo-de* construction in the following way. Since the individual-level predicate needs an independent (background) topic –it lacks an eventive argument capable of doing the job–, we expect that the subject nominal, which is the one that should bear this role be a suitable topic, hence a specific nominal. This is, indeed, the situation we have been describing thorough this section.

As for the impossibility of having a stage-level predicate, we suggest that it follows from an incompatibility between two topics, namely the event argument and the subject nominal: whereas the *lo-de* construction forces a topic reading on the latter, the predicate forces a topic reading on the former. This clash between both requirements, we argue, is the source of the impossibility of having a stage-level predicate in the *lo-de* construction.

The coherence of the overall picture arising from the data reviewed in this section and the strong parallelism with respect to the robust independent evidence provided us by clitic-right dislocation with respect to a wide range of quantifiers allows us to safely make the following statement:

Generalization 8 The subject of the *lo-de* construction must be specific because it is a background topic.

In the next paragraph, we add QBNPs to the puzzle to obtain a more consistent and compelling set of supporting evidence.

3.2.5 *Completing the picture: QBNPs*

Interestingly, the empirical tests that led us to assign the subject of the *lo-de* construction the status of background topic reproduce in full for the subject position of Spanish QBNPs (see Villalba (2007b)). First, consider the contrast between inherently nonspecific and specific quantifiers (cf. (57)):

- (68) a. *Consiguió conocer al idiota de todo/cualquier alcalde
managed know the idiot of every/any mayor
- b. Consiguió conocer a los idiotas de todos
managed know the.M.PL idiots of every.M.PL the.M.PL
los alcaldes/ambos alcaldes.
mayors/both mayors

Second, the subject position of QBNPs is banned as well for excess quantifiers, which we have shown to be inherently nonspecific (cf. (58)):

- (69) * Conoció a los idiotas de demasiados/excesivos
knew to the.MASC.PL idiots of too.many/too.many
alcaldes.
mayors

Third, the strong preference for quantifiers allowing partitivity readings is reproduced in full in the subject position of QBNPs (cf. (59)-(61)):

- (70) a. Conoció a los idiotas de algunos/muchos/varios alcaldes.
knew to the.M.PL idiots of certain/many/several mayors
b. Conoció a los idiotas de algunos/muchos/varios de
knew to the.M.PL idiots of certain/many/several of
los alcaldes.
the.PL mayors

- (71) a. * Conoció a los idiotas de menos de cuatro/pocos
knew to the.M.PL idiots of less of four/few
alcaldes.
mayors
b. * Conoció a los idiotas de menos de cuatro/pocos de los
knew to the.M.PL idiots of less of four/few of the
alcaldes.
mayors

- (72) a. * Conoció a los idiotas de entre cuatro y seis
knew to the.M.PL idiots of between four and six
alcaldes.
mayors
b. * Conoció a los idiotas de entre cuatro y seis de
knew to the.M.PL idiots of between four and six of
los alcaldes.
the mayors

Finally, bare plurals are also impossible (cf. (63)):

- (73) a. * No hablé con los idiotas de alcaldes.
not talked with the idiots of mayors

- b. * En este país es inútil hablar con los idiotas de
 in this country is useless talk with the.PL idiots of
 alcaldes.
 mayors

Therefore, we can straightforwardly extend our generalization regarding the subject of the *lo-de* construction to QBNPs:

Generalization 9 The subject of the *lo-de* construction *and of QBNPs* must be specific because it is a background topic.

4 A new proposal: *lo-de* as a DP-internal predicate focus-fronting construction

In sections 2 and 3 we have established a quite complex and solid set of empirical generalizations that we extract and summarize here for the sake of reference:

- (1) The *lo-de* construction and QBNPs involve a subject-predicate relationship.
- (2) Neither in the *lo-de* construction nor in QBNPs is *de* a true preposition.
- (3) Neither in the *lo-de* construction nor in QBNPs does the *de*+DP sequence form a constituent.
- (4) *lo-de* and QBNPs are incompatible with non-high/low syntactic degree quantification
- (5) The *lo-de* construction and QBNPs are islands for extraction.
- (6) Neither the subject of the *lo-de* construction nor that of QBNPs are focus.
- (7) The subject of the *lo-de* construction and of QBNPs must be specific because it is a background topic.

