

## Set-anchored anaphora in Rioplatense Spanish: Direct object clitic doubling\*

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**Abstract** This paper analyzes accusative clitic doubling in Rioplatense Spanish as an anaphoric device: the clitic presupposes a uniquely identifiable discourse set, and the doubled DP refers to or quantifies over it, rendering clitic doubling truth-conditionally superfluous. A DRT implementation models clitic doubling as a redundant update step and derives the attested distribution: licensing with definites (including kinds and collective-denoting nominals), exclusion with narrow-scope nominals, and clitic doubling of quantifiers and indefinites only under wide scope or proportional readings.

**Keywords:** clitic doubling, anaphora, agreement, pronouns, Rioplatense Spanish, DRT

### 1 Introduction

Clitic doubling is a cross-linguistically well-known phenomenon, where a clitic appears in a clause alongside a nominal. As in Rioplatense Spanish in (1), where the direct object (or *accusative* henceforth) may be expressed simultaneously by both the clitic *lo* and the proper name *Diego*. In languages with clitic doubling (e.g., Albanian, Greek, and Romanian), the clitic appearing in such constructions is typically also used as an autonomous clitic pronoun, as in example (2) from Rioplatense Spanish.

- |     |   |          |                           |     |               |
|-----|---|----------|---------------------------|-----|---------------|
| (1) | <i>(Lo<sub>i</sub>) vi</i>                            | <i>a</i> | <i>Diego<sub>i</sub>.</i> | (2) | <i>Lo vi.</i> |
|     | 3.SG saw:1SG  | DOM      | Diego                     |     | 3.SG saw:1SG  |
|     | ‘I saw Diego.’  |          |                           |     | ‘I saw him.’  |
|     | (lit.: ‘I saw him <sub>i</sub> Diego <sub>i</sub> .’) |          |                           |     |               |

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Cross-linguistically, direct object clitic doubling correlates with such semantic and pragmatic properties as animacy, definiteness, specificity, anti-focusing or deaccentuation, topichood, and givenness (cf. [Kallulli 2000](#) on Albanian and Greek, [den Dikken 2006](#) on Hungarian, [Dobrovie-Sorin 1990](#) on Romanian and Spanish [Zeller 2009, 2015](#) on Zulu, i.a.). Generalizing, clitic-doubled elements appear to be D(iscourse)-linked, i.e. connected to something that is already in the discourse, rather than introducing entirely new entities (cf. [Kallulli 2008](#)).

There are two main families of approaches to clitic doubling. One treats clitics as agreement markers, parallel to subject-verb agreement. Clitics on these accounts are taken to be akin to differential object marking triggered by the D-linking of the doublee (cf. [Jaeggli 1982, 1986](#); [Borer 1984](#); [Suñer 1988](#) i.a.). The other family of accounts treats clitics in clitic doubling as pronouns, coindexed with the doubled DP, often within a "big DP" structure or as resumptives ([Torrego 1995](#); [Uriagereka 1995](#); [Baker & Kramer 2018](#) i.a.).

Each family of approaches has advantages and challenges: agreement accounts capture the discourse sensitivity of clitic doubling but struggle with its optionality and with the pronominal use of clitics; pronominal accounts capture referential properties of clitic doubling but raise structural questions about the co-occurrence of clitics and full direct objects.

Accusative clitic doubling is a particularity of Rioplatense Spanish spoken along the Rio de la Plata in Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. It is only marginally found in other Spanish varieties. In what follows, I will restrict the discussion to Rioplatense Spanish.

With the sole exception of full pronouns, which cannot be used independently and must therefore be clitic-doubled in all Spanish varieties, clitic doubling is optional and does not affect truth conditions of the sentence. So in (1) and in (3), the variants with and without the clitic have the same meaning. There are, however, restrictions on the DPs that can be clitic doubled. For instance, while negative indefinite *ninguno* 'no one' in (3) can be clitic doubled, clitic doubling is blocked for such indefinites as *alguien* 'somebody' in (4).

- |     |                                   |     |                                 |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------|
| (3) | <i>Lau no (lo) vio a ninguno.</i> | (4) | <i>Lau (*lo) vio a alguien.</i> |
|     | Lau no 3SG saw DOM none           |     | Lau 3SG saw DOM somebody        |
|     | ‘Lau saw no one/none (of them).’  |     | ‘Lau saw somebody.’             |

Several accounts have attempted to explain the behavior of clitic doubling in Spanish, for instance by linking it to definiteness (cf. [Gutiérrez-Rexach 1999](#); [Leonetti 2007](#)) or specificity ([Suñer 1988](#)). Yet none of these proposals captures the full distribution of direct object clitic doubling in Rioplatense Spanish, leaving its semantic and pragmatic conditions unsettled. To fill this gap is the main goal of this paper.

I propose that the clitic in clitic doubling constructions is an anaphoric expression whose antecedent is a non-empty set of individuals; i.e., clitic bears a presupposition that such a set exists. It is the same set that the doubled DP refers to or quantifies over. For instance, in example (1) we are dealing with a singleton set, and in (3) with a definite set including two or more individuals. The doubled DP accesses the antecedent-set independently of the clitic, picking up on one or more members (possibly all) of it. So in a context with a salient unique group of students, clitic doubling in (5) is felicitous; the quantifier *algunos* ‘some’ operates over the definite set of students, which is also the antecedent of the clitic. By contrast, clitic doubling fails with discourse-new indefinites, as in (4), because they are not linked to any determinate set of individuals. I model the proposed meaning of clitics in Discourse Representation Theory (DRT) (Kamp 1981; Kamp & Reyle 1993).

