



Distribution and interpretation  
of the alleged neuter definite  
article "lo" in Spanish\*

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# Spanish *lo* particle

- 1) Me preocupa **lo rojo de tu ojo derecho.**  
me worry LO red of your eye right  
'I'm worried about the redness in your right eye'



# *Lo* is considered a neuter definite article

Although

- I. Spanish does not currently have neuter grammatical gender
- II. *Lo* usually cannot accompany nouns
- III. It is unclear whether *lo* is a determiner
- IV. *Lo* does not only occur in nominal domains
- V. It is not always evident that its meaning contribution is definiteness

# More illustrations of *lo*

which in one way or another are problematic for the characterization of the particle as a neuter definite article

- 2) Me encanta **lo verde del aceite de oliva**  
me love LO green of oil of olive  
'I love the greenness of olive oil'
- 3) Me preocupa **lo de Juan.**  
me worry LO of Juan  
'I'm worried about Juan's situation'
- 4) Eso es **lo que me dijeron**  
That is LO that me said  
'That is what they told me'
- 5) ¿Te contó Lía **lo desafinado que canta Fer?**  
You told Lía LO out-of-tune that sings Fer  
'Did Lía tell you how out of tune Fer sings?'
- 6) Lola no duerme **lo suficiente**  
Lola not sleep LO enough  
'Lola doesn't sleep enough'

# Aim of this talk

To provide a general overview of the different uses of *lo*.

# Outline

1. Emergence of the *lo* particle
2. Is *lo* a determiner or a pronoun?
3. Three uses of *lo*
4. Conclusions and plans for future research

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# Three relevant changes from Latin to Spanish

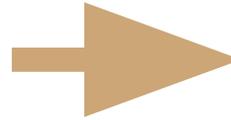
I. Loss of case system

II. Loss of neuter gender

III. Emergence of definite articles

# Loss of case system

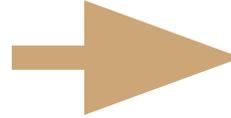
Latin noun <i>periculum</i> 'danger'		
	Singular	Plural
Nominative	Periculum	Pericula
Genitive	Periculi	Periculorum
Dative	Periculo	Periculis
Accusative	Periculum	Pericula
Ablative	Periculo	Periculis
Vocative	Periculum	Pericula



Spanish noun <i>peligro</i> 'danger'		
	Singular	Plural
	Peligro	Peligros

# Loss of neuter gender

Latin noun gender system		
Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Amicus	Rosa	Periculum



Spanish noun gender system	
Masculine	Feminine
Amigo	Rosa

# Loss of neuter gender

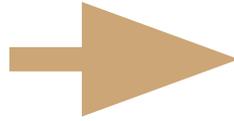
Latin neuter nouns
Periculum 'danger'
Mare 'sea'
Bellum 'war'



Spanish nouns	
Masculine	Feminine
Peligro 'danger'	
Mar 'sea'	
—	

# Emergence of definite articles

Latin demonstrative pronoun 'that'				
ille, illa, illud				
		M.	F.	N.
SING.	NOM.	ille	illa	illud
	GEN.	illius	illius	illius
	DAT.	illī	illī	illī
	ACC.	illum	illam	illud
	ABL.	illō	illā	illō
PLUR.	NOM.	illī	illae	illa
	GEN.	illōrum	illārum	illōrum
	DAT.	illis	illis	illis
	ACC.	illōs	illās	illa
	ABL.	illis	illis	illis

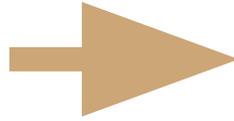


Spanish definite articles		
	M.	F.
SING.	el	la
PLUR.	los	las

lo

# Emergence of definite articles

Latin demonstrative pronoun 'that'				
ille, illa, illud				
		M.	F.	N.
SING.	NOM.	ille	illa	illud
	GEN.	illius	illius	illius
	DAT.	illī	illī	illī
	ACC.	illum	illam	illud
	ABL.	illō	illā	illō
PLUR.	NOM.	illī	illae	illa
	GEN.	illōrum	illārum	illōrum
	DAT.	illīs	illīs	illīs
	ACC.	illōs	illās	illa
	ABL.	illīs	illīs	illīs



