

CLITIC INTENSIFIER CONSTRUCTION CORPUS PROJECT: AN INITIAL REPORT*

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ABSTRACT

Clitic Intensifier Construction (CIC) in Spanish is a construction that involves *superfluous clitic* that intensifies the verb of the predicate. (Hernández Batista 2011)

- (1) a. Yo **me** bebí todo el refresco.
b. **Me** le das recuerdos de mi parte.

In each sentence in (1), the main verb lacks a grammatical function (GF- θ) for the clitic *me*, thus making it *superfluous*. They are thematically vacuous. Yet, the clitics emphasize (or, *intensify*) the verb, and thus they must be visible at the syntax-semantic interface. The construction has not been studied, because its property has not been adequately documented. The chief reason for this is because it, being a sub-standard colloquial register, is regarded as “incorrect” by prescriptive grammarians. We even found that many speakers use this construction without being aware of it.

The present project is to fill the gap in the description and analysis of the CIC by creating a linguistic corpus of the local dialect spoken in the Holguín region. This will be done primarily by recording either casual running conversations of local volunteers or casual interviews or conversations found on media. The project was loosely formulated at the 2018 WEFLA conference, when the authors discussed on the relevant topics; the goals of the project were made precise in August 2018. As the first step, we have decided to start with annotating the transcribed interviews of pre-college students. The present talk is a progress report of this project, illustrating CIC, and some findings through this project.

1. Introduction

The present paper is a progress report on the initial phase of our latest Western/Huron–Holguín joint linguistics project. The project concerns what we call Clitic Intensifier Construction (CIC) in Spanish, as in (1).

- (1) a. Yo **me** bebí todo el refresco.
b. Nosotros **nos** tomamos varias cervezas.
c. **Me** la saludas.

CIC involves what Bello and Cuervo (1978) call *superfluous use* of clitics, to be denoted in bold font. CIC is a relatively unknown construction of Spanish, even though clitics have long been one of the most closely examined topics in Spanish linguistics (Luján 1976, Rivas 1977, Suárez 1988, Zagana 2012, Fernández Lopez 2018, among others). To the best of our knowledge, there are no Spanish textbooks that handle it. Hernández Batista was among the first to recognize its importance

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(Hernández Batista 2011, in process, Hernández Batista, Bidot Martínez, and Dominguez Hernandez. 2017).

In what follows, we first provide a brief background information of how the present project came about and what it is concerned with. Then, a brief description of the properties of CIC is given, followed by a short discussion on building a small linguistic corpus. Finally, we conclude our discussion by mapping out our future plans and speculate expected outcomes.

2. Background

The present project originated from informal conversations, held by some participants of the 2017 WEFLA conference, about CIC and subject-aux-inversion (SAI)-less Wh-question in Spanish. At the 2018 WEFLA conference, the same people returned to the same conversational topics and started formulating a set of research questions on both constructions in colloquial Spanish. We have decided to focus on CIC at this stage of the project as Hernández Batista has already done the ground work. For this reason, we decided to focus upon CIC exclusively in what follows.¹

As already noted above, the construction has not been widely recognized or studied to our satisfaction; its property has not been adequately documented. While we do not have definitive evidence, the chief reason for this omission appears to be most likely due to the sub-standard colloquial register that CIC allegedly belongs to, and as such it is regarded as “incorrect” by prescriptive grammarians. The view of prescriptive grammarians appears to have influenced the attitude of the speakers of the Holguín dialect. They appear to avoid using CIC in formal conversational contexts; the users often seem to discourage themselves from openly admitting the use of this construction, in fear of being labelled as uneducated; even when they use the construction in casual conversational contexts, they often seem to be unconscious of their using those constructions. In contrast, we consider CIC as a full-fledged construction of (Cuban) Spanish that offers us an opportunity for examining a micro-parametric variation in Cuban Spanish. Rejection of the existence of such variations, and worse, discriminatory attitudes toward the use of the local dialect are reflections of the ignorance on what language is. It is surely not a position of descriptive linguists; for us descriptive linguists, the register of the construction does not constitute a reason to ignore, or reject, it.² We have at hand an interesting, hitherto under-examined, construction involving Spanish clitics. The gap of the knowledge about CIC that exists today is a strong incentive for our investigation. Following up, we spelled out in August 2018 a set of tentative goals of this project, as described in (2).

