

The information status of Spanish appositives

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Nominal appositives and supplementary relatives have been claimed to convey conventionally-implicated semantic content (Potts 2005). Recent work on appositives has shown that there is a difference between two types of appositives in English (nominal appositives [1] vs non-restrictive relative clauses [2]) with respect to the type of content they contribute. English appositive relative clauses (ARCs), initially posited to exclusively contribute not-at-issue, or secondary meaning, have the ability to shift to at-issue status, or primary meaning, under certain conditions (Amaral et al. 2007; AnderBois et al. 2010; Syrett and Koev 2014). In an experimental study, Syrett and Koev (2014) found that, though most commonly perceived as contributing not-at-issue meaning, ARCs in clause-final position (3) can be denied directly, as in B's response in (3), as usually predicted for at-issue content, i.e., without the indirect "Hey, wait a minute!" strategy (Shanon 1976; von Stechow 2004). Additionally, they have the ability to be associated with an elliptical question, and, along with nominal appositives and ARCs in all sentence positions, contribute to the overall truth-value of a sentence; that is, when appositive content is false, the entire sentence is deemed false. The current study seeks to expand this field of inquiry by examining the type of content contributed by Spanish appositives.

- (1) Sophie, a classical violinist, performed with the symphony last night.
- (2) Sophie, who is a classical violinist, performed with the symphony last night.
- (3) A: The symphony hired my friend Sophie, who is a classical violinist.
B: That's not true. She's not a classic violinist.
(Adapted from Syrett and Koev 2014)

The particular discourse status of nominal appositives (NAs) has been highlighted with respect to Spanish; they appear "a modo de comentario de otro nombre" ('as a comment on another noun [phrase]', our translation, Suñer Gratacós 1999: 540), meaning that they do not introduce the main, thematic content of an utterance, but rather provide commentary on an element of the main clause. To date, the type of meaning contributed by the different Spanish appositive expressions has not been experimentally examined. Given the possibility for ARCs to shift in information status clause-finally in English, the current study sought to determine if Spanish ARCs behaved in the same way by manipulating variables of clause position and appositive type. The present study responds to the following research questions: i) When presented with direct rejection strategies, do native-speaking Spanish respondents prefer to reject main clause content or appositive content?, and ii) Do Spanish appositives display the ability to shift to at-issue meaning, that is, can appositives be rejected directly? If so, under what conditions?

The current study employs a forced-choice task adapted from Syrett and Koev (2014). Participants were provided with a dialogue in which Speaker B must reject what Speaker A has said (4). Speaker B begins with the direct rejection "No es verdad" 'It's not true', and then the participant was asked to choose the preferred continuation, according to what sounds most natural: either the content expressed by the main clause or the content expressed by the

appositive. The experimental items were manipulated for appositive type (i.e. nominal appositive versus ARC) and clause position of the appositive (i.e. clause medial versus clause final).

- (4) Persona A: Antonio Lucio, director del Medio Natural de Cantabria, ha dado informaciones sobre los focos de incendio activos en zonas altas e inaccesibles.
'Person A: Antonio Lucio, director of the Natural Environment Agency of Cantabria, has provided information about the active fires in high and inaccessible areas.'

Persona B: No, no es verdad. _____

'Person B: No, that's not true.'

- Él no ha dado informaciones.
'He hasn't provided information.'
- Él no es director del Medio Natural de Cantabria.
'He is not the director of the Natural Environment Agency of Cantabria.'

Preliminary data suggest that, when presented with direct rejection, respondents prefer to reject the main clause content over the content conveyed by the appositive when the appositive is in clause medial position, both for NAs and ARCs. However, when the appositive appears in clause final position, be it NA or ARC, there is no such preference; in fact, responses are at chance level. When comparing appositive type, there is a preference to select main content for direct rejection in sentences with NAs rather than ARCs. These results provide cross-linguistic evidence for the role of appositive type and clause position in the information status of appositives, further demonstrating the need for a more fine-grained understanding of the meaning of different types of supplemental expressions across languages.

References:

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