

Clitic doubling and scope: why weak definites cannot be clitic-doubled?

Ekaterina Levina, University of Vienna

Clitic doubling of direct objects is a process whereby in one clause, the object argument of the verb is expressed by two elements, a clitic and a DP, as in (1). For Spanish and Romanian, it has been argued that only specific DPs can be clitic-doubled (cf. Farkas 1978; Suñer 1988; Dobrovie-Sorin 1990). Although definites are usually considered specific, there seem to be at least one kind of definites, weak definites, which allows pronominal uptake but cannot be doubled by a clitic. Based on the evidence from Argentinian Spanish, the presentation accounts for this fact in terms of scope: while clitic doubled elements are specific and therefore, have wide scope in the clause, weak definites are event dependent and take obligatory narrow scope which prevents them from being clitic-doubled.

(1) Argentinian Spanish

Ayer lo ví a Gustavo.
yesterday 3SG:DO saw ANIM Gustavo
'Yesterday, I saw Gustavo.'

In Spanish, **clitic doubling** of direct objects is not obligatory. Nonetheless, clauses like the ones in (2) with and without a clitic show differences in their interpretation. The instances without clitic doubling, as in (2a), are ambiguous between two interpretations, a specific and a non-specific one (cf. von Heusinger (2002) for the underlying understanding of *specificity*). On the specific interpretation, the DP in question has a unique referent: all the boys love one and the same girl. On this reading, the existential quantifier has a wide scope. On the other, non-specific interpretation, the DP does not have a unique referent: the boys love different girls. That is, the universal quantifier scopes over the existential quantifier, i.e., the existential quantifier has narrow scope. For the parallel example with clitic doubling in (2b), only a specific reading is available. That is, the clitic-doubled DP necessarily receives specific a scope interpretation: there is a particular girl that all the boys love.

- (2) a. *Todos los chicos quieren a una chica.* $\exists > \forall / \forall > \exists$
all the boys love ANIM a girl
'All the boys love a girl.'
- b. *Todos los chicos **la** quieren a una chica.* $\exists > \forall / \forall > \exists$
all the boys love 3SG.F ANIM a girl
'All the boys love a girl.'

Weak definites are morphologically definite nominal phrases which seem to violate uniqueness. So in (3a), the boldfaced DP can denote one or several entities: the first sentence of the example is compatible with an interpretation on which the speaker visits two different doctors in a year. Unlike regular definites or indefinites, weak definites are characterized by reduced anaphoric accessibility. On the currently most prominent account for weak definites, they are analyzed as definites embedded under atomic events (cf. Farkas and de Swart 2003; Yanovich 2008; Krifka and Modarresi 2016). This embedding, deeper than

the one characteristic for regular arguments and obliques, explains their reduced accessibility for the uptake by personal pronouns. The continuation given in the parenthesis in (3a) provides us with an example where the weak definite is referred back by a covert anaphora. Interestingly, although weak definites allow anaphoric uptake, they cannot be clitic-doubled. So the morphologically definite clitic-doubled DP in (3b) does not allow weak definite interpretations: the only available reading of the sentence is the one on which the speaker sees one and the same doctor twice a year.

- (3) a. *Veo al medico dos veces al año. (Siempre me tratan bien.)*
 see:1SG ANIM the doctor two times per year always me treat:3PL well
 ‘I see the doctor two times per year. (They always treat me well.)’
 b. *Lo veo al medico dos veces al año. (#Siempre me tratan bien.)*
 3SG.M see:1SG ANIM the doctor two times per year always me treat:3PL well
 ‘I see the doctor two times per year. (They always treat me well.)’

One of the characteristic features of weak definites is obligatory narrow scope, for instance, under negation or modal operators. The latter case is exemplified in (4). On the weak definite reading of the sentence, the modal operator necessarily overscopes the existential quantifier: there is no particular doctor, which Gustavo needs to see, rather, any doctor would do.

- (4) *Gustavo tiene que ver al medico.* □ > ∃ / * ∃ > □
 Gustavo must see ANIM the doctor
 ‘Gustavo has to go to the doctor.’

I propose that it is the obligatory narrow scope of weak definites that does not allow them to be clitic-doubled: clitic doubling necessarily induces wide scope readings in Spanish and is, therefore, not compatible with the narrow scope property characteristic of weak definites.

The proposal presented can be extended to other languages exhibiting clitic doubling. For instance in Albanian, where it has been argued to encode topichood and/or givenness, bare nouns cannot be doubled by a clitic (Kallulli 2000, 2008). Along with weak definites, bare nouns belong to the family of nominal descriptions all of which exhibit obligatory narrow scope (cf. Borik and Gehrke 2015; Levina 2024). Topical and/or given referents of clitic-doubled elements are expected to take wide scope and are, therefore, incompatible narrow-scoping bare nouns.

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