Spanish definite articles		
	M.	F.
SING.	el	la
PLUR.	los	las

lo
----

# Neuter forms in Spanish

## I. Demonstrative pronouns

- Proximal *esto* (from neuter *istud*)
- Distal *eso* (from neuter *ipsum*)
- Distal *aquello* (from *eccum* + neuter *illud*)

## II. Personal pronouns

- Nominative *ello* (from neuter *illud*)
- Accusative *lo* (from neuter *illud*)

## III. Definite article

- *Lo* (from neuter *illud*)

# Neuter reference in Spanish

## I. With demonstrative pronouns

- 7) Me gusta **esto** pero **eso** no. **Aquello** también me gusta.  
me like this but that not. That too me like  
'I like this but not that. I like that too'

## II. With personal pronouns

- 8) Tengo dolor de cabeza pero **ello** no impedirá que vaya a la fiesta. No se **lo** digas a nadie.  
have pain of head but that not prevent that go to the party. Not him it say to anyone  
I have a headache but that will not stop me from going to the party. Don't tell (it to) anyone.

## III. With the definite article

- 9) ¿Supiste **lo** de Juan, **lo** que le pasó en Montevideo?  
know LO of Juan LO that him happen in Montevideo  
Did you hear about Juan's matter, about what happened to him in Montevideo?

# Outline

1. Emergence of the *lo* particle
2. Is *lo* a determiner or a pronoun?
3. Three uses of *lo*
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# Is *lo* a determiner or a pronoun?

*Lo* is a pronoun (Leonetti 1999; RAE/ASALE 2009)

- It cannot accompany regular noun phrases:

10) \*Juan preparó lo pizza.  
Juan prepared LO pizza

Therefore, it cannot be a determiner.

- The other forms performing neuter reference in Spanish (*ello* 'that', *aquello* 'that', *eso* 'that', *esto* 'this', accusative *lo* 'it') are all pronouns.

# Is *lo* a determiner or a pronoun?

*Lo* is a determiner (Alcina y Blecua 1998; Leonetti 1999; RAE/ASALE 2009; Di Tullio y Malcuori 2012)

- It cannot be alone: *me gusta lo \*(bello)*
- It seems adequate to assume a complete paradigm of determiners corresponding to the nominative third-person pronouns:

	Determiner	Pronoun
Masculine	el	él
Feminine	la	ella
Neuter	lo	ello

# Is *lo* a determiner or a pronoun?

*Lo* is not a determiner (Alcina y Blecua 1998; Leonetti 1999; RAE/ASALE 2009; Di Tullio y Malcuori 2012)

- Just like the other definite articles in Spanish, *lo* creates (semi-)free relative clauses in combination with a dependent relative clause:

- 11) a. Conversé con **el** **que ganó el Oscar.**  
Chatted with the\_MASC that won the Oscar  
`I talked to the male person who won the Oscar`
- b. Juan insultó a **la** **que votó por Trump.**  
Juan insulted to the\_FEM that voted for Trump  
`Juan insulted the female person who voted for Trump`
- c. Juan no creyó **lo que dijo Lola.**  
Juan not believed LO that said Lola  
`Juan didn't believe what Lola said`

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  - a. Referential *lo*
    - i. Phrases referring to inanimate objects
    - ii. Phrases referring to matters
    - iii. Phrases referring to properties
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# Outline

1. Emergence of the *lo* particle
2. Is *lo* a determiner or a pronoun?
3. Three uses of *lo*
  - a. Referential *lo*
    - i. Phrases referring to inanimate objects (usually identified in the grammars, e.g. RAE/ASALE 2009)
    - ii. Phrases referring to matters (not identified before)
    - iii. Phrases referring to properties (identified as from McNally & Swart, 2015, and de Swart, McNally, and Richtarcikova, 2018)
  - b. Quantitative *lo* (usually identified in the grammars, e.g. RAE/ASALE 2009)
  - c. Exclamative *lo* (usually identified in the grammars, e.g. RAE/ASALE 2009)
4. Conclusions and questions for future work

