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GENDER AS A PROBE[1]

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ABSTRACT. This article discusses one of the possible roles that gender could have in the Agree operation (Chomsky 2000, 2001). Based on the analysis of the PCC in Spanish developed in Camacho Ramírez (2024), in which, in the context of a ditransitive verb, gender would be necessary to guide the other probes of v* toward a specific goal, it is proposed here that gender should also guide the probes of the v* of a transitive verb.

Keywords: Gender, probe, direct object, feature geometry

RESUMEN. En este artículo se discute uno de los posibles roles que tendría el rasgo de género en la operación Agree (Chomsky 2000, 2001). Con base en el análisis del PCC en español desarrollado en Camacho Ramírez (2024), en el que, en un contexto de un verbo ditransitivo, género sería necesario para guiar a las otras sondas de v* hacia una determinada meta, se propone aquí que género también debe guiar a las sondas del v* de un verbo transitivo.

Palabras-clave: Género, sonda, objeto directo, geometría de rasgos

1. Introduction

Within the framework of the Agree operation (Chomsky 2000, 2001), phi features can be analyzed from at least two positions: as part of the goal or as part of the probe. In relation to the gender feature as part of the goal (usually a noun), it has been proposed that gender divides the semantic domain denoted by the noun and produces agreement (Kramer (2020), Fábregas (2022)). This article discusses the function that the gender feature would have as part of the set of probes of the functional head v*. We assume the proposal developed in Camacho Ramírez (2024), which argues that gender acts mainly as a probe that directs the other probes of v* towards a specific goal, the direct object (DO). In this sense, gender functions as a guiding-probe. The proposal in Camacho Ramírez (2024) is developed in the context of PCC (Person Case Constraint), that is, when restrictions appear in the combination of two clitics. The aim of this article is to extend the aforementioned hypothesis to the context of a single object. To develop the proposal, cases of *leísmo*, *laísmo*, and *loísmo* will be discussed. Two theoretical tools will be used in the analysis: the feature geometry of Harley and Ritter (2002) and Chomsky's labeling theory (2013, 2015).

This article is organized as follows. In section 2, we briefly present the proposal on PCC developed in Camacho Ramírez (2024). In section 3, we develop the proposal of

[1] I would like to thank both reviewers for their careful reading of the text and their valuable comments and suggestions. Any remaining errors are my own.

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this article, namely, that a guiding-probe is necessary even when there is only one object at the goal. Finally, the conclusions.

2. Theoretical tools and assumptions

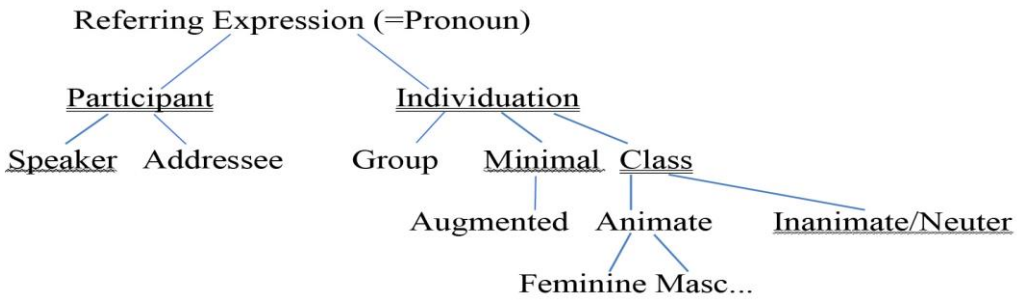
It is well known that in Spanish, as in other languages, certain restrictions apply when two clitics are combined. One of the most widely studied restrictions is known as strong PCC (Perlmutter (1971), Bonet (1991, 1994, 2008); Anagnostopoulou (2003, 2017); Béjar and Rezac (2003); Adger and Harbour (2007); Ormazabal and Romero (2007); Nevins (2007), Coon and Keine (2021), Preminger (2019), Stegovec (2020), Ordóñez (2002), Foley and Toosarvandani (2022), Deal (2024)). Let's look at the following case:

(1) *Pedro me(OD) le(OI) presentó.
Pedro me(DO) him(IO) introduc-PAST
'Pedro introduced me to him'

According to Bonet (1991), the problem in (1) is that in a combination of two clitics, a direct object (DO) clitic and an indirect object (IO) clitic, the DO clitic must be 3p. In (1), the DO clitic is 1p.[2] Before moving on to the alternative hypothesis about strong PCC defended in Camacho Ramírez (2024), we will briefly present the theoretical tools and proposals adopted in that analysis.

(I) *Feature geometry.* Harley and Ritter (2002) propose the following feature geometry:

(2)



The geometry of (2) consists of organizing nodes (participant, individuation, class) that dominate features that may be present (non-default features) or absent (default features). The default feature in the participant organizing node (ON) is speaker; in the individuation ON, it is minimal; in the class ON, it is inanimate/neuter. There is a relationship of implication between the features. If A dominates B, there cannot be B without A, although there can be A without B.

