

UNO QUE OTRO: A DISTRIBUTIVE INDEFINITE IN MEXICAN SPANISH

Fernando Chapa Barrios & Violeta Vázquez Rojas Maldonado
El Colegio de México

ABSTRACT. In Mexican Spanish, the indefinite quantifier “uno que otro” is used to refer to low cardinalities of entities separated over space or time. Even though they have a strictly singular form, noun phrases with “uno que otro” always refer to more than one entity. And, despite their notional content of plurality, they reject collective predicates. In this paper we propose a semantic analysis of this expression as a distributive indefinite, that is, an indefinite whose reference covaries as a function of a distributive operator, in the way that adnominal distributive numerals do in other languages (Gil, 1983; Cable, 2014). Distributive numerals are supposed not to exist in Spanish; however, we claim that “uno que otro” is a distributed share marker (Choe, 1987; Bosnić et al 2020) related to a set of events (Balusu, 2006; Cable, 2014; Romero, 2006). This set is necessarily plural, although of low cardinality, and involves the precondition that its elements (atomic events) occur in non-contiguous time or space intervals. The semantic characterization of “uno que otro” as a distributive indefinite captures its referential dependence, its plural sense, its rejection of collective predicates and its content of separation as a secondary effect of a precondition on the events over which it is distributed. We thus show that Spanish has an adnominal expression of the same semantic nature as distributive numerals, with the precision that it requires distribution over events and not over entities.

Keywords: indefiniteness; quantification; distributivity; distributive numerals; event semantics; plurality

RESUMEN. En español mexicano se usa el cuantificador indefinido “uno que otro” para referir a cardinalidades bajas de entidades separadas en el espacio o el tiempo. A pesar de que tienen forma estrictamente singular, las frases nominales con “uno que otro” remiten siempre a más de una entidad. Y, a pesar de su contenido nocional de pluralidad, rechazan combinarse con predicados colectivos. En este trabajo proponemos un análisis semántico de esta expresión como un indefinido distributivo, es decir, una expresión indefinida cuya referencia covaría en función de un operador distributivo, a la manera como lo hacen los numerales distributivos adnominales de otras lenguas (Gil, 1983; Cable, 2014). Se supondría que en español no existen como tales los numerales distributivos, sin embargo, nuestra propuesta es que “uno que otro” es un marcador de cuota distribuida (Choe, 1987, Bosnić et al 2020), relacionada con un conjunto de eventos (Balusu, 2006; Cable, 2014; Romero, 2006). Este conjunto es necesariamente plural, aunque de baja cardinalidad, e introduce la precondition de que sus elementos (eventos atómicos) ocurran en intervalos temporales o espaciales no contiguos. La caracterización semántica de “uno que otro” como indefinido distributivo captura su dependencia referencial, su sentido plural, su rechazo a predicados colectivos y su contenido de separación como efecto secundario de una precondition acerca de los eventos sobre los que se distribuye. Mostramos, así, que el español cuenta con una expresión adnominal de la misma naturaleza semántica que

los numerales distributivos, con la precisión de que requiere distribuirse sobre eventos y no sobre entidades.

Palabras clave: indefinitud; cuantificación; distributividad; numerales distributivos; semántica de eventos; pluralidad

1. Introduction

In Mexican Spanish, the expression “uno que otro” / “una que otra” is used as an indefinite quantifier or determiner.¹ As such, it can introduce argumental noun phrases like those exemplified in (1)-(3). In (1), the sentence headed by “uno que otro” appears as the subject; in (2) it is a direct object, and in (3) it functions as the complement of a preposition:²

- (1) **Uno que otro columnista** nos estimuló con el, a veces tan justo, beneficio de la duda.
'Some columnist or other stimulated us with the sometimes so fair benefit of the doubt.'
- (2) El tiempo lo dedicaba a sus estudios preparatorianos (...), a leer **uno que otro libro** y a la lectura y redacción de cartas.
'He dedicated his time to his middle school studies, to reading some book or other and to writing letters.'
- (3) La obra fue centro de atracción turística y de **uno que otro suicidio**.
'The site was a center for tourist attraction and for some suicide or other.'

Sentences with “uno que otro” entail that the entities referred make up a set of low cardinality (González, 2022a&b). This can be verified in examples (4) and (5), in which a sentence with the quantifier “uno que otro” is continued with a sentence that expresses the idea of high cardinality or a large quantity of the same entities over which “uno que otro” quantified in the previous sentence. Such continuations are unacceptable:

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² There is a comparative structure of identical form, but with a very different semantics, which will not be the object of our attention, and which is shown in (i):

- (i) Escenificando un poco más, durante dos horas, los tres candidatos estuvieron haciendo la ola. Unas veces permanecía más levantado **uno que otro**, pero al final, los tres quedaron empapados.

'Staging a little more, for two hours, the three candidates were doing the wave. Sometimes **one** stood higher **than the other**, but in the end, all three remained soaked.'

Most examples are naturalistic occurrences found on Google. For simplicity, we decided to translate “uno que otro” as ‘one N or other’, ‘some N or other’, or ‘a N or other’ (N being the common noun in the phrase). Another possible free translation would be ‘an N here and there’, but we consider that the adverbial locution makes the dispersion reading too salient, while in “uno que otro” this content doesn’t seem to be part of the assertion (González 2022a&b).

- (4) Cuando la escuché por primera vez se me salió **una que otra lágrima**.
#Lloré muchísimo.
'When I heard it for the first time, I shed **a tear or other**. #I cried a lot.'
- (5) Nunca faltaba en sus discursos **uno que otro texto latino sobre la decadencia de las repúblicas**. #Citaba una gran cantidad de textos latinos sobre el tema.
'He would never fail to mention in his speeches **one or other Latin text** about the decadence of republics. #He used to quote a large number of Latin texts on the subject.'

Another meaning associated with “uno que otro”, and which will be the focus of our attention in this work, is the idea that the individuals referred to by the noun phrase are separated or dispersed among themselves:

- (6) **Uno que otro animal**, invisible en la sombra, hacía latir su cencerro.
'**One or other animal**, invisible in the dark, would shake their cowbell.'
- (7) El polvo señala sobre las paredes desnudas la marca vertical de los paños; y **uno que otro clavo** conserva aún hilachas y jirones de terciopelo turquí.
'The dust signals on the walls the vertical line of the cloth; and **a nail or other** still maintains loose threads of turquoise velvet.'

Our intuitions about these sentences are the following: sentence (6) describes a situation where a few animals ring their cowbells on separate occasions. The sentence could be true in two types of situations: in a situation in which the animals are in the same area and the sounds of their respective cowbells occur at different time intervals; or in a situation in which the cowbells sound in simultaneous or contiguous events³, but the animals are spatially separated. A situation in which a few animals are in the same place ringing their bells at the same time would not be adequately described by (6). The coordinated sentence in (7) would be unacceptable in a situation in which all the nails described, even if they were few, were located right next to each other. In section 4 we provide empirical evidence supporting these intuitions.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the semantics of “uno que otro”, paying special attention to this aspect of separation or dispersion between the individuals described in the sentence. The main question is how it is possible for a noun phrase to introduce a condition on the spatio-temporal location of individuals, when spatio-temporal coordinates are usually expressed in the verbal phrase. Our proposal is that this spatial or temporal separation condition is the result of two pieces of semantic content: (i) a distributive relation between a set of individuals and a set of atomic events and (ii) a condition that these atomic events must occur at separate spatial or temporal intervals. Since the individuals denoted by the noun phrase are distributed among these separate atomic events, they result separated or dispersed from each other. Under this analysis, although the expression “uno que otro” syntactically corresponds to a quantifier, semantically contributes the *distributed share* of a distributive relation (Choe, 1987). In this relation, the

³ Here we use “event” in the broader sense of “eventuality”, a term credited to Bach (1981) which encompasses “events, processes and states”. Following a widespread tradition in the literature on event semantics we use the term “event” for simplicity.

distributive key, that is, the set to which each of these entities is assigned, would be a set of events provided by the predicate of the sentence. Although this kind of expressions has not been the object of attention in Spanish, they have been identified under different names in different languages: as distance-distributive elements, (Zimmermann 2002), as distributive numerals (Gil, 1983; Cable 2014), as anti-quantifiers (Choe 1987) or as dependent indefinites (Farkas 1997).

The paper is structured as follows: in section 2 we present some definitions proposed in the literature for “uno que otro” and we describe the geographical distribution of its use, which, as we will show, is clearly Latin-American. In that section we also present our main hypothesis and the methodology upon which our research is based. In section 3 we provide a morphosyntactic characterization of sentences with “uno que otro”. In section 4 we show the contexts in which these sentences are acceptable and those in which they are less acceptable or not acceptable at all. In that same section, we present some hypotheses and evidence about the type of separation (strong or weak) involved in the dispersion of entities. In section 5 we explain what a distributive relation is, and we present a brief typology of distributive numerals and the types of sets that can be involved in a distributive relation. In section 6 we present a formal proposal of the semantic content of “one or the other”. Section 7 states the conclusions.

2. Background and methodology

2.1 Previous descriptions

The *Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española* (NGLE) describes the form “uno que otro” as a Latin-American variant of “algún(o) que otro” (§20.3s). Regarding this last form, the NGLE says that it is a complex quantifier that “precedes count nouns and often suggests a certain temporal or spatial dispersion of the quantified notion” (§19.5j). Both in this reference grammar of Spanish (§19.4h), and in the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (DLE) it is indicated that “alguno que otro” is a variant of “alguno”.

In the *Gramática Descriptiva de la Lengua Española*, Gemma Rigau indicates that “algún que otro” is a quantifier “that entails a non-specific interpretation” (§5.2.2.2). By “non-specific”, the author means that the speaker does not “presuppose the existence of a referent”. However, Rigau does not elaborate on the type of (non)specificity to which she refers.

In contrast to the consistency of both reference grammars in identifying the form “alguno que otro” –and, therefore, “uno que otro”– as a quantifier, the DLE identifies it as an adjective phrase, while the *Diccionario Panhispánico de Dudas* (DPD) treats it as a determinative locution. In any case, it can be said that “uno que otro” is a (semi-)lexicalized form that belongs to the same category as determiners and quantifiers, since it has the same syntactic distribution: as a prenominal element, it licenses count singular nouns as arguments, and it can appear without a full noun also in argument function –just as numerals (*tres*) and quantifiers (*varios*, *algunos*)–.

