

INDEFINITE READINGS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS AND NULL OBJECTS IN SPANISH¹

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ABSTRACT. It has been claimed in the literature that referential null subjects receive definite readings in consistent null-subject languages, like Spanish. That is why they are said to display the typical behavior of definite pronouns (referential *pro*). However, referential null subjects can receive indefinite readings under the following conditions: *i*) the antecedent must be a bare plural, *ii*) the indefinite null argument is interpreted as a bare noun, typically as an internal argument, and *iii*) identity of sense anaphora is involved. Crucially, referential null objects appear under similar conditions, and receive indefinite readings in European Spanish. This suggests that the gap could be analyzed in the same way. In this paper, I argue that both null arguments should not be analyzed as empty pronominals (*pro*), given the syntactic behavior that they show. By contrast, I will argue that an argument ellipsis analysis should be assumed, given that the internal argument position is occupied by an indefinite, non-specific bare noun, the null gap can receive sloppy readings, and the omission is not as ‘big’ as the one at verb-stranding VP-ellipsis, nor as ‘small’ as the one at nominal ellipsis.

Keywords: anaphora; argument ellipsis; bare plurals; empty categories; indefinite null objects; indefinite null subjects; null arguments.

RESUMEN. En la bibliografía se ha sostenido que los sujetos nulos anafóricos reciben lecturas definidas en lenguas de sujeto nulo como el español. Esta es la razón por la que se ha afirmado que se comportan como pronombres definidos (*pro* referencial). Sin embargo, los sujetos nulos anafóricos pueden recibir lecturas indefinidas bajo las siguientes condiciones: *i*) el antecedente debe ser un plural escueto, *ii*) el argumento nulo indefinido se interpreta como un nombre escueto, normalmente como un argumento interno, y *iii*) se trata de casos de anáfora de identidad de sentido. Crucialmente, los objetos nulos anafóricos aparecen bajo condiciones similares y reciben lecturas indefinidas en español europeo. Ello sugiere que el vacío podría analizarse de la misma manera. En este artículo defiende que ambos argumentos nulos no deben analizarse mediante pronombres vacíos (*pro*), dado su comportamiento

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sintáctico. Por el contrario, deben analizarse en términos de elipsis argumental, puesto que la posición de argumento interno está ocupada por un nombre escueto indefinido e inespecífico, el hueco nulo puede recibir lecturas descuidadas, y la omisión no es tan amplia como la que tiene lugar en la elipsis del SV, ni tan reducida como la que tiene lugar en la elipsis nominal.

Palabras clave: anáfora; elipsis argumental; plurales escuetos; categorías vacías; objetos tácitos indefinidos; sujetos tácitos indefinidos; argumentos tácitos.

1. Introduction

Spanish is said to be a typical case of *Consistent Null-Subject Language* (henceforth, CNSL), like Italian and Portuguese, among other languages.³ One of the grammatical properties of CNSLs is that referential *Null Subjects* (henceforth, NS) receive definite readings. This is the main reason why referential NSs in Spanish have been identified with definite pronouns (Alonso-Ovalle & D’Introno 2000; Barbosa 2019; Cardinaletti 1997; Chomsky 1981, 1982; Cole 1987; Frascarelli 2007). By contrast, it has been claimed that CNSLs disallow the indefinite readings of referential NSs that *Discourse Null-Subject Languages* (henceforth, DNSL), such as Japanese, admit (Oku 1998a, 1998b; Tomioka 2003). This difference has been said to be crucial to distinguish between CNSLs and DNSLs.⁴

Despite being one of the most well-known ideas in theoretical linguistics, mostly in Principles and Parameters (Biberauer 2009; Holmberg 2005; Homberg *et al.* 2009; Huang 1984; Jaeggli & Safir 1989), and in Hispanic linguistics too (Bosque & Brucart 2019; Cabrera 2008; Camacho 2013, 2016; Fernández Soriano 1989; Gutiérrez Maté 2013; Martínez-Sanz 2011; Toribio 2000), the distinction between CNSLs and DNSLs needs to be revised in light of new data. The necessity of a revision has been claimed in several studies, for instance, by pointing out the availability of (null) expletive pronouns in CNSLs (Barta-Kaufmann 2012; Bosque & Brucart 2019; Cabrera 2008; Martínez-Sanz 2011; Muñoz Pérez 2014). The aim of this paper is to shed light on the availability of indefinite readings of NSs in a CNSL like Spanish. As far as I know, this has not been put into the spotlight while revising the Null Subject Parameter (Holmberg 2010; Jaeggli & Safir 1989).

In the following sections, I show that, even though NSs show a tendency to receive definite readings (like those of definite pronouns) in Spanish, they can also receive indefinite readings under certain conditions. These conditions are shared by indefinite referential null objects. The availability of indefinite readings has not only a significant impact on the understanding of CNSLs, but also on analyzing NSs as an empty pronominal, typically referential *pro* (Alonso-Ovalle & D’Introno 2000; Bosque y Gutiérrez-Rexach 2009). In this debate, I will argue that the concept of *argument ellipsis* is the key to unify the analysis of indefinite referential NSs and indefinite referential null objects in Spanish.

³ I am concerned about the difficulty of classifying Spanish within the paradigm of CNSLs. It has been claimed that some varieties of Caribbean Spanish, typically Dominican Spanish, do not share the cluster of properties of CNSLs. These varieties express the subject more ‘frequently’, have overt expletive pronouns and overt subjects within *wh*- questions. I leave aside this problem, since I am not dealing here with American varieties of Spanish. See Bosque & Brucart (2019); Cabrera (2008); Camacho (2013, 2016); Fernández Soriano (1989); Gutiérrez Maté (2013); Martínez-Sanz (2011); Toribio (2000) for further information.

⁴ Abbreviations used in this article. ACC = accusative, AE = argument ellipsis, CNSL(s) = consistent null-subject language(s), DNSL(s) = discourse null-subject language(s), GEN = genitive, NS(s) = null subject(s), NO(s) = null object(s), NOM = nominative, TOP = topic marker, VP-ellipsis = verb phrase ellipsis.

1.1. Consistent Null-Subject Languages and Discourse Null-Subject Languages

The generalization that NSs in CNSLs receive definite readings is consistent with the examples in (1), where NSs receive definite readings, as shown in (1a), from Portuguese, in (1b), from Italian, and in (1c), from Spanish.⁵

- (1) a. [Eu]_i deixei os bolinhos na geladeira porque Ø_i vou comer tarde hoje.
 ‘I left the cookies in the fridge because I am going to eat late today.’
 b. [Gianni]_i non vuole pagare. Ø_i Non ha soldi.
 ‘Gianni does not want to pay. He has no money’
 c. [El médico]_i ha llegado antes porque Ø_i tenía mucho trabajo hoy.⁶
 ‘The doctor has arrived earlier because he has a lot of work today.’

In CNSLs, the definite readings of the NSs in (1) are obtained through definite antecedents. Interestingly, the interpretation of NSs is definite also when linked to indefinite, specific antecedents, as in (2a), and indefinite, non-specific antecedents, as in (2b).⁷

- (2) a. [Un hombre]_i entró en el metro. Ø_i Iba descalzo.
 ‘A man entered the subway. He was barefoot.’
 b. Solicitó [dos informes]_i. Esperaba que Ø_i estuvieran correctamente traducidos.
 ‘(S)he required two reports. (S)he expected that they were correctly translated.’

