

Quirks in Old Spanish Noun Paradigms: a case-study in inflectional morphology and its interfaces

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The paper aims to explain why some common nouns documented in Old Spanish (13th – 14th centuries) codices surface almost exclusively as singular forms, which happens in defiance of the fact that legal norms have potentially an unrestricted set of addressees. Moreover, the singular is pervasive irrespective of the syntactic architecture of NPs denoting individuals subject to regulations (bare nouns, DPs, NPs restricted by a relative clause or with a free-choice quantification)

*Sy **algun omne** se querellar **al iuyz de otro**. & **el iuyz non le quisier oyr o nol quier dar su seyello o le perlonga el pleyto** ... [Fuero Juzgo, fol. 14r] ‘If any man happens to lodge a complaint against another person before the judge and the judge refuses to conduct a hearing or to give them his seal, or defers their case ...’*

*Esto es por fuero de Castiella que sy **vn fijo dalgo** baraia con **otro fijo dalgo** ... (Seudo-Fernando III, *Libro de los fueros de Castilla*) ‘The Fuero of Castile orders that if a nobleman quarrels with another nobleman ...’*

*Otosi si **fidalgo** ouiere quereylla de **otro fidalgo** & fiador non podiere auer fagua le atal drecho como sobrescripto es* ... (Anónimo, *Fuero General de Navarra*; Versión B) ‘Furthermore, if a nobleman happens to quarrel with another nobleman and there can be no guarantor, he should do it the way it is written’

This semantics-morphology mismatch is assumed to be triggered by a series of four clustering parameters: i) type of inflection (plural tends to appear only as an instance of ‘contextual inflection’, see Booij, 1996, p. 2; Spencer, 2006, p. 108); ii) text genre characteristic (the singular is given preference over the plural in so-called ‘distance-pole’ texts, see Koch and Oesterreicher, 2011, p.135, pp. 148-152); iii) NP status (the singular is a default option in non-specifically / generically used NPs; Schwenter, 2014, pp. 245-246) and iv) syntactic environment: a closer inspection reveals that singular forms are pervasive after conditional *si* (see (Schwenter, 1999, p. 13-15). Moreover, rather than falling within the scope of ‘pure morphology’ (Aronoff, 1994, p. 25), the phenomenon under discussion is an instance of ‘morphological interfaces’ (Börjars and Vincent, 2011).

Two major conclusions can be drawn from this study: (i) of two competing hierarchies likely to account for formal variation in common nouns and to exert their influence on the choice of number, the Animacy Hierarchy (AH) is outweighed by the Definiteness Hierarchy ranking nominal items according to their quantifying force. Non-specificity coerces singular forms into becoming nearly all-encompassing, while plural is strongly underrepresented, even if a given common noun is highly ranked in the AH (see Corbett, 2000, p. 56); (ii) morphological interfaces should not be restricted to language-internal mechanisms (syntax – inflection, semantics – inflection, etc.). On the contrary, morphology can sometimes be shown to interact with other domains of life; e.g., the peculiar construal of legal regulations.

Keywords: inherent inflection, distance-pole texts, morphological interfaces, non-specific NP, non-canonical paradigms

Word count (including title, keywords and linguistic examples alongside their translations): 501

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