

Diachronic change and variation in use: Judgments of clitic doubling in Peninsular vs. Rioplatense Spanish

Esther Rinke

Goethe University Frankfurt
Esther.Rinke@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Sol Lago

Goethe University Frankfurt
sollago@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Carolina Andrea Gattei

Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires
carogattei@utdt.edu



Received: 26-11-2022

Accepted: 07-03-2023

Published: 23-03-2023

How to cite: Rinke, Esther, Lago, Sol & Carolina Andrea Gattei. 2023. Diachronic change and variation in use: Judgments of clitic doubling in Peninsular vs. Rioplatense Spanish. *Isogloss. Open Journal of Romance Linguistics* 9(1)/3, 1-18.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/isogloss.293>

Abstract

Previous studies have demonstrated that in spontaneous speech, Rioplatense Spanish speakers—in contrast to speakers of Peninsular Spanish—sometimes produce clitic-doubled accusative nominal objects. If this contrast between varieties reflects different grammatical systems, it would be expected to also affect the acceptability of clitic doubling across varieties. We tested this hypothesis in a judgment study that compared

the acceptability of dative and accusative clitic-doubled objects between Rioplatense and Peninsular Spanish speakers. Speakers of both varieties showed similar preferences with dative clitic doubling, consistent with previous work. By contrast, accusative clitic doubling was highly acceptable in Rioplatense Spanish, but not in Peninsular Spanish. Based on accounts of the diachronic development of clitic doubling, we argue that the Rioplatense speakers exhibit a diachronically advanced behavior compared to Peninsular Spanish speakers.

Keywords: clitic doubling, acceptability judgments, diachronic change, Rioplatense Spanish, Peninsular Spanish

1. Introduction

Based on speech corpora and introspective data, previous studies have argued that Peninsular Spanish and Rioplatense Spanish differ with respect to clitic doubling of direct objects. For example, the sentence in (1) is considered grammatical in Rioplatense Spanish but ungrammatical in Peninsular Spanish.¹

- (1) Spanish (Fernández Soriano, 1999: 1251)
 La encontré a mi hija
 Cl=her-fem.acc met DOM my daughter
 ‘I met my daughter.’

A recent corpus investigation by Rinke et al. (2019) confirmed this cross-dialectal difference based on the comparison of two corpora of spontaneous speech: one from speakers from the Madrid region in Spain (Peninsular Spanish) and one from speakers from Buenos Aires in Argentina (Rioplatense Spanish) by showing that clitic-doubled accusative objects were systematically attested in the Buenos Aires corpus but they were virtually nonexistent in the Madrid corpus. The authors argued for language change in Rioplatense Spanish, in line with previous diachronic accounts (Gabriel & Rinke 2010; Leonetti 2007; Pujalte & Saab 2018; Rinke 2011; Sánchez & Zdrojewski 2013).

However, the low frequency of clitic-doubled accusative objects in the Madrid Corpus cannot be taken as unequivocal evidence that they are ungrammatical in this variety. For example, it could be that the use of doubling of accusative objects is only strongly disfavoured in comparison to non-doubling. This would be in line with arguments that corpus data are not sufficient to fully describe a grammatical system, because spontaneous speech mainly reflects which grammatical structures the speakers choose to use in their speech (Kempen & Harbusch, 2008; Newmeyer, 2003; Featherston, 2005).² Thus, production data should be complemented by acceptability

¹ See Belloro 2007; Barrenechea & Orecchia 1970/71, 1977, Colantoni 2002; Di Tullio et al. 2019; Fernández Soriano 1999; Fontana 1993; Jaeggli 1982; Kayne 1975; Leonetti 2007, 2008; Parodi 1998; Saab & Zdrojewski 2012, 2013; Suñer 1988; and Zdrojewski 2008, among many others.

² See also Bader & Häussler (2010), Schütze (2011) and Francis (2022), among others.

judgments in order to demonstrate that the non-occurrence of a construction goes along with its low acceptability.