It is important to note that, thus far, NSs refer to the same entity that their antecedents are referring to, therefore the NS and the antecedent are coreferential in (1)-(2) (Büring 2005; Chomsky 1981, 1982).

In (3), the NS cannot be interpreted as indefinite with an indefinite, non-specific antecedent. However, under the same circumstances, this reading is possible in DNSLs, like Japanese.

- (3) [Una estudiante]_i fue a verle. Ø_i También fue a ver al decano.
 ‘A student went to see him. She also went to see the dean.’
 (Leonetti & Martínez García 2022)

In (4), the behavior of the NS in Japanese is different from that of the NS in Spanish, because the NS in Japanese can receive an indefinite reading. In (4), “the salesman who visited John’s house can be a different salesman from the one who visited Mary’s house. This has been labeled as ‘the indefinite reading of null arguments’” (Oku 1998b: 306).

- (4) A: — Seerusuman-ga Mary-no uchi-ni kita.
salesman-NOM Mary-GEN house-to came
 ‘A salesman came to Mary’s house.’
 B: — Ø John-no uchi-ni-mo kita.
John-GEN house-to-also came
 ‘He came to John’s house, too.’

⁵ See Espinal & Cyrino (2019); Heim (1982); Leonetti (1999, 2011, 2019, 2022) on *definiteness*.

⁶ I use the symbol Ø to represent null elements (i.e., elements deleted from phonetic structure). This way, I avoid the idea about the existence of *pro* in subject position by now. Anyway, as I try to show in the following pages, the reasons for representing null elements without *pro* are empirical: it is doubtful that an empty pronoun, represented by *pro*, could be posited for the data I show. Additionally, I use hooks to highlight antecedents.

⁷ See Leonetti (2006, 2011, 2019); von Heusinger (2011) on *specificity*.

(Adapted from Oku 1998b: 306)

In the same example in Spanish, which appears in (5), the salesman who visited Juan's house is the same salesman who visited Maria's house. Therefore, Spanish NSs behave like overt pronouns, which are definite in these cases (Oku 1998b).

- (5) [Un vendedor]_i fue a la casa de María y también Ø_i fue a la casa de Juan.
'A salesman went to Mary's, and he also went to Juan's.'

This pronoun-like behavior is one of the main reasons why NSs in Spanish are analyzed as instances of *pro*, which is supposed to behave like a definite pronoun (Alonso-Ovalle & D'Introno 2000; Frascarelli 2007; Saab 2008, 2014). As pronouns, NSs in Spanish search for a prominent antecedent, receive a definite reading, and form a coreferential chain with their antecedent, as shown in (1)-(3) and (5). By contrast, the example of Japanese in (4) is not a case of coreference, but a case of identity of sense anaphora (Büring 2005; Chomsky 1981, 1982; Grinder & Postal 1971; but see Bresnan 1971 for discussion).

1.2. Research Questions

Hence, there seem to be reasons for linking NSs to definiteness in Spanish. NSs identify a discourse antecedent, and receive a definite reading. This happens *a*) with definite antecedents, as in (6a), *b*) with indefinite, specific antecedents, as in (6b), and *c*) with indefinite, non-specific antecedents, as in (6c).

- (6) a. [La estudiante]_i salió de clase. Ø_i Se encontraba enferma.
'The student left the classroom. She was sick.'
b. [Un hombre]_i entró en el metro. Ø_i Estaba descalzo.
'A man entered the subway. He was barefoot.'
c. Llegaron [turistas]_i a la costa. Ø_i Estaban muy cansados.
'Tourists arrived on the coast. They were exhausted.'

Two kinds of NSs are excluded. The first one is the deictically identified NS, like the one in (7a), whose interpretation is pragmatically controlled, with the aid of contextually-driven indications (Bosque 1998, 2015; Fillmore 1986). The second one is related to arbitrary readings in non-referential uses of NSs, like the one in (7b), whose interpretation is compulsorily human (*arbitrary*, in terms of Rizzi 1986; Suñer 1983). Thus, from now onwards, when using the term *NS(s)*, we are referring to argumental, referential null subjects.

- (7) a. [Context: Pointing some vegetables.]
Ø Están negras.
'They turned black.'
b. Ø Llamaron a la puerta a las dos de la madrugada.
'Someone knocked on the door at two in the morning.'

The traditional generalization that NSs in CNSLs typically receive definite readings has some crucial theoretical consequences. The first consequence is that, in some accounts, the existence of a [+DEFINITE] feature is suggested. This feature plays a major role in the licensing of NSs as empty pronominals (*pro*), either as a property of a null element or as a property of finite agreement. The second consequence is that the availability of (in)definite readings of NSs has been considered the central asymmetry between CNSLs and DNSLs.

The question that emerges from the previous considerations is whether a [+DEFINITE] feature is needed to account for these facts in Spanish (as it has been claimed in the literature), or this feature could be dispensed with. The answer awaits new data and a new analysis. Our hypothesis is that this feature could be dispensed with, since positing a [+DEFINITE] feature faces two basic problems: *i*) the existence of indefinite interpretations of NSs; and *ii*) the existence of indefinite interpretations of NOs. These interpretations, as I will try to prove, are better understood through an argument ellipsis analysis.

This paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I identify some indefinite readings of referential NSs, and present their grammatical conditions (§2). Next, I compare the indefinite readings of referential NSs and null objects in Spanish (§3). Right after, I wrap up the first part of the paper (§4). Then, I review the pros and cons of positing an empty category analysis (§5.1) and an ellipsis analysis (§5.2), concluding that the second one shows more theoretical advantages for these cases. I conclude with some final remarks (§6).

2. Indefinite Null Subjects

Contrary to what has been claimed in the literature, there are some referential NSs that can receive indefinite readings in Spanish. The crucial condition is provided by the antecedent, which must be a bare plural, which is by default indefinite and non-specific (Espinal 2010; Laca 2013; Leonetti 2011). The datum in (8) has not received much attention before, as far as I know (see Campos 1986: 357-358 for intuitions; and Laca 2013 for more data).

- (8) A: — ¿Se aceptan aquí cheques al portador?
 ‘Are cash checks accepted here?’
 B: — No, no se aceptan Ø. / Sí, se aceptan Ø.
 ‘No, they are not. / Yes, they are.’

(Leonetti & Martínez García 2022)

The NSs in (8B) can have an indefinite, existential reading that reproduces the value of the antecedent. Thus, the readings of the NSs in (8B) can be indefinite, meaning ‘No, no se aceptan cheques al portador’ and ‘Sí, se aceptan cheques al portador’, respectively. A set of more data of indefinite NSs appears in (9).

- (9) a. ¿Te hacen falta más tornillos? A mí me sobran Ø...
 ‘Do you need more screws? I’ve got plenty of them.’
 b. Han pasado cosas muy raras. Y seguirán pasando Ø.
 ‘Very strange things happened. And more will happen.’
 c. Vienen turistas europeos. Y vendrán también Ø de Asia.
 ‘European tourists come. And tourists from Asia will also come.’
 d. A: — ¿Corrieron americanos en la carrera de hoy?
 ‘Did Americans run in the athletics race of today?’
 B: — No, no corrieron Ø. / Sí que corrieron Ø.
 ‘No, they did not run. / Yes, they did run.’