- (2) a. Description of the construction: What are the properties of the construction?
- b. Sociological Questions: What are the facts about the use of this construction?
 - i. In which areas is this construction commonly used?
 - ii. In which register is this construction commonly used?
 - iii. How is the effect of CIC captured in those dialects without CIC?
- c. Historical account: How did CIC arise in the dialects that has it?

The goals in (2) are quite ambitious; we cannot tackle them all at once. Rather, our first concrete step is to work on (2a) and (2b). (2a) is important because no empirical investigation can proceed without a body of data. At the same time, in order to collect the data on the construction, we do need

¹ We are hopeful that the data in our linguistic corpus that we collect for the present purpose can be used for the study of SAI-less wh-questions.

² Biologists who study cats are not worried about where the cats are from: award-winning cats, stray cats, farm cats, or regular house cats; they are just as good subjects as any other cats.

a working understanding of CIC; we cannot collect data blindly. Therefore, we have given ourselves a two-part assignment: to formulate a preliminary analysis of CIC, and to create a starter corpus.

(2b) is a set of socio-linguistic questions. Regarding (1b-i), Hernández Batista initially suggested that CIC is specific to the dialect spoken in and around Holguín, mainly among farmers. It is still an open question as to whether or not CIC is specific to the dialect(s) in Holguín, or Eastern Province. We have some reason to doubt this, however, as some anecdotal reports on the use of CIC outside Holguín, and even Cuba (e.g. Bello and Cuervo 1978, Fernández López 2018, Escalante Batista and Paéz Pérez (personal communication)). Leaving this question open, one thing is clear: CIC is an integral part of the Spanish language spoken in Holguín, and our knowledge of Spanish language should reflect this fact. Regarding (1b-ii), we already know that CIC is used in a substandard register, but we need to know more precisely which level of substandard register: What are the speech groups that frequently use CIC, and in which linguistic contexts does it happen most naturally/frequently? (1b-iii) is a functional account of CIC: what does the use of CIC accomplish in the speech act and how do the dialects without the use of CIC express the same thing? In order to address (1a) and (1b), an empirical investigation of CIC is in order, so as to gather the data and create a linguistic corpus of the relevant dialects. With it, we can begin to construct an adequate description of CIC.

This may be a good place to insert an anecdotal comment on a merit of international collaborations in linguistic science. In an attempt to identify the properties of CIC, the research group members faced an interesting challenge arising from the “cultural” difference in their respective methodological approaches. Generally speaking, Cuban linguists tend to focus mostly, if not completely, on positive examples – i.e. what CIC can be; thus, their works tend to be a list of examples of CICs. This is a tendency found also in such structural linguists as Bloomfield, Hockett, and Gleason. For the Canadian participant, who is trained under the tradition of generative grammar, negative examples (i.e., what CIC cannot be) is equally important.³ Granted positive examples are necessary to illustrate CIC, we also need to identify what CIC is not, in order to define CIC.⁴ Having dialogues with different methodologies is highly constructive and thought-stimulating.

3. CIC

CIC is a construction that involves *superfluous clitic* that intensifies the verb of the predicate Hernández Batista 2011, in process, Hernández Batista, Bidot Martínez, and Dominguez Hernández. 2017).

- (3) a. Yo **me** bebí todo el refresco.
b. Nosotros **nos** tomamos varias cervezas.
c. **Me** la saludas.
d. A mi sobrina no **me** la aconsejaba cualquier vecino o cualquiera amistad.
e. A mi mamá **me** le tocan dos paquetes de tabletas de Enalapril cada dos meses.
- (4) a. Yo me demandé.

