Lo interessante: syntax and semantics of the so-called neuter definite article in Spanish

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In this talk (prepared in collaboration with Renato García González and Mayra García Rodriguez), I discuss the referential uses of the particle *lo* in Spanish (illustrated in 1 and 2), which has been traditionally identified as a neuter definite article (e.g., RAE & ASALE, 2009), although the language does not currently have neuter grammatical gender and *lo* cannot (overtly) be complemented by NPs.

1) *Lo dañado.*
   LO damaged
   ‘What is damaged.’
2) *Lo rojo de tu ojo.*
   LO red of your eye
   ‘The redness of your eye.’

First, I will show that there exist two types of *lo*-DPs, well-differentiated both morphosyntactically and semantically. *Lo*-DPs of type A (in 1): i) refer to maximal portions or pluralities of inanimate objects; ii) can be constituted of *lo* + AdjP (always headed by a masculine, singular adjective), *lo* + bound relative clause, or *lo* + PP (headed by de ‘of’); iii) can substitute *lo* by a neuter demonstrative; iv) can be quantified by *todo* ‘all’. *Lo*-DPs of type B (in 2): i) refer to unique properties exhibited by a particular individual; ii) can only be constituted of *lo* + AdjP (always headed by an adjective agreeing in gender and number with the individual holding the property); iii) must include an adjective complemented by a PP headed by de ‘of’ (which specifies the holder of the property, unless this is retrievable contextually); iv) cannot replace *lo* by a neuter demonstrative; v) cannot be quantified by *todo* ‘all’.

Next, I will discuss and dismiss the possibility of adopting McNally & de Swart’s (2015) analysis of nounless definite DPs in Dutch to account for *lo*-DPs. Following them, in the DPs of type A, *lo* combines with a small clause containing a null pronominal DP as a subject and a AdjP or a PrepositionP or a bound relative clause as a predicate. The result has the semantics of a free relative clause. In contrast, in the DPs of type B, *lo* directly combines with an AdjP headed by an adjective with an argument corresponding to the individual holding the designated property. The result is a construction referring to the holder’s property. This analysis cannot easily account for some of the facts in Spanish, one of them being the agreement patterns displayed by the adjectives.

Finally, I will propose an alternative account for *lo*-DPs, which retrieves Kester’s (1996) arguments for analysing nounless definite DPs in terms of null nouns. I will propose that both types of *lo*-DPs are headed by null nouns that are defective in gender; the difference between type A and type B, is that the former contains a mass noun denoting sets of inanimate individuals, whereas the latter contains a relational noun that can be paraphrased like nature/aspect (of). This analysis, which in a way is an adaptation of McNally & de Swart’s, is consistent with the way the particle *lo* originated during the evolution from Latin to Spanish.