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# Lo-phrases referring to inanimate objects

## Examples

- 12) Lola va a arreglar **lo despintado de la pared**.  
Lola goes to fix LO unpainted of the wall  
`Lola is going to fix the unpainted part of the wall`
- 13) A mi solamente me gusta **lo de enmedio**.  
To me only me like LO of in-the-middle  
`I only like what is in the middle`
- 14) **Lo que tú estás pensando** es falso.  
LO that you are thinking is false  
`What you are thinking is false`



# Lo-phrases referring to inanimate objects

Type of constituent formed

- Determiner phrases performing both argumental and predicative functions:

15) **Lo que tú estás pensando** es falso.

LO that you are thinking is false

`What you are thinking is false

16) Eso, **lo que tú estás pensando**, es falso.

That, LO that you are thinking is false

`That, what you are thinking, is false'

# Lo-phrases referring to inanimate objects

## Composition

I. *Lo* + adjective phrase (in masculine and singular)

- 17) Yo suscribo **lo propuesto**.  
I subscribe LO proposed  
'I subscribe what has been proposed'

II. *Lo* + dependent relative clause

- 18) Está nevando, **lo cual me hace muy feliz**.  
Is snowing LO which me make very happy  
'It's snowing, which makes me very happy'

III. *Lo* + prepositional phrase headed by *de* 'of'

- 19) Lava a mano **lo de seda que tiene Lía**  
wash by-hand LO of silk that has Lía  
'Wash by hand the silk clothes that Lía has'

# Lo-phrases referring to inanimate objects

## Interpretation

Lo podrido => *the maximal portion or plurality displaying the property of being rotten in the domain of evaluation.*  
'LO rotten'



# Lo-phrases referring to inanimate objects

## Testing definiteness



- 20) a. Borra lo podrido  
Erase LO podrido  
'Erase the rotten parts'



- b. # Borra lo podrido  
Erase LO podrido  
'Erase the rotten parts'



- c. # Borra lo podrido  
Erase LO podrido  
'Erase the rotten parts'

# Lo-phrases referring to inanimate objects

In different definite uses

- Immediate situation

21) (uttered in front of an unpainted wall)

Lola va a arreglar **lo despintado**  
Lola goes to fix LO unpainted  
'Lola is going to fix the unpainted (part)'

- Larger situation

22) (uttered in this room)

No quiero saber **lo que se diga del Papa**  
Not want know LO that IMP say of\_the pope  
'I don't want to know what it may be said about the Pope'

- Anaphoric

23) Está nevando, **lo cual me hace muy feliz.**  
Is snowing LO which me make very happy  
'It's snowing, which makes me very happy'

- Bridging

24) Superman vió la torre y se subió a **lo más alto**  
Superman saw the tower and climbed to LO most tall  
'Superman saw the tower and climbed to the tallest part'

- Kind reference

25) **Lo artesanal** se está volviendo popular  
LO artesanal is becoming popular  
'Artisanal products are becoming popular'

# Lo-phrases referring to inanimate objects

Lo can be replaced by neuter demonstratives

26) Lola va a arreglar ~~lo~~ **esto despintado**.  
Lola goes to fix LO this unpainted  
'Lola is going to fix these unpainted parts'

27) A mi solamente me gusta ~~lo~~ **eso de enmedio**.  
To me only me like LO that of in-the-middle  
'I only like what is in the middle'

28) ~~lo~~ **aquello que tú estás pensando** es falso.  
Lo that that you are thinking is false  
'What you are thinking is false'



# Lo-phrases referring to inanimate objects

Lo can be replaced by neuter demonstratives

- 29) Lola va a arreglar ~~lo~~ **esto despintado**.  
Lola goes to fix LO this unpainted  
`Lola is going to fix these unpainted parts`