- (5) *(Los) vi a algunos.*  
 3PL.ACC saw:1SG DOM some  
 ‘I saw some (of them).’

As a consequence of the proposed analysis, I argue that clitics in clitic doubling constructions are neither pronouns nor agreement morphemes, but anaphoric expressions of a different kind, anchoring their referents to definite sets. This conclusion partly converges with recent outcomes reached by Saab (2024), who, on independent grounds, rejects both the agreement and pronominal views and analyzes clitics in Rioplatense Spanish as probes for A-movement at LF, i.e. neither pronouns nor agreement markers.

The paper is structured as follows. After providing the reader with the required background information on clitics in Spanish in Section 2, I formulate the proposal and show how it accounts for the data from Rioplatense Spanish (Section 3). The same Section sketches the proposed treatment of clitic doubling in DRT. Section 4 discusses broader implications of the proposed analysis. Section 5 concludes the paper with a brief summary.

## 2 Basics of Spanish Pronominal System

Just like other varieties of Spanish, Rioplatense Spanish is a pro-drop language: subject pronouns are generally omitted as long as verbal inflection suffices to recover the subject, as is the case in examples (1), (2) and (5) from above.

Spanish distinguishes between two kinds of object pronouns: clitics and full (strong) pronouns. Full pronouns, usually used for such information-structural needs as focusing (cf. (2) vs. (6)); they only appear after prepositions (e.g., *para el* ‘for him’, *con el* ‘with him’); they cannot occur independently in argument position and require clitic doubling if expressing direct objects, cf. (6). By contrast, clitic



meaning of the clitic itself, its referent, is only defined so far that the referent of the clitic is a subset (not necessarily a proper subset) of its set-antecedent.

Back to our examples, the quantifier ‘various’ *several* is ambiguous between two readings, a cardinal and a proportional (cf. Barwise & Cooper 1981; Keenan & Stavi 1986; Partee 1988). Cardinal quantifiers tell us how many individuals are involved (perhaps relative to some contextually settled threshold  $n$ ). In contrast, proportional quantifiers specify what proportion of the set is involved. In Context 2, *various* ‘several’ is interpreted cardinally: Lau found more than one hairdresser online. In Context 1, the same quantifier is interpreted proportionally: Lau saw several **of** her colleagues.

Due to this ambiguity between cardinal and proportional interpretations of quantifiers, sentence (7a), without clitic doubling, can be felicitously uttered in both contexts which, in each case, trigger either the one or the other interpretation. Conversely, sentence (7b), with clitic doubling, is incompatible with cardinal interpretation of the quantifier because the clitic, sharing its antecedent with the quantifier phrase, presupposes that there is a proportional relationship between its referent and a set-antecedent. As a result, the only interpretation of the quantifier *various* ‘several’ in (7b) is proportional, it is therefore incompatible with contexts like Context 2 lacking definite sets.

Note, that in Context 1, the clitic is optional (both (7b) and (7a) can be uttered felicitously). The clitic therefore provides optional anaphoric support for the recovery of the referent of the doublee by presupposing the existence of a set-antecedent. As in all other cases of accusative clitic doubling, with exception of full pronouns in (6), the doublee can pick up on its referent independently of the clitic.

Let us now evaluate how the proposed above allows us to account for the distribution of clitic doubling in Rioplatense Spanish.

### 3.2 Clitic Doubling in Rioplatense Spanish: Distribution and DRT Modeling

This section provides a sketch of a treatment of accusative clitic doubling in DRT (Kamp 1981; Kamp & Reyle 1993), one of the established frameworks for modeling anaphoric relationships in discourse. For our purposes, the theory encompasses everything we need, different kinds of antecedents, various types of quantifiers, and anaphora. I also adopt the treatment of kind, concept, and partitive anaphora developed by Krifka (2025).

For reasons of space, I will use flat Discourse Representation Structures (DRSs). The following example illustrates how a sentence with an indefinite object is represented and interpreted in DRT.

- (9) a. *Estela compró un libro.*  
 Estela bought a book  
 ‘Estela bought a book.’
- b.  $\langle i_0, i_1, x_1, x_2, x_3 \mid \begin{array}{l} x_1 = \text{ESTELA}, x_2 = \lambda i \lambda x [\text{BOOK}(i)(x)], \\ x_3(i_1)(x_2), i_1 < i_0, \text{BUY}(i_1)(x_3)(x_1) \end{array} \rangle$

A DRS consists of a set of discourse referents (DRs) and the conditions they satisfy. In (9b), the DRs are  $x_1, x_2, x_3$ ; the conditions state that  $x_1$  is ESTELA,  $x_2$  is the concept BOOK,  $x_3$  is a count instantiation of that concept BOOK at index  $i_1$ , and a buying event performed by  $x_1$  on  $x_3$  at index  $i_1$  interpreted with respect to an index  $i_0$  as the world and time of actual situation.

