ON PLURAL NUMBER IN PROPER NAMES

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This presentation focuses on the presence/absence of plural morphology on proper names (PrN), when interpreted as predicates. As discussed in previous research (Arias&Mare 2024, Mare 2025), the use of anthroponyms as predicates is a very common cross-linguistic phenomenon. In Spanish varieties it is very frequent to find PrN as non-verbal predicates, not only to describe a unique entity (1), but especially when predicating a property which can be applied to various human beings (2).

(1) Marianella Nuñez: **la Messi del ballet.** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-N3tlJ4fgvE)
(2) Así nos roban una y otra vez **los Caputo de la vida.**
(https://www.instagram.com/reel/DPlpfJ8jdfd/)

As can be observed, the surname *Caputo* lacks plural morphology in (2), although it behaves like a common noun in that it describes multiple referents. The presence of plural morphology is not impossible, but the most common pattern is the one represented in (2). In relation to that fact, there seem to be some differences between surnames and first names, the latter displaying a behavior which is more similar to common nouns (3).

(3) a. Los Rubenes de la vida...
    b. ?Los Rubén de la vida...

Additionally, there is a very interesting crossover between the phenomena studied here and the lack of plural morphology in word formation processes characteristic of Lunfardo (Bohrn, 2020): suffixation with Jewish and Italian prototypical surname endings (-*owsky* and -*etti*, respectively) in adjectives and nouns (4a-b) or paranomasia (4c). Again, it is not impossible to find plural morphology in these cases, but the most productive form is the singular. Interestingly, in cases of paranomasia, the lack of plural morphology is odd with first names (5), too.

(4) a. Los zurdo*(s) están de paro / Los zurdowsky están de paro
    b. Los colgado*(s) de siempre/ Los colgetti de siempre
    c. ¡Qué buenos tema*(s)! / ¡Qué buenos Temaikén!
(5) a. Ya pedí los Uber / ?Ya pedí los Uberto
    b. Tomamos unos Fernet ayer / ??Tomamos unos Fernando ayer

The goal of this presentation is to find out which kind of morphosyntactic properties trigger the possibility to productively obtain singular forms in the predicative use of surnames. Our hypothesis is that, on the one hand, the sequence [det + PrN] has the same syntactic structure as N+N compounds, the first N being a null nominal head with the feature [HUM]. On the other hand, we explore the hypothesis that surnames and first names are processed differently, because of the structural features each one involves: surnames would be similar to collective nouns, while first names would have the same functional information or structure as individual nouns.

References

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