³ Analogous to this is the following scenario. Suppose we have a set S of integers, a set of prime numbers, say. By giving only prime numbers, such as 3, 5, and 11, as examples, one cannot confidently identify S being a set of prime numbers; the more prime examples, only the likelihood increases. To fully establish its status, you need to include the evidence that the set does not include such non-prime numbers as 4, 28, 600, and so forth. A generalization of a grammatical construction based only on positive instances does not define the boundary of the construction.

Bearing this, we can appreciate the striking fact about children’s ability to acquire a language, as they do not appear to have access to consistent and explicit negative instances of the target language, and, if it such instances may be accessible (for over-zealous grammarian parents), they do not appear to utilize such data See Chomsky 1965, Gold 1968, and Lasnik 1981 for the issues arising from the absence of *direct negative data* and the role of *indirect negative data* for language acquisition.

⁴ Note that the importance of negative definition for scientific study highlights the limitation of purely corpus-based analysis, as corpora do not normally contain them. This does not mean linguistic corpora are useless. Researchers must be aware of their merits and limitations. (See also Gries 2013, 2015).

- b. Salúdame.

In each sentence in (3), the main verb lacks a grammatical function (GF- θ : a grammatical function associated with a thematic role (Chomsky 1981)) for the clitic *me*; they are thematically vacuous, in other words. Observe the contrast between the clitics in (3) with (4). The clitics in the latter have their GF- θ s specified: the patient of the predicate. They are not superfluous, as they contribute to semantic/thematic interpretation. Further, Hernández Batista notes that CIC-**me** appears to lack a deictic reference or an overt antecedent for agreement.

At the same time, CIC-clitics behave as real clitics as they can clitic-climb, as in (5b/d), where **me** can intensify either *beber*, or *pude/ quiere*.

- (5) a. Pude beber**me** el refresco.
 b. **Me** pude beber el refresco.
 c. Quiere beber**me** el refresco.
 d. **Me** quiere beber el refresco.

Under the clitic climbing environment, the clitic cannot be affixed to the upstairs verb stem (6a/b), because of *restructuring* of the complement clause, as shown in (6c). This is true for non-CIC clitics, as well, as shown in (7). So, the ungrammaticality of (6a/b) has little to do with its CIC status, but a status of being a clitic.

- (6) a. * Púd**me** beber el refresco.
 b. * Pude **me** beber el refresco.
 c. ... [pude-beber] el fresco.
 (7) a. * Quiere lo acostar.
 b. * Quiérello acostar.

Further, a CIC-clitic seems to occur in many different syntactic environments, as shown in (8).

- (8) a. Si mi hijo se **me (nos, vos, te)**, yo me muero...(Conditional clause)
 b. Yo quiero que mi hijo se **me (nos, vos, te)** vaya a estudiar a La Habana (Subjunctive complement clause)
 c. Cuando mi hijo se **me (nos, vos, te)** vaya, yo me muero de tristeza (Subjunctive temporal adjunct clause)
 d. Mi hijo, que se **me (nos, vos, te)** piensa ir para La Habana, es muy estudioso. (Relative clause)

In other words, the evidence above strongly suggests that the superfluous **me** (i.e. CIC-clitic) in (3) appears to be syntactically a full-fledged clitic, except for its lack of GF- θ .

Our next research topic is the notion of *intensification*, as it stands, it is far from transparent. Yet, the superfluous clitics are not literally superfluous; they *intensify* the verb, according to Hernández Batista, and thus they must be visible at the syntax-semantic interface.⁵ Clearly, the notion of *intensifier* cannot refer to the *intensification transformation* on a fuzzy set (cf. Bosc, HadjAli, and Pivert 2008). Intensification could mean *phonetic intensification* (accent-stress), or such syntax-semantic interface operations as *focalization* (not unlike pseudo-clefting, predicate raising in English), *exclamatives*, *emotive emphasis*, or *intensifier so modified predicates*. In order to identify the semantico-pragmatic function of CIC, an extensive investigation of CIC on its syntax, semantics and discourse function will

⁵ Here, we are assuming that anything that has semantic consequences are visibly present at the syntactic representation at the syntax-semantics (or Conceptual-Intentional (C-I)) interface (Chomsky 2008, 2015).

be necessary for our project. Concretely, we must first devise diagnostic tests, which we are currently working on.