As usual, a DRS  $K$  is interpreted with respect to a model  $\langle A, F \rangle$ , where  $A$  is the universe of discourse, and  $F$  is a function that maps the constants of the DRS language to entities, sets or tuples constructed from  $A$ . The DRS  $K$  is true with respect to a model  $\langle A, F \rangle$  if and only if there is a mapping  $g$  from the DRs of  $K$  into  $A$  such that each condition of  $K$  is verified by  $g$  with respect to  $\langle A, F \rangle$ .

I have proposed that the clitic in clitic doubling triggers a presupposition that there is a uniquely identifiable set of which the referent(s) of the clitic are members.<sup>1</sup> It is the same set that serves as an antecedent for the clitic doubled DP. In what follows, I illustrate how clitic doubling can be modeled in standard DRT notation.

### 3.2.1 Definites

Along with proper names, mentioned in the introduction, other kinds of **regular definites** can also be clitic-doubled, as shown in (10).

- (10) *Lau (la) llamó a Estela / la profesora / su hermana.*  
 Lau 3SG.F called DOM Estela / the:F professor:F / her sister  
 ‘Lau called Estela/ the professor/ her sister.’

In standard DRT notation, I propose to model clitic doubling as a redundant update step where the clitic contributes an anaphoric requirement (a definite set antecedent), which, however, merely doubles the requirement already spelled out by the doubled DP and therefore has no impact on the truth conditions. The definite set antecedent is presupposed and therefore appears in the DRS universe.

<sup>1</sup> This treatment of clitic doubling somewhat resembles that of partitives, which also presuppose definite sets they quantify over (cf. van Geenhoven 1998). There is, however, a crucial difference between clitic doubling and partitives: sets partitives quantify over must have a cardinality of two or higher (they must be plural) (e.g., \*one of the cat). This means that partitive DPs always denote proper subsets of the presupposed supersets they quantify over. This restriction does not hold for clitic doubling, since, as we have seen, singular definites can be clitic doubled. On our analysis they are linked to a singleton set identical to the one the clitic refers to.

Consider the example (10) above with a definite *Estela* and representations of its variants without and with clitic doubling in (11a) and (11b), respectively. Unlike the former in (11a), the latter includes a presupposed set  $S$  whose only member,  $x_3$ , is identical to  $x_2$ , the referent of the DP. The contribution of the clitic, highlighted in blue, is redundant, since truth conditions of (11a) and (11b) are identical.

(11) a. Without clitic doubling:

$$\langle i_0, i_1, x_1, x_2 \mid x_1 = \text{LAU}, x_2 = \text{ESTELA}, i_1 < i_0, \text{CALL}(i_1)(x_2)(x_1) \rangle$$

b. With clitic doubling:

$$\langle i_0, i_1, x_1, x_2, x_3, S \mid x_1 = \text{LAU}, x_2 = \text{ESTELA}, |S| = 1, x_3 \sqsubseteq_p S, x_3 = x_2, i_1 < i_0, \text{CALL}(i_1)(x_2)(x_1) \rangle$$

Unlike regular definites, for **narrow-scope definites**, as in (12), the account predicts that clitic doubling is ruled out due to a scope clash: since the referents of definites must be identical with the antecedent set of the clitic, they must take the widest scope which does not hold for narrow-scope definites.

- (12) *Cada hombre<sub>i</sub> (#la) quiere a su<sub>i</sub> novia.*  
 every man 3SG loves DOM his girlfriend  
 ‘Every man loves his (own) girlfriend.’<sup>2</sup>

Just as narrow scope definites, **weak definites** cannot be clitic doubled because of the obligatory narrow scope they take (van Geenhoven 1998; Farkas & de Swart 2003; Carlson, Sussman, Klein & Tanenhaus 2006; Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts 2010; Borik & Gehrke 2015; Frey 2015, 2022; Krifka & Modarresi 2016, 2021 i.a.). For example, in a sentence without clitic doubling such as (13), the definite *el plomero* ‘the plumber’ is ambiguous between a regular and a weak definite reading: on the regular reading, Tebi calls one particular plumber every month; on the weak definite reading, he may call different plumbers, definite within each sub-event and thus taking narrow scope (cf. Krifka & Modarresi 2016, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Saab (2024: 10) rates a similar sentence given below as acceptable. However, the sentences were rejected by all the ten consulted native speakers of the same variety as the one considered by Saab (2024).

- (i) *Cada hombre la ama a su madre.*  
 Every man CL.ACC.F.3SG loves DOM POSS mother  
 ‘Every/each man loves his mother.’ Ok under the reading “every person  $x$  loves  $x$ ’s own mother.” (Saab 2024: 10)

- (13) *Tebi llama al plomero todos los meses.*                    same or  
 Tebi calls DOM.the plumber all the months                    different  
 ‘Tebi calls the plumber every month.’                            plumber

Conversely, in sentences with clitic doubling, the regular definite (wide-scope) interpretation is forced, while the weak definite reading is ruled out. Thus, in (14), the clitic doubled counterpart of (13), only the interpretation where one particular plumber is meant is possible.

- (14) *Tebi lo llama al plomero todos los meses.*                    same  
 Tebi 3SG calls DOM.the plumber all the months                    plumber  
 ‘Tebi calls the plumber every month.’

