

## The Dominican marker /-se/: a case for Expressive Morphology

In popular Dominican Spanish, speakers tend to produce the overt marker /-(e)se/ so that singulars *mujer* ‘woman’ and *gallina* ‘hen’ turn into the respective plurals *mujérese*, and *gallínase*. Traditionally dubbed ‘double plurals’, Núñez Cedeño (1980, 2003) and Harris (1980, 1999) advanced standard generative and distributed morpho-phonological explanations of its formation and distribution, followed by Terrell (1986), who discussed it from a functional-based approach. In his 2003 study, Núñez Cedeño proposed that grammar alone is not sufficient to account for this plural process, even when it ensures good phonological outputs. He provided an information structure account suggesting that pragmatic factors guided speakers’ intentions in selecting specific, well-defined grammatical contexts where they insert that marker. He claimed that when constituents are focused in argument (subjects, in traditional grammar) or predicate structure positions, they are marked with /-(e)se/. More recently, Colina (2006) has also attempted to tackle the process. While endorsing Núñez-Cedeño’s focusing hypothesis, Colina nonetheless dismisses his and all previous analyses which postulate separate plural morphemes to explain the surfacing /-(e)se/. Instead, she proposes an optimality-oriented analysis arguing both that the regular plural is formed on an underlying plural /-s/, which is regulated by a constraint that prevents it from surfacing in word-final position, and that an idiosyncratic focal constraint licenses its phonetic realization in prominent position.

In this paper I am proposing a three-pronged approach to counter both the underlying plural /s/ hypothesis and the informational structure analyses mentioned above. Firstly, I also maintain that the “double plural” does not exist, but *contra* Colina’s, I propose that /-e/, not /-s/, is the sole, regular plural marker to which /-se/ will pragmatically attach. To support this claim, I rely on extant and additional data coming from popular Dominican speech showing there is no documented proof of a final [s] which supposedly is the reflex of plural marker /-s/. That regular plural formation in this vernacular is expressed through the single morpheme /-e/ is attested by singular words ending in /d, r, l, n, s/, the only permissible consonants in coda positions. The singulars /uted/ (standard /usted/ ‘you’), /trator/ (standard /traktor/ ‘tractor’, /motel/ (/motel/ ‘motel’), /kamjon/ (/kamjon/ ‘truck’) and /mes/ (/mes/ ‘month’) thus become the respective plurals [utéde], [tratóre], [motéle], [kamjóne], and [mese]. The fact that [s] surfaces in this last form, and in others such as the plural [ekosése] (standard /eskoseses/ ‘Scotsmen’), among others, provide clear evidence that it must have a lexical referent /s/, whose deletion is easily accounted for by any theoretical model.

If, on the contrary, a word ends in a vowel, no marker is added; thus the plural for *casa*, ‘house’ *concho*, ‘car used for public transportation,’ and *tomate* ‘tomato’ are the homophonic [kasa], [končo] and [tomáte], respectively. In these cases, syntax provides other means for recovering the notion of plurality, as in *vario tomate* ‘several tomatoes’, where ‘vario’ (standard *varios*) triggers a following plural noun.

Secondly, I am considering recent data collected in fieldwork interviews which show that Núñez-Cedeño’s arguments (2003), and by extension all those based on his study, cannot hold because /-se/ realization is limited not only to focused positions but to contrastive and topicalized constituents. Therefore, given the generality of its occurrences in specified syntactic domains, the focus and predicate arguments previously

offered fail. Thirdly, I am proposing the novel idea that /-se/ is not a traditional plural morpheme but an extra-linguistic marker used by speakers, under some restricted phonological conditions, as an expressive morphological marker (Labov 1972, Woodbury 1987, Zwicky and Pullum 2004). /-se/ is an enhancer which lends support to the Expressive Morphology hypothesis because the realization of the former meets many of the conditions that define the latter. To mention a few: it signals that the item it attaches to is semantically plural, i.e., speakers would never say the phrase *\*tengo un mán-gose* but the expected *tengo uno mangose* ‘I have a few mangoes’, where the indefinite article *un* ‘a’ in the first sentence denotes a singular meaning, thereby disrupting the expected agreement with its following plural noun, as the second sentence shows; it is only used by some speakers, especially by those with low schooling-, it is an alternative to the regular plural marker /-e/ or standard /-s/, i.e., *maní* > *manise* ‘peanut(s)’, instead of *\*manie* or *\*maní(e)s*; it shows promiscuity in regard to the bases it attaches to, for example, it not only occurs in nouns but also in adverbs and prepositions, which are never inflected in regular Spanish, as in *arribase* < *arriba* ‘up there’; and it shows promiscuity in regard to input basehood, for instance, it attaches to forms already inflected for plurality, as in *mujerese* < *mujere* never *\*mujerse*. The proposal of a unique /-e/ is not only novel to Spanish phonology but it coherently and factually explains observed alternations in Dominican without having to posit abstract representations. Additionally, /-se/ adds to regularly formed plural markers expressive meanings, though its manifestation is linguistically constrained, as it occurs in English, Yupik Eskimo, Hixkaryana, Bambara, and in many other languages.

### *Selected references*

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