In this section, we pursue an analysis of the *lo-de* construction capable of accounting for this systematic set of properties. The crucial points of our proposal are the following. First, the *lo-de* construction and QBNPs involve a subject-predicate structure mediated by a functional projection, along the lines suggested by Bennis et al. (1998); den Dikken (1998, 2006); Kayne (1994). Second, the quantificational value of the *lo-de* construction relies on a nominal DEGREE head hosting a null degree operator in its specifier. Moreover, this element, which is argued to be absent in QBNPs, will be responsible for the lack of agreement between the subject and the predicate, for it will count as a closer checking goal for the uninterpretable phi-features of the adjective. Third, in both constructions the predicate moves to a DP-internal focus position. Finally, the exclamative flavor of the *lo-de* construction will be derived from the movement of the degree operator to the left periphery of the DP, resulting

In order to explain the divergent agreement pattern of the *lo-de* construction, we will crucially rely on the role of high degree quantification, and more precisely on the presence of a null degree operator. However, since this aspect of the analysis will become paramount, we developed it in detail in a separate paragraph.

4.2 High degree quantification

As we have argued for extensively in 2.4, besides the subject-predicate relation, the *lo-de* construction requires the adjective to be gradable, and involves high degree quantification. We formalize this fact by means of a null degree operator (DegP), which selects the adjective (see Cresswell (1976); Kennedy (1999), among many others; cf. the proposal in Corver (2000), that places the DegP as a complement of the adjective):⁹

$$(76) \quad [_{XP} [_{DP} \textit{la casa}] [_{X'} X [_{DegP} \textit{Deg} [_{AP} \textit{car-}]]]]$$

Yet, we want to entertain the idea that the structure of the DegP in this structure is a bit more complex than in standard degree modification configurations like *una casa muy cara* ‘a very expensive house’. Traditional Spanish grammarians –see for instance, Alarcos (1970)– take the neuter article *lo* as a nominalizer which converts the adjective into a noun:

$$(77) \quad \textit{lo} + [_{A} \textit{alto}] = \textit{lo} [_{N} \textit{alto}]$$

An implementation of this idea is found in Contreras (1973); Rivero (1981), which insert the adjective under a N head. However, as argued convincingly in Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999), such an analysis must face unsurmountable technical and empirical difficulties. For example, it cannot explain the impossibility of the presumed noun to be modified by nonrestrictive relatives, in contrast with deadjectival nominals:

- (78) a. *Vio *lo sucio*, que era muy asqueroso.
 saw LO dirt that was very disgusting
- b. Vio *la suciedad*, que era muy asquerosa.
 saw the.FEM dirtiness that was very disgusting.FEM

⁹ From a semantic point of view, the proposed syntactic structure corresponds to the combination of a gradable adjective of type $\langle d, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$ with a degree of type $\langle d \rangle$, yielding a property $\langle e, t \rangle$. See Kennedy (1999).

Our proposal will, thus, pursue a different line of analysis, while retaining the original insight that the construction nominalizes an adjective. In order to formalize this idea, we adopt from Kayne (2005b) the idea of a null DEGREE noun as the head of the DegP. Moreover, this DEGREE noun hosts a null operator over degrees in its specifier, from where it binds the degree variable of the adjective. Schematically:

$$(79) \quad [_{\text{DegP}} \text{OP} [_{\text{Deg}'} \text{DEGREE} [_{\text{AP}} \text{car-}]]]$$

Notably, this structure faithfully reflects the interpretation of the *lo-de* construction, as nominalizing a property held to a high degree:

$$(80) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{Me} \quad \text{sorprendió} \quad \text{lo} \quad \text{caro} \quad \text{de la} \quad \text{casa.} \\ \text{to.me surprised} \quad \text{LO} \quad \text{expensive of the house} \\ \text{par.: 'It surprised me the high degree of expensiveness of the house.'} \end{array}$$

This is in fact the interpretation of the Spanish neuter article *lo* that proposes (Gutiérrez-Rexach, 1999, 43), following previous insights by Ojeda (1982, 1993): '[t]he function denoted by the determiner *lo* in a degree relative clause selects the maximal degree in the denotation of a gradable property.' Following this scholar, the null degree operator would correspond to a MAXIMALITY operator (see Rullmann (1995) for the basic semantic notion, and Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999) for the details of the application to the Spanish neuter article *lo*):¹⁰

$$(81) \quad \textit{lo caro} \equiv \textit{MAX}(\lambda d \lambda x. \textit{Expensive}'(d)(x))$$

