On the Internal Structure of Spanish Attributive Qualitative Binominal Constructions

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1. Introduction

In this paper I examine several aspects of the syntax and semantics of the so-called Spanish attributive qualitative binominal noun phrase (henceforth, a-QBNP). Spanish a-QBNP has the following syntactic structure: *NP(AP) de NP* 'NP(AP) of NP', and involves at some level of abstraction NP-internal predication (Bennis, Corver and den Dikken 1998) -i.e., (1a) can be paraphrased roughly as (1b)[1]:

(1) a. un   idiota   de   gobernador
        an   idiot   of   governor
        'an idiot of a governor'
    b. un   idiota   como   gobernador
        an   idiot   as   governor
        'an idiot as a governor'

In (1a) we have a DP-subject *gobernador* 'governor' being modified by a AP-predicate *idiota* 'idiot'. There is another construction in Spanish similar to a-QBNP, namely, the comparative qualitative binominal noun phrase (c-QBNP) (Español-Echevarría 1997, 1998; García and Méndez 2002; Casillas 2003; den Dikken 2006; Bartra and Villalba 2006; Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann 2010; González-Rivera and Delicado-Cantero 2010), which displays the following syntactic structure: *Def-N/A de Def-N* 'Def-N/A of Def-N' and, like a-QBNP, involves DP-internal predication. However, its meaning is different from a-QBNP's. Consider, for instance, (2a). In this example the AP-predicate applies directly to the DP-subject.

(2) a. el   idiota   del   decano
        the idiot   of-the   dean
        'the idiot of the dean'
    b. el   decano   es   un   idiota
        the dean   is   an   idiot
        'The dean is an idiot.'

The most natural hypothesis is to assume that the internal structure of a-QBNP's and c-QBNP's is different -i.e., the basic predication relation is not similar in both constructions (cf. Hulk and Tellier 2000). The proposal advanced so far, and the one assumed here, is that c-QBNP's can be analyzed in terms of predicate inversion (García and Méndez 2002; den Dikken 2006; Bartra and Villalba 2006;

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[1] As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, there are examples of a-QBNP's that do not admit such interpretation: e.g., the most natural interpretation for *un asco de ponencias* 'some disgusting presentations' is that *the presentations are disgusting*. This interpretation arises when the DP-subject does not name a professional occupation. Based on this interpretation one may suggest that these examples have the syntax of a-QBNP's but the semantics of c-QBNP's. This is discussed in Section 5.

Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann 2010; González-Rivera and Delicado-Cantero 2010), while in a-QBNP's the AP-predicate has to be base-generated -i.e., it does not raise from an embedded position. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: in the following section (Section 2) I discuss some relevant properties of QBNP's in general. In Section 3 I provide further differences between the two clauses, namely, a-QBNP's and c-QBNP's, in Spanish, and in Section 4 I analyze the internal structure of Spanish c-QBNP's, before turning my attention to a-QBNP's in Section 5, where I argue that not all cases of a-QBNP's considered so far in the linguistic literature are in effect a-QBNP's. In Section 6, I summarize my proposal and advance some future research.

2. Qualitative Binominal Noun Phrases (QBNP's)

QBNP's come in two different flavors: attributive (1) and comparative (2) (den Dikken 2006). The syntactic difference between the two clauses can be explained as follows: c-QBNP's are headed by a definite determiner and must contain a second definite second constituent, whereas a-QBNP's are headed by an indefinite determiner and require an indefinite bare noun as their second constituent. Español-Echevarría (1997, 1998) refers to the former as *Def-Def* contexts, while the latter exemplifies cases of *Indef-Indef* contexts:

(3) a. *el idiota   de   decano
         the idiot   of   dean
         'the idiot of the dean'
     b. *un idiota   del   gobernador
         an idiot   of-the   governor
         'an idiot of the governor'

However, the distinction between c-QBNP's and a-QBNP's is not merely structural -i.e., there are semantic and syntactic differences that force us to tease them apart. For example, (1a) repeated below as (4), ascribes a property to its subject in *his capability as a governor*, and not necessarily as a human being, whether it is or not the case[2]. Thus, (4b) can be roughly paraphrased as (4c). Notice that we can easily apply another predicate to the subject without contradiction (4d):