Eguren & Sánchez (2021) provide an analysis of the internal structure of “uno que otro” whereby the conjunction “que” is taken as a disjunctive conjunction that introduces alternatives, and which, in combination with “otro” conveys “a sense of disconnection between entities”.

Summing up, “uno que otro” has been identified as a Latin-American variant of “alguno que otro”, a complex (semi-)lexicalized quantifier with a semantics close to that of “some”, which is combined with singular count nouns and adds to the noun phrase an indefinite interpretation and a content of temporal or spatial dispersion between entities.

2.2 Geographic distribution

As the NGLÉ (§20.3s) already points out, there is a clear geographical distribution in the use of the form “uno que otro”. Although this is not exclusive to Latin America, since there are records of its use in Spain in corpora such as CREA and CORPES XXI, as seen in (8), it is possible to say that it is used almost exclusively in Latin America:

- (8) Siempre con la intención de que se conociera mejor al más desconocido de los grandes poetas del 27, algunos de los amigos (García Ascot, Xirau...) habían publicado **uno que otro artículo sobre la poesía de Prados**, pero ninguno tan detallado.
 ‘Always with the intention to make known the most unknown of the great poets of 1927, some of his friends (García Ascot, Xirau...) had published **one or other article** on Prados’s poetry, but none of them was this detailed.’ (CORPES XXI version beta 0.92 Spain)

Of the 761 cases of “uno que otro” and the 591 of “una que otra” in CORPES XXI, only 24 are from Spain. Of them, only 13 represent instances of the quantifier, while the remaining 11 are instances of the comparative construction, as in (9):

- (9) Debió resultar mujer de su gusto, o a lo mejor **le daba igual una que otra**, quién sabe (CORPES XXI versión beta 0.92 España)
 ‘She must have been a woman to his liking, or perhaps he didn’t care about **one or the other**, who knows.’ (CORPES XXI beta version 0.92 Spain)

A similar situation is registered in the CREA, where only 9 occurrences of the 281 of “uno que otro” and 10 of the 191 of “una que otra” are from Spain. However, only 2 are instances of the quantifier, and the are cases of the comparison construction or citations of Latin American speakers who use the quantifier.

In contrast, the forms “algún que otro” and “alguna que otra” are almost exclusively peninsular. In CORPES XXI, for example, 636 of the 887 cases of “algún que otro” and 499 of the 853 cases of “alguna que otra” are from Spain. The geographical distribution of the paradigms of “algún que otro” and “uno que otro” is already noted in the NGLÉ. The peninsular version is taken as the basic form and “uno que otro” is recorded as a variant (NGLÉ §20.3s). The most used form in Mexico is “uno que otro”, with its feminine variant. The shortened form “algún que otro” is not used in Mexico, but the non-shortened form is (“alguno que otro”), although, according to the data from the corpus consulted, at a much lower frequency.

2.3 Hypothesis and methodology

In this research we show that “uno que otro” is a determiner/quantifier whose semantic content implies that the individuals denoted by the accompanying noun are spatially or temporally separated.

Our proposal is that this content is articulated by means of a distributive operation, in which the predicate of the sentence denotes a set of non-contiguous events and each of these is assigned a different individual denoted by the noun phrase with “uno que otro”. The referent of the phrase with “uno que otro” thus covaries as a function of each atomic event belonging to the sum of events denoted by the predicate.

The meaning of separation or dispersion involved in this quantifier is the result, therefore, of a distributive dependency between entities and events, the latter associated with a condition of non-contiguity between the time or space intervals in which they occur.

We rely on a truth-conditional semantics that determines the meaning of sentences based on the contribution they make to the truth conditions of the sentence where they appear. Our primary data are judgments of truth and acceptability with “one or the other” in different contexts.

The primary source of our evidence is our own intuitions as native speakers of Mexican Spanish. The judgments of truth and acceptability that we present and that support our analysis are based mostly on introspection, but we confirm these intuitions with other speakers. It should be emphasized that this is not a quantitative study and that our analysis is not frequency-based, but instead relies on a hypothesis-driven methodology (Tonhauser and Matthewson, 2015). Thus, we propose truth and felicity conditions for sentences with “uno que otro” and confirm with native speakers whether the sentences are acceptable in situations where those conditions predict they will be acceptable, and unacceptable in those contexts where it is predicted that they will be rejected.

A sentence is considered acceptable by a speaker if she judges it to be suitable for the context in which it is presented. This judgment of the speaker is interpreted by analysts as a sign that the sentence in question is grammatical, as well as true and felicitous in the given context (Matthewson 2004:409, Tonhauser and Matthewson 2015:19).

As in any hypothesis-driven semantic analysis methodology, we seek to collect both positive evidence (judgments that deem the sentence acceptable in a given situation) and negative evidence (judgments that reject the sentence in a given situation).

When we consider that the reason for the unacceptability of a sentence is the violation of a morphosyntactic rule (for example, agreement), we mark the unacceptability with an asterisk. When we consider that the rejection of a construction has a pragmatic or semantic basis, we use the hashtag sign '#'. The use of these diacritics is merely descriptive and, beyond the precision we just made, it does not involve a detailed analysis of the source of the unacceptability of a sentence at a given context.

3. Morphosyntactic characteristics of noun phrases with “uno que otro”

3.1 Gender and number agreement

The quantifier “uno que otro” agrees with the gender of the noun that makes up its restriction, as seen in (10):

- (10) a. Carlos se comió **uno que otro pan** durante la reunión.
 ‘Carlos ate a piece of bread or other during the meeting.’

- b. Carlos se comió **una que otra galleta** durante la reunión.
 ‘Carlos ate a cookie or other during the meeting.’

Regarding number, the quantifier only occurs in singular form, despite being notionally plural. Thus, in the sentence in (11a), the subject noun phrase, headed by “uno que otro” has a singular form and agrees in singular with the verb, even though the sentence refers to more than one tree. (11b) shows that “uno que otro” does not accept a plural form.⁴

- (11) a. **Uno que otro árbol** agónico y desgreñado intentaba sobrevivir entre la asfixiante contaminación.
 ‘One or other dying and disheveled tree tried to survive between the suffocating pollution.’
- b. ***Uno(s) que otro(s) árboles** agónicos y desgreñados intentaban sobrevivir entre la asfixiante contaminación.
 Lit: ‘Ones or others dying and disheveled trees tried to survive among the suffocating pollution.’

One way to show that these noun phrases have a plural meaning, even though their form is necessarily singular, is that their referent can be recovered with a plural demonstrative pronoun, as in (12a). Recovering the reference with a singular demonstrative pronoun, as in (12b), sounds marked or unacceptable:

- (12) a. **Uno que otro árbol agónico y desgreñado** intentaba sobrevivir entre la asfixiante contaminación. Pero **esos árboles** murieron a los pocos días.
 ‘One or other dying and disheveled tree tried to survive between the suffocating pollution. But **those trees** died within a few days.’
- b. **Uno que otro árbol agónico y desgreñado** intentaba sobrevivir entre la asfixiante contaminación. # Pero **ese árbol** murió a los pocos días.
 ‘One or other dying and disheveled tree tried to survive between the suffocating pollution. #But **that tree** died within a few days.’

⁴ Although the forms “unos que otros” and “unas que otras” occur in the corpus, as well as in spontaneous speech, their frequency of appearance is very low. There are only 19 cases in CORPES and 10 in CREA. They usually correspond to comparative constructions or, as in (i), to pronominal uses.

- (i) Ondeando “tripas” fluorescentes el público cantó y **unos que otros** bailaron temas como “Las divinas”, “Amigos del corazón”, “¿Y ahora qué?”, “Quiero, quiero” y “fiesta”.
 (<https://www.elsiglodetorreon.com.mx/noticia/2008/esta-feo-pero-recibe-ovacion.html>)
- (ii) Me costó un poquito de trabajo al aprender, **unas que otras cortaditas**, pero lo que distingue a un tablero es saber cortar (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_tff0n69VI)
- (iii) Te levantas con la bendición de tu esposa, y **una que otras veces** con el «que te vaya bien, papi» de tu hija. (https://twitter.com/efra_31/status/1553958007792451587)

The infrequent alternation with the plural form may be due to a dialectal variation that we will not explain now.

In general, and especially in adnominal uses, the plural version is unacceptable, as corroborated by (13).

- (13) a. ***Unos que otros niños** entraron a la casa.
Lit. ‘Some or other children entered the house.’
- b. **Uno que otro niño** entró a la casa.
‘Some or other child entered the house.’

Singular agreement is shown not only in the noun, but also in modifiers, as in (14), and in the verb, as shown in (15). In the following examples, we underline the target of agreement.

- (14) a. Como alcalde no se destacó mucho. Por ahí una calle remendada, luz para **uno que otro barrio apartado** y puestos para los concejales.
‘As a mayor, he did not stand out much. Over there a patched street, light for **one or another secluded neighborhood** and seats for councilors.’
- b. Como alcalde no se destacó mucho. *Por ahí una calle remendada, luz para **uno que otro barrios apartados** y puestos para los concejales.
‘As a mayor, he did not stand out much. Over there a patched street, light for **one or another secluded neighborhoods** and seats for councilors.’
- (15) a. **Una que otra persona** cruzaba por nuestro camino.
‘One or another person crossed our path.’
- b. ***Una que otra persona cruzaban** por nuestro camino’
‘One or another person crossed.pl our path.’

When the noun phrase with “uno que otro” contains a relative clause, the subordinate verb also agrees in the singular, as seen in (16), and plural agreement is either unacceptable or only marginally acceptable. The fact that plural agreement in the subordinate can marginally be accepted is another sign of the notionally plural character of the noun phrase.

- (16) a. Hoy, como testimonio de aquellas anónimas excavaciones, aún se puede llegar a ubicar **una que otra carcasa** que, obviamente, ya no contiene nada de valor.
‘Today, as a testimony to those anonymous excavations, one can still locate **one or another casing** that, obviously, no longer contains anything of value.’
- b. Hoy, como testimonio de aquellas anónimas excavaciones, aún se puede llegar a ubicar **una que otra carcasa** ?? que, obviamente, ya no contienen nada de valor.
‘Today, as a testimony to those anonymous excavations, one can still locate **one or another casing** that, obviously, no longer contain anything of value.’