A necessary adaptation of Harley and Ritter's geometry to Chomsky's Agree operation is that the ONs in the geometry must function as probes of a functional head.[3] An ON, for example individuation of v*, must match the ON individuation of the goal, and copy the features that individuation of the goal dominates. The same must happen with the other ONs, so that each one functions as a probe.

[2] The abbreviations used in this text are as follows: DO: direct object; IO: indirect object; 1p: first person; 2p: second person; 3p: third person.
[3] Some authors also assume similar ideas: Béjar (2003), Preminger (2014), Kalin (2017), Camacho Ramírez (2019, 2022, 2023, 2024).

Harley and Ritter's analysis focuses primarily on the participant and individuation ONs. Regarding the class ON, the authors assume that gender features are dominated by the animate feature. Our alternative proposal here is that the ON class dominates a probe that, depending on its specification, will be either an animacy probe or a gender probe. If the specification is that it only matches the goal, it will be the animacy probe (Animacy includes the animate feature and the inanimate feature). If the specification is that it not only matches but also copies the feature of the goal, it will be a gender probe. Note that if copying a feature of the goal implies having matched it, then gender implies animacy. This fits with the relationship between animacy and gender proposed in Harley and Ritter's geometry.

Harley and Ritter's geometry does not include the referential features of specificity and definiteness; however, authors such as Cooper and Hall (2003) have proposed adding these features to the geometry. Following this line of analysis, we will assume here that the features of specificity and definiteness are dominated by an organizing node that we will call r. The respective geometry follows:

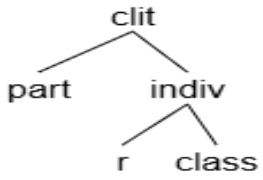
(3)

The features of specificity and definiteness interact with the features of animacy in phenomena such as differential object marking (Torrego (1998), Rodríguez-Mondoñedo (2007), von Heusinger and Kaiser (2003), López (2012), Camacho Ramírez (2019, 2022)), object ellipsis (Cyrino (2021), Schwenter (2006), Camacho Ramírez (2025)), clitic doubling, among others. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that ON r and ON class are related. We will assume here that r and class are in a sisterhood relationship, mainly because there is no implication relationship between them.[4]

The general geometry of a clitic to be used in the analysis appears in (4a). (4b) is the geometry of the clitic *me*, and (4c) is the geometry of the clitic *la*. Both geometries are after the Agree operation.[5]

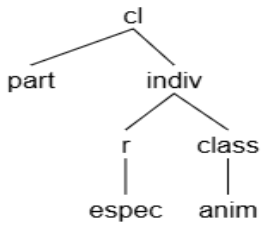
(4)

a. General geometry of a clitic



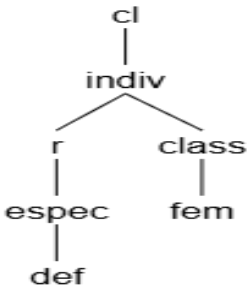
[4] For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Camacho Ramírez (2024).
[5] For an analysis of Spanish clitics using Harley and Ritter's geometry, see also Heap (2001).

b. Geometry of the clitic *me*



The geometry of the clitic *me* has an ON participant that does not dominate any feature, because the speaker feature (the one from 1p) is default in the geometry of Harley and Ritter; therefore, it does not appear in the geometry. The individuation ON does not dominate any features because the minimal feature (of the singular) is also default. The class ON dominates an animate probe. This probe should only have matched the goal; it should not have copied from the goal. The ON r dominates a feature of specificity.

c. Geometry of the clitic *la*

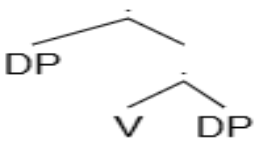


The geometry of the clitic *la* does not present an ON participant, because the 3p does not present that ON in the geometry of Harley and Ritter. The ON individuation does not dominate any feature, because the minimal feature is default. The clitic *la* presents an ON r that dominates specificity and definiteness features. The ON class also dominates a feminine gender probe. This probe should have matched and copied the gender feature of the goal.

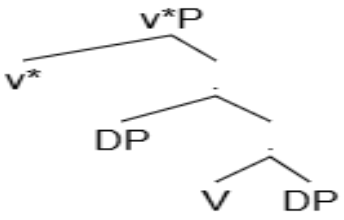
(II) The labeling operation in Chomsky (2013, 2015). This is the second theoretical tool that will be used. According to Chomsky, the structure formed by syntactic operations requires labels that must be interpreted by the system. The steps for forming a label are as follows:

(5)

a. Merge of V with the DP, and movement (IM) of the DP.

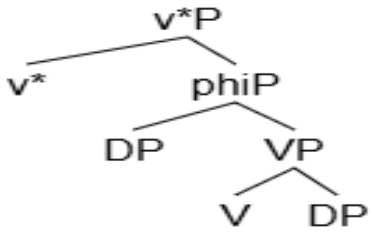


b. Merge of v*.



After v* merges into the structure, v* inherits its unvalued features for V (Chomsky 2008). Next, Agree occurs between v* and the goal (DP); v* values its features and the goal receives a case. The features that v* inherited for V are also valued. According to the adaptation we have made, it can be said that the probes of v* (the ONs of v*) copy the features of the goal. Those features copied by the probes of v* will also appear in the ONs that v* inherited for V.

c. Labeling. The missing labels in the geometry of b are formed here. The VP label and the phiP label are formed by sharing prominent features between the DP and V.

