

In this paper we attempt an analysis of the constraints that govern the distribution of information in cliticized three-place verb constructions in (Argentinean) Spanish. The organization of this paper is as follows. First, we briefly review some of the traditional analyses of object clitics in the literature and we propose the relevance of accounting for their role in the distribution of information in the sentence. Then we suggest that the studies that analyzed clitics from a discourse perspective fail to recognize that the dative and accusative clitics differ in terms of their pragmatic role. We propose that whereas the accusative clitic serves to mark accessible elements, the dative clitic does not. It is the absence of the dative phrase what signals the dative argument as highly topical in discourse representation. In this regard, the dative clitic is more similar to the PSA-agreement in the verb ending, which serves as the sole representation of topical PSAs. Finally, we argue that the asymmetry between dative and accusative “doubling” can be neatly captured by the distinction between Actual and Potential Focus Domains (AFD, PFD; Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997, Van Valin 2001, 2005), stating the fact that in three-place verbs constructions the PFD excludes the accusative NP.

## 1. THE GENERATIVE ANALYSIS OF CLITIC CONSTRUCTIONS

Spanish is known by its series of object clitics, which may either encode the non-actor arguments or “double” them. Consider examples (1) to (4):

- (1) Se lo dio  
 DAT.3 ACC.3 gave-3sing.<sup>1</sup>  
 'He/She gave it to him/her'
- (2) Se<sub>h</sub> lo dio a Maria<sub>h</sub>  
 DAT.3 ACC.3 gave-3sing. to Maria  
 'He/She gave it to Maria'
- (3) Lo vio  
 ACC.3 saw-3sing.  
 'He/She saw him/her'
- (4) Lo<sub>h</sub> vio a Juan<sub>h</sub>  
 ACC.3 saw-3sing. to Juan  
 'He/She saw Juan'

In sentences such as those in (1) and (3) above the dative and accusative clitics are the sole representation in the syntactic structure of the non-actor arguments of the verb. The fact that the PSA-agreement on the verb ending plus these objects clitics can constitute a sentence on its own, as illustrated by those examples, was at the origin of the traditional classification of object clitics in Spanish and other Romance languages as pronominal heads (Kayne 1975, among others). In the analyses that follow Kayne's seminal work within the generative tradition clitics are considered to be generated in canonical argument position, and it is assumed that due to their weak phonological nature they "move" in order to attach to the host (i.e. the verb), leaving a "trace" in the argument's structural position. Since the argument's structural position is occupied by a trace, this analysis further predicts that the occurrence of a lexical phrase in the same slot would yield ungrammatical results. This prediction is born out in the analysis of French data, in which clitics and lexical phrases occur in strict complementary distribution. However, it was promptly noted that such strict complementarity does not

---

<sup>1</sup> The third person dative clitics *le* (sing.) *les* (plural) are replaced by the suppletive form *se* when preceding an accusative clitic. This form neutralizes number agreement. The third person accusative clitic inflects for gender (-a- for feminine; -o- for masculine) and number (∅ for singular; -s for plural). In all examples, the PSA-agreement suffix on the verb also encodes past tense. Abbreviations: DAT (dative); ACC (accusative).

hold for other Romance languages (for instance, Spanish) in which the co-occurrence of pronominal clitics and their correspondent lexical phrases (i.e. the instances of “clitic doubling”) occurs quite extensively, as illustrated by sentences (2) and (4) above.

In an attempt to solve this problem it was proposed that the lexical phrases do not occupy an argument position but are “dislocated” elements. However, this proposal was also proved unviable since, for instance, clitics can serve as antecedents of anaphors (which must be bound from argument positions); and there does not always need to be a pause between this supposedly “dislocated” element and the rest of the clause.

As another alternative to the “movement hypothesis” proposed by Kayne some scholars supported the view of clitics as directly generated on their surface position, thus leaving the canonical argument position free to be occupied, in the cases of “doubling”, by the corresponding lexical phrase. This approach, known as the “base-generation hypothesis” was originally developed by Rivas (1977) and Jaeggli (1981). However, it also faces some problems. If the constituent formed by the clitic and the verb is assumed to form a syntactic unit, the Lexical Integrity Hypothesis (LIH, as proposed by Chomsky 1970) needs to be abandoned, since clitics enter into syntactic operations (such as “climbing” and functioning as binders). On the other hand, if the LIH is preserved, one cannot account for the clitics’ affixal nature. This latter alternative is nevertheless the one that Jaeggli explicitly favors, presenting three reasons why clitics should be considered as words, separated from the verbs to which they attach: clitics can “climb” in the syntactic structure, they do not affect the stress pattern of the verb, and they show nominal inflectional morphology. Still, these reasons do not always hold. Whereas it is apparent that the phenomenon of clitic “climbing” does not have any