Eguren and Sánchez (2021) give an account of the plurality associated with this expression whereby one of the components of “(alg)uno que otro”, namely “otro” (other,

another) is the origin of the notional plurality of the expression. The authors propose that “otro” denotes “alterity or contrast”, making its meaning close to the paraphrasis “a different one” (*uno distinto*) (Eguren & Sánchez 2021:331). The way this meaning is compositionally incorporated into the meaning of the expression is not explored further, and this account leaves out some problems. The first one is that it does not explain why the expression “(alg)uno que otro” always shows a singular agreement pattern? Admittedly, the authors explore varieties where there is plural morphology and plural agreement, but they concede, as we do, that they are less frequent than the singular form. In contrast to Eguren and Sánchez we propose that the notional plurality of “uno que otro” can be derived from a semantic condition imposed on the distributive key of a distributive relation. The key shows a *multiplicity quality*, that is, it denotes a set whose cardinality is always greater than one. This semantic component, as will become clearer in section 5 below, allows the covariation between the members of the set introduced by “uno que otro”, and the members of the key. In our account, plurality is then derived from distributivity. This proposal explains why the expression remains morphologically singular. “Uno que otro” only requires singular agreement because its plurality is not derived from a morphological operation, but from the semantics behind the covariation needed from distributivity. This equates the morphological behavior of “uno que otro” to other distributive operators in Spanish, as the key marker “cada” (each), which also shows obligatory singular agreement.

In sum, “uno que otro” triggers singular agreement and has no plural counterpart. However, it refers to more than one entity, so if the referents are retrieved anaphorically, this is done using a plural pronoun. Sometimes the relative clause verb whose head is a noun phrase with “uno que otro” can show plural agreement. This ability to refer to more than one entity is a consequence of the semantic requirements of distributivity.

3.2 Syntactic category of the complex expression “uno que otro”

The expression “uno que otro” has the expected distribution and syntactic behavior of a determiner (in the wide sense of “determiner” that also includes adnominal quantifiers), as already stated in 2.1. In addition to the obvious fact that it can be combined with common nouns, there are two syntactic criteria that allow us to classify it as such: (a) it enables singular count nouns to appear as verbal arguments and (b) it legitimizes empty categories as complements (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2008). Additionally, noun phrases with “uno que otro” show variable scope, as we will explain in section 4.

With respect to the first syntactic criterion, and as we explained in examples (1), (2) and (3) of the introduction, the phrases introduced by “uno que otro” can occupy argumental slots. In Spanish, singular count nouns cannot function as arguments unless they are licensed by a determiner (except for known exceptions such as “usar sombrero” or “tener perro”, ‘to wear a hat’ and ‘to own a dog’, respectively). The fact that “uno que otro”, can occupy an argument position shows that it is a determiner:

- (17) a. **Uno que otro columnista** nos dio el beneficio de la duda.
 ‘One or another columnist gave us the benefit of the doubt.’
- b. ***Columnista** nos dio el beneficio de la duda.
 Lit. ‘Columnist gave us the benefit of the doubt.’

The second criterion we use to classify “uno que otro” as a determiner is the legitimation of empty categories as complements. This criterion allows us to distinguish determiners from modifiers (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2008:299; Leonetti 2016:3). Determiners allow referring to a set previously introduced in the discourse without having to mention it explicitly, as seen in (18a), in contrast to (18b), where a modifier like “distintos”, ‘different’ does not allow this:

- (18) a. Fui al centro a buscar pantalones y encontré **uno que otro**.
 ‘I went downtown to look for pants and found one or another.’
- b. *Fui al centro a buscar pantalones y encontré **distintos**.
 Lit. ‘I went downtown to look for pants and found different (ones).’

Lastly, it is worth noting that, like other determiners, “uno que otro” has a fixed pronominal position, and that it cannot alternate, as some modifiers do, between pronominal and postnominal positions:

- (19) a. La tranquilidad se ve interrumpida por **uno que otro automóvil**.
 ‘The tranquility is interrupted by one or another car.’
- b. *La tranquilidad se ve interrumpida por **automóvil uno que otro**.
 Lit. ‘The tranquility is interrupted by car one or another.’

We must also note that, although the position of “uno que otro” is fixed pronominally, the noun can be inserted after the first element, in which case it does not have the form of a pronoun and rather looks like the indefinite determiner, as in (20):

- (20) La tranquilidad se ve interrumpida por **un automóvil que otro**.
 ‘The tranquility is interrupted by a car or another.’

This type of construction casts doubts on the lexicalized character of the expression in question. However, given its infrequency, we will limit ourselves to describing the form with an external noun (“uno que otro automóvil”) and we will leave the alternating form with an internal noun (“un automóvil que otro”) for later work.

With the criteria adduced we can conclude, therefore, that “uno que otro” belongs to the syntactic category of determiner. However, it is problematic to determine the syntactic category of each of its constituents. On the one hand, we can consider that each of them is a pronoun (“uno” and “otro”) joined by the nexus “that”, which in this case acts as a conjunction. The claim that the two main elements are pronouns is based on the form of “uno”, which in its determiner form –whether cardinal or indefinite– would not have an explicit gender mark in the masculine. The locution is thus not **“un que otro”* as it would be if it were a conjunction of determiners. The expression “otro” does not change its form when it functions as a determiner or as a pronoun, but we can assume that, since it is a conjunction, both expressions belong to the same category, and therefore, since “uno” is a pronominal form, “otro” must be a pronoun as well.

A problem with this account is that it is problematic to explain how a conjunction of pronouns could then combine with a noun, like a regular adnominal determiner. For this reason, we believe that both elements are determiners, joined by a conjunction, and that they result in a complex determiner. A reviewer suggests the possibility that the first determiner is followed by an empty noun (hence the form “uno” instead of “un”), while the other one (“otro”) can take an explicit noun as a complement. We think that this analysis is on the right track, and it explains why the first determiner can combine with an explicit noun as well, however, some restriction would have to be added in order to prevent ungrammatical sequences of two full noun phrases like “*Un libro que otro libro”.

We also rule out that “one” corresponds to a numeral, since it does not alternate with other numerals: the expressions *“dos que otro(s)” or “tres que otro(s)” do not exist.

As for the role of “que”, it is clear that it does not fulfill the function of a relative pronoun or complementizer and it seems to correspond rather to a conjunction, such as the one found in constructions of the type “Vimos dos que tres patos”,⁵ ‘We saw two or three ducks’, or in verbal reduplications with pluractional meaning, such as “Está ronca que ronca”, ‘She is snoring and snoring’, or “Anda corre que corre”, ‘He is running and running’. For the purposes of this work, we will consider “uno que otro” as a (semi-) lexicalized expression and we will not attend to the individual semantic or syntactic contribution of its component parts but see Eguren & Sánchez (2021:332-333) for an account that tries to derive the meaning of the complex determiner from its internal structure, about which they consider that “que” contributes a disjunctive conjunction.⁶

Regarding the syntactic category of “uno que otro” as a whole, the main point is that the complex expression is a determiner and that, since it does not alternate with cardinal numbers, it is not a numeral but an indefinite. Hence, as will be explained later, we choose to characterize it as a distributive indefinite and not as a distributive numeral, although semantically both descriptions are adequate to capture its behavior.

4. Semantic characteristics

4.1 “Uno que otro” as a weak quantifier

“Uno que otro” has the semantics and distribution of a weak quantifier, (Milsark, 1974), which can be shown by its ability to appear in existential contexts, as the subject of existential “haber” ‘there-be’, or as the object of the verb “tener” ‘to have’:

⁵ “Dos que tres” is a complex quantifier, common in Mexican Spanish, whose semantics is close to “a few”, but that deserves further investigation. The form is lexicalized, as the strategy “numeral + que + numeral” is not productive, it does not work with other numerals, as we see in (i) and the sequence cannot be interrupted with a noun, as seen in (ii).

- (i) *Ocho que nueve niños.
‘Eight or nine children’
- (ii) *Dos niños que tres.
‘Two children or three’

⁶ Another reason not to derive the meaning of “uno que otro” from the meaning of its component parts is that, as we will see in example (26), this complex quantifier alternates, apparently without any change in meaning, with “alguno que otro”. If the meaning of the complex quantifier were derived from the meaning of its parts, this would predict that the latter version would only have non-specific interpretations, which is not the case.

- (21) a. Hay **uno que otro libro** sobre la mesa.
 ‘There is a book or other on the table.’
- b. El mantel tiene **una que otra mancha**.
 ‘The tablecloth has a stain or other.’

As an indefinite quantifier, the noun phrase introduced by “uno que otro” does not refer to the totality of a set, nor does it carry presuppositions about the existence of its referents, which are characteristics of universal and “definite” quantifiers (Keenan 1996, Keenan and Paperno 2012). Its non-maximality can be shown by contrasting it with a typically maximal determiner, such as the plural definite article (Sharvy 1980, Brisson 1998). Note in (22) that, while a sentence with a determiner that encompasses the entire set denoted by the noun does not admit a continuation with “the rest”, “uno que otro” does allow it, as seen in (23), which is evidence that it does not refer to the entire set that appears as its restriction:

- (22) **Los pollos** se metieron al corral. #El resto se quedó afuera.
 ‘The chickens went into the pen. #The rest stayed outside.’
- (23) **Uno que otro pollo** se metió al corral. El resto se quedó afuera.
 ‘One chicken or other got into the pen. The rest stayed outside.’

“Uno que otro” can appear as the head of a partitive construction, that is, of a quantificational structure whose restriction is introduced by a definite phrase, as seen in (24) and (25). In this respect, “one or the other” behaves like numerals and other quantifiers considered indefinite:

- (24) Conozco a **uno que otro** de los invitados.
 Lit. ‘I know one or another of the guests.’
- (25) En los panteones de nuestra tierra nunca falta **uno que otro** de los árboles que popularmente llamamos “inmortal”.
 Lit. ‘In the cemeteries of our land, there is always one or another of the trees that we popularly call “immortal”.’