Finally, we have been searching for a construction comparable to CIC, without a clear success. Cross-linguistically speaking, natural language has mechanisms to add an argument that is not selected by the predicate. One such example is *applicative constructions* (See Harris Allen 2015 and references therein), where “the number of object arguments selected by the predicate is increased by one with respect to the basic construction” (Polinsky 2013). Two examples from African languages are given in (9).

- (9) a. Mukasa ya-tambu-dde **Katonga**
 Mukasa 3sg.pst-walk-pst Katonga
 ‘Mukasa walked for Katonga.’ (Luganda: Pylkkänen 2008:20)
- b. Faatu sampa-**al-na** **yaay-am** ker.
 Fatou build-appl-aff.3sg mother-poss.3sg house
 ‘Fatou built her mother a house.’ (Wolof: Dunigan 1994:238)

However, applicative constructions typically add a valency to the predicate, which CIC does not. Therefore, it does not seem to be a good comparator for CIC. Alternatively, the CIC may abstractly resemble *personal dative* construction in Appalachian English (Christian 1991), as in (10), an emotive emphasis *no-da* construction in Japanese (Kuno 1973, Tanomura 1990, Otake 2002) (11b).

- (10) a. He was looking to buy **him** a house for his family.
 b. I want to find **me** a pretty card for my mother.
 c. I shot **me** a pheasant.
- (11) a. Watashi-wa sono hon-o yom-anak-atta.
 I-topic that book-acc read-not-past.
 ‘I did not read the book (as a fact).’
- b. Watashi-wa sono hon-o yom-anak-atta-**n(o)**-da.
 I-topic that book-acc read-not-past-emphatic marker-be
 ‘I did not read the book (and I have some emotional reaction with it).’

Both constructions involve an item (*personal pronouns* in the former and nominalizing marker-*no* in the latter) without GF- θ that gives a rise to emphatic interpretation. At this point the similarities with those constructions are only suggestive. We need a fine-grained account of emphasis/intensification before properly evaluating their similarity. An extensive investigation of CIC on its syntax, semantics and discourse function is in order.

4. Linguistic Corpus: The First Step

Another pillar of our research goal is to compile data of the CIC into a linguistic corpus of the local dialect spoken in the Holguín region. Central to this are two tasks for corpus creation: viz., collection and organization of linguistic data. By *linguistic corpus* or just *corpus*, we take the following (standard) definition: A collection of linguistic data, either written texts or a transcription of recorded speech. At this stage of our research, for the reason to be elaborated immediately below, we do not adopt another (standard) definition of the following kind: a corpus or text corpus is a large and structured set of texts. This will involve creation of a corpus by collecting relevant data and organizing them.

Let us first consider the creation of the body of the data for linguistic corpora. We have decided to approach this task in three ways. First, we have started annotating the transcribed interviews of pre-college students. Thus far, we have the transcription of 24 interviews with pre-college (Grade 10–

12) students conducted by volunteering students of the journalism major. The length of the answers is roughly in the range of 300 and 700 words per interview. We are currently annotating the corpus with a summary of the data as follows:

- (12) a. Word counts and number of sentences
- b. Presence/absence of CIC in each recorded interview.
- c. Number of sentences containing CIC.
- d. Overt marking of the sentences containing CIC
- e. Annotation of the grammatical elements (types of verbs, environment, etc. Cf. (10))

Our preliminary scanning of the corpus shows that some pre-college students use more than others. Yet, overall the use of CIC is not as frequent as we expected. We speculate that the colloquial nature of CIC is not most compatible with the interview-format, even if the interview is reasonably casual. With this concern in mind, we are currently collecting data from broadcasted radio program where teenagers are free to converse. It is also important to note that there is no better alternative to conducting recording sessions of natural conversations among friends in casual setting. We are planning to conduct such recording sessions in 2019–2020 academic year.

