'SUPERLATIVE SYNTACTIC AMALGAMS' IN AN IBERIAN SPANISH DIALECT[*]

Luis Sáez
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

ABSTRACT. This article addresses an as yet unnoticed Spanish superlative construction attested in the mid area of Northern Spain. This construction features two striking properties: (i) it contains a relative pronoun which, at first glance, does not seem to introduce a TP (there is no overt verb to its right), which raises the question how the relative pronoun can obtain its Case/theta role; (ii) even if it were true that the relative pronoun actually introduces a TP and heads a full subordinate clause (presumably a free relative), the latter would arise in an anomalous position which disrupts the natural word order of the main clause and where it seems to lack any obvious licensor (as an adjunct, argument or predicate). A simultaneous answer to both problems will be obtained from the proposal that the construction at issue is a "syntactic amalgam" (Lakoff 1974): (i) assuming Kluck's (2011) approach to amalgams, the relative pronoun of the construction can unproblematically be considered to introduce a sluiced TP, so it heads a full relative clause and does have a (covert) Case/theta-role licensor; (ii) the disruptive position of the relative clause and the opacity for licensing from the main clause are now expected as they are the defining properties of the so-called "interrupting clauses" in Horn-/Andrews-amalgams. As in Kluck (2011), such properties will be assumed to result from the operation "par-merge" giving rise to paratactical configurations (de Vries 2007).

Keywords:. Superlatives, syntactic amalgams, relatives, sluicing, par-merge

RESUMEN. Este trabajo aborda una construcción superlativa del español aún no registrada en la bibliografía, y localizable en la parte media de la zona norte de España. La construcción muestra dos propiedades sorprendentes: (i) contiene un pronombre relativo que no parece introducir un ST (no aparece verbo alguno a su derecha), lo que plantea el problema de cómo puede este pronombre obtener su Caso/papel temático; (ii) incluso si fuera cierto que el pronombre relativo estuviera introduciendo un ST y encabezara por tanto una oración subordinada íntegra, supuestamente una relativa libre, esta última estaría figurando en una posición anómala que interrumpe el orden de palabras natural de la oración principal y donde, además, la relativa parece carecer de un legitimador (como adjunto, argumento o predicado). Se ofrece en este artículo una respuesta simultánea a ambos problemas mediante la propuesta de que la construcción bajo estudio es realmente una "amalgama sintáctica" (Lakoff 1974): (i) asumiendo la propuesta de Kluck (2011) para las amalgamas, se deduce que el pronombre relativo de la construcción está introduciendo un ST sometido al borrado conocido como "sluicing", de manera que encabeza una cláusula de relativo plena y posee por tanto un legitimador de Caso/papel temático; (ii) la intrusiva posición de la cláusula relativa y la opacidad de esta para legitimación desde la oración principal resultan ahora rasgos previsibles, pues son también rasgos característicos de las llamadas "cláusulas

interruptoras" en las amalgamas tipo Horn/Andrews. Al igual que en Kluck (2011), se asumirá aquí que tales propiedades derivan de una operación "ensamble-par" que genera configuraciones paratácticas (de Vries 2007).

Palabras clave: Superlativos, amalgamas sintácticas, relativas, sluicing, ensamble-par

1. Introduction

   The non-standard superlative construction illustrated in (1) is attested in the mid area of Northern Spain.

(1)   Ella$_i$ marca   **la que$_i$**   más   goles.
      she   scores   who.fem.sg   most   goals
      "She scores the most goals."   ("comparative" reading; Szabolcsi 1985)

Data like these are found in Spanish provinces like Huesca, Zaragoza, Álava, Burgos, Palencia, or Navarra ((2)) yet remain unnoticed in descriptive grammars.

(2)   a. Amarillo   no   tiene   **el que**   más   figuras.
          Yellow (proper.name)   not   has   who.masc.sg   most   figures
          "Yellow is not the one who has the most pieces of this kind."
          https://cawagirona.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Samurai-juego-de-mesa-reglas-en-espa%C3%B1ol.pdf   (José C. de Diego Guerrero; Zaragoza)
      b. La   tuya   tiene   **la que**   mejor   pinta.
          the.fem.sg   yours   has   what.fem.sg   best   aspect
          "Yours (paella) is the one that looks the best."   (Zaragoza)
          https://www.forocoches.com/foro/showthread.php?t=3856453&page=51
      c. ...se   dice   que   tiene   **la que**   mejor   sonoridad
          impers.says   that   has   what.fem.sg   best   sonority
          "...it is said that it has the best sonority."   https://studylib.es/doc/6561232/consejos-prcticos-berln---universidad-de-zaragoza (University of Zaragoza)
      d. Hizo   **el que**   más   kilómetros.
          he.made   who.masc.sg   most   kilometers
          "He made the most kilometers."
          http://www.raidestella.com/2013/02/   (Estella, Navarra)
      e. Hizo **el que**   más   por   el   deporte
          made who.masc.sg   most   for   the   sport
          "He was the one who made the most for the sport."
          https://www.diariodelaltoaragon.es/Movil/Noticia.aspx?Id=1114776
                              (José María Aspiroz, *Diario del Alto Aragón*; Huesca)
      f. ... el que   manda siempre tiene   **el que**   más   pasta.
          the.masc.sgt rules   always   has   who.masc.sg   most money
          "..the one who rules always has the most money."
          https://genius.com/Green-valley-yo-naci-lyrics
                              (song *Yo nací*; reggae band Green Valley; Álava)
      g. Yo   tengo   **la que**   más   posibilidades.
          I   have.   who.fem.sg   most   possibilities
          "It is me that has the best chance."   (Fieldwork; Burgos)[1]

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1 A fair amount of data presented in the text correspond to the author's own intuitions and their (un)grammaticality has been corroborated by speakers from the town of Burgos.

(1) and its English translation (under a "comparative" reading; Szabolcsi 1986, Hackl 2009) do not have the same syntactic structure. In the English translation, an article *the* precedes the superlative quantifier ("SQ") *most*; in (1), instead, a relative pronoun ("RP") *la que* 'who' (in bold type) precedes the SQ *más*.[2] RP corefers with the subject *ella* (which is indicated by subindices). The closest Spanish construction conveying the meaning in (1) is the superlative cleft in (3), in the sense that (1) and (3) share both the RP and the SQ. However, while RP in (3) gets its Case/theta-role from T/*marca* in the TP it is the subject of, no overt TP follows *la que* in (1), thus the question arises how this RP gets its Case/theta role.

(3) Ella$_i$ es   **la que$_i$**   **más**   **goles**   **marca.**
     she   is   who.fem.sg   most   goals   scores
     "It is her that scores the most goals."

