



Differential object marking in Chavacano^{*}

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Barrie, Michael Jonathan Mathew, Gune Kim, and Abee Eijansantos. 2026. Differential object marking in Chavacano. *Linguistic Research* 43(2): 351-376. This research investigates differential object marking in the Zamboanga dialect of Chavacano (ZChav), a Spanish-based Creole spoken in Zamboanga region in the south of the Philippines. Using various diagnostics, we show that differential object marking in ZChav correlates with epistemic specificity and discourse-linkedness. We ultimately tie both of these phenomena to the notion of the Common Ground and propose that it underlies the distribution of the differential object marker. We further make some notes on the interaction between differential object marking and word order in ZChav. ZChav is a VSO language; however, with non-specific objects the word order VOS is found. For VSO order, we propose that the object raises out of the VP and that the remnant VP raises to SpecTP. For VOS order, we propose that the non-specific object remains inside the VP and that the VP (V+O) raises to SpecTP. (Sogang University · Zamboanga State College of Marine Sciences and Technology)

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses the particle *conel*, which appears on specific objects in the Zamboanga dialect of the Spanish-based creole, Chavacano (cbk), henceforth Zamboanga Chavacano (ZChav). We analyze *conel* as a kind of differential object marker (DOM). In particular, we analyze the semantic properties of objects marked

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with *conel* and observe that it corresponds both with epistemic specificity (Karttunen 1968; Farkas 1994) and (D)iscourse-Linkedness (Pesetsky 1987). We argue that these two properties can be explained by appealing to the notion of Common Ground (Stalnaker 1978, 2002). The following example illustrates the phenomenon.

- (1) a. Ta buska yo iru.
 PROG look.for 1SG dog
 ‘I’m looking for a dog.’ (any dog, speaker has no dog in mind)
- b. Ta buska yo conel iru.
 PROG look.for 1SG DOM dog
 ‘I’m looking for the/a (specific) dog.’ (speaker has a dog in mind)

It is well known that specificity can manifest in a number of ways (von Heusinger 2011, 2019). Using enriched contexts as described in Matthewson (2004, 2022) and Bochnak and Matthewson (2020) we observe that *conel* indicates epistemic specificity with an additional constraint that the addressee has in mind the possible identity of the *conel*-marked object. The phenomenon is very similar to the concept of D(iscourse)-Linkedness (Pesetsky 1987), which we show also correlates with *conel*. We propose that the *conel*-marked object, in line with the above observations, indicates that the object must come from the Common Ground in the sense of Stalnaker (1978, 2002). We show in passing that *conel* does not indicate definiteness.

ZChav has VSO order; however, it has been observed that with non-specific objects the order VOS is found. We argue, following Diesing (1992) and López (2012) that the non-specific object is of type <et> and must remain inside the VP to undergo existential closure. A specific or definite direct object of type <e> must escape VP to avoid existential closure. We propose that the object escapes the VP but raises to a position lower than the subject. To account for the word order variation, we propose that ZChav is a VP raising language along the lines that Massam (2001) proposed for Niuean. When the non-specific object remains inside the VP it raises along with the verb to a position higher than the subject.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 gives the background necessary for this study, including a discussion on basic aspects of Chavacano grammar and Tagalog grammar as necessary, and basic properties of differential object marking. Section 3 presents the data on *conel* marking, giving enriched contexts for various

conceptions of specificity. Section 3 also discusses the word order facts of sentences with and without *conel*-marked objects. Section 4 presents a semantic and syntactic analysis of *conel* marking. Section 5 is a conclusion.

2. Background

2.1 Chavacano

ZChav is a creole language (Lipski 1987, 2013; Barrios 2006; Steinkrüger 2008) whose superstrate is Spanish (Lipski 1987) and whose substrate languages are subject to discussion. The substrate languages have variously been analyzed as Cebuano and Tagalog (Barrios 2006), and Yakan, Sinama, and Hiligaynon (Grant 2011). Further, Grant (2011) argues that Cebuano, Spanish, Tagalog, and English constitute ZChav's adstrate languages, while Lesho (2022) explicitly highlights Tagalog as having the adstrate status to ZChav. From the substrate languages, traces of Austronesian features have been observed in the language (Barrios 2006; Barrios and Bernardo 2012), and the case alignment system is analogous with that of its superstrate, Spanish, as it exhibits the nominative-accusative alignment (Nolasco 2005; Eberhard et al. 2023), which is different from most Philippine-type languages, which are typically ergative (Reid and Liao 2004).