(4) a. un idiota   de   gobernador
         an idiot   of   governor
         'an idiot of a governor'
     b. Pepe   es un idiota   de   gobernador.
         Pepe   is an idiot   of   governor
         'Pepe is an idiot of a governor'
     c. Pepe   es un idiota   como   gobernador.
         Pepe   is an idiot   as   governor
         'Pepe is an idiot as a governor'
     d. Pepe   es un idiota   como   gobernador, pero   no como   abogado.
         Pepe   is an idiot   as   governor   but   not as   lawyer
         'Pepe is an idiot as a governor, but he is not (an idiot) as a lawyer.'

In c-QBNP's, on the other hand, the property denoted by the predicate applies directly to an individual that happens to have a profession or, in the case of (5), an academic position.

(5) a. Pepe   es el idiota   del   decano.
         Pepe   is the idiot   of-the   dean
         'Pepe is the idiot of the dean.'

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[2] a-QBNP's involves two level of predication -i.e., *un idiota de gobernador* 'an idiot of a governor' does not only predicate that *x is a governor*, but it say that *x as a governor is an idiot*. Contrary, c-QBNP's involve only one level of predication: *el idiota del gobernador* 'the idiot of the governor' entails that *x, the governor, is an idiot*.

    b. Pepe   es un idiota y   es decano.
        Pepe   is an idiot   an is dean
        'Pepe is an idiot and he is a dean (also).

Notice also that (5a) cannot be paraphrased with the particle *como* 'as'. This is strong evidence for considering the predicate as applying directly to the DP-subject in Spanish c-QBNP's (6).

(6) *Pepe   es el idiota   como   el decano.
      Pepe   is the idiot   as   the dean
      'Pepe is the idiot as the dean'

Syntactic evidence for the difference between a-QBNP's and c-QBNP's comes not only from Spanish (*Indef-Indef* vs. *Def-Def* distinction), but also from other languages, such as Italian and English. In Italian, as in Spanish, a-QBNP's require a naked NP in the position following the preposition *di* 'of' (7a), while c-QBNP's may show up with a definite article (7b), as shown by Napoli (1989; cf. den Dikken 2006: 163):

(7) a.   quell'   ignorante   di   dottore
        that   ignorant   of   doctor
        'that ignorant of a doctor'
    b.   quell'   ignorante   del   dottore
        that   ignorant   of-the   doctor
        'that ignorant of the doctor'

In English, there is a variant of a-QBNP that has the two noun phrases juxtaposed without the intervention of any lexical material between them (8a-b); this is not possible, however, in English c-QBNP's -i.e., (9a) cannot be paraphrased as (9b) (den Dikken 2006: 162-163):

(8) a.   an idiot of a doctor
    b.   an idiot doctor

(9) a.   a jewel of a village
    b.   *a jewel village

Den Dikken (2006) calls clauses like (9a) comparative QBNP's because a comparison is established between the subject of the predication 'village' and the predicate 'jewel'. Thus, (10a) may be interpreted as (10b):

(10)   a.   a jewel of a village
        b.   the village is like a jewel

This author takes the indefinite article preceding the subject of predication to be a spurious article. His main empirical evidence comes from the Dutch data: Dutch allows number disagreement between the article *enn* 'a' preceding the subject and the subject itself -i.e., the subject can be either singular or plural (Villalba 2007: 122).

(11)   a.   die idiot   van een doktor
        the idiot   of a   doctor
        'those idiot of a doctor'
    b.   die idioten   van een doktoren
        the idiots   of a   doctors
        'those idiots of a doctors'

Another property of c-QBNP's, according to den Dikken (2006), is that the subject shows number disagreement with respect to the whole DP (12) (cf. Villalba 2007: 122).

(12) die twee ramp van een feiten
      the two   disaster of a   facts

If this is the case, then the subject of c-QBNP's must be big enough to accommodate a Number Phrase (NumP), independent of the whole DP. However, NumP is not big enough to accommodate e.g. a quantifier phrase. This explains why quantifiers are banned from c-QBNP's, as the ungrammaticality of the Dutch examples in (13) demonstrates. This proposal, nonetheless, cannot be apply to Spanish c-QBNP's, as Villalba (2007: 123) has convincingly demonstrated.