So far for the semantics. On the syntactic side, we want to pursue the idea that the nominal nature of the null DEGREE is the responsible of the typical disagreement pattern. Our way to flesh out this idea is the following. First, while the null operator lacks ϕ -features altogether, the null nominal DEGREE is endowed with *unspecified* ϕ -features. This difference is crucial in the probe-goal design of the feature-checking mechanism, which is standard in the Minimalist Program either in its original formulation (Chomsky (2000, 2001)) or in the crash-proof version (Frampton and Gutmann (2000, 2002); López (2005, 2007)). The unspecified ϕ -features of DEGREE will be active and function as

¹⁰ Another promising line of research is considering the denotation of the *lo-de* construction a *trope* –thanks to M. Teresa Espinal for bringing tropes to our attention. (Moltmann, 2004, 746) defines this concept as follows: 'Tropes are concrete instantiations of properties, such as the particular hostility of John's gesture or the particular beauty that Mary manifests.' Note that Moltmann's first example is a nice translation of the Spanish *lo hostil del gesto de Juan*. We leave this issue for a future research.

a probe (82a). Then the probe finds the matching unvalued ϕ -features of the adjective (82b). Finally, the unspecified ϕ -features of DEGREE value those of the adjective (82c). As a consequence, the unspecified ϕ -features of the adjective become inactive and invisible to further probing until Spell-out, when they are assigned the default morphological value, namely masculine singular, yielding a disagreement pattern with respect to the subject DP.^{11 12}

- (82) a. $\text{DEGREE}_{[\alpha\phi]} \xrightarrow{\text{probing}} \dots$
 b. $\text{DEGREE}_{[\alpha\phi]} \xleftrightarrow{\text{matching}} A_{[\phi]}$
 c. $\text{DEGREE}_{[\alpha\phi]} \xrightarrow{\text{valuation}} A_{[\alpha\phi]}$

Henceforth, the crucial difference between the *lo-de* construction and those involving degree modification and subject-predicate agreement –*una casa muy cara* ‘a very expensive house’– would concern the value of the ϕ -features of the degree element: unspecified in the case of the nominal DEGREE –hence active–, absent in the case of the standard degree modifier –hence inactive. A direct issue of concern at this point is the behavior of QBNPs, which, as we have seen thorough the article, do show subject-predicate agreement:¹³

- (83) las idiotas de tus hermanas
 the.FEM.PL idiots of your sister.FEM.PL

Our proposal is that the quantification involved in QBNPs is *not* encoded syntactically by means of a DEGREE head and a DegP, but rather is a lexically-encoded –and hence highly idiosyncratic– evaluative property of the predicate. As discussed in the literature (see e.g. García and Méndez (2002); Suñer (1990); Hernanz and Suñer (1999)), not all nominals are suitable as predicates in QBNPs. Typical instances involve negative evaluative nominals like *idiota*

¹¹ A different technical solution is assume that matching unspecified features can probe, but cannot value, those of the goal. Yet once matching takes place the features of the goal become inactive. One must then assume that these unvalued features don’t cause the derivation to crash, but rather they receive the default realization (López (2007)).

¹² We are leaving aside nontrivial technical details concerning noun-adjective agreement, for, as far as we can see, this is a neglected issue in the otherwise huge bibliography on agreement within the Minimalist Program, which probably cannot be separated from the fact that English lacks noun-adjective agreement. See, for instance, Chomsky (2000, 2001), Frampton and Gutmann (2000, 2002) and López (2005, 2007) for three divergent views on feature agreement and valuation, which leave this particular issue unattended.

¹³ On the agreement pattern in these and other related constructions, see Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a,b); Casillas-Martínez (2001); Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999); Hulk and Tellier (2000).