Regarding the interaction between the indefinite “uno que otro” and other operators, such as negation, its behavior also seems standard: the indefinite phrase can be interpreted within or outside the scope of the operator that precedes it. For example, in sentence (26), where the negation precedes “uno que otro estado de la República” ‘some state of the republic or other’, two interpretations arise. In one of them, the negation takes the quantifier under its scope, so that what is denied is that the states that the PRI governed in 1997 were few.⁷ This interpretation corresponds to the paraphrase offered in (27):

⁷ The PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) is a political party that governed Mexico and all of its states for decades. The example is an adaptation of a natural statement heard in an interview, in which the person interviewed speaks of when the absolute control of the PRI began to decline at the state level.

- (26) En 1997, el PRI ya no gobernaba **uno que otro estado de la república**.
 ‘In 1997, the PRI no longer governed one or another state of the republic.’
- (27) No es verdad que el PRI, en 1997, gobernara uno que otro estado, sino que gobernaba muchos.
 ‘It is not true that the PRI, in 1997, governed one state or another; it Governed many of them.’

A second reading of (26) arises by interpreting “uno que otro estado de la República” outside the reach of the negation that precedes it. In that case, the speaker asserts the existence of one or another state that the PRI, in 1997, no longer governed. This interpretation can be paraphrased as in (28):

- (28) Hay uno que otro estado (a saber: Baja California, Nuevo León y Querétaro) que en 1997 el PRI ya no gobierna.
 ‘There is one state or other (namely, Baja California, Nuevo León and Querétaro) that in 1997 the PRI no longer governs.’

We can conclude from these diagnoses that “uno que otro” is a weak, non-maximal quantifier with variable scope with respect to negation; that is: it behaves as a typical indefinite quantifier.⁸ Now we will explain what are the semantic characteristics that differentiate it from other quantifiers of its kind.

4.2 ‘Low quantity’ entailment

We showed that “uno que otro” is an indefinite quantifier, in the sense that it introduces new referents, can be the head of a partitive construction and does not have maximality entailments. Now, we will talk about the semantic characteristics that differentiate it from other indefinites.

The first of them, and a very salient one, is the entailment of ‘low quantity’. This has been recognized and described by González (2022a&b), and we will limit ourselves to showing only some tests. The following sequences present some evidence in favor of the claim that “uno que otro” entails that the entities denoted are few with respect to a contextual standard:

- (29) a. Cuando estuvimos en Veracruz, visitamos **uno que otro pueblo costero**.
 ‘When we were in Veracruz, we visited one coastal town or another’
 b. #Al final conocimos muchísimos.
 ‘In the end, we visited a lot of them.’

⁸ Note that this variable scope behavior is at odds with the description put forth by Rigau (1999) and Eguren and Sánchez (2021) of “uno que otro” as a non-specific quantifier, at least in the sense that it is not necessarily interpreted under a scope-taking operator, like the negation in (26). The same happens with intensional contexts. Thus, in (i), “uno que otro” can have a specific or a non-specific interpretation. Under the specific interpretation there is a set of a few friends that I would like to see, and under the non-specific reading, the speaker does not have in mind any particular friends she would like to see:

(i) Estas vacaciones quiero descansar y ver a uno que otro amigo.
 ‘These holidays I would like to rest and see some friend or other.’

A reader with Spanish competence will be able to corroborate that continuing sentence (29a) with (29b) results in a contradiction. This shows, in principle, that there is an entailment between (29a) and the negation of (29b). This kind of examples was also presented in (4) and (5) in the introduction.

In (30) and (31) we show more evidence of the ‘low quantity’ entailment. In this case, the second sentence openly negates the low cardinality content introduced by the first sentence, again resulting in a contradiction:

- (30) Senta, sentada junto a mí en el taller, sonrió **una que otra vez**, #y no es verdad que sonrió pocas veces.
 ‘Senta, sitting next to me in the workshop, smiled one or other time, #and it’s not true that she smiled few times.’
- (31) Antes habíamos dado cobijo a **uno que otro herido**, #y no es verdad que habíamos dado cobijo a pocos heridos.
 ‘Before, we had given shelter to one or another wounded, #and it’s not true that we had given shelter to few wounded.’

Despite its implication of ‘small amount’, “uno que otro” does not license polarity items, in contrast with downward-entailing quantifiers such as “few” or “rarely”:

- (32) a. Pocos legisladores moverían un dedo para prohibir los productos chatarra.
 ‘Few legislators would lift a finger to ban junk food.’
 b. *Uno que otro legislador movería un dedo para prohibir los productos chatarra.
 Lit. ‘One or another legislator would lift a finger to ban junk food.’
- (33) a. Rara vez dice palabra.
 ‘Rarely does she say a word.’
 b. *Una que otra vez dice palabra.
 Lit. ‘Some time or other time does she say a word.’

We will not dwell further on this aspect. Suffice it to say that, despite entailing the notion of ‘low quantity’, “uno que otro” does not behave like decreasing quantifiers (“few”, “rarely”) that license negative polarity items or minimizers.

4.3 Content of ‘separation’

Sentences with noun phrases headed by “uno que otro”, either in verbal argument or adjunct position, imply that the individuals denoted by the noun that accompanies the quantifier are separated from each other, either spatially or temporally.

We will present evidence of this interpretation, first, showing that the sentences with “uno que otro” refuse to be arguments of collective predicates and of those temporarily modified in such a way that their events must be simultaneous; second, by showing that these phrases are not acceptable as descriptions of situations where there is no separation between individuals. Third, we show that the separation content brought about by the

quantifier is *weak*, that is, the requirement of separation between entities is satisfied if at least two of the individuals that make up the set are non-contiguous to each other, and it is not necessary that all its elements are separated from one another.

4.3.1 Incompatibility with collective and simultaneity predicates

A sign that “uno que otro” introduces the condition that the referred entities are separated or dispersed is that they do not admit adverbial modifiers that express simultaneity of events:

- (34) a. Llegó **uno que otro estudiante**.
 ‘One or other student arrived.’
- b. # Llegó **uno que otro estudiante** al mismo tiempo.
 Lit. ‘One or other student arrived at the same time.’
- (35) a. **Uno que otro participante** recitó su poema.
 ‘One or other contestant recited his poem.’
- b. # **Uno que otro participante** recitó su poema simultáneamente.
 Lit. ‘One or other contestant recited his poem in chorus.’

Sentences with “uno que otro”, in contrast, are acceptable if they appear with adverbs that denote separation of events, such as “de vez en cuando” ‘from time to time’, which expresses infrequency and temporal separation, but they are less acceptable if they appear with adverbs that denote temporal contiguity between events, such as “ininterrumpidamente” ‘uninterruptedly’. Compare (36a) with (36b):

- (36) a. De vez en cuando los bombardeos matan **una que otra tortuga marina**.
 ‘From time to time, the bombings kill one or other sea turtle.’
- b. #? Ininterrumpidamente los bombardeos matan **una que otra tortuga marina**.
 ‘Uninterruptedly, the bombings kill one or other sea turtle.’

If, as we assert, the individuals denoted by the noun phrase are necessarily dispersed in space or time, it is to be expected that they cannot participate in collective events, such as “reunirse” ‘to meet’, “estar juntos” ‘being together’ or “recitar a coro” ‘reciting in chorus’. This prediction is borne out as shown in (37):

- (37) a. # Se reunió **uno que otro consejero**.
 Lit. ‘One or other counselor met.’
- b. # **Una que otra hoja** está(n) junta(s) en el folder.
 Lit. ‘One or other sheet of paper is/are together in the folder.’
- c. # **Uno que otro concursante** recitó un poema a coro.
 Lit. ‘One or other contestant recited a poem in chorus.’

Noun phrases with “uno que otro” are not acceptable arguments for reciprocal predicates, as seen in (38):

- (38) a. **Uno que otro consejero** # se acusó / # acusaron mutuamente.
Lit. ‘One or other counselor accused each other.’
- b. **Uno que otro consejero** # se saludó / # se saludaron.
Lit. ‘One or other counselor greeted each other.’

The data in (37) and (38) show that noun phrases with “uno que otro” refuse to be collective predicate arguments. Informally, for now, we will consider a predicate to be collective if it implies that the individuals or entities involved act as a single participant in a certain event (Champollion, 2014:18). For example, the predicate “invadir” ‘invade’ requires a plural or a group entity as a subject and rejects subject agents denoting atomic entities:

- (39) a. El ejército invadió la explanada de la Facultad de Medicina.
‘The army invaded the front court of the Faculty of Medicine.’
- b. # Un soldado invadió la explanada de la Facultad de Medicina.
Lit. ‘A soldier invaded the front court of the Faculty of Medicine.’

One could think that the reason why phrases with “uno que otro” reject being subjects of a predicate such as “invade” is their content of low cardinality, since “invade” would require not only a subject of plural reference, but also one that constitutes a large sum of entities. However, this is not the case: sentence (40a) shows us that even a phrase like “unos pocos” ‘a few’ can be the subject of this verb, while (40b) shows that “uno que otro”, in the same context, is unacceptable:

- (40) a. **Unos pocos ladrones** invadieron a la fuerza las oficinas de los Tiburones Rojos.
‘A few thieves forcefully invaded the offices of the Red Sharks.’
- b. # **Uno que otro ladrón** invadió a la fuerza las oficinas de los Tiburones Rojos.
Lit. ‘One or other thief forcefully invaded the offices of the Red Sharks.’

Another piece of evidence that the noun phrase with “uno que otro” cannot denote a sum that participates in a single collective event is offered in (41). Definite plural phrases (“las tejas” ‘the tiles’) or indefinite ones (“varias tejas” ‘several tiles’) can be the argument of the preposition “entre” ‘between’ or ‘among’, which requires that its complement denote a semantically plural participant. However, “una que otra teja”, despite referring to more than one tile, does not provide an adequate argument for this type of preposition:

- (41) a. La lagartija se escondió entre **las tejas**.
‘The lizard hid among the tiles.’
- b. La lagartija se escondió entre **varias tejas**.

‘The lizard hid among several tiles.’

c. # La lagartija se escondió entre **una que otra teja**.

Lit. ‘The lizard hid among some tile or other.’

