

Interpretability by Merge: the implicit argument of evaluative adjectives

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1 Introduction

1.1 Relativism vs. Contextualism

The semantics of **evaluative adjectives** (EA), in particular the semantics of **predicates of personal taste** (PPT), (1), has been the object of a debate between relativist proposals (Lasersohn 2005; Stojanovic 2007) and contextualist proposals (Sæbø 2009; Schaffer 2011; Pearson 2013).

According to **relativism**, the semantics for PPT must include an interpretation function with a judge parameter along with the rest of circumstances of evaluation (1a). According to **contextualism**, PPT include an implicit experiencer argument lexically associated with their argument structure, (1b).

(1) El salmón está sabroso. (“The salmon is tasty”)

- a. $\llbracket \text{El salmón está sabroso} \rrbracket^{c,w,t,j} = 1$ iff the salmon is tasty to j in w, t
- b. $\llbracket \text{El salmón está sabroso } pro_j / PRO_j \rrbracket^{c,w,t} = 1$ iff the salmon is tasty to j in w, t

Goals of the talk:

- Provide syntactic evidence in favour of the contextualist proposal based on the behavior of **depictive secondary predication** and the feature specification of the implicit argument of PPT.
- Extend this evidence to include other classes of EA: **extreme-degree adjectives**, (*genial*, *wonderful*-type adjectives), and **adjectives of physical appearance**, (*bonito*, *beautiful*-type adjectives) (also McNally and Stojanovic (2017)).
- Argue in favor of a merge-based approach to argument structure (Hale and Keyser 2002; Collins 2022).

1.2 A short review of properties of PPT

Properties of PPT (Umbach 2020)

- Faultless disagreement
- They can take experiential arguments

- Embedding under subjective-attitude verbs like *find*, *encontrar*

Faultless disagreement

- (2) Disagreement about matter of taste or valuation: either party may be right

Silvia: El salmón está sabroso.
 the salmon is tasty
 'The salmon is tasty'

Isabel: No, no lo está.
 no no it is
 'No, it is not.'

Faulty disagreement

- (3) Disagreement about facts of the matter: one party must be wrong

Silvia: La glicerina es soluble.
 the glycerol is soluble
 'Glycerol is soluble'

Isabel: No, no lo es.
 no no it is
 'No, it is not.'

They can take experiential arguments.

- (4) El salmón está sabroso [para Elsa]
 The salmon is tasty to Elsa
 'The salmon is tasty to Elsa'

- (5) *La glicerina es soluble [para Elsa]
 The glycerol is soluble to Elsa

Embedding under subjective-attitude verbs.

- (6) a. Encuentro el salmón sabroso.
 find.1SG the salmon tasty
 'I find the salmon tasty.'
- b. *Encuentro la glicerina soluble.
 find.1SG the glycerol soluble

Embedding of extreme-degree adjectives and aesthetic adjectives.

- (7) a. Encuentro la película horrible.
 find.1SG the movie awful
 ??I find the movie awful
- b. Encuentro el cuadro hermoso.
 find.1SG the cuadro beautiful
 ??I find the painting beautiful

2 Depictive Secondary Predicates and PPT

We will argue in favor of the contextualist proposal for the semantics of PPT, and, in general of EA: the implicit argument of EA is **syntactically projected**.

The implicit argument of EA can be the subject of an adjoined small clause with a **depictive secondary predicate**, (8), SP. The implicit argument is syntactically active and it can establish a predication relation, under the assumption that secondary predicates are licensed by a local c-commanding DP (Williams 1980; Demonte 1987).

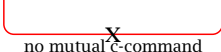
- (8) a. El salmón está sabroso **borracho**.
 The salmon is tasty drunk.MASC
 'The salmon is tasty drunk.'
- b. El cine de Nolan está genial **dormido**.
 The movies of Nolan are great asleep.MASC
 'Nolan's movies are great asleep.'
- c. La plaza está hermosa **drogado**.
 The square is beautiful high.MASC
 'The public square is beautiful when high.'

2.1 Predication: mutual c-command

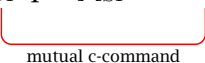
The implicit argument must be a **DP**, since only a DP (apart from sentences) can be the subject of an adjoined secondary predicate, **SP**.

