Object Person Marking in two under-represented Spanish Dialects of Mexico

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Abstract

This paper is about a clitic-like form *lo* that appears in two under-studied dialects of Mexico in the context of transitive clauses. The distribution of this clitic-like form in these dialects is at odds with Standard Mexican Spanish which does not allow it in the same context. This clitic-like form resembles the singular, masculine, accusative object clitic of Standard Spanish, but it differs in that it does not show the agreement pattern expected for object clitics. In this paper we argue that this clitic-like form is better understood as an object marker that is triggered by the lack of a positive [Participant] feature in the direct object as part of the extended projection of the Object-DP. We also propose that this marking strategy is not the result of linguistic transfer or interaction with a different language, but rather a possible development

within the grammar of Spanish. This marking strategy is, in fact, an inherent strategy of Spanish, but it gets blocked by normative pressure. The fact that this strategy flourishes in dialects apart from normative/academic contexts could be an indicator that the explanation we offer is on the right track.

Keywords: Spanish clitics, person marking, Spanish dialects, Differential object marking, underrepresented varieties, dialect contact

1. Introduction

In this paper we argue for a unified analysis of an OBJECT PERSON MARKING (OPM) strategy by means of a morphological exponent *lo,* that resembles the third person, masculine, singular Clitic Pronoun of Standard Spanish, in two under-represented Spanish dialects spoken in two different regions in Mexico. One variety is spoken in the state of Chiapas (ChS) whereas the other is spoken in Teopantlan, Puebla (TS). The latter can be argued to be contact induced since most speakers are bilingual with Nahuatl as L1 and Spanish as L2, while in the former contact is not synchronically attested.

We explore the relation of Spanish in contact with other languages in the above- mentioned regions to show that the remarkable differences between them preclude an account for the homogenous distribution of *lo* based solely on *contact*. One shared commonality is that both of these varieties are what we call *unsupervised*; that is, these varieties are not under the influence of any other dominant, more normative variety of Spanish spoken by a community that might assign some negative social value to the linguistic features that characterise them. In other words, the varieties we study are isolated from the normative pressure of dialects considered prestigious, and, as such, they can develop grammatical features that are latent in the grammar of Spanish.

This article is organised as follows: in §2 we present a characterization of the variants under study, in §3 we show some well-known facts about doubling in more wide-spread Spanish dialects and we contrast them with descriptive data from less-known doubling dialects. In §4 we present an analysis of the dialects under study based on the lexical properties of the functional layer of the Verb, and finally, in §5 we sketch an explanation of the linguistic data that draws a general picture of the phenomenon. In §6 we attempt to answer a question regarding the fact that only certain dialects exhibit this behavior as opposed to Standard Spanish and other varieties. §7 sums up our views presented in this paper and gives a conclusion.

2. Two different Spanish variants, same oddity

In this article we draw data from two different regional variants of Mexican Spanish: the Spanish spoken in the municipality of Teopantlan, Puebla (TS) and the Spanish spoken in the State of Chiapas (ChS). The former is located roughly in the central portion of the country, whereas the latter is located in the south-east region of Mexico. Both variants exhibit the *same* morphosyntactic property at odds with the Standard variant of Mexican Spanish (MSS), that is, both variants place a *clitic-like* form *lo* in a preverbal position resembling the context of clitic-doubling. Interestingly, these

clitic-like forms have a very different distribution of that of the well-known clitic-doubling contexts:

(1)   a.   *Lo* llevo   <u>las chamacas</u> que   viajan   conmigo (ChS)
           lo take-1SG   the girls   that   travel-3PL   with.me
           'I take the girls that travel with me.'
      b.   *Lo* está   protegiendo la   pared para que no pase tanto   frío (TS)
           lo is-3SG protecting   the wall   for   that not pass so-much cold
           'She/he fixes the wall so she/he does not feel so much cold'.
      c.   Llevo   a   <u>las   chamacas</u> (MSS)
           take-1SG DOM   the   girls
           'I take the girls with me.'
      d.   *¿Los/*lo/*la/*las* conoce usted <u>los metates</u>? (cited by Belloro 2012: 417)
           them   know   you   the metates
           'Do you know them the *metates*?'

(1a) shows data from ChS where the clitic-like form *lo* is in the preverbal position. The same can be seen in (1b), taken from TS. In (1c) we see data from MSS where this marker does not appear in a similar sentence to (1a). Although MSS is not normally thought of as a variety where clitic-doubling normally occurs, some studies have shown that clitic-doubling does appear in corpus with a similar proportion than in Rioplatense Spanish (Barraza 2006, Belloro 2012). Clitic-doubling is obligatory when a third person pronoun is in the object position: *él* (he)*, ella* (she)*, ellos* (they.M)*, ellas* (they.F). When a full DP is doubled the clitic that doubles it agrees in gender and number, without agreement the sentence is not grammatical, as shown in (1d).

Besides the distribution of *lo* in the preverbal position, the data from both ChS and TS shares several commonalities, such as an almost complete lack of Differential Object Marking (DOM) where it would otherwise be expected for other varieties such as MSS (1c) for [+Human], [+Animate] or [+Definite] referents. This fact can be observed even with proper nouns such as (2) and a wide range of syntactic and semantic diverse objects (3):

(2)   a.   *Lo*   miras   ø <u>Nico</u>   diciendo   eso. (ChS)
           lo-3SG.OBJ see-2SG   ø N   saying   that
           'You can see Nico saying that.'
      b.   Carlos *lo*   vio   ø <u>José</u>. (TS)
           Carlos lo-3.OBJ   see-3.SG.PST ø José
           'Carlos saw José.'