All these examples constitute evidence that phrases with “uno que otro” cannot be subjects of collective predicates, nor can be terms of prepositions that require semantically plural complements. This would indicate that noun phrases with “uno que otro” do not allow the denoted entities to participate in the predicate as if they were a single multiple participant and, on the contrary, the predicate of the phrases with “uno que otro” must apply to each member of its denotation separately. The latter corresponds to the definition of distributive predication.

In a sense, as Champollion (2014) explains, the notion of collectivity is understood as “absence of distributivity”, and vice versa: we interpret the impossibility of participating in collective events as a sign that this type of noun phrases forces a distributive reading of the predicate with which they appear. Before explaining in more detail the concept of distribution that we think is behind the expression “uno que otro”, we will show more evidence for its dispersion or separation content.

4.3.2 Unacceptability in situations without separation of individuals

Continuing a sentence with “one or the other”, such as (42a), with another that denies the idea of separation between the individuals referred to, such as (42b), results in an anomaly. The same happens in (43) and (44):

(42) a. La obra fue centro de atracción turística y de **uno que otro suicidio**.

‘The site was a center of tourist attraction and one or another suicide.’

b. # Los suicidios, curiosamente, ocurrieron al mismo tiempo.

‘The suicides, strangely, happened all at the same time.’

(43) a. Sólo el paso de **uno que otro vehículo militar** quita al lugar la imagen de un pueblo fantasma.

‘Only the passing by of some military vehicle or other removes from the place the image of a ghost town.’

b. # Los vehículos militares pasan en grupo a la misma hora.

‘The vehicles pass in group all at the same time.’

(44) a. La patineta tiene **uno que otro detalle**, pero está muy bien para patinar.

‘The skateboard has one or another detail, but it is very good for skating.’

b. # Los detalles están juntos en la rueda trasera izquierda.

‘The details are all in the left back wheel.’

To support this argument, we corroborated these intuitions with other native speakers of Mexican Spanish. In (45) and (46) we show two of the sentences from which we collected judgments:

- (45) Se fue la luz en una que otra casa.
'The light went out in one house or other.'
- (46) Hay uno que otro huevo en el cartón.
'There is one or other egg in the carton.'

To show whether sentence (45) implies that the individuals referred to by “una que otra casa” must be separated, we presented two situations. In the first, we can see a series of nine adjoining houses, of which six are illuminated and three are dark. These three dark houses are next to each other, as shown in Figure A. In the second situation, the three dark houses are separated from each other, as shown in Figure B.



Figure A. Picture showing adjacent dark houses.

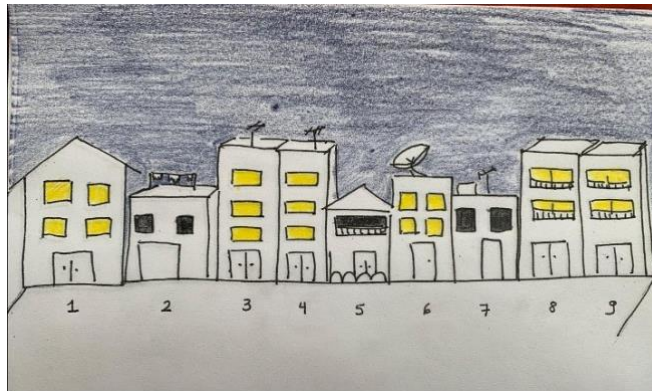


Figure B. Picture showing non adjacent dark houses

After showing the situations, which were presented to each collaborator in a different order, this question is posed:

- (47) In which of the two situations would you use the sentence “Se fue la luz en una que otra casa” (‘The light went out in one or another house’)?

This task was presented to 15 people, of which 12 responded that they would use the sentence in the situation presented in Figure B. Three people chose the situation described in Figure A, but about these it is necessary to know that (i) one chose the figure before the

question was asked (he asked his own question, shall we say); (ii) two answered a different question, which was: in which of these situations is the sentence “se fue la luz en una que otra casa” true? We believe that this way of formulating the question, which gave rise to thinking that there could be correct or incorrect answers, could have influenced the choice of the situation in Figure A. To avoid the fear of answering incorrectly, we reformulated the question as it is presented in (48), without giving an explicit instruction on whether only one of the situations could be chosen, if neither could be chosen, or if both could be chosen. The unanimous response of those who responded to this specific question was Figure B.

Another stimulus we used was the pair of situations shown in Figures C and D:



Figure C. Box of eggs with only three adjacent eggs



Figure D. Box of eggs with only three non-adjacent eggs

Once these images were shown, participants were asked the following question:

- (48) In which of these situations would you use the sentence: “Hay uno que otro huevo en el cartón” ‘There is one or other egg in the carton?’

In 7 out of the 8 answers obtained, participants chose the situation in Figure D. The only participant who did not choose this figure said that they would not use the sentence in (48) in any of the situations presented, after which they said that for a scenario to be properly described by the sentence in question a situation like the one shown in Figure D should have eggs but also other kind of objects in between the eggs.

We consider that these answers confirm our own judgments that “uno que otro” can be adequately used to describe situations where the referred entities are scattered or separated from one another. It is important to say that we did not obtain negative evidence, that is, judgements reporting that the sentences we presented in (47) and (48) were unacceptable or false in the described situations. Given the nature of the question, the only answers we received were the ones where one situation was selected as more adequate than the other. In every answer the situation in which the referred entities are scattered in space was favoured.

4.3.3 Strong or weak separation and irregular scattering

As we have shown, our judgments and those of other speakers agree in that the situations in which entities are separated from one another are more compatible with the acceptability of sentences containing “uno que otro”. However, separation is not a discreet criterion, it can occur in different modalities. In one of them, at least two of the individuals involved are separated from one another, even if other ones occupy contiguous places. We consider that this situation is one where the separation criterion is fulfilled in a *weak* manner. The other possibility is that each one of the referred individuals are separated from one another, so that none occupy contiguous places. We call this *strong separation*. The empirical question we asked is whether the separation content involved in the interpretation of sentences containing “uno que otro” belongs to one or the other manner of separation.

To test the compatibility of sentences containing “uno que otro” with weak and strong separation scenarios we produced a set of seven pairs of images, each showing a grid of five-by-five squares. Some squares from the grids were painted blue and the rest were white. Each pair of grids had the same number of blue squares, so the number of painted squares would not influence the answers. Three of the pairs establish the following contrast: in one image of each pair the blue squares are completely separated from one another, that is, there are no contiguous blue squares; while in the other image of the pair some blue squares are together and some others are separated, that is, the square are *weakly separated*. Two examples of this are shown in Figures F & G below.

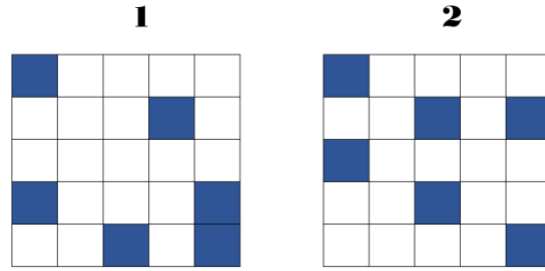


Figure F. Stimulus example.

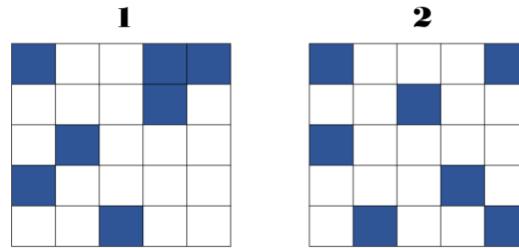


Figure G. Stimulus example.

We consulted 15 participants who, individually, saw each of the three pairs one by one and they were asked the following question:

- (49) Does any of these pictures represent what is said in the sentence: “Uno que otro cuadro está pintado de azul” ‘There is one or other square painted blue?’

The participants were told that the possible answers to the question were “in none of the pictures”, “in option 1”, “in option 2” and “in both”. None of the people consulted selected, as their only pick, the grids that showed the partially separated blue squares (F1, G1 o G2). Two thirds of the participants chose “both” (that is, either both images in F or both images in G), whereas a third of the participants preferred the option that showed total separation (F2). In other words, even if the grids with partially separated blue squares were never selected by any of the participants as an answer to (49), these images were included in the answers of five people that chose both. The images with totally separated blue squares were selected by ten of the consulted participants as their answer to (49).

The answers show that, even if the situations with totally separated individuals are preferred as adequate to be described by the sentence containing “uno que otro”, the situations where the separation is weak also make the situation acceptable. It does not seem to be, then, a strict content of strong separation between individuals, although this kind of configuration could present the requirement of separation unequivocally.

A second parameter we tested was whether the speakers required that the entities be scattered in an irregular manner to consider a description containing “uno que otro” acceptable. We obtained this hypothesis from comments made by some of our collaborators, who claimed that situations where individuals are separated by intervals of different magnitudes make sentences containing “uno que otro” more acceptable. To test this hypothesis, we showed a group of participants four pairs of images. In each pair, the following contrast was made: in one of the grids the blue squares were separated by regular

intervals, showing a visible pattern, while in the other grid the separation followed no pattern, and the blue squares were scattered in an irregular manner as shown in Figure H.

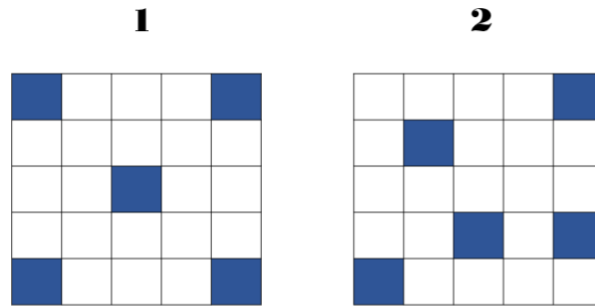


Figure H. Stimulus example with no adjacent blue boxes

For each pair of images, two thirds of the people consulted chose the one that presented blue squares irregularly scattered (H2). No participant preferred any images with the blue squares arranged in a pattern. Nevertheless, a third of the participants said that the sentence “ono que otro cuadrado está pintado de azul” (‘one or other square is painted blue’) correctly described both grids of each pair. The results show that, even though the image where blue squares that were arranged in a pattern (H1) was never preferred over the other available option, it cannot be said that it prevents a sentence containing “uno que otro” from being judged acceptable.