### 3.2.2 Number and Gender mismatch

In Rioplatense Spanish clitic doubling constructions, the clitic may mismatch in number with either the doublee or the antecedent: in the example below, both plural and singular clitics are felicitous.

- (15) Lau went to a party where her colleagues were supposed to be.  
*No lo/los vio a ninguno.*  
 no 3SG/3PL saw DOM none  
 ‘She didn’t see any (of them).’

This clitic behavior is predicted by the proposed analysis, according to which the clitic and the doublee are independently linked to the unique set. Unlike clitics used pronominally, like the one in (2), which directly pick up the antecedent and therefore must match with it in number, clitics in clitic doubling merely trigger the presupposition that there is a set, without referring to it. Consequently, they do not have to match in number: in example (15), *lo* ‘3SG’ can be used.

Importantly, in the same sentence (15), *los* ‘3PL’ is also acceptable, even though it mismatches in morphological number with its doublee. Such behavior is not predicted by agreement-based approaches to clitic doubling (cf. Jaeggli 1982, 1986; Borer 1984; Suñer 1988 i.a.), but it is not ruled out under the analysis proposed here.

Beyond negative quantifiers, collective nouns allow the clitic and the doublee to mismatch in number and gender. Consider the examples below: sentence (16) introduces the antecedent set required for successful clitic doubling, and the continuations in (17a)–(17c) are all acceptable, though the latter two are less acceptable than the first. In (17a), the clitic matches in number and morphological gender with

the set antecedent; in (17b), it matches in number and gender with the doublee; while in (17c), it matches the antecedent in semantic number only.

- (16) Durante de los últimos despidos de empleados realizados por es presidente, **el personal bancario** (SG.M) fue el que más sufrió.  
 ‘During the president’s recent layoffs of employees, the bank staff (SG.M) were the ones who suffered the most.’
- (17) a. *Lo despidió a la mitad.*  
 3SG.M laid off DOM 3SG.F half  
 ‘He laid off a half (of it (SG.M)).’
- b. ?? *La despidió a la mitad.*  
 3SG.F laid off DOM 3SG.F half  
 ‘He laid off a half (of it (SG.F)).’
- c. ? *Los despidió a la mitad.*  
 3PL.M laid off DOM 3SG.F half  
 ‘He laid off a half (of it (PL.M)).’

Interestingly, in a context with a plural antecedent, as in (18), only the plural clitic in (19c) is acceptable, while the singular forms in (19a) and (19b) are ruled out. From this behavior we can conclude that clitics in Rioplatense Spanish clitic doubling do not behave like pure morphological agreement markers.

- (18) Los últimos despidos del presidente tocaron a **los empleados bancarios**.  
 ‘The president’s recent layoffs concerned bank employees (PL.M)’
- (19) a. # *Lo despidió a la mitad.*  
 3SG.M laid off DOM 3SG.F half  
 ‘He laid off a half (of it (SG.M)).’
- b. # *La despidió a la mitad.*  
 3SG.F laid off DOM 3SG.F half  
 ‘He laid off a half (of it (SG.F)).’
- c. *Los despidió a la mitad.*  
 3PL.M laid off DOM 3SG.F half  
 ‘He laid off a half (of it (PL.M)).’

However, morphological mismatch in number between the clitic and the doublee is not always possible. For instance, in (20), the clitic must agree in number with the quantifier *uno* ‘one’. This may be because the clitic must agree with the doublee not in morphological but in semantic number: plural in (17) and (19), but singular in (20). If so, the felicity of (17a) and (17b) would require assuming two different interpretations of *la mitad* ‘the half’: as a set of individuals, in (17c) with plural clitic, or as a singular sum individual, in (17a) and (17b).

(20) Lau went to a party where her colleagues were supposed to be.

*Solo lo/#los vio a uno.*  
 only 3SG.M/3PL.M saw DOM one.  
 ‘She only saw one (of them).’

As for the negative element *ninguno* ‘none’, as in (15): being an empty set, it lacks semantic number and therefore allows both singular and plural clitic doubling.

### 3.2.3 Quantifiers and Indefinites

We now proceed with the modeling of **clitic doubling with quantifiers**. Recall the examples in (7) and (8) on page 224. (21a) represents the sentence (7a), without clitic doubling uttered in the Context 1.<sup>3</sup> Here, the quantifier *several* is captured as a subset relation between the presupposed set of Lau’s colleagues,  $x_2$ , and the set  $x_3$  of colleagues that Lau saw, whose cardinality is greater than or equal to two.

(21b) represents the counterpart of the same sentence (7b) with clitic doubling. The optional contribution of the clitic is highlighted in blue. The clitic introduces a referent  $x_4$ , a subset of the same presupposed set  $x_2$ ;  $x_4$  is coreferent with  $x_3$ .