‘idiot’, *bruja* ‘witch’, *gilipollas* ‘asshole’, *burro* ‘silly’ (lit. ‘donkey’), whereas non evaluative nouns like *médico* ‘doctor’ or *político* ‘politician’ are forbidden, yielding only the non-predicative reading –hence the strangeness of *político* ‘politician’ in this context:

- (84) el médico/#político de tu hermano
 the doctor/politician of your brother
 ‘your brother’s doctor/#politician’

Crucially, when a deprecatory morphological mark like *-ucho* or *-astro* is added or a marked negative lexical alternative is chosen, QBNPs become perfect:¹⁴

- (85) el medicucho/políticastro de tu hermano
 the bad.doctor/bad.politician of your brother

If we link this behavior to the fact that what counts as a proper evaluative nominal has a cultural conditioning, one is naturally inclined to assign the quantificational flavor of QBNPs to the lexical properties of the predicate rather than to a particular syntactic configuration, in the case at hand, to the presence of a null DEGREE nominal and a null operator. Note for instance, the contrast between the masculine *brujo* ‘wizard’ and the feminine *bruja* ‘witch’. Whereas the latter allows typical QBNPs (86a), and one finds 10 occurrences in the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* of the RAE, the former is awkward (86b), and it is unattested in the same corpus.

- (86) a. la bruja de mi suegra
 the.FEM witch of my mother-in-law
 ‘that witch of my mother-in-law’
 b. #el brujo de mi suegro
 the.MASC wizard of my father-in-law
 ‘that wizard of my father-in-law’

Hence, we are not assuming the presence of a DEGREE projection nor of a null degree operator in Spanish QBNPs. The second major syntactic consequence of the presence of the nominal DEGREE and the null operator concerns the exclamative interpretation of the *lo-de* construction and its selectional restrictions. We will turn to this point in 4.4, now we will consider the relative position of the subject and the predicate.

¹⁴Note that, in contrast with the *lo-de* construction, the difference has nothing to do with gradability, for neither nominal is gradable: **Juan es muy médico/medicucho* ‘*Juan is very a doctor/a bad doctor.’

4.3 Predicate focus fronting

Let us consider the structure we are assuming for QBNPs. We have the subject-predicate structure build by means of the relator XP with the addition of the complex DegP:

$$(87) \quad [_{XP} [_{DP} \textit{la casa}] [_{X'} X [_{DegP} OP [_{Deg'} DEGREE [_{AP} \textit{car-}]]]]]]$$

At this point, we propose a major difference with respect to standard accounts of DP-internal Predicate Inversion like Bennis et al. (1998) and den Dikken (2006). As we have argued at length in section 3, there is strong compelling evidence to consider that the predicate is focus, in sharp contrast with the proposal that den Dikken (2006) assumes for QBNPs in particular and Predicate Inversion in general, which is based on the assumption that the predicate must raise to some *A*-position to become licensed through formal feature checking. Yet, one further refinement is in order, for we have shown that the *lo-de* construction nominalizes the high degree to which a property holds of one individual. So then, when we utter

$$(88) \quad \begin{array}{l} \textit{Me} \quad \textit{sorprendió} \quad \textit{lo caro} \quad \textit{de la casa.} \\ \textit{to.me surprised} \quad \textit{LO expensive of the house} \\ \textit{par.: 'It surprised me the high degree of expensiveness of the house.'} \end{array}$$

we are not surprised by the fact that the house is expensive, but by its *high degree of expensiveness*. In other words, what is being focused is not the AP, *but the nominal DEGREE*.¹⁵ So then, we propose that it is the whole DegP that moves to the specifier of a DP internal Focus Phrase, which we indentify with Kayne's and den Dikken's neutral F, for checking an interpretable focus feature –or, in other terms, to satisfy the Focus Criterion; see Brody (1990); Rizzi (1997) (see Bosque (2001) for a similar intuition, and García and Méndez (2002) for a different proposal for Spanish QBNPs based on modality). To allow this movement, the nominal DEGREE head must raise to X and then to F –this complex head is lexically realized by the particle *de* 'of', a *linker* in den Dikken (2006); den Dikken and Singhapreecha (2004) terms:

$$(89) \quad \begin{array}{l} [_{FocP} [_{DegP} OP [_{Deg'} DEGREE [_{AP} \textit{car-}]]]] [_{Foc'} DEGREE+X+Foc(=de) \\ [_{XP} [_{DP} \textit{la casa}] [_{X'} \textit{t}_{DEGREE+X} \textit{t}_{DegP}]]] \end{array}$$

¹⁵ This fits in with the fact that all traditional grammarians (see Alcina and Blecaua (1975); Fernández-Ramírez (1986); Bosque and Moreno (1990)) have pointed out that all types of *lo* constructions seem to focalize the adjective.