This is also possible with the regular definite articles

- 30) Lola va a arreglar ~~el~~ **este techo**.  
Lola goes to fix the this roof  
`Lola is going to fix this roof`
- 31) Lola va a arreglar ~~las~~ **esas bicicletas**.  
Lola goes to fix the those bicycles  
`Lola is going to fix those bicycles`

# Lo-phrases referring to inanimate objects

Lo can be accompanied by the quantifier *todo* 'all'

- 32) Lola va a arreglar **todo lo despintado**.  
Lola goes to fix all LO unpainted  
'Lola is going to fix all the unpainted parts'

# Lo-phrases referring to inanimate objects

*Lo* can be accompanied by the quantifier *todo* 'all'

- 32) Lola va a arreglar **todo lo despintado**.  
Lola goes to fix all LO unpainted  
'Lola is going to fix all the unpainted parts'

This is also possible with the regular definite articles

- 33) Lola va a arreglar **todo el techo**.  
Lola goes to fix all the  
'Lola is going to fix the whole roof'
- 34) Lola va a arreglar **todas las bicicletas**.  
Lola goes to fix all the bicycles  
'Lola is going to fix all the bicycles'

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# Lo-phrases referring to matters

## Examples

- 35) ¿Supiste **lo de Noah**?  
know LO of Noah  
'Did you hear about Noah's problem/situation/news...'
- 36) **Lo del Papa Francisco** es cierto.  
LO of-the pope Francisco is true.  
'The matter (gossip) about Pope Francis is true'



# Lo-phrases referring to matters

Type of constituent formed

- Determiner phrases performing both argumental and predicative functions:

37) **Lo del Papa Francisco** es cierto.

LO of-the pope Francisco is true.

‘The matter (gossip) about Pope Francis is true’

38) Eso, **lo del Papa Francisco**, es cierto.

That, LO of-the pope Francisco, is true.

‘That, the matter (gossip) about Pope Francis is true’

# Lo-phrases referring to matters

## Composition

Only *Lo* + prepositional phrase headed by *de* 'of':

39) ¿Supiste **lo de Noah**?

know LO of Juan

`Did you hear about Juan's problem/situation/news...'

# Lo-phrases referring to inanimate objects

## Interpretation

Lo de Noah => *the maximal plurality of Noah's affairs in the domain of evaluation*  
'LO of Noah'



# Lo-phrases referring to matters

## Testing definiteness

- 40) a. (uttered in a context in which everyone just heard that Juan got divorced)  
    **Lo de Juan** era esperable.  
    LO of Juan was expected.  
    `Juan´ s situation was expected`
- b. (uttered in a context in which nobody but the speaker knows that Juan got divorced, and the speaker is aware of that)  
    # **Lo de Juan** era esperable.  
    LO of Juan was expected.  
    `Juan´ s situation was expected`
- c. (uttered in a context in which everyone learns that Juan got divorced five minutes after it is announced to everyone that he got the Nobel Prize, and the speaker is aware of that)  
    # **Lo de Juan** era esperable.  
    LO of Juan was expected.  
    `Juan´ s situation was expected`

# Lo-phrases referring to matters

In different definite uses

- Immediate situation

41) (uttered in this room by Ana)

**Lo de Bert** es una excelente noticia.  
LO of Bert is a excellent news.  
`The matter about Bert is excellent´

- Larger situation

42) (uttered in front of an unpainted wall)

**Lo del Papa Francisco** es cierto.  
LO of-the pope Francisco is true.  
`The gossip about Pope Francis is true´

- Anaphoric

43) Juan recibió malas noticias y Martín también.  
Juan got bad news and Martín too. LO of  
`Juan received bad news and Martín did too´

**Lo de Juan** es muy grave.  
LO of Juan is very serious.  
`Juan's thing is very serious´

- Bridging

NA ?

- Kind reference

NA ?

