

Negative Quantification and Degree Restriction: The Case of *más nada* in Puerto Rican Spanish

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1. Introduction

Whereas in a majority of Spanish dialects it is not possible to delimit or restrict an n-word with a degree modifier occurring before the negative element (*nada más*, *nada menos* vs. **más nada*, **menos nada*), post and pre-neg delimitation is possible in Puerto Rican Spanish and in Caribbean Spanish in general: Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba, some regions of Mexico, etc. (Kany 1945), as shown in (1). This syntactic alternation is also attested in certain areas of Spain (Andalucía, Canarias), but in a less productive fashion.

- (1) a. No quiero saber [post-neg nada más] de ti.
 No want.1st.PRES to-know nothing more of you
 ‘I do not want to know anything else about you.’
- b. No quiero saber [pre-neg más nada] de ti.
 No want.1st.PRES to-know more nothing of you
 ‘I do not want to know anything else about you.’

In principle, it would seem that both forms are completely equivalent and in free-alternating distribution. This seems to be the standard position in the descriptive and normative tradition (Real Academia Española 2005). Nevertheless, in this paper we argue that this is not an instance of optional or free syntactic alternation and that there are several syntactic and semantic constraints regulating the use of the two forms in Puerto Rican Spanish. As it will be shown, freedom of placement is limited to some n-words (commonly *nada* ‘nothing’, *nunca* ‘never’, *nadie* ‘no one’) and only strong or purely negative uses of the n-word allow premodification —i.e., only those n-words licensed by a neg head allow pre-neg delimitation. On the other hand, premodification and post-modification of the n-word may trigger different presuppositions. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: after a brief discussion of Puerto Rican Spanish in section 2, section 3 examines new data related to the alternation between *más nada* and *nada más* and similar pairs in Puerto Rican Spanish. Section 4 provides a syntactic analysis of such an alternation and explores further connections with other constructions (cf. comparative/superlative clauses). Section 5 examines the semantics of these constructions, and section 6 concludes the paper and suggests directions for future research.

2. Puerto Rican Spanish

Puerto Rican Spanish is spoken in Puerto Rico, an island located between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, just east of the Dominican Republic. There is an estimated population of 4,000,000 (approx.) habitants on the island and there are another 4,000,000 (approx.) speakers of Puerto Rican origin in the US (mainly in New York, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Ohio, New Jersey, etc.). Even though Spanish and English are both official languages in the island, Spanish is the native language of most of the population and the one used in daily life. English is restricted to specific contexts (e.g., the Federal Court). However, both languages are taught in school from K to 12 grades. As a Caribbean dialect (Cuba, Dominican Republic, etc.), Puerto Rican Spanish has some idiosyncratic grammatical properties, such as the use of overt subject pronouns in contexts where the more typical option in other dialects is a null subject pronoun (2); non-inversion in *wh*-questions (3), while in Standard Spanish either the subject pronoun may be dropped or it appears post-verbally; and the occurrence of overt subject pronouns with infinitives (4) (cf. Lipski 2006):

- (2) **Yo** traje la ensalada que **tú** me pediste.
 I bring.1ST.PAST the salad that you to-me ask.2ND.PAST
 ‘I brought the salad you asked me for.’
- (3) ¿Cómo **tú** te llamas?
 What you you call.2ND.PRES
 ‘What is your name?’
- (4) Al **yo** oír la noticia, tuve miedo.
 to+the I hear.INF the news get.1ST.PAST afraid
 ‘When I heard the news, I got scared.’

As stated above, another idiosyncratic dialectal property of Puerto Rican Spanish is the alternation between pre-modification and post-modification of a negative word by a degree modifier, as in (1) — i.e., post- and pre-neg delimitation. As stated above, this alternation is not possible in a majority of the Spanish dialects but it is common in most Caribbean dialects:

- (5) Y no oí más nada.
 and no hear.1ST.PAST more nothing
 ‘And I did not hear anything.’

(Carrera *Cuentos* [Venezuela 1980])

- (6) No la volví a besar más nunca.
 no her repeat.1ST.PAST to kiss.INF more never
 ‘I did not kiss her ever again.’