The aim of the current study is to provide such experimental evidence from an acceptability judgment task. We show that Peninsular Spanish (here exemplified by speakers from Canarias) and Rioplatense Spanish (here exemplified by speakers from Buenos Aires) systematically differ in their judgments about the acceptability of clitic doubling with animate accusative objects. We interpret this finding as supporting a grammatical difference between varieties and therefore as additional evidence of diachronic change. Concretely, we argue that, together with the between-variety contrast previously demonstrated in speech data, our findings support the hypothesis of a diachronic change in Rioplatense Spanish as compared to Peninsular Spanish. Further, the specific direction of this grammatical change is predicted by the diachronic accounts proposed by Gabriel & Rinke (2010), Fischer & Rinke (2013), and Leonetti (2007). More broadly, we discuss how corpus and experimental data can complement each other and how they can help to distinguish between preference-based variation in use and proper grammatical variation.

1.1 Previous diachronic accounts

Clitic doubling differs from otherwise superficially similar clitic right- or left-dislocated structures in a number of respects. In dislocation structures, the object occupies a peripheral position and it is interpreted as a topic and separated from the core sentence by a prosodic break. By contrast, in clitic-doubled structures, the object occupies the canonical object position, it is information-structurally interpreted as being part of the focus and it is not separated from the clause by a prosodic break (Belloro 2015, see Gabriel & Rinke 2010 for discussion). Hence, clitic doubling can be defined as the co-occurrence of a clitic pronoun and a coreferential object—a pronoun or a noun phrase—within the same prosodic and syntactic unit (Gabriel & Rinke 2010). All varieties of Spanish show optional clitic doubling of dative objects³ (2a) and obligatory clitic doubling of pronominal objects (2b) (Fernández Soriano 1999).

- (2) Spanish (Fernández Soriano, 1999:1248)
- a. Pedro le_i dio una manzana a Juan $_i$.
 Pedro him.CL.DAT gave an apple to John
 ‘Pedro gave an apple to John.’
 - b. Le_i di el regalo a él $_i$.
 him.CL.DAT gave the present to him
 ‘I gave the present to him.’

By contrast, clitic doubling of nominal accusative (direct) objects as in (1) is generally considered ungrammatical in Peninsular Spanish (with the exception of Basque Spanish, see Franco 1993) but grammatical in Rioplatense Spanish. The

³ This does not imply that all varieties of Spanish behave identically with respect to the doubling of indirect objects. The new RAE points out that the doubling of bare indirect objects is banned or non-favored in Peninsular Spanish. Further, subtle differences concerning the semantic factors conditioning the clitic doubling of indirect objects in Madrid vs. Buenos Aires Spanish have also been reported in Rinke et al. (2019).

precise conditions for the doubling of accusative objects are still debated, but it is uncontroversial that DOM-marked, animate, definite and specific accusative objects can be doubled in Rioplatense Spanish (Jaeggli, 1982; Suñer, 1988; Parodi, 1998; Di Tullio and Zdrojewski, 2006; Zdrojewski, 2008; Di Tullio, Saab & Zdrojewski 2019; among others).

Leonetti (2007:135) was the first to propose that the difference between varieties reflected a diachronic innovation in Rioplatense Spanish, more precisely an advancement along the definiteness scale shown in (3).

- (3) Definiteness Scale (Leonetti, 2007)
 $\emptyset < \text{weak (clitic) pronouns} < \text{strong (stressed) pronouns} < \text{demonstratives} < \text{simple definite descriptions} < \text{complex definite descriptions} < \text{specific indefinites} < \text{non-specific indefinites}$

In the spirit of this hierarchy, clitic doubling should follow a staged diachronic pathway, arising first for strong pronominal objects, then for dative nominal objects and finally for accusative nominal objects, as in (4).

- (4) strong pronouns > dative nominal objects > accusative nominal objects

The emergence of doubling with strong pronouns before doubling with dative nominal objects is supported by corpus data (Gabriel and Rinke 2010). The mentioned scales do not make reference to animacy, although some previous literature has argued that animacy—in combination with specificity and DOM-marking—is a precondition for clitic doubling of accusative nominal objects in Rioplatense Spanish (Parodi 1998; Sánchez & Zdrojewski 2013). Based on this observation, it is likely that clitic-doubling firstly emerged for animate, specific and DOM-marked accusative objects.

Leonetti's (2007) proposal concerning the diachronic advancement of clitic doubling is empirically supported by a diachronic corpus study by Gabriel & Rinke 2010. This study investigated the spread of clitic doubling in Peninsular Spanish from the 15th to the 18th centuries. The results showed that the extension of clitic doubling started with personal pronouns in the 15th century (with a rate of 20% of doubling of all occurrences of personal pronouns) and reached 80% in the 16th century. Meanwhile, indirect (dative) nominal objects started being doubled later than personal pronouns, in the 16th century (10%) and extended to approximately 20% in the 18th century.