As far as the origin of ZChav is concerned, Parkvall and Jacobs (2018) call into question the claims that Chavacano started among the immigrant groups called the *Mardikas* (Whinnom 1956) or among the mixed Chinese-Filipino origin (Fernández 2018) and contend that Chavacano varieties are related where the proto-Chavacano began in the early 17th century in the area of Manila/Cavite. This is controverted by the argument that the similarities in the Chavacano varieties may not be attributed to the single ancestry but on account of the close relation of their respective adstrate languages (Fernández 2006; Sippola and Lesho 2020; Lesho 2022). ZChav is uncommon among creole languages in that it possesses a system of determiners and articles, although the use of articles is quite variable.

Proper nouns appear with a determiner. Subjects appear with *si* and objects appear with *con*. We argue below, however, that *con*, like *conel* is a differential object marker. The form *conel* appears with common nouns, while *con* appears with proper nouns.

On the other hand, *si* only appears with proper nouns in subject position. The following examples illustrate these properties.

- (2) a. Ta llama bata si Juan.
 PROG call child DET Juan
 ‘Juan is calling a child.’ (non-specific)
- b. Ta llama si Juan con Maria.
 PROG call DET Juan DOM Maria
 ‘Juan is calling Maria.’

Note that with intransitive verbs, the single argument, if proper, appears with *si*, illustrating accusative Case alignment. Consider the following data. Observe that the single argument is marked with *si* for both unaccusative (‘die’) and the unergative (‘cough’) verbs.¹

- (3) a. Ya muri si Juan.
 PFV die DET Juan
 ‘Juan died.’
- b. Ya tusi si Maria.
 PFV cough DET Maria
 ‘Maria coughed.’

The form *conel* (often shortened to *col*) in ZChav is superficially composed of *con* and *el*, which are also found independently. Consider the following examples. In (4) the indirect object appears with *con*, and in (5) either the subject or the direct object can appear with *el*.

- (4) Ya dale si Maria libro con Juan.
 PFV gave DET Maria book DAT Juan
 ‘Mary gave a book to John.’

¹ Note that we have not tested to see if an unaccusative/unergative distinction is found in Chavacano. For the current discussion we have simply chosen verbs that are prototypically assumed to be unaccusative and unergative. We leave a detailed discussion of the unaccusative/unergative distinction to future research.

- (5) a. Ya kome carne el iruh.
 PFV eat meat ART dog
 ‘The dog ate some meat.’
- b. Ya cumpra el muher el mansanas.
 PFV buy ART woman ART apple
 ‘The woman bought the apples.’

The use of *conel* as a differential object marker is shown in (6a). We make the preliminary observation that *conel* appears only with the object and not with the subject (6b), unlike *el*, which can appear on either the subject or the object. Note that with proper nouns the differential object marker appears as *con*. Thus, we propose a single DOM whose allomorphy varies depending on whether it appears with a common noun or a proper noun. One may alternatively analyze the differential object marker as simply *con*, which does not change. One would have to say that common nouns marked with *con* must appear with the article *el*. Either analysis works for the analysis we present below.

- (6) a. Quirre si Maria le *(conel) libro.
 want DET Maria read DOM book
 ‘Maria wants to read the/a (specific) book.’
- b. *Ya kome carne conel iruh
 PFV eat meat DOM dog
 (‘A specific dog ate some meat.’)

Like Tagalog, ZChav is verb-initial. The basic word order is VSO, as can be seen in much of the data so far. When the object is non-specific, there is a strong tendency for VOS order to manifest, as shown in (5a). Similar facts have been observed in other varieties of Chavacano. Sippola (2011) states that VOS is possible in the Ternate variety in particular when the object is indefinite (Sippola 2011: 182, translated from the original Spanish).²

² As a reviewer points out, there seems to be no sense of “throughout the night” in the Chavacano sentence. We have simply repeated the original data here, translating Spanish into English. We have no explanation for the difference in meaning here.

- (7) Talagán tasé harána el baguntáw i dalága.
 in.fact do.IMPF serenade DET youth.M and youth.F
 ‘In fact, the youths serenaded throughout the night.’

Pérez (2015: 88) offers similar data from the Cavite variety, giving negative evidence that VOS order is not possible with definite objects. ZChav follows the same pattern as shown in (8).