(3)   a.   Que   se *lo*   dé   <u>un   vaso   de   agua</u>. (ChS)
           That   se **lo**-3.OBJ give-1SG a   glass   of   water
           'That I give it to them a glass of water'.
      b.   *Lo*   llevan   al   campo <u>una vaca y   un   burrito</u>. (TS)
           lo-3.OBJ take-3PL   to.the   field   a   cow   and a   donkey
           'They are taking a cow and a donkey to the fields.'

Nevertheless, when marking first/second person it yields an ungrammatical reading (4a). For the expression of those person features, these dialects seem to conform with MSS both in the selection of the correspondent clitic for first and second person, and in the DOM of the doubled pronoun (4b):

(4) a. *Ayer   *lo*   vi   a   ti
         Yesterday **lo**-2.OBJ   see-1SG.PST   DOM   you
         Intended: 'Yesterday I saw you'.
     b. Ayer   *te*   vi   **a**   ti
         Yesterday 2.OBJ   see-1SG.PST   DOM   you
         'Yesterday I saw you'.

Following (Mayer 2017) these varieties could be characterized as *liberal clitic doubling with non-agreeing clitics dialects*, since the doubling phenomenon is not restricted to animate referents, but rather it has been extended to inanimate referents. However, we will propose that this is not an instance of clitic-doubling, but rather of Object Person Marking (OPM). In the next subsection §2.1 we examine the analyses that have been provided in the literature for Spanish dialects that show a similar pattern to the one we have just presented. In §2.2 we outline our proposal of the sociolinguistic conditions we believe can give rise to the object marking strategy under discussion.

2.1. Lo-*object marking as contact induced change*

The phenomenon we have identified for the ChS and TS varieties is not an entirely unnoticed one. Forms of an invariant *lo* that appear in object marking constructions have been identified in several Spanish varieties that share what has been called *a contact situation*, that usually involve varieties of Spanish in contact with a minoritized language: Spanish-Quechua (Kany 1994, Lipski 1996, Caravedo 1997, Palacios 2006, Gómez-Seibane 2012, Klee 2014, Mayer 2017), Spanish-Tzutujil (García 2006), Spanish-English (Guerrero 2013, Parodi & Guerrero 2016), Spanish-Otomi (Guerrero-Galván 2006, Zimmermann 2010, Avelino-Sierra & Torres-Sánchez 2021), Spanish-Nahuatl (Flores-Farfán 2008), Spanish-Zoque (Torres-Sánchez 2021), Spanish-Basque (Gómez-Seibane 2017), among others. The languages with which Spanish is in contact belong to typologically very different families and do not form a cohesive geographical location. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of a reduced clitic paradigm and clitic doubling is attested in all of them, which would call for a unified explanation and analysis.

Not all the works cited provide an analysis of the phenomenon, the ones that do (García 2006, Palacios 2006, Mayer 2017, Avelino-Sierra & Torres-Sánchez 2021, Torres-Sánchez 2021, among others) agree in identifying this invariable *lo* doubling construction as an instance of *Contact induced Change* (CIC) and tend to give one of two explanations to it. In the first one, bilingualism is understood as the trigger that causes the observed pattern. Studies of this kind tend to provide a much more detailed description of the bilingualism status observed in a community and its members. Avelino-Sierra & Torres-Sánchez (2021), for instance, offer a precise characterization of the level of bilingualism attested in two different communities, one in contact with Otomí, and the other in contact with Tepehuano. The authors try to link bilingualism, and other sociolinguistic variables with the frequency of *lo*-object marking constructions in corpus. The two communities analysed by Avelino-Sierra and Torres-Sánchez show different levels of bilingualism as well as different distributions of the construction analysed, but the authors conclude that bilingualism is the key factor that allows for the construction to exist. Nevertheless, this kind of studies don't provide a change mechanism that can explain why this particular feature is shared among contact varieties.

The second kind of analysis (Palacios 2006, 2014, Gómez-Seibane 2012, 2017) relies on a form of CIC (Palacios 2014, Heine & Kuteva 2003, 2005, 2010, Ross 2020)

that cannot be categorised as a form of borrowing or transference from one language to another. The contact situations that can be described with this kind of contact induced change show "large-scale bilingualism among the linguistic communities concerned, or at least in one of the linguistic communities, and it involves a larger time span, not seldom extending over three to five centuries" (Heine & Kuteva 2003: 531). This large-scale bilingualism does not necessarily translate into synchronic bilingualism, so it is not always possible to measure it and properly characterize it as in the above-mentioned studies. Although this kind of contact induced change has gained some notoriety as a theory of change it fails to provide a reasonable account of the change mechanism. In many of the discussions of this phenomenon, it is almost the lack of other measurable features that allow for the label "contact induced change" to apply.