In sum, the content of separation of individuals can be satisfied even if some individuals are contiguously placed, although there is a tendency to prefer situations in which all individuals are separated from one another. With respect to the configuration of separation intervals there is a tendency to prefer irregular intervals, although configurations where a pattern is perceivable are also acceptable.

Separation is not necessarily a spatial criterion, it can also be satisfied when the individuals are separated because they participate in events that are non-contiguous in time. To show this we designed four stimuli which we presented verbally to eight participants. The stimuli describe a scenario and then present two sentences that describe different situations. Each participant was asked to choose which of the presented situations was true in relation to a sentence containing “uno que otro” in an argument position. The scenarios, sentences that describe situations to be evaluated and questions from the experiment are shown below:

- (50) Sergio used to play football every day, but months ago he hurt his knee and stopped playing. Now he is almost completely recovered. If we know that last month Sergio played “uno que otro partido” (‘one or other match’), which of the following situations describes what happened?
1. Sergio played a game Saturday the 5th, Saturday the 12th and Saturday the 19th
 2. Sergio played a game Tuesday June the first, another one on Saturday June 5th and another one on Monday 14th of June.
- (51) Daniel worked the night shift at a hotel’s reception answering calls from the

guests. If we know that last night Daniel received “una que otra llamada” (‘one or other call’), which of the following situations describes what happened?

1. Daniel received one call at 21:00, another call at 22:30 and a last call at 3:00 am.
2. Daniel received a call at 21:00, another call at 21:03 and a last call at 21:05.

(52) Different packages from different people arrive everyday to Clara’s store. If Clara says “el martes llegó uno que otro paquete” (‘last Tuesday one package or other arrived’), which of the following situations describes what happened?

1. Last Tuesday two packages arrived in the morning and one in the afternoon.
2. Last Tuesday a package arrived at 5:00 pm, another one arrived at 5:30, and a third one arrived at 6:00.

In this set of tests participants were not allowed to select more than one of the available options. The task in (50) compares events that have a temporal pattern (the games occur each Saturday) with events that show no pattern. Task (51), on the other hand, compares events (taking calls) occurring without temporal contiguity with events that happen one some minutes after the other. Task (52) compares a situation in which events of packages arriving are separated by long intervals for one day, even if two of them occur during the same interval, with another situation in which separation, in addition to being regular an absolute, is also shorter. In the first of these tasks six out of eight participants preferred the situation without any distribution pattern in time (answer 2), whereas the other two selected the situation with a pattern (answer 1). Regarding task (51), the eight participants consulted selected the situation where there was no contiguity in all the events distributed in time (answer 1). Finally, in task (52) half of the participants selected the option that shows the events as separated and distributed throughout the day (even if two of the packages are delivered in the morning, answer 1), whereas the other half preferred the situation in which the deliveries were totally separated, but with a regular pattern (answer 2).

In sum, sentences containing “uno que otro” are not acceptable when describing situations where *there is no* separation between individuals. For this criterion to hold it is enough that some individuals be separated, even if some others are contiguous. In this sense we say that “uno que otro” imposes a separation condition that is satisfied with *weak* (partial) separation, even if in situations with *strong* (total) separation the use of the quantifier is also acceptable.

Situations where intervals of separation are regular, such that a separation pattern can be identified, are not preferred by speakers over situations that show separation with irregular intervals, but it cannot be concluded from this that the irregular separation is a necessary condition for the acceptable use of “uno que otro”, because some participants indicated that a sentence containing “uno que otro” was acceptable in both kinds of situation.

The generalizations presented so far will be useful when we give a formalization of the semantic content of sentences containing “uno que otro” in section 6, where we argue that the separation content, confirmed both by our own judgements and by that of other speakers, is due to a distributive relation between individuals and events, conditioned by a restriction that holds of the spatial-temporal intervals in which these events take place.

As a global summary of the present section about the semantic description of “uno que otro” we can say the following: (i) “uno que otro” is a weak, non-presuppositional, non-maximal quantifier with possible partitive uses, that is, it corresponds to what we would informally call an indefinite. (ii) Unlike other indefinite quantifiers in Spanish (*uno/unos, otro/otros, alguno/algunos*) “uno que otro” does not have a plural version, but it does involve a notional reference to more than one entity. (iii) Even when it has a notion of plurality not morphologically expressed, unlike other indefinite quantifiers, “uno que otro” does not allow collective readings, that is, readings where the predicate is true of all the referred entities in the same event. Sentences containing “uno que otro” are, then, strictly distributive. (iv) Sentences with “uno que otro” imply⁹ the spatial or temporal separation of the individuals denoted by the noun. Given that temporality and spatiality are properties of events and not of individuals (or of individuals only as long as they are participants of events), we claim that this spatial-temporal separation is an effect of a distributive relation between these participants and the events in which they participate, plus a separation condition between the spatial-temporal coordinates of the events.

In what follows, we describe the parts of a distributive relation, we show which of them is marked by the noun phrase introduced by “uno que otro” and we present a formalization of its semantic content.

5. Distributive relations

5.1 Structure and parts of distributive relations

So far, we have only described distributive relations negatively as those relations that are not collective (Champollion 2014). To speak more precisely about how a distributive relation is formed we will follow the terminology and explanation offered by Choe (1987). We assume his notion of distributivity as a relation between two sets. One of them, called “distributive key” is made up by individuals to which an element or group of elements from the other set is assigned (distributed). This second set is called “distributed share”.

The distributed share and the distributive key differ in an important respect: while the set denoting the share is not necessarily exhausted in the distributivity relation, the set denoting the key does: all its elements must be assigned to an element of the other set. In other words, in the distributive relation the key is universally quantified since all its

⁹ We say “imply” in a general sense, as “it allows us to infer”. We are not entirely sure about the information status of the separation content. We know that this content is strongly associated to sentences containing “uno que otro”, by everything that acceptability judgments show us, but these tasks do not help us determine the kind of meaning it constitutes. We are sure it is not an entailment, because when a sentence with “uno que otro” is negated the separation content is not cancelled. It cannot be said to be a conversational implicature as it is neither cancellable nor it seems to be derived from any Gricean maxim. González (2022a&b) argues that it is not an at-issue content (with which we agree) without exactly defining what kind of secondary meaning it has. Our own intuition, which we have not been able to test, is that this semantic content is a presupposition. In our formalization we add the separation content as a pre-condition over events, so it is not part of the at-issue content, but it is part of the necessary conditions for sentences containing this expression to be acceptable. Of course, saying that the separation between entities is a necessary condition for the acceptability of sentences with “uno que otro” is a strong statement and it poses the challenges of explaining cases (marginal in the evidence we provide) in which sentences are acceptable even if the entities are all contiguous to one another. Our explanation is that “separation”, or “non-contiguity”, is a vague concept and there must be pragmatic and world-knowledge factors involved in determining whether two events are (sufficiently) separated. This vagueness provides the range of variation of the speakers’ judgements.

elements are related with at least another element of the distributive share. The distributed share, on the other hand, is not necessarily exhausted; that is, it is not necessary that each of its elements is assigned to another member of the distributive key.

The following diagram is meant to illustrate these notions. The set on the left represents the distributive key, in this case a set of people. Each of them is assigned an element from the distributed share, which in this case is a set of apples. The situation described in this diagram would make a sentence like (53) true:

- (53) Cada persona recibió una manzana
 ‘Each person received an apple.’

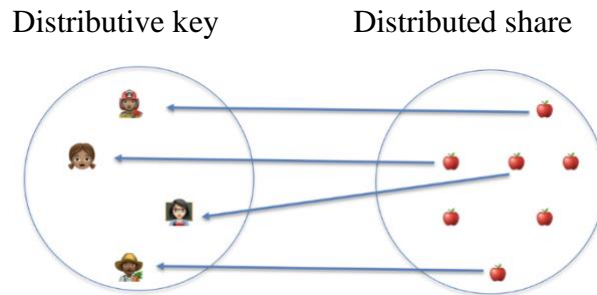


Diagram 1. Components of a distributive relation (Choe 1987)

In our example, the distributive key is constituted by individuals, but the entities that are part of this set, as we will see shortly, can also be events. The distributive relation is introduced by the quantifier “cada” ‘each’. Note that, if instead of this quantifier there was a plural definite article, like in (54), the sentence would still be true in the situation represented in Diagram 1, but it would also be true if together, all the people, had received only one apple instead of one apple each.

- (54) Las personas recibieron una manzana
 ‘The people received an apple.’

Another thing we must note is that “cada” ‘each’ is a quantifier that introduces the distributive key (the set of individuals), whereas the distributed share in (53) is expressed by a singular indefinite “una manzana” (an apple). In spite that “una manzana” is morphologically singular it does not refer to a unique entity, but it refers to as many apples as there are individuals in the distributive key.

This dependency relation in which the reference of the indefinite “una manzana” covaries with the individuals from the set introduced by “cada persona” (each person) is explicitly marked in some languages in the indefinite phrase, this is, in the phrase that denotes the distributed share. Choe (1987a, 1987b) describes the Korean suffix *-ssik*, which, when affixed to a numeral like “one” always produces a distributive reading in which the phrase containing *-ssik* refers to as many entities as elements in the set over which they are distributed.

- (55) ai-tul-i [phwungsen-hana]-rul saessta
 children-PL-NOM balloon-one-ACC bought
 ‘The children bought a balloon.’
(Korean. Choe 1987b: 130)

- (56) ai-tul-i [phwungsen-hana-ssik]-ul saessta
 children-PL-NOM balloon-one-ssik-ACC bought
 ‘The children bought a balloon each.’
(Korean. Choe 1987b: 131)

The dependency of the phrases containing *-ssik* to what Choe calls an antecedent or distributive key motivates the name *anti-quantifiers* for this kind of noun phrases. While one of the properties of quantifiers is that they take expressions under their scope, phrases marked with *-ssik*, on the contrary, are characterized by always being under the scope of an operator, particularly, a distributive quantifier that either can be explicit in the sentence or can be recovered from context.