- (21) a.  $\langle i_0, x_1, x_2, x_3, i_1 \mid x_1 = \text{LAU}, \text{COLLEAGUES}^*(x_1, x_2), x_3 \sqsubseteq_p x_2, \langle$   
 $\mid |x_3| \geq 2, i_1 < i_0 \text{ SEE}(i_1)(x_3)(x_1) \rangle$
- b.  $\langle i_0, x_1, x_2, x_3, i_1, x_4 \mid x_1 = \text{LAU}, \text{COLLEAGUES}^*(x_1, x_2), \langle$   
 $\mid x_3 \sqsubseteq_p x_2, |x_3| \geq 2, x_4 \sqsubseteq_p x_2, x_4 = x_3, \rangle$   
 $\mid i_1 < i_0, \text{SEE}(i_1)(x_3)(x_1)$
- (22)  $\langle i_0, x_1, x_2, x_3, i_1 \mid x_1 = \text{LAU}, x_2 = \lambda i \lambda x [\text{HAIRDRESSER}(i)(x)], \langle$   
 $\mid i_1 < i_0, *x_3(i_2)(x_2), |x_3| \geq 2, x_5 \sqsubseteq_p x_4, x_5 = x_3, \rangle$   
 $\mid \text{SEE}(i_1)(x_3)(x_1)$

(22) represents the sentence in (7b) in Context 2, where clitic doubling is infelicitous (highlighted in red). Here,  $x_2$  is the concept HAIRDRESSER and  $x_3$  is its plural instantiation at index  $i_1$ . There is no presupposed set of hairdressers,  $x_4$ , with respect to which a subset referent of the clitic,  $x_5$ , could be defined. Clitic doubling is therefore infelicitous.

The outlined generalizations and the DRT modeling also extend to other indefinite quantifiers, such as *muchos* ‘many’, *pocos* ‘few’, *algunos* ‘some’. Further, indefinites can only be clitic doubled when they are anchored to a particular set, like the set of Lau’s colleagues in (23) or the set of addressee’s brothers in (24), or

<sup>3</sup> The asterisk \* stands for sum individuals and index  $p$  for pluralities (cf. Krifka 2025).

when they have a referent known to the speaker, as in (25). In short, they must be wide scope indefinites.<sup>4</sup> Indefinites can be modeled in DRT in the same way as the quantifiers. I will not discuss those here for the sake of space.

- (23) Lau went to a party where her colleagues were supposed to be.

*Solo lo vio a uno.*

only 3SG.M saw DOM one.

‘She only saw one (of them).’

- (24) *Quiero conocerlo a alguno de tus hermanos.*

want:1SG get.to.know:3SG DOM some:SG of your brothers

*No me importa cuál.*

NEG me matter which

‘I want to get to know one of your brothers. I don’t care which one.’

- (25) *Lo busco a un muchacho que lleva camisa roja.*

3SG.M look for DOM a guy that wears shirt red

‘I’m looking for a guy who is wearing a red shirt.’

### 3.2.4 Negative elements

Negative elements in Spanish can be clitic doubled only selectively.<sup>5</sup> This distribution can also be explained in terms of the proposed analysis.

As shown in example (26), the negated existential *nadie* ‘nobody’ takes obligatory narrow scope. It is incompatible with the wide-scope existential interpretation supplied by clitics. Clitic doubling is therefore not possible.

- (26) a. *Lau no (#lo) vio a nadie.*      b.  $\neg\exists x[\text{HUMAN}(x) \wedge \text{SAW}(L,x)]$   
 Lau no 3SG saw DOM nobody  
 ‘Lau didn’t see anybody.’

Unlike negative existential *nadie* ‘nobody’, negative element *ninguno* ‘none’, as in (27) and (28), can be clitic doubled. This is so because *ninguno*, when it occurs independently, involves quantification over a contextually salient, presupposed set: the set of thieves in (27), which is also specified in the sentence with *de los ladrones*

<sup>4</sup> For related discussion of wide scope indefinites see among others Heim (1982); Fodor & Sag (1982); Winter (1997); Krifka (2002); von Stechow (2019).

<sup>5</sup> Spanish negative elements are also known in the literature as *n-words*. For further discussion of these items in connection to negative polarity items and negative concord see Vallduví (1994); Espinal (2000); Giannakidou (2000); Herburger (2001); Giannakidou (2019); Espinal & Lloper (2022).

‘of the thieves’, or, as in (28), a contextually salient set, here the set of Lau’s colleagues (cf. Gutiérrez-Rexach 1999 for discussion of the differences between *nadie* and *ninguno*).

(27) *Lau no (lo) vio a ninguno de los ladrones.*  
 Lau no 3SG saw DOM none of the thieves  
 ‘Lau didn’t see any of the thieves.’

(28) Lau went to a party where her colleagues were supposed to be.

*No (lo) vio a ninguno.*  
 no 3SG saw DOM none  
 ‘She didn’t see any (of them).’

In some contexts, as for instance (29), both *nadie* and *ninguno* can be used. In such cases, *nadie* serves an emphatic purpose, as it makes a stronger statement than *ninguno*: *nobody came* entails *none of the three friends came*. In such contexts, clitic doubling of *nadie* is ruled out as well.

(29) *Invité a tres amigos míos pero no vino ninguno / nadie.*  
 invited.1SG DOM three friends mine but NEG came no one / nobody  
 ‘I invited three friends of mine but non of them/nobody came.’

The difference in anchoring to a definite set between *nadie* and *ninguno* is further supported by the fact that, unlike *nadie*, *ninguno* is incompatible with *haber*-existentials (the Spanish counterpart of English *there*-existentials), which always take narrow scope. An example is given below.

(30) *Entré a la habitación pero no había #ninguno / nadie.*  
 entered.1SG into the room but NEG have no one / nobody  
 ‘I entered the room but nobody was there.’

