

Plural indefinite articles: the case of *des* and *unos*

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The paradigm of plural indefinite articles is different from the singular one in that singularity is a single-flavored concept whereas plurality comes in two flavors, an inclusive and an exclusive one. We argue that this leads to two different kinds of articles – exemplified by French *des* and Spanish *unos* – each with their own properties with respect to blocking, aspect and pragmatics.

Background | The Spanish determiner *unos* (Laca & Tasmowski 1993; Villalta 1994; Gutiérrez-Rexach 2001, 2010; Lopez-Palma 2007; Martí 2008; Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2012) shares a number of characteristics with prototypical indefinite articles like English *a*: (i) it doesn't allow for partitive readings (#A child is dumb. #*Unos* niños son mudos.), (ii) it cannot be used as an answer to a *how many* question (How many children came? *A child came/ **Unos* niños vinieron), (iii) and it can occur in the scope of a generic operator without giving rise to taxonomic readings (A millionaire doesn't travel coach. / *Unos* millonarios no viajan en segunda clase.) These three characteristics set *a* apart from the numeral paradigm as well as from other indefinite determiners and have consequently been taken to define the class of indefinite articles (Farkas 2002, Krifka 2004, Le Bruyn 2010). For *unos*, however, an article analysis in which it would be the simple spell-out of existential quantification in the plural is rarely explicitly defended. Wisdom has it that plural indefinite articles block bare plurals from appearing as arguments, and semantically behave like French *des*. We challenge these predictions by exploring recent advances in plurality, improving on the semantics of *for*-adverbials, and challenging the alleged incompatibility of *unos* with distributive predicates.

Plurality | Plurality is crucially different from singularity in that it comes in two flavors: an inclusive (atoms + plural individuals/groups) and an exclusive one (plural individuals/groups). We follow Krifka (1989), Sauerland et al. (2005), Spector (2007), Zweig (2008) and Farkas & de Swart (2010) in assuming that the morphological plural on nouns can express an inclusive interpretation.

Given that we have two flavors of plurality, we expect there to be variation in the plural indefinite article paradigm. *Des* and *unos* illustrate this: the former resembles standard plural morphology in that it can express an inclusive interpretation, the latter only expresses an exclusive one:

(1) Tu as vu des enfants ('Have you seen DES children')? Yes, I have seen one.

(2) Has visto unos niños ('Have you seen UNOS children')? *Yes, I have seen one.

Even though the choice of plurality flavor seems to be a minor issue, it has important consequences for blocking. Following Chierchia (1998), we assume articles block covert type-shifts as soon as their contribution is truth-conditionally equivalent to the type-shifts in question. Under the assumption that *des* expresses the same plural as plural morphology, we expect it to block bare plural nouns from appearing in argument position. *Unos* is different and consequently doesn't play a blocking role.

Aspect | *Unos* objects are not compatible with *for*-adverbials whereas *des* objects are:

(3) Il a cueilli des fraises pendant une heure. ('He picked DES strawberries for an hour')

(4) *Preparé unas galletas durante una hora. ('He prepared UNOS cookies for an hour')

We argue that this difference can be reduced to the difference in plural flavor treated above and that it should consequently not be taken as an argument against the article status of *unos*.

Krifka (1989) proposes that *for*-adverbials turn atelic predicates into telic ones and that atelicity should be seen as a combination of cumulativity of the verb and cumulativity of the object. Zucchi & White (2001) point out that Krifka has a problem with *some N* as well as *a sequence* (see also Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2012 on *unos*) given that these can be argued to be cumulative but are nevertheless incompatible

with *for*-adverbials:

(5) #John wrote some letters for half an hour.

(6) #John wrote a sequence for half an hour.

They propose a DRT analysis instead in which all run-of-the-mill objects are in some sense non-cumulative. The reason *letters* ends up being compatible with *for*-adverbials has to do with the fact that *letters* doesn't directly refer to actual letters but to kinds instead.

A straightforward problem for Zucchi & White's analysis is that bare plurals in Romance as well as *des* N behave the same but crucially don't refer to kinds (Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003). A non-referential analysis wouldn't help either given that Romance bare plurals and *des* N – unlike Romance bare singulars (Espinal & McNally 2011) – are compatible with non-restrictive relative clauses (see (7)), suggesting that they come with their own referential force.

(7) Emily sometió los resultados a sencillas estadísticas que – por lo demás – no eran necesarias.

Emily submitted the results to simple statistics that – for the rest – were not necessary.

Our proposal goes back to Krifka's but instead of tying the compatibility of predicates with *for*-adverbials to cumulativity, we tie it to (partial) divisiveness. Building on insights in the literature on pluractionality (Van Geenhoven 2005 and de Swart 2006), we propose that a sentence like *John ate apples for an hour* is not about a succession of events closed off by *for an hour* but rather about a single event of eating apples that took an hour and for which it necessarily holds that there is a plurality of subevents to which the same predicate applies. We add this last condition as a felicity condition in (8).

(8) $[[\text{for an hour}]] = \lambda P(P(e) \& h(e) = 1 / \forall e'(P(e') \rightarrow \exists e'' \exists e''' (e'' < e' \& e''' < e' \& e'' \neq e''' \& P(e'') \& P(e'''))))$

Independent support for (8) comes from coercion: (4), (5) and (6) become grammatical as soon as we give them an iterative interpretation. The contrasts for the default readings follow if we make one extra assumption for bare plurals and *des* N, viz. that – despite the fact that they are semantically compatible with a singular interpretation – they can never be used if plurality is not at issue (Farkas & de Swart 2010). This means that at least the event e' in (8) has to involve a plurality. With this assumption in place, all the facts follow: we predict (i) bare plurals and *des* N to be compatible with *for*-adverbials, (ii) *unos* N – given its exclusive plural interpretation – to be incompatible with *for*-adverbials: there is no guarantee that a predicate containing *unos* N will be true of e' , e'' and e''' , (iii) the noun *sequence* as well as the DP *some* N to be incompatible with *for*-adverbials: like *unos*, they come with no guarantee that a predicate that is true of e' is also true of e'' and e''' .

Distributivity | *Des* N is known to allow for collective and distributive readings whereas *unos* – since Villalta (1994) – has been claimed to only be compatible with collective readings. Extensive corpus research as well as native speaker judgments however show that *unos* has a strong preference for collective readings but does not impose them. If it did, it should turn out to be incompatible with overt distributive operators like *cada uno* and *sendos*, contrary to fact (data from CREA and CORDE, *contra* Gutiérrez-Rexach 2001):

(9) Unos espectadores que habían apoquinado sus buenas pesetas **cada uno** para...

(‘UNOS viewers that had **each** spent their precious pesetas to...’)

(10) unos medallones antiguos con **sendos** relieves de pasta de marfil

(‘UNOS antique medals **each** with its marble paste relief’)

We conclude that the collective nature of *unos* comes from pragmatics rather than from semantics. The inclusive/exclusive plural distinction gives us the beginning of a handle on this: if *unos* competes with the bare plural in expressing exclusive rather than inclusive plurality, we expect distributive readings – which undo part of the effect of exclusive pluralization – to be dispreferred. No such preference comes with *des* as it has no bare plural competitor.