

Telling clitics from affixes: the morphological realization principle as a criterion

There is no agreement among linguists regarding the locus of Romance pronominal clitics in the architecture of grammar. According to the generative tradition, they are minor syntactic constituents (Perlmutter 1971, Kayne 1975, Rizzi 1986, Brandi & Cordin 1989). Since Zwicky (1977, 1985) and Zwicky & Pullum (1983), it has also been claimed that they are inflectional affixes (see Kaiser 1992 for French, Monachesi 1999 for Italian, Luís 2004 for European Portuguese, among others). Monachesi (1999: 21-22) summarizes the following criteria for identifying affixes, following Joseph (1990):

- Selectivity in combination
- Idiosyncratic behaviour
- Parallel to morphophonological process
- Ordering
- Phonological dependence

We assume that today's clitics have gone through a grammaticalization process, moving from one locus to another in the architecture of grammar and that forms with a common origin may be (syntactic) clitics in one language and affixes in another (Haiman 1991). We hypothesize that there is a further criterion, which enables us to tell, for a given language, whether its "clitics" belong to syntax or to morphology, we call it the morphological realization principle (MRP). According to MRP, inflectional features must be realized if, loosely speaking, a morphological realization is available. More precisely, MRP requires that a feature be realized in a given paradigmatic cell, if

- the feature is specified for that cell
- the realization is not systematically defined as zero
- the particular stem does not idiosyncratically reject the realization.

Hence, MRP is not violated in the following examples:

- Italo-Romance dialects have *canta* 'sings', 'sing', with no Number affix because Number is not specified for the 3rd Person.
- In It. (and other languages), the feature [TENSE = PRESENT] is systematically realized by "zero", i.e. by the unaffixed stem.
- It. "non-inflecting" nouns such as *film* or *yogurt* are idiosyncratically unable to accept the Number-affix.

Clitics and affixes can be distinguished on the basis of MRP. If a given dependent form does not satisfy MRP, it is not an inflectional affix. Thus the Friulian and standard French "subject clitics" actually are clitics, because they ignore MRP. In Friulian, subject clitics are obligatory in some contexts, but ungrammatical in others. Thus the negation *no* must not be followed by a vocalic subject clitic (not **no e cianta*, but *no cianta* 'she does not sing'). Notice that this constraint is not merely a phonological one; it also involves (morphological) syncretism avoidance (Gaglia 2010). In standard French, the subject clitic does not occur with unspecific subjects such as *qui* 'who' or *tout le monde* 'everyone'. Analogously, the ungrammaticality of a resumptive object clitic in It. contrastive focus constructions shows that forms like *lo* 'it' are clitics; cf. *Il TUO LIBRO ho comprato* 'I bought YOUR BOOK' vs. *Il tuo libro, lo ho comprato* 'your book, I bought it'. If *lo* were an affix, MRP would be violated.

Besides being an efficient criterion for the distinction between clitics and affixes, MRP is a general characteristic of (inflectional) morphology and, hence, an argument for the autonomous status of morphology in the architecture of grammar.

References

- Brandi, L. & P. Cordin (1989): Two Italian dialects and the null subject parameter, in: Jaeggli, O. & K. Safir (eds.): *The null subject parameter*. Dordrecht: Kluwer. 111-142.
- Gaglia, S. (2010): The omission of preverbal subject clitics in Friulian: methodology and constraint-based analysis, in *Corpus*, 9: 191-220.
- Haiman, J. (1991): From V/2 to Subject Clitics: Evidence from Northern Italian, in: Traugott, E. C. & B. Heine (eds.): *Approaches to Grammaticalization*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins. 135-157.
- Joseph, B. (1990): The benefits of morphological classification: on some apparently problematic clitics in modern Greek, in: Dressler, W. U. (ed.): *Contemporary Morphology*. Berlin: De Gruyter. 171-181.
- Kaiser, G. A. (1992): *Die klitischen Personalpronomina im Französischen und Portugiesischen. Eine synchronische und diachronische Analyse*. Frankfurt: Vervuert.
- Kayne, R. (1975): *French Syntax: the Transformational Cycle*. Cambridge: MIT.
- Luis, A. (2004): *Clitics as Morphology*. Doctoral Thesis. University of Essex.
- Monachesi, P. (1999): *A lexical approach to Italian cliticization*. Stanford: CSLI.
- Perlmutter, D. (1971): *Deep and Surface Structure Constraints in Syntax*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Rizzi, L. (1986): On the status of subject clitics in Romance, in: Jaeggli, O. & C. Silva-Corvalan (eds.): *Studies in Romance linguistics*. Dordrecht: Foris. 391-419.
- Zwicky, A. (1977): *On clitics*. Bloomington: IULC.
- Zwicky, A. (1985): Clitics and particles, in: *Language*, 61 (2): 283-305.
- Zwicky, A. & G. Pullum (1983): Cliticization vs. inflection: English n't, in: *Language*, 59 (3): 502-513.