- When the experiencer argument of the EA is overt, (9), it surfaces as a PP with *para* (*to* or *for* in English).
- The DP embedded in the PP cannot establish a predication relation with the secondary predicate since it requires local c-command (Demonte 1987).

- (9) *El salmón está sabroso para Elsa **borracha**
 The salmon is tasty to Elsa drunk.FEM
 (OK with comma intonation)

- (10) El salmón está sabroso [PP para [DP Elsa]] [SP borracha]
- 

- (11) El salmón está sabroso **borracho**
 The salmon is tasty drunk

- (12) El salmón está sabroso [DP pro] [SP borracho]
- 

2.2 Generic implicit argument

- The implicit argument of the EA is a **DP with a generic interpretation** when it is modified by a depictive secondary predicate.
- The generic interpretation of null arguments in Spanish requires that the set of ϕ -features of *pro* includes the features [-feminine] and [-plural].

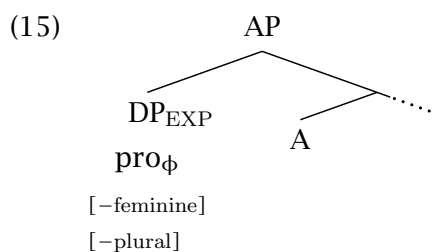
The implicit argument of EA when generic is **incompatible with feminine agreement** in the secondary predicate, SP, (13) (Rizzi 1986).

- (13) a. *El salmón está sabroso [SPborrach-a]
 the salmon is tasty drunk-FEM
- b. *El cine de Nolan está genial [SPdormid-a]
 the cinema of Nolan is great asleep-FEM
- c. *La plaza está hermosa [SPdrogad-a]
 the square is beautiful high-FEM

The implicit argument of EA when generic is **incompatible with plural agreement** in the secondary predicate, SP, (14) (Bosque 2015).

- (14) a. *El salmón está sabroso [SPborrach-os]
 the salmon is tasty drunk-MASC.PL
- b. *El cine de Nolan está genial [SPdormid-os]
 the cinema of Nolan is great asleep-MASC.PL
- c. *La plaza está hermosa [SPborrach-os]
 the square is beautiful high-MASC.PL

The generic implicit argument of EA when construed with SP has the following feature specification.



3 Generic argument as null *uno/one*

Our proposal is that the implicit generic experiential argument of EA is an **unpronounced version of *uno/one*** (RAE-ASALE 2009; Moltmann 2010).

The implicit generic experiential argument of EA cannot be interpreted as a **semantic plural argument**: it is incompatible with the adverbial *a la vez/at the same time*, (16b), which requires reference to a plural argument to individuate events (16a), (Landau 2010).

- (16) a. El salmón está sabroso para ellas a la vez.
 The salmon is tasty to them.FEM.PL at the same.time
 b. *El salmón está sabroso *pro*_{EXP} a la vez

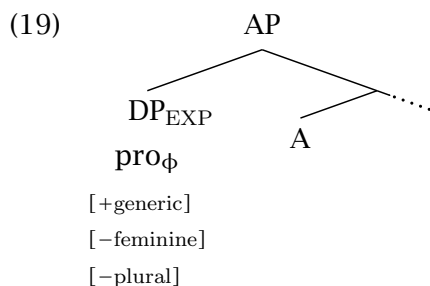
The implicit generic experiential argument of EA is different from other implicit non-referential arguments like the null subject of clauses, (Bosque 1988).

- (17) a. **pro**_{ARB} llaman a la puerta a la vez.
 they.ARB are.knocking at the door at the same.time
 b. Hay que **PRO**_{ARB} llamar a la puerta a la vez.
 there.is that PRO.ARB to-knock at the door at the same.time
 'We have have to knock at the door at the same time'

The implicit generic experiential argument of EA has modal force, since acceptability improves with a modal element like **soler** ('used to') or **deber de** ('may') as in (18), (see on passives, Demonte (1986)).

- (18) a. El salmón solía estar sabroso *pro*_{EXP} **borracho**.
 The salmon used-to be tasty pro drunk
 b. El cine de Nolan suele estar genial *pro*_{EXP} **dormido**
 The cinema of Nolan uses-to be great pro asleep
 c. La plaza debe de estar hermosa *pro*_{EXP} **drogado**
 The public.square may be beautiful pro high

The generic implicit argument of EA when construed with SP includes the feature [+generic].



