When your associates tag along: Associative plurality in Rural Iberian Spanish proper names

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1. Introduction

'Additive plural' expressions refer to a homogeneous plurality (i.e. a group) of individuals that all bear the same property. These plural expressions are distinct from 'associative plural' expressions. The latter refer to a non-homogeneous plurality consisting of a salient individual, known as the focus, and other individuals who are different from the focus but stand in an association relation with it (Daniel & Moravcsik 2013). The plural-marked named serves as the focus. The two different expressions are illustrated in (1), with pseudo-English.[1]

(1) a. *Mary*-ADD.PL 'many Marys' b. *Mary*-ASC.PL 'Mary & her associates'

Descriptively, it seems that languages with both additive and associative plurality can be classified into two types: `type 1` languages morphologically mark additive and associative each differently. As illustrated in (2), Afrikaans has a dedicated associative marker which is different from the additive plural marker: *-hulle* vs. *-s* (den Besten 1996). The other type of languages, i.e. `type 2`, morphologically mark both the same. For example, Turkish in (3) has a single plural marker, e.g. *-ler*, and yet the expression may be understood in two different ways (Görgülü 2011).[2]

(2) a. suster-s
sister-ADD.PL
'sisters'

b. suster-hulle
sister-ASC.PL
'the sister & her associates' (*Afrikaans*)

(3) Ahmet-ler
Ahmet-PL
ADD.PL: 'Many Ahmets', ASC.PL: 'Ahmet & his associates' (*Turkish*)

Lewis (2023, 2024) observes that `type 1` and `type 2` languages differ in their ability to express articles, and establishes the generalization in (4).[3]

(4) *Lewis's generalization:* All `type 2` languages lack free-standing definite articles (they have affixal definite articles or lack definite articles).

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[1] Glosses: ADD.PL 'additive plural'; ASC.PL 'associative plural'; DEF 'definite'; DOM 'differential object marking'; DU 'dual'; F 'feminine'; M 'masculine'; PL 'plural'; POSS 'possessive'; SG 'singular'; THV 'theme vowel'.

[2] As opposed to additive plural expressions, associative plural expressions are generally restricted to names or kinship terms: (i) from Turkish (Görgülü 2011). Expressions referring to non-homogenous pluralities that are not restricted to humans do exist, e.g. similatives (see e.g. Smith 2020).

(i) kitap-ler
book-PL
ADD.PL: 'books', #ASC.PL: 'books and related items'

[3] Lewis refers to `type 2` as 'the plural pattern'. Lewis discusses and analyzes some purported counterexamples to (4). Those generally involve demonstratives or 3rd person plural pronouns.

Taking free-standing articles as evidence for there being a D-layer in the extended projection of the NP (e.g., Bošković 2005, 2010), Lewis attributes the lack of dedicated associative marking to a difference in projecting D. In other words, `type 2` languages are set for the negative value of the [±DP] parameter.

Lewis' generalization in (4) predicts that a `type 2` language that also has free-standing articles is impossible. Here, we show that Rural Iberian Spanish (RIS) is such a language: plural-marked first names can have an associative understanding when occurring with the plural-marked definite article, e.g. (5).[4]

(5) Vimos a lo-s Roman-e-s allí
saw.1PL DOM the.M-PL Roman-THV-PL there
ADD.PL: 'We saw the many individuals named Román there'
ASC.PL: 'We saw Román & his associates there'

In a situation where we are talking about Román, his wife María, and their children, (5) is only felicitous if understood associatively. (5) is a genuine counterexample to (4): there is only one and the same marker, i.e. *-s*, which surfaces on the determiner and the noun. Outside of first names, this is how (additive) plural-marking works in the language, e.g. (6). In addition, *el/los* 'the.M/ the.M.PL' are not affixes, like definite markers in other languages (e.g. Danish, Hankamer & Mikkelsen 2008; Amharic Kramer 2010) but standalone articles.

(6) Lo-s estudiant-e-s
the.M-PL student-THV-PL
'the students'

Our goal is to concentrate on definite and plural-marked first names in RIS.[5] In particular, why do first names in a `type 2` language like RIS admit an associative and additive understanding? Despite their identical surface forms, we argue that each understanding in (5) corresponds to a distinct underlying syntactic structure. While both project Number[PL], only associative plural names are referential expressions like bare unmarked proper names (e.g. *Román, John*) and as such bear a definite proprial article (e.g. Ghomeshi & Massam 2009, Muñoz 2019, Pancheva & Cao 2025). Associative plural names, however, differ from bare unmarked proper names in (a) the presence of a R(elator) head, introducing the association (e.g. den Dikken 2023), and (b) Number[PL], higher than R but lower than D, responsible for number-marking. While we leave a detailed discussion of variation in morphological marking between languages for future research, the upshot is that (cross-linguistic) variation cannot be reduced to different values of the [±DP] parameter.