As for the DRT modeling, the pair of examples with **negative elements** in (28), uttered in the context including a presupposed set, can be captured as in (31a) and (31b), with and without clitic doubling respectively. The variant with clitic doubling, is enriched by a DR  $x_4$  that equals  $x_3$  and therefore does not contribute to the truth conditions of the sentence. Note that, being under the scope of negation, both  $x_3$  and  $x_4$  are number neutral (i.e., they lack semantic number), which allows us to account for the morphological number variation of the clitic discussed in Section 3.2.2.

(31) a. Without clitic doubling

$$\left\langle i_0, x_1, x_2 \mid x_1 = \text{LAU}, \text{COLLEAGUES}^*(x_1, x_2), \right. \\ \left. \neg \langle i_1, x_3 \mid x_3 \sqsubseteq_p x_2, i_1 < i_0, \text{SEE}(i_1)(x_3)(x_1) \rangle \right\rangle$$

b. With clitic doubling:

$$\left\langle i_0, x_1, x_2 \mid x_1 = \text{LAU, COLLEAGUES}^*(x_1, x_2), \right. \\ \left. \neg \left\langle i_1, x_3, x_4 \mid x_3 \sqsubseteq_p x_2, x_4 \sqsubseteq_p x_2, x_4 = x_3, \right. \right. \\ \left. \left. i_1 < i_0, \text{SEE}(i_1)(x_3)(x_1) \right. \right\rangle$$

### 3.2.5 Generic and mass nouns

**Generics** can be clitic doubled when they denote definite, well-established kinds, as in the case of *el ser humano* ‘man’ in (32). (For *kind reference* cf. Nunberg & Pan 1975; Gerstner-Link & Krifka 1993; Krifka, Pelletier, Carlson, ter Meulen, Chierchia & Link 1995; Krifka 2003). We can treat clitic doubling of definite kinds just like regular definites, with their antecedents being singleton sets linked to clitics.

- (32) *Dios (lo) creó al ser humano.*  
 God 3SG created DOM.the being human  
 lit.: ‘God created the human (being).’ / ‘God created man.’

Spanish definite plurals, like *las chicas* ‘the girls’ in (33), can be ambiguous between regular definite and generic readings. On a regular definite reading, (i), they denote a salient set of girls whom Nora loves. We have discussed clitic doubling of definites earlier in the paper. On the other, generic reading, (ii), Nora likes all individuals that have the property of being a girl. This second kind of nominal is typically expressed in English by bare plurals.

- (33) *Nora (las) quiere a las chicas.*  
 Nora 3PL love DOM the girls  
 (i) ‘Nora loves the girls (e.g., in her class).’  
 (ii) ‘Nora loves (all) girls (gen.).’

Generically used definite plurals can be analyzed either as kind-referring nominals (cf. Dayal 2004) or as nominals referring to a maximal sum individual (cf. Gerstner-Link & Krifka 1993; Krifka et al. 1995; Krifka 2003). Both analyses are compatible with the proposal made in this paper. If *las chicas* is interpreted as a definite kind, then clitic doubling works exactly as in (32): the clitic and the doublee target a unique singleton set antecedent consisting of the definite kind.

If, on the other hand, *las chicas* in (ii) is interpreted as denoting the maximal atomic sum individual of all entities satisfying the property ‘girl’, this also guarantees wide scope and uniqueness, thereby licensing clitic doubling. On this analysis, (ii) asserts that Nora’s loving relation holds of the maximal sum individual, and distributivity derives the inference that she loves each of them. The clitic doubling is felicitous in this case because a definite antecedent set is provided.

While a detailed discussion of the relative merits of these analyses of generics lies beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that both readings of the sentence in (33) are compatible with the individual-referring continuation in (34). This suggests that the analysis treating such generic nominals as referring to maximal sum individuals is more convincing than those treating them as kinds (cf. von Stechow 1993 for exceptive constructions). Furthermore, the maximal sum individual approach accounts for the ambiguity of (33) between readings (i) and (ii), allowing the definite description to be anchored either to a contextually salient domain (i) or to the domain of all girls (ii), both being available.

- (34) *Nora (las) quiere a las chicas, menos a Andrea.*  
 Nora 3PL love DOM the girls except DOM Andrea  
 (i) ‘Nora loves the girls (e.g., in her class), except for Andrea.’  
 (ii) ‘Nora loves (all) girls (gen.), except for Andrea.’

As for the DRT modeling of the instances of kind reference, sentence in (32), with and without clitic doubling, can be represented as in (35a) and (35b). The  $\sigma_p$  operator (cf. Krifka 2025 for motivation) shifts the concept  $x_2$  to a definite kind  $x_3$ , which then is treated as a singleton set just like a regular definite in (11). Here too, the redundant contribution of the clitic is highlighted in blue.