(Adapted from Leonetti & Martínez García 2022)

The NSs in (9) behave differently from the NSs in (6). To begin with, the NSs in (6) receive definite readings, while the NSs in (9) receive indefinite readings. Furthermore, the NSs in (6) form a coreferential chain with their antecedents, but the NSs in (9) are instances of identity of sense anaphora. Hence, the behavior of the NSs in (9), from Spanish, is closer to that of the NSs in (4), from Japanese, than to that of the NSs in (6). Finally, the NSs in (6) are preverbal, but the NSs in (9) are postverbal.

It is commonly assumed that preverbal subjects, like the ones in (6), are external arguments. By contrast, postverbal subjects, like the ones in (9), are located within the internal part of the VP (i.e., they are internal arguments, and behave ‘like objects’). Interestingly, most examples of indefinite NSs involve predicates that favor the appearance of postverbal subjects. This happens with intransitive predicates, typically with unaccusative verbs, like *pasar* ‘to happen’ and *venir* ‘to come’ in (9a-b). In these cases, subjects are located in the internal part of the VP, and typically receive the thematic role ‘theme’ (Burzio 1981; Perlmutter 1978).

Indefinite readings of NSs can also appear within unergative predicates, like *correr* ‘to run’ in (9d). In principle, this is not expected, since subjects within unergative predicates are said to be base-generated as external arguments, and receive the thematic role ‘agent’ (Burzio 1981; Perlmutter 1978). However, note that the interpretation of the subjects in (9d), with the ‘unergative’ verb *correr* ‘to run’, is not necessarily agentive: the proposition in (9d) can mean ‘Americans took part in the event of athletics race today’ (experiencer). The fact that an adverb like *deliberadamente* ‘deliberately’ cannot appear in *??Mañana corren americanos deliberadamente* evidences that the subject does not behave as a typical agent. Thus, the subject in (9d) do not behave as (canonical) subjects of unergative predicates (see Sorace 2000, 2004, 2011 for criticism on the classic approach to intransitive predicates). Since the conditions to have unaccusative/unergative predicates is a (traditional) general issue for the theory of unaccusative/unergative predicates, I leave this problem aside here. The crucial fact is that NSs can receive indefinite readings in postverbal positions within intransitive predicates, and they are interpreted like theme-like entities.

More examples of indefinite NSs are found within unaccusative predicates, like *venir* ‘to come’, in (10a), and within unergative predicates, like *participar* ‘to participate’, in (10b).⁸

- (10) a. A: — ¿Vinieron estudiantes?
 ‘Did any students come?’
 B: — No, no vinieron Ø. / Sí que vinieron Ø.
 ‘No, they did not come. / Yes, they came.’
 b. A: — ¿Participaron estudiantes?
 ‘Did any students participate?’
 B: — No, no participaron Ø. / Sí que participaron Ø.
 ‘No, they did participate. / Yes, they did participate.’

The availability of indefinite readings of referential NSs in this kind of predicates follows from the traditional explanations on the availability of bare plurals in Spanish. CNSLs, and Spanish in particular, do not commonly permit the introduction of bare plurals as subjects in preverbal positions (Espinal 2010; Laca 2013; Leonetti 2011), as shown in (11a). Instead, it is necessary to use full-fledged DPs, as in (11b).

- (11) a. *Fontaneros están en mi casa.

⁸ Note that the antecedent of the NS is not necessarily selected by an intransitive verb, as in (i).

(i) No hay estudiantes en la sala, porque no han venido Ø.
 ‘There are no students in the room, because they have not come.’

An anonymous reviewer points out that, in cases like (10b) and (i), the indefinite NSs that refers to the bare plurals can also be substituted by a pronominal, explicit subject (e.g., *No, ellos no participaron* ‘No, they did not participate’). In these cases, the subject is in external argument position, contrary to what is predicted, but the subject, being explicit, is focalised (i.e., other people, but not the students, participated). I leave aside cases in which the subject or the object is focalised, since I am dealing with null arguments, which are by definition topics.

- ‘Plumbers are at my house.’
 b. {Los fontaneros / unos fontaneros} están en mi casa.
 ‘The plumbers / some plumbers are at my house.’

However, the introduction of bare plurals as subjects is permitted under restrictive conditions. The crucial condition is that the bare plural must be postverbal (i.e., an internal argument).⁹ Postverbal subjects are mostly permitted within intransitive predicates. Within these predicates, they can be located within a part of the VP ‘reserved’ for objects. This intuition is strengthened by the fact that the distribution of the NSs in (9) is parallel to that of the partitive clitics, like *en* in Catalan (e.g., *Hi havia bresquilles, però ja no en queden* ‘There were biscuits, but there are no more’), *en* in French and *ne* in Italian, which are internal arguments too.

Contrary to (11), bare plurals can occur as postverbal subjects within unaccusative and unergative predicates, like the ones in (12).

- (12) a. Vendrán fontaneros a mi casa.
 ‘Plumbers will come home.’
 b. Han ocurrido sucesos terribles.
 ‘Terrible events happened.’
 c. Han corrido atletas internacionales esta semana.
 ‘International athletes have run this week.’

Hence, the only way that the indefinite, non-specific readings of bare plurals can ‘survive’ is in postverbal positions. This typically happens when the antecedent is a topic; if the antecedent is a contrastive focus, the NS can appear in preverbal position (e.g., *Han ocurrido sucesos terribles, pero ocurren Ø todos los días* ‘Terrible events have happened, but they happen everyday’). Given that the NSs in (8)-(10) receive indefinite readings, it seems reasonable to pose that they are interpreted as bare nouns.

The (in)definite readings of NSs in Spanish have a crucial correlation with the external/internal status of the NS.¹⁰ Further evidence to defend that NSs in (8)-(10) do not contain a [+DEFINITE] feature is related to modification by adjectives in (13).

- (13) Cuando fuimos al restaurante la última vez, había platos calientes, pero ya solo quedan Ø fríos.
 ‘When (we) went to the restaurant last time, there were hot dishes, but now they only have left cold (ones).’

In (13), the adjective *frío* ‘cold’ appears on the rightmost position, and it behaves not as a depictive, but as a modifier of the NS. In Demonte & Masullo (1999), it is said that depictives can only be applied to definite arguments. An interesting contrast appears in (14).

- (14) a. Han traído los platos fríos. / FRÍOS han traído los platos.

⁹ As an anonymous reviewer correctly explains, bare plurals can also appear in preverbal positions when focalised in Spanish. I am only concerned about utterances with neutral intonation conditions in this paper. If an element receives a non-neutral intonation, capital letters are used, especially for focalised constituents.

¹⁰ A piece of evidence comes from crosslinguistic data. Russian and Mandarin can license bare nouns in preverbal and postverbal positions, while in Spanish the appearance of bare nouns is restricted. If Russian and Mandarin lack articles, the question is how is definiteness/specificity interpreted. In Russian, fronting to preverbal position is a way of marking definiteness/specificity (Chvany 1973). Similarly, in Mandarin, bare nominals in preverbal position can only receive definite/generic interpretations (Cheng & Syberma 2005).

- ‘They brought the dishes cold.’ / ‘Cold they brought the dishes.’
 b. Han traído platos fríos. / *FRÍOS han traído platos.
 ‘They brought cold dishes.’ / ‘Cold they brought dishes.’