2. First names in RIS

Definite, referential and plural-marked. The plural definite determiner is obligatory for the associative understanding. If it is absent, as in (7), the proper name is only understood additively. Plural marking on the first name is also obligatory; in fact, an expression with a plural definite determiner and an unmarked first name is ungrammatical, e.g. (8).

[4] Most speakers of RIS (20/33) were from rural Valladolid (the area known as 'Tierra de Pinares'). The rest were from the rural part of northern Madrid (6/33), rural Córdoba around Puertollano (5/33) and rural Cuenca (2/33). The phenomenon may not be limited to just Spain, as some speakers of Mexican Spanish accept the RIS sentences.

[5] While speakers of General Spanish do not seem to accept the first name data like (5), they do accept last names with an associative plural understanding. Crucially, though, as described by Camacho (2021), the definite determiner must be plural-marked, but the last name cannot. Compare (ii) with (iii). Due to space limitations, we leave the comparison between first and last name expressions for the future. But see Kumaran & Toquero-Pérez (2025) for preliminary discussion.

(ii) Lo-s Toquer-o
the.M-PL Toquer-THV
#ADD.PL: 'The many Toqueros'
ASC.PL: 'The Toquero group/family'

(iii) Lo-s Toquer-o-s
the.M-PL Toquer-THV-PL
ADD.PL: 'The many Toqueros'
#ASC.PL: 'The Toquero group/family'

(7) Vimos a Roman-e-s allí
saw.1PL DOM Roman-THV-PL there
ADD.PL: 'We saw many Romanes there'
#ASC.PL: 'We saw Román & his associates there'

(8) * Vimos a lo-s Román allí
saw.1PL DOM the.M-PL Roman there

Further support for the idea that syntactic definiteness, as marked by the definite article, is required comes from partitives. The *of-* complement of a partitive requires a definite NP (Jackendoff 1977), e.g. (9). Plural-marked first names are grammatical in this position, e.g. (10).

(9) una parte de *(lo-s) estudiant-e-s
a.F part of the.M-PL student-THV-PL
'some of the students'

(10) [Only Hugo and his son Bruno came; his wife Carolina, and their daughters didn't]
una parte de *(lo-s) Hug-o-s
a.F part of the.M-PL Hugo-THV-PL
'a part of the group comprised by Hugo & his associates'

In addition, plural-marked first names with an associative understanding are referential. As shown by Chung et al. (1995), referential expressions such as names cannot serve as the antecedent for a sluice. This is shown in (11): sluicing in the second conjunct fails because the antecedent is an bare unmarked proper name *Hugo*.Names that are not referential expressions, such as the bare plural-marked name in (12), are exempt from this restriction. This indicates that plural-marked first names understood additively, like common count nouns, are not referential expressions.

(11) * María cenó con Hug-o, pero nunca supimos con quién (exactamente)
María dined with Hugo-THV but never knew.1PL with who exactly
'María had dinner with Hugo, but we never knew with whom/who (exactly)'

(12) María cenó con Hug-o-s, pero nunca supimos con quién-e-s (exactamente)
María dined with Hugo-THV-PL but never knew.1PL with who-THV-PL exactly
'María had dinner with (some) Hugos, but we never knew with whom/who (exactly)'

Plural-marked first names under the associative understanding pattern like bare unmarked proper names. We take this property, illustrated in (13), as evidence for their referential status.

(13) [María had dinner with Hugo, his wife and their children]
* María cenó con lo-s Hug-o-s, pero nunca supimos con quién-e-s (
María dined with the.M-PL Hugo-THV-PL but never knew.1PL with who-THV-PL
exactamente)
exactly
'María had dinner with Hugo & his associates, but we never knew with whom/who (exactly)'

Modification. Size adjectives can modify the definite plural-marked first name without blocking the associative understanding. This is true regardless of whether the adjective is pre- or postnominal: (14).

(14) Lo-s (pequeño-s) Roman-e-s (pequeño-s) llegaron
the.M-PL little.M-PL Roman-THV-PL little.M-PL arrived
ADD.PL: 'the many young Romanes arrived'
ASC.PL: 'the young members of the group comprised of Román & his associates arrived'

Modification by numerals is also possible. Suppose we are in a context where only Román and his wife María have been invited, but their children have not. (15), with an associative understanding, is acceptable in that context.