As a consequence, the structure gets partitioned in the following way, which mirrors the focus-presupposition partition of the sentence in Rizzi (1997):

- (90) $[_{\text{FocP}} \underbrace{\text{DegP}}_{\text{FOCUS}} [_{\text{Foc}'} \text{X+Foc} \underbrace{[_{\text{XP}} \text{DP} \dots]}_{\text{BACKGROUND}}]]$
- (91) $[_{\text{FocP}} \underbrace{\text{XP}}_{\text{FOCUS}} [_{\text{Foc}'} \text{X+Foc} \underbrace{[_{\text{TP}} \dots]}_{\text{PRESUPPOSITION}}]]$

We are perfectly aware that this line of analysis entails the existence of pragmatically motivated movements in syntax, which argues against one of the basic tenets of the Chomskian program, namely the radical autonomy of syntax. Yet, without entering into architectural discussions, we feel that it makes perfect sense from a theoretical point of view to defend that the same mechanisms devised to express the informational-partition of sentence in terms of focus and topic –standardly, FocP and TopP– should be assumed for the DP as well, just like other functional layers (see Aboh (2004a,b); Giusti (1996); Haegeman (2004) for different proposals along these lines; cf. Szendrői (2004)). Furthermore, moving to an empirical standpoint, our proposal does a good job in accounting for the main properties of the constructions under scrutiny, particularly islandhood (see 2.6) and the referential constraints on the subject (see 2.5). As for the islandhood of the *lo-de* construction and QBNPs, it comes without surprise that extraction from the subject is impossible altogether, for topics are opaque domains for extraction. In other words, the ungrammaticality of (92) is parallel to that of the instances of extraction from a right-dislocate (93) in Catalan –see Villalba (1998), (Villalba, 2000, ch. 4):¹⁶

- (92) a. *¿[En qué asunto] te extrañó lo mezquino de su
in what matter to.you struck LO mean of his/her
interés *t*?
interest
- b. *¿[De qué ciudad] conociste al granuja del alcalde *t*?
of what city met.you to.the crook of the mayor
- (93) *De què creus que no ho és pas, [de responsable *t*]?
of what think.you that not it is NEG of responsible
‘What do you think (s)he is not responsible of?’

As for the referential constraints on the subject, our proposal fares better than approaches based on structural restrictions like the one defended in den Dikken (2006) for QBNPs, which resorts to the claim that the subject must

¹⁶ We offer an example of Catalan clitic right-dislocation, for this construction is far less common in Spanish, which resorts to other mechanisms, such as deaccenting or prosodic movement (see Villalba (2007a); Zubizarreta (1998)).

be a Number Phrase, and not a full DP. Such a hypothesis makes the strong prediction that neither definite articles, nor demonstratives, nor quantifiers should be allowed in this position, which on the basis of the evidence presented in section 3, is simply incorrect for Spanish *lo-de* and QBNPs (see Villalba (2007b) for a similar point concerning Romance QBNPs in general).

Therefore, we are defending that the inverted predicate-subject configuration in the *lo-de* construction is not the result of Predicate Inversion as originally conceived by Bennis et al. (1998), but rather the consequence of the *A'*-movement of the complex DegP –the predicate DP in the case of QBNPs–, which pied-pipes the predicate, to a DP-internal FocusP. An explanation of whether this contrast with Germanic QBNPs follows from an underlying syntactic or lexical property, we leave for a future research.

4.4 *The exclamative force*

We have considered the motivation, mechanics, and consequences of predicate fronting in Spanish QBNPs, now it's time to take into account the selectional properties of the *lo-de* construction. First of all, it is a well-established fact (see Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a,b) for the original insight) that the *lo-de* construction must be selected by a restricted number of predicates with factive meaning. Consider some minimal pairs:

(94) factive predicates

- a. Le sorprendió lo caro de la casa.
to.him/her surprised LO expensive of the.FEM house
“It struck him/her the (degree of) expensiveness of the house.”
- b. Nos asombró lo rápido de la respuesta.
to.us amazed LO quick of the.FEM answer
“We were amazed by the (degree of) quickness of the answer.”
- c. Lamentó lo negativo de la respuesta.
regretted LO negative of the.FEM answer
“(S)he regretted the (degree of) negativity of the answer.”