(13) a. *die ramp   van (een) alle   feiten
          the disaster of a   all   facts
      b. *die ramp   van (een) ieder   feit
          the disaster of a   every   fact

So far we have seen that there are semantic and syntactic differences between a-QBNP's and c-QBNP's, which have been pointed out by other researchers. These differences not only arise in Spanish, but also are present in others languages such as Italian and English. In the following section I provide further differences between a-QBNP's and c-QBNP's in Spanish.

3. a-QBNP's versus c-QBNP's

In Spanish there are substantive differences, both in their meaning and structure, between a-QBNP's and c-QBNP's. These differences support the claim against a unifying analysis of QBNP's in Spanish.

3.1. Subject position

c-QBNP's can appear as subjects in a sentence, whereas a-QBNP's headed by the indefinite *un* 'a' cannot. Notice that in Spanish a DP headed by an indefinite is possible in subject position (14c). Thus, the indefinite *un* 'a' is not responsible for this restriction on a-QBNP's in Spanish.

(14) a. El idiota   de Pepe   vino   a   verme.
          the idiot   of Pepe   come-Past   to   see.me-CL
          'The idiot of Pepe came to see me.'
      b. *Un idiota   de Pepe   vino   a   verme.
          a   idiot   of Pepe   come-Past   to   see.me-CL
          'An idiot of Pepe came to see me.'
      c. Un idiota   vino   a   verme   (esta   mañana).
          an idiot   come-Past   to   see.me-CL   this   morning
          'An idiot came to see me this morning.'

3.2. Recursion

While c-QBNP's allow recursion to apply to its predicate, a-QBNP's do not necessarily allow recursion:

(15) a. el pichón de abogado del   gobernador
          the pigeon of lawyer of-the governor
          'the pigeon of a lawyer of the governor'
      b. ?un pichón de abogado de   gobernador
          a   pigeon of lawyer of   governor
          'a pigeon of a lawyer of the governor'

3.3. Referentiality/Specificity

c-QBNP's require a referential/specific DP to sit in the subject position (16) -i.e., non-specific/referential DP's and bare NP's are ruled out. This is not the case for a-QBNP's, which impose a ban on referential DP's, and require bare NP's (17). This may be due to the fact that the whole construction is headed by an indefinite D, and therefore the second NP/DP in the linear order must be indefinite. This agreement between the two DP's is known as the *(in)definiteness agreement effect*, a point first made by Español-Echevarría (1997, 1998), who claims that an NP headed by an (in)definite D must contain a second (in)definite D -i.e., when an (in)definite determiner appears in initial position, the post-prepositional nominal has to be (in)definite. This same effect has been noticed in the literature for other languages (cf. Napoli (1989) for Italian, and Danon (2001, 2008a,b) for Hebrew) (González-Rivera and Delicado-Cantero 2010).

(16) a. el   gilipollas   de   Fortuño
          the   asshole   of   Fortuño
          'the asshole of Fortuño'
      b. *el   gilipollas   de   algún   gobernador
          the   asshole   of   some   governor
          'the asshole of some governor'
      c. *el   gilipollas   de   gobernador[3]
          theasshole   of   governor
          'the asshole of governor'

(17) a. *un   gilipollas   de   Fortuño
          a   asshole   of   Fortuño
          'an asshole of Fortuño'
      b. un   gilipollas   de   gobernador
          a   asshole   of   governor
          'an asshole of a governor'

3.4. A ban against possessive pronouns

c-QBNP's allow a possessive pronoun in the (understood) subject of the clause, in clearly contrast with a-QBNP's, which do not allow possessive pronouns:

(18) a. el   idiota   de   tu   primo
          the   idiot   of   your   cousin
          'the idiot of your cousin'
      b. *un   idiota   de   tu   primo
          a   idiot   of   your   cousin
          'an idiot of your cousin'