Part of the problem with contact explanations is the broad sense in which 'contact' is typically used. It encompasses a variety of sociolinguistic situations that range from bilingualism, diglossia, dialects in contact, mixed languages, and creoles to code switching, as well as heritage varieties (Fisiak 1995, Nicolaï 2007, Zimmermann 2010, D'Alessandro 2021). The linguistic outcomes produced by contact are also various and can be as different as borrowings, transferences (Heine & Kuteva 2003), convergences (Wiemer 2021), indirect contact (Palacios 2011), among many others. The multiplicity of phenomena and the lack of a clear definition of contact, contact-induced change, indirect contact, etc., has been noticed by the proponents of this field of research as it is commonly remarked in the theoretical discussions of this linguistic subdiscipline (Nicolai 2007, Winford 2020, Martinez 2021). Instead of being treated as a subject of investigation, contact is normally assumed as a feature that both describes and explains linguistic configurations.

2.2. Lo-*object marking varieties as unsupervised varieties*

D'Alessandro (2021) provides a framework for understanding change in contact that distinguishes between macrocontact, as contact between maximally different languages, and microcontact, as contact between minimally different languages or varieties. She analyses structural differences between the languages under contact in microcontact situations. The existing analysis for *lo*-object marking varieties assume from the start that the phenomenon is related to macrocontact; that is, two languages with major structural differences are spoken in the same space, but there is no clear mechanism of borrowing or structural transfer that can explain the similar outcome observed. The only two commonalities of these varieties appear to be that they involve a change in the grammar of Spanish and that there is contact involved in the process. These two features are correlated, but no indication of the change mechanism is outlined as to provide a causal link between them.

In this paper we propose that *lo*-object marking, as attested in all these varieties is related not to macrocontact, but to microcontact, or more precisely, a lack of intense microcontact between a non-normative variety of Spanish and a Standard normative variety of the same language. In other words, the varieties under study are typically isolated from other hegemonic varieties that could exercise normative pressure. This lack of normativity allows both for bilingualism to exist and internally possible features of Spanish to surface and develop. In this sense, language contact would be viewed not as a trigger for change, but rather as an epiphenomenon that correlates with change. In what follows we will use ChS and TS as an example to specify the theory we believe can better explain the phenomenon under study.

In his account of linguistic ecologies, Yakpo (2021) distinguishes between "economically and politically more egalitarian linguistic ecologies [that] create the conditions for the early acquisition of multiple languages" and "hierarchical and non-egalitarian ecologies with rather sharp ethnolinguistic boundaries" (Yakpo 2021: 129). This second class of linguistic ecology represents an accurate description of the social conditions shared by contact varieties of Spanish in general and, more particularly, by the varieties we analyze. The relationship indigenous languages in Mexico have with Spanish is determined by the political and economic hegemony of the latter; this is, of course, a result of colonialism and sustained practices of oppression that followed the country's independence in 1810 (Zimmerman 2010). Following Yakpo (2021) good examples of hierarchical and non-egalitarian ecologies are "those created by European colonialism and other enterprises of conquests" (2021:129). The conditions in which ChS and TS have developed respond to these non-egalitarian linguistic ecologies and, as a result, substandard varieties of Spanish have emerged. Here, we use substandard from the point of view of normativity and social valuation. There is nothing linguistically substandard in these varieties, but precisely because of the isolated and marginalised conditions the communities that speak these varieties of Spanish experience, they are viewed as far from the centre of normativity. It is necessary to provide a more precise characterization of the linguistic ecologies with which we are concerned in this paper.

The community of Teopantlan is a Spanish-Nahuatl bilingual community. It can be divided into three different groups according to how "loyal" the speakers are to the variety of Spanish spoken there (García-González 2021:117). In the first group there are individuals who have a stable variety that shows a reduced *lo* clitic paradigm, do not have DOM with *a* where it would be otherwise expected, and double every direct object. The individuals who belong to this group do not show mobility, they tend not to leave the community and only speak with a tight social network of individuals who belong to the community as well. The second group is made by individuals that show an intermediate variety; they double all the direct objects they produce but some direct objects show DOM with *a*. These individuals tend to have some contact with external government authorities and travel outside the community. The third group is made by individuals who have sustained contact with government officials outside the community; they show the closest resemblance with the standard normative variety of Spanish. However, individuals from the third group show accommodation, that is, they tend to double the direct objects with *lo* when speaking to members of the community, and not to do it when speaking to individuals outside of it.

In the south-eastern state of Chiapas, the linguistic situation is somewhat more complex. Chiapas shows great linguistic diversity with 14 different languages from two linguistic families: Mayan (Akatek, Ch'ol, Chuj, Jakaltek, K'iche', Lakandon, Mam, Q'anjob'al, Mocho, Teko, Tojolabal, Tseltal and Tsotsil) and Mixe-zoque (Chiapas Zoque). As of 2020, Chiapas is the Mexican state with more people of 5 years of age or older who speak an indigenous language, 1,459,648 according to the last census (INEGI 2020). Other indigenous languages, like Zapotec are spoken in the state, thanks to migration processes. Contact between the languages currently spoken in Chiapas and Spanish is considerable, but there are few studies that can characterise the degree of contact and the linguistic consequences of it in either a particular indigenous language or Spanish (Cruz-Gómez 2014).