Let us now turn to the second part of the task – i.e. organizing of the linguistic corpora. As noted earlier, our present goal is to describe – and account for – the core properties of CIC. Our primary use of the corpus, at the present stage of our research, will be for the grammatical analysis of the properties of CIC, not quantitative, search-based analysis of the corpus. For that purpose, a corpus consisting of collection of sentences from the appropriate register suffices; we do not need the data to be *structured* with grammatical annotation.⁶ At this point, we are working on organizing the data by cataloguing them so that we can refer to them easily. For that, we are giving a reference number for each interview and each sentence within, so that we can locate the relevant datum easily. Also, we are appending to each interview transcripts with the background information, such as biographical information of the subjects and the interviewer, background information. The occurrences of CIC are flagged in terms of highlighting, as well as the sentence reference numbers.

5. Closing Comments: Conjectures and Future Plans

To sum up, in our collaborative project we are ultimately concerned with the following questions: A) what are the structural (syntactic) properties of CIC?; B) what are its semantic/pragmatic function and how it does relate to syntax?; C) what is the geographic boundary for CIC?; and D) how has it been developed locally? Naturally, those questions are too extensive for the first stage of our investigation. Instead, we aim to set up a model first step of research project that will lead to addressing them all. Namely, we are focusing on (A) and (B), and for those, gathering data, in the form of linguistic corpus is of at most importance.

Our immediate action plans for the former are as follows. First, we organize and analyze the existing data from the interviews with pre-college students. Recall our suspicion of the scarcity of the CIC found in the current corpus: the interview format might make the linguistic environment too formal. Second, we will make recordings of free conversation available on radio broadcasting programs targeting pre-college teens. The radio program, where teenagers are having free-form conversation, may rectify this bias. We predict that we find more cases of CIC used in conversation. We are hopeful that we have enough recorded conversation to verify our conjecture that was entertained in the previous section.

⁶ Besides, we must first obtain a reliable analysis of CIC before we can annotate the relevant occurrences of CIC-clitics in the corpus. Once the size of the corpus grows, it will be important to have each word grammatically annotated so that text search can be conducted.

Independent of the outcome of this, we will most likely need to record free-form conversations, because that will be the most natural linguistic environment among the options described above. This is important in identifying the register of the construction. Broadcasted conversations and independently generated interviews do not allow us to control the register of the conversation by making it more formal or less formal. Taping a real conversation may allow us to softly interfere with the conversation to shift the register. Also, some conversation topics may be less likely to trigger CIC; we might usher the conversation toward the topics which are more likely to encourage CIC to be used.

In order to address (1b-i)–(1b-iii), (2c), (C), and (D), it will be necessary to expand the geographical domain of our inquiry. An obvious candidate would be other parts of the Province, as well as cities and their surrounding areas, such as Bayamo, Las Tunas, Camagüey, and Santiago de Cuba; we need to recruit collaborators from those areas. At one point in future when we will have gained a sufficiently large body of data, we certainly would like to ask such questions as what the frequency difference of CIC in colloquial speech among different speech group, dialectal regions, among others. At that point, the data will have been thoroughly grammatically annotated so as to conduct a large-scale search-based corpus analysis. While a sociolinguistic analysis of CIC can be done without quantitative generalizations, it seems reasonable to aim both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the construction: the former intersects more with formal (=grammatical) generalizations, whereas the latter offers more statistical (=sociological) generalizations (Biber 1993, Gómez 2010). We are excited for the prospect of new findings through this international scientific collaboration.

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