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On the emergence of two classes of clitic clusters in Italo-Romance

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This contribution deals with the make-up of Italo-Romance clitic sequences. Building on Kayne (1994), I will argue that some clitic combinations are *clusters* in which one clitic is left-adjoined to the other, while others are *split* sequences formed by adjacent clitic heads. In particular, on the basis of morphological evidence, I will argue that clusters are formed via a process of root incorporation. Evidence supporting this view comes from both diachronic and synchronic data. Diachronically, I argue that the emergence of cluster configurations resulted in a change reversing the order of certain clitic combinations (roughly, from accusative > dative to dative > accusative). Synchronically, clusters differ from split combinations as the latter can be marginally separated.

1. Introduction

The present contribution focuses on the order of clitic sequences.¹ I will couple data from the diachronic evolution of Italo-Romance with evidence from the synchronic behaviour of modern varieties in order to formulate a hypothesis concerning the syntactic structure of clitic clusters (see also Pescarini 2014).

Building on Kayne (1994: 19–21) (see also Cardinaletti 2008), I will argue that certain combinations are *split*, i.e. the clitics occupy different positions, while others are *cluster*, with one clitic left adjoined to the other. To support this claim, I will examine diachronic and synchronic evidence showing that certain clitic combinations exhibit a series of morphological and syntactic peculiarities which the above hypothesis can account for.

First of all, I will focus on the historical change reversing the order of clitic elements. In Old Florentine, the ancestor of modern Italian, the change occurs at

1. For their helpful comments, I wish to thank two anonymous reviewers and the audience of LSRL42.

- (5) **bi/*li=** l'=appo datu (Log. Sardinian)
 to.him/her/them= it= I.have given
 'I gave it to him/her/them.'

Lastly, in a few Italian dialects, the etymological 3dat *le/li* is replaced by the partitive element deriving from Lat. INDE (the following example is from Manzini & Savoia 2005: 291):

- (6) **n/*i=** u= da (Rocca Imperiale)
 to.him/her/them= it= gives
 'He/she gives it to him/her/them.'

It is worth noting that these patterns of substitution are always found in sequences with the order dative > accusative, while the 3dat clitic escapes suppletion when it occupies the rightmost position of a cluster. See, for instance, the following data from certain Sardinian dialects⁵ (Manzini & Savoia 2005, vol. II: 317–321): the etymological form *li* is allowed in isolation (7a) or when it follows another clitic element (7b), while, when it occupies the leftmost position of the cluster, as in (7c), it must be replaced by the “spurious” exponent *bi*.

- (7) a. **li=** dana kustu
 to.him/her= gives this
 'He/she gives this to him/her.'
- b. **nde=** **li=** dana
 of.them= to.him/her= gives
 'He/she gives some of them to him/her.'
- c. **bi/*li=** **lu=** dana
 to.him/her it gives
 'He/she gives it to him/her.'

This shows that there must be a correlation between suppletion and ordering, as the above irregularities target the same class of clitic combinations crosslinguistically.

One can therefore argue that the above “opaque” combinations are clusters corresponding to a single complex head and that the opacity results from the incorporation of the dative clitic onto the following one. Before testing the consequences of the hypothesis, let us clarify the latter point.

First of all, notice that all the patterns above result from the substitution of a bimorphemic clitic with a monomorphemic one such as the 3p reflexive, the locative or the partitive clitic; cf. (5)–(7). Bimorphemic clitics are formed by a root \sqrt{l} expressing Person features (say, $\sqrt{\{P\}}$) followed by an agreement marker expressing

5. Ittiri SS, Padria SS, Luras OT, Siniscola, NU Galtelli NU, Bosa OR.

Number and Gender. On the basis of these features, vocabulary items are inserted after syntactic operations have taken place (Halle & Marantz 1993):

$$(8) \begin{array}{ccc} [_{D^{\circ}} \sqrt{\{P\}} [_{Agr} \{G,N\}]] & & \\ | & | & \\ /l/ & /e/ & = \text{It. } le \text{ 'to her'} \end{array}$$

I propose that once a bimorphemic dative clitic (e.g. *li*) combines with an accusative or partitive clitic (represented as a D head in (9)), only the root of the dative clitic undergoes incorporation, while its inflectional material is stranded:

$$(9) \begin{array}{ccccccc} [& D^{\circ} & \dots & [_{D^{\circ}} & \sqrt{\{P\}} & [_{Agr} \{G,N\} \\ \uparrow & & & & \circlearrowleft & \end{array}$$