The phenomenon under discussion in this work has been attested in Spanish monolingual communities from Chiapas (Chapa-Barrios 2019). If this linguistic ecology was to be described as a form of 'contact situation', it would have to be as a

form of indirect contact (Palacios 2011, 2014). As of now, it is impossible to say with certainty what degree of contact with which language results in a form of Spanish with clitic doubling. The lack of sociolinguistic studies in the region makes it harder to say what degree of extension this phenomenon has in Chiapas. What is clearer, as we have said before, is that clitic doubling is attested in a variety of communities of monolingual speakers of Spanish in the state.

There is no account of the sociolinguistics of Chiapas, nonetheless we know it is a historically isolated place. Contact with the country's capital was difficult until the last decades of the 20th century (De Vos 2010). Perceptual dialectology studies made in Mexico (Serrano 2019) show that individuals from the capital do not recognize a particular variety from Chiapas. In contrast with this unknowingness regarding ChS, the few studies made from this variety (Francis 1960, Gutiérrez-Penagos 2015, Chapa-Barrios 2019) show a well differentiated dialect with grammatical features not shared by any other variety spoken in the country. So much so that Chiapas was once called "a paradise to the Mexican dialectologist" (Lope 1960: 223). This rich and different variety is well unnoticed by the general population of the rest of the country and there is no stereotypical representation of this dialect in the media or in the collective imagination. This is another proof of the relative isolation that Chiapas has had, one that is just recently starting to change. In the capital of Chiapas, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, *lo*-object marking is not uncommon, but is far from obligatory. DOM occurs even in objects marked by *lo*. Chapa-Barrios (2019) shows data of around 40% of *lo*-marked objects with DOM with *a*. Communities that are far from the capital show greater frequencies of doubling and lack of DOM.

The linguistic ecologies we compare here show a difference of degree. In TS it is the individuals that can be categorised in different groups according to mobility and fidelity to the local variety, whereas in ChS the communities can be grouped according to how close a relationship they have with the state's capital. Teopantlan is a bilingual community but the data from Chiapas was all taken from Spanish monolingual communities. In this sense, we can say that bilingualism does not seem to play a crucial role in the development of the phenomenon we analyze.

In this section we have provided our take on the sociolinguistic conditions in which *lo*- marked objects appear. We call these varieties "unsupervised" because they are isolated from the normative centre which does not recognize them and, because of that, cannot censor them. It is the lack of microcontact between these substandard varieties and the standard/normative centre that has allowed both contact situations to be sustained and the *lo*-object markers to emerge in Spanish grammar. In this sense, we propose that contact is not a trigger for this particular change, but rather a phenomenon that cooccurs with it. The ecological conditions of these varieties have allowed the emergence of a feature that is latent in the grammar of Spanish. In the rest of this paper, we provide an explanation for the structural conditions that characterise the *lo*-object marker.

3. Person features

This work is concerned with one of the so-called phi-features, in particular with the person feature in that it seems to be the driving force behind the distribution of the *lo* form in what we have shown above.

Person has been taken as a feature that relates discourse participants with the grammar (Harley & Ritter 2002) in that it refers either to the speaker or to the

addressee. The syntactic (and morphological) import of person lies in the fact that it triggers agreement with the verb or some functional projection of it, and that in languages such as Spanish, this relation is signaled via morphological agreement.

Within Minimalism, it is now standard to understand the agreement relation in the probe-goal system as Agree (Chomsky 2001), in which a phi-feature is carried into the derivation by two separate categories; one (the goal) has an interpretable version of the feature, whereas the other (the probe) has an uninterpretable one. In this framework, interpretability means that this formal feature has a semantic interpretation at the interface with semantics. For Agree to take place, it is necessary that the probe c-command the goal.[1]

Most person feature typologies assume that there is a fairly small inventory of persons: first person (the speaker or author), second person (the addressee), and the third person (others, or non-discourse participants). Since it is not central for our current argumentation, we will simply assume Ackema & Neelsen's (2018) proposal that there is a three-way system of person features that distinguishes first person, second person and third person.[2] According to them, the third person refers broadly to *others*, that is, entities (people or objects) not currently in the discourse while the first and second person refer to the discourse participants (I, and you).

We believe that this distinction is what lies at the core of the distribution of the clitic- like form *lo* in the dialects under study; in particular, in the feature geometry system by Harley& Ritter (2002), we assume that the relevant distinction lies in the PARTICIPANT node, in this case, the lack of person features (i.e. non-participant) is what triggers the marking of the third person object.

(5)   Morphosyntactic Feature Geometry adapted from Harley & Ritter (2002:486)
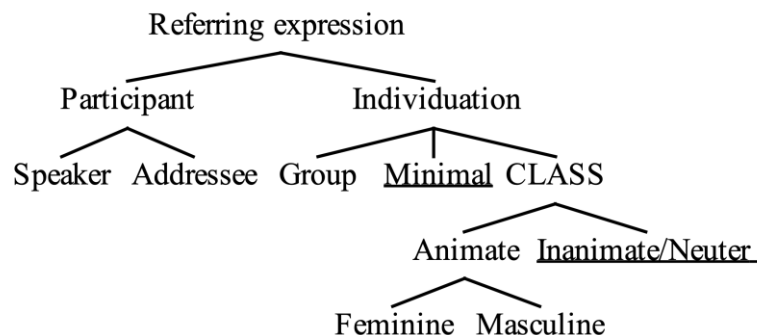
In (5) we see the geometry proposed by Harley & Ritter (2002), and according to them, the main difference between first/second person and third person is that the reference of first/second are interchangeable in the discourse, whereas the reference of the third is always fixed.

