On gender resolution in Spanish proper names.

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The aim of this contribution is to present new evidence coming from gender resolution in proper names against the view that proper names share the same underlying syntax as regular common nouns and, consequently, a similar semantics, i.e., they are predicates. At first sight, both have some clear differences, for example, proper names do not bear definite articles in referential uses. But these differences do not persist in every use of proper names, as shown in (1).

(1) a. Todas las María(s) que conozco son amables.

'Every Mary I know is nice.'

This kind of evidence has been used as a way of equating proper names and common nouns: since proper names can be pluralized, modified and, in general, can occur in the same contexts as common nouns, then they must be common nouns that happen to bear a null determiner. In this talk, I will challenge this view by looking at the distribution of gender. This evidence will not only prove the presence of crucial differences between the two categories previously anticipated, but also shed light onto the way we understand gender in Spanish.

Referential uses: the problem with Human Cloning in bare proper names

Following Harris' (1991) analysis of gender in Spanish and taking into account the tripartition he posits for it (semantic gender or sex, grammatical gender and morphophonological word markers), I assume that common nouns in general are divided into two groups: those that designate humans, like *profesor* 'professor'*,* and others that designate non-humans, like *mesa* 'table'. Both have grammatical gender, but only human nouns are affected by what Harris calls the Human Cloning rule, which provides a male and a female form for each human noun. Given the sheer reach of this rule, it is to be expected that, if proper nouns are predicates, it affects them all the same.

At first glance, many Spanish proper names seem to abide by the Human Cloning rule, namely, there exists a male and female form for each of them, and the resulting pairs can be, most times, easily predicted, as they align with the observations made for common nouns. (2) shows exactly this.

(2)	**Masculine**	**Feminine**	
a.	Alejandr**o**	Alejandr**a**	like *alumno/alumna*
b.	Juan	Juan**a**	like *bailarín/bailarina*
c.	René	René	like *estudiante*
d.	Enrique	Enrique**ta**	like *poeta/poetisa*

However, this set of data is incomplete: Human Cloning is seemingly not comprehensive of all proper names (not even of the majority of them), as shown in (3).

(3)	**Name**	**Grammatical gender**	**Word marker**
a.	Mariel**a**	only feminine	-a
b.	Carmen	only feminine	-∅
c.	Ampar**o**	only feminine	-o
d.	Franc**o**	only masculine	-o
e.	Héctor	only masculine	-∅
f.	Luc**as**	only masculine	-Vs
g.	Bautist**a**	only masculine	-a

One might be tempted to equate these Human Cloning non-conforming names to non-human names, but this seems an ad-hoc move in view of the fact that these proper names behave as human DPs in all other respects (e.g., differential object marking).

In summary, a significant portion of proper names are not mated in the way common human nouns are; that is, a male and female form do not necessarily exist for the same name. The assumption that proper names are predicates in a sense entails that proper names should, at least generally, be affected by the one rule that seems overarching over all common human nouns.

Predicative uses: problems with pluralization of non-bare proper names

Pluralized or modified proper names are usually interpreted as something along the lines of *'person named x'*. Yet, gender resolution on predicative uses of proper names points out to the conclusion that, again, they do not behave as common nouns. Since gender in Spanish works as a privative system with masculine as its unmarked gender, it is expected that the plural masculine of a human noun includes both male and female individuals. This is indeed the case for common nouns, but, as shown in (4), not for proper names.

(4) a. Todos los profesores que conozco son inteligentes.

    'Every professor I know is intelligent'

  b. Todos los Alejandros que conozco son inteligentes.

    'Every Alejandro I know is intelligent'

While (4a) includes men and women who are professors, (4b) does not include men named Alejandro and women named Alejandra. Not even 'neuter' names behave as expected. Take for example the case of shortenings: forms like *Ale* can stem from both *Alejandro* or *Alejandra*, but the same effect is observed. (5a) and (5b) can only refer to exclusively male groups, that's why a mixed interpretation cannot be forced.

(5) a. #Los Ale(s) que conozco, *hombres y mujeres*, son amables.

    '#The Ales I know, men and women, are nice.'

  b. #Ambos Ale(s), *el chico y la chica,* llamaron ayer.

    '#Both Ales, the boy and the girl, called yesterday.'

On the other hand, when there is no determiner or quantifier with a masculine mark, the inclusive interpretation is available, as seen in (6a) and (6b).

(6) a. Cada Ale que conozco, *sea hombre o mujer,* entrena.

    'Each Ale I know, man or woman, trains'

  b. Tres Ale(s), *dos hombres y una mujer*, vinieron ayer .

    'Three Ales, two men and a woman, came yesterday'

The same cannot be said for last names: as seen in (7), the name *Fernández,* used as a predicate, can include men and women in all the contexts *Ale* only includes men. This shows that first names in particular have their own distinctive pattern, radically different from common names.

(7) a. Los Fernández que conozco, *hombres y mujeres*, son amables.

    'The Fernández I know, men and women, are nice.'

  b. Ambos Fernández, *el chico y la chica,* llamaron ayer.

    'Both Fernández, the boy and the girl, called yesterday.'

What the evidence shows is simply the fact that, in regards to gender, human proper names do not behave in the same manner human common names do, whether we observe them in referential contexts (this is, with no determiner) or in predicative ones (modified and pluralized). Subsequently, this is, at the very least, challenging to theories that posit a unified category for all nouns/names. Furthermore, it says something about the way gender manifests in proper names: in contrast to what we know about common nouns, it appears to be inherent instead of inflectional; equipollent as opposed to privative.

References

Harris, James. 1991. The Exponence of Gender in Spanish. *Linguistic Inquiry* 22: 65-88.