3.5. Modifiers

Lexical items such as *muy* 'very' are permitted in c-QBNP's, but not in a-QBNP's:

(19) a. el   muy   idiota   de   tu   primo
          the   very   idiot   of   your   cousin
          'the very idiot of your cousin'

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[3] However, Spanish admits the following syntactic configuration: [+def] -- [-def] in *el idiota de gobernador que nos gastamos* 'the idiot of the governor that we have'. González-Rivera and Delicado-Cantero (2010) account for this unexpected configuration. The hypothesis advanced there is that the agreement effect between the two DP's is a consequence of specificity, and not definiteness. Thus, instead of speaking of *(In)definiteness Agreement Effect*, we should speak of *Specificity Agreement Effect*.

    b.   *un muy   idiota   de   tu   primo
        a   very   idiot   of   your   cousin
        'a very idiot of your cousin'

These differences support the claim that in effect we are dealing with two different clauses, both in their meaning and structure, of QBNP's. In the following section I take a look briefly to the underlying syntactic structure of c-QBNP's, and then in Section 5 I turn my attention to a-QBNP's, which constitute the focus of this paper.

4. Syntactic derivation of c-QBNP's

Den Dikken (2006) suggests a syntactic derivation for c-QBNP's in which the predicate inverts with its subject in the course of the derivation, so an empty predicate head can be licensed, which this author assumes to be the predicate-head SIMILAR (20a). This representation gives us the semantics of comparison. Thus, the syntactic derivation of (20a) proceeds among the following lines: first, a functional projection is created headed by the nominal copula 'of' –i.e., a LINKER in den Dikken's terms; then, the RELATOR 'a' incorporates to F for checking some formal features (120b), and finally, the FP is selected by a nominal functional head (20c) (cf. Villalba 2007).

(20)   a. $[_{RP}$ [city] [RELATOR [SIMILAR jewel]]]
       b. $[_{FP}$ $[_{NumP}$ jewel$]_j$ $[_F^0$ LINKER=of+RELATOR=a $[_{RP}$ $[_{NumP}$ city] $[_R^0$ t_i t_j]]]]
       c. $[_{DP}$ a $[_{FP}$ $[_{NumP}$ jewel$]_j$ $[_F^0$ LINKER=of+RELATOR=a $[_{RP}$ $[_{NumP}$ city] $[_R^0$ t_i t_j]]]]]

This proposal can be summarized as follows: (i) the existence of a spurious indefinite article, (ii) the NumP hypothesis, and (iii) predicate inversion. However, den Dikken's solution runs into problems when we apply it to Spanish c-QBNP's, specifically the NumP hypothesis, since e.g. in Spanish partitive/specific quantifiers are possible (21), as argued by Villalba (2007).

(21)   a.   los idiotas   de   muchos   de   los   gobernadores
        the idiots   of   many   of   the   governors
        'the idiots of many of the governors'

       b.   los idiotas   de   todos   los   gobernadores
        the idiots   of   all   the   governors
        'the idiots of all of the governors'

The NumP hypothesis, as argued by Villalba (2007), is inadequate for the analysis of c-QBNP's. The question we must answer now is whether or not we should maintain it for the analysis of a-QBNP's, based mainly in the following facts: (i) the impossibility of quantifiers in the subject position (22) –i.e., only bare nominals can sit in the subject position of a-QBNP's, and (ii) the impossibility of wh-phrases in the subject position (assuming that wh-phrases are larger than NumP) (23).

(22)   *un idiota   de   todos   los   gobernadores
       a   idiot   of   all   the   governors
       'an idiot of every governors'

(23)   *¿Quién piensa   que Fortuño es   un   idiota   de   qué?
       who   think   that Fortuño is   a   idiot   of   what
       'Who thinks that Fortuño is an idiot of what?'

However, as pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, quantifiers are banned not only from a-QBNP's in general, but from other constructions in Spanish as well (24). If we assume that only bare nouns can sit in the (understood) subject position of Spanish a-QBNP's, then for we can dispense of the NumP hypothesis.

