

## A Construction Grammar Perspective of Spanish Variable Clitic Placement

Pablo E. Requena (*The Pennsylvania State University*)

Spanish displays variable positioning of DO clitic pronouns accompanying verbal periphrases (1). Generative accounts of clitic placement rely either on movement (Kayne, 1975), or on some form of base-generation of the clitic in its surface position (González López, 2008). Basically, traditional derivational accounts view (1a) and (1b) as cases of alternations. Nevertheless, while derivational accounts can explain generalizations, they find it hard to account for idiosyncratic cases.

- (1) a. *Quier-o*                      *comprar=lo*                      **(Enclisis)**  
want-PRS.1SG      buy-INF=**it**-ACC-M3SG  
'I want to buy **it**'
- b. ***Lo***                      *quiero*                      *comprar*                      **(Proclisis)**  
**it**-ACC-M3SG want-PRS.1SG      buy-INF  
'I want to buy **it**'

Within a usage-based perspective, corpus data has revealed that lexical (finite verb), semantic (animacy) and discourse (topicality) factors constrain clitic placement (Davies 1995, Schwenter & Torres Cacoullos forthcoming). The main finding has been that some verbs favor enclisis (eg. *tener que* 'have to') despite the overall preference for proclisis reported for Spanish in the literature. In Functionalist or Usage-based approaches, language use impacts language structure through frequency (Bybee 2010). Construction Grammar assumes that, through frequency, certain pairings of forms and uses/meanings conventionalize into *constructions* (Goldberg 2006). This work tries to answer: Can the framework of Construction Grammar account for the reported clitic placement variation including idiosyncratic cases? **This paper proposes a novel analysis of variable clitic placement in Argentine Spanish that looks at (1a) and (1b) as instantiations of different constructions which are part of a hierarchical network of constructions.**

We examined the Corpus of Habla Culta de Buenos Aires (Barrenechea 1987) consisting of 33 free conversations (17-55 minutes in length) between both male and female speakers between 26-70 years old. All were professionals born in Buenos Aires. All occurrences of 3P ACC clitics (*lo*.MSG, *los*.MPL, *la*.FSG, *las*.FPL) were manually extracted. They were coded for Clitic position (dependent variable), Finite verb, Animacy of the referent, Referent Accessibility (or referent previous mention) and two measures of Topicality. A total of N=252 cases of variable clitic placement were entered into a multivariate analysis. Of those, n=163 (65%) display proclisis, whereas n=89 (35%) enclisis. Enclisis was significantly favored by clauses with *tener que* 'have to' which contained a propositional or inanimate referent that was not predicated further than five following clauses. Given the previously attested frequency effects in language use and the unchallenged role played by the lexical verb in variable clitic placement, I propose the existence of constructions which function at different levels and which can capture both the preferential preverbal pattern of Spanish clitic placement as well as idiosyncratic uses. This analysis has the advantage that it attempts to build language structure from performance based on corpus data replicated in the literature, which identifies the uses with which each schema is associated.

References

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