correlate among affixes<sup>2</sup>, it is less clear that clitics never affect the stress pattern of the verb to which they attach. On the contrary, for speakers of Argentinean Spanish enclitic cluster constructions may cause the stress to shift to the ultimate syllable (cf. Argentinean “poné” vs. “ponetelo” ‘put’ vs. ‘put it on’<sup>3</sup>). Regarding the fact that clitics retain some inflectional similarities with other words, such as the –s marking of plurality and the contrast –a/-o to mark feminine and masculine gender, one must note that number inflection in –s only applies to third person clitics (*le/les, lo/los*) and gender inflection only to its subset marking accusative case (*lo(s)/la(s)*), with the rest of the paradigm presenting neither number nor gender inflection.

Furthermore, there seems to be more straightforward evidence supporting the view of clitics as affixes also from a purely grammatical perspective. Following the tests proposed by Zwicky and Pullum (1983), Monachesi (ms.) examines the characteristics that relate clitics to affixes in several Romance languages. All of these characteristics are applicable to Spanish: clitics are constrained in terms of their combinatory possibilities (they can only combine with a verb); they do not alter the lexical category of the host; clitic clusters must be arranged in an idiosyncratic rigid order (e.g. datives always precede accusatives); they can not generally have wide scope over coordinated verbs<sup>4</sup>; and as it is also the case for inflectional formations, the phonological shape of clitics may be affected by other clitics with which they combine<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> At least in Spanish. However Franco (2000:182) refers to Laka (1993) as presenting “evidence from languages with full-fledged verbal agreement [in which] agreement markers can be displaced within the inflectional amalgam.”

<sup>3</sup> Fernandez Soriano (1993) mentions some other phonological process generated by the presence of the clitic: for instance, Standard Peninsular Spanish eliminates in the imperative the second person plural –d and the first person plural –s from the verb: *poned* – *poneos*; *vamos*, *vámonos*. Likewise, she acknowledges the tendency, in colloquial speech, to attach the plural subject agreement morpheme to the cluster formed by the verb and the clitic: *denle* → *delen*.

<sup>4</sup> With the only exception of verbs closely related semantically (like “wash and dry”) and only if the clitics precede the verb (*Lo lavamos y secamos en cinco minutos* ‘We wash and dry it in five minutes’); *\*Para lavar y secarlo en cinco minutos* (\*‘To wash and dry it in five minutes’).

Further, another problem faced by the “base-generation” hypothesis is that inasmuch as it considers clitics to be arguments of the verb, it needs to create “absorption” rules (either in terms of thematic roles or of case) that account for the role of the NP in the cases of “doubling”. The idea of analyzing the clitics as absorbing a thematic role, proposed by the advocates of the “dislocation” version of the “movement hypothesis”, was argued against above. Franco (2000) also challenges the view of considering clitics to absorb case, assigned to the lexical phrase, in turn, by the preposition *a* (Jaeggli 1981), offering examples in which the preposition does not necessarily occur (idem:156):

- (5) La comí la torta  
 ACC.3 ate-1sing. the cake  
 ‘I ate the cake’

A third generative proposal, advanced by Franco (2000), shares with the “base-generation hypothesis” the assumption that clitics are generated *in situ*. However, it favors the idea of treating them as object-verb agreement morphemes, on a par with subject-verb agreement. Thus, it suggests agreement nodes that may be occupied by the clitics, co-indexed either with lexical phrases (in the cases of “doubling”) or with phonologically null *pros* otherwise. Franco’s proposal, however, does not satisfactorily explain, to our point of view, what principle prevents both argument positions to be occupied by lexical phrases in clitic cluster constructions as presented below.

## 2. FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Despite their productive findings, the proposals reviewed above have in common their dependence on abstract syntax and their neglect of pragmatic factors in the

---

<sup>5</sup> A Spanish illustration of this phenomenon is the case of the “spurious *se*”, which is an allomorph of the dative “*le(s)*” when combined with an accusative clitic.