As it cannot combine with an agreement marker, the head $\sqrt{\{P\}}$ can no longer be expressed by the exponent *l-*, which ends up being replaced by a suppletive monomorphemic exponent. Because they do not match the $\{P\}$ specification of the root, the 1/2 clitics cannot be inserted (in Halle & Marantz’s terms, they would violate the Subset Principle). Eventually, the root *l-* ends up being replaced by a dummy exponent, subject to cross-linguistic variation (see Pescarini 2010) as schematized below:

(10)	$[\sqrt{\{P\}} + D^{\circ}$...	$[_{D^{\circ}} t_{\sqrt{\{P\}}} [_{Agr} \{G,N\}]$
	<i>gli</i>	<i>lo</i>	Modern Italian
	<i>bi</i>	<i>lu</i>	Logudorese Sardinian
	<i>si</i>	<i>lu</i>	Campidanese Sardinian
	<i>n</i>	<i>u</i>	Rocca Imperiale, etc.

The above analysis is supported by the phenomenon termed *parasitic plural* (Halle & Harris 2005; Kayne 2010; Manzini & Savoia 2009): in Sardinian and Ibero-Romance, the plural feature of an incorporated dative may be expressed by the morpheme *-s* in cluster-final position, as shown in (11).

(11)	Nara =bi	=lo-s	(Logudorese Sard., from Jones 1993)
	Tell	=there =it-PL	
	‘Tell it to them.’		

Following the above analysis, the position of the plural suffix *-s* can be accounted for as an instance of stranding of the agreement features of the dative pronoun, whose root has incorporated into the accusative clitic *lo*:

$$(12) \begin{array}{ccccccc} [\sqrt{\{P\}} + D^{\circ} & \dots & [_{D^{\circ}} t_{\sqrt{\{P\}}} [_{Agr} \{G\}} [_{Agr} \{N\}] \\ | & | & & & & & | \\ bi & lo & & & & & -s \end{array}$$

In modern Italian the clitic *ne* always follows the dative clitic, while Old Florentine also exhibits the opposite order (*ne* > dative) when the latter is 3p. In Boccaccio's works, in particular, both orders alternate rather freely:

- (14) a. e assai **ne=** gli= piacquero (BoccDec, 98)
 and many of.them= to.him= he.liked
 'and he liked many of them'
- b. ché gli= ne= potrebbe troppo
 because to.him= of.it= could too.much
 di mal seguire (BoccDec, 197)
 of bad(luck) to.follow
 'because it could cause him too much misfortune'

With 1/2p datives, conversely, the only possible order is dative > *ne* since the earliest attestations, but we cannot exclude that the order was in fact possible in a previous undocumented stage.

In modern Italian, the locative clitic *ci* has the same distribution as 3p dative clitics: like 3p clitics, the locative precedes 3p accusative clitics and *ne*. One can therefore wonder whether this ordering results from the same diachronic process and whether such combination had ever displayed the opposite order, with the locative clitic in cluster-final position. In Old Florentine, in fact, there is only a couple of attestations of the opposite order, both involving the locative clitic *vi* and an accusative clitic as illustrated in (15b):

- (15) a. se qualcuno **ce=** lo= portasse
 if anybody there= it/him= bring.SUBJ
 'if anybody would bring it there'
- b. s'alcun lo= vi= volesse apossimare (Fiore, 60)
 if anybody it= there= would bring.near
 'if anybody would bring it near there'

If we interpret these examples as relics of an archaic stage, this means that the locative clitic underwent the same change that occurred to dative clitics.

To summarise, the above data show that a set of clitic combinations, those containing a 3acc pronoun (e.g. *lo*, *la* 'it/him, her') or the partitive clitic *ne*, underwent a change reversing their order, which ended up mirroring the order of the corresponding DP complements. In light of the hypothesis put forth in Section 2, this means that these clitic combinations have become *clusters* in which the dative clitic is left-adjoined to the other clitic. It is worth noting in fact that these sequences are subject to suppletion inasmuch as the bimorphemic dative clitic *le* cannot occur in cluster-initial position (Cardinaletti 2008; Pescarini 2014).

Other clitic combinations, conversely, do not show any systematic change. Sequences formed by 1/2p clitics, the locative clitic and the impersonal *si* do in fact display the same orders in both old and modern Italian. Moreover, the order of clitics cannot be related to the order of the corresponding DPs as they contain a case-syncretic clitics which can express either the direct or the indirect object. Hence, these combinations normally are ambiguous between different possible interpretations depending on whether the 1/2p clitic stands for a direct or indirect object:

- (16) **mi=** **ti=** ha presentato Carlo
 (to.)me= (to.)you= has introduced Carlo
 ‘Carlo has introduced me to you.’
 ‘Carlo has introduced you to me.’
- (17) **mi=** **si=** presenta Carlo
 (to.)me one introduces Carlo
 ‘One introduces Carlo to me.’
 ‘One introduces me to Carlo.’