Given the above said, we could say that what drives the marking of third person in the dialects under study, is the fact that every time a nominal goal in the Object position lacks Participant, it renders the agreement of *v* and Object to be signaled by *lo,* which in other doubling variants or in other pronominal clitic environments it would

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[1]   There are other proposals in which the way this asymmetry is ordered can be inverted (i.e., that thegoal c-commands the probe). For a discussion see (Ackema & Neeleman 2018).

[2]   In their proposal they call *i, u,* and *o,* respectively for first, second, and third person. They also propose an extensive discussion regarding the different types of third persons, and the effects that arise when person features meet number features.

co-vary with the number and gender of the Object. This of course raises some questions about *v* such as i) why, if it is the case, the *v* probe comes to a halt to its agreement task, and ii) what happens with the rest of its phi-features (number and gender).

One way to address these two challenges may be the very fact that person features rank over number and gender features and that in these dialects the lack of person is a condition enough to insert a vocabulary item such as *lo* which is neutral regarding number and gender as opposed to, say, MSS where the lack of person in the Object is enough to trigger the marking of number and gender. In any case, regarding (ii), we may propose that the *v* probe is already defective, lacking number/gender features, and underspecified for person; the second possibility is that the *v* probe actually agrees fully with its N goal but in the morphological component there is an insertion rule that blocks the insertion of further agreement morphemes beyond person and halting its specification in *lo*. We will come back to this in §5.

Given Harley & Ritter's (2002) system, we could say that these dialects use *lo* as a referring expression that individuates minimally its Objects:

(6)   Feature Geometry for third person Objects in TS and ChS

<div align="center">

Referring expression
|
Individuation
|
Minimal
lo

</div>
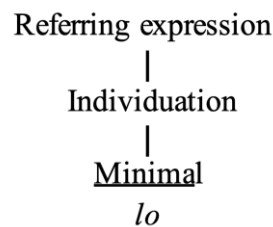
If what we propose is on the right track, then, there must be a syntactic way to implement it. We will explain the details in the remainder of the paper.

4. Object Clitic-doubling across some Spanish variants

From a syntactic perspective, Spanish pronominal clitics (PCs) have a very well-defined distribution with respect to the verb. PCs are postverbal whenever the verb is in its non-finite form (7a), in positive imperative (7b), gerund (7c), and subjunctive imperative (7d):

(7)   a.   (Quiero)   creer=*lo*
               (want-1PRS)   believe.INF=it
               'I want to believe it'.
        b.   ¡Crée=*lo*!
               believe-2IMP=it
               'Believe it!'.
        c.   (Estoy)   creyéndo=*lo*
               (be-1PRS)   believe-1SG.PRS=it
               '(I am) believing it'.
        d.   Créa=*lo* (usted)
               believe-2IMP.SBJV=it (you)
               'Believe it (you respect)'.

PCs are preverbal whenever the verb is finite or in the non-finite verb forms excluded from the postverbal position, that is, the participle:

(8) a. *Lo* quiero.
         it=want1-PRS
         'I want it.'
     b. Eso es   *lo*   querido.
         that be-3PRS   it   want.PST.PTCP
         'That is what is wanted.'

There are a few well-known Spanish dialects in which the PC is doubled by a DP with which it—apparently—shares the argument position,[3] the most renowned of them might be the Rioplatense spoken in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The basic facts of clitic doubling are that there appear to be two elements sharing the same argument position, Object in this case, one is a full DP, while the other is a PC:

(9) a. *Lo*   vimos   <u>a   Carlos</u>
         him   see.1PL.PST   DOM   Carlos
         'We saw (him) Carlos'.
     b. La   vimos   a   María
         her   see.1PL.PST   DOM   María
         'We saw (her) María'.

One of the classic accounts for this behavior is the so-called Kayne's Generalisation (Kayne 1975), which describes the morphosyntactic distribution of doubled elements co-occurring with clitics. The basic idea is that due to case-marking requirements, the doubled DP must be introduced by an affix which in the absence of the clitic would not appear. In Spanish, this is instantiated by the *a* morpheme.
    In (9a-b) the *a* morpheme is supposed to assign Case the DPs *Carlos* and *María*, respectively.
    There are other semantic considerations that have been brought to light to be of importance, for example, in the Rioplatense doubling. For instance, Suñer (1988) has argued that the referent of the clitic-doubled DP must be Specific not only Animate or Human as was previously proposed:

(10) a. No   (*lo)   oyeron   a   ningún   ladrón
         not him   hear.3PL.PST DOM   any   thief
         'They didn't hear any thief'.
     b. (*La) buscaban   a   alguien   que   los   ayudara
         her   search.3PL.PST DOM   somebody who   them   help.SBJV
     c. *La* oían   a   Paca / a   la   niña / a   la   gata.
         her   hear.3PL.PST DOM Paca DOM the girl DOM the cat
                                                        [+anim+spec(-def)]
         'They heard Paca/ the girl/ the cat'.
     d. A diario, *la* escuchaban   a   una   mujer   que   cantaba
         daily   her   hear.3PL.PST DOM   a   woman   who   sing.3SG.PST

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[3]   There might also be the case that the true argument is the clitic, and the DP is the double. There are several investigations that deal with this phenomenon, so we will refer the reader to them. See, Uriagereka (1995), Raposo & Uriagereka (2005), Romain (2015), *inter alia*.

tangos.   [+anim,   +spec,   -def]
tangos
'Daily, they heard (her) a woman who sang tangos.' (adapted from Suñer 1988:396)

Suñer showed that there was a specificity requirement for the DPs to be clitic-doubled as we see in her examples of (9). In particular, Suñer argued that there should be an agreement relation between V and the DP and that the relevant feature was [Specific] in what she called the *Matching Principle*. We will see that this requirement is obviated in other doubling dialects.