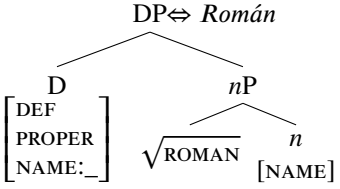
(15) Invitaron solo a #(lo-s) dos Roman-e-s adulto-s.
invited.3PL only DOM the.M-PL two Roman-THV-PL adult-PL
'they only invited the two adult members of the group comprised of Román & his associates'

Summary. First names with an additive and associative understanding both require plural-marking on the name and any agreeing NP-internal modifiers. Both are also compatible with size adjective modifiers and numerals. However, they differ in two crucial ways: plural-marked first names understood associatively are obligatorily definite and referential; those understood additively need not be.

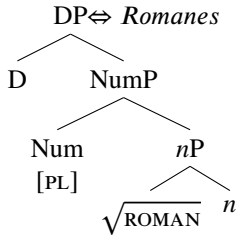
3. The syntax of name-expressions

Following e.g. Ghomeshi & Massam (2009), Muñoz (2019), and Saab & Lo Guercio (2019), we assume that bare unmarked proper names understood referentially have the syntax in (16). We propose that plural-marked names understood additively, however, have the syntax of common count nouns: (17).

(16) bare unmarked (referential)



(17) additive plural (non-referential)

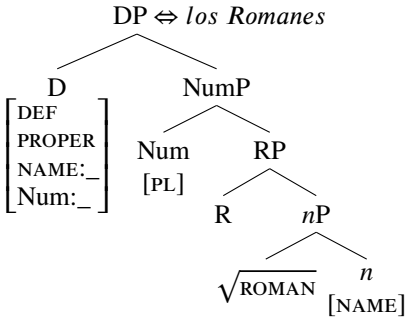


Bare unmarked names in (16) have a feature [NAME] on *n* and a covert definite proprial article, i.e. D[DEF, PROPER], that heads the DP. We propose that the [NAME] feature on *n* must be licensed under `Agree` with a [NAME:__] probe, which is only borne by D[DEF, PROPER], forcing the obligatoriness of the proprial article with referential expressions.

Plural-marked names understood additively in (17) are non-referential, and thus they lack *n*[NAME] and D[DEF, PROPER]; but like common count nouns (e.g. *book*), they project Number. *n* lacks a [NAME] feature, so D is not required to be definite or proper. Thus these expressions may appear bare (without a determiner, e.g., (7)) or with non-definite determiners including but not limited to indefinites (e.g. *unos* 'a few') and demonstratives (e.g. *estos* 'these'). Num[PL] is the locus of plural-marking (e.g. Ritter 1991, Picallo 2008), and its presence enables size adjective modification and numerals, e.g. Borer (2005) and Toquero-Pérez (2025).[6]

We hypothesize that plural-marked first names understood associatively are referential plural expressions. The proposed syntactic representation is in (18).

(18) associative plural (referential)



[6] In terms of their semantics, we consider that plural-marked names understood additively are extensionally no different from common plural count nouns: they both denote predicates or properties of pluralities of individuals.

(iv) a. $[\![I\ saw\ students]\!] = \exists x$: [$x$: $x \in$ sum $\wedge$ *student(x)][saw(I, x)]
'There is an x, x a sum of individuals who are students, and I saw x'

b. $[\![I\ saw\ Romanes]\!] = \exists x$: [$x$: $x \in$ sum $\wedge$ *Román(x)][saw(I, x)]
There is an x, x a sum of individuals named Román, and I saw x'

As referential expressions, they have a proprial definite article and a [NAME] feature on the categorizer.[7] This explains why, like bare unmarked proper names, they must be obligatorily definite and they cannot act as antecedents for sluicing. As plurals, they must project Num[PL]. Consequently, the facts about modification by size adjectives and numerals follow.

But unlike (16) and (17), they also project a R(elator) head (in the sense of den Dikken 2023). R is the locus of (covert) associative-marking; it takes the *n*P, consisting of *n*[NAME] and the root, as its complement. [PL] on Num is the locus of plural-marking. While R is not mapped to any overt exponent at the point of Vocabulary Insertion (VI), [PL] is spelled out as usual, i.e. *-s* adjacent to the relevant theme vowel. We assume that theme vowels, realized as *-o, -a, ø/-e*, are always inserted and adjoined to the *n*-node post-syntactically (e.g. Oltra-Massuet & Arregi 2005, Embick 2010, Kramer 2015). The VI rules for the morphemes in RIS are given in (19).