analysis of the “clitic doubling” phenomenon. In opposition, there are also several attempts to account for the role of “clitic doubling” in purely communicative terms. For instance, Silva-Corvalán’s (1981) pioneering study of accusative “doubling” in Argentinean Spanish showed that animate/definite referents are more likely to be doubled, and more likely to be topics of discourse. Similarly, Wiessenrieder (1995) correlated dative “doubling” with the reference to entities that are highly identifiable and topical in the discourse segment, using as corpus the novel “El beso de la mujer araña”, by the Argentinean author Manuel Puig. In turn, Colantoni (2002) confirmed the relevance of the animacy scale for clitic doubling, based on quantitative data obtained from a corpus of oral interviews with Spanish speakers from Corrientes, Argentina. She corroborated that “doubling” occurs predominantly with animate referents, and that therefore it is more frequent with datives than with accusatives. However, she interprets the “doubling” examples in her corpora as an attempt to render the referent of the pronoun more identifiable (as in the cases of elements newly introduced in the discourse context), or to assign contrastive focus to one constituent when there is a set of candidates competing for the reference. At first sight, then, these studies seem to present contradictory results, some claiming that “doubling” emerges for marking topical elements and others that it emerges to mark focal ones.

This disagreement seems to arise in part from a different interpretation of which one the “doubling” element is. As in the case of the grammatical proposals summarized above, researchers who interpret clitics as pronominal heads tend to assume that the “doubling” element is the lexical phrase, whereas researchers who treat clitics as agreement markers tend to assume that the “doubling” element is the clitic. These different perspectives have direct implications for analyses of “doubling” constructions from a discursive standpoint. Thus, in the case of Wiessenrieder’s analysis, which recasts clitics as object agreement markers, it is not surprising that in 75% of the cases

in her corpus the dative clitic suffices as the sole morphosyntactic representation of topical referents, whereas for Colantoni, who favors the view that it is the noun phrase what “doubles” the clitic and therefore needs to account for the co-occurrence of the NP, it is expected to find that in 60% of the cases in her corpus this lexical phrase helps to identify the referent.

As we mentioned, both Wiessenrieder and Colantoni confirm that clitic “doubling” is more frequent for datives than for accusatives. It is claimed that these facts correlate with the place of the referents along the Animacy Hierarchy (cf. Comrie (1989) among many others), given that datives typically encode animate referents whereas accusatives typically encode inanimate ones. The assumption, then, is that the “doubling” of accusative and dative arguments serve the same functions and can be explained by the same principle. It seems to us, on the contrary, that the accusative and dative clitics have, at least in Argentinean Spanish, a fundamentally different status with regards to their role in the encoding of information structure, which correlates with their different privileges of occurrence in “doubling” constructions. This difference seems particularly clear if one analyzes constructions in which *both* clitics appear, and the peculiarities that they manifest. In fact, when both the dative and accusative arguments are cliticized, there is an asymmetry with regards to which of them can be also expressed by a noun phrase in an unmarked word order. Thus, whereas the dative clitic can co-occur with the correspondent NP (6), the accusative clitic cannot (7):

- (6) Se lo di a Maria  
DAT.3 ACC.3 gave-1sing to Maria  
'I gave it to Maria'
- (7) \*Se lo di el regalo  
DAT.3 ACC.3 gave-1sing the present  
'I gave her the present'

This phenomenon seems more intriguing if one accepts the traditionally established correlation between dative NPs, animate referents, and discourse TOPICS at the level of discourse representation. Let us note that in Spanish the unmarked focal accent falls in the last constituent in the CORE. In cases such as the ones above, then, one would expect that the example in which the accusative phrase is in focus (7) would be more acceptable than the one in which the dative phrase is in focus (6). The evidence, however, points in the opposite direction.

We would like to suggest that this puzzle may be solved if one abandons the assumption that dative and accusative “doubling” serve the same discursive function. In fact, when one revises the restrictions that govern the “doubling” of dative vs. accusative arguments, some interesting differences emerge.

The “doubling” of dative arguments is allowed across all varieties of Spanish. Moreover, it has been argued that there are certain constructions in which the co-occurrence of the dative clitic with a lexical dative NP is obligatory. Fernandez Soriano (1993) mentions the cases of inalienable possession constructions (8), and predicates introducing a “benefactive” (9) or an “experiencer” (10), as demanding the co-occurrence of dative clitics:

- (8) (\*)le duele la cabeza a Juan  
DAT.CL hurt.3s. the head to Juan  
'Juan has a headache'
- (9) (\*)le preparé una tarta a mi amigo  
DAT.CL prepared.1s. a cake to my friend  
'I prepared my friend a cake'
- (10) (\*)le gusta el cine a Juan  
DAT.CL like.3s. the movies to Juan  
'Juan likes the movies'

Whereas certain varieties of Spanish allow for the omission of the dative clitic in cases other than the ones just mentioned, an analysis of Argentinean Spanish corpora<sup>6</sup> shows that in this variety the dative clitic is obligatory in virtually all cases in which the dative argument is treated as a direct core argument of the verb (marked by *a*).