- (8) a. ya cumpra mansanas el muher.
 PFV buy apples DET woman
 ‘The woman bought apples.’
 b. ya cumpra el muher el mansanas.
 PFV buy DET woman DET apples
 ‘The woman bought the apples.’
 c. *ya cumpra el mansanas el muher.
 PFV buy DET apples DET woman

Recall that ZChav has accusative Case alignment. This differs from Tagalog, which has symmetrical Case alignment, also known as Austronesian Case alignment (Kroeger 1993, among others). As mentioned, there appear to be no remnants of symmetrical Case alignment in ZChav.

Finally, it has been observed that specificity plays a role in Tagalog grammar (Latrouite 2011; Paul et al. 2015; Sabbagh 2016). The observations on Tagalog differential object marking and specificity do not play a role in the manifestation of specificity in ZChav as they behave quite differently. Having introduced some basic aspects of ZChav grammar, we turn next to a discussion of differential object marking.

2.1 Differential object marking

This section introduces the general properties of DOM giving illustrations from Spanish, where DOM was first identified. Differential object marking is a phenomenon in which the appearance of a marker on the object correlates to one or more of a variety of properties including definiteness, specificity, humanness, animacy, among

others (Bossong 1982; Bossong 1985, 1991; Aissen 2003; Levin 2019; Driemel 2023). Aissen (2003) has proposed two implicational hierarchies ('scales' in her terms) along which DOM varies cross-linguistically.

- (9) a. Animacy scale: Human > Animate > Inanimate
 b. Definiteness scale: Personal pronoun > Proper noun > Definite NP > Indefinite specific NP > Non-specific NP

Aissen offers an Optimality Theoretic discussion of how different languages vary along these two scales. For a given language, any object on the scale that appears with DOM entails DOM appears on objects higher in the scale. The following Spanish example illustrates DOM triggered by humanness.

- (10) Spanish, Indo-European (Fábregas 2013: 1)
 a. Encontré un problema.
 I.found a problem
 'I found a problem.'
 b. Encontré a un superviviente.
 I.found DOM a survivor
 'I found a survivor.'

In (10), we see that DOM is present on a human object, but not on a non-human object. DOM also varies with respect to specificity in Spanish. Consider further the following data. In (11a), the speaker has a specific secretary in mind and adds extra information that the secretary speaks English. Thus, it is rendered as a non-restrictive in the English translation. In (11b), the speaker has no secretary in mind, and the ability to speak English restricts the range of secretaries the speaker is looking for, so it is rendered as a restrictive relative clause in the English translation.

- (11) Spanish, Indo-European (Fábregas 2013: 19)
 a. buscar *(a) una secretaria que habla inglés
 search.INF *(DOM) a secretary COMP speak.3SG.INDIC English
 'to look for a (specific) secretary, who speaks English'

- b. buscar (*a) una secretaria que hable inglés
 search.INF (*DOM) a secretary COMP speak.3SG.SBJV English
 ‘to look for a secretary who speaks English’ (non-specific)

At this point, we must be careful how we define specificity. Von Heusinger (2011, 2019) offers in depth discussions of various kinds of specificity, which we cover briefly here. Epistemic specificity refers to whether the speaker has a particular reference in mind (Karttunen 1968; Farkas 1994). If (12) is followed up as in (12a), then the expression *a student* has a specific reading. If it is followed up as in (12b), it has a non-specific reading.

- (12) A student in Linguistics 101 cheated on the final exam.
 a. His name is Fred. (specific)
 b. We’re trying to figure out who it was. (non-specific)

Scopal specificity refers to whether an indefinite takes scope over another scope bearing element (Fodor and Sag 1982). The sentence in (13) is famously ambiguous. The reading in (13a) is scopally specific, the indefinite object takes scope over the quantified subject. The reading in (13b) is scopally non-specific. The indefinite object takes low scope.

- (13) Every student read a book.
 a. They all read the same book. ($\exists > \forall$)
 b. A potentially different book was read by each student. ($\forall > \exists$)

Partitive specificity refers to whether an indefinite is part of a previously referred to entity or not (Enç 1991). Given the context in (14), example (14a) illustrates partitive specificity as the expression *two students* refers to two members of the group of students in (14). The same expression in (14b) does not refer to this group, so is non-specific.