(24) a. una casa   de hierro
          a   house   of steel
          'a house (made) of steel'

      b. *una   casa   de algunos hierros
          a   house   of some   steels
          'a house (made) of some steels'

Villalba's (2007) proposal for c-QBNP's is just another instantiation of den Dikken's (2006) account (20), one in which there is a Predicate-specifier structure configuration, but with the predicate moving to a DP-internal focus position (A'-movement) –i.e. this author takes a semantic account, one in which the informational role of the subject and the predicate are taken into consideration, and this information structure is responsible for the inversion of the predicate around its subject. Villalba's syntactic configuration is as in (25) (see also Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann 2010)[4].

(25) a. $[_{RP} [_{XP} [SUBJECT [_{R'} RELATOR [_{YP} PREDICATE]]]$
      b. $[_{FP} [PREDICATE]_j [_{F'} LINKER+RELATOR_i [_{RP} [SUBJECT] [_{R'} t_i t_j]]]]]$

(26) a. el idiota   del gobernador
          the idiot   of-the governor
          'the idiot of the governor'
      b. $[_{FocP} [_{DP} idiota] [_{FOC'} R+FOC=de [_{RP} [_{DP} el gobernador] [_{R'} t_R t_{DP}]]]]$

In sum, c-QBNP's show a general structural pattern of predication mediated by a functional head, or a RELATOR in den Dikken's (2006) terms. This subject-RELATOR-predicate structure involves predicate inversion, which derives the predicate-LINKER+RELATOR-subject linear order of Spanish c-QBNP's. a-QBNP's, on the other hand, reflect an underlying predicate-RELATOR-subject order -i.e., the predicate is base generated. In the following section I discuss some relevant properties of Spanish a-QBNP's and provide my analysis of such clauses.

5. The internal structure of Spanish a-QBNP's

Den Dikken (2006: 162) claims that a-QBNP's support a derivation based on predicate inversion, but these clauses are better understood as the two NP's based-generated in their surface order. However, this author does not discuss in detail why a based-generated analysis is more suitable for a-QBNP's. García and Méndez (2002: 103-104), on the other hand, claim that a-QBNP's may receive a syntactic interpretation based on predicate inversion. Their claim is that adjectives in QBNP's have a strong modal feature, namely, $[M_{valorative}]$ that needs to be discharged in the course of the syntactic derivation. While this is true (i.e., adjectives in a-QBNP's are highly valorative/evaluative, as we will see), no answer is provided for the different semantic interpretation that c-QBNP's and a-QBNP's receive, plus their syntactic distribution. It turns out to be that both den Dikken (2006) and García and Méndez (2002) are on the right track if some distinction of a-QBNP's are assumed.

5.1. Not all a-QBNP's are in effect a-QBNP's

In note 1 I advanced the idea that some a-QBNP's share the semantics of c-QBNP's: they involve one level of predication. Thus, the most natural interpretation of (27a) is (27b).

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[4] I will not be saying much about Spanish c-QBNP's in this paper. The reader is referred to García and Méndez (2002), Español-Echevarría (1998), Casillas Martínez (2003), Villalba (2007), Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann (2010), González-Rivera and Delicado-Cantero (2010), González-Rivera (2010a), among others, for further discussions about this construction. For the Romance languages and other languages in general, the reader is referred to Milner (1978), Napoli (1989), Suñer (1990), Hulk and Tellier (2000), Doetjes and Rooryck (2003), and den Dikken (2006).

(27)   a.   una mierda de ponencias
               a   shit   of   talks
               'a shit of talks'
      b.   The talks were a shit (bad).

The most natural interpretation (or at least one possible interpretation) of (28a) is (28b):

(28)   a.   un idiota de decano
               a   idiot   of   dean
               'an idiot of a dean'
      b.   As a dean, *x* is an idiot.

However, the difference between (27) and (28) is not merely of interpretation, but they show structural discrepancies -i.e., examples such as (27) may be left-dislocated, but (28) cannot. Notice that c-QBNP's can be left-dislocated (31):

(29)   Una mierda de ponencias   las que escuché   hoy.
        a   shit   of   talks   the that hear.Past   today
        'A shit of talks the one I heard today.'