The notion of dependency shown by the constituent that introduces the distributed share to a universal quantifier (overt or covert) that exhausts the distributive key is also crucial to the description of Hungarian reduplicated numerals provided by Farkas (1997, 2021). The following examples show a minimal pair of a regular indefinite (57) and a reduplicated indefinite (58):

- (57) minden gyerek olvasott egy/hét könyvet
 every child read one/seven book.ACC
 ‘Every child read one book/seven books.’
(Hungarian. Farkas 2021: 381)

- (58) minden gyerek olvasott egy-egy / hét-hét könyvet
 every child read one-one/ seven-seven book.ACC
 ‘Every child read one book / seven books each.’
(Hungarian. Farkas 1997: 243)

Hungarian reduplicated numerals impose a condition over their interpretation that is absent from the regular numerals like those in (57). The sentence in (57) has two interpretations: one in which the indefinite phrase *egy könyvet* ‘one book’ or *hét könyvet* ‘seven books’ refer to a unique book or a unique sum of seven books, and a second one where they refer to as many individual books or groups of seven books as there are children referred by *minden gyerek* ‘every child’. Sentence (58), on the other hand, only has the second interpretation. The reference of reduplicated numerals/indefinites depends on the different assignments received by the variable introduced by the universal quantifier, which does not have a rigid reference either. Farkas defines dependency using the following formulation:

- (59) A variable *v2* is dependent on a variable *v1* iff the values assigned to *v2* covary with those assigned to *v1*.

The phenomena described by Choe (1987) and by Farkas (1997), although explained in different terms, are indeed similar: both describe a nominal expression that must be interpreted as the distributed hare in a distributive relation. The difference is that, whereas Choe establishes this relation between two sets of individuals, Farkas establishes it between the assignment functions of two different variables. Following Choe's terminology we claim that "uno que otro" is a quantifier that corresponds to the *distributed share* of a distributive relation, but to simplify the terminology we call it a *distributive indefinite*.

5.2 The typology of distributive numerals

5.2.1 Cross-linguistic overview

The first cross-linguistic study of distributive numerals is Gil's (1982) PhD dissertation. In it, Gil establishes some typological generalizations. The first and strongest is that distributive numerals always mark the distributed share of the relation and never the key. Another generalization is that all languages have adverbial expressions containing numerals with distributive interpretations (*two by two*, *in twos*), but only some languages have adnominal distributive numerals. Moreover, languages of this last kind can be classified depending on whether the adnominal distributive numerals are identical to the adverbial forms (as in Latin, Hausa, Yoruba, Pangasinan), if they only share a derivation base (as in Bikol and Georgian), if the adverbial form is derived from the adnominal one (Turkish, Fox, Mundari, Cebuano), or if they do not have any morphological material in common (Tagalog).

Both adverbial and adnominal distributive numerals may belong to different syntactic categories, which is not rare considering that numerals themselves do not belong to the same syntactic category in all languages, and they can even belong to more than one category (for example, adjective and adverb) in the same language. Gil (1982) explicitly claims that adnominal distributive numerals "never belong to the determiner class" and he even claims that languages with adnominal distributive numerals do not possess determiners, or they do not distinguish between common noun phrase and determined noun phrase. This last proposal is a strong claim that can be proven or disproved. Spanish, as we have said, does not have a distributive numeral paradigm, but what "uno que otro" shows is that there are expressions that belong to the syntactic category of determiners -or quantifier, if we consider that as a syntactic category- that have the semantics of distributive numerals, that is, that mark the set of entities that are distributed among the members of another set.

The concept of "distributive numeral" was first coined by Gil (1982) and its expression has been described in various languages, like Korean (Oh, 2001), Telegu (Balusu 2006), Mixe (Romero 2006), Purépecha (Vázquez Rojas 2013), Tlingit (2014) and Matlatzinca (Gómez González 2015), to mention some. In (60) we reproduce Cable's (2014) definition:

- (60) Distributive numeral: A morphosyntactic construction containing a numeral, whereby (i) the sentence as a whole receives a distributive reading, and (ii) under the allowable readings, the numeral contained within the construction must be interpreted AS IF it is within the scope of a distributive operator (Cable 2014: 563).

We will see that “uno que otro”, despite not being a numeral, but an indefinite, does have the conditions described by Cable for distributive numerals.

5.2.2 Types of keys

A parameter of variation between distributive constructions is the kind of elements that form the distributive key. In typical cases, like the ones we have exemplified from (53) to (59), the elements from the share are distributed over a set of individuals, denoted by a noun phrase that appears as a predicate co-argument. Nevertheless, expressions that introduce the distributed share can, in some languages, appear as arguments of intransitive predicates, without any other nominal or quantificational expression that explicitly marks the key. In (61) we illustrate a case with these characteristics in Matlatzinca:

- (61) nè-ánima ro-re-ʔári-wewí mun tenowi-wewi
 PL-animal 3PL-PST-get.out-DL DIST two-DL
 ‘The animals got out two by two.’

(Matlatzinca. Gómez González 2018:31)

In Matlatzinca the particle *mun* before a numeral like *tenowi* ‘two’ forces a distributive reading. Since in the event described in (61) there is only one participant (theme), what is distributed is the set of animals over a set of events of “getting out”, so that each atomic event in which animals get out is an event in which exactly two animals get out, as rendered by the free translation. We know that “nè-ánima” is the distributed share and not the key, because it is possible that there are some animals that did not get out, but for the sentence to be true all the events of animals going out must be events in which the theme participant is a pair of animals.

In Telugu, Balusu (2006) provides a description where distributive numerals can have distributive readings over participants, over spatial locations, or over temporal intervals. A way to provide a uniform explanation for this phenomenon is that sentences with distributive numerals in this language always have distributive readings where the key is constituted by events, and what changes in the different readings is the criterion by which events are defined: we can say there is an event per spatial location, an event per temporal interval, or an event per participant.

Not every language with distributive numerals allows a relation with events in the key and individuals in the share. This can be seen, for instance, in Hungarian (Farkas 2021) and in Kaqchikel (Henderson 2014), languages in which reduplicated numerals cannot be interpreted if there is not an explicit key in the sentence.

- (62) *egy-egy gyerek énekelt
 a-a child sang
 ‘A-a child sang.’

(Hungarian. Farkas 2021:387)

- (63) *Mari kell találkozzon egy-egy matematika tanárral
 Mari must meet a-a mathematics professor
 ‘Mari must meet with a-a mathematics professor.’

(Hungarian. Farkas 2021:387)

- (64) *xe'inchäp ox-ox wäy
 x-e'-in-chäp ox-ox wäy
 CP-A2P-E1S-handle three-RED tortilla
 Intended: 'I took three-three tortillas.'

(Kaqchikel. Henderson 2014:3)

Moreover, Kaqchikel allows distributive numerals with a pluractional marker in the verb, which allows the elements in the share to be distributed over the elements of an explicitly introduced plurality of events:

- (65) a. x-∅-in-kan-ala' jun-jun wuj
 CP-A3S-E1S-search one-RED book
 'I looked for a book (in each location or at each time).'

(Kaqchikel. Henderson 2014:4)

- b. jantape' e k'o ox-ox ixtan-i' chu-u-wäch r-ochoch ajaw
 always A3P exist three-RED girl-PL E3S-face E3S-house lord
 'There are always three girls in front of the church.'

(Kaqchikel. Henderson 2014:8)

In sum, in distributive relations we can identify two sets (share and key). The key set can be either a set of individuals or a set of events. Since events, unlike individuals, cannot be presented as “naturally” separated, we distinguish the limits of events by other means: either by the limits of the spatial or temporal intervals they occupy or by the individuals they have as participants (Balusu 2006, Cable 2014).

Distributive relations in which the key is made by a set of individuals (*participant key*) can be understood, then, as a form of dependency in which the reference of the expression that introduces the share covaries as a function of the individuals in the key, so that in each event there is an individual from the key and as many individuals from the share as it is specified by the numeral. The underlined portion of the formulas corresponds to the contribution of the share markers in each sentence:

- (66) Participant key: “Each person received two apples”
 $\forall x. x \in D_{\langle e,t \rangle} \ \& \ \text{person}(x) \ \& \ \text{atom}(x) \rightarrow \exists y. y \in D_{\langle e,t \rangle} \ \& \ *apple(y) \ \& \ |\{z: \text{atom}(z) \ \& \ z < y\}| = 2 \ \& \ x \text{ received } y.$

According to the formalization in (66), the sentence: “each person received two apples” is true if and only if for every atomic individual x that is a person there is a sum-individual y that belongs to the set of pluralities of apples and that is made up exactly by two atomic apples, so that x received y .

In distributive relations where the key is constituted by events the elements of the share are assigned directly to each event (in the cardinality marked by the numeral base):¹⁰

¹⁰ In the literature on distributive expressions with an event key, it is common to find that events are not presented as a set, but as a sum of atomic events. The relation between atomic events and the sum-events is a part-whole relation, whereas the relation between individual events and sets of events is the ‘element-of’

- (67) Event key: “The children entered in the classroom two by two”
 $\exists e. e \in D_{\langle e, t \rangle} . |\{e': \text{atom}(e') \ \& \ e' < e\}| > 1 \ \& \ \forall e'. e' < e \rightarrow \exists y. y \in D_{\langle e, t \rangle} \ \& \ *child(y) \ \& \ |\{x: \text{atom}(x) \ \& \ x < y\}| = 2 \ \& \ \text{entered-in-classroom}(y, e')$

The formalization in (67) states that the sentence “The children entered two by two” is true if and only if there is a sum-event e with more than one atom or sub-event, such that for every atomic proper part (or sub-events) e' there is a plurality of two children that entered to the classroom in sub-event e' .

Once we have established what distributive numerals express as share markers, we can state what we consider allows “uno que otro” to express separation between individuals. The proposal is that “uno que otro” is a distributed share marker that takes a sum of events as key and assigns an individual from the set denoted by the noun next to the quantifier to every atomic sub-event. Moreover, the cardinality of the atomic sub-events is low or, rather, inferior to a standard. Lastly, a precondition of the events is that they must be separated either because they are located in non-contiguous spaces or because they occur in non-contiguous temporal intervals. In the next section we provide a detailed explanation of how the meaning of “uno que otro” is composed from its basic function of distributive-share marker.