The obligatory nature of the dative clitic in the relevant cases casts doubts over its role as encoding the status of the referent in discourse representation. On the contrary, it seems to merely indicate the existence of a non-macrorole direct core argument, whose discourse status is expressed by the characteristics of the lexical phrase selected, in accordance with Topic Continuity Hierarchies such as the one proposed by Givón (1983) and Levinson (1987), among others, which represent the “markedness” of occurrence as Topic along the following (increasing) continuum (from Van Valin, 2005): Zero < Clitic/Bound pronoun < Unstressed pronoun < Stressed pronoun < Definite NP < Indefinite NP.

The situation is different with respect to accusative clitics: its presence is obligatory across all varieties if there is a strong pronoun in direct object position (11). For speakers of Argentinean Spanish, when the accusative argument is encoded by a lexical phrase, the clitic is optional (as in (4) above repeated below as (12)). However, in cases such as this one the referent of the lexical phrase must be recoverable from the discursive or situational context. Thus, (13) is ungrammatical and (14) is only acceptable inasmuch the indefinite NP refers to a specific referent:

(11) (\*)Lo vio a él  
ACC.3 saw.3sing. to he  
'He/She saw him'

(12) Lo vio a Juan  
ACC.3 saw.3sing. to Juan  
'He/She saw Juan'

---

<sup>6</sup> namely, *El Habla Culta de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires*, (Barrenechea, 1987).

- (13) \*Lo compró un regalo.  
ACC.3 bought.3sing. a present  
'He/She bought a present'.
- (14) Lo llamaron enseguida a un médico  
ACC.3 called-3pl. immediately to a doctor  
'They immediately called a doctor'

Note that the privileges of occurrence of accusative “doubling” correlate with the markedness of occurrence as topic of the lexical expression selected, along the topic continuity hierarchy mentioned above. The higher up this expression is in the hierarchy, the less likely the accusative NP will be “doubled” by the accusative clitic. Inversely, in the lower end of the hierarchy we will find that the argument is exclusively encoded by the clitic, and the less likely it will be for the clitic to be “doubled” by a lexical phrase. The challenge then is to explain the “doubling” cases that occur in the middle portion of the hierarchy, involving both the accusative clitic and a NP represented by a strong pronoun, definite NP or (specific) indefinite NP. Our hypothesis is that the accusative clitic is marking the referent of the relevant argument as recoverable, regardless of the fact that a correferential accusative NP may occur in what counts otherwise as the unmarked focal position, as in (13), (15) and (16) above.

Thus, in order to explain accusative doubling, the relevant distinctions seem to be in terms of the distribution of activation levels in discourse representation, which is orthogonal to focus structure. One of the advantages of Role and Reference Grammar over generative models is that it readily allows for the incorporation of the discourse referents' activation levels as part of the information expressed in each of the argument positions in the Logical Structure, thus accounting for the effect that pragmatic factors may have over the syntactic structure. The distinction of different levels of activation is a fine grained one. Following studies by Prince (1981b) and Chafe (1987), among others, Van Valin (2005) proposes that there are, at least, five categories: *active*, i.e. actively

under consideration in the discourse by means of direct mention; *accessible*, i.e. not actively under consideration but readily recognized by the addressee due either to knowledge of the world or occurrence in the immediate environment of the speech situation; *inactive*, i.e. previously mentioned but not actively under consideration and not assumed by the speaker to be recognized by the addressee; *brand new anchored*, i.e. not previously mentioned but related to something already mentioned or accessible; and *brand new unanchored*, i.e. not previously mentioned or related to anything previously mentioned.

Thus, depending on how each argument position is marked in the Logical Structure, we may predict whether the accusative argument will be represented in the syntactic structure by the clitic alone, by a lexical phrase, or by both. The following pattern emerges, with the instances of accusative “doubling” marked in bold (table 1):

	<i>Clitic</i>	<i>NP</i>
<i>Active</i>	Yes	No
<i>Accessible</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Strong pronoun</b>
<i>Inactive</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Definite NP</b>
<i>Brand-new anchored</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Indefinite NP (specific)</b>
<i>Brand-new unanchored</i>	No	Indefinite NP (unspecific)

Another relevant distinction that RRG incorporates is that between Actual Focus Domain and Potential Focus Domain. Let us remember that the first refers to the syntactic domain in which the focal elements may occur, whereas the second refers to the part of the sentence that is actually in focus. Thus, whereas the accusative NP is allowed within the PFD in cliticized two-place verb constructions, in cliticized three-place

verb constructions the PFD excludes it, which accounts for the ungrammaticality of the example (7) above. This sentence becomes grammatical only if there is a pause before the last constituent, marking that it occurs outside of the CORE, in the Right Detached Position, and thus outside of the PFD. As we mentioned above, this asymmetry, together with the distinctions in the privileges of occurrence of the clitics summarized before, seems to suggest that accusative and dative clitics serve a different function with regards to the expression of the information structure in the sentence, and that whereas the accusative clitic marks arguments as recoverable, the dative clitic does not serve by itself to express the status of the referent in discourse representation but merely to encode the existence of a non-macrorole direct argument, whose discursive status is expressed by the referring expression selected to occupy the corresponding position in the Logical Structure.