- (35) a.  $\left\langle i_0, x_1, x_2, x_3, i_1 \mid \begin{array}{l} x_1 = \text{GOD}, x_2 = \lambda i \lambda x [\text{HUMAN}(i)(x)], \\ x_3 = \lambda i \sigma_p x_2(i), i_1 < i_0 \text{ CREATE}(i_1)(x_3)(x_1) \end{array} \right\rangle$   
 b.  $\left\langle i_0, x_1, x_2, x_3, i_1, S, x_4 \mid \begin{array}{l} x_1 = \text{GOD}, x_2 = \lambda i \lambda x [\text{HUMAN}(i)(x)], \\ x_3 = \lambda i \sigma_p x_2(i), x_4 \sqsubseteq_p S, |S| = 1, x_4 = x_3, \\ i_1 < i_0 \text{ CREATE}(i_1)(x_3)(x_1) \end{array} \right\rangle$

Similarly for kind referring characteristic statements, as (ii) in (33), the  $\sigma_p$  operator produces a maximal atomic plural individual, i.e. a definite set, with which the referent of the clitic (and the DP) is identical.

- (36) a.  $\left\langle i_0, x_1, x_2, x_3 \mid \begin{array}{l} x_1 = \text{NORA}, x_2 = \lambda i \lambda x [* \text{GIRLS}(i)(x)], \\ x_3 = \lambda i \sigma_p x_2(i), \text{LOVE}(i_0)(x_3)(x_1) \end{array} \right\rangle$   
 b.  $\left\langle i_0, x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4 \mid \begin{array}{l} x_1 = \text{NORA}, x_2 = \lambda i \lambda x [* \text{GIRLS}(i)(x)], \\ x_3 = \lambda i \sigma_p x_2(i), x_4 \sqsubseteq_p x_3, x_4 = x_3, \\ \text{LOVE}(i_0)(x_3)(x_1) \end{array} \right\rangle$

Similarly to generics, **definite collective nominals**, like singular *la gente* ‘the people’ in (37) or *el personal* ‘the staff’ in (38), can be clitic doubled. Just like *las chicas* on its regular definite reading, they have a maximal sum individual, i.e. a unique set, as antecedent. The sentence in (38) with the definite collective *el personal*

*bancario* ‘the bank staff’ can be followed by the bracketed continuation with *except*, confirming that it refers to a maximal set. By contrast, bare collectives in (39) cannot be followed by an *except*-phrase because they are not linked to unique sets. Thus, the only interpretation of the nominal in (39) is ‘some bank staff’, similar to previously discussed cardinal quantifiers. For reasons of space I skip presenting their DRT representation here.

- (37) *Los impuestos la perjudican a la gente.*  
 the taxes 3SG harm DOM the:SG people:SG ‘  
 ‘Taxes harm people.’
- (38) *El presidente (lo) despidió al personal bancario (menos a Tom).*  
 the president 3SG laid off DOM.the staff banking except DOM  
 Tom  
 ‘The president laid off the bank staff (everybody) (except for Tom).’
- (39) *El presidente (#lo) despidió a personal bancario (#menos a Tom).*  
 the president 3SG laid off DOM staff banking except DOM Tom  
 ‘The president laid off (some) bank staff (#except for Tom).’

## 4 Broader implications of the analysis

### 4.1 Differential object marking, animacy, and dative clitic doubling

Within Spanish, two other phenomena are closely connected to accusative clitic doubling: differential object marking (DOM) and dative clitic doubling. Any account of accusative clitic doubling must be compatible with what is independently known about these.

Spanish exhibits differential object marking, a selective marking of direct objects based on their semantic or pragmatic properties, or a combination of both. The relevant factor in Spanish is individuation, a scalar notion derived from the interaction of animacy, referentiality, and topicality. The higher a nominal ranks on the individuation scale, that is, the more animate, definite, or topical it is, the more likely it is to receive DOM. Accordingly, all animate direct objects in the examples discussed so far appear with the marker *a*. Unlike animate, inanimate objects generally do not show DOM, as exemplified in (40).

- (40) *Voy a tomar (\*a) este bondi.*  
 going:1SG to take DOM this bus  
 ‘I’ll take this bus.’

However, in rare cases in which inanimate direct objects are clitic doubled, they do require DOM. Compare (41) with the previous example. We can conclude that the conditions for clitic doubling are subset of conditions for DOM. In other words, they are sufficient for DOM.

- (41) *Lo voy a tomar \*(a) este bondi.*  
 3SG going:1SG to take DOM this bus  
 ‘This bus, I’m going to take.’ / ‘I’ll take this bus.’

The same morpheme *a* also occurs in a different domain: it invariably marks indirect objects. In this case, *a* is not a differential object marker but a structural dative case marker, appearing independently of animacy or referentiality (cf. (42) and (43)). Further, dative DPs also show a much broader range of obligatory clitic doubling than accusatives. For instance, definite animate datives like *Diego* in (42) must be clitic-doubled.

- (42) *\*(Le) regalé un libro \*(a) Diego.*  
 3SG.DAT gifted1SG a book DOM Diego.  
 ‘I gifted Diego a book.’ / ‘I gifted a book to Diego.’

There are, however, contexts where dative clitic doubling is optional. Inanimate datives like the one in (43), as well as bare plurals or indefinites such as in (44), do not strictly require doubling. Since *a*-marking can appear without a clitic, but not vice versa, the conditions for clitic doubling once again form a subset of those for *a*-marking.

- (43) *(Le) eche el agua a la planta.*  
 3SG.DAT threw the water to the plant  
 lit.: ‘I threw water to the plant.’ / ‘I watered the plant.’
- (44) *(Les) subieron el sueldo a algunas secretarias.*  
 3SG.DAT raised the salary to some secretaries  
 ‘They (impers.) raised the salary to some secretaries.’