Indeed, in its explicit counterpart in (14b), *platos* ‘dishes’ is modified by *fríos* ‘cold’, and this is why the adjective cannot be placed in focal positions: it cannot be extracted out of the DP. By contrast, if the subject is definite, as in (14a), it can receive a depictive interpretation, and that is why the adjective can be placed in focal positions: it can be moved, since it forms a constituent out of its own. Thus, NSs in (8)-(10) behave as bare nouns.

Once identified the data of indefinite readings of referential NSs in Spanish, I establish their grammatical conditions. The conditions are the following:

1. The antecedent of the NS must be a bare nominal (with an indefinite, non-specific reading itself).
2. The NS represents an argument that could occur as a bare nominal (it has to be an internal argument, at least in neutral intonation conditions).
3. Identity of sense anaphora (not coreference) is involved.

These conditions are motivated in the sense that they constrain the interpretation in such a way (bare plural as the antecedent and identity of sense anaphora) that the only reading available for the NS is an indefinite one in (8)-(10).

3. Indefinite Null Objects

While NSs mostly receive definite readings, and restrict indefinite readings to certain conditions, *Null Objects* (henceforth, NO) only receive indefinite readings in (European) Spanish (Armstrong 2014; Brucart 1999; Campos 1986, 1999, 2016; Cyrino 2019; Martí 2011; RAE-ASALE 2009). It has been said that, if a language has a system of clitics, clitics must be used instead of NOs (Dimitriadis 1994). This generalization appears in (15).

(15) *Dimitriadis’ Generalization*

Null objects occur just where pronominal clitics cannot appear.

Indeed, to retrieve the definite antecedent *el dinero* ‘the money’ in (16), the clitic *lo* ‘it’ is used in the second clause. If a NO is used in this case, the sentence is not grammatical. This is so because, following (15), since Spanish has definite clitics (Leonetti 2006, 2011) to retrieve the definite antecedent *el dinero* ‘the money’, it is necessary to use a clitic instead of a NO.

- (16) Encontraron [el dinero]_i en el pozo porque los ladrones *(lo)_i habían dejado allí.
 ‘They found the money in the pit because the thieves left it there.’

The same restriction is found in other European languages, such as Modern Greek, which uses a clitic to retrieve definite antecedents too, as shown in (17) (Giannakidou & Merchant 1997; Papanounas & Sitaridou 2018). However, other languages, like Portuguese, naturally permit the introduction of NOs when retrieving a definite antecedent, as shown in (18) (Cyrino 2001, 2016, 2019; Farrell 1990; Raposo 1986).

- (17) A: — Efere o Nikos [ta vivlia]_i?
 ‘Did Nikos bring the books?’
 B: — Ne, *(ta)_i efere.
 ‘Yes, he brought some.’

(Adapted from Paparounas & Sitaridou 2018: 1-2)

- (18) Pedro consertava [as bicicletas]_i e Rosa vendia Ø_i para amigos.
‘Pedro repaired the bicycles and Rosa sold them to friends.’

(Adapted from Cyrino 2019: 16)

The keypoint is what happens in Spanish when retrieving an indefinite antecedent with an object-like expression. In languages that have clitics for retrieving indefinite antecedents (typically partitive clitics), following (15), NOs cannot appear. Thus, the distribution of this kind of NOs is parallel to that of the partitive clitics *ne* in Italian, in (19), *en* in French, in (20), and *en* in Catalan, in (21).

- (19) A: — Hai comprato del pane?
‘Have you bought bread?’
B: — Sí, ne ho comprato Ø.
‘Yes, I have brought some.’

(Adapted from Clements 2006: 137)

- (20) A: — Est-ce que Jean vend des carottes?
‘Is Jean selling carrots?’
B: — Oui, il en vend.
‘Yes, he is selling some.’

(Adapted from Clements 2006: 137)

- (21) A: — Ven el Joan llibres?
‘Does John sell books?’
B: — Si, en ven.
‘Yes, he sells some.’

(Adapted from Clements 2006: 137)

Spanish lacks partitive clitics. That is why NOs appear instead clitics when retrieving indefinite antecedents, as in (22), where the antecedent of the NO is *cervezas* ‘beers’. A similar phenomenon occurs in Polish (Ruda 2017) and Hungarian (Keresztes 2014).

- (22) Ah, has traído cervezas. Yo también he comprado Ø.
‘Ah, you brought beers. I also bought some.’

Recall that bare plurals provide the ideal ‘habitat’ for NOs to ‘survive’ (i.e., not be replaced by a clitic, since bare plurals are by default indefinite and non-specific; Espinal 2010; Espinal & Cyrino 2019; Leonetti 2011). More data of NOs in Spanish appear in (23).¹¹

- (23) a. Buscaban defectos de forma, pero no había Ø.
‘They looked for formal defects, but there were none.’

¹¹ In some cases, like in (23a), a definite clitic can appear instead of the NO (e.g. *Buscaban defectos de forma, pero no los había* ‘They looked for formal defects, but there were none’), as correctly stated by an anonymous reviewer. I claim, in line with Leonetti (2011), that there is no ‘alternation’ here, since the interpretation obtained with a NO and the interpretation obtained with a clitic are different. When the clitic is used, a generic reading of the sentence is forced to appear, while, when the NO is used, it always refers to indefinite, non-specific antecedents. Note that, if the context does not enable generic readings, a clitic cannot appear (e.g., *Tiburones ballena, no conseguimos ver(*los)* ‘Whale sharks, we could not see them’). See Leonetti (2011) for further considerations and more data.

- b. A: — ¿Tienes cerillas?
 ‘Do you have matches?’
 B: — No, no tengo Ø.
 ‘No, I do not have any.’

(Adapted from Bruccart 1999: 2805)

In line with NSs in (8)-(10), NOs in (22)-(23) are interpreted as bare nouns too, as seen in (13). Further evidence to defend this approach is related to modification by adjectives, as shown in (24). Applying the reasoning in (13), NOs are bare plurals due to the fact that they cannot receive a depictive interpretation, but only be modified.

- (24) Cuando fuimos al restaurante la última vez, había platos calientes, pero ya solo tienen Ø fríos.
 ‘When (we) went to the restaurant last time, there were hot dishes, but now they only have cold (ones).’

I exclude two different kinds of NOs. As with NSs, the first ones are the deictically identified NOs in (25) (Bosque 2015). The second ones are related to arbitrary readings in non-referential uses of NOs in (26), where there are crucial contextual restrictions (Bosque 1988; Dvorak 2017; Jaeggli 1986).

- (25) a. [*Context: A person holding a row*] ¡Corta Ø!
 ‘Cut it!’
 b. [*Context: A poster on the door*] No abrir Ø.
 ‘Do not open it.’
- (26) a. Esta película sorprende Ø.
 ‘This film surprises one.’
 b. El buen tiempo invita Ø a salir.
 ‘Good time invites one to go out.’

I also leave aside data of some varieties of American Spanish, in which a definite reading, like that in (18), from Portuguese, is possible (Masullo 2017; Sánchez 1999; Schwenter 2005; Suñer & Yépez 1988). Data of Quiteño and River Plate Spanish appear in (27)-(28). The difference is that coreferentiality is involved in (27)-(28), but identity of sense anaphora takes place in (22)-(23).