(95) non-factive predicates

- a. *Sospechó lo caro de la casa.
suspected LO expensive of the.FEM house
- b. *Esperaba lo rápido de la respuesta.
waited LO quick of the.FEM answer
- c. *Temía lo negativo de la respuesta.
feared LO negative of the.FEM answer

This sharp contrast concerning selectional restrictions faithfully reproduces the behavior of exclamative sentences (see Elliott (1971, 1974); Grimshaw (1979) for the main facts in English):

(96) factive predicates

- a. Le sorprendió lo cara que era la casa.
to.him/her surprised LO expensive that was the.FEM house
"It struck him/her how expensive the house was."
- b. Nos asombró lo rápida que fue la respuesta.
to.us amazed LO quick that was the.FEM answer
"We were amazed by how quick the answer was."
- c. Lamentó lo negativa que fue la respuesta.
regretted LO negative that was the.FEM answer
"(S)he regretted how negative the answer was."

(97) non-factive predicates

- a. *Sospechó lo cara que era la casa.
suspected LO expensive.FEM that was the.FEM house
- b. *Esperaba lo rápida que fue la respuesta.
waited LO quick.FEM that was the.FEM answer
- c. *Temía lo negativa que fue la respuesta.
feared LO negative.FEM that was the.FEM answer

Yet, one must take into account that the *lo-de* construction doesn't have to be selected by a predicate with an exclamatory meaning. Consider some examples of nonexclamatory factive predicates selecting *lo-de* complements from the Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española:

- (98) a. hasta con cierto orgullo se acepta lo absurdo de la
even with certain proudness SE accepts LO absurd of the
situación
situation
'even with a certain proudness, one accepts how absurd the situation is' Pérez Tamayo, Ciencia, paciencia y conciencia, 1991
- b. pero más difícil aún es reconocer lo vergonzoso de esta
but more difficult even is recognize LO shameful of this
situación.
situation
'but it is even more difficult to acknowledge how shameful this situation is.' "Grave Disminución de Recursos Gubernamentales en el Sector", Excélsior, 25/07/2000

- c. Repentinamente se da cuenta de lo peligroso de la
suddenly SE gives account of LO dangerous of the
situación y decide huir.
situation and decides run.away
'Suddenly (s)he realizes how dangerous the situation is and de-
cides to run away.' Guillermo Schmidhuber de la Mora, María Ter-
rones, 1985
- d. Ahí fui consciente de lo duro de la sanción, ¡de lo injusto
there was conscious of LO hard of the sanction of LO unfair
de la sanción!
of the sanction
'Then I realized how hasty the penalty was, how unfair!' Diego
Armando Maradona, Yo soy el Diego, 2000

As we will argue for below, this kind of examples run against assuming a specialized [exclamative] feature for the *lo-de* construction.

A second obvious property of the *lo-de* construction is its nominal behavior, which, we will argue, is linked to its presuppositional nature. One clear test of the nominal character of the construction is clefting, which is fine with DPs but impossible with sentences. What we found is that the *lo-de* construction can be clefted (99a), contrary to what we find with sentential arguments (99b), and *lo-que* (99c):

- (99) a. Fue lo caro de la casa que me sorprendió.
was Lo expensive of the.FEM house that to.me surprised
"It was the (degree of) expensiveness of the house that surprised
me."
- b. *Fue lo cara que era la casa que me
was LO expensive that was the.FEM house that to.me
sorprendió.
surprised
- c. *Fue que la casa fuera tan cara que me
was that the.FEM house were so expensive that to.me
sorprendió.
surprised

Now its time to link the factive and the nominal nature of the *lo-de* construction. Our technical solution will follow original insights by Aboh (2004a,b); Haegeman (2004), who argue that the highest DP-field host the force features of the whole DP in a parallel fashion to Force Phrase in the CP left-periphery as proposed by Rizzi (1997). Yet, we will argue that a satisfactory technical can be pursued without committing ourselves to the existence of a ForceP in

the DP domain, but rather deriving its effects from the combination of two independent syntactic properties: degree quantification and definiteness. Let us consider the derivation stepwise.

