

Definiteness and Differential Object Marking in Zamboanga Chavacano

Nutshell: We examine the semantic properties of the object marker *con* in Zamboanga Chavacano, a Spanish-based creole spoken in the Philippines. The variety under discussion is spoken in the city of Zamboanga. We discuss the distribution of the DOM marker *con* and propose that it indicates definiteness.

Background: Chavacano, an understudied creole (McKaughan 1954; Forman 1972; Sippola 2011), has a morpheme *con* that sometimes appears at the left edge of a direct object and shows properties of differential object marking (DOM) (Bossong 1985; Fábregas 2013) and definiteness (Heim 1988; Gillon 2013). We examine the distribution of *con*, using data from three speakers of Zamboanga Chavacano, one of whom is a co-author.

Distribution of *con*: Examples (1) to (3) show that *con* appears with a specific object but not with a non-specific object. *Con* does not appear with subjects (not shown for lack of space).

- (1) Context: Mary wants to eat a mango. So, she went to the store to see if they had any.
 Quirre come (*con el) mangga si Maria.
 want eat DOM DET mango DET Maria
 ‘Mary wants to eat a mango.’ (non-specific)
- (2) Context: There’s a book Maria wants to read. So, she went to the library to look for it.
 Quirre si Maria le *(con el) libro.
 want DET Maria read DOM DET book
 ‘Maria wants to read (a specific) book.’
- (3) Context: Maria wants to read three books this summer. She doesn't have any specific books in mind. She just wants to see if she can read that many in one summer.
 Quirre si Maria le (*con el) tres libro este samer.
 want DET Maria read DOM DET three book this summer

***Con* as DOM:** At first glance, it appears to have the same distribution as other languages with DOM (for Spanish, see López 2012; Fábregas 2013). As expected, an object marked with *con* takes scope above *want*, while an object without *con* takes low scope, (4).

- (4) Context: There is a list of ten recommended books to read. Maria wants to read three of the books, and Jose wants to read four.
- a. Quirre si Maria le con el tres del mga libro
 want DET Maria read DOM DET three of.the PL book
 ‘Maria wants to read three of the books.’ (3 > want; three specific books)
- b. Quirre si Maria le tres del mga libro
 want DET Maria read three of.the PL book
 ‘Maria wants to read three of the books.’ (want > 3; any three books)

As in many DOM languages, the DOM marker is the equivalent of the dative marker that introduces the indirect object (not shown for lack of space). Finally, *con* is obligatory on proper nouns and pronouns in object position.

- (5) Ta busca si Juan con Maria/contigo.
 ASP search DET John DOM Mary/DOM.you
 ‘John is looking for Mary/you.’

***Con* as Definiteness:** Example (5) shows that a definite object is obligatorily marked with *con*.

- (6) Context: Maria went to the store and bought an apple and a mango. She ate the apple but put the mango away to eat later.
 Ya come le *(con) el mansanas.
 ASP ate 3SG DOM DET apple
 ‘She ate the apple.’

Since definiteness entails specificity, this observation is not surprising. Consider, however, example (6). Here, the form *con* is used only when the referent is familiar to both the speaker and the addressee in the sense of Heim (1988).

- (7) Context: Speaker is looking for any child, say to be in a TV commercial
- a. Ta busca yo un/*con el bata.
 ASP look.for 1SG ART/DOM DET child
 I’m looking for a child. (any child)
- b. Ta busca yo *(con el) bata.
 ASP look.for 1SG (DOM DET) child
 I’m looking for a child.’ (specific child, but must be familiar to addressee)

It is tempting to attribute the determiner *el* to definiteness; however, it can appear in indefinite contexts. In the following example, (7)a is the context for (7)b.

- (8) a. Ya mira *(el) *(un) perro (un) pajaró.
 ASP see DET ART dog ART bird
 ‘A dog saw a bird.’
- b. ya ase apas el perro con el pajaró.
 ASP make chase DET dog DOM ART bird
 ‘The dog chased the bird.’

We suspect that the determiner *el* is related to specificity, at least in subject position. We set aside the properties of *el* for now.