On the other hand, while the relative clause ("RC") introduced by RP in (3) is licensed as a predicate by the cleft copula (*es*), a presumable RC headed by RP in (1) would appear in a very disruptive position, apparently lacking any sort of licensor (as an adjunct, argument or predicate).

In this paper I address these puzzles. I propose (1) is a "syntactic amalgam" (Lakoff 1974) so I will call constructions like (1) "superlative syntactic amalgams" ("SSAs") as they necessarily involve an SQ.

A sentence like (4a) illustrates what a syntactic amalgam is (an "Andrews-amalgam" in this case, so-called because Lakoff credited it to Avery Andrews). In (4a), processing starts with a sentence like (4b) (the "host clause", "HC"), where a DP object for *eat* is expected (which is indicated by dots); however, unexpectedly, processing of a sentence like (4c) starts (the "Interrupting Clause", "IC") containing a DP *what* introduced by *know*, but simultaneously interpreted as the expected DP object of *eat* in (4b). As a result, it looks like as if (4b) and (4c) are sharing a phrase (the "content kernel"), which motivates the intuition that (4a) results from the "amalgamation" of (4b) and (4c) as it is a single sentence.

(4) a. Sally will eat [I don't know what].
     b. Sally will eat...
     c. I don't know what

In a way parallel to (4), it could be said that (1) starts with a sentence like (5a), where a [-human] object (*goles* 'goals') is expected after the verb *marca* 'scores' (expectation indicated by dots); suddenly, though, processing of the string in (5b) starts with an RP *la que* 'who' co-referring with the [+human] subject *ella* 'she' of (5a), thus incompatible with the selectional properties of the preceding verb *marca*; however, the string also contains the [-human] nominal *goles* expected as the object of *marca*, so it looks as if such nominal is shared by (5a) and (5b). Then, (1) might be considered to be the result of the "amalgamation" of (5a) and (5b).

(5) a. Ella marca...
     b. La que más goles

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2 From now on, "SQ" will simply refer to the superlative words (*most/más*); "SQP" will refer to phrases containing those words (*most books/más goles*).

Note no overt T/V follows RP in (5b); as said above, though, it is required in order to provide RP with its mandatory Case/theta role. However, as I am proposing (5b) is amalgamated with (5a), (5b) may be shown to be a full RC (headed by RP and containing a T/V) under several of the theoretical approaches to amalgams found in the literature (Guimaraes 2004, van Riemsdijk 2006, Kluck 2011, de Vries 2011, Johnson 2013, Griffiths 2015 or Craenenbroeck 2017, a.o.).[3]

More specifically, in section 2 I will develop a proposal for SSAs built on Kluck's (2011)/Griffiths' (2015) approach to amalgams. Section 3 will present some correct predictions made by this proposal as well as some empirical arguments for discarding possible alternatives based on multi-dominance (Guimaraes 2004; Johnson 2014) or grammaticalization. Section 4 concludes the paper.

2. A proposal for SSAs based on "*Par*-merge"+ellipsis.

2.1. Theoretical background.

Under an approach to amalgams like Kluck's (2011)/Griffiths (2015), (4a) (repeated below) results from combining the HC (6a) and the IC (6b). Selectional restrictions are fully complied with in HC/IC (they are complete sentences): the symbol *e* in (6a) (in bold type) represents an indefinite null nominal variable akin to *something*, the understood nominal object of *eat*; on the other hand, (6b) contains a full-fledged interrogative clause (in bold type) selected by *know*, where *what*, the nominal object of *eat*, raises to the left periphery and leaves a variable (a copy, represented as a coindexed *t* for the sake of simplicity). The combination of (6a) and (6b) yields (6c). Here, as indicated by strikethrough, the interrogative TP is deleted by "identity" with the HC TP (see below), thus leaving *what* as a remnant

(4) a. Sally will eat I don't know what.
(6) a. Sally will eat **e**.
     b. I don't know what$_i$ **Sally will eat t$_i$**.
     c. Sally will eat **e** I don't know what$_i$ ~~Sally will eat t$_i$~~

According to Kluck (2011), (6a) and (6b) are combined through the structure-building operation called "*Par(enthetical)*-Merge" proposed by de Vries (2007, 2011). De Vries devises "par-merge" in order to accommodate parentheticals into a configuration. If objects X and Y are par-merged giving rise to the object Z, neither Z or any node dominating Z dominates X/Y. X is always a functional head "Par" which

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3 Then, unlike Andrews-amalgams like (4a) or so-called "Horn-amalgams" like (i a) (credited by Lakoff to Lawrence Horn; IC in bold type), IC in (1) is not a root clause but a free RC. The same happens in so-called "Transparent Free Relatives", illustrated in (i b). Van Riemsdijk (2006) rejects Grosu's (2003) treatment of such relatives as standard free RCs, and shows sentences like (i b) to be *bona fide* syntactic amalgams (IC, the free RC, is in bold type):

(i) a. John is going to **I think it is Chicago** on Sunday.
     b. They didn't make **what can be reasonably be considered headway**.

Van Riemskijk argues, for instance, that (i b) must contain an NP *headway* shared by an HC and an IC. This explains such NP is licensed as part of the idiom chunk *make headway* in (i b) in spite of the fact that, as shown in (ii), the idiom is not available when *make* is a matrix verb and *headway* is inside a standard free RC (in bold type):

(ii) *They didn't make **what we attributed to considerable headway.**

merges with another object Y; in (7a), Y (the string in bold type) is a "non-anchored" parenthetical (non-anchored because it admits a quite free distribution):

(7)   a. She$_i$ thinks that John, **and Mary$_i$ is quite sure about that,** criticized Bill in the party.

   b. she$_i$ thinks that John,   Z=ParP   criticized Bill in the party.

   X:Par   Y:[and Mary$_i$ is quite sure about that],
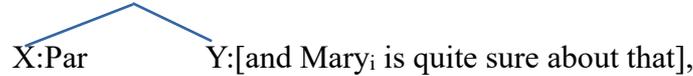
As a result of par-merge (see the simplified configuration in (7b)), objects internal to Y cannot maintain c-command relations with objects external to Y, which explains the opacity of Y for pronominal binding and NPI licensing, or, as in (7), the absence of conditon-C violations (note *she* and *Mary* may unproblematically be co-referential, as indicated by subindices).

   ParP is eventually merged to the main spine by "pair-merge", the structure-building operation put forward by Chomsky (2000) for regular adjunction (and not to be confused with de Vries' "par-merge"). In (7), ParP is probably left-adjoined to the embedded VP (it follows the embedded subject *John* and precedes the verb *criticized*).

