Specificity in Clitic Doubling and in Differential Object Marking

Manuel Leonetti
Universidad de Alcalá

Several languages show specificity restrictions in different types of object marking constructions (scrambling, clitic doubling, case marking, object agreement). Such constraints share a number of properties: they appear with direct objects only, and not with other verbal arguments, are triggered by grammatical elements that do not encode any [+specific] feature themselves, and arise only when object marking is optional. One of the major questions raised by the mentioned constructions is why specificity effects are present in all of them.

Spanish represents an interesting source of data for research on object marking, as it is a well known case of a language with Differential Object Marking (DOM), and shows different systems of clitic doubling in its dialectal varieties. Mostly relying on Spanish data, I intend to give an answer to two interrelated questions:

(i) What kind of connection holds between these two kinds of object marking?

(ii) How do specificity effects arise in both cases? Is there a unified explanation for them?

An answer to question (i) involves a reexamination of the fundamental intuition behind so-called 'Kayne's generalization' (cf. Jaeggli 1982, Bleam 1999), i.e. the assumption that clitic doubling requires the object to be case-marked. Two problems for this generalization are its descriptive inadequacy –given that counterexamples are available both in Spanish dialectal syntax and in languages such as Greek (Anagnostopoulou 1999)- and its inability to offer an adequate account of the parallel interpretive constraints that characterize both clitic doubling and DOM. Thus, the idea that there is a syntactic dependence holding between them should be excluded. Their cooccurrence in certain languages is simply an effect of their common properties.

As for question (ii), my point is that there is no unified account of specificity restrictions. In clitic doubling, they originate in the [+definite] feature of the clitic and the formal and interpretive requirements it imposes on the associate DP (Gutiérrez-Rexach 2001): when the associate is an indefinite DP, the only way it can obey the matching condition established by the definite clitic in the doubling configuration is being assigned a specific (partitive or D-linked) reading. In this way, not only the specificity condition on the doubling with indefinites is accounted for, but also the preference for anaphoric and D-linked interpretations of any kind of DP participating in clitic doubling, as well as the ban against doubling with bare nouns (as they lack specific and D-linked readings). DOM, on the contrary, is not associated with specificity by means of definiteness and discourse-dependence. The basic property that triggers specificity restrictions in DOM contexts, whatever it may be (topicality, prominence, or marking of type-theoretic properties, as in Bleam 2006), does not give rise to the same presuppositionality effects and anaphoric readings that clitic doubling forces. Thus, specificity effects derive from different semantic features in the two constructions. However, most of the resulting semantic properties are essentially the same (for instance, wide scope of indefinite objects). This provides some justification for an analysis of the similarities and the differences related to specificity in both cases: it should offer useful data for the study of specificity types, as well as some clues for a better understanding of the nature of both clitic doubling and DOM.