Based on Leonetti's proposal and the corpus results of Gabriel and Rinke (2010), Fischer and Rinke (2013) proposed that the diachronic development of clitic doubling follows an implicational parametric hierarchy (Baker 2008; Roberts 2011). The claim is that synchronic parametric variation mirrors diachronic development and that parametric change can consist of larger macroparametric changes (e.g., the emergence of a new category) initiating several gradual processes, i.e., microparametric changes or steps that languages may follow or not. In accordance with Leonetti's (2007) hierarchy, it is assumed that later stages of development always include earlier developments.⁴

⁴ A similar proposal that variation in clitic doubling patterns can be analyzed as parametric variation is found in Zdrojewski & Sánchez (2014). Based on a comparison of

With respect to the synchronic variation in clitic doubling in Spanish, this predicts that any variety of Spanish that includes later stages—e.g., the clitic doubling of accusative nominal objects—will include earlier ones, such as the doubling of dative nominal objects and pronouns. Accordingly, Rioplatense Spanish is diachronically more advanced than Peninsular Spanish because the former allows the doubling of both dative and accusative objects, whereas only dative objects can be doubled in Peninsular Spanish.⁵

1.3 Research questions and hypotheses

Our research questions concern the existence of differences between Rioplatense and Peninsular Spanish in the acceptability of clitic doubling with dative and accusative nominal objects. Specifically, we ask whether speakers of Rioplatense and Peninsular Spanish differ in their judgments of clitic-doubled nominal objects, and whether such differences occur in the direction expected under diachronic accounts of clitic doubling (Leonetti 2007, Gabriel & Rinke, 2010; Fischer & Rinke, 2013).

Based on previous findings, we hypothesize that the contrasts between varieties should differ for dative and accusative objects. For indirect objects, we hypothesize that clitic-doubled dative objects should be rated as equally or more acceptable than their non-doubled counterparts (Montrul 2004, 2010). Furthermore, Rioplatense speakers may show a stronger preference towards clitic doubling, as previous corpus work demonstrated higher rates of clitic doubling and less semantic restrictions in speech (Rinke et al. 2019).

For accusative objects, our predictions are based on the corpus findings of Rinke et al. (2019). Our experiment used animate DOM-marked objects, which were found to be clitic-doubled more often in Rioplatense than Peninsular Spanish (42.71% vs. 6.15%). If this difference in spontaneous production truly reflects a grammatical change, Rioplatense speakers should accept the doubling of accusative animate, DOM marked objects to a larger extent than Peninsular Spanish speakers.

2. Acceptability judgment experiment

2.1 Methods

2.1.1 Participants

Sixty-six native speakers of Canarian Spanish and seventy-four speakers of Rioplatense Spanish participated in the experiment. Canarian Spanish is a good variety to contrast with Rioplatense Spanish because they both preserve the etymological clitic system, such that they don't exhibit *léismo*, *laísmo*, or *loísmo* phenomena. This helps

Buenos Aires Spanish and Lima Spanish, the authors suggest that Kayne's generalization and subject-verb agreement effects reflect additional properties of Buenos Aires Spanish.

⁵ Di Tullio et al. (2019) agree with this conclusion, but relate the extension of doubling to a gradual process of grammaticalization of the person feature on the D° head of the object (see also Pujalte and Saab 2018). As a result, lexical determiner phrases in Argentinian Spanish can be optionally assigned a [3rd person] feature whereas this is not possible in other dialects of Spanish.

avoid potential problems in comparison to varieties of Peninsular Spanish with non-etymological systems.

Participants were recruited at the University of La Laguna in Tenerife and at the University Torcuato Di Tella and the Pontifical Catholic University in Buenos Aires. They received either payment or course credit for their participation. To be included in the analysis, participants had to report having been born in Canarias (Canarian Spanish group) or in the Buenos Aires province (Rioplatense Spanish group). They also had to report being native speakers of Spanish, not having learned other languages at home, having normal or corrected-to-normal vision and no history of language or reading impairments. Finally, participants were required to answer correctly at least six out of seven attention checks administered during the experiment. After applying these exclusion criteria, 126 participants were entered in the analysis: 61 Canarian Spanish speakers (mean age 19 years; 49 females and 1 non-binary; 54 right-handed) and 65 Rioplatense Spanish speakers (mean age 27 years; 57 females; 58 right-handed). All procedures were in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.1.2 Materials

Materials consisted of 32 experimental item sets, 32 filler items and 7 attention checks. The experimental items were distributed in a 2×2 design crossing the grammatical case of the verb's animate object (dative vs. accusative object) and whether the object was doubled by a clitic pronoun (doubling vs. no doubling). A sample experimental item set is shown in (4).