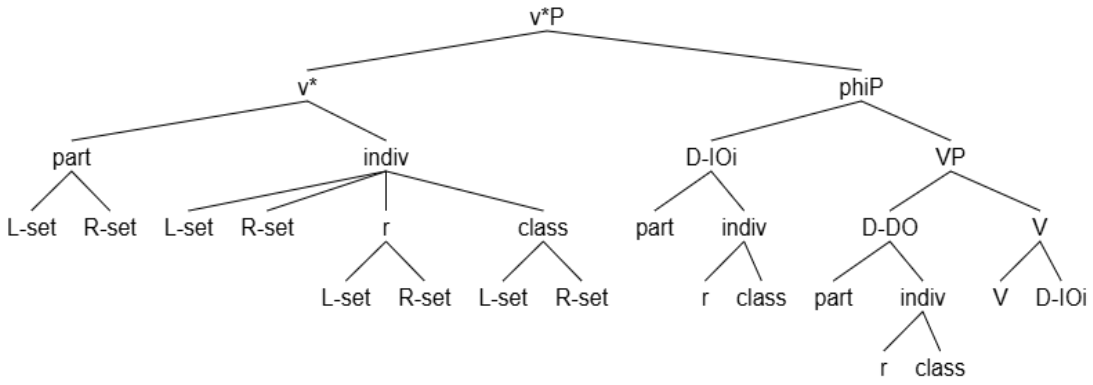


(III) *The formation of clitics*. We will assume that clitics are agreement morphemes (Borer (1984), Suñer (1988), Franco (1993), Sánchez (2006), Paparounas and Salzmann (2023)); they are not the result of the movement of a determiner from the goal. Specifically, clitics are formed in V with the ONs that v* inherits to V, and with the features that dominate those inherited ONs (which arrive at V as a result of the Agree operation between v* and the goal, as indicated). Since the geometry constructed in V is the same as that in v*, we will refer only to the geometry of v* in the rest of the analysis.

(IV) *A functional head can dominate two sets of probes*. PCC occurs in a context in which the goal presents two objects. In this context, it would be possible for a functional head, for example v*, to dominate two sets of probes. One set would do Agree with one object (the DO) and the other set would do Agree with the other object (the IO). This hypothesis can be considered a radical version of Hiraiwa's (2004) Multiple Agree theory.

The geometry with the aforementioned adaptations is that of (6) below.

(6)



The geometry of (6) presents a functional head v* that dominates ONs (participant, individuation, class, r), which in turn dominate probes that can be grouped into two sets of probes: the L(eft)-set and the R(ight)-set. With the ONs and features of each of these sets, a clitic will be formed; that is, with the L-set a clitic will be formed, and with the R-set another clitic will be formed.[6]

Regarding the objects, we assume that the objects form a clause where V initially merges with the IO; the DO will be merged after (Larson, 1988).

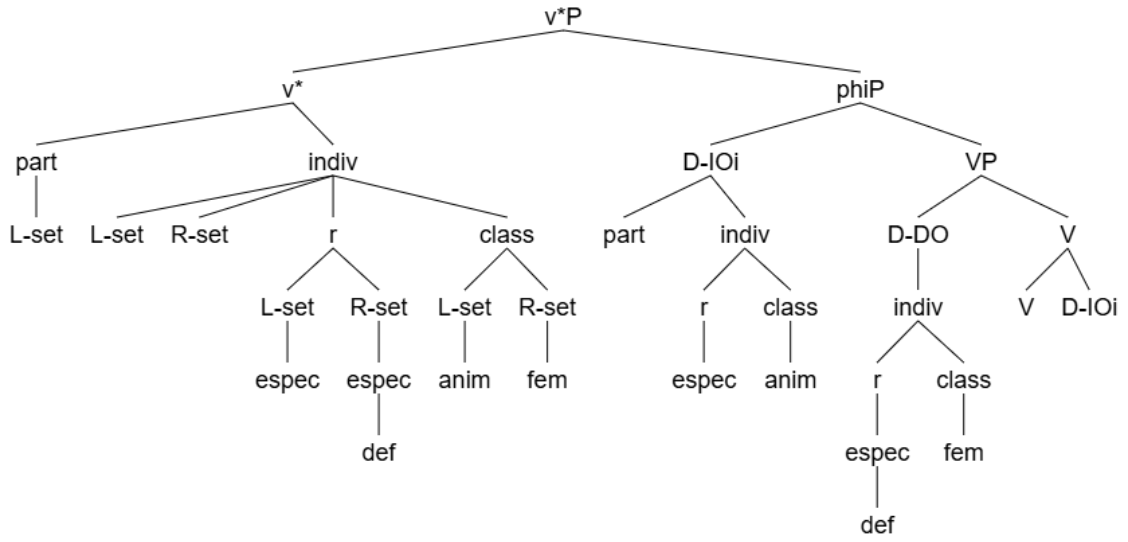
After presenting the theoretical tools and proposals that we assume, let us move on to the analysis of a case of clitic combination in Spanish.

