

PRONOMINAL CLITICS IN GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

In this chapter, some general descriptive problems regarding clitics will be discussed in the light of generative syntactic theory. Issues to be considered include the derivation of clitics (movement vs. base generation), the syntactic domain of cliticization (clitic climbing), the position of clitics with respect to the verb (enclisis vs. proclisis), the contrast (if any) between referential clitics and object markers, and the issue of clusters. The focus is not on illustrating these problems *per se*, but on illustrating their reflex in the theoretical debate, often using just Romance (Italian/French/Spanish) evidence. The choice of the particular set of languages is partially bound up with history, since clitics were first investigated in Romance and partially a matter of convenience. This essentially monolingual approach is based on the generative methodological postulate that any language-specific grammar will necessarily lead us to the universal foundations of language. Conclusions concerning the points just mentioned, i.e. basic derivation, locality, referential status and order of clitics, are likely to embed a universal core tolerating a limited spectrum of variation (including the point in the spectrum represented by the Romance languages).

1. Movement analyses

The history of cliticization in generative grammar begins with Kayne (1975), who introduces object cliticization in French into the theoretical debate. In French, object clitics and full object NPs, including full pronouns are in complementary distribution, for instance in (1). It is natural therefore to conclude that the clitic structure in (1b) is derived from something like (1a) via a transformation that reorders the pronoun moving it to a position adjacent to the verb.

- (1) a. Marie voit (seulement) lui
 Marie sees only him
 b. Marie le voit
 Marie him=sees

The movement derivation is embraced in particular by Chomsky (1995). The first step of what we may take to be the standard movement derivation, has the clitic undergoing External Merge (EM) in θ -position, as in (2a). For some reason, the clitic obligatorily undergoes movement, and adopting the conclusions of Kayne (1991), it adjoins to IP, which in French hosts is a position adjacent

to the finite verb in I (Pollock 1989).

- (2) a. ... [VP voit [DP le]]
 b. [IP le [IP voit ... [VP ... le]]
 ↑ _____|

At least two theoretical questions are raised by the derivation in (2), as indicated in (A).

- (A) i. what kind of movement is involved? e.g. is it head movement or head movement?
 ii. what triggers movement?

The classical answer to the trigger problem is that some inherent deficiency of clitics requires them to move. A theoretically viable reconstruction of this notion is attempted by Cardinaletti and Starke (1999). In (3) I summarize their most relevant conclusions.¹

- (3) Cardinaletti and Starke (1999: 192)
 [...]
 - b. Since strong elements have a functional case-feature but deficient elements lack it:
 - deficient elements are necessarily in a case-assigning specAgrP at S-structure (to recover case).
 - c. Since strong, but not deficient, elements have an index (from their functional case feature):
 - deficient elements cannot refer, they must associate to an antecedent prominent in the discourse (i.e. discourse-internal co-reference: "specificity", "old information", etc., but also impossibility in most contrastive contexts, or with ostension)
 [...]

The key conclusion is (3b), which connects clitic movement to the lack of a functional Case projection (CP) in the internal structure of clitics. This forces the clitic to move to Spec, AgrP (AgrPO or AgrPS). But are there independent reasons to exclude the presence of a CP functional node in clitics, as opposed to full DPs? Independent evidence from morphology seems out of the question; in a language like French, clitics are basically the only nominal elements to bear overt Case. This is why clause (3c) is relevant. Could the absence of the CP layer be semantically motivated? (3c) explicitly states that clitic pronouns must be discourse-anaphoric and cannot refer under ostension, i.e. deictically. But this

¹ Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) in fact aim to account for a three-way contrast, involving clitics, full pronouns and weak pronouns. Weak pronouns are not considered here not to complicate the presentation unduly.

is not true, at least not as stated (cf. Cardinaletti and Starke 1999: 154, 156, 161). The sentence in (4a), is perfectly grammatical, if some ostension-like means are available to point to the referent of *le* ‘him’, e.g. nodding in the direction of somebody who just entered the room. Sentence (4b) which is marked as ungrammatical by Cardinaletti and Starke (1999: 153) is just unfelicitous; the repetition of the same sentential material leaves the clitic to carry contrast – which is impossible. If contrast is carried by the verb, as in (4c) the sentence becomes acceptable with deictic (non-discourse anaphoric) reference of the clitic.

- (4) a. Je l’ai vu hier
I him=have seen yesterday
- b. #J’ai vu Marie puis je l’ai vu
I have seen Marie then I him=have seen
- c. J’ai vu Marie puis je les ai embrassés
I have seen Marie then I them=have kissed

In short, it seems to me that the bases are lacking for taking the deficiency route to explaining clitic movement.

A different line of explanation as to why clitics move is proposed by Uriagereka (1995: 90-91) who suggests the generalization that “only and all material assigned VP-external scope is interpreted as specific at Logical Form”. In turn, “whether a given language has an active F prior to or at LF will have consequences for the (overt) syntactic placement of clitics in this language”; Western Romance (specifically Galician) has an F position that clitics target.² In fact, according to Uriagereka, F is targeted by