(Cabrera Infante *Habana* [Cuba 1986])

In Puerto Rican Spanish there are also phonetically reduced versions [ná máh] and [máh ná] that cannot always be used to substitute for the full forms. As the following examples demonstrate, these forms and the full forms are not necessarily in free-alternating distribution.

- (7) a. No quiero saber [máh ná] de ti.
 no want.1ST.PRES know.INF more nothing of you
 ‘I do not want to know more/anything else about you.’
 b. *No quiero saber [ná máh] de ti.
 no want.1ST.PRES know.INF nothing more of you
- (8) a. Voy a comer eso [ná máh].
 go.1ST.PRES to eat.INF that nothing more
 ‘I am going to eat only that.’
 b. *Voy a comer eso [máh ná].
 go.1ST.PRES to eat.INF that more nothing

Even though the alternation *más nada/nada más* and its phonetically reduced versions [máh ná] and [ná máh] is a widely spread phenomenon in this Caribbean dialect, as documented in previous studies (González-Rivera 2005) and in spontaneous speech-data (9), there has not been any attempt to explain the syntax and semantics/pragmatics of this alternation.

- (9) “Me han dado duro, me quieren ‘afalcar’. Yo no puedo más, yo no puedo. Esto es increíble, yo lo que quiero es servirle a mi pueblo. Eso es lo que yo quiero. **Yo no quiero más nada, más nada.** Esto es increíble. Yo no puedo más. Yo no puedo más. Lo que yo he hecho es 13 años con el señor alcalde trabajando duro por Caguas. Yo no soporto eso, no puedo más”, indicó Varela entre sollozos.

(Rosario *El Nuevo Día* [Puerto Rico 2010])

As it will be shown in the following sections, there are several syntactic and semantic constraints regulating the use of *nada más* and *más nada* in Puerto Rican Spanish. The syntactic constraints are discussed in the following section.

3. The case of *más nada*: syntactic constraints

As pointed out in the introduction, several restrictions are at work to determine the occurrence of *más nada* and *nada más*, and the syntax of pre and post-neg delimitation in general. Freedom of placement of *más* is limited to certain pronominal n-words: *nada* ‘nothing’, *nunca* ‘never’, *nadie* ‘nobody’, *ninguno* ‘none’ and *ningún* ‘none’:

- (10) a. [Nunca más] volveré a hablar contigo.
 never more repeat.1ST.FUT to talk.INF with you
 ‘I will not talk to you ever again.’
 b. [Más nunca] volveré a hablar contigo.
 more never repeat.1ST.FUT to talk.INF with you
 ‘I will not talk to you ever again.’
- (11) a. No he visto a [nadie más].
 no have seen.1ST.PRET PERF to nobody more
 ‘I have not seen anybody else.’
 b. No he visto a [más nadie].
 no have seen.1ST.PRET PERF to else nobody
 ‘I have not seen anybody else.’
- (12) a. Además de Pepe, no hay [ninguno más] que
 besides of Pepe no there.is no-one more that
 sea valiente
 be.3RD.PRES SUBJ brave
 ‘Besides Pepe, nobody else is brave.’
 b. Además de Pepe, no hay [más ninguno] que
 besides of Pepe no there.is more no-one that
 sea valiente
 be.3RD.PRES SUBJ brave
 ‘Besides Pepe, nobody else is brave.’
- (13) a. No jugó [ningún niño más].
 no play.3RD.PAST no kid more
 ‘No other kid played.’
 b. No jugó [más ningún niño].
 no play.3RD.PAST more no kid
 ‘No other kid played.’

Freedom of placement, however, is not allowed with other pronominal quantifiers —i.e., premodification of quantificational pronouns other than n-words (*poco* ‘few’, *tanto* ‘such/so much’, *algo* ‘some’, *mucho* ‘many’, etc.) with the degree word *más* yields ungrammatical results:

- (14) a. Hace [poco más] de un año que no te veo.
 makes-it little more of a year that not you see
 ‘I have not seen you in little more than a year.’
 b. *Hace [más poco] de un año que no te veo.
 makes-it more little of a year that not you see

- (15) a. Me gusta [tanto más] que eso.
 me likes as more than that
 'I like it so much more than that.'
- b. *Me gusta [más tanto] que eso.
 me likes more as than that
- (16) a. Leeré [tres libros más].
 read.1ST.FUT three books more
 'I will read three more books.'
- b. *Leeré [más tres libros].
 read.1ST.FUT more three books

In addition, only 'strong' or purely negative uses of the n-word—in other words those licensed by a neg head (Ladusaw 1979)—allow premodification. In the following examples, the use of *nada más* is not negative and becomes equivalent in meaning to a focal particle (*solo* 'only'). As will be argued below, in all three cases the n-word lacks sentential scope and is not licensed by negation (cf. Sánchez López 1999).