- (14) Ten students and five professors entered the room.
 a. Two students cleaned the blackboard while the professors chatted.
 b. They greeted two students (who were already sitting in the room).

Finally, López (2012) observes that *wh*-phrases in Spanish obligatorily bear DOM. This point of comparison will become important below.

- (15) *(A) quién buscaste?
 (DOM) who sought.2SG
 ‘Who did you look for?’ (López 2012: 94)

Turning to a different but related phenomenon, we note that D-linkedness refers to when a *wh*-marked nominal is restricted to a set of elements that the speaker has in mind (Pesetsky 1987). In English, D-linked *wh*-phrases appear as *which XP*, as in the response labelled B in (15). Non-D-linked *wh*-phrases appear as *what XP*, as in the response labelled B’ in (16).

- (16) A: Mary just bought a new car yesterday.
 B: I heard she had narrowed it down to either a Hyundai Sonata, an Alfa Romeo Giulia, or a Toyota Camry. Which car did she end up buying?
 B’: I had no idea she was in the market for a new car. What car did she buy?

3. Object marking in Zamboanga Chavacano

This section discusses the properties of DOM marking in ZChav with respect to the various concepts of specificity discussed in section 2. First, recall that DOM varies with respect to two scales cross-linguistically (Aissen 2003). ZChav appears to be sensitive only to the definiteness scale, as described in detail in the following sections. The following examples show that the animacy scale does not affect DOM marking on the object.

- (17) a. Quirre come (conel) mangga si Maria.
 want eat (DOM) mango DET Maria
 ‘Maria wants to eat a (specific) mango.’

- b. Ta buska yo (conel) iru.
 ASP look.for 1SG (DOM) dog
 ‘I’m looking for a (specific) dog.’
- c. Ta busca yo (conel) bata.
 ASP look.for 1SG (DOM) child
 ‘I’m looking for a (specific) child.’

Many subsequent examples also show that *conel* is possible on objects of any degree of animacy. The following sections discuss the correlation between *conel* marking and different kinds of specificity.

3.1 Scopal specificity

An indefinite that takes scope below a modal typically cannot appear with *conel*. The following context makes clear that *mangga* (‘mango’) scopes below *quirre* (‘want’).

- (18) Context: Mary wants to eat a mango. So, she went to the store to see if they had any.
 Quirre come (*conel) mangga si Maria.
 want eat DOM mango DET Maria
 ‘Maria wants to eat a mango.’ (any mango)

The following context illustrates again the difference in scopal specificity. Observe that the object appears with DOM when it takes scope over *want*. The form in (19b) is not consistent with the context given here; however, it would be consistent with a context in which Maria wants to read any three books.

- (19) 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 conel tres del mga libro
 want DET Maria read DOM three of.the PL book
 ‘Maria wants to read three of the books.’ (3 > want)

- 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)

Furthermore, an object marked with *conel* can scope out of a conditional island. Consider the following examples. Observe that in (20a) the object appears without *conel*. This sentence is consistent with a situation in which John will be unhappy if Maria invites any singer. In (20b), however, inclusion of *conel* changes the meaning of the sentence such that there is a particular singer such that if Mary invites them, John will be unhappy.

- (20) a. Si imbita si Maria un cantora,
 if invite DET Maria ART singer
 hindi keda alegre si Juan.
 NEG become happy DET Juan
 ‘If Maria invites a singer, John will be unhappy.’ (if > singer)
- b. Si imbita si Maria conel cantora,
 if invite DET Maria DOM singer
 hindi keda alegre si Juan.
 NEG become happy DET Juan
 ‘If Maria invites a singer, John will be unhappy.’
 (singer > if)

Both syntactic environments above suggest that *conel* marking correlates with scopal specificity. We examine further evidence below, however, showing that this conclusion is too hasty.

3.2 Epistemic specificity

Epistemic specificity refers to whether the speaker is familiar with the referent or not. A transparent context can give rise to a difference in epistemic specificity.

- (21) a. Mary spoke to a student yesterday, but I don't know who it is.
 b. Mary spoke to a student yesterday. His name is Billy.

In light of this, consider the following ZChav data. In the context given, example (22a) can be followed by “I guess it's her child, but I don't really know.” Even though the grammatical subject of the sentence, Maria, has a specific child in mind, this sentence cannot be marked with *conel*. Crucially, the addressee does not have a set of particular children in mind that contains the child in question.