- (27) A: — ¿Cuándo quieres que te mande [las tarjetas]_i?
 ‘When do you want me to send you the cards?’
 B: — ¿Puedes enviarme Ø_i mañana?
 ‘Can you send them to me tomorrow?’

(Suñer & Yépez 1988: 513-514)

- (28) A: — ¿Me traerías [el diccionario]_i?
 ‘Would you bring me the dictionary?’
 B: — Ya te traigo Ø_i. Ø_i Está en mi dormitorio.
 ‘Yes, I bring it. It is in my bedroom.’

(Masullo 2017: 56)

The crucial fact is that the same reading takes place both in the case of referential, postverbal NSs within intransitive predicates and in the case of referential NOs. Indefinite readings occur

in internal argument positions. Hence, it seems plausible to posit that the definite/indefinite readings are related to the external/internal status of the null argument. This leads us to think that the gap is to be analyzed in the same way.

The conditions to have indefinite readings of referential NOs in Spanish like the ones in (22)-(23) are the following:

1. The antecedent of the NS must be a bare nominal (with an indefinite, non-specific reading itself).
2. The NS represents an argument that could occur as a bare nominal (it has to be an internal argument, at least in neutral intonation conditions).
3. Identity of sense anaphora (not coreference) is involved.

Not surprisingly, the conditions are similar as those to have indefinite readings of NSs.

4. Interim Summary

The existence of indefinite readings shared by NSs in (8)-(10) and NOs in (22)-(23) has some crucial theoretical consequences. I outline them in this section.

First, though NSs mostly display the properties of preverbal subjects (see Barbosa 2009; Camacho 2013: 68-76; Cardinaletti 1997 for discussion), that is to say, they behave as external arguments, the NSs in (8)-(10) receive a reading that corresponds to postverbal subjects (i.e., they behave as internal arguments, at least in neutral intonation conditions). The status of internal argument is shared by NOs in (22)-(23), whose interpretation is the same as that of NSs in (8)-(10), namely, indefinite.

Second, definiteness cannot be involved in the licensing of referential NSs. If this was so, NSs in Spanish would always be interpreted as definite, but, according to the data in (8)-(10), they can also be interpreted as indefinite under restrictive conditions. Conditions like definiteness and agreement have often been mentioned in the literature as licensing factors for NSs (Cardinaletti 1997; Holmberg 2005, 2010; but see Barbosa 2019 for discussion). As for the first one, it seems that it is an interpretation that NSs usually receive, but not an intrinsic feature of NSs, at least in Spanish. As for the second one, Spanish allows for ellipsis of indefinite NSs even when they agree with the verb. This contradicts the so-called “anti-agreement parameter”, which states that a language allows ellipsis of an argument if this argument does not agree with the verb (Landau 2018; Saito 2007; Takahashi 2008; 2013; 2014). Since the indefinite readings of NSs in Spanish are obtained when agreeing in third person, oneway of avoiding this problem is considering the third person to be the default person, thus no ‘marked’ agreement takes place. Another way of avoiding it is by considering that NSs cannot check agreement in internal argument position.

Third, if the NOs in (22)-(23) are interpreted like the NSs in (8)-(10), should they be analyzed in the same way? The first problem is that subjects, but not objects, are said to be licensed by pronominal agreement (see Devís Márquez 2012 for discussion). However, if one sticks to this assumption, the parallelism between subjects and objects is lost. There should be a natural connection between the occurrence of the (in)definite interpretation and the external/internal status of the subject. Thus, the analysis should be the same, and the contrast between definite and indefinite readings is partially derived from the external/internal asymmetry.

Finally, licensing of NSs is a different problem from the interpretation of NSs. They are connected in some way, but they must be kept separated if one wishes to account for the similarities between indefinite NSs and indefinite NOs. Even though the availability of indefinite readings of referential NSs was linked to DNSLs, the NSs of CNSLs can also receive

an indefinite interpretation. Thus, the availability of indefinite readings is not a solid test to distinguish different kinds of CNSLs.

5. Towards a Unified Approach

Given that indefinite readings of NSs and NOs occur under similar conditions, and at the same position, the analysis provided should capture both phenomena. The two analyses to capture null arguments are the empty category analysis and the ellipsis analysis.

If we defend an analysis in terms of empty categories, the phenomena here would fall under the properties of empty categories, namely, *pro*, PRO or the traces (Authier 1989, 1992; Barbosa 2017; Campos 1986; Cummins & Roberge 2004; Raposo 1986; Rizzi 1986). If we defend an analysis in terms of *pro*, indefinite NSs and NOs are equivalent to a null pronominal. The alternative view is an analysis in terms of ellipsis (Cyrino 2001, 2016, 2019; Duguine 2014; Giannakidou & Merchant 1997; Han *et al.* 2020; Paparounas & Sitaridou 2018; Saito 2007; Şener & Takahashi 2010; Takahashi 2008, 2013, 2014). If NSs and NOs are deleted arguments, and there is no empty category in internal argument position, definiteness could be dispensed with. Ellipsis only triggers the search for a prominent antecedent. Thus, an antecedent has to be retrieved, but no definiteness feature is involved.

5.1. Against an Analysis as Empty Categories

In this section, I discuss the possibility of positing an empty category to account for both NSs and NOs. The debate focuses on *pro*, which has been typically been proposed for analyzing NSs, and the *wh*-trace, which has been proposed for analyzing NOs in Spanish. PRO must be directly discarded, because NSs and NOs are governed by the verb and are typically located within finite clauses, contrary to PRO (Lebeaux 1984), and the NP-trace needs to be bound by a null argument in A-position (but NOs do not occupy this position).

5.1.1. *pro*

The first possibility to account for the indefinite readings of NSs and NOs is by analyzing them as instances of the empty category *pro*. This empty category is commonly interpreted as definite, is licensed by the verb inflexion, typically as a preverbal, external argument (Chomsky 1981, 1982), and displays a pronoun-like behavior. Thus, it must refer to some entity in the discourse and form a coreferential chain with it, like definite pronouns in Spanish (Jaeggli & Safir 1989; RAE-ASALE 2009). Given these properties, analyzing indefinite NOs in terms of *pro* is impossible, since they occupy the internal argument position and are not licensed by inflexion. Anyway, if one wishes to account for the behavior of indefinite NSs and indefinite NOs with one approach, it is necessary to refute the (common) idea that NSs behave as an referential, empty pronominal (*pro*).

In principle, an analysis as *pro* predicts the behavior of the NS in (29), which shows the typical definite reading of pronouns. In (29), the NS of *se sentó* ‘she sat down’ is referring to the indefinite, specific antecedent *una estudiante* ‘a student’. The interpretation of the NS in (29) is definite, and it refers to an antecedent, being coreferential with it.

- (29) [Una estudiante]_i entró en el aula. Ø_i Se sentó cerca de la pizarra.
 ‘A student entered the classroom. She sat close to the blackboard.’

However, it is unclear that an analysis in terms of *pro* could apply to indefinite NSs. As shown above, definiteness cannot be involved in the interpretation of the NS in (30). Moreover, since indefinite NSs are in postverbal position, they do not behave like external, inflexion-licensed pronouns. Thus, an analysis in terms of *pro* cannot predict their interpretation.

Moreover, the NS in (30) does not refer to the same entity as their antecedent (identity of sense anaphora).

