

Accusative Clitic Strategies in Mosquito Coast Spanish

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The Caribbean coast of Nicaragua is home to a linguistically diverse demographic of speakers, including Spanish, Nicaraguan Creole English, and various indigenous languages including Miskitu, a language with around 120,000 speakers. Miskitu, classified as part of the Misumalpan language family, is considered a heritage language by those whose second language is Spanish, the majority language in Nicaragua. The variety of Spanish spoken by these bilingual speakers is called Mosquito Coast Spanish (MCS). Due to the contact that exists between Miskitu and Spanish, MCS exhibits several interesting morpho-syntactic features. In this study, we will examine the use of clitic pronouns in accusative contexts in this contact variety, focusing on third-person forms.

Spanish has a distinct set of clitic pronouns for accusative and dative third-person forms (Table 1). In contrast, Miskitu has no dative/accusative distinction (Table 2), no singular/plural distinction for object pronouns, and obligatorily null third-person clitic pronouns (1).

- (1) a. *siknis* *ai* *daukisa*
 sickness 1SG-CL 3SG-have-PRES
 ‘I am sick’
- b. *siknis* \emptyset *daukisa*
 sickness \emptyset 3SG-have-PRES
 ‘He/She/It/They is/are sick’

Previous research in other contact varieties of Spanish illustrate several strategies used by bilingual speakers when approaching the complex clitic system in Spanish, including clitic omission (for Maya-Spanish contact see García Tesoro 2002, 2008; for Andean Spanish see Escobar 1990, 2012; for Paraguayan Spanish see Choi 1998), the neuter clitic *lo* (for Maya-Spanish contact see García Tesoro 2002, Klee and Lynch 2009:128; for Andean Spanish see Klee 1990, 1996) and the use of datives in lieu of accusatives (for Basque Spanish see Landa 1995, Ormazábal and Romero 2013; for Andean Spanish see Yépez 1986, Parades and Valdez 2008; for Paraguayan Spanish see de Granda 1988, Choi 1998).

Our analysis of MCS includes 12 participants, all bilingual speakers of Miskitu and Spanish. All of these individuals reside in the city of Puerto Cabezas, on the Caribbean coast of the country and consider Miskitu to be their first language. Using oral sociolinguistic interviews, we analyzed 198 tokens, extracting all cases of clitics used in accusative contexts. We find that our participants produced the masculine form *lo* with feminine referents in 94% (56/59) of cases and with plural referents in 86% (37/43) of cases, evidence that *lo* acts as a neuter clitic in this variety of Spanish. The lack of gender/number agreement indicates a simplification in the clitic system in MCS. We also observe several cases of clitic doubling, not permitted in accusative contexts, as well as the use of clitic pronouns when not grammatically necessary.

Table 1. Direct and Indirect Object Pronouns in Spanish

IO Clitics		DO Clitics	
First-person, Second-person	Third-person	First-person, Second-person	Third-person
sg. <i>me, te</i> pl. <i>nos, os</i>	<i>le</i> <i>les</i>	<i>me, te</i> <i>nos, os</i>	<i>lo, la</i> <i>los, las</i>

(adapted from Ormazábal & Romero 2013:314)

Table 2. Object Pronouns in Miskitu

First-person	<i>ai</i>	<i>ai</i>
Second-person	<i>mai</i>	<i>mai</i>
Third-person	-	-

(adapted from Salamanca 1988:251)

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