   For non-anchored parentheticals like the one in (7), Par is monovalent (it only selects one element, its complement). By contrast, for anchored parentheticals like appositions, with a quite restricted distribution (see the one in (8a), in bold type), de Vries proposes a bivalent Par which selects two arguments and establishes a paratactic coordination between them (see the structure in (8b)).

(8)   a. I talked with Sting**(, a singer,)** yesterday night (*a singer)

   b.   ParP

         DP   Par'

           Sting   Par   apposition: a singer
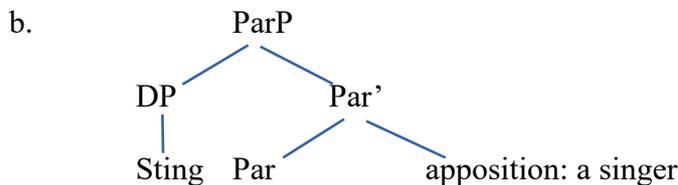
In (8b), the apposition is the complement of Par (its first argument). The activity of par-merge ends here, as the second argument of Par is set-merged in the Spec of ParP (hence it is dominated and c-commanded by other constituents in the root clause). Crucially, as *Sting* is the first constituent of a coordination (ParP), it is fully visible as the complement of *with*. The configuration in (8b) explains the apposition cannot strand the anchor (Potts' (2005: 104) obligatory immediate adjacency); see, for instance, the asterisk arising in (8a) when *a singer* appears in final position. Moreover, the complement of bivalent Par specifies the semantics of the anchor (adds information for *Sting* in (8b)), according to de Vries' (2011) analysis of appositions as "specifying coordination". By contrast, the complement of monovalent Par just adds information to a whole proposition.

   All these properties of bivalent merge hold true for syntactic amalgams. So, according to Kluck (2011), the successive steps giving rise to (4a) are as follows:

a) Par-merge first merges the abstract bivalent head Par and IC ((6b)), the internal argument of Par:

(9) Par+IC=Par'
[Par' Par
[CP=IC I don't know
[CP what$_i$ [TP **Sally will eat t$_i$.**]]]]

b) Set-merge merges Par' and the indefinite nominal variable *e* (akin to something) mentioned above concerning (6a); it is the second argument of Par, thus located in Spec-ParP, and gets paratactically coordinated to IC. The non-pronounciation of *e* is licensed by co-reference with its correlate *t* in IC (co-reference indicated by subindices).

(10) [DP *e*]+Par'=ParP
[ParP [DP *e$_i$*]
[Par' Par
[CP=IC I don't know
[CP what$_i$ [TP **Sally will eat t$_i$.**]]]]]

c) ParP set-merges to the spine of HC, creating the structure in (11). Crucially, *e* fully satisfies the selectional requirements of *eat* in HC, as Par introduces it as the first member of a coordination:

(11) *eat*+ParP=VP, *will*+VP=TP, etc. (the computation proceeds until HC is concluded)
[CP=HC [TP1 Sally will eat
[ParP [DP *e$_i$*]
[Par' Par
[CP=IC I don't know
[CP what$_i$ [TP2 ~~Sally will eat t$_i$.~~]]]]]]]]

Finally, as already advanced above, TP2 is deleted by "identity" with TP1 in (11) (as indicated by strikethrough). This is a classical instance of sluicing fully complying with the so-called "e-GIVENness" condition proposed for sluicing by Merchant (2001) and also assumed in this paper.

Merchant's (2001) "e-GIVENness" condition on ellipsis builds on Schwarzschild's (1999) notion of "GIVENness", presented in (12) (according to Schwarzschild, only GIVEN expressions may delete):

(12)a. If a constituent X is not Focus-marked, X must be GIVEN.
   b. An expression E counts as GIVEN iff E has a salient antecedent A and, modulo ∃-type shifting A entails the F(ocus)-closure of E.

"F-closure" is defined by Schwarzschild in the following way:

(13) The F-closure of an expression X, written F-clo(X), is the result of replacing F-marked parts of X with ∃-bound variables of the appropriate type.

The result of introducing ∃(=existential)-operators binding the variables created by F-marked constituents is "∃-type shifting", that is, expressions of type <e,t> (with the free variable) raise to type <t> (with the variable existentially bound). ∃-operators can

also be freely introduced for binding indefinites (which are free variables; Heim 1982); this is called "existential closure".

In (11), TP2 would be "E" of (12b). Once the copy of *what* (a focus constituent) undergoes F-closure and ∃-type shifting, the result would be (14a) (of type <t>). As *e* in HC is an indefinite variable, TP1 (the expression "A" in (12b)) gets semantically converted into (14b) (of type <t>) after simple ∃-closure (Heim 1982); (14a) clearly entails (14b) (they are identical):

(14) a. ∃x. Sally will eat x
     b. ∃x, Sally will eat x

For empirical reasons, Merchant (2001: 31) strengthens Schwarzschild's condition on ellipsis as in (15) (now A and E must mutually entail one another), which is dubbed "e-GIVENness":

(15)   An expression E counts as e-GIVEN iff E has a salient antecedent A and, modulo ∃-type shifting,
        (a) A entails Focus-closure(E),   and
        (b) E entails Focus-closure(A)

Actually, licensing of sluicing in (11) does not hing on this modification as (14a) and (14b) are identical, so TP2 and TP1 mutually entail one another.

In summary, Kluck's (2011) theoretical proposal provides an adequate account for Andrews-amalgams like (4a).

2.2. The analysis of SSAs.

A parallel approach to the one just presented in the previous section can be plausibly adopted for SSAs. (1), for instance, would result from combining the HC (16a) and the IC (16b). Both (16a) and (16b) are complete clauses:[4] (16a) contains a null variable *e* (akin to an indefinite like "a certain number of…") as the object of *marca*; (16b) is a superlative free RC whose Superlative Quantifier Phrase ("SQP"), as typically happens in such RCs, raises to a left-peripheral position immediately following RP and preceding V (Bosque & Brucart 1991). I assume Rohena-Madrazo's (2007) proposal for superlative free RCs (based on Bianchi's (1999) cartographic left periphery for RCs), according to which RP is in Spec-ForceP and SQP is in Spec-FocusP. (16c) obtains once (16a) and (16b) are put together:

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4 As already observed in footnote 3, the IC in SSAs is not a root clause (unlike (6b)), but rather a free RC. In this sense, SSAs are similar to "Transparent Free Relatives", also introduced in that footnote.