Moving on, *con* shows lack of uniqueness in the sense of Gillon (2013). Consider the following example. The object must refer back to the set of apples in the context, but it does not need to be exhaustive.

- (9) Context: Maria bought four apples and two mangoes.
 ya come yo con el mga mansanas, pero ya come yo tres bilug lang
 ASP eat 1SG DOM DET PL apple but ASP eat 1SG three piece only
 ‘I ate the apples but I only ate three.’

We also tested the Law of Contradiction (Löbner 2002), but the data are not shown for lack of space. Again, *con* patterns like a definiteness marker; however, it appears in object position only.

Interim Summary: We have seen that *con* has properties of both DOM and definiteness. It is correlated with definiteness on the object only. It never appears on the subject regardless of interpretation. It acts as a definiteness marker in the sense that both the speaker and the addressee have to be familiar with the referent in the sense of Heim (1988). It also has a uniqueness implicature, which can be cancelled.

Discussion: The Chavacano marker *con* indicates definiteness on the object. In terms of Aissen’s (2003) scale, we see that *con* is found on pronouns, proper nouns, and definite nominals, but nothing lower on the definiteness scale. We follow Gillon (2013) and propose the following denotation and vocabulary insertion rule for *con*. Gillon proposes a function, C, that acts as a domain restrictor.

- (10) a. $[[\text{DET}]] = \lambda P f(\lambda x [P(x) \wedge C(x)])$
 b. DET $\rightarrow con \setminus _ _ [ACC]$

We depart from Gillon in the following way. In Gillon’s study of *Skwxwú7mesh*, in novel contexts C is D_e , that is the domain of all entities. As such, determiners can be used in novel contexts in *Skwxwú7mesh*. We propose that C in novel contexts is undefined. Preliminary evidence for this proposal comes from the observation that *con* is found on D-linked *wh*-phrases but not on non-D-linked *wh*-phrases.

- (11) a. Cosa si Maria quirre kome? b. Con el cosa si Maria quirre kome?
 what DET Mary want eat DOM ART what DET Mary want eat
 ‘What does Mary want to eat?’ ‘What thing does Mary want to eat?’

The object marked with *con* must refer back to a set of potential entities familiar to the addressee.

Conclusion: We have given an in depth description of the marker *con* in Chavacano, linking it to DOM. We have outlined a basic analysis suggesting that it signals definiteness. We proposed an analysis along the lines of Gillon (2013) that accounts for the mere implicature of uniqueness in definite DPs in Chavacano. We suggested that the difference between *Skwxwú7mesh* and Chavacano resides in our stipulation that $[[\text{DET}]]$ is undefined in novel contexts, thus can only be used when a context is available.

References: Aissen, Judith. 2003. Differential Object Marking: Iconicity vs. Economy. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 21(3). 435–483. Bossong, Georg. 1985. *Differentielle objektmarkierung in den neuiranischen sprachen* (Ars Linguistica). Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag. Fábregas, Antonio. 2013. Differential Object Marking in Spanish: state of the art. *Borealis. Int. J. Hisp. Linguist.* 2. 1–80. (doi:10.7557/1.2.2.2603) Forman, Michael Lawrence. 1972. Zamboangueño texts with grammatical analysis. A study of Philippine Creole Spanish. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University. (Doctoral Dissertation.) Gillon, Carrie. 2013. *The Semantics of Determiners: Domain Restriction in Skwxwú7mesh*. New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Heim, Irene. 1988. *The Semantics of Definite and Indefinite Noun Phrases*. New York City, NY: Garland Press. Löbner, Sebastian. 2002. *Understanding Semantics*. London: Arnold Publishers. López, Luis. 2012. *Indefinite Objects: Scrambling, Choice Functions, and Differential Marking*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. McKaughan, Howard P. 1954. Notes on Chabacano grammar. *Journal of East Asiatic Studies* 3. 205–226. Sippola, Eeva. 2011. *Una gramática descriptiva del chabacano de Ternate*. University of Helsinki. (Doctoral dissertation.)