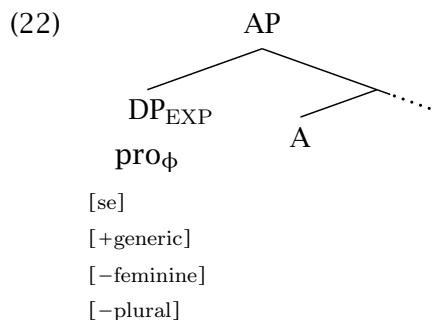
The pronoun **uno/one** is a generalisation projected either on the basis of the speaker's own experience... (Moltmann (2010) and RAE-ASALE (2009, §15.8m)).

The pronoun **uno/one** would include a **logophoric feature [se]** that is responsible for the connection to the speaker... (Malamud 2012).

- (20) $\llbracket se \rrbracket = \lambda x. \text{author}(x)$

- (21) a. El salmón está sabroso para **uno**_[se]
 The salmon is tasty to one
 b. El salmón está sabroso **pro**_[se]
 The salmon is tasty to pro.AUTH

The generic implicit argument of EA when construed with SP includes the feature [se].



Why does the presence of a SP force the interpretation *pro* [+generic]? (Remember (8))

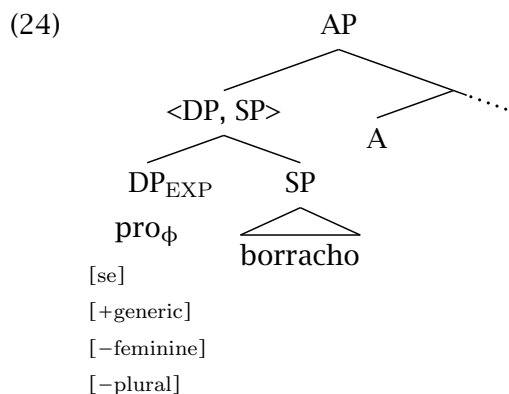
(23) El salmón está sabroso [DP pro] [SP borracho]

The pronoun *uno/one* is a generalisation projected either on the basis of the speaker's own experience... or **through the speaker taking the perspective of each person in a relevant set**.

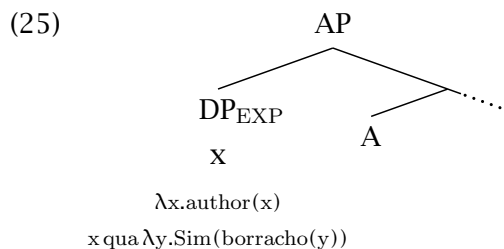
This perspectivization is done through a **Simulation** relation that relates an individual *x* as a **simulated member of the set defined by the relevant property** (Moltmann (2010) and RAE-ASALE (2009, §15.8m)).

The SP provides the property to simulate the perspective of each person and generalize from it and from the experience of the speaker.

The SP is introduced as a **supplement** of the DP.

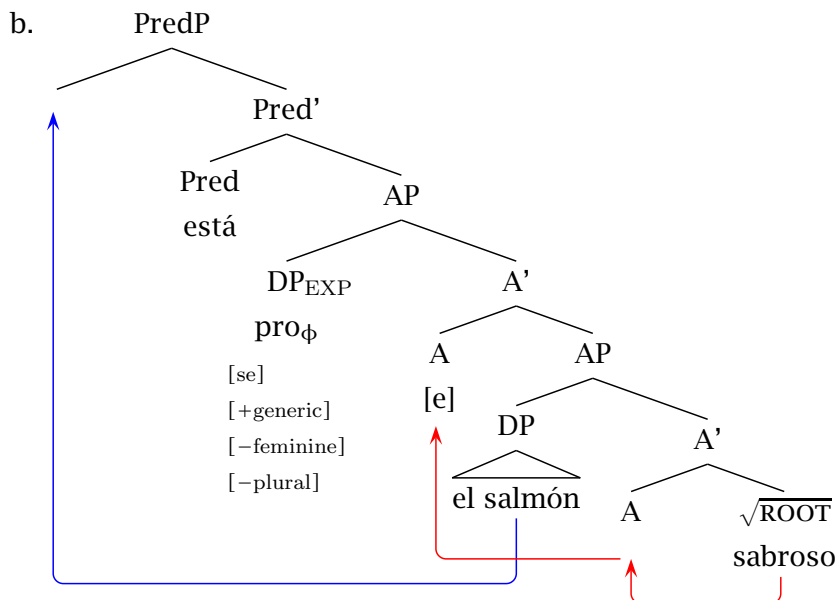


The **Simulation** relation provides the means to take the perspective of each person extracted from the relevant domain, in this case, the set of drunk people (Malamud 2012).