One of the *Borealis* reviewers observes (1) is not interpreted as "she scores the most goals", but rather as "she is the (person) who scores the most goals". In fact, I guess this is a meaning conveyed by IC if IC is understood as a sort of copula-less cleft. Informally speaking, (1) should be compositionally interpreted as the discourse in (i) (where the English translation evidences the cleft interpretation conveyed by RC):

(i) Ella marca goles; **la que más   goles**.
     she scores goals; who   most goals
     "She scores goals; **it is the one (=person) who scores the most goals**."

How a formal compositional semantics should deal with these constructions is something I must leave for future work.

(16) a. Ella marca **e**.
      b. [$_{RC=ForceP}$ [$_{RP=DP}$ la que]$_j$ [Force [$_{FocusP}$ [$_{SQP}$ más goles]$_i$ [Foc [$_{TP2}$ **t$_j$ marca t$_i$**]]]]]]
      c. Ella marca *e* [la que]$_j$ [más goles]$_i$ ~~t$_j$ marca t$_i$.~~

Finally, TP2 in (16c) (in bold type) can undergo deletion (indicated by strikethrough) as it complies with e-GIVENness: after existential closure of *e* and F-closure of the focus-copy t_i in IC, TP1 and TP2 obtain the translations in (17). They mutually entail one another as they are identical (the copy of the RP *la que* is interpreted here as a *pro$_i$* co-referring with *ella*):

(17)   a.   TP1: ∃y=a number, ella$_i$ marca y
        b.   TP2: ∃y=a number, pro$_i$ marca y

Under a configuration like (16c), then, a covert TP (with an inflected V) actually follows RP in (1), hence RP can get a Case/theta role unproblematically (which accounts for the main problem raised in this paper).

The derivational steps for (16c), detailed in (18)-(20), fully parallel the ones presented in (9)-(11) for (6c):

a) Par-Merge merges the bivalent abstract head Par and its internal argument (RC):

(18) Par + IC= Par'
      [$_{Par'}$ Par
      [$_{RC=ForceP=IC}$ [$_{RP=DP}$ la que]$_j$ [Force [$_{FocusP}$ [$_{SQP}$ más goles]$_i$ [Foc [$_{TP}$ **t$_j$ marca t$_i$**]]]]]]

b) Set-merge merges Par' and *e*, the second argument of Par; in this way, *e* becomes paratactically coordinated to RC (the non-pronounciation of *e* is licensed by identity with its correlate t_i in IC, which is indicated by subindices):

(19) [$_{QP}$ *e*]+ Par'= ParP
      [$_{ParP}$ [$_{SQP}$ *e$_i$*]
      [$_{Par'}$ Par
      [$_{RC=ForceP=IC}$ [$_{RP=DP}$ la que]$_j$ [Force [$_{FocusP}$ [$_{SQP}$ más goles]$_i$ [Foc [$_{TP}$ **t$_j$ marca t$_i$**]]]]]

c) ParP set-merges to the spine of HC, yielding the structure in (20). Again, it is worth emphasizing that, under this configuration, the indefinite null variable *e* (here akin to an indefinite like "a certain number of…") fully satisfies the selectional requirements of the verb in HC (*marca* in this case), as Par introduces it as the first member of a coordination. That is, although *marca* and RC are phonologically contiguous in (1), in no way is RC performing as the complement of *marca*; such complement is actually *e,* interpreted by identity with *más goles* in the same way *e* is interpreted by identity with *what* in (11) (as I am assuming Kluck's (2011) approach to amalgams, no particular stipulation is needed in this paper in order to abide by lexical selection).

(20) *marca*+ParP=VP, *v*+VP=*v'*, *ella*+*v'*=*v*P, *et cetera* (the computation proceeds until HC is completed)
      [$_{CP2=HC}$ [$_{TP1}$ Ella marca
      [$_{ParP}$ [$_{QP}$ *e$_i$*]
      [$_{Par'}$ Par
      [$_{RC=IC}$ [$_{RP=DP}$ la que]$_j$ [Force [$_{FocusP}$ [$_{SQP}$ más goles]$_i$ [Foc [$_{TP2}$ ~~**t$_j$ marca t$_i$**~~]]]]]]]]]]]

Finally, as already justified above on semantic reasons, TP2 undergoes sluicing (indicated by strikethrough). According to Merchant (2001), though, sluicing must be restricted to constituent questions for syntactic reasons (Lobeck 1995). In his view, provided that a TP "X" complies with e-GIVENness, sluicing of X can only be licensed by a feature $E_{s(luicing)}$ located on a C having X as its complement. E_s, in turn, can only be licensed by an interrogative *wh* in its Spec as it is supposed to bear strong uninterpretable [wh/Q]-features to be valued by such *wh*; this is exactly what happens in (11), with E_s in C licensed by *what* in its Spec. This severe restriction would prevent sluicing in an RC like (20) yet it has been questioned in later work (van Craenenbroeck & Lipták (2006), Kluck (2011), Lipták & Aboh (2013), Lipták (2015), Contreras, Ott and Siddiqi (2020), Citko (2020) or Šimík (2020), a.o., argue for the existence of sluicing in RCs under certain conditions). Van Craenenbroeck & Lipták (2006) contend the Hungarian RC in bold type in (21a) has the configuration in (21b), where E_s is located on a left-peripheral Focus-head licensing sluicing of its TP-complement; unlike English E_s, Hungarian E_s could be licensed by a [+focus]-XP in its Spec or, more generally, by a [+Operator]-XP (upper case letters in (21) indicate [+focus]):

(21) a. Kornél   AZT   A   LÁNYT   hívta   meg,
       Kornél   that-ACC   the   girl-ACC   invited   preverb
       akit   ZOLTÁN   [e]
       rel-who-ACC Zoltán
       "The girl who Kornél invited was the one who Zoltán did."

    b. [CP akit   [C   [FocusP ZOLTÁN   [Foc   [TP   e=scluicing]]]]]

According to van Craenenbroeck & Lipták (2006), Spanish E_s aligns with Hugarian E_s.[5] Sluicing, then, is expected to be attested in Spanish superlative free RCs as their SQP is most naturally located in Spec-FocP (as said, I am assuming Rohena-

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5 The same happens with stripping. Thus, unlike English ((i a)), stripping is possible in embedded clauses with a complementizer both in Hungarian, (i b), and Spanish, (i c) (Wurmbrand 2017), as they share the configuration in (i d) (parallel to (21b)) with Foc licensing stripping:

(i) a. *Abby claimed (that) Ben would ask her out, but she didn't think **that Bill (too) [e]**.
     b. János meghívott   valakit   és   azt   hiszem,
        János preverb-invited   someone-ACC   and   that-acc   think
                        hogy   BÉLÁT   [e].
                        that BÉLÁT-acc
        "János invited someone and I think it was Bélá whom he invited."
     c. Juan   invitó   a   alguien,   creo   **que   A   LUIS [e]**
        Juan   invited   to   somebody,   I.think that   TO   LUIS
        "Juan invited somebody, and I think it was Luis that he invited."
     d. [CP [C=hogy/que   [FocusP BÉLÁT/A LUIS [Foc   [TP e=ellipsis]]]]]

Wurmbrand (2017) contends non-pronounciation of TP (sluicing/stripping) is only possible when TP is the complement of a phase head with the relevant licensing feature (in accordance with "ellipsis-as-zero-spell-out" premises: only heads that are phase-heads can trigger the spell-out of their domains, and ellipsis is the option of not realizing a spell-out domain at PF). She claims such phase head is Foc in Hungarian/Spanish. Citko (2020) proposes that, in these languages, Foc obtains its phase-status from C through "phasehood-inheritance". In this way, she preserves Wurmbrand's original idea that the highest head in an extended projection of a lexical head is always the phase head (C in the cases dealt with here).

Madrazo's (2007) proposal for the left periphery of such RCs). This expectation is confirmed by data like (22), where SQP is *más* (in bold type) and sluicing is indicated by strikethrough.[6] Note the RC left-periphery in (22) is parallel to the one in (21b) ("CP" and "ForceP" are just notational variants for the same CP layer).

(22) Esa actriz   sobreactúa,   pero   no   es
     that actress   overacts,   but   not   is
     [RC=ForceP   [RP la que]$_i$ [Force [FocusP [SQP **más**]$_j$ [Focus [TP ~~t$_i$ sobreactúa t$_j$~~]]]]]
           who   most   overacts

     "That actress overacts, but it is not her that overacts the most."

As I am claiming superlative free RCs take part of SSAs ((19), for instance, is the IC of (20)), it is fully expected that sluicing takes place in SSAs. Again, note the RC left-periphery in (20) is identical to the ones in (21b)/(22).

3. Some predictions made by the proposal.
My proposal makes some predictions I present in the next sub-sections.

3.1. Unavailability of the relative pronoun 'quien' "who" in Superlative Amalgams
An RP like *quien* 'who' can always replace [+human] *la que* in regular superlative free RCs ((23a)), but it cannot if sluicing takes place (compare (23b) with (22)); it cannot in (1) either ((23c)). These facts are consistent with the proposal that a superlative free RC with sluicing underlies SSAs.[7]

(23) a. Es   esa   actriz **quien/<la que>**   más   sobreactúa.
        is   that   actress who   most   overacts
        "It is that actress that overacts the most."
     b. *Esa actriz sobreactúa, pero no es **quien** más.
     c. *Ella marca quien más goles.

3.2. The relative pronoun and its antecedent must be clause-mates
If (20) is correct, it is possible to rule out (24a), with the structure in (24b), once some well-known facts and standard proposals concerning superlatives are taken into account. In (24a), the head of the IC RC co-refers with an antecedent *ella* (both in bold type) located in a higher clause, as indicated by the indices:

(24) a. ****Ella$_i$** dice   que marcamos   **la   que$_i$** más   goles.
        she   says   that we.scored   who.fem.sg. most   goals
        "(intended reading:) The number of goals she says we scored is
        higher than the amount of goals the other persons say we scored."

---

6 As correctly observed by one of the *Borealis* reviewers, sluicing is generally disallowed for Spanish RCs, including most superlative RCs. As far as I know, no clear principles have been provided as yet in the literature explaining such overwhelming impossibility. In any case, examples like (22) are perfect.
    The reasons for these contrasts must be left for future research.

7 The reason for this contrast between complex RPs like *la que* and [+wh] RPs like *quien* is a question I will not address in this paper. It is worth pointing out, though, that, according to Bianchi (1999), RCs with [+wh] RPs involve a more complex left-periphery.
    One of the *Borealis* reviewers suggests the ungrammaticality of (23c) might be related to the fact that *quien* lacks gender agreement (I thank the anonymous reviewer for this observation).

b. [$_{CP=HC}$ [$_{TP1}$ ella dice
[$_{CP}$ que marcamos
[$_{ParP}$ [$_{QP}$ e_j] [$_{Par'}$ Par
[$_{IC=RC=ForceP}$ [$_{RP}$ la que]$_i$ [$_{Force'}$ Force
[$_{FocusP}$ [$_{SQP}$ más goles]$_j$ [$_{Focus'}$ Focus
[$_{TP2}$ ~~t_i dice [$_{CP}$ que marcamos t_j~~]]]]]]]]]

Szabolcsi (1986)/Heim (1999) claim SQs (under a comparative reading) take a 2-place relation between entities and degrees as one of its arguments. As a consequence, they need to LF-raise in order to adjoin to a constituent denoting a 1-place predicate. The latter defines the "comparison class" of the superlative construction, and must contain an entity variable (the "licensing variable") left by a focus/*wh*-XP; the SQ will add a lambda-abstractor over degrees creating the required 2-place relation. For illustration, the SQ *-est* (in bold type) of (25a) (only possible with a comparative reading, as there is no largest prime number; Heim 1999) LF-adjoins to TP in (25b) because TP is a 1-place predicate denoting the comparison class of the superlative construction (in this case "the set of x persons that wrote a prime number"); the reason why TP is a 1-place predicate is that it contains a trace (denoting the entity variable "x" for persons) left after movement of *who*$_i$. LF-adjunction creates a 2-place relation, as *-est*$_j$ itself leaves a second trace in TP, d_j, denoting a degree variable. The constituent in (25b) between angle brackets perfectly fits as an argument for the SQ, which selects the person "x" of the comparison class who wrote a prime number whose degree "d" is higher than the degree "d" of any other prime number written by any other person "x" in the comparison class. The two variables in TP are emphasized by bold type in (25b).

(25) a. Who wrote the larg**est** prime number?
     b. [$_{CP}$ who$_i$ [$_{TP}$ *-est*$_j$ <[$_{TP}$ **t_i** wrote the larg-**d_j** prime number]>]]

Further data led Szabolcsi (1986) to propose the restriction in (26) concerning the relation between the two variables at issue:

(26) In order for the comparative reading to obtain, the licensing variable must be in the same domain with independent tense as the superlative.

(26) is motivated by the ungrammaticality of complex sentences like (27) under the interpretation where the licensing variable is the trace (in bold type) of the *who*-subject of the main V *said* (the comparison class, then, intends to be "the set of x persons who said..."); the SQ *–est* (in bold type) belongs to the embedded clause, so the licensing variable and *-est* belong to different domains with independent tense (they are not clause-mates; the embedded clause is between brackets):

(27) *Who$_i$ **t_i** said [that you wrote the larg**est** prime number**]**?