- (22) Context: Maria is looking for a specific child; however, the speaker is unsure of the identity of the child.
- a. Ta busca si Maria un bata.
 ASP search DET Maria ART child
 ‘Maria is looking for a (certain) child.’
- b. #Ta busca si Maria conel bata.
 ASP search DET Maria DOM child
 (‘Maria is looking for the/a (certain) child.’)

Consider now the following examples.

- (23) a. Quirre si Maria kasa (un) K-Pop star.
 want DET Maria marry(ART) K-Pop star.
 Suga su nombre.
 Suga his name
 ‘Maria wants to marry a K-Pop star. His name is Suga.’
- b. Quirre si Maria kasa conel un K-Pop star.
 want DET Maria marry DOM ART K-Pop star.
 Suga su nombre.
 Suga his name
 ‘Maria wants to marry a K-Pop star. His name is Suga.’

In (23a) the speaker assumes that the addressee does not know who Suga is. In (23b), however, the speaker assumes that the addressee does know who Suga is. More specifically, the addressee has to have some general knowledge of K-Pop performers

and be aware that Suga and other such personalities are of potential marriage interest to Maria. In other words, the appearance of *conel* depends not only on the speaker's frame of mind, but also the addressee's.

We discuss definiteness in more detail below; however, we note here that the addressee does not have to have definite and specific knowledge of the identity of the direct object in question. In other words, there is no presupposition of familiarity and uniqueness. Consider the following example.

- (24) Ta busca yo conel bata.
 ASP search I DOM child
 'I'm looking for a (specific) child.'

The addressee in (24) could ask what the child looks like as a follow up question. Thus, the child does not need to be uniquely familiar to the addressee. The addressee must only know who the speaker might potentially be looking for.

Finally, the following data show that the presence or absence of *conel* does not correlate with the scopal relation between the object and a quantified subject.

- (25) a. Context: There is a book such that every student wants to read it. The name of that book is *Noli Me Tángere*.
 Kada estudyante quirre le conel libro.
 every student want read DOM book
 'Every student wants to read a book.' (book > every)
- b. Context: Every student wants to read a specific book.
 For example, Suzie wants to read *Noli Me Tángere*;
 Bobby wants to read *Banaag at Sikat*; and Patty wants to read *Po-on*.
 Kada estudyante quirre le conel mga libro.
 every student want read DOM PL book
 'Every student wants to read a book.' (every > book)

Consider, furthermore, the following contexts, in which the speaker does not know the identity of the books.

- (26) a. Context: There is a book such that every student wants to read it, but I don't know what book it is.

Kada estudyante quirre le un libro.
 every student want read ART book
 'Every student wants to read a book.' (book > every)

- b. Context: Every student wants to read a book, but I don't know which student wants to read which book.

Kada estudyante quirre le libro.
 every student want read book
 'Every student wants to read a book.' (every > book)

It is clear from these examples that *conel* is sensitive to epistemic specificity and the addressee's state of mind rather than scopal specificity.

3.3 Partitive specificity

Enç (1991) proposes that specificity in Turkish is sensitive to the notion of partitivity. Specifically, a direct object in Turkish is marked with accusative case if it refers back to a subset of a previously mentioned group. The following examples illustrate this concept, testing it with ZChav data. In (27a) the presence of DOM restricts the mango eaten to one of the three mangos mentioned in the context. In (27b), however, the mango eaten need not be a member of the set mentioned in the context, although speakers would probably assume that it is.

- (27) Context: Maria bought three mangoes and two apples at the store. She ate a mango and put the rest of the fruit away to eat later.

a. Ya kome le conel unu mangga.
 ASP ate 3SG DOM ART mango
 'She ate the (one) mango.'

b. Ya kome le (unu) mangga.
 ASP ate 3SG (ART) mango
 'She ate a mango.'

As it stands, it is difficult to tease apart partitive specificity from epistemic specificity from these two examples. Consider the following enriched context.

- (28) Context: The teacher gave us a list of ten books to choose from.
 I want to read a book, but not one from the list. The book I want to read is “Noli Me Tángere”.
- a. Quirre yo le (un) libro.
 want I read (ART) book
 ‘I want to read a book.’
- b. Quirre yo le conel un libro.
 want I read DOM ART book
 ‘I want to read a book.’