(4) a. **Dative object, no doubling**

Mercedes ha dado flores a Rafael en el parque
 Mercedes has given flowers DOM Rafael in the park
 'Mercedes gave flowers to Rafael in the park'

b. **Dative object, doubling**

Mercedes le_i ha dado flores a Rafael $_i$ en el parque.
 Mercedes CL.DAT $_i$ has given flowers DOM Rafael $_i$ in the park
 'Mercedes gave flowers to Rafael in the park'

c. **Accusative object, no doubling**

Mercedes ha encontrado a Rafael en el parque
 Mercedes has met DOM Rafael in the park
 'Mercedes met Rafael in the park.'

d. **Accusative object, doubling**

Mercedes lo_i ha encontrado a Rafael $_i$ en el parque.
 Mercedes CL.M.ACC $_i$ has met DOM Rafael $_i$ in the park
 'Mercedes met Rafael in the park.'

The dative items were structured as follows: (proper noun) subject + (clitic) + ditransitive verb + direct object (inanimate) + indirect object (animate) + adverbial phrase. In the doubled conditions, the verb phrase was preceded by the third person singular dative clitic "le"—Spanish dative clitics have the same form for masculine and feminine antecedents. The sentence subject always differed in gender from the

animate object (e.g., “Mercedes”, “Rafael”). We used the following eight ditransitive verbs of transfer: “dar” (‘to give’), “ofrecer” (‘to offer’), “devolver” (‘to return’), “vender” (‘to sell’), “comprar” (‘to buy’), “regalar” (‘to give away’), “enviar” (‘to send’), “prestar” (‘to loan’).

The accusative items were structured as follows: (proper noun) subject + (clitic) + transitive verb + direct object (animate) + adverbial phrase. In the doubled conditions, the verb phrase was preceded by a third person singular accusative clitic, which was also marked for gender: “lo” was used with masculine objects and “la” with feminine objects. Half the experimental items featured a masculine object and half a feminine object, ensuring that clitic gender was counterbalanced across trials. As with the dative items, the subject and animate object always differed in gender. We used the following eight transitive verbs: “encontrar” (‘to find’), “saludar” (‘to greet’), “ver” (‘to see’), “abrazar” (‘to hug’), “empujar” (‘to push’), “conocer” (‘to know’), “interrogar” (‘to ask’), “buscar” (‘to seek’). Experimental items were arranged such that each participant saw only two instances of each verb across trials. The items were revised by two native speakers of each variety. When necessary, words were changed to be appropriate for each Spanish variety. For example, the word for ‘market’ was “mercadillo” in the Canarian Spanish version but “bazar” in the Rioplatense Spanish version. The experimental items can be found in Appendix S1. All materials, data and analysis code are publicly available at <https://osf.io/hj4d7/>.

The experimental verbs appeared in the so-called “compound” past tense (“pretérito perfecto compuesto” in Spanish; e.g., “ha dado”). The tense of the verbs was kept constant across varieties. This is potentially problematic because, even though the compound past is fully grammatical in both varieties, Rioplatense Spanish speakers often use the simple past in contexts in which Peninsular speakers use the compound past (Louro 2009, Menegotto 2013). We kept the tense constant to minimize changes to the linguistic materials and keep the experiments as similar as possible across varieties. Further, we reasoned that although the compound past might lower acceptability in Rioplatense Spanish overall, it should not affect specific differences *between* individual experimental conditions, which shared the same tense (e.g., 4c vs. 4d).