(30)   *Un idiota   de decano al   que vi   hoy.
        a   idiot   of   dean   to+the   that see.Past today
        'An idiot of a dean the one I saw today.'

(31)   Al   idiota   del   decano lo vi   hoy.
        to-the   idiot   of-the   dean   LO see.Past today
        'It was the idiot of the dean that I saw today.'

These differences seem to support the hypothesis that not all cases of a-QBNP's considered so far in the literature (e.g., *una mierda de ponencias* ' a shit of talks') are in effect a-QBNP's, but rather they may be considered special cases of c-QBNP's, or other type of constructions[5]. If this proposal is on the right track, then a-QBNP's are those in which the subject names a professional occupation. Some relevant properties and the internal structure of this clause are discussed below.

5.2. Relevant properties and structure of a-QBNP's

With the above discussion in mind, we can discuss the relevant properties of what I consider a-QBNP's, namely, those clauses that involve two level of predication and the subject names a professional occupation. First, these clauses show up mainly after the copula in canonical SUBJECT-COPULA-PREDICATE. Hence, a-QBNP's are used predicatively (32), in clear contrast with c-QBNP's, which may receive an equative interpretation when appear after the copula (33):

(32)   Fortuño es   un idiota   de gobernador.
        Fortuño be.Present   a   idiot   of   governor
        'Fortuño is an idiot of a governor.'

(33)   Fortuño es   el idiota   del   gobernador.
        Fortuño be.Present   the idiot   of-the   governor
        'Fortuño is the idiot of the governor.'

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[5] Examples like *una mierda de ponencias* 'a shit of talks' not only show number disagreement between the subject and the predicate, but they also may allow lexically frozen attributes that do not agree with the subject, e.g. *una bazofia de arroz* 'a distaste of rice' (Villalba and Bartra-Kaufmann 2010; see also Casillas Martínez 2003). Those adjectives that do not agree with the subject are *inherently gendered lexeme* -i.e., they come from the lexicon with a fixed gender value (Casillas 2003).

In (32) the a-QBNP clause tells us something about the referent of the subject, namely, that he is a governor and an idiot (as a governor). In other words, it describes the subject. In (33), however, what is said is that *there exists a (unique) x, which is governor, and that such x is equal to Fortuño*: ∃!x [P(x) & x = Fortuño].

Second, the subject of a-QBNP's has to be a bare nominal, either singular or plural, though bare plural are not common in present-day Spanish:

(34)   a.   un imbécil de abogado
             a   idiot   of lawyer
             'an idiot of a lawyer'
    b.   unos   imbéciles   de abogados
             a   idiots   of lawyers
             'an idiots of lawyers'

Third, the subject and the predicate may not agree in gender (35a); however, the meaning is preserved as (35b) shows:

(35)   a.   Pepe   es   una   bestia   de   profesor.
             Pepe   be.Present   a.Fem   beast.Fem   of   professor.Masc
             'Pepe is a beast of a professor' (= Pepe is a good/extraordinary professor.)
    b.   Pepe, as a professor, is a beast (but as a friend, is a jerk).

Fourth, the N predicate must have an evaluative/appreciative (typically negative, although not necessarily; see example (35a)) interpretation. However, non-evaluative/non-appreciative adjectives may be licensed when modified by appreciative and elative morphology.

(36)   a.   *un abogado de estudiante
             a   lawyer of student
             'a lawyer of a student'
    b.   *un argentino   de profesor
             a   Argentinean of   professor
             'an Argentinean of a professor'

(37)   a.   un abogaducho de estudiante
             a   shyster   of   student
             'a shyster of a student'
    b.   un argentinísimo   de profesor
             a   argentinism   of   professor
             'an argentinism of a professor'

Fifth, the preposition *de* 'of' between the subject and the predicate may be considered a nominal copula -i.e., a meaningless element whose presence in the structure is forced by syntactic constraints. Like *ser* 'to be', the nominal copula can serve as the lexicalization of the RELATOR-head (den Dikken 2006). (38a), for example, can be paraphrased without the presence of the preposition (38b), just as its counterpart in English (39a), but with the predicate following its subject (39b). Thus, copular elements in the Spanish nominal domain are realized as *de* 'of'.