- (30) Vienen turistas europeos. Y vendrán Ø también de Asia.
‘European tourists come. And tourists from Asia will also come.’

This different behavior of the definite NS in (29) and the indefinite NS in (30) leads one to conclude that NSs must be splitted into two subcategories: only the first ones can be analyzed as *pro*; the second ones, parallel to NOs, not. Thus, another analysis must be suggested in order to predict the behavior of the NS in (30).

5.1.2. *wh*-trace

In Campos (1986), it is argued that indefinite NOs are instances of a *wh*-trace in Spanish. The empty element occurring in object position is the trace of the operator OP suggested in Chomsky (1982), and developed in Huang (1982). According to the literature, *wh*-words in interrogative sentences are moved from the argument position of a verb, leaving a trace in that position. This movement is only possible if it occurs from a simple NP or an argument.

A classic example to illustrate object drop in Spanish appears in (31). In Campos (1986), the structure of (31B) is that one in (32).

- (31) A: — ¿Compraste regalos?
‘Did you buy presents?’
B: — Sí, compré Ø.
‘Yes, I bought some.’

- (32) OP_i[yo compré t_i]

(Adapted from Campos 1986: 355)

As the OP in (32) is moved in the syntax, it must meet the general constraints on movement (Ross 1967; Huang 1982; Campos 1986; Raposo 1986; Hornstein 1999). One of these constraints is the so-called *Complex NP Constraint*, which predicts that an empty category cannot be extracted from complex NPs (i.e., NPs with clauses inside). Another constraint is the *Condition on Extraction Domains*, which predicts that a phrase “may be extracted out of a domain only if that domain is properly governed” (Campos 1986: 358). Adjunct clauses are not properly governed, so one expects that indefinite NOs and indefinite NSs cannot occur within them. These constraints were mostly applied to explain why some *wh*-movements cannot happen in English. This predicts that (33b) is ungrammatical, since the movement occurs from a complex NP. The same reasoning is applied in Campos (1986) for NOs.

- (33) a. Who_i did you hear that Mary kissed t_i?
b. *Who_i did you hear the rumor that Mary kissed t_i?

If we assume that NOs are *wh*-traces, they should follow the *Complex NP Constraint*. However, this constraint does not apply for NOs in (34), since they can appear within complex NPs (*pace* Campos 1986). The same applies for NSs in (35).

- (34) a. A: — ¿Traerá Juan cerveza a la fiesta?
‘Will John bring beer to the party?’
B: — Pues existe el rumor de [que traerá Ø].
‘There exists the rumor that he will bring some.’

- b. A: — ¿Quién trajo cerveza a la fiesta?
 ‘Who brought beer to the party?’
 B: — Pues no conozco al chaval [que trajo Ø].
 ‘I do not know the boy who brought some.’

(Adapted from Campos 1986: 355)

- (35) A: — ¿Vendrán amigos de Juan a la fiesta?
 ‘Will John’ friends come to the party?’
 B: — Pues existe el rumor de [que vendrán Ø].
 ‘There exists the rumor that (they) will come.’

Moreover, NOs do not follow the *Condition on Extraction Domains*: they can be extracted from adjunct clauses (*pace* Campos 1986), as in (36). The same applies for NSs in (37). Thus, indefinite NOs and indefinite NSs behave in the same way with regard to these constraints: they show no island-sensitivity.

- (36) A: — ¿Encontrasteis entradas para la película?
 ‘Did you find tickets for the film?’
 B: — Sí, pudimos entrar al cine [porque encontramos Ø].
 ‘Yes, we could enter the cinema because we found some.’
 (37) A: — ¿Es verdad que vendrán conferenciantes de todo el mundo al congreso?
 ‘Is it true that lecturers from all over the world will come to the workshop?’
 B: — Sí; el simposio será un éxito [porque vendrán Ø].
 ‘Yes, the symposium will be successful because they will come.’

(Campos 1986: 357-358)

These examples naturally work in Spanish (Verdecchia 2022), even though they are considered to be ungrammatical in Campos (1986). Things being like this, empty categories cannot predict the behavior of NOs and NSs. This triggers the necessity of considering another omission process that can predict their behavior: argument ellipsis.

5.2. *In Favor of an Analysis as Argument Ellipsis*

In this section, I discuss the possibility of positing an ellipsis analysis that could unify indefinite readings of NSs and NOs. Several researchers have argued that null arguments are better analyzed involving argument ellipsis (Kim 1999; Oku 1998a, 1998b). Most pieces of evidence for *Argument Ellipsis* (henceforth, AE) come from Asian languages, such as Korean (Han *et al.* 2020), Japanese (Saito 2007; Takahashi 2008, 2013, 2014) and Javanese (Sato 2014), but also from Hebrew (Landau 2018), Turkish (Şener & Takahashi 2010) and Malayalam (Takahashi 2013).

5.2.1. Strict Readings and Sloppy Readings

In the literature on null arguments it has been stated that, if the null argument itself is an empty pronoun, its reference would be given in the discourse without ambiguity (*strict reading*). By contrast, if an AE analysis is put forward, the antecedent is just copied as a deleted argument, and its reference could be ambiguous (*strict reading* and *sloppy reading*). An example of Japanese appears in (38).

- (38) A: — Taro-wa zibun-no hahaoya-o aisiteiru.
Taro-NOM self-GEN mother-ACC loves
 ‘Taro loves self’s mother.’
 B: — Hanako-wa zibun-no hahaoya-o nikundeiru.

Hanako-TOP self-GEN mother-ACC hates

‘Hanako hates self’s mother.’

- *Strict reading*: ‘Hanako hates Taro’s mother.’
- *Sloppy reading*: ‘Hanako hates her own mother.’

(Adapted from Şener & Takahashi 2010: 80)

In this context, (38B) is ambiguous between two readings. It can mean “either that Hanako hates Taro’s mother, which is called the strict reading, or that Hanako hates her own mother, which is called the sloppy reading” (Şener & Takahashi 2010: 80; but see Hoji 1998; Merchant 2013 for criticism). This is not expected if the empty gap is analyzed as *pro*, since, with an overt pronoun in that position, only the strict reading is available, as in (39), from English (Doron 1999; Duguine 2014). However, with an argument ellipsis analysis, an elided DP bearing a bound possessive pronoun is copied. Thus, pronouns are “deep anaphors”, while ellipsis sites are “surface anaphors” (Hankamer & Sag 1976; Depiante 2000).

(39) A: — John loves his mother.

B: — Bill hates her.

- *Strict reading*: ‘Bill hates John’s mother.’
- *Sloppy reading*: #‘Bill hates his own mother.’

Since in (38B) we can have the strict and the sloppy reading, “we need something other than an empty pronoun for the null object” (Şener & Takahashi 2010: 80). Of course, not every null argument can be analyzed in the same way in other languages. Definite, preverbal NSs in Spanish cannot be analyzed in terms of AE, but as empty pronouns (Oku 1998a, 1998b). In (40B), only the strict reading is available. This suggests that NSs in Spanish behave like the pronoun in (39B), from English (see Duguine 2014: 516-522 for criticism).

(40) A: — María cree que su propuesta será aceptada.

‘Mary believes that her proposal will be accepted.’

B: — Juan también cree que Ø será aceptada.

‘John also believes that it will be accepted.’