# Lo-phrases referring to matters

Lo can be replaced by neuter demonstratives

- 44) ~~Lo~~ **eso del Papa Francisco** es cierto.  
LO that of-the pope Francisco is true.  
`The matter (gossip) about Pope Francis is true`

# Lo-phrases referring to matters

*Lo* can be accompanied by the quantifier *todo* 'all'

- 45) **Todo lo del Papa Francisco** es cierto.  
All LO of-the pope Francisco is true.  
'The whole matter (gossip) about Pope Francis is true'

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# Lo-phrases referring to properties

## Examples

- 46) Michael finalmente enseñó **lo Corleone**  
Michael finally showed LO Corleone  
'Michael finally showed his Corleone-ness'
- 47) **Lo claro del mar Caribe** ofrece visibilidad total  
LO clear of-the sea Caribe offers visibility total  
'The clearness of the Caribbean Sea offers total visibility'



# Lo-phrases referring to matters

Type of constituent formed

- Determiner phrases performing both argumental and predicative functions:

48) Michael finalmente enseñó **lo Corleone**  
Michael finally showed LO Corleone  
'Michael showed his Corleoneeness'

49) Eso es **lo Corleone**  
That is LO Corleone  
'That is the Corleoneeness'

# Lo-phrases referring to properties

## Composition

- *Lo* + adjective phrase/noun phrase behaving like an adjective phrase + prepositional phrase (obligatory unless the linguistic context provides the information they convey)

50) A Lola le molesta **lo antivegetariano de Juan**  
To Juan him emerge LO antivegetariano of Juan  
'Lola dislikes Juan's anti-vegetarianism'

51) Michael finalmente enseñó **lo Corleone**  
Michael finally showed LO Corleone  
'Michael showed his Corleoneness'



# Lo-phrases referring to properties

## Interpretation

lo claro del Mar Caribe => *the (unique?) property of being transparent displayed by the Caribbean Sea*  
'the clearness of the Caribbean Sea'



# Lo-phrases referring to properties

## Testing definiteness

- 52) (uttered in a context in which the speaker is having a conversation about the fact that he is considering to live in Colonia Doctores in México City and everybody knows that it is a dangerous neighborhood)

¿Cómo ves lo peligroso del barrio?

How see LO dangerous of\_the neighborhood

'How do you see the danger in this neighborhood?'

- 53) (uttered in a context in which the speaker is having a conversation about the fact that he is considering to live in Colonia Doctores in México City and no one but him knows that it is a dangerous neighborhood)

# ¿Cómo ves lo peligroso del barrio?

How see LO dangerous of\_the neighborhood

'How do you see the danger in this neighborhood?'

# Lo-phrases referring to properties

## Lexical selection

- There is at least a verb, *salirle* ('emerge' + dative clitic), selecting complements referring to properties:

54) A Juan le salió **lo antivegetariano/animal/ cavernícola/hombre/vikingo**  
To Juan him emerge LO anti-vegetarian/ animal/ caveman /male /viking  
'Juan's anti-vegetarian/animal/caveman/male/viking aspect emerged'



- Interestingly, the adjective/noun heading the phrase combining with *lo* has to agree in gender and number with the noun phrase doubling de dative:

54') A mis hermanas les salió **lo antivegetarianas/\*o/\*0**  
To my sisters them emerge LO viking\_FEMPI/Mas/SNG  
'My sisters' anti-vegetarian aspect emerged'



# Lo-phrases referring to properties

Lo cannot be replaced by neuter demonstratives

- 55) # Michael finalmente enseñó ~~lo~~ **eso** **Corleone**  
Michael finally showed LO that Corleone
- 56) # ~~Lo~~ **Eso claro del Mar Caribe** ofrece visibilidad total  
LO that clear of-the sea Caribe offers visibility total  
'The clearness of the Caribbean Sea offers total visibility

# Lo-phrases referring to properties

*Lo* cannot be accompanied by the quantifier *todo* 'all'

- 58) # **Todo lo claro del Mar Caribe** ofrece visibilidad total  
All LO clear of-the Caribbean Sea offers visibility total
- 57) # Michael finalmente enseñó **todo lo Corleone**  
Michael finally showed all LO Corleone