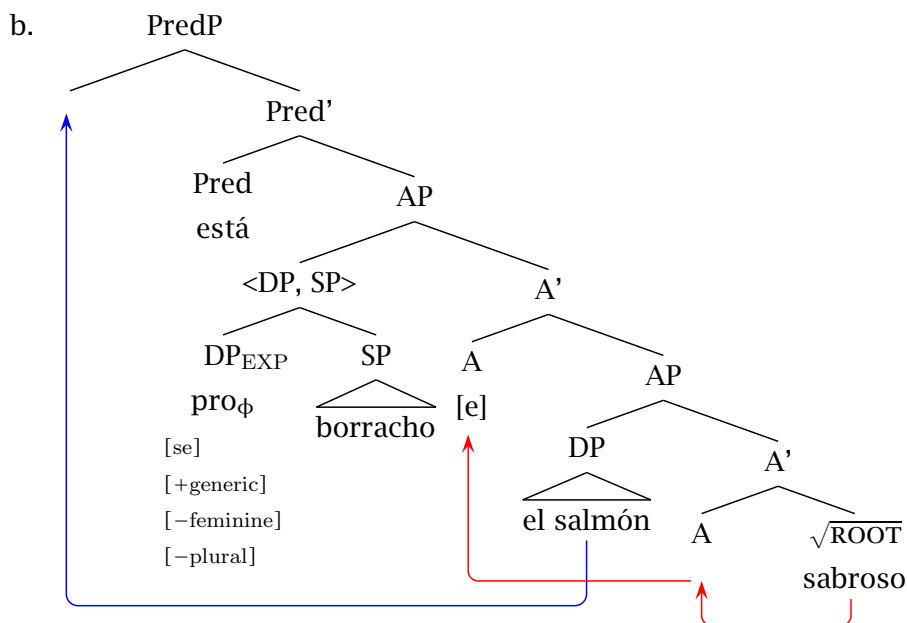
The implicit experiential argument of the EA merges as a [DP pro] in a Larsonian adjectival shell. Head movement of A to the adjectival shell extends the phase.

(26) a. El salmón está sabroso *pro*_{EXP}



The SP is merged as a supplement to [DP *pro*] and it induces the generic interpretation.

(27) a. El salmón está sabroso [DP *pro*] [SP borracho]



4 Conclusions

- We provided evidence that the implicit argument of EA is active syntactically since it can license a SP.
- When combined with a SP, the implicit argument of EA tends to be interpreted generically since the SP provides the property to construct the Simulation relation and, then, to generalize from the perspective of each person in the relevant domain.

- The generic implicit argument of *is* is specified as $\phi=\{[se], [+generic], [-feminine], [-plural]\}$ when combined with a SP.
- We provided evidence in favour of the contextualist position in the semantics of PPT, and, in general, of EA.

5 Questions for discussion

The pronoun *uno* can also be [-feminine] even when used by female speakers.

- (28) a. Sara: “No hubo cambios importantes en los gastos de la familia después de que me dieron el préstamo. Lo que cambió fue que pude comprar algunas cosas para la casa como adornos, o una mesita para la televisión, pero pocas cosas. Cosillas que a veces **uno** no puede y que compra así.¹”
(RAE-ASALE 2009, §15.8ñ)
- b. “There weren’t any important changes after I was granted de loan. What really changed was that I could buy some things for the houses like ornaments, a small table for the tv, but that was all. Small things such as these that one often cannot buy except in that way.”

The implicit argument of EA is part of the argument structure of the EA and not some kind of applicative dative. It can appear in context where the EA is itself a SP with the same generic interpretation.

- (29) a. La plaza se ve bonita muerto./ *La plaza se ve ancha muerto
 b. La fiesta parecía fantástica borracho./ *La fiesta parece vendida borracho
 c. La pizza con piña sabe deliciosa muerto./ *La piña se ve redonda muerto
 d. La entrega de medallas se presenta divertida borracho./ *La entrega se presenta rápida borracho

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¹Costa Rica

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