The filler items were designed to have high, mid or low acceptability to encourage participants to fully use the rating scale. There were more fillers with low ($n = 16$) than high ($n = 8$) acceptability because we expected most of the experimental items to be judged as acceptable by the Rioplatense speakers. Thus, the low acceptability fillers were used to generate variability in expected responses across the experiment. The low acceptability fillers consisted of sentences that were ungrammatical, for example because they contained number, gender or tense agreement violations, e.g., “*Los empresarios firmó el contrato después de muchas discusiones” (‘The businessmen signed.SINGULAR the contract after many discussions’). By contrast, the mid acceptability fillers consisted of sentences that were grammatical but had non-canonical properties, for example less frequent word orders, e.g., “Después de que el profesor corrigió el examen, a las alumnas lo devolvió” (Intended meaning: ‘After the professor rated the exam, he returned it to the students.’).

The attention checks were designed to ensure that participants were attentive during the task (Oppenheimer, Meyvis & Davidenko 2009). Each attention check consisted of a sentence such as ‘Instead of judging this sentence, please press the key

X', with X corresponding to one of the seven values in the rating scale. Only participants who answered correctly at least 6 of the 7 attention checks were included in the analysis.

2.1.3 Procedure

Participants completed the experiment using the online testing platform PCIBex (Zehr & Schwarz 2018). They were instructed to rate the acceptability of each sentence using a 7-point scale (1 = 'least acceptable', 7 = 'most acceptable'). The instructions defined an acceptable sentence as a sentence that sounded natural and that could be used by a native speaker of participants' variety. Participants were asked to follow their intuition and to base their judgments on the form of the sentence, rather than its real-world plausibility. During the experimental trials, each sentence was displayed together with the rating scale. To enter their ratings, participants could click on numeric boxes or use the numbers on their keyboards. The order of presentation was randomized for each participant. Prior to the instructions, participants completed a demographic questionnaire. An experimental session lasted 10–15 minutes.

2.1.4 Analysis

Raw data were preprocessed manually in order to correct typos and inconsistencies in demographic responses. The preprocessed data was exported to R (R Development Core Team 2022). Acceptability ratings were analyzed with mixed-effects ordinal logistic regression to appropriately account for discrete response categories and non-normal response distributions (McCullagh 1980; Verissimo 2021). For this purpose, the "ordinal" package was used (Christensen 2019). Trials were entered in the analysis if their response time was between 2–20 seconds. These cut-off points were based on pilot testing and theoretical considerations: We estimated the reading of the sentence to take at least 2 seconds, with responses longer than 20 seconds likely reflecting disruptions associated with online testing (e.g., connectivity problems, environmental interruptions). Exclusion percentages are reported in the results section.

To address our research question, we directly compared speakers of Canarian and Rioplatense Spanish using models with fixed effects of Doubling, Group and their interaction. Sentences with dative and accusative objects were analyzed separately because our predictions differed between them. The critical parameter in the models was the Doubling \times Group interaction: We expected the two speaker groups to differ specifically in their ratings to clitic-doubled accusative objects. This should result in a doubling \times group interaction in sentences with accusative objects. By contrast, no interaction was expected in sentences with dative objects, in which both groups were expected to accept clitic doubling. When fixed effects interacted, we conducted follow-up pairwise comparisons.

All contrasts were sum-coded as ± 0.5 , such that model parameters reflected differences between condition means. For doubling (-0.5 non-doubled / $+0.5$ doubled), a positive coefficient reflects higher acceptability ratings in the clitic-doubled conditions. For group (-0.5 Canarian Spanish / $+0.5$ Argentinian Spanish), a positive coefficient reflects higher ratings in the Rioplatense Spanish group. All models had maximal random effects structures, including intercepts and slopes by participants and items for all fixed effects and their interactions (Barr et al. 2013). We report effect sizes with model coefficients in log odds ($\hat{\beta}$), standard errors (SE) and the z-statistic.

2.2 Results

The two groups performed similarly with the filler items, assigning high ratings to the high acceptability fillers, intermediate ratings to the intermediate acceptability fillers and low ratings to the low acceptability fillers (Appendix S2). 2.59% of trials were removed due to exceeding the response time deadline (Canarian Spanish: 2.97%; Rioplatense Spanish: 2.21%). In the experimental items, 3.13% of trials were removed due to exceeding the response deadline (Canarian Spanish: 4.05%; Rioplatense Spanish: 2.21%).

In the experimental items, different qualitative profiles were observed for dative and accusative objects (Figure 1). With dative objects, the two groups reacted similarly to clitic doubling, giving higher ratings to doubled than non-doubled sentences: 6.35 vs. 5.55 in Canarian Spanish and 6.32 vs. 5.27 in Rioplatense Spanish. This result suggests that non-doubled and clitic-doubled dative objects are both grammatical, but the latter are preferred to similar extents in both Spanish varieties.