5. *Lo* as an object person marker and the features of Person

In order to explain how the object person marking (OPM) *lo* is instantiated in these dialects, we need to lay down the mechanism we assume here. Firstly, along with van der Waal (2015) we propose a version of the DP with multiple layers, critically, we assume that the DP is selected by a Person head that projects a Person Phrase (PersP).

This PersP can be independently proposed since several authors (see §3) agree that along the phi-features continuum, person ranks over number and gender, therefore we would expect that each of those features projects a phrase of their own above the NP. We leave aside those features/projections in the representations here, due to space constraints:
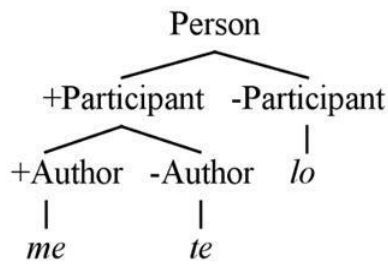
(11)   [PersP [Pers][DP [D] [NP]]]

A reviewer has drawn our attention to Nevins (2007) in which the author proposes that person is a feature composed, minimally, by [Participant] and [Author] features. Nevins argues that those features are binary in nature, so the value of the person feature is the result of alternation of the values of those features:

(12)   Feature values for Person (simplified)
        1st: [+Participant, +Author]
        2nd: [+Participant, –Author]
        3rd: [–Participant, –Author]

                                                Adapted from Nevins (2007:288)

We believe that our proposal is in line with much of Nevins': there seems to be evidence to argue that 3p is actually a person, as opposed to being the absence of person, at least in the syntax. The evidence considered so far suggests that there is a morphological exponent of the 3p in the dialects we study here, and it enters to fill a *gap* in the Object agreement paradigm that is left usually unmarked for in Standard Spanish:

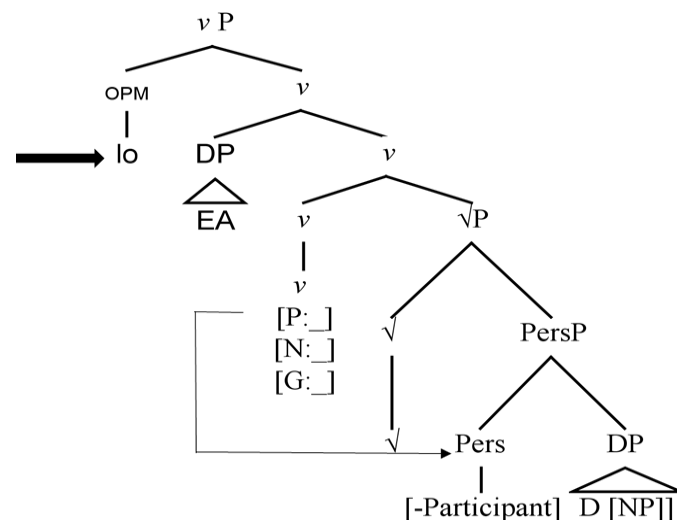(13)   Person features geometry and their Object marker correlates in TS and ChS.

```
                    Person
              ⟋————————⟍
       +Participant   -Participant
          ⟋————⟍          |
     +Author  -Author     lo
        |        |
       me       te
```

Considering the above described, the agreement process would begin at the relevant probe for the given domain, in this case, *v* which is minimally specified for [uParticipant:_, uAuthor:_]. As *v* probes into PersP, the matching process could have two different outcomes. The first is that *v* finds [+Participant] and then it has two choices, either 1p or 2p is involved. Under Multiple Agree (Hiraiwa, 2001), *v* must keep probing until it finds the [Author] feature with either of two values +/−. If the value of the feature is [+Author], then the Person is set to 1p and the agreement marker will spell-out as *me*: *La mujer **me** vio (a mí)* ('the woman saw me'). On the other hand, if the value is [–Author], the Person is set to 2p and the agreement marker will be *te*: *La mujer **te** vio (a ti)* ('the woman saw you').

The second relevant outcome results when *v* probes PersP and finds [-Participant]. In this case, the probe stops its agreement process, the Person value is set to 3p, and (since it is not relevant for non-participants to distinguish between speaker or addressee) in these dialects, the agreement relation is spelled-out as *lo*: *El hombre **lo** vio el perro* ('the man saw the dog'). So, considering what we have described above, in the Person head, there is a feature that crucially distinguishes between 1/2p and 3p [Participant], this feature can have two values, the positive value can trigger 1/2p agreement, whereas the negative triggers 3p.