(7) Juan me(OI) la(OD) presentó (a la chica-OD) (a mí-OI).
Juan me(IO) her(DO) introduce-PAST (the girl-DO) (to me-IO)
'Juan introduced me to her (the girl) (to me)'

The following geometry is from the combination *me*(IO)-*la*(DO) in sentence (7).

[6] In favor of the hypothesis that a functional head can dominate two sets of probes, we can say the following. If we assume that clitics are formed as a result of the Agree operation (as we assume), the natural way to explain the formation of two clitics is that each of them was formed with a set of different features. In this context, at least two options arise: On the one hand, the possibility that these two sets of features may each derive from a different functional head (each clitic would have its own v*); on the other hand, the option that there is a single v* that contains both sets. With the first option (which postulates two v*), the question arises of how these two v* are organized: should one dominate the other or should they be coordinated? The answer is not obvious. On the other hand, it seems counterintuitive to postulate two functional heads (two v*) for a single lexical head (V). In comparison, in relation to the second option (there is a single v* with two sets of features), we may think that it is the best option to explain the cases of clitic fusion that occur in European Portuguese. In this language, a combination of clitics such as *me-lo* results in the form *mo*. This type of fusion seems more likely to occur (and is even expected to occur) when a single functional head (v*) dominates two probes. In this case, the union could be carried out by eliminating one of the two probes that dominate each ON. For example, the ON class dominates two probes in the *me-lo* combination: the animacy probe (from the clitic *me*) and the gender probe (from the clitic *lo*). The probe that would be eliminated would be the animacy probe, probably because the gender probe has greater specification (this probe not only matches but also copies the gender feature of the goal). Again, it is not obvious how to explain this type of clitic union in European Portuguese if there are two v*, one for each clitic.

(8)



In (8), the clitic *me*(IO) in (7) was formed with the features that the probes (the ONs) of the L-set copied from the ONs of the goal (the pronoun *mí*-IO). The clitic *la*(DO) in (7) was formed with the features that the probes (the ONs) of the R-set copied from the ONs of the goal (the DP *la chica*-DO). In the geometry of (8), that goal DO (*la chica*) does not present a participant ON, since the 3p would not present that ON (Harley and Ritter 2002).[7] In v*, the participant-v* only has one probe, which will match the IO. On the other hand, the minimal feature is the default feature in the ON individuation, which is why it does not appear in the geometry; although the ON individuation does appear. In relation to the ON class-v*, note that the clitic *me* has an animacy feature present in the L-set. We will assume that the morpheme *-e* of the clitics *me*, *te*, *le* materialize the animacy feature of class-v* (for similar ideas about the morpheme *-e* in question, see Harris (1996), Halle and Marantz (1994)).

If we observe the behavior of clitics in Spanish, we notice that they always appear in the same order. In a combination such as *me*(IO)-*la*(DO), the clitic related to the IO will always be on the left and the clitic related to the DO will be on the right. This suggests that the match between probes and goals cannot be random; because if it were, a given set of probes (for example, the L-set) could match either the DO or the IO. This would lead to different orders of clitics (IO-DO or DO-IO), which is not the case. In this context, and observing the geometry of (8), the question arises as to how it is determined which set of probes (L-set or R-set) will match which goal (DO or IO). In Camacho Ramírez (2024), the following idea is proposed.

Hypothesis 1: In a context of two sets of probes, a probe is needed to indicate (identify) which of those two sets will match a given goal. The probe that identifies will be gender, and the goal will be DO.

According to hypothesis 1, gender is the feature that identifies the set that matches the DO goal. The question arises as to why gender should be the feature that identifies, and the DO the goal sought. To answer this question, we follow the ideas of Camacho Ramírez (2022, 2023). Tenny (1994) argues that only DOs can be affected (or measure the verbal event, in the author's terms); IOs delimit the verbal event. This creates a relationship between DOs (an argument) and the lexical feature affectedness (present in

[7] Some 3p (e.g., the clitic *se*) could exhibit some kind of person feature. See Nevins (2007), Béjar (2003), Camacho Ramírez (2024) for a discussion of that option.

V).[8] According to Camacho Ramírez, the mediator between that lexical feature of V and the goal is a probe dominated by the ON class, typically the gender probe. What would the affectedness feature of the DO need? The phi features of that DO. The phi features of the DO reach V via the operation of Inheritance, as indicated. The interaction between the phi features of the DO and the feature of affectedness is part of the operations for generating, for example, the differential marking of animate objects (DOM) in Spanish.[9]

Having established the relationship between the gender feature v* and the DO, the question arises as to how gender locates the DO in the object clause. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that there is an order in the construction of the two sets of v* (the L-set and the R-set). The candidate for the first set is the IO set (the L-set in Spanish), because the gender feature of the DO set (the R-set) would be there to avoid a potential ambiguity between the two animacy features dominated by the ON class (see (8)). This implies that before the entry of gender, there must have been a set present; otherwise, nothing would force the presence of gender. In this context, one might think that the set that is constructed last (the R-set) has the information to search for the c-commanded object, the DO. In this way, the gender probe would find the DO goal.[10]

In summary, it can be said that the gender feature (present in clitics such as *lo*(*s*), *la*(*s*)) is a feature that seeks the DO, because it is with the features of that DO that the licensing of the affectedness feature must be satisfied. We can say that gender in the probe would be a feature specialized in the search for a specific goal, the DO. In this sense, gender can be understood as the feature of a set of probes that guides the other probes in the set toward the DO. A natural consequence of this analysis is to think that the other probes in the set do not have the specification of seeking a specific goal, probably because they are not part of the licensing of the lexical feature of V under discussion, affectedness.

