

Proper nouns, degree and infinitive clauses

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This presentation aims to describe in detail a particular kind of general Spanish constructions which, at least according my knowledge, have not been explored by grammatical literature, except marginally (cf. RAE 2010: §37.3i). These constructions include an infinitive clause appearing as the sentential subject and meaning an action (as in 1) or, less frequently, a process or a state. As the non-exact English translations try to reflect, this action is evaluated, by means of the predicate ‘BE + Degree + preposition *de* + proper noun’, as characterizing or typical of the entity referred by the proper noun, which could be either an anthroponym (1.a), a toponym (1.b) or the name of a political party (1.c), among others:

- (1) a. Era muy de **Maneco** elegir una espada (Borges, “El informe de Brodie”).
BE-PST very of Maneco to-choose a sword
‘It was just like Maneco to choose a sword’
b. Ah, convidar es muy de **México** (CORPES).
INTERJ to-invite BE-PRES very of Mexico.
‘To invite is very Mexico-like’
c. Vender la piel del oso antes de cazarlo es muy del **PP** (web)
to-sell the skin of.the bear before of to-catch.CL BE-PRES very of.the PP
‘To sell the skin of the bear before you catch it, that’s so PP’

The constructions are to be characterized starting with the more evident properties of their internal structure, for example the obligatory presence of a degree modifier as *muy*, *re*, *bien* (cf. too Oggiani 2025), the interpretation of the entity involved in the proper noun either as an individual or as a kind (cf. 1.a vs. 1.b-c) and the constituents order (e.g., subject postposed or anteposed to the verb, cf. 1.a vs. 1.b-c). Besides, I take into consideration for the analysis other (more complex) structural factors, which play a role in the relations of (co)reference between the proper noun and the empty category functioning as the subject of the infinitive clause (PRO), namely the referential (cf. 2.a) or arbitrary reading of PRO (and of other pronominal elements in the sentence), as well as the possibility that the infinitival clause is coordinated with a subjunctive clause (cf. 2.b):

- (2) a. “Es muy de **Cristina**_i [PRO_i ir en contra de...]” (J. Viale, statements)
BE-PRES very of Cristina to-go against...
‘That’s so Cristina to go against...’
b. [PRO_{ARBk} Ir a tu_{ARBk} primer evento importante como youtuber, que pro_{ARBm}
to-go to your-ARB first event important as youtuber, which
te_{ARBk} estafen y que pro_n salga en todos los medios] es re de **Pablo Agustín**_i
you-ARB scam and that appears in all the media is very of Pablo Agustín
‘To go to your first important event as a youtuber, that somebody scam you and that all this appears in the news that’s classic Pablo Agustín’

I also analyze two possible interpretations of the infinitival clause represented in the previous examples: it can refer to multiple identical events (i.e., a type of events), as (2.a),

or to only one (i.e., a token of event), as (2.b) (cf. Soto & Castro for a discussion about the reading of token for events). Taking into account, precisely, the case of singular events, another relevant point of research is how the operator in these sentences should be thought of: whether it should be understood in aspectual terms of frequency or habituality (i.e., ‘the event X is frequent/ habitual [in proper noun]’, cf. Cusic 1981 and subsequent literature) or rather in modal terms of (counter)expectations (i.e., ‘the event X is expected [in PN]’) (cf. Soto, Hasler & García 2011 for a preliminary proposal about the relations between grammar and the semantic-pragmatic domain of expectation management). This research will help to answer, then, what means that an event is *characterizing* or *typical* of an individual (or, eventually, of a kind).

References

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