(38)   a.   an idiota   de gobernador
             a   idiot   of governor
             'an idiot of a governor'
    b.   un gobernador idiota
             a   governor   idiot
             'an idiot governor'

(39)   a.   an idiot of a governor
        b.   an idiot governor

Finally, as I have mentioned previously, both NP's must be indefinite in Spanish a-QBNP's. We can now summarize the basic properties of Spanish a-QBNP's as follows:

1.   a-QBNP's must be interpreted predicatively; hence, they seem to be restricted to the position following the copula in canonical SUBJECT-COPULA-PREDICATE clauses.
2.   The subject is a bare noun, either singular or plural; though in present-day Spanish bare plurals are not common.
3.   The subject names a professional occupation.
4.   The predicate must have an evaluative/appreciative interpretation. Adjectives that do not receive this interpretation may be licensed by elative morphology.
5.   The preposition *of* 'de' is a nominal copula -i.e., an element whose presence in the structure is forced by syntactic constraints.
6.   The subject and the predicate must be both indefinites.
7.   a-QBNP's involve two level of predication.

Thus, following an insight by den Dikken (2006), the internal structure of canonical a-QBNP's can be represented as follows:

(40)   a.   Fortuño es   un idiota   de gobernador.
              Fortuño be.Present   a   idiot   of governor
              'Fortuño is an idiot of a governor.'
        b.   [$_{RP}$ Fortuño [RELATOR=ser [$_{RP}$ [$_{NP}$ un idiota] [RELATOR=de [$_{NP}$ gobernador]]]]]

(40a) may be paraphrased as (41a), with both having the semantic interpretation of (42a):

(41)   a.   Fortuño es   un gobernador idiota.
              Fortuño be.Present   a   governor   idiot
              'Fortuño is an idiot governor.'
        b.   [$_{RP}$ Fortuño [RELATOR=ser [$_{RP}$ [$_{NP}$ un gobernador] [RELATOR=∅ [$_{AP}$ idiota]]]]]

(42)   a.   Fortuño es   un idiota   como   gobernador.
              Fortuño be.Present   a   idiot   as   governor
              'Fortuño is an idiot as a governor.'
        b.   [$_{RP}$ Fortuño [RELATOR=ser [$_{RP}$ [$_{NP}$ un idiota] [RELATOR=como [$_{NP}$ gobernador]]]]]

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed the syntax and semantics of the so-called Qualitative Binominal Noun Phrase constructions (QBNP's). These clauses can be broadly classified in two classes: comparative QBNP's and attributive QBNP's (den Dikken 2006). I have argued for a non-unifying account for both constructions based on their syntactic distribution and semantic properties. While c-QBNP's involve predicate inversion, a-QBNP's are better understood as based-generated with the predicate preceding its subject. I have also pointed out that some examples considered as a-QBNP's by some researchers (e.g., *una mierda de ponencias* 'a shit of talks'), are not a-QBNP's, but c-QBNP's or other construction. If this proposal is on the right track, then a-QBNP's are those in which the subject names a professional occupation. This proposal is far from conclusive and more research needs to be done in this direction.

There are other cases of QBNP's in which the clause is headed by a demonstrative, as the example in (43) shows. Demonstratives are by nature [+def].

(43)   Ese idiota   de   gobernador
         that idiot   of   governor
         'that idiot of a governor'

The question that arises is whether or not we should consider those examples as instances of c-QBNP's or a-QNBP's. If we apply the properties of a-QBNP's listed toward the end of Section 5, particularly (6) -i.e., the subject and the predicate must be both indefinites, then we are forced to conclude that QBNP's headed by a demonstrative are not examples of a-QBNP's, but rather of c-QBNP's. In these clauses the feature [+def] of N_1 spreads to the whole clause. But again, more research needs to be done in this direction.

Finally, the semantics of QBNP's in general is still unresolved. In González-Rivera (2010b), I try to account for the semantics of QBNP's following a neo-Carlsonian approach. Further research must tackle the semantics of such clauses. A comprehensive semantic analysis of such clauses will help us to better understand the different types of QBNP's.

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