First, the head D merges:

$$(100) \quad \begin{array}{l} \left[\text{D}' \text{ D } \left[\text{FocP } \left[\text{DegP } \text{OP } \left[\text{Deg}' \text{ t}_{DEGREE} \left[\text{AP } \text{car-} \right] \right] \right] \left[\text{Foc}' \text{ DEGREE+X+Foc}(=de) \right. \right. \\ \left. \left. \left[\text{XP } \left[\text{DP } \text{la casa} \right] \left[\text{X}' \text{ t}_{DEGREE+X} \text{ t}_{DegP} \right] \right] \right] \right] \end{array}$$

At this point, we propose that the null maximality operator must raise to Spec,DP to have wide scope over the generalized quantifier provided by the definite D head:

$$(101) \quad \begin{array}{l} \left[\text{DP } \text{OP } \left[\text{D}' \text{ lo } \left[\text{FocP } \left[\text{DegP } \text{tOP } \left[\text{Deg}' \text{ t}_{DEGREE} \left[\text{AP } \text{caro} \right] \right] \right] \left[\text{Foc}' \text{ DEGREE+X+Foc}(=de) \right. \right. \right. \\ \left. \left. \left[\text{XP } \left[\text{DP } \text{la casa} \right] \left[\text{X}' \text{ t}_{DEGREE+X} \text{ t}_{DegP} \right] \right] \right] \right] \end{array}$$

Evidence that the degree operator must have the widest scope is provided by (Gutiérrez-Rexach, 2001, 175) and (Villalba, 2004, 15). Consider, for instance the interaction of degree wh-exclamatives with universal quantifier *all*:

$$(102) \quad \text{How expensive all the books are!}$$

In this sentence the degree operator must have wide scope over the universal quantifier, namely it can only be interpreted as (103a), but not as (103b) (see Gutiérrez-Rexach (1996, 2001) for similar examples and remarks; cf. González (to appear)):

$$(103) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{a. } \iota x[x = \text{MAX}(\forall y[y = \text{book}]\lambda d.\text{expensive}'(d)(y))] \\ \text{b. } \forall y[y = \text{book}]\iota x[x = \text{MAX}(\lambda d.\text{expensive}'(d)(y))] \end{array}$$

Note that a sentence like (102) would be appropriate in a situation where several books are evaluated against a scale of expensiveness, and all of them happen to be far beyond our expected or reasonable price for a book. However, it is not necessary for all the books to be equally priced: it makes perfect sense to have, say, five extremely expensive books but with different particular prices. The issue then is determine how the interpretation obtains that a maximal value is involved, since there are several values considered, which obviously cannot all be maximal. Intuitively, the solution comes from the consideration of the different prices not individually but grouped, namely it is the interval containing all the ten prices that is evaluated, and not the position of each of them on the scale. What is more noteworthy is that the unavailable reading in (103b) corresponds to an exclamative sentence with a distributional quantifier like *each*, which we know that must have wide scope over the distributor. Henceforth, we predict a clear contrast between (102) and (104):

(104) *How expensive each book is!

The wide scope reading required by the quantifier *each* blocks the consideration of the prices as a group and imposes an evaluation of each price individually, with the corresponding clash with the uniqueness requirement of a maximal degree.¹⁷

Turning back to the *lo-de* construction, the consequences of the raising of the operator to the Spec,DP are the following. First, from a morphological point of view, the operator cannot value the ϕ -features of the [+definite] D, and the other possible goals –DEGREE and the adjective– are unspecified for these features. Consequently, the D will be realized as the unmarked definite morpheme, namely, the neuter determiner *lo*. From a semantic point of view, the combination of the degree operator with the with the [+definite] feature of D in the left periphery of the DP renders the construction close to an exclamative. This latter move connects with the vision of the exclamative sentence-type developed by Portner and Zanuttini (2005); Zanuttini and Portner (2003), where it is claimed that 'exclamativity' is not directly encoded in syntax, but it is the result of two independent semantic properties: wh-movement and factivity. The differences are more apparent than real between their characterization of the exclamative sentential force and our proposal for the *lo-de* construction. First, we do not have a wh-element, but our null degree operator does the job, in a totally parallel fashion to the null relative operator in the nominal exclamatives analyzed in Portner and Zanuttini (2005). Second, even though we do not resort to a factive operator as they do, we can derive the presupposed nature of the construction from the definite value of the whole DP and from degree quantification. On the one hand, the *lo-de* construction is a definite description of a (particularized) property, so it comes without surprise that it comes associated with existential presupposition. On the other hand, we follow Gutiérrez-Rexach (1999) in attaching a maximality operator to the denotation of the neuter article *lo*. Crucially the definition of the maximality operator provided by Rullmann (1995) incorporates a iota operator to reflect the fact that the operator singles out just one entity, be it an individual (<e>) or a degree (<d>). Yet, when we move to quantification over degrees, the maximality operator is necessarily associated with a presupposition of existence of the maximal degree at issue. Hence, the following logical relations hold:

- (105) a. How expensive this house is!
 ⇒ The house is d-expensive & d is higher than expected
 b. How expensive this house is! #Well, in fact, it is really cheap.

¹⁷ Note that the explanation of this contrast cannot rest on the referential status of the quantifiers involved, for both *cada* 'each' and *todos* 'all' (cf. *todo* 'every') are inherently specific, but on the clash between the semantic requirements of exclamatives and those of the universal distributive quantifier.

The degree exclamative entails the existence of a degree of expensiveness which is higher than a standard degree in accordance with the speaker's expectations (105a). Moreover, as suggested by (105b), this relation seems to be one of presupposition, and not one of implicature, which would allow cancellation (cf. with a typical scalar implicature: *Mary wrote some poems in the book. Well, in fact, she wrote all of them*). This is indeed the kind of situation we find in the *lo-de* construction, as pointed out before in 2.4:

- (106) a. Es increíble lo caro de la casa
 is incredible LO expensive of the house
 ⇒ The house is d-expensive & d is higher than expected
- b. # Sería increíble lo caro de la casa si fuera
 would.be incredible LO expensive of the house if were
 realmente cara.
 really expensive

So then, it seems plausible to pursue the idea that the *lo-de* construction is a nominal construction which obtains its exclamatory meaning from the combination of degree quantification and definiteness, and not necessarily from some [exclamative] feature. This position makes more sense when the context of occurrence of this construction is considered. First of all, unlike clear exclamative constructions, the *lo-de* construction cannot appear in root contexts, as pointed out by Bartra-Kaufmann and Villalba (2006a,b), which suggests it lacks exclamative illocutionary force:

- (107) a. * ¡Lo caro de la casa!
 LO expensive of the house
- b. ¡Qué cara, la casa!
 how expensive the house
 'How expensive, the house!'
- c. ¡Lo cara que era la casa!
 how expensive that was the house
 'How expensive the house was!'
- d. ¡Qué casa tan cara!
 which house so expensive
 'What a expensive house!'

Secondly, and more important, even though we dispense with the [exclamative] feature, we can still account for the fact that this construction is selected by factive verbs, even though not necessarily those that convey an exclamatory meaning (see exs. (96)-(98)).

To sum up, the close exclamatory meaning of the *lo-de* construction can be explained as the result of the combination of two independent properties, namely degree quantification, and definiteness. This proposal offers a straightforward solution to the selectional requirements just reviewed, without committing ourselves to a syntactic exclamative typing mechanism, which would be hardly tenable for a nominal structure without a propositional content.

5 Conclusions

In this article we have unrevealed new evidence supporting the hypothesis that the architecture of the DP domain mirrors that of the sentence, particularly concerning the topic-focus articulation. We have arrived at these conclusions from the analysis of the Spanish nominal *lo-de* construction, which has been described in detail on a pair with comparative qualitative binominal noun phrases. It has been defended on the light of a wide bulk of evidence that these constructions have a subject-predicate configuration, and that involve predicate raising over the subject to a Focus Phrase, yielding a partition of the sentence where the predicate is focus, and the subject, a background topic. This proposal –which sharply contrasts with that defended for Germanic *and Romance* QBNPs by den Dikken (2006); den Dikken and Singhapreecha (2004)– provides an accurate explanation of a wide range of (mostly unattested) data, particularly concerning the wide and complex set of referential restrictions affecting the subject of both constructions. Moreover, it has been argued that the exclamatory meaning of the *lo-de* construction follows straightforwardly from the combination of a degree quantificational structure, and the definiteness value of the highest Det head, offering a simple solution to the restriction of this construction to factive predicates.

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