I can therefore conclude that the combinations affected by the change are those with an *unambiguous* morphology, i.e. sequences including one element (either a 3acc clitic or the clitic *ne*) which cannot stand for a dative complement.

The ambiguous ones, by contrast, are not affected by ordering rules and, therefore, it is reasonable to think that they still behave like split sequences. To find out, in the following section I will focus on the behavior of clitics in restructuring contexts.

Before concluding this section, however, a final remark on the nature of the incorporation process is in order. In fact, one may wonder whether the incorporation has to be considered a synchronic or diachronic process. Put in a different way, are clusters synchronically analysable or, rather, are they frozen structures stored in our functional lexicon? At present, the data do not allow us to exclude one option or the other. Nonetheless, I would like to submit the hypothesis that all clitic sequences derive from a universal cartographic-like structure representing the interface between syntax and interpretation. Each clitic, to receive the right interpretation, must be connected to a dedicated position endowed with a (set of) grammatical feature(s) (see, among others, Tortora 2014). Hence, even in the case of opaque combinations, we still have to postulate that speakers make use of language-specific synchronic rules in order to connect the abstract functional skeleton with its morphological spell-out.

4. Synchrony: On restructuring

In the previous sections I have argued that the mirror order is due to the incorporation of a clitic root to another. I have shown that this accounts for patterns of suppletion and is consistent with the diachronic evolution of Italo-Romance.

Moreover, I have put forth the hypothesis that not all Italian clitic combinations are clusters as some of them have never changed their order. This means that in present-day Italian clitic combinations fall at least into two different classes (see Cardinaletti 2008 for a more articulated view): one in which clitic combinations are morphologically opaque and exhibit the mirror order, the other in which clitic combinations are transparent and their order does not necessarily mirror the one of the corresponding complements.

In what follows I will verify this prediction on the basis of evidence from restructuring contexts (Rizzi 1982), i.e. sequences formed by a functional verb (as a modal, perception or motion verb) followed by an infinitive. In Italian, restructuring constructions allow clitics to stand either enclitically to the inflected verb or proclitically to the infinitive. In the case of split sequences, one would wonder whether clitics can be separated, with one clitic attached to the modal verb and the other enclitic to the lexical one. By contrast, the same pattern is supposed to be totally ungrammatical with true clusters.

The separation is commonly allowed with the impersonal clitic. Before addressing the relevant data, it is worth noting that the impersonal *si* cannot occur enclitic to the infinitive, as shown below (see also Cardinaletti 2008):

- (18) a. *si= può partire*
 one can leave
 ‘One can leave.’
 b. **può partir =si*
 can leave =one
 ‘One can leave.’

Once combined with another clitic pronoun, the impersonal must stand proclitic to the inflected verb, while the other pronoun may either precede the functional verb or follow the infinitive (some speakers do not accept the latter pattern⁶):

6. Given the two orders *gli si può dire* and *si può dirgli*, Google retrieves about 3 million occurrences of the former and about 212.000 occurrences of the latter (on 22nd August 2013).

- (19) a. Non **gli**= **si**= può dire niente
not to.him= one= can say anything
b. Non **si**= può dir =**gli** niente
not one= can say =to.him anything
'You cannot tell him anything'

The separation with the impersonal *si* is allowed with any kind of clitic, including 3p accusatives:

- (20) a. **Lo**= **si**= può dire?
it= one= can say?
b. **Si**= può dir =**lo**?
one= can say =it
'Can we say it?'

Notice that when both occur in proclisis the impersonal pronoun follows the accusative clitic (*lo si*). Conversely, the homophonous 3p reflexive clitic *si* has to precede the accusative clitic; cf. (21a). The difference between the placement of the impersonal and the reflexive *si* depends on the syntactic make-up of the combination: the former always occur in a split configuration, while the reflexive clitic has to incorporate onto the accusative one. In fact, the reflexive *si*, unlike the impersonal *si*, cannot be separated, see (21b):

- (21) a. **Se**= **lo**= può mangiare
to.self= it= can eat
b. ***Si**= può mangiar =**lo**
to.self= can eat =it
'He can eat (for himself).'