- *Strict reading*: ‘John also believes that Mary’s proposal will be accepted.’
- *Sloppy reading*: #‘John also believes that his own proposal will be accepted.’

(Adapted from Oku 1998a: 165)

However, if the null argument is indefinite and postverbal, the ambiguity persists. In (41), both the strict reading and the sloppy reading are available. In the first case, Mary brought John’s grandfather’s books, and in the second, Mary brought her own grandfather’s books.

(41) A: — Juan trajo ayer libros de su abuelo.

‘John brought his grandfather’s books yesterday.’

B: — María también trajo Ø.

‘Mary brought some too.’

- *Strict reading*: ‘Mary brought John’s grandfather’s books too.’
- *Sloppy reading*: ‘Mary brought her grandfather’s books too.’

The same applies to NSs in (42). In the first reading, A’s father’s friends are coming to B’s home. However, in the second one, B’s father’s friends are coming to B’s home.

- (42) A: — Vendrán amigos de mi padre a mi casa.
 ‘My father’s friends will come to my home.’
 B: — ¡A la mía también vendrán Ø!
 ‘Some will come to mine too!’
 - *Strict reading*: ‘A’s father’s friends will come to B’s home too.’
 - *Sloppy reading*: ‘B’s father’s friends will come to B’s home too.’

As mentioned above, the reasons for defending an AE analysis are empirical. An analysis in terms of *pro* does not predict the sloppy interpretation, since a pronoun, like the one in (39B), does not permit this reading, as in (43a). The availability of these readings is better understood through an AE process like the one in (43b), in which the antecedent is copied in the null gap (Duguine 2014; Landau 2018). This way, the possessive expression *su* is also copied in that gap, thus it can refer to Juan or to Mary.

- (43) a. A: — Juan trajo ayer libros de su abuelo.
 ‘John brought his grandfather’s books yesterday.’
 B: — María también trajo *pro*.
 ‘Mary brought some too.’
 b. A: — [Juan]_i trajo [libros de su abuelo]_i.
 ‘John brought his grandfather’s books yesterday.’
 B: — [María]_x también trajo [<libros de su abuelo>]_{i, x}.
 ‘Mary brought some too.’

Thus, this gap is better analyzed in terms of AE. If we substitute the indefinite antecedent with a definite antecedent and, following the generalization in (15), we substitute the NO with a pronoun (a definite clitic), only the strict reading is available, as shown in (44).

- (44) A: — Juan trajo ayer los libros de su abuelo.
 ‘John brought his grandfather’s books yesterday.’
 B: — María también los trajo.
 ‘Mary brought (them) too.’
 - *Strict reading*: ‘Mary brought John’s grandfather’s books too.’
 - *Sloppy reading*: #‘Mary brought her grandfather’s books.’

The availability of sloppy readings is, thus, related to some point with indefinite readings of NSs and NOs. Sloppy readings cannot appear with definite readings of NSs, nor with definite readings of NOs, in which a clitic must compulsorily appear in Spanish instead of the NO.

5.2.2. ‘Bigger’ than an N

Thus far, it has been said that the null arguments in (45) are interpreted and syntactically represented as bare plurals. The problem is that, if the bare plurals are the only grammatical content that gets elided, an analysis in terms of nominal ellipsis (Eguren 2010) could be put forward rather than one in terms of AE.

- (45) a. No hay naranjas hoy, porque no han traído Ø.
 ‘There are no oranges today, because they have not brought some.’
 b. No hay naranjas hoy, porque no han llegado Ø.
 ‘There are no oranges today, because they have not arrived.’

If AE is involved in the null arguments in (45) rather than nominal ellipsis, one expects that the omission be ‘bigger’ than an N (Lobeck 1995). Thus, the null arguments in (45) would be full-fledged DPs. This is confirmed in the data in (46), in which the null elements are interpreted as full-fledged DPs: in (46a), *María también trajo* means ‘María también trajo libros del siglo XX’ (not ‘María también trajo libros’), and, in (46b), *¡A la mía también vendrán!* means ‘¡A la mía también vendrán amigos de Juan!’ (not ‘¡A la mía también vendrán amigos!’). Thus, AE triggers the omission of the whole DP.

- (46) a. A: — Juan trajo ayer libros del siglo XX.
 ‘John brought books from the XX century.’
 B: — María también trajo Ø.
 ‘Mary brought some too.’
 b. A: — Vendrán amigos de Juan a mi casa.
 ‘My father’s friends will come to my house.’
 B: — ¡A la mía también vendrán Ø!
 ‘Some will come to mine too!’

By contrast, if a null element is derived by nominal ellipsis, this element is only interpreted as the head of the NP. In (47a), the null element is only interpreted as ‘naranjas’. Moreover, the empty element must be governed by an X^0 specified for strong agreement (Lobeck 1995). This agreement is not provided in (46), where there are just bare plurals.¹² However, the agreement is provided by D^0 in (47a), which bears in Spanish strong agreement marks (basically, gender and number). The ungrammaticality in (47b) ‘has been attributed to the fact that the empty nominal is not governed by a Det bearing strong agreement markers in the English case’ (Eguren 2010: 435).

- (47) a. Pedí las naranjas grandes, pero me han dado las Ø pequeñas.
 ‘I asked for big oranges, but they have given me the little ones.’
 b. I like the oranges from Paris, but I prefer the *(ones) from Africa.

In light of these facts, it seems that the omission in (46) cannot be derived from the nominal ellipsis typical of examples in (47), but from something ‘bigger’.

5.2.3. ‘Smaller’ than a VP

The last reason to pose an AE analysis is related to the extent of the omission. If AE is involved, one expects that the omission applies only for the argument, not for the VP where it is located. In order to demonstrate that, I put forward two arguments: the recovery of adverbials and the weak quantifier stranding (Johnson 2001, 2008; Merchant 2001).

VP-ellipsis targets a VP remnant without V, which is stranded in Flex (Doron 1999; Landau 2018). If VP-ellipsis occurs in a sentence, it involves deletion of a VP. Thus, it must also delete adjuncts within the VP. (Goldberg 2005; Paparounas & Sitaridou 2018; Şener & Takahashi 2010). When the verb is stranded and the VP is elided, adjuncts are not recoverable at the

¹² According to some proposals, DPs with bare nouns bear a null D^0 that controls the NP (Longobardi 1994; Zamparelli 2000). However, it seems unclear, first, why D^0 can be null (and under which grammatical circumstances), and, second, if we suppose it is null, how is it possible that bare plurals always bears an indefinite, non-specific reading, if the null D^0 is commonly definite. If it could also be indefinite, the question of why is that so remains open. Additionally, the indefiniteness of indefinite D^0 like *un* ‘a(n)’ is different from that of bare plurals. Thus, I follow Laca (2013) in not admitting the existence of a null D^0 , and I leave the debate aside (see Espinal 2010; Espinal & Cyrino 2019; Giannakidou & Merchant 1997; Laca 2013; Longobardi 1994; Raposo 1986; Zamparelli 2000 for further information and discussion).

ellipsis site in the case of NSs and NOs in Spanish.¹³ As can be seen in (48a), the indefinite NO targets the bare plural *cervezas* ‘beers’, but not the VP, *cervezas en el Mercadona* ‘beers at Mercadona’. The same applies to the indefinite NS in (48b).