By contrast, clitic doubling lowered the acceptability of sentences with accusative objects. Crucially, this effect differed between groups, as shown by a significant Doubling \times Group interaction (Table 1). Pairwise comparisons showed that the dispreference towards clitic-doubled accusative objects was significantly larger in Canarian than Rioplatense speakers. Specifically, clitic doubling strongly reduced the mean acceptability of sentences with accusative objects from 6.54 to 2.63 in Canarian speakers. By contrast, this reduction was much smaller in Rioplatense speakers: from 6.34 to 5.81. This result suggests that the doubling of animate accusative objects is a grammatical option in Rioplatense Spanish, but not in Peninsular Spanish.

Figure 1. Acceptability ratings of sentences with dative and accusative objects compared between speaker groups. Circles reflect by-condition averages across participants, and error bars show ± 1 standard deviations. Each point represents an individual participant. Canarian and Rioplatense Spanish speakers reacted similarly to the doubling of dative objects. By contrast, the two groups differed in their responses to doubled accusative objects.

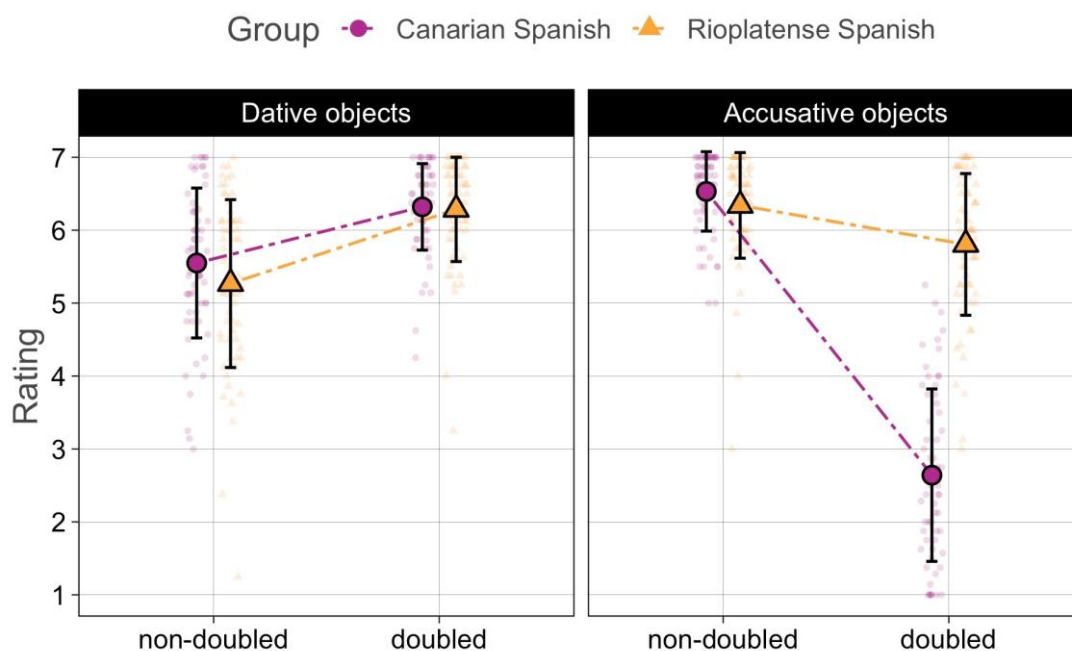


Table 1. Model results for the between-group comparisons. Model estimates are expressed in log odds and significant effects at the $\alpha = .05$ level are bolded. Pairwise comparisons showed that the dispreference towards clitic-doubled accusative objects was significantly stronger in Canarian than Rioplatense speakers (compare the values of the z- coefficients in the bottom two rows)

	$\hat{\beta}$	SE	z	p
<i>Dative objects</i>				
Doubling	1.82	0.21	8.89	.000
Group	-0.47	0.29	-1.60	.109
Doubling \times Group	0.38	0.33	1.15	.252
<i>Accusative objects</i>				
Doubling	-4.54	0.28	-16.43	.000
Group	2.43	0.33	7.46	.000
Doubling \times Group	6.62	0.54	12.25	.000
Canarian Spanish: doubling	-7.85	0.43	-18.14	.000
Rioplatense Spanish: doubling	-1.23	0.33	-3.69	.000

3. General discussion

The results of the judgment study support the pattern previously found in spontaneous production. Specifically, speakers of Rioplatense and Canarian Spanish preferred clitic doubling with indirect nominal objects. However, they differed in their acceptance of doubled accusative nominal objects: while Rioplatense Spanish speakers clearly accepted clitic doubling, Canarian speakers mostly did not.