(19) a. $\sqrt{\text{ROMAN}} \Leftrightarrow$ *Roman*
b. [THV3] $\Leftrightarrow -e/\_\_$[PL]
c. R $\Leftrightarrow \emptyset$
d. [PL] $\Leftrightarrow -s$

In terms of its semantic contribution, R is responsible for introducing the association relation. R will take the [NAME]-marked *n*P as its argument and create a set that contains the focus, their (contextually restricted) associates and their sums (i.e. focus+associate(s)). Assuming an exclusive interpretation of the plural morpheme (e.g. Chierchia 1998, Farkas & de Swart 2010, Harbour 2011), [PL] will restrict the extension of its argument, i.e. RP, to just the sums containing the focus and those associated with it. In a nutshell, we can represent this with the sets in (20).

(20) a. ⟦*n*P⟧= Román.
b. ⟦RP⟧= {Román, María, Miguel, Román+María, Román+Miguel ... Román+María+Miguel}.
c. ⟦NumP⟧= {Román+María, Román+Miguel ... Román+María+Miguel}.

4. Evidence for the proprial article

Nominal expressions that denote definite descriptions such as *the student* have been reported to allow both a bound and a rigid interpretation under universal quantifiers (e.g. Abbott 2002). The Spanish example in (21a) may be understood in two different ways: a different student wins every time (bound) and the same student wins every time (rigid). This contrasts with bare unmarked proper names, which resist being bound by universal quantifiers and can only be understood rigidly (Muñoz 2019): (21b).[8]

(21) En cada competición ...
in each competition ...

a. el estudiant-e gana el premio
the.M student-THV wins the prize
'the student (whoever they might be) wins the prize' rigid, bound

b. Román gana el premio
Román wins the prize
'Román wins the prize' rigid, *bound

Based on this contrast, Muñoz (2019) argues the following: (i) while both nominals occur with a D[DEF], said D is also marked [PROPER] in the case of bare unmarked proper names; and (ii) it is the feature [PROPER] that is responsible for the exclusively rigid interpretation. Applied to plural-marked names, we predict that those understood additively can receive both a rigid and bound interpretation whereas those understood associatively can only receive a rigid interpretation. This follows if only the latter have the feature [PROPER] as part of their representation, as we have proposed. The data is in (22).

[7] Pancheva & Cao (2025) also argue that expressions like *the three Musketeers* in Turkish pattern like associative plural names: they have D[DEF, PROPER]. They motivate this by showing that these expressions, despite having no overt determiner, cannot be bound by universal quantifiers.

[8] Interestingly, Davis (2025) describes a potential counterexample to this generalization in St'át'imcets: proper names may be rigid or bound. This has no bearing on our Spanish-internal argument, though.

(22) En cada competición ...
in each competition ...

a. [Román Herrero, Román García, Román Martín]
lo-s { Roman-e-s/ estudiant-e-s } ganan el premio
the.M-PL Roman-THV-PL student-THV-PL win the prize
'the {Romanes/ students} (whoever they might be) win the prize' rigid, bound

b. [Román, María and their children]
lo-s Roman-e-s ganan el premio
the.M-PL Roman-THV-PL win the prize
'(the same group of) Román & his associates wins the prize' rigid, *bound

The predictions are borne out: plural-marked names understood additively and common nouns in (22a) accept both interpretations, whereas plural-marked names understood associatively in (22b) cannot be bound.

5. Morpheme ordering

We have separated (additive) plural-marking on Num from associative marking on R. What is more, we have proposed that the former c-commands the latter. In RIS, only [PL] on Num is overt. But there might be languages where both terminals are overtly realized. In those languages, if our structure is descriptively adequate, we expect that the exponent realizing R is closer to the root than the exponent realizing [PL]. This follows from the observation encoded in the Mirror Principle (Baker 1985) that the order in which affixes appear reflects syntactic derivations.

The predicted morpheme order is instantiated in Yup'ik.[9] This language has an additive plural marker *-t* and a dual marker *-k* which can be affixed to the noun as in (23). The language also has an associative marker *-nku-* which surfaces between the root and the plural/dual marker (Corbett & Mithun 1996: 11, Corbett 2000: 108-109). This is shown in (24).