- (17) a. Estapersona es [nada más] y nada menos que
 that person is nothing more and nothing less than
 el presidente.
 the president
 'That individual is just the president.'
- b. *Esta persona es [más nada] y nada menos que
 that person is more nothing and nothing less than
 el presidente.
 the president
- (18) a. Voy al cine [nada más] que para verte.
 go.1ST.PRES to-the cinema nothing more than for see-you
 'I am going to the movies only to see you.'
- b. *Voy al cine [más nada] que para verte.
 go.1ST.PRES to-the cinema more nothing than for see-you
- (19) a. ¿Quieres comer algo? Eso [nada más].
 want.2ND.PRES eat something that nothing more
 'Do you want something to eat? Only that.'
- b. *¿Quieres comer algo? Eso [más nada].
 want.2ND.PRES eat something that more nothing

Finally, when the n-word is a negative-polarity item licensed in a non-negative environment (by an affective, decreasing or non-veridical operator, cf. Giannakidou 1998), premodification is not allowed: for example, the n-word occurs in the antecedent of a conditional clause in (20), and within the restriction of a universal quantifier in (21):

- (20) a. Como protestes [nada más], te suspendo.
 if complain.2ND.PRES nothing more you fail.1ST.PRES
 'If you complain any more, I'll give you a failing grade.'
- b. *Como protestes [más nada], te suspendo.
 if complain.2ND.PRES more nothing you fail.1ST.PRES
- (21) a. Todo el que diga [nada más] sufrirá las consecuencias.
 every the that say.3RD.PRES nothing more suffer.3RD.PRES the consequences
 'Whoever says anything more will suffer the consequences.'
- b. *Todo el que diga [más nada] sufrirá las consecuencias.
 every the that say.3RD.PRES more nothing suffer.3RD.PRES the consequences

In summary, pre-neg delimitation is restricted to pronominal n-words licensed by a neg-head. When this is not the case, the degree modifier cannot occur in a preposed position. When the n-word is a negative-polarity item licensed in a non-negative environment, preposing is not allowed either. Finally, premodification is not possible with other quantifiers. In the following section we lay out the syntactic analysis of the alternation *nada más/más nada*.

4. Overt degree raising

Following an insight by Bosque and Brucart (1991), we assume that degree quantification in Caribbean Spanish allows for higher scope of the degree element in the overt syntax, something required by comparative/superlative elements in general at the level of Logical Form (Bosque & Brucart 1991, Heim 1999, Matushansky 2008). Thus, in Caribbean Spanish the Spell-Out orders (22a) and (23a) are possible, in addition to the standard (22b, c) and (23b, c).

- (22) a. Pepe es el más que lee de todos nosotros.
 Pepe is the more that read.3RD.PRES of all us
 ‘Pepe is the one who reads the most of all of us.’
 b. Pepe es el que más lee de todos nosotros.
 Pepe is the that more read.3RD.PRES of all us
 c. Pepe es el que lee más de todos nosotros.
 Pepe is the that read.3RD.PRES more of all us
- (23) a. Pepe es el más rápido que corre de todos nosotros.
 Pepe is the more fast that run.3RD.PRES of all us
 ‘Pepe is the fastest among us.’
 b. Pepe es el que más rápido corre de todos nosotros.
 Pepe is the that more fast run.3RD.PRES of all us
 c. Pepe es el que corre más rápido de todos nosotros.
 Pepe is the that run.3RD.PRES more fast of all us

Parallel to superlatives, degree-modified negative expressions also involve the displacement of a degree term out of its original domain. When it occurs in a ‘premodifier’ position, the degree delimiter can be claimed to scope out of the Neg Phrase to a higher Degree Phrase (Corver 1997, Demonte 2008; cf. also Matushansky 2008 for other outscoping possibilities).