6. Truth conditions

Let us sum up here what we have shown so far about the meaning of “uno que otro”. We have seen that noun phrases containing this quantifier reject being argument of collective predicates, they refer to a low cardinality of individuals, and these individuals are separated either in space or in time, even if this separation is only “weak, that is, it is not necessary that all the referred individuals are separated spatially or temporally, but that only some of them are seems to be enough for a sentence with “uno que otro” to be acceptable. We also showed that, even if this quantifier only has a singular form, the noun phrase containing “uno que otro” always refers to a plurality of individuals. Now we will present a formalization of the meaning of this quantifier that accounts for all the aforementioned aspects in the most parsimonious way possible. Our proposal is that “uno que otro” is a distributive-share marker, so the entities it refers to are assigned to different events from a plurality denoted by the sentence predicate.

The restriction that bars noun phrases containing “uno que otro” from being the only participant in a collective predicate can be explained as an effect of the distributive character of the quantifier. In this respect it is similar to a universal quantifier like “cada” (adnominal each), but it is different from the latter in an evident feature: whereas “cada” is a universal quantifier, “uno que otro” is not. Assuming that both quantifiers express a distributive relation, their quantificational force would categorize them in different components of that distribution: “cada” introduces a key, while “uno que otro” introduces a distributed share.¹¹

relation. Up until now we have assumed Choe’s (1987) terminology, which represents distributive relations as relations between sets (instead of relations between sums), however, we have chosen to represent events as sums. For a formalization that treats event keys as sets see Romero 2006.

¹¹ See Bosnić et al. (2020) for the idea that the distributive-key needs to be exhausted or it may allow readings in which only some of the members of that set are assigned to an element of the share. In our proposal the

Now, if “uno que otro” is a distributed-share marker, we still have to specify what kind of entities constitute the distributive key. We propose that this is an event key: for every event in the key there is one and only one of the individuals introduced by the noun phrase acting as a participant. The truth conditions of a sentence like (68a) are then partially formalized as (68b):

- (68) a. Apareció una que otra nube
‘A cloud appeared here and there.’
- b. $\exists e. \forall e'. e' < e \ \& \ \text{atom}(e') \rightarrow \exists y. \text{cloud}(y) \ \& \ \text{atom}(y) \ \& \ \text{appeared } y \text{ in } e'$.

The notion of distributivity is then relationally captured in (68b): on one hand, with a universal quantifier over atomic events that are proper parts of the sum-event e ; on the other hand, with a dependency between this quantifier and the existential quantifier which introduces the indefinite and assigns a different entity to each atomic event in e .

We have also shown that noun phrases containing “uno que otro”, although morphologically singular, refer to more than one individual, this is, they are notionally plural. This requirement is captured without having to add a plurality component in the noun phrase. The plurality of individuals can be obtained by two conditions: first, that the event described be constituted by more than one atomic sub-event (this is why atoms are a proper part of events), and second, the dependency relation between atomic events and individuals. In (68a) there are as many clouds as there are atomic events where it is the case that a cloud appeared.

We have said that “uno que otro” entails that the cardinality of the referred individuals is greater than one, but inferior to some contextual standard, since it expresses that its cardinality is low. We can represent this semantic content by adding a condition over the cardinality of atomic events that cumulatively make up the total sum of events introduced by the sentence predicate:

- (69) $\exists e. \forall e'. e' < e \ \& \ \text{atom}(e') . |\{e'': e'' < e \ \& \ \text{atom}(e'')\}| \geq 2 \ \& \ < \text{st} \rightarrow \exists y. \text{cloud}(y) \ \& \ \text{atom}(y) \ \& \ \text{appeared } y \text{ in } e'$.

The formalization in (69) explicitly establishes that there is a sum-event whose atoms have a cardinality lower than a certain contextual standard (st) and that for each of these atomic events it is the case that there is an individual, which is a cloud and that it appeared in that atomic event. Of course, we want the formalization in (69) to be valid for all sentences and not only for those that involve clouds and events where they appear. If we substitute the specific predicates in (69) for variables, both the noun introduced by “uno que otro” and the predicate with which the noun phrase appears, we will get the following semantic content:

share of a distributive relation involving “uno que otro” has to be completely exhausted, otherwise a sentence like “apareció una que otra nube en el cielo” (una que otra cloud appeared) would be true if there are three separated events in which a cloud appears and other events where many clouds appeared. In spite of being an indefinite expression, “uno que otro” has a universal quantifier over a set of events of low cardinality built in, as we will make clear.

$$(70) \quad \llbracket \text{uno que otro} \rrbracket = \lambda P \lambda Q. \exists e. \forall e'. e' < e \ \& \ \text{atom}(e') \ \& \ |\{e'': e'' < e \ \& \ \text{atom}(e'')\}| \geq 2 \ \& \ < st \rightarrow \exists y. P(y) \ \& \ \text{atom}(y) \ \& \ Q(e') \ \& \ \text{Rel}(y, e').$$

It is important to note that the existential that introduces de quantifier is under the scope of a distributive operator whose restrictor is a plurality of events with low cardinality. Each of these events is assigned to one and only one entity from the set denoted by the noun. P is a variable ranging over properties (like the ones that designate nouns like “cloud” or “apple”), type $\langle e, t \rangle$ and Q a variable ranging over event predicates, type $\langle \varepsilon, t \rangle$. Thus, “uno que otro” maintains the semantic type of quantifiers ($\langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle \langle \varepsilon, t \rangle, t \rangle \rangle$) except that its scope is an event predicate instead of an individual predicate. We take the constant *Rel* from Romero’s (2006) analysis. Cable (2014:582) also uses a similar constant which he names “participant”, and he defines it as a meta-predicate that holds between an event and an entity if, and only if, that entity has a thematic role (agent, theme, patient, etc.) in said event.

One of the central claims we have tried to make in this text is that sentences containing “uno que otro” describe situations in which the referred individuals are separated from one another. In our proposal this is not a direct condition over individuals, but rather over the events in which they participate.

We assume that events occur in portions of space-time which we will call *intervals*. For the events that occur in these intervals to be separated, between every two intervals there must be a third where no event of the same kind occurs. Thus, a situation in which (68a) is acceptable is one where a (low) number of events occur in different intervals, in each of which a cloud appeared, but between one event and the other mediates an interval of space or time with no cloud. These preconditions over the intervals where events occur is formalized in (71).

As we can see, in (70) the condition that individuals be separate is still not explicitly formulated. This meaning is not asserted. This can be seen in that, when a sentence like (68a) is negated, the separation component is not cancelled but it is maintained. Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether this is a presupposition in all its form, we are interested, for now, in capturing this content as a pre-condition over the atomic events that cumulatively form the total sum-event.

$$(71) \quad \forall i. \forall i'. \forall e'. \forall e''. [e' \leq e \ \& \ \text{atom}(e') \ \& \ e'' \leq e \ \& \ \text{atom}(e'') \ \& \ \text{occurs}(e', i) \ \& \ \text{occurs}(e'', i') \rightarrow \exists i''. \neg \exists e'''. e''' \leq e \ \& \ \text{atom}(e''') \ \& \ \text{occurs}(e''', i'') \ \& \ \text{contiguous}(i'', i) \ \& \ \text{contiguous}(i'', i')].$$

In the formalization in (71) i, i' are variables ranging over spatial or temporal intervals, e', e'' are variables ranging over events and “occurs” is a predicate that relates events and intervals such that $\text{occurs}(e, i) = 1$ iff e occupies interval i . “Contiguous” is a predicate of pairs of intervals such that $\text{contiguous}(i, i') = 1$ iff some point at the edge of i is in proximity to one of the points at the edge of i' (we assume that intervals are series of successive points). What (71) establishes is that between two atomic events e' and e'' that occur in their respective intervals i and i' there must be an interval, contiguous to these two, where *no* atomic event of the same kind occurs, that is, an event which belongs to the same sum to which e' and e'' belong.

7. Conclusions

We have shown that “uno que otro” is a quantifier whose use is extended in Latin American Spanish, that is in many respects similar to indefinites in this language: it lacks a maximality presupposition, it is monotonic increasing, and it shows variable scope with respect to other operators. Even when it entails low cardinality like other indefinites, it is different from them: unlike “pocos” (‘few’), it does not show decreasing monotonicity, and, crucially, unlike “unos pocos” or “unos cuantos” (‘a few’), phrases containing “uno que otro” cannot be the only argument of a collective predicate.¹² Moreover, we showed that speakers find sentences with “uno que otro” to be more adequate as descriptions of situations where the referred individuals are spatially or temporally separated than as those where they occupy what could be considered the same spatial/temporal interval.

The fact that a nominal quantifier has implications over the spatial or temporal placement of its referents is worthy of attention, since normally those coordinates are expressed in the predicates that describe events and not in the predicates that refer to individual. As far as we know no other quantifier in Spanish bears implications on the spatial or temporal placement of the individuals that it designates.

We resolved this paradox by proposing an analysis where “uno que otro” is an indefinite that distributes entities over a set of events. These events constitute a set of low cardinality and they have the precondition of occurring in separate intervals. The quantifier is then associated to its noun as any other quantifier, but instead of relating it to another set of individuals, as classic quantifiers are supposed to do (at least according to Generalized Quantifier Theory), it assigns individuals to each of the atoms of an event key. The quantifier introduces an existential dependent on the sub-events described in the main predicate. In this sense, we identify “uno que otro” with a distributed share marker, what Choe (1987) calls an anti-quantifier, and Cable calls a “distributive numeral”, or what Farkas (2021) calls a “dependent indefinite”.

Fernando Chapa Barrios
Centro de Estudios Lingüísticos y Literarios. El Colegio de México
jchapa@colmex.mx

Violeta Vázquez Rojas Maldonado
Centro de Estudios Lingüísticos y Literarios. El Colegio de México
vazquezrojas@colmex.mx

¹² Of course, if in the sentence there is some other argument that is compatible with the collective predicate, “uno que otro” can introduce the other participant:

- (i) #Uno que otro soldado invadió la plaza
Lit. ‘One or other soldier invaded the square.’
- (ii) Los soldados invadieron una que otra plaza
‘The soldiers invaded a square here and there /one or other square.’

In the first sentence “uno que otro” would be the only phrase that can serve as the agent of the predicate, but it is incompatible with the collectivity required by the verb “invadir” (to invade). On the other hand, in (ii), despite it being the same predicate, the phrase containing “uno que otro” is the theme, the plural agent is perfectly compatible with the collective predicate and the sentence describe a sum of events, separated in space or time, in each of which the plural agent invades a square.

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