Our results confirm previous findings with spontaneous speech and also complement them. This is because judgments and spontaneous production data could in principle reflect two different mechanisms (e.g., application of grammatical constraints vs. candidate selection processes, e.g., Featherston, 2005). If language change takes place and a structure becomes part of a grammatical system, it should not only appear in production but also be systematically accepted. Thus, in order to support the possibility of grammatical change, it is necessary to show not only differing frequencies of use but also differences in acceptance rates.

Acceptability data is especially important because a dispreference in use may not always be associated with low acceptability: a structure that is preferred in colloquial speech may nonetheless be judged as unacceptable (e.g., because it is stigmatized). Conversely, a structure may be highly acceptable but rarely produced. This latter option can be exemplified with the clitic doubling of indirect objects. A previous corpus study had revealed a clear preference for the clitic doubling of indirect nominal objects: 81.8% and 91.5% in Peninsular and Rioplatense Spanish respectively (see tables 2 and 3 from Rinke et al. 2019). But these findings left open whether non-doubled indirect objects were used less due to a low acceptability, or only dispreferred—and thus not necessarily less acceptable. Our judgment data support the latter option. In both varieties of Spanish, non-doubled indirect objects were highly acceptable, even if Spanish speakers disprefer them in production.

A different situation arises with accusative nominal objects. Corpus data have shown overall low rates of production of clitic-doubled accusative nominal objects in Rioplatense and Peninsular Spanish alike. It was only with animate specific DOM-marked nominal accusative objects that the doubling rates significantly differed between varieties: 6.15% in Peninsular Spanish vs. 42.71% in Rioplatense Spanish. Our data showed that Rioplatense speakers in contrast to Canarian speakers clearly judge clitic-doubled animate DOM-marked accusative objects as acceptable. This confirms the assumption of language change in Rioplatense Spanish.

Table 2. Proportion of doubling of accusative and dative noun phrases in COLA Madrid + C-Oral ROM (Rinke et al. 2019: 28)

COLA Madrid + C-Oral-Rom				
		N	%	N (%)
Accusative noun phrase	doubling	17	0.5	3123 (100)
	non-doubling	3106	99.5	
Dative noun phrase	doubling	90	81.8	110 (100)
	non-doubling	20	18.2	
Total				3233

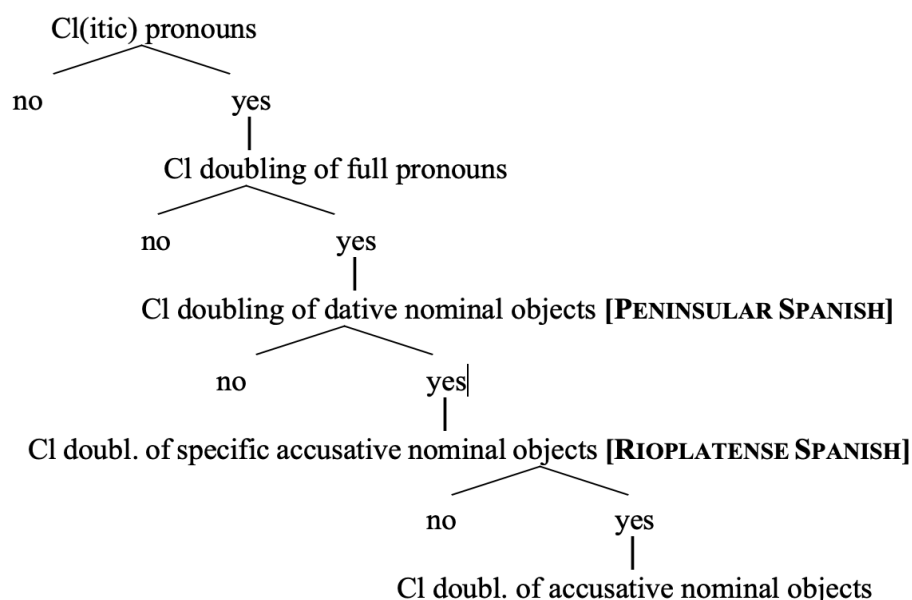
Table 3. Proportion of doubling of accusative and dative noun phrases in COLA Buenos Aires (Rinke et al. 2019: 29)