- (24) [_{DegP} ... más ... [_{NegP} nada (más)_{copy}]]

This higher scope option is only available when the degree element —the copy in its base position— is licensed by sentential negation. Outscoping out of the NegP is not allowed in other decreasing environments (conditionals, the restriction of universal determiners, etc.) which are not negative, as illustrated above (20, 21). Similarly, when the delimiter *más* heads a comparative phrase (Sánchez López 1999), it cannot escape it —syntactically, there would be a violation of the locality constraint on comparative CPs (cf. Lechner 2004):

- (25) a. No hay nada más] terrible que sufrir en vano.
 not there-is nothing more terrible that suffer in vain
 ‘There is nothing more terrible than suffering in vain.’
 b. *No hay [más nada] terrible que sufrir en vano.
 not there-is more nothing terrible that suffer in vain
- (26) a. No hizo [nada más] que llegar y se durmió.
 not made nothing more than arrive and REFL sleep.3RD.PRES
 ‘He just came in and fell asleep.’
 b. No hizo [más nada] que llegar y se durmió.
 not made more nothing than arrive and REFL sleep.3RD.PRES

The same restriction is attested in focus constructions. These can take a variety of forms. In the examples (17) – (19) above, *nada* behaves like a focus particle (only) and does not allow the preposing of the degree delimiter. A similar instance is found in (27), where pre-modification of *nada* is not allowed. The explanation for these facts is closely related to what we have just seen in this section. Focus structures constitute closed domains, i.e. they give rise to focus islands (Drubig 1993, López 2009). As such, they would prevent the extraction of the degree element and its movement to a higher Degree Phrase.

- (27) a. [Nada más] te digo que soy pobre.
 Nothing more you say.1ST.PRES that be.1ST.PRES poor
 ‘I only tell you that I am poor.’
 b. *[Más nada] te digo que soy pobre.
 more nothing you say.1ST.PRES that be.1ST.PRES poor

In sum, premodification of the n-word can be viewed as an instance of displacement to a higher degree projection and is subject to standard locality constraints. This operation is allowed in Caribbean Spanish and blocked in other dialects.

5. The semantics of [*más* + n-word]

In this section we claim that premodification of the n-word is not just an additional optional syntactic operation allowed in Caribbean dialects. Such an operation has semantic repercussions, so we must conclude that it is conditioned by interface requirements. There is a subtle difference in meaning between the premodified and the postmodified structures, a fact that has not been noticed in the literature so far. This difference in meaning becomes evident when the modified negative quantifier applies to a property of events. Consider the following examples:

- (28) a. Pepe no comió [nada más].
 Pepe no eat.1ST.PAST nothing more
 ‘Pepe did not eat anything else.’
 b. Pepe no comió [más nada].
 Pepe no eat.1ST.PAST more nothing
 ‘Pepe did not eat anything else.’
 c. No leyó [más nada].
 no read.1ST.PAST more nothing
 ‘He did not read anything else.’

Sentence (28a) is interpreted as stating that Pedro stopped eating, i.e. he did not continue or resume eating again. On the other hand, (28b) states something additional, namely, that the Agent (Pepe) was satiated and was not able to continue reading. Similarly, (28c) states that the agent was unable to continue reading, maybe because he got tired, etc. Additionally, pre- and post-modification of *más* trigger different presuppositions:

- (29) a. No leeré [nunca más] libros de Vargas Llosa.
 not read.1ST.FUT never more books of Vargas Llosa
 ‘I will not read books by Vargas Llosa ever.’
 b. No leeré [más nunca] libros de Vargas Llosa.
 not read.1ST.FUT more never books of Vargas Llosa
 ‘I will not read books by Vargas Llosa anymore.’

Sentence (29b) does not presuppose necessarily that I have read books by Vargas Llosa before. For example, it would be true in a situation in which I do not like this type of novels and I do not read them as a matter of principle. Under this interpretation, (29b) may be paraphrased as follows:

- (30) No leeré jamás libros de Vargas Llosa.
 not read.1ST.FUT never books of Vargas Llosa
 ‘I will never read books by Vargas Llosa.’