(23) qaya-t, qaya-k
kayak-ADD.PL kayak-DU
'Kayaks' 'two kayaks'

(24) a. Cuna-nku-t
Cuna-ASC.PL-ADD.PL
'Cuna and his friends'

b. Cuna-nku-k
Cuna-ASC.PL-DU
'Cuna and his friend'

These facts are readily accounted for by our proposed structure. What is more, languages like Yup'ik challenge accounts that locate associative plural marking higher than Number, and sometimes even higher than D (e.g. Nakanishi & Tomioka 2004, Görgülü 2011, Cinque 2018, Lewis 2023, 2024), as in (25). Their evidence is typically indirect based on the interaction between the associative and definiteness. More substantial for their claim is the Turkish data in (26).

(25) *alternative analysis:* $[_{\text{AscP}}$ Asc[PL] $[_{\text{DP}}$ D $[_{\text{NumP}}$ Num $[_{n\text{P}}$ n $\sqrt{}$]]]]

(26) a. teyze-ler-im
aunt-PL-1POSS.SG
'my aunts'

b. teyze-m-ler
aunt-1POSS.SG-PL
'my aunt & her associates'

If *-ler* precedes the 1st person singular possessor marker, e.g. (26a), the expression is understood additively; but if the order is reversed, e.g. (26b), it is understood associatively.[10] These facts, which

[9] This is also potentially the case in Greek: only when a last name is understood associatively, a vowel *-e-* appears between the last name and the plural marker *-i* (Camacho 2021: 12).

(v) Papadopoul-e-i
Papadopoul-THV-PL
'members of the Papadopoulos family.

(vi) Papadopoul-i
Papadopoul-PL
'Many Papadopouloses'

[10] It is unclear that these ordering facts are indicative of the purported height difference based on independent facts about Turkish morpheme orders. For example in nominalizations, plural-marking follows 1st/2nd person-possessive markers but not 3rd, even though both have an additive interpretation (Paparounas & Akkuş 2023).

seem to challenge our analysis, are consistent with approaches locating the associative high in the DP, but only if we assume that possessors are always generated higher than NumP (e.g. Abney 1987, Corver 1990).

However, it has been shown that possessors are not always generated high: possessors can surface high or low in the nominal domain depending on the type of possession relation (e.g. Alexiadou 2003, den Dikken 2015, Myler 2016, Oppong 2023, Adamson 2024) or the presence of certain case markers (e.g. Pleshak 2023). Therefore, we can hypothesize that the morpheme ordering facts in (26) are reflecting a difference in the encoding of possession, as opposed to a difference in the location of *-ler*. The underlying structures schematized in (27) are consistent with our proposed analysis.

(27) a. $[_{\text{DP}}\ [_{\text{NumP}}\ [_{n\text{P}}\ \sqrt{\text{TEYZE}}\ n]\ \text{Num[PL]}\ ]\ \text{D[POSS]}\ ]$
teyze -ler -im

b. $[_{\text{DP}}\ [_{\text{NumP}}\ [_{\text{RP}}\ [_{n\text{P}}\ \sqrt{\text{TEYZE}}\ n\text{[NAME]}\ ]\ \text{R[POSS]}\ ]\ \text{Num[PL]}\ ]\ \text{D[PROPER]}\ ]$
teyze -m -ler

6. Conclusion

We have shown that RIS constitutes a genuine counterexample to Lewis' generalization in (4): (a) plural-marked first names understood associatively have the same surface form as plural-marked first names understood additively and (b) the language has a stand-alone definite article. We have also argued, based on a series of diagnostics, that plural-marked first names understood associatively are obligatorily definite and referential, and cannot be bound by universal quantifiers. These are three properties that they share with bare unmarked proper names. Based on these similarities, we have analyzed these plural first names as having a proprial definite article.

This finding, i.e. the obligatory presence of D with proper and referential expressions, aligns with independently motivated claims that (bare unmarked) proper names universally require a proprial article, regardless of whether said article is overt, affixal or free (Ghomeshi & Massam 2009, Muñoz 2019). If our analysis and these independent claims are correct, it cannot be the case that variation in the domain of associative and additive marking is reducible to different values of the [±DP] parameter, as proposed by Lewis. Instead, the presence or absence of dedicated associative morphology will depend on the interplay of two factors: (A) the syntactic representation available to generate plural referential expressions; and (B) the rules of exponence for the relevant terminal nodes in the language. That is, different marking strategies emerge from the underlying syntactic structure alongside the conditions under which [PL] and R are exponed in each language, potentially leading to one or two dedicated surface forms.

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