For both accusative and dative clitic doubling, we can therefore posit the same general correlation: all conditions that trigger clitic doubling also trigger *a*-marking, but not vice versa.

Dative and accusative clitic doubling appear to be manifestations of the same process at different stages of grammaticalization. Clitic doubling is known to have originated as a topic-marking strategy applied to full pronouns, which later lost their independent status. The process seems to have spread from animate, definite datives to other types of datives (cf. Fischer, Navarro & Vilanova 2019). Its extension to

accusative objects can be viewed as the next step in the same direction. As with datives, it appears to have begun with the fairly standard clitic doubling of proper names and is now gradually extending to other accusatives. According to Fischer et al. (2019), the process is even more advanced in Andean Spanish, particularly in the variety spoken in Lima, Peru.

In general terms, the key semantic factor driving clitic doubling is referentiality, with animacy playing a reinforcing role. These features are much more pronounced in datives than in accusatives: datives are more likely to be discourse-old and animate, while accusatives tend to be discourse-new and less often animate. This explains why dative clitic doubling is fully conventionalized across Spanish varieties, whereas accusative clitic doubling remains a developing phenomenon. If this trajectory is correct, we should expect a gradual increase in the frequency of clitic doubling across different types of nominals (e.g., along the referentiality scale) over time, something that could be investigated through Rioplatense Spanish oral corpus data.

Interestingly, native speakers consulted for this study rated many sentences with accusative clitic doubling as acceptable but highly colloquial, often noting that although they do often encounter such instances, they “wouldn’t speak like that” themselves. Such metalinguistic awareness supports the view that accusative clitic doubling in Rioplatense Spanish is currently undergoing change.

## 4.2 Clitic doubling as an anaphoric device

I have proposed that the clitic in clitic doubling constructions is an anaphoric expression whose antecedent is a uniquely identifiable set of individuals. If the language has a device that enforces anaphoric connections already available in the discourse, we would expect it to be used primarily in contexts where such reinforcement is needed, that is, with nominals lower on the referentiality scale, such as indefinites or quantifiers. Particularly, we would expect clitic doubling to be useful in cases of ambiguity, for instance between weak and regular definites (cf. (13)–(14)), or proportional and cardinal interpretations of quantifiers (cf. (7)–(8)). In line with that, non-ambiguous definite expressions, such as proper names, should not require such support and meaning contribution of clitics doubling to these elements should be redundant, i.e., for these expression we would rather expect lower rates of clitic doubling.

Surprisingly, actual language use shows the opposite pattern: in Rioplatense Spanish, clitics consistently double proper names, followed by unambiguously definite animates, and only marginally, in highly colloquial settings, quantifiers.

At first glance, the preference for clitic doubling in contexts where it contributes no additional interpretive content, such as with proper names or unambiguous definites, makes clitics appear similar to pure agreement markers: elements without

truth-conditional import, merely registering feature concord. Yet this resemblance is only superficial. Canonical agreement morphology, even if it is semantically conditioned like DOM, is obligatory, while clitic doubling in Rioplatense Spanish is optional. This fact shows that clitics have not yet fully grammaticalized as agreement markers. Rather, they occupy an intermediate stage between pronouns and agreement morphemes reinforcing discourse continuity instead of encoding pure concord.

Cross-linguistically, similar transitional stages are found in languages where clitic doubling is more advanced, such as Albanian or Andean Spanish (Kallulli 2000; Fischer et al. 2019). Rioplatense Spanish thus represents an earlier point on the same path, one where the clitics' original referential function coexists with emerging morphosyntactic agreement behavior. This coexistence of optionality and agreement-like distribution signals that the construction is in flux, its distribution is expanding, but is not yet fully determined by syntax.

These are, of course, hypotheses that remain to be tested. A closer investigation of spontaneous spoken data, ideally through oral corpora, could help trace the ongoing diffusion of accusative clitic doubling across referential contexts. Complementary experimental work could also determine whether clitic doubling facilitates reference resolution or disambiguation in real-time comprehension. Such research would provide valuable evidence for whether Rioplatense Spanish clitic doubling is indeed evolving toward the predictive distribution proposed here.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper argued that accusative clitic doubling in Rioplatense Spanish is best analyzed as an anaphoric device that presupposes a uniquely identifiable set to which the doubled DP is linked (as member, subset, or maximal individual). The contribution of the clitic in clitic doubling constructions is truth-conditionally redundant. Modeling this in DRT captures the optionality of doubling as a redundant update step and derives the observed distribution: availability with regular definites (including kind-denoting and collective nominals), unavailability with narrow-scope definites (including weak definites), licensing for indefinites only under wide scope readings, and the contrast between negative elements *ninguno* (set-anchored) and *nadie* (negated existential). Number and gender mismatches fall out because the clitic does not encode pure agreement but indicates set-anchoring. The account aligns with other related phenomena in the language: all conditions that license clitic doubling also license DOM, and dative clitic doubling represents a further-advanced stage of the same discourse-anchoring trajectory. The resulting picture is one of grammaticalization in progress placing Rioplatense Spanish at an intermediate point between pronominal use of clitic and agreement morphology.

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