[8] I assume that affectedness is, in general, a feature that describes the incidence of an agent/causer on the direct object of the verb. This idea encompasses Tenny's notion of affectedness, which she calls measure out, although it also allows for the inclusion of verbs that the author would consider as not allowing the verbal event to be measured (for example, the verb Admire, as pointed out by a reviewer). Note that this more general notion of affectedness that I assume does not contradict Tenny's assertion that only direct objects can be affected; indirect objects delimit the event. I embrace this idea of the author.

[9] Various authors (Torrego (1998), Næss (2004), Rodríguez-Mondoñedo (2007), von Heusinger and Kaiser (2011)) assume that the animate feature and the affectedness feature participate in the DOM in Spanish. In Camacho Ramírez (2022, 2023), it is argued that DOs should be marked with A (*Juan golpeó *(a) Pedro* 'Juan hit Pedro') if the feature shared between the DO and the VP is the animate feature or the specificity feature in the case of the DOM with inanimate objects (*El verbo sigue *(a)l sujeto* 'The verb follows the subject'), the lexical feature of V is not affectedness but a feature that indicates the pre-existence of the object, the δ feature). The A marking would materialize in the phiP label of a geometry such as that in (8). That phiP label must also contain the affectedness feature or the δ feature.

[10] A reviewer asks how to account for cases such as (i-iii) where the combination *me-le* is possible:

(i) Me le tiré encima 'I threw myself on him/her'
(ii) Me le abalancé "I lunged at him/her"
(iii) Te le reíste en la cara 'You laughed in his/her face'

The clitic *me*/*te* in cases (i-iii) is not a DO or IO clitic, as shown by the fact that this form agrees with the elided subject. Thus, the clitics *me, te* in (i-iii) should not share the same functional head (v*) as the IO clitic (*le*) in those sentences. In the cases we analyze (cases such as (iv) below), the two clitics are part of the same functional head (v*), according to the proposal we defend. Therefore, cases such as (i-iii) should not be considered cases of PCC. Strong PCC (the PCC we analyze in the article) occurs with clitics related to objects of the verb. To account for cases (i-iii), it is necessary to analyze the function and how the *se*-inherent of those sentences is formed; it is also necessary to establish the status of the DP that is (mandatorily) doubled by the clitic *le*. The analysis of these aspects exceeds the scope of this article.

(iv) María me(OI) lo(OD) presentó. 'Mary introduced him to me'

Hence, we can conclude that there could not be a set of probes without a guiding-probe.[11,12]

According to the analysis just made, a guiding-probe (gender, in the case at hand) would have two functions: (i) to guide the other probes in a given set toward a given goal, the DO, and (ii) to identify (indicate) that this set will be the one to search for the DO. The identification function is crucial in the analysis we assume about strong PCC. Let's look at sentence (1), which is repeated here with a different number.

(9) *Pedro me(OD) le(OI) presentó.
Pedro me(DO) him(IO) introduc-PAST
'Pedro introduced me to him'

We mentioned that according to Bonet (1991), the problem with the combination **me-le* is that in a combination of two clitics, a direct object (DO) clitic and an indirect object (IO) clitic, the DO clitic must be 3p. In (9), the DO clitic is 1p. According to Camacho Ramírez (2024), the problem with the combination **me-le* (9) begins with the need to license the affectedness feature of V. That feature must be licensed using a class probe; however, in the combination **me-le*, it is not possible to identify which animacy probe will guide toward the DO (the argument that can be affected). Assigning gender to one of these probes will allow that probe to be identified as the probe that must match the DO; by identifying the probe, the set to which the probe belongs is also identified. As a result of the introduction of gender, the impossible combination **me-le* (9) must change to *me-la* (7).[13]

So far, we have presented Camacho Ramírez's (2024) proposal that, in a context of two objects, a guiding-probe (the gender feature) is necessary in one of the two sets of v*. In section 3, we will develop the idea that when there is a single object, a guiding-probe is also necessary.

[11] This leads us to wonder what the guiding-probe will be in the set that matches the IO. The development of this topic exceeds the scope of this article, so it will be left for future research. Nevertheless, what does seem clear is that the guiding-probe of the set that seeks the IO could not be gender, because if gender were the guiding-probe in both sets (the L-set and the R-set), the identification of the set that seeks the DO would be lost.

[12] One reviewer argues that the function of a guiding-probe is unclear, since probes search within their complement domain. I fully assume that a probe must search for the complement in its domain. This idea expresses the structural condition that the search must meet; my proposal is about how that search is organized. Specifically, the search would require a guiding-probe 'chosen' by the prominent lexical feature of V, which the other probes must follow.