In the dialects under study, we propose that this distinction is central for the distribution of *lo*, in particular, the negative value of [-Participant] will trigger its external merge (signalled by the bold arrow in (14)) on the edge of *v:*

(14)   Structure of the *v* phase in TS and ChS (provisional)

```
                        v P
                  ⟋————————⟍
             OPM              v
              |          ⟋————————⟍
        ➡️   lo      DP              v
                    ⟋⟍         ⟋————————⟍
                    EA  v        v          √P
                         |              ⟋————⟍
                         v             √        PersP
                       [P:_]           |      ⟋————⟍
                       [N:_]           |    Pers    DP
                       [G:_]           |      |    ⟋⟍
                                     √ ➡️ Pers  [-Participant] D [NP]]
```

The tree in (14) sums up our proposal so far: The Person head introduces a [–Participant] feature into the derivation with *v* probes and agrees with (signalled by the

downwards arrow) and because of Agree *lo* is merged in the edge of *v* as an Object Person Marker (OPM).

As we have shown above, these dialects seem to disregard other phi-features such as number or gender (see, (4), for example), even when the Object is marked for plural or for feminine. We propose that this is a straightforward consequence of the configuration of the DP (rather, of the extended projections of the DP): given that person ranks over number and gender, in these dialects there seems to be a condition that avoids *v* to keep probing further than Person into the DP (or other relevant heads) whenever its value is negative for [Participant], rendering impossible to mark number/gender features in the Object Marker. In a sense, this context halts the Multiple Agree operation.

One obvious prediction of an analysis such as the one we are putting forward is that whenever Person introduces a positive value of the [Participant] feature the external merge of *lo* will be blocked. This appears to be the case as we showed in the data in §1. A further prediction that follows from this proposal, is that when there is a positive value for [Participant] feature in the Person, *v* will proceed to agree further inside the DP, therefore valuing its number features with the Number projection, as sketched in the geometry in (13).

The above-mentioned proposal, successfully predicts the distribution pattern of *lo* in these dialects, and also explains the alternation between *lo* and other Object Markers specified for [+Participant], but leaves us with a problem that need to be addressed: if *v* agrees only with Person and comes to a halt if the feature there is [-Participant], what happens with the rest of the unvalued features of *v* [Number] and [Gender]?

One alternative is that those features are left unvalued, however this is clearly a problem, given that probes need to value all its unvalued features as per Agree (Chomsky 2000, 2001); other alternative is to assume that *v* is somewhat defective in that it lacks [Number] and [Gender] and only [Person] is present in these dialects. This proposal is in line with what Rodriguez-Mondoñedo (2006, 2007) has proposed for some Spanish dialects that show variation at the lexical level in the composition of *v*. If this is correct, then, we could argue for a *v* with a different bundle of phi-features in these dialects, namely, with just [Person].

(15)   Structure of *v* phase in TS and ChS (revised)
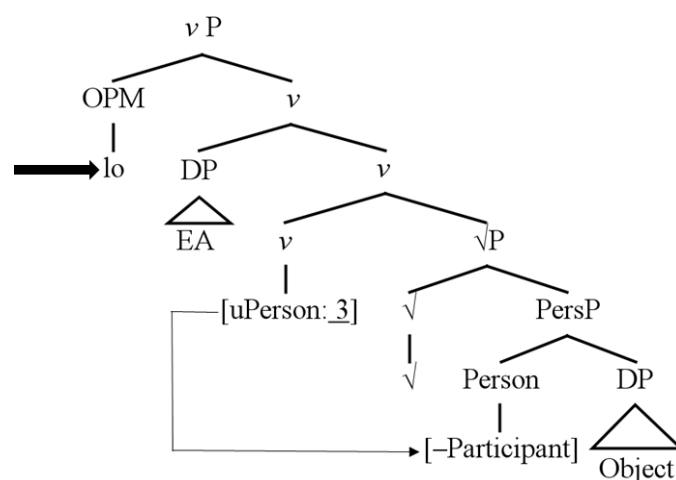
In (15) we show a revised version of the *v* phase in which the *v* head only introduces an unvalued person feature that matches its value with the Person head

[-Participant] resulting in 3p agreement. Since all the phi-features of *v* are exhausted by agreement, it allows the assignment of the accusative case to the Direct Object,[4] therefore there is no need for an extra mechanism such as the DOM to license the Object-DP.

6. The distribution of object person marking dialects

As we hope to have made clear by now, *lo* appears in a process of object person marking as a result of a microparameter in the lexical specifications of *v* in the dialects under discussion. A reasonable question at this point would be to ask why this configuration occurs in some Spanish dialects and not in others.[5] The perspective we defend here is that this configuration is not a result of a process of contact, understood as the interaction of two or more languages in a linguistic community, but rather as an inherently possible development in the grammar of Spanish, which is normally blocked by the pressure of normative, conservative tendencies. The dialects in which this phenomenon occurs are those that are the farthest from the most normative forces. It is in this sense that we call these varieties *unsupervised*. The regular occurrence of these dialects with other minorized languages is also a result of this distancing from regulating forces. This idea needs further clarification, which we provide in what follows.

The correlation of linguistic variation with language contact is a common presupposition in sociolinguistics (Palacios 2005, Martínez 2021, Palacios & Sánchez-Paraíso 2021 for a recent general overview). Nevertheless, even when a correlation can be empirically attested there is no standard theory that explains the way contact produces certain linguistic phenomena. In the case of OPM, we cannot talk about a case of grammatical transfer, where a structure from one grammar gets copied into another. The diversity of the languages with which Spanish gets in contact, as well as the difference of contact situations make it difficult to establish a pattern that could have contact as an explanation for the data attested.