Instead, (28a), which has the configuration in (28b), is fully grammatical and manages to obtain the intended reading reproduced under (24a). This is due to the fact that (26) is respected as the SQP *más goles* (in bold type) has raised to the main clause, thus becoming a clause-mate of the entity variable (t_i) subject of *dice*.

(28) a. Ella es **la que**$_i$ **más goles**$_j$ t_i dice [que marcamos t_j]
         she   is who.fem.sg   most goals   says that   scored.1p.pl
         "The number of goals she says we scored is higher than the amount of
         goals the other persons say we scored."
    b. Ella es
       [$_{RC=ForceP}$ **[$_{RP}$ la que]**$_i$ [$_{Force'}$ Force
       [$_{FocusP}$ **[$_{SQP}$ más goles]**$_j$ [$_{Focus'}$ Focus
       [$_{TP}$ **t_i**   dice
       [$_{CP}$ **t_j** que marcamos **t_j**]]]]]]

RC of (28b) intends to be the IC=RC complement of Par in (24b), nonetheless (24a) is ungrammatical. The reason is that, in order to preserve the mutual entailment between TP2 and TP1 in (24b) needed for licensing sluicing of TP2, a 2-place relation must be created both in TP1 and TP2. However, this is impossible in TP1 as the indefinite QP variable e cannot move so e and the entity variable of *ella* (potentially created by LF-movement) cannot be clause-mates.

3.3. Prepositions cannot introduce the superlative quantifier in Superlative Amalgams

Since the 2-place relation in HC/IC of SSAs must relate entities and degrees, SSAs like (29a), with a PP remnant in IC (in bold type), are predicted to be excluded. The PP remnant in IC contains a pied-piped SQP (*más gente*), so the 2-place relation is possible in IC ((29b) is grammatical); however, it demands a PP correlate e in HC (e_{PP} in (29a)) satisfying the c-selection requirements of the verb *desconfía*, which prevents the presence of a QP/SQP null variable needed to create a 2-place relation between entities and degrees in HC (as a result, slucing in IC is not licensed).

(29) a. *Ella   desconfía **e**$_{PP}$ [$_{IC=RC}$ la que   **[$_{PP}$ de [$_{SQP}$ más**   **gente]]**]
          she   mistrusts   who.fem.sg.   of   most   people
    b. Ella es [$_{RC}$ la   que   **[$_{PP}$ de [$_{SQP}$**   **más**   **gente]]**$_i$ desconfía t_i].
          she   is the.fem.sg.   of   most   people   mistrusts
          "She mistrusts the most people."

3.4. The indefinite null variable cannot be the subject of a finite clause

The indefinite variable e of amalgams cannot appear in the subject position of a finite clause, as illustrated by (30a) for Horn-amalgams (Kluck 2011) and (30b) for Andrews-amalgams (Guimaraes 2004); the correlates of e in IC are in bold type:

(30) a. * **e**   [$_{IC}$ I think it's **Brussels**] is the capital of Belgium.
    b. *Tom said that   **e**   [$_{IC}$ I forgot **who**] is dating Amy.

If the constructions dealt with in this paper are amalgams, it is predicted parallel cases with e in subject position will be excluded as well. This prediction is borne out, as illustrated by the ungrammatical (31) (with the subject e in postverbal position and the RP *el que* of IC co-referring with the clitic-left dislocated object *ese videojuego* (as indicated by subindices):

(31) * [Ese videojuego]ᵢ lo   conocen **e**ⱼ
     that videogame   it-CL-ACC know.3.pl
     [IC [RP el que]ᵢ   **[más niños   franceses]**ⱼ]
     what   most children   French
     "That videogame is the one that most French children know."

3.5. The relative clause cannot be headed by a nominal in Superlative Amalgams

    Superlative RCs may be headed by a nominal, as illustrated by (32a) (with the nominal head in bold type). However, in these cases, sluicing is not possible, as shown by the asterisk in (32b). Then, if the dialectal constructions dealt with in this paper are SSAs where the IC is a superlative RC, cases like (32c) are correctly predicted to be ruled out as the RC is headed by a nominal *chica* and, as a consequence, no sluicing may take place in IC:

(32) a. Ella es la **actriz**   que   más sobreactúa.
         she is the actress   that   most overacts
         "She is the actress that overacts the most."
      b. Esa actriz sobreactúa, pero no es la actriz que más ***(sobreactúa)**.
      c. *Ella marca la **chica** que más goles.

3.6. No overt verb may follow the relative pronoun in Superlative Amalgams

    If (1) is a syntactic amalgam, it is predicted no overt verb may follow the RP (see (33a)) as sluicing is obligatory in syntactic amalgams (see (33b, c)):

(33)a. Ella marcó la que más goles (***marcó**)
    b. John is going to I think it is Chicago (***that he is going to**) on Sunday (Horm-amalgam).
    c. Sally will eat I don't know what (***Sally will eat**)

This obligatoriness has always been recognized as an unexpected fact for the sluicing account of amalgams since most instances of sluicing are optional, as illustrated in (34):

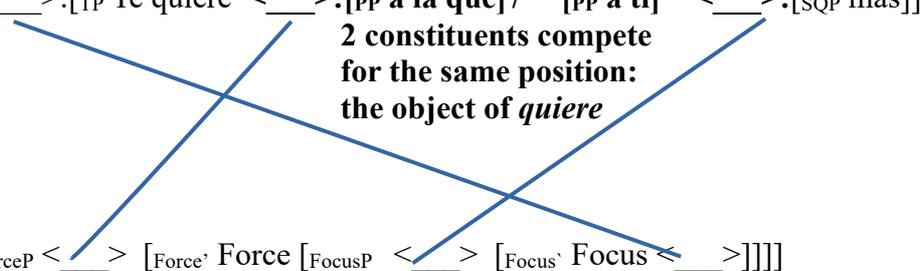(34) Sally will eat something, but I don't know what (**she will eat**).