Observe that *conel* can appear in this context even though it refers to a book not mentioned in the context, thus not complying with Enç’s notion of partitive specificity.

3.4 Definiteness

As definite nominals are necessarily specific, it is unsurprising that a definite object is obligatorily marked with *conel*. Consider the following example.

- (29) 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 *(conel) mansanas.
 ASP ate 3SG DOM apple
 ‘She ate the apple.’

Consider, now, a more elaborate scenario. Observe that *conel* appears on the object, but does not have to refer to the full set of mangoes. Crucially, in this context (30a) can refer only to one of the mangoes that Maria had previously bought. The sentence in (30b) can refer to any mango, but there is an implicature that it would be one of the mangoes discussed.

(30) Context: Maria bought three mangoes and two apples at the store. She ate a mango and put the rest of the fruit away to eat later.

a. Ya kome le conel unu mangga.

ASP ate 3SG DOM ART mango

‘She ate the (one) mango.’

b. Ya kome le (un) mangga.

ASP ate 3SG (ART) mango

‘She ate a mango.’

Recall that we noted above that the use of *conel* requires the addressee to have an idea of the set of possible referents. Recall the following example that makes clear that definiteness is not at stake in objects marked with *conel*.

(31) Ta buska si Maria conel bata.

PROG search DET Maria DOM child

‘Maria is looking for a child.’

The addressee in (31) can reply by asking what the child looks like. In other words, the addressee must have an idea of the set of potential children the speaker is looking for, but need not know the identity of the particular child the speaker is looking for. A reviewer notes that definiteness has been analyzed as involving either uniqueness (Frege 1892, et seq.) or familiarity (Heim 1988 inter alia). Thus, if definiteness in ZChav is based on familiarity, then one might conclude that *conel* does indeed mark definiteness.³ In fact, Gillon (2013) argues that determiners in Skwxwú7mesh (Salish, western Canada) encode only familiarity and not uniqueness. There is a difference between the situation in Skwxwú7mesh and ZChav, however. Consider the following example.

(32) Skwxwú7mesh, Salish, (Gillon 2013: 87)

Context: There are two cups equidistant from the speaker.

³ Recall that there are other nominal functional forms in ZChav including *el*, *si*, and *un*. It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a complete analysis of the entire nominal domain. Descriptive grammars of other varieties of Chavacano list *el* as a determiner, but of course do not provide any systematic formal analysis. A full analysis of the ZChav DP will have to await future research.

Mi7-shit-[t]s chexw ta lepát.
 come-APPL-1SG.OBJ 2SG.SBJ DET cup
 ‘Bring me one of the cups.’ (translated as: ‘Bring me the cup.’)
 Consultant’s comment: “You’re not asking for a specific one.”

The use of the determiner in *Skwxwú7mesh* indicates merely familiarity and not uniqueness. The same situation in ZChav, however, does not allow the use of *conel*. Again, *conel* means that the speaker has a specific referent in mind and the addressee must have an idea of what the referent might be. Here is the same example in ZChav.

- (33) same context
- a. Liba kumigo unu del mga tasa.
 bring to.me of of.the PL cup
 ‘Bring me one of the cups.’
- b. #Liba kumigo conel tasa.
 bring to.me DOM cup
 (‘Bring me one of the cups.’)

Finally, (34) shows that *conel* can appear with a question word. When *conel* does not appear on the object (34a), the range of possible answers is unrestricted. When *conel* appears on the object (34b), the answer is restricted to a specific set of possible answers under discussion (say *adobo*, *estopao*, or *paksiw*).⁴ This aligns exactly with the notion of D-Linking (Pesetsky 1987).

- (34) a. Cosa si Maria quirre kome?
 what DET Mary want eat
 ‘What does Mary want to eat?’
- b. Conel cosa si Maria quirre kome?
 DOM what DET Mary want eat
 ‘What (which thing) does Mary want to eat?’

4 These are three different kinds of traditional Filipino food.

3.5 Summary

We have examined various types of specificity with ZChav and have determined that DOM correlates with epistemic specificity and also indicates that the addressee has some familiarity with the potential referents of the marked object, which we likened to D-Linking in interrogatives. Finally, we showed that *conel* does not indicate definiteness.

4. Discussion

We have seen from the previous section that *conel* functions as a differential object marker in ZChav. In particular, it indicates epistemic specificity with the additional requirement that the object marked with *conel* be familiar in some way to the addressee. Recall that *conel* also appears on D-Linked interrogative objects. In an interrogative, the potential answer to the questions must be drawn from a set of individuals in the Common Ground (Pesetsky 1987: 16; Hirose 2003). We extend this observation of the application of the Common Ground from interrogatives to declaratives. Recall that DOM in ZChav correlates with epistemic specificity but with the added constraint that the identity of the *conel*-marked object be delimited to a set of individuals that the addressee has in mind. In other words, it acts like the D-Linked *wh*-phrase we saw in the interrogatives. Thus, in both the declarative and in the interrogative *conel* indicates that the nominal is D-Linked.

The common ground is the set of propositions, p_1 , p_2 , p_3 , etc. that the interlocutors all share.⁵ A question such as “*Which car did Mary buy?*” requires that the following proposition be part of the Common Ground, otherwise the question is infelicitous.

$$(35) p: \lambda w' \exists x. \text{car}(x)(w') \text{ and } \text{bought}(\text{mary}, x)(w')$$

As this is a D-Linked question, the interlocutors must have a set of cars that Mary is considering in the common ground. We can formalize this by postulating

5 More technically, the common ground consists of a set of propositions that all interlocutors share and that all interlocutors believe every other interlocutor also believes. This distinction will not play a role here, so we set it aside. See Stalnaker (2002) for more details.

the following propositions as examples of what is in the common ground.

- (36) p1: Mary is considering buying a Hyundai Sonata.
 p2: Mary is considering buying an Alfa Romeo Giulia.
 p3: Mary is considering buying a Toyota Camry.

The same analysis can be carried over to (34b). For the use of *conel* in declaratives, consider example (31), repeated here.

- (37) Ta buska si Maria conel bata.
 PROG search DET Maria DOM child
 'Maria is looking for a child.'

This sentence asserts the existence of a child that Maria is looking for. In addition, as with D-Linked questions, there is a set of children in the Common Ground, one of whom the speaker is looking for. Again as with the D-Linked question, we propose the following potential propositions in (38) that are part of the Common Ground for (37). Note that the interlocutors may or may not know the names of the children involved.

- (38) p1: Mary is in charge of Suzie, who may be missing.
 p2: Mary is in charge of Billy, who may be missing.
 p3: Mary is in charge of a child with a red hat, who may be missing.
 etc.

Thus, we propose that what the speaker is doing when they use *conel* either in a declarative or interrogative is the following. The speaker has a particular individual in mind (for declaratives). The speaker is also drawing upon the Common Ground in order for the addressee to narrow the range of the identity of the individual marked with *conel*. Thus, the core meaning of *conel* is that the nominal it attaches to indicates a set of potential referents in the Common Ground. Let us formalize this as follows. Let S be the set of children in the common ground with respect to the sentence in (37).⁶ The set of propositions, R, in the Common Ground produced from S can then be expressed as in (39b).

- (39) a. $S = \{\text{Suzie, Billy, child with a red hat...}\}$
 b. $R = \{\text{speaker is in charge of } x \mid x \in S \}$

The denotation of *conel*, then, can be expressed as follows. The form *conel* takes a predicate P of type $\langle e, t \rangle$ and contains a presupposition that there is an x that is taken from S in the Common Ground.

- (40) $[[\text{conel}]] = \lambda P_{\langle e, t \rangle}: P(x) \text{ and } S(x) . x$

Turning now to word order, recall that the basic word order of ZChav is VSO; however, VOS is found with non-specific objects. This pattern is also found in the Cavite variety (Pérez 2015).

- (41) a. *Ya cumpra el mujer conel manzanas.*
 PRF buy DET woman DOM apple
 ‘The woman bought the apples.’
 b. *Ya cumpra manzanas el mujer.*
 ASP buy apple DET woman
 ‘The woman bought apples.’
 c. **Ya cumpra conel manzanas el mujer.*
 ASP buy DOM apple DET woman
 (‘The woman bought the apples.’)
 d. *Ya cumpra el mujer manzanas.*
 ASP buy DET woman apple
 ‘The woman bought apples.’

Observe that VSO is possible with indefinite objects, but VOS is impossible with specific objects. We suggest an analysis along the lines of Massam (2001) in which the VP raises to a higher position, sometimes carrying the object with it. As ZChav has accusative Case alignment, we assume that the subject is assigned nominative Case by T and that the object is assigned accusative Case by v (Chomsky 1995). We assume further that a specific object must raise out of VP to escape existential closure

6 See also Heim (1982) and Kamp (1981) for augmenting the Common Ground to include entities in addition to propositions.

(Diesing 1992). If we assume a tripartite structure of the VP-layer (Harley 2013; Legate 2014), there is space for the object to move to in order to escape the VP.⁷ Thus, when a specific object vacates the VP and raises to Spec,_vP, the remnant VP raises to Spec,TP, giving rise to the order VSO, as in (42).⁸

(42) [_{CP} C [_{TP} [_{VP} V t_j]_i [_{T'} T [_voIP Subj [_voI' Voi [_vP Obj_j [_{v'} v t_i]]]]]]]]

When a non-specific object remains inside the VP for existential closure, it raises along with the verb, giving rise to the order VOS, as in (43). We caution the reader, however, that the syntactic structure proposed here is still speculative and requires further research.

(43) [_{CP} C [_{TP} [_{VP} V Obj]_i [_{T'} T [_voIP Subj [_voI' Voi [_vP [_{v'} v t_i]]]]]]]]

Before concluding, we note that the original analysis in Massam (2001) has been challenged (Clemens 2019). Specifically, Clemens notes that Massam's analysis fails to account for pseudo incorporated oblique arguments (such as locations and instruments). While the verb and the object may be adjacent facilitating VO order when the VP raises, the verb and a location or instrument are not necessarily adjacent, causing problems for the VP raising analysis. Clemens proposes a prosodic account, which need not concern us here. First, we note that both Massam and Clemens are attempting to account for pseudo noun incorporation in Niuean. There is currently no evidence for pseudo noun incorporation in ZChav, however. Both noun incorporation (NI) and pseudo noun incorporation (PNI) share a number of properties in opposition to DOM (Mithun 1984; Massam 2009; Dayal 2015; McKenzie 2021). NI and PNI are often lexically idiosyncratic, showing limited productivity. The presence or absence of *conel* is fully productive and not subject to idiosyncratic

7 There is, of course, a long line of literature suggesting that the object raises to an intermediate projection in the VP layer (Johnson 1991; Koizumi 1995; Basilico 2008 inter alia).

8 In Massam's original proposal, the object raises out of VP to a Case marking position to be assigned Case. Ergative Case alignment in Niuean provides ample evidence of Massam's analysis. ZChav has nominative Case alignment. There is no evidence forthcoming for the same kind of Case-based analysis Massam proposes. There is significant cross-linguistic evidence for existential closure operating at the VP level (Diesing 1992 et seq.). In the absence of evidence to the contrary, we pursue the current approach in which the object escapes the VP to escape existential closure.

limitations. NI and PNI often gives rise to idiomatic or institutionalized readings. DOM does not share this property. The meaning of DOM in ZChav is fully compositional. Finally, NI and PNI can also affect other non-core arguments such as instruments and locations. The presence and absence of *conel* marking as discussed here appears only on the theme argument (the direct object), never on locations or instruments. Thus, the revised PNI analysis based on Clemens' concerns is not required for ZChav. In short, the prosodic mechanism that Clemens uses to ensure all bare nominals (not just themes) are adjacent to the verb is not required here. Furthermore, the non-specific nature of the bare objects in VOS sentences is more amenable to an analysis in which the object remains inside VP for existential closure. Existential closure or lack thereof affects all relevant nominals, not just a lexically restricted set as with NI and PNI.

5. Conclusion

We have examined the semantic and syntactic properties of the nominal marker *conel* in Zamboanga Chavacano under the lens of specificity, D-Linking, and definiteness. Employing the diagnostics in von Stechow (2011, 2019) we have shown that *conel* correlates with epistemic specificity and with D-linkedness. We proposed that both of these properties are related to the notion of the Common Ground. Specifically, we proposed an analysis of *conel* such that it identifies a set of entities in the Common Ground from which the identity of the referent predicated of the nominal restriction must be drawn. We also proposed an analysis of VSO and VOS word order in which the VP raises to SpecTP. When the object is non-specific it remains in VP to be existentially closed and is swept along with the verb giving rise to VOS order. When the object is specific, it raises out of VP to a position below the subject. When the remnant VP raises to SpecTP, the order VSO results. It remains to be seen how this model fares with ditransitives.

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