- (48) a. A: — Ayer cogí cervezas en el Mercadona.
 ‘I brought beers at Mercadona yesterday.’
 B: — Yo también cogí Ø.
 ‘I also brought (some).’
 - *First reading*: ‘I also brought beers.’
 - *Second reading*: #‘I also brought beers at Mercadona.’
 b. A: — Llegaron turistas rápidamente.
 ‘Tourists arrived quickly.’
 B: — En Canadá también llegaron Ø.
 ‘They also arrived in Canada.’
 - *First reading*: ‘Tourists also arrived in Canada.’
 - *Second reading*: #‘Tourists also arrived in Canada quickly.’

Further evidence that the empty gaps in (48) are not interpreted with an adjunct inside is that it is possible to cancel the reading with the adjunct, as in (49). This supports the idea that the adjunct is not within the elided gap; if so, the sentence would be unnecessarily repetitive.¹⁴

- (49) a. A: — Ayer cogí cervezas en el Mercadona.
 ‘I picked up beers at Mercadona.’
 B: — Yo también cogí Ø, pero no en el Mercadona.
 ‘I also picked some up, but not at Mercadona.’
 b. A: — Llegaron turistas rápidamente.
 ‘Tourists arrived quickly.’
 B: — En Canadá también llegaron Ø, pero no rápidamente.
 ‘Some arrived in Canada too, but not quickly.’

Additionally, weak quantifiers and numerals are stranded when indefinite drop takes part. In (50), these elements appear explicitly in the sentence, but, if the indefinite drop of NSs and NOs is analyzed as VP-ellipsis, “these elements should not appear overtly, as they are embedded within the VP and never move beyond it” (Paparounas & Sitaridou 2018: 7).

- (50) a. A: — ¿Has traído dos libros?
 ‘Have you brought two books?’
 B: — Sí, he traído dos Ø.
 ‘Yes, I have brought two.’

¹³ An anonymous reviewer points out that this readings is perfectly possible in Spanish. In principle, this reading should not be available, given that Spanish is said to lack VP-ellipsis, in line with Hebrew (see Cyrino 2019; Landau 2018, 2020 for discussion). A grammaticality judgement task will clarify this issue in future research.

¹⁴ An anonymous reviewer points out that this test is not definite, because it is also possible to correct the arguments, and not only the adjuncts. I claim that, contrary to what happens with the cancellation of adjuncts in (49), it is not possible to cancel the argument *tourists* in (ii). The sentence in (ii) is unnecessarily repetitive.

- (ii) A: — Llegaron turistas rápidamente.
 ‘Tourists arrived quickly.’
 B: — ??En Canadá también llegaron Ø, pero no turistas.
 ‘Some arrived in Canada too, but not tourists.’

- b. A: — ¿Llegaron dos libros?
 ‘Did two books arrive?’
 B: — Sí, llegaron dos Ø.
 ‘Yes, two arrived.’

These pieces of evidence show that, in order to account for indefinite readings of NSs and NOs, an analysis as AE is preferable over an analysis in terms of empty pronominals.

6. Final Remarks

Referential NSs in CNSLs commonly receive definite readings, as it has been stated in the literature. However, they also can receive indefinite readings under restricted conditions. The crucial condition is related to the antecedent of the NS, which must receive an indefinite, non-specific reading (typically, it must be a bare plural). The second condition is that the NS must represent an argument that could occur as a bare nominal (usually, it has to be an internal argument, typically within intransitive predicates). Finally, contrary to what happens with preverbal, definite NSs, which are coreferent with their antecedents, identity of sense anaphora is involved in the case of indefinite NSs. The same readings can be obtained with NOs, under similar conditions. It is worth pointing out that indefinite NSs and indefinite NOs are internal arguments. This suggests that the gap is to be analyzed in the same way.

The consequences of these phenomena are summarized as follows. First, in (8)-(10), NSs are assigned a reading that corresponds to postverbal subjects (i.e., they are internal arguments). This internal argument status is derived from the intransitive predicates they are located in. This same status is shared by NOs in (22)-(23), whose interpretation is the same as that of NSs. Second, in light of the data in (8)-(10), definiteness cannot be involved in the licensing of referential NSs, even though it has been mentioned in the literature as licensing factors for NSs. However, it seems that they are not intrinsic features of NSs, at least in Spanish. This favors an analysis of NSs as deleted nominals rather than as empty pronominals, and suggests that the availability of indefinite readings is not a solid test to distinguish between CNSLs and DNSLs. Thus, the analysis should be AE, and the contrast between definite and indefinite readings is derived from the external/internal asymmetry. Third, if indefinite NOs are interpreted like indefinite NSs, they should be analyzed in the same way.¹⁵ Finally, licensing of NSs is a different problem from the interpretation of NSs. They are connected in some way, but they must be kept separated if one wishes to account for the similarities between indefinite NSs and NOs. In this context, a basic problem is that subjects, but not objects, are allegedly licensed by pronominal agreement.

In order to unify the phenomena, an empty category analysis is not the appropriate option. First, *pro* is licensed by agreement, but NOs are not. Moreover, *pro* receives definite readings and is coreferential with its antecedent in CNSLs, but indefinite NSs do not follow these properties. Second, NOs do not follow the restrictions on movement that apply to *wh*-traces. Thus, an analysis through empty categories is not the best way to understand the phenomena. By contrast, an AE analysis is preferable. This alternative view posits that NSs and NOs are simply deleted arguments, and there is no specific empty category in internal argument position. The indefinite reading is derived from the internal status of both indefinite NSs and indefinite NOs. The reasons for this decision are empirical: sloppy readings are not available for preverbal NSs, and that suggest that they need to be analyzed as *pro*; but sloppy readings

¹⁵ An anonymous reviewer correctly points out that, when replacing an indefinite NS with a pronoun, the reading obtained is coreferential, while when replacing an indefinite NO with a pronominal clitic, the reading is not necessarily coreferential. I claim that this difference is not related to the asymmetry null vs. overt elements, but to the asymmetry personal, strong pronouns vs. pronominal, weak clitics. While strong pronouns must corefer, clitics do not have to.

are available for postverbal, indefinite NSs and NOs, so an empty category cannot occur in their position, and a deletion must occur instead of it. Finally, the omission of NSs in (8)-(10) and NOs in (22)-(23) is ‘bigger’ than an omission of an NP head (nominal ellipsis), since the omission is understood as a full DP, and has not a governing head D°, as nominal ellipsis has been described. Finally, it is ‘smaller’ than an omission of the VP (VP-ellipsis), since adjuncts and numerals can be stranded.

Future research might shed light on some topics that are still to be solved. To begin with, I have assumed that indefinite NSs are not licensed by agreement, since they are selected by verbs whose inflection is ‘non-marked’. Therefore, the “anti-agreement parameter” does not pose a problem for the licensing of NSs. However, it is still unclear where indefinite NSs are base-generated. If we assume they do not check agreement with the verb, they should be directly generated in the internal part of the VP. Additionally, it is still unclear how to reconcile the traditional idea that subjects of unergative predicates are generated as external arguments with the idea that postverbal indefinite NSs appear within unergative predicates.

These final remarks invite a reconsideration of the alleged necessity of a definite feature to account for NSs in Spanish, and offer a critical perspective against analyzing indefinite NSs and NOs as empty pronominals. Finally, it brings to the core the need of unifying indefinite NSs and NOs in terms of AE, since they share basic grammatical properties.

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