    In fact, data like (33b,c) are the main reason why Guimaraes (2004)/Johnson (2013, 2014) develop a multi-dominance approach to amalgams. According to such approach, the configuration for (33c) would be (35). The lines in (35) do not express movement (there is neither internal-merge nor copies here), but rather they connect the two different positions occupied by a single constituent in a common configuration (below, such positions are indicated by angled brackets, and the constituent occupying them is introduced by a colon). For the TP *Sally will eat what*, for instance, these positions are the root position in HC and the complement position of the C selected by *know*. Likewise, one single instance of *what* is simultaneously occupying two positions: the object position of *eat* and Spec-CP (note it is eventually pronounced in Spec-CP in (33c)):

(35)   HC.   < ___>:[TP Sally will eat <___>:[DP what]]
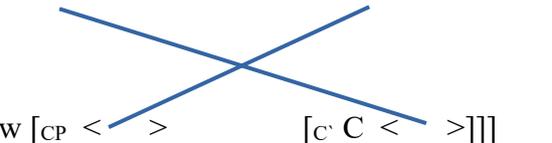
       IC.   [TP I don`t know [CP <___>   [C' C <___>]]]

Since there is only one TP in (35), cases like (33c) with a verb following RP are simply underivable, which in principle represents a clear advantage for multi-dominance accounts.

However, a multi-dominance approach cannot be extended to SSAs. Let us take an SSA like (36a), for instance. Here *a ti* in HC is an object and *a la que* in IC is the RP co-referring with it; the SQP is *más*. Clearly, a multi-dominance configuration for (36a) is unfeasible: as illustrated in (36b), the RP of IC and the object of HC would compete for the same position (the object position of the only verb available, *quiere*) in the shared TP.

(36) a. **Te   quiere [PP a   ti]i**   [PP a la que]i   [SQP **más**].
         CL.Acc.2.sg. loves   to you.sg   to who.fem.sg.   most
         "It is you that (s)he likes the most."

     b. HC <___>:[TP Te quiere <___>:[PP **a la que**] /   [PP **a ti**]   <___>:[SQP **más**]]
                                              2 constituents compete
                                              for the same position:
                                              the object of *quiere*

         IC [ForceP <___> [Force' Force [FocusP <___> [Focus' Focus <___>]]]]

I will not pursue the question of why sluicing is obligatory in amalgams (see Kluck 2014).[8] What is relevant for this paper is that, whatever the reason might be, it can be extended to sentences like (1); if sentences like (1) are SSAs containing sluicing, their RPs can naturally be assigned a Case/theta role (which is the main problem addressed in this paper),

3.7. RPs introduced by prepositions; adverbial RPs; availability of multiple SQPs

One of the anonymous *Borealis* reviewers suggests constructions like (1) might perhaps be considered to be the result of a grammaticalization process:[9] RP (here *las que*) and SQ (*más*) would directly combine giving rise to a sort of complex quantifier *la que más*. The reviewer mentions the Spanish expression *como **el que** más* "as anyone else", close to a lexical item, or an idiom like ***el que** más **el que** menos* "everybody"; in both cases, an RP (in bold type) and an SQ following it get combined.

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8 Kluck (2014) shows multi-dominance cannot account for obligatory sluicing as there are constructions where sluicing is obligatory and multi-dominance cannot be invoked. This is the case of parentheticals like (i), in bold type, where no TP can be shared with the main clause (*someone* is the object of *hit* in the main clause, while *who* is the object of *hit* in the sluiced TP; the asterisk indicates sluicing is obligatory):

(i) Bob hit *someone* – **you can imagine who (*Bob hit in the face)** – in the face.
9   I deeply thank the reviewer for having raised this interesting question and having provided the potentially challenging data discussed in the paragraphs *b)* and *d)* below.

The reviewer concludes that, were the string *la que más* just a complex quantifier directly quantifying on *goles* in (1), no analysis based on amalgamation would be needed[10] (RP would not need any Case/theta role licensor as would just be part of a complex quantifier).[11]

Although an analysis like this might be conceivable, this paper has rather addressed phenomena like (1) in a purely syntactic way, as they display some properties suggesting RP is actually introducing a full RC:

a) Sentences like (36a), where a P introduces RP (*a la que*), are fully productive in the dialect at issue and show RP needs Case.[12] The P *a* preceding RP in (36a) is the accusative Case manifestation of [+human] direct objects in Spanish. The presence of such P can be hardly understood if *la que* has just become part of a complex quantifier *la que má*s (with no RC), but it is if the underlying configuration for (36a) is (37); here, the [+human] PP *a la que* is base-generated as the direct object of the V *quiere* 'loves' in IC (later deleted by sluicing), and then raises to Spec-ForceP (note that the adverbial indefinite null variable *e* in HC is licensed by identity with the adverbial SQP *más* located in the Spec-FocusP of IC):

(37) $[_{CP=HC}$ $[_{TP1}$ ella te quiere a ti
$[_{ParP}$ $[_{QP}$ e_j $]$ $[_{Par'}$ Par
$[_{IC=RC=ForceP}$ $[_{PP}$ a la que$]_i$ $[_{Force'}$ Force
$[_{FocusP}$ $[_{SQP}$ más$]_j$ $[_{Focus'}$ Focus
$[_{TP2}$ ~~ella quiere t_i t_j~~$]]]]]]]]$

On the other hand, it is worth pointing out that not only RPs like *la que/el que/los que/las que* may introduce RCs in SSAs; also adverbial RP s like *donde* 'where' can do so:

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10 According to the reviewer, this is desirable as amalgamation entails strong computational processes. I share the reviewer's view on amalgamation as Kluck's (2011) analysis of amalgams, for instance, involves the above-introduced operation par-Merge, yet structure-building operations ("extensions" of Merge) like parallel-Merge (multi-dominance), sidewards movement, late-Merge or par-Merge itself have been severely criticized by Noam Chomsky in much recent work (Chomsky (2019a, 2019b, 2019c); Chomsky, Gallego and Ott (2019)) on the ground that they are not compatible with the Strong Minimalist Thesis (*i.e.*, with also much recently proposed minimalist principles like Determinacy).

  Yet empirical facts (see the paragraphs below) and the need to obtain a theoretical explanation momentarily justify an assumption like Kluck's theory, otherwise already recently put into practice by other authors for other instances of amalgamation and parenthetical constructions (see, for example, Griffiths (2015)). In this way, SSAs can be eventually perceived as very much less an exceptional phenomenon than it might appear (RP in (1) would be in fact a regular RP).

11 The reviewer emphasizes this hypothesis would also provide the V *marca* in (1) with a properly selected local SQP object (*la que más goles*); recall, though, that my hypothesis is providing *marca* with a properly selected local object as well, this time in the form of an indefinite null SQP variable *e* identified by the SQP *más goles* in IC.