[13] One reviewer notes that the introduction of gender causes a change of case and order in the clitics (from **me*(DO)-*le*(IO) to *me*(IO)-*la*(DO)). Regarding case, I assume that DPs are the ones that receive case, not clitics. I also assume that case is a feature that is assigned as a result of Agree (Chomsky 2001); that is, case is the result of the relationship between probes and goals. That being so, the change of case (from **me*(DO)-*le*(IO) to *me*(IO)-*la*(DO)) would be a consequence of a change in the formation of probes in v*. On the other hand, in the proposed analysis, a relationship arises between gender and the accusative case, because only DPs that receive the accusative case have a clitic with gender in standard Spanish. Since gender is related to the lexical feature affectedness (it could be said that affectedness 'chooses' the gender probe so that it can copy the features that will serve for its licensing), an indirect relationship arises between affectedness and the accusative case. An exhaustive exploration of this relationship is beyond the scope of this article. Observing the change in order that occurs from the combination *me*(DO)-*le*(IO) to *me*(IO)-*la*(DO), as indicated, the position of the gender probe (which guides towards the DO) is parametric: in Spanish it is on the right (which explains why the gender clitic is on the right in the combination *me*(IO)-*la*(DO), although in Cheso it is on the left, as shown in the combination *la*(DO)-*me*(IO).

3. Guiding-probe with a single object

Having established the need for a guiding-probe (gender) when there are two objects, we must ask whether a guiding-probe is necessary when there is only one object. The answer is affirmative.

We have argued that the guiding-probe in a context with two objects would have two functions: (i) to guide the other probes in the set toward the relevant goal, the DO; (ii) to identify (distinguish) the set of probes that will match the DO. In a context of strong PCC in Spanish, identification occurs by placing the gender probe only in the R-set.

As indicated, the identification function allows to distinguish the set that will match the DO from the set that will match the other object, the IO. Therefore, if the functional head presents a single set of probes (because there is only one object), it would not be necessary to identify that single set. We can therefore say that the primary function of a guiding-probe is to guide the other probes in the set toward a specific object; the identification function would not be primary. Following this line of argument, it seems reasonable to expect that a guiding-probe is necessary not only when there are two objects but also when there is only one. In both cases, the set of probes must need one of its probes to guide the others toward a specific object. In what follows, we will assume that this is the case.

The following is the hypothesis regarding a single object:

Hypothesis 2: In the context of a single object in the verb, a guiding-probe is necessary to guide the other probes in the set toward that object, the goal.

In Spanish, there are variations in relation to the animacy and gender features that a clitic can have when there is a single object or two objects in the goal. These variations have been called *leísmo*, *laísmo*, and *loísmo*.[14] Analyzing the *leísta*, *laísta*, and *loísta* dialects will allow us to discuss the behavior of the guiding-probe when there is only one object.[15]

We said that the identification function of a guiding-probe allows us to distinguish the set that will match the direct object from the set that will match the indirect object. Thus, if the functional head presents a single set of probes (because there is only one object), it would not be necessary to identify that single set. Identification would become optional. The data show that some varieties of Spanish will continue to make the identification as if there were two objects; other varieties will no longer identify. The first varieties (those that make the identification) correspond to the standard form of general Spanish; the second (those that dispense with identification) can be subdivided into *leísta* dialects on the one hand, and *laísta* and *loísta* dialects on the other.[16] Let us analyze these dialects following the theoretical framework presented in section 2.[17]

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[14] Basically, in *leísmo*, the gender marker tends to disappear from the direct object clitics of 3p (*la*(*s*), *lo*(*s*)); only the clitic *le*(*s*) is used. In *laísmo*, the indirect object clitic *le*(*s*) with a feminine referent is replaced by the clitic *la*(*s*). In *loísmo*, the indirect object clitic *le*(*s*) with a masculine referent is replaced by the clitic *lo*(*s*). I'll come back to this point.

[15] For an analysis of *leísmo* within the framework of the Minimalist Program, see Colomina, Gallego, Roca (2019).

[16] The dialect of the standard language corresponds to what has also been called the etymological paradigm or the case-distinguishing paradigm; the *leísta*, *laísta*, and *loísta* dialects correspond to the referential paradigm.

[17] I would like to mention that the following analysis does not cover all aspects related to the dialects under study. For a state of art, see Fernández-Ordóñez (1999). The analysis in this article focuses on investigating the role played by the need for a guiding-probe in the formation of *leísmo*, *laísmo*, and *loísmo*. This will allow us to observe in some detail the behavior of a guiding-probe with a single object, as indicated.

In the standard dialect of general Spanish, a clitic with gender is used for the direct object (10a) and a clitic with animacy, without gender, is used for the indirect object (10b).