To summarize, in this paper I presented some of the challenges posed by Spanish clitics to purely formal grammatical models, and argued for a distinction between the dative and accusative clitics with regards to their role in encoding the status of the referents in discourse representation. By presenting evidence from cliticized three-place verb constructions, I suggested that this distinction manifest itself in the ungrammaticality of structures in which the accusative clitic co-occurs with a correferential NP within the Potential Focus Domain. In this regard, the distinctions available in RRG in terms of Actual and Potential Focus Domain and the incorporation of the different activation levels of the referents in the argument positions in the Logical Structure open a productive way for accounting for the impact of pragmatic factors into the syntactic structure.

## REFERENCES

- Barrenechea, A. (ed.) 1987. *El habla culta de la ciudad de Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires.
- Belloro, V. 2004. *A Role And Reference Grammar Account Of Third-Person Clitic Clusters In Spanish*. M.A. thesis, Department of Linguistics, University at Buffalo.
- Bresnan J. and S. Mchombo. 1987. Topic, Pronoun, and Agreement in Chicheŵa. *Language*, 63(4):741-782.
- Chafe, W. 1987. Cognitive Constraints on Information Flow. In Tomlin, R. (ed.) *Coherence and Grounding in Discourse*, 21-51, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Colantoni, L. 2002. Clitic Doubling, Null Objects and Clitic Climbing in the Spanish of Corrientes. In Gutierrez-Rexach, J. (ed) *From words to discourse: Trends in Spanish Semantics and Pragmatics*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Fernandez Soriano, O. 1993. Los pronombres átonos en la teoría gramatical. Repaso y balance. In Fernandez Soriano (ed) *Los pronombres átonos*, Madrid: Taurus.
- Franco, J. (2000). Agreement as a Continuum. In Beukema, F. and M. den Dikken (eds) *Clitic Phenomena in European Languages*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- García-Miguel, J.M. 1991. La duplicación de complemento directo e indirecto como concordancia. *Verba* 18:375-410.
- Givón, T. 1983. Topic continuity in discourse: An introduction. In T. Givón (ed.) *Topic continuity in discourse: A quantitative cross-language study*, 1-42. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Jaeggli, O. 1981. *Topics in Romance Syntax* Dordrecht: Foris.
- Lambrecht, K. 1994. *Information structure and sentence form*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Levinson, S. 1987. Pragmatics and the grammar of anaphora: A partial pragmatic reduction of binding and control phenomena. *Journal of Linguistics* 23: 379-434.
- Kayne, R. 1975. *French Syntax: The Transformational Cycle*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Monachesi, P. (ms.) *The verbal complex in Romance: a case study in grammatical interfaces*.
- Prince, E. 1981b. *Toward a Taxonomy of Given-New Information*. In Cole, P. (ed.). *Radical Pragmatics*. New York: Academia Press, 223-256.
- Real Academia Española. 1999. *Gramática descriptiva de la lengua Española*. Madrid: Espasa.
- Silva-Corvalán, C. 1981. The Diffusion of Object-Verb Agreement in Spanish. *Papers in Romance*, 3:163-76.
- Suñer, M. 1988. The role of agreement in clitic-doubled constructions. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 6:391-434.
- Van Valin, R. 1999. *A Typology of Focus Structure and Syntax*. In Raxilina, E. and J. Testelec (eds.) *Typology and the Theory of Language: From Description to Explanation*. Moscow.
- Van Valin, R. 2001. *The Role and Reference Grammar Analysis of Three-Place Predicates*. Unpublished ms. [available on RRG web site].
- Van Valin, R. (in press) *Introduction to RRG*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Van Valin, R. and R. LaPolla 1997. *Syntax. Structure, meaning and function*. Cambridge:CUP.
- Weissenrieder, M. 1995. Indirect Object Doubling: Saying Things Twice in Spanish. *Hispania* 78:169-177.
- Zubizarreta, M. 1999. Las funciones informativas: Tema y Foco. In Bosque, I. and Demonte, V. (dir.) *Gramática Descriptiva de la Lengua Española*, v. 3. Madrid: Espasa.