12 SSAs are fully productive, but one of the severe conditions they respect is the one concerning a proper Case assignment for RP. This Case is expected by my hypothesis, as RP is base-generated in a full RC. One of the *Borealis* reviewers asks how an ungrammatical sentence like (i) would be prevented under an amalgamation hypothesis; however, note the RP in (i) lacks the P *a*, mandatory for [+human] objects in Spanish (RC, in bold type, would contain an eventually deleted V *considero* assigning P *a* to RP *el que*):

(i) *Considero a   Pedro   **el que más   listo**.
        I consider   to   Pedro   who   most   intelligent
    "I consider Pedro to be the most intelligent."

(38) Ella   estuvo en   Madrid   **donde** más   veces.
     she   was in   Madrid   where most times
     "It was in Madrid where she was most often."

b) If RP and SQ were just parts of a single quantifier, sentences like (39) would be impossible: the SQ *más* of the SQP *más goles* would be fused with the RP *la que*, so the SQP *más goles* could not be coordinated with the SQP *más canastas*; however, (39) is grammatical in the dialect at issue:

(39) Ella   marca **la que**   más   goles   y   más   canastas.
     she   scores who.fem.sg most   goals and more baskets
     "She scores the most goals and the most baskets."

Instead, under a configuration like (40), the RP *la que* is in Spec-ForceP and the SQP *más goles y más canastas* is the object of *marca* located in Spec-FocusP:

(40) $[_{CP=HC}$ $[_{TP1}$ ella marca
    $[_{ParP}$ $[_{QP}$ e_i] $[_{Par'}$ Par
    $[_{IC=RC=ForceP}$ $[_{RP}$ la que$]_i$ $[_{Force'}$ Force
    $[_{FocusP}$ $[_{SQP}$ más goles y más canastas$]_j$ $[_{Focus'}$ Focus
    $[_{TP2}$ ~~t_i marca t_j~~]]]]]]]]

c) RP in SSAs may be followed by more than one SQP, as illustrated in (41):

(41) Ella$_i$ marcó **la que**$_i$ más   goles en más partidos.
     she   scored who.fem.sg   most   goals in most games
     "She scored the most goals in the most games."

According to my proposal, the IC in (41) would be represented as in (42). In this configuration the SQP *más goles* is in Spec-FocP and the second SQP *en más partidos* is located in the specifier position of a Topic Phrase (Spec-TopicP), once Rohena-Madrazo's (2007) proposal for multiple SQPs in superlative RCs is assumed:

(42) $[_{CP=HC}$ $[_{TP1}$ ella marcó
    $[_{ParP}$ $[_{QP}$ e_i] $[_{Par'}$ Par
    $[_{IC=RC=ForceP}$ $[_{RP}$ la que$]_i$ $[_{Force'}$ Force
    $[_{FocusP}$ $[_{SQP}$ más goles$]_j$ $[_{Focus'}$ Focus
    $[_{TopicP}$ $[_{SQP}$ en más partidos$]_k$ $[_{Topic'}$ Topic
    $[_{TP2}$ ~~t_i marca t_j t_k~~]]]]]]]]]]]

Every SQ in (42) is licensed by the fact that it is included in an RC introduced by an RP. No Spanish SQ can be licensed if it is not c-commanded by an RP or definite article, as illustrated by (43):

(43) *Ella marcó   más   goles
     she scored most   goals
     (ungrammatical under the intended reading: "she scored the most goals")

If *la que* were part of a complex quantifier *la que más* in (41), the SQ in the SQP *en más partidos* would not be c-commanded by either an RP or a definite article so it would not be licensed.

d) Were it true that RP is just a variable needing to be bound by its antecedent and taking part of a complex item RP+SQ (a further suggestion made by the reviewer),[13] it would be possible to find it in an SQP introduced by a P (*para* in (44)); however, such cases are ungrammatical:

(44)   * Ellos   trabajan **para** los que   más empresas.
         they.masc   work   for   who.masc.sg most companies
         "It is them that work for the most companies."

My hypothesis correctly predicts the ungrammaticality of (44): *para más empresas* is an SQP raised to Spec-FocP of IC-RC; *los que* is the RP introducing RC and located in Spec-ForceP of IC-RC, so in no way could RP end up occupying a position internal to SQP.

4. Summary and conclusions

This paper dealt with a dialectal Spanish superlative construction attested in the mid area of Northern Spain. This construction, which I have called Superlative Syntactic Amalgam (SSA), exhibits some anomalous features. On the one hand, it contains a relative pronoun which does not seem to introduce a TP; this poses the question how the pronoun obtains its Case/theta role. On the other hand, a presumable relative clause headed by the relative pronoun would be located in a very odd position disrupting the natural word order of the main clause and preventing the relative clause from obtaining any sort of licensor (as an adjunct, argument or predicate). I have offered a simultaneous account for both problems by proposing that the construction at issue is a syntactic amalgam. If Kluck's (2011) approach to amalgams is assumed, it may be shown that the relative pronoun actually introduces a full relative clause, a superlative free relative with a sluiced TP, so it can obtain a Case/theta role licensor. On the other hand, under par-merge (de Vries 2007), also proposed for other amalgams, the disrupting position of the relative clause and its opacity for licensing from the main clause are expected. The proposal makes some further predictions:
(i) as SSAs contain a superlative free relative with sluicing, both the unavailability of certain relative pronouns like *quien* and the mandatory absence of nominal heads preceding the relative pronoun are expected for SSAs;
(ii) the need of a two-place relation between entities and degrees explains the locality between the relative pronoun and its antecedent as well as the fact that superlative quantifiers cannot be dominated by a PP;

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13   The reviewer remarks that a bound variable status for an RP taking part of a complex item RP+SQ would also predict SQP cannot be left dislocated:

(i)   * **La que   más   goles**, los   marcó   María
         who.fem.sg   most   goals, CL.them.masc   scored   María
         'María scored the most goals.'

Nonetheless, the ungrammaticality of (i) is also predicted by my approach: ICs (here *la que más goles*) are always second conjuncts in a paratactical coordination created by par-merge, but second conjuncts cannot ever raise to the left periphery.

(iii) as the construction at issue is an amalgam, it is unsurprising superlative quantifiers cannot correlate with a subject in the host clause as this also happens with other sorts of amalgams; on the other hand, the fact that the relative pronoun cannot introduce a verb is now perceived not as an striking feature, but as something natural since sluicing is obligatory in all sorts of amalgams.

Finally, some empirical argument have been offered for discarding multi-dominance or grammaticalization as possible approaches which, in principle, seemed to offer an account for the fact that no verb may follow the relative pronoun in these constructions.

Luis Sáez

luissaez@filol.ucm.es

Departamento de Lengua Española

y Teoría de la Literatura

Facultad de Filología

Edificio D, despacho 360

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Avda. Complutense s/n

28040 Madrid,

España

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