(10)

a. A María(OD), Juan la(OD) empujó.
ACC María(DO), Juan CLIT-ACC push-PAST
'Juan pushed María'

b. A Elena(OI), Pedro le(OI) entregó el reloj.
To Elena(IO), Pedro CLIT-DAT gave the watch
'Pedro gave Elena the watch'

We have indicated that a guiding-probe would have two functions: to identify a specific set of probes and to guide the other probes in the set toward a specific goal. If there is only one object, and therefore only one set of probes, it should not be necessary to identify that single set; that is, it would not be necessary to distinguish that single set by gender. However, the dialect of the standard language does so, as cases (10) show. One possible reason for maintaining this distinction could be an attempt to indicate with the clitic whether the related object is affected (if it is the DO) or unaffected (if it is the IO); nevertheless, this indication would be dispensable, as shown by the *leístas* dialects. In these dialects, a clitic without gender, only with animacy, is used for both objects, the DO and the IO, as shown in (11) below. According to Fernández-Ordóñez (1999), the most frequent *leísmo* is that which refers to a singular, masculine, personal DO; plural *leísmo* with the same referent is not as common. Singular *leísmo* with a non-personal, masculine, singular referent is more common than the plural version. *Leísmo* with a feminine DO referent is the rarest of all.

(11)

a. Juan le(OD) recogió a Pedro(OD) de la escuela.
Juan CLIT-DAT pick-PAST up ACC Pedro(DO) from school
'Juan picked up Pedro from school'

b. Félix le(OI) entregó el libro a Elena(OI).
Félix CLIT-DAT gave the book to Elena(IO)
'Felix gave the book to Elena'

We can say that in *leísmo*, the function of identifying (with gender) the set of probes is not realized, because such identification would not be necessary if there were only one set of probes. The animacy feature of the clitic *le*(*s*) would be sufficient to guide the other probes in the set toward the direct object of the verb; gender is not necessary.

Let us now look at the following sentences which are cases of *laísmo* and *loísmo*. In (12), a case of *laísmo*, the clitic *la* refers to the DP-IO *Elena*. In (13), a case of *loísmo*, the clitic *los* refers to the DP-IO *los alumnos*.

(12) La di su regalo (a Elena-OI).
CLIT-ACC giv-PAST her gift (to Elena-IO)
'I gave her gift (to Elena-OI)'

(13) Los entregué la carta (a los alumnos-OI).
CLIT-ACC sen-PAST the letter (to the students-IO)
'I sent them the letter (to the students)'

In *laístas* varieties, the clitic *la* is used instead of the clitic *le* with feminine, animate or inanimate, singular or plural referents. In *loístas* varieties, the clitic *lo* replaces the clitic *le* with masculine, animate or inanimate, singular or plural referents.[18]

In *laísta* and *loísta* dialects, the opposite of what is observed in *leísmo* seems to occur. Instead of replacing the gender feature of 3p clitics with the animacy feature (which occurs in *leísmo*), the animacy of 3p clitics is replaced with gender. This is equivalent to saying that in *leísmo* the specification to copy the gender feature of the goal is eliminated; only the specification to match the goal remains, which means having only animacy in all 3rd person clitics. On the other hand, in *laísmo* and *loísmo*, only the specification to copy the gender feature of the goal remains; therefore, there will be no 3rd person clitic with animacy.[19] According to this analysis, we can say that *leísmo*, and *laísmo*, *loísmo* are forms of *simplification* or *standardization* of the specifications that will have probes dominated by the ON class. The objective would be to have only one type of specification. However, there is an important fact that must be taken into account in the analysis, namely, that in *laísmo* and *loísmo*, the clitic *le*(*s*) is never completely eliminated. Therefore, we can say that there are no exceptions to the *simplification* or *standardization* in *leísmo*; however, in *laísmo*, *loísmo* does have exceptions. As indicated, in *laísmo*, the clitic *la* is used only for the feminine IO; for the masculine IO, the clitic *le* is used. In *loísmo*, the clitic *lo* is used only for the masculine IO; for the feminine IO, the clitic *le* is used. The question arises as to why, in *laísmo* and *loísmo*, the clitic *le* must remain.[20] Let's see how to approach this issue.

In the literature, it is often assumed that *laísmo* and *loísmo* are a consequence of *leísmo* (Flores 1998, among others); we assume that this is indeed the case. In relation to *leísmo*, we saw that the guiding-probe that guides towards the DO of 3p is the animacy feature, and not gender. On the other hand, if we look at the 1p and 2p clitics in (14) below, it can be observed that the guiding-probe towards the DO is always animacy, since 1p and 2p do not allow gender in Spanish. Thus, since animacy is the only guiding-probe in all the clitics of the *leísta* dialect, we can suposse that if animacy is eliminated as a guiding-probe for 3p, it would also have to be eliminated as a guiding-probe for 1p and 2p. Thus, since the 1p and 2p clitics cannot have gender, without animacy such clitics would be irremediably left without a guiding-probe. In the analysis we defend, a clitic without a guiding-probe would not be possible, because the other probes in the set of that clitic would not know what goal to match, as indicated.

[18] There are trends, for example, *loísmo* (less common than *laísmo*, and subsequent to it) is mainly recorded with masculine, plural, and personal references.
I would like to point out that it is not the purpose of this article to analyze the possible reasons for the variation in frequency shown by the data on *leísmo*, *laísmo*, and *loísmo*. For a comprehensive analysis of the topic, see Fernández Ordóñez 2001.