As we see things, Spanish should show either a complete *v* probe or as a non-complete *v* probe. We believe that what sets apart dialects regarding Object agreement and clitic distribution and form lies at the lexical level. In TS and ChS, *v* would have just [Person], while the MSS would have [Person, Number, Gender].

In both TS and ChS, the dialects studied in the present work, there is a sociolinguistic configuration that could more easily explain the expression of the defective *v* that could give rise to OPM. In Teopantlan, it is the population that does not have any contact with other more Standard dialects of Spanish that show a greater degree of OPM (García-González 2021). That is, the individuals who stay within the boundaries of the communities, who also tend to lack formal education, are the ones who show a more consistent pattern of OPM. In contrast, the people in the community who have relations with other dialects, who travel away from the communities, tend to be less consistent when marking the person features of the object in the verb. A

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[4]   Keep in mind that in Chomsky (2001), Case is not a feature, but a result of Agree between a probe and a goal. Whether in this case, *v* is phi-complete or defective (since we propose that it only has [Person]) is something that needs to be further explored. For the time being, since the DP has no additional licensing Case morphemes, we assume that it is Case-assigned after Agree with *v*.

[5]   We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this question to us.

similar situation occurs in ChS. In this case, instead of focusing on the behavior of individuals, we should look at communities as a whole. The communities that are in greater contact with Standard Spanish are the ones that exhibit less systematic OPM. For instance, in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the state capital of Chiapas, the occurrence of OPM in the population is less than in other less connected areas.

What we observe in these different linguistic communities is a difference of degree of the same phenomenon. The farther from normative force -understood as the dominant presence of Standard dialects of Spanish and the institutions that work to establish it as unique- an individual/community is, the greater the possibilities are of showing a stable, systematic OPM pattern. As we can see, this explanation leaves contact with other languages out of the picture and rather focuses on contact between Spanish dialects. It is, then, the lack of normative supervision what we believe accounts for the appearance and development of object person marking.

This account rightly predicts that a non-standard variety of Spanish is susceptible of showing object person marking as the one discussed here even if there is no contact with another language. So far, this prediction gets confirmed in the data from Chiapas. It is important to say here that Spanish spoken in Chiapas has been characterised as divergent with respect to the rest of Mexico. It shows more affinity with Central America, and it has been thought as a dialect on its own from the works of Lope Blanch and Enriquez Ureña (Martín Butragueño 2020).

If what we propose is on the right track, the correlation between object person marking and linguistic contact can be explained as two unrelated phenomena that are both produced by the absence of a normative force acting in the community. The expression of normative forces through school programs that both produce standardization and work against the right of indigenous populations to speak their languages, as well as linguistic discrimination and linguistic ideologies that cast some forms of speaking a language as correct and others as incorrect, can have negative effects in both linguistic variation and bilingualism and other contact related processes. If those normative forces are absent, then, microparameters like the defective *v* can develop and other languages can be spoken with a greater degree of freedom, giving rise to linguistic contact. As it should be clear by now, in our explanation, linguistic contact should be understood as an epiphenomenon.

The proposal that we have sketched here needs empirical confirmation. In this sense, what we have shown so far regarding the sociolinguistic configuration of the varieties under discussion should be taken as a research program, to which we expect to be able to contribute more in the future. As of now, we can say that our explanation is consistent with the data we have, and it could be used as a basis for future investigations.

7. Conclusions

In this article we have examined the properties of a clitic-like form that appears in the context of transitive sentences in two understudied varieties of Mexican Spanish. We have proposed that this form is a way of marking the person features of an object in the verb phrase. Since object marking seems to be a wide-spread strategy that has risen in several situations both, diachronically and synchronically in Spanish, we contend that contact is not a necessary condition for this language to show object markers. In this respect, several instances of what is usually dubbed as clitic-doubling might

indeed be analyzed as object marking. We proposed a syntactic analysis of the relevant data that places *lo* in the edge of *v* after it agrees with the outer layer of the object.

We first introduced the phenomenon in the dialects under study and showed the similarities between them. We also examined different proposals to analyze the data in other more studied varieties of Spanish. In contrast with these proposals, we developed a syntactic account of the data that has allowed us to make the following claims.

First, we want to conclude that in the dialects under study, object marking is a person- sensitive strategy, specifically, the lack of a positive feature of [Participant] triggers the marking of the object. Ultimately, we believe that this is possible given a variation in the composition of features of the *v* head, which, in these dialects, lacks number and gender features. If what we propose is on the right track, the latter is a welcomed result under the idea that the language and dialectal variation is due to differences in the composition of lexical items (the so-called Borer-Chomsky Conjecture). Secondly, we proposed that, given that different dialects of Spanish show this or a very similar strategy, object marking is in fact an inherent morphosyntactic pattern of this language as a whole, but under some circumstances this strategy is unfavored by normative pressures.

Our proposals in this work should be taken as a research program. Other, more detailed investigations are needed to corroborate our claims. We need, for example, to provide data that can show that isolated varieties that are not under the influence of other more normative dialects do develop the object-marking strategy we have analyzed here. But even so, we believe that we provide a fresh path of explanation to a phenomenon attested in a great number of Spanish varieties. We hope to contribute with future research and present further evidence for our claims.

Acknowledgments

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