In other cases the separation is more problematic than in the case of the impersonal clitic. This is the case of sequences formed by a locative clitic and a 1/2p person pronoun: both clitics normally occur either proclitically or enclitically, as in (22a) and (22b), respectively. Moreover, split combinations like (22c) are marginally tolerated in a colloquial register (again, the example has been gathered from the internet):

- (22) a. Nessuno **mi**= **ci**= può accompagnare?
nobody me= there= can take
b. Nessuno può accompagnar =**mi** =**ci**?
nobody can take =me =there
c. %Nessuno **mi**= può accompagnar =**ci**?
nobody me= can take =there
'Can anybody take me there?'

This is consistent with the conclusions of the preceding section, in which I observed that the incorporation leading to the mirror order did not affect ‘ambiguous’ combinations formed by case-syncretic elements like (22), in which the 1/2 may stand for either a direct or indirect object.

By contrast, ‘unambiguous’ sequences (those in which the grammatical functions of both clitics are immediately recognizable) underwent the change leading to the mirror order and, because of incorporation, they ended up being inseparable. Compare (22) with (23), where the locative clitic combines with a 3p accusative pronoun: the contrast between the marginality of (22c) and the complete ungrammaticality of (23c) is due to the split vs. cluster nature of the combination.

- (23) a. Nessuno **ce= lo=** può accompagnare?
 nobody there= him= can take
- b. Nessuno può accompagnar **=ce =lo?**
 nobody can take =there =him
- c. *Nessuno **lo=** può accompagnar **=ci?**
 nobody him= can take =there
 ‘Can anybody take me there?’

The separation leads to severe ungrammaticality with all the sequences in which a dative or locative clitic precedes a 3p accusative pronoun or the genitive partitive *ne*, namely in all the combinations whose order, according to the reconstruction given in Section 3, was reversed.

- (24) a. ***ti=** può portar **=lo**
 to.you= can bring =it
- b. ***lo=** può portar **=ti**
 it= can bring =to.you
 ‘He/she can bring it to you.’
- (25) a. ***ti=** può portar **=ne**
 to.you= can bring =of.it/them
- b. ***ne=** può portar **=ti**
 of.it/them= can bring =to.you
 ‘He/she can bring of.it/them to you.’

In conclusion, clitic combinations behave quite differently in restructuring contexts. Combinations including the impersonal *si* are easily separated because the impersonal *si* – unlike the reflexive *si* – always occur in a split configuration. Combinations formed by a locative and a case-syncretic clitic are marginally separable: in present day Italian the separation sounds rather degraded and it may occur only in informal registers. However, the separation does not give rise to severe ungrammaticality as it does with clusters containing a 3p accusative

clitic or *ne* (the unambiguous combinations, according to the distinction drawn in Section 3). The latter combinations – which are those displaying the mirror order – are in fact completely inseparable.

These differences, combined with the historical evolution outlined in Section 3 and the morphological evidence discussed in Section 2, confirm the hypothesis that the latter sequences are true clusters formed via root incorporation, while the others are split sequences in which the clitics occur in different syntactic positions.

5. Conclusion

In this contribution I have explored a possible link between the evolution of the internal order of Romance clitic clusters and the existence of different classes of clitic clusters in modern Italo-Romance.

I have argued that many Romance languages have been targeted by a change reversing the order of certain clitic sequences. This change affected clusters containing the partitive/genitive *ne* or a 3acc clitic. As a consequence of the syntactic change, these sequences display the mirror order, i.e. the order of clitic elements ended up mirroring the one of the corresponding DP arguments. On the contrary, combinations formed by case-syncretic clitics, which can express either the direct or the indirect object, have maintained their rigid order across chronological stages.

From a syntactic point of view, such a change can be due to the placement of the dative clitic, which, in the latter case, left-adjoins to the accusative one forming a syntactic complex head instead of occupying a separate syntactic projection. In Kayne's terms, combinations formed via incorporation are *clusters* (in a narrow sense), while the others correspond to a *split* configuration. According to this hypothesis, Italian clitics can therefore be divided into two major classes on the basis of their historical evolution.

I have observed that true clusters are subject to suppletion when the dative clitic is a regular reflex of Lat. *ILLI(s)*. In many Romance varieties, the bimorphemic exponent *li(s)/le(s)* is replaced by a suppletive monomorphemic item. I argued that this morphological substitution follows from the incorporation process determining the mirror order: in fact, only the root of the dative clitic incorporates, while its agreement features remain stranded in their original position.

Lastly, I have focused on restructuring contexts, where clusters differ from split sequences as the latter, but not the former, cannot be separated. In fact, with split combinations, one clitic can stand proclitic to the inflected (modal, auxiliary or perception) verb, while the other clitic stands enclitic to the infinitive.

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