[19] We have assumed that the ON class dominates a probe that, depending on its specification, will be either an animacy probe or a gender probe. If the specification is that it only matches the goal, it will be the animacy probe. If the specification is that it not only matches but also copies the feature of the goal, it will be a gender probe.

[20] This is one of the questions that Fernández-Ordóñez (1993, 1999, 2001) describes as pending a satisfactory answer.

(14)

a. Juan me(OD) saludó.
Juan me(DO) greet-PAST
'Juan greeted me'

b. María te(OD) saludó.
María you(DO) greet-PAST
'María greeted you'

According to the analysis just made, we can say that in *laísmo* and *loísmo* (variations that are a consequence of *leísmo*), it is necessary that the animacy present in the clitic *le*(*s*) remain in some cases; otherwise, the option of having a guiding-probe in the 1p and 2p would be lost, since it is not possible to have 1p and 2p clitics with gender. A clitic without a guiding-probe is not possible in the analysis we defend.

The proposal suggests that the processes behind the variations (*leísmo*, *laísmo*, *loísmo*) occur by observing not only the 3p (where these variations appear) but the entire paradigm of person. It is to be expected that something like this would occur, since in this way the variations that may arise in a given person do not bring unnecessary complexities to the others.

We are arguing that the identification function is not relevant when there is a single object, since it is not necessary to identify (distinguish) a single set. This lack of identification would explain, at least in part, the possibility of having *leísmo*, *loísmo*, and *laísmo*. The analysis predicts that when there are two goals, two objects, the identification function should be activated. That seems to be the case. *Leístas* dialects introduce gender into the DO clitics when there are two objects; there is no longer *leísmo* in that context. In other words, when there are two objects, the *leístas* dialects behave like the standard dialect of general Spanish. Consider the following cases from Ormazabal and Romero (2007):

(15)

a. Te lo di
2DAT 3ACC gave
'I gave it to you'

b. *Te le di
2DAT 3ACC gave
'I gave him to you'

(Ormazabal; Romero, 2007, p. 8)

The correct combination in a *leísta* dialect is not **te-le* (15b) but *te-lo* (15a).[21] According to the ideas we have been developing, it can be said that what happens in (15) is that it is necessary to identify the set that will match the DO (the affected object) when the functional head v* dominates two sets of probes, specifically in a context of strong PCC (**me/te-le*). That is, the identification function, which is deactivated when there is only one set of probes in v* (as in (11a)), is activated when there are two sets of probes in v* (15a). In relation to *laístas* and *loístas* dialects, it is not necessary to perform any type of (de)activation, because gender is always available, with one object or with two. In a strong PCC context (**me*/*te-le* > *me/te-lo/a*), this gender feature will be used not only to guide the other probes in the set towards the DO but also to identify that set.

The analysis developed shows us the plausibility of the idea that a guiding-probe is necessary in the set of probes v* even when there is only one object. The guiding-probe

[21] Ormazabal and Romero (2007) conclude, based on the observation of cases such as (15), that PCC has to do with animacy and not with person. The hypothesis we defend also considers that animacy (and gender) are the central features in Spanish PCC. Crucially, our analysis also appeals to the idea of a guiding-probe.

towards the DO is gender; however, it is possible that animacy can also guide towards the DO, a phenomenon known as *leísmo*. It is not unexpected that animacy is the other option for the guiding-probe that guides towards the DO, because the animacy probe and the gender probe are the same class probe, albeit with different specifications. As we assume, the animacy probe will be the class probe with the specification of only matching; the gender probe will have the specification of matching and copying the gender feature of the goal. Copying a feature from the goal implies having matched before; therefore, gender will imply animacy, but not the opposite. Also, the analysis developed allows us to address cases of *laísmo* and *loísmo*; cases with two sets of probes in v*, since they involve an IO and a DO. These two variations would have arisen from *leísmo*, which in turn would be based on the now standard dialect of general Spanish (which uses *le*(*s*) only for the IO and *lo*(*s*), *la*(*s*) only for the DO). It could be thought that *laísmo* and *loísmo* express the way in which gender recovers its function as a guiding-probe towards the DO. Gender is already present in the now standard dialect of general Spanish, although it is lost in *leísmo*. Interestingly, *laísmo* and *loísmo* were not limited to reestablishing gender as the only guiding-probe towards the DO, but also extended towards the IO; although here gender will no longer be the guiding-probe that guides toward the IO, as indicated (see note 11). This appearance of gender in the domain of IO clitics does not completely eliminate the IO clitic, *le*(*s*). Probably because that would imply eliminating animacy from the 1p and 2p clitics, which would mean losing the guiding-probe to the DO in the clitics *me*, *te*. However, it would not be possible to form a clitic without a guiding-probe, as we said.

4. Conclusion

The main objective of this article was to discuss the function of the gender feature as part of the probes in a set. The central hypothesis is that the gender feature shares with the animacy feature the possibility of being the guiding-probe in a given set of probes of the functional head v*. The guiding-probe must guide and identify a set of probes towards a specific goal, the DO. It was proposed that a guiding-probe is necessary not only when there are two objects but also when there is only one. The theoretical framework developed allowed us to outline a unified explanation for cases of feature variation such as *leísmo*, *laísmo*, and *loísmo*.

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