On the other hand, (29a) presupposes that I have read books by Vargas Llosas before and it asserts that I will stop reading them. Interestingly, those dialects banning premodification also ascribe the same event realization presupposition to *nunca más*. Sentence (29a) is unambiguous in those dialects. It can only be interpreted with the presupposition that the event has been realized prior to its utterance, i.e. I have read books by Vargas Llosa before. The interpretation in which there is no presupposition about a previous reading event requires the use of the unmodified *nunca* or *jamás*, as in (30), but not *nunca más*.

Additionally, the contrast in (29) is not possible in Puerto Rican Spanish when the involved individual is not the thematic Agent of the relevant eventuality —i.e., the presupposition of (29a) is not triggered when the individual responsible for the ending of the event is not the Agent (Agent-Orientation Restriction). Consider the following sentences:

- (31) a. No puedo salir contigo [nada más].
 not can.1ST.PRES go-out with-you nothing more
 ‘I do not want to go out with you anymore.’
 b. No puedo salir contigo [más nada].
 not can.1ST.PRES go-out with-you more nothing

Under standard pragmatic assumptions, (31b) cannot be interpreted as the theme-dependent ending of an event event. In other words, in a context in which I have found out that my girlfriend is cheating on me and she is responsible for our break up, (31b) would not be felicitous. On the other hand, in a context in which I have make such a decision without her intervention, (31) would be felicitous. Finally, non-agentive derived subjects (32) or topicalized objects (33) disfavor premodification too.

- (32) a. [Nadie más] llegó a la fiesta.
 nobody more arrive.3RD.PAST to the party
 ‘Nobody else arrived at the party.’
 b. ?[Más nadie] llegó a la fiesta.
 more nobody arrive.3RD.PAST to the party
- (33) a. [A nadie más] vi en la fiesta.
 to nobody more see.3RD.PAST in the party
 ‘I did not see anybody else at the party.’
 b. *[A más nadie] vi en la fiesta.
 to more nobody see.3RD.PAST in the party

Assuming that the eventive structure of a sentence projects in syntax (Kratzer 1997, McDonald 2008) and is conditioned by its *qualia* structure (Pustejovsky 1995), the Agent-orientation restriction follows from the interaction of the scopal properties of the degree delimiter and event decomposition (Doetjes 2007) —i.e., the constituent with the Agent role/feature is in the specifier of *vP* and it is the closest element to be able to enter in an agreement relation (via the Agree operation) with DegP, as predicted by the Minimal Link Condition (Chomsky 1995). Semantically, notice that when an Agent is involved, a scopal ambiguity arises between the order AG(CAUS(DEG)) and DEG(AG(CAUS)) of the degree and causative operators and the Agent denotation: The Agent may be the cause of the delimitation of the event to a certain degree or extent, or the delimitation may be independent of the Agent involvement (wide scope of the DEG operator). On the other hand, such an ambiguity does not emerge with an element bearing the Theme role, since a Theme does not normally have causative involvement in an event (Dowty 1979).

Only the degree modifier *más* can occur as a pre- or post-modifying element in Puerto Rican Spanish. The modifier with opposite scalar value *menos* is not allowed as a premodifier. Additionally, the interpretation of *nada menos* is not the reverse equivalent of *nada más*. It simply behaves like an intensifier:

- (33) a. Ha leído cincuenta libros nada menos.
 has read fifty books nothing less
 ‘He has read fifty books (indeed).’
 b. *Vino nada menos.
 see.3RD.PAST nothing less
 ‘He came’

The impossibility of **menos nada* is due to the fact that *menos* reverses the associated degree scale and blocks the triggering of the associated presuppositions, delimiting the event and agent involvement. In other words, *nada menos* would require a subtraction operation to be performed on an empty set, which is not possible semantically.

6. Conclusion

In this paper it has been argued that placement (preposition) of the degree delimiter is allowed by a Deg raising operation characteristic of Puerto Rican Spanish (and possibly Caribbean Spanish in general). This operation is restricted by general syntactic locality constraints. The generalized Deg raising operation has also been attested in superlatives, and possibly in other structures in Caribbean Spanish. This property seems to suggest potential fruitful avenues for further research: for example, to determine whether it would be possible to establish microparametric variation within the Caribbean area with respect to this property. We have also argued that the associated differential interpretations of *más nada/nada más* can be derived from general eventive requirements and the presuppositions they may trigger.

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