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  - a. Referential *lo*
    - i. *Reference to inanimate mass/plural objects*
    - ii. *Reference to matters*
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# Quantitative *lo*

## Examples

58) Juan trabaja **lo suficiente como para merecerse descansar hoy.**  
Juan works LO enough as to deserve to rest today  
'Juan works hard enough to deserve to rest today'

59) Lola trabajó **lo menos posible.**  
Lola worked LO little possible.  
'Lola worked as little as possible'

# Quantitative *lo*

Type of constituent formed

- Adverb phrases of quantity

60) Lola come **lo necesario**

Lola eats LO necessary

`Lola eats what is necessary (to not to be malnourished)´

61) Juan hizo la cena **lo mejor posible.**

Juan made the dinner LO better possible.

`Juan cooked dinner as well as possible´

# Quantitative *lo*

## Composition

- *Lo* + adverb phrases meaning 'enough' (*necesario, bastante, suficiente*) or 'as much/little/good/bad... as possible':

62) Lola ahorró **lo bastante como para poderse comprar una casa.**

Lola saved LO enough like to can buy a house.

`Lola saved enough to buy a house'

63) Lola trabajó **lo menos posible.**

Lola worked LO little possible.

`Lola worked as little as possible'

# Quantitative *lo*

## Interpretation

*lo necesario => the degree of a predicate meeting a particular standard of comparison*

LO enough

*lo menos posible => the smallest degree possible*

LO little possible

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# Exclamative *lo*

## Examples

64) Me impresiona **lo bonita que es tu hermana.**

me impress LO pretty that is your sister

`It impresses me how pretty your sister is'

65) Es increíble **lo terriblemente agudo que habla Lola.**

Is incredible LO terribly sharp that speaks Lola

`It's incredible how terribly sharp Lola speaks'

# Exclamative *lo*

Type of constituent formed

- Exclamative sentences preferably occurring in embedding contexts:

66) a. ? ¡**Lo terriblemente agudo que habla Lola!**

LO terribly sharp that speaks Lola

`How terribly sharp Lola speaks!'

b. Es increíble **lo terriblemente agudo que habla Lola.**

Is incredible LO terribly sharp that speaks Lola

`It's incredible how terribly sharp Lola speaks'

# Exclamative *lo*

## Composition

- *Lo* + adjective/adverbial phrase designating a gradable predicate + (obligatory) relative clause modifying it:

67) Me impresiona **lo bonita que es tu hermana.**

me impress LO pretty that is your sister

`I'm impressed by how pretty your sister is'

68) Es increíble **lo bien que baila Lola.**

Is incredible LO well that dances Lola

`It's incredible how well Lola dances'

# Exclamative *lo*

## Interpretation

Lo bonita que es tu hermana => the (affecting) degree in which your sister is beautiful  
'How beautiful your sister is'

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# Conclusions

- There are five uses of *lo* semantically and morphosyntactically differentiated:
  - Referential *lo*
    - *Reference to inanimate objects*
    - *Reference to matters*
    - *Reference to properties*
  - Quantitative *lo*
  - Exclamative *lo*
- Definiteness is clearly involved in the three referential uses (a bit questionable in the case of phrases referring to properties) but not in the quantitative and the exclamative use (perhaps yes, if we think in terms of unique/maximal degrees).

# Plans for future work

- To carry out a diachronic study to identify how the different uses of *lo* emerged in the language and understand better the synchronic relation between them.
- To associate a semantic theory to the referential uses of *lo* (adopting and adapting McNally & de Swart, 2015, seems to be a promising plan, although Villalba, 2009, and Villalba & Bartra-Kaufmann, 2010, should also be considered).
- To develop a semantic theory for the quantitative use of *lo* (to our knowledge, almost nothing has been said about this use).
- Exclamative *lo* is at the moment out of the scope of this project. Also, is the one that has received more attention so far and some semantic analysis are already in the market (see, for example, Gutiérrez-Rexach 1996, 1999, 2001 and Villaba, 2008).

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Gracias