COLA Buenos Aires				
		N	%	N (%)
Accusative noun phrase	doubling	48	3.5	1353 (100)
	non-doubling	1305	96.5	
Dative noun phrase	doubling	75	91.5	82 (100)
	non-doubling	7	8.5	
Total				1435

Putting the results from accusative and dative constructions together, our findings support the parameter hierarchy of Fischer and Rinke (2013), which is shown on Figure 2. Reading the hierarchy top down accounts for the diachronic evolution of

clitic doubling: the first step is the emergence of a category of D°/phi-clitics initiating a number of subsequent gradual processes, modeled as microparametric changes or steps that languages may diachronically follow or not. If a language develops clitic doubling, then it should first affect full pronouns, then dative, and finally accusative nominal objects. Peninsular and Rioplatense Spanish can be placed at different stages of this diachronic path: Peninsular Spanish allows for the doubling of datives, whereas Rioplatense is more advanced and has extended clitic doubling to accusative objects (at least those with specific animate referents and DOM-marking). Following this reasoning, the observed synchronic differences between Peninsular and Rioplatense Spanish result from microparametric diachronic change in Rioplatense Spanish.

Figure 2. Parameter hierarchy from Fischer and Rinke (2013) (building on Baker 2008: 3, see also Roberts 2011). Note that the figure abstracts over grammatical features like animacy, person and definiteness, which may additionally influence the diachronic pathway



While the proposal above accounts for the acceptability judgments displayed at the group level, the inspection of the participant-level results suggests a more nuanced picture. As shown in Figure 1, there is between-participant variability in the judgment of clitic-doubled accusatives. Specifically, although only Rioplatense speakers cluster at the high end of the acceptability scale, and only Canarian speakers appear at its low end, the judgments of some speakers of Canarian and Rioplatense Spanish overlap. There may be several factors for this overlap. A potential source of variability in the judgments of Rioplatense speakers may be connected to the use of the compound past tense, which is less common in Rioplatense than in Peninsular Spanish. Specifically, Rioplatense speakers might have assigned low acceptability ratings to some items not due to factors linked to clitic-doubling per se but because the use of the compound past made the items sound unnatural. While this possibility is reasonable and deserves future investigation, it can't fully explain the observed variability, because between-participant variability was also seen in the Canarian group, which does not disprefer the compound past tense.

A second possibility is that Canarian speakers sometimes misinterpreted clitic-doubled accusative objects as dislocations due to the lack of prosody. We tried to avoid this misinterpretation by adding a sentence-final adverbial phrase, which made it less likely for the direct object to be interpreted as right dislocated: this option would imply two right dislocated elements, the object and the adverbial phrase. However, these precautions may not have been fully effective. Future research using spoken—rather than written—acceptability judgments could address this possibility.

Alternatively, Canarian Spanish speakers might have judged clitic-doubled accusative objects not solely according to their own grammar but also the grammar of familiar varieties—which could include Rioplatense Spanish. In addition, some Rioplatense speakers could have rejected doubling with accusatives because they relied on a more formal register, in which non-doubling of accusatives is still preferred. Finally, another possibility is that some Canarian Spanish speakers may already show diachronically progressive behaviors. Under this view, the difference between the two varieties would be that the proportion of “progressive” speakers is much higher in Rioplatense than in Canarian Spanish.

While future work is necessary to arbitrate between the possibilities above, the current study illustrates that patterns of diachronic change can provide a useful way to explain variability in the grammatical behavior of different varieties of a language. Further, our study illustrates that judgment data is a useful complement to production data because it can help distinguish between preference-based and acceptability-based variation in spontaneous speech data. An interesting avenue for future research concerns the use of comprehension paradigms that do not rely on explicit judgments, such as reading-for-comprehension tasks using eye-tracking and self-paced reading.

Acknowledgments

We thank Claudia Pañeda, Horacio Barber and Carlos Javier Álvarez González for their valuable help with stimuli preparation and data collection. Sol Lago and Esther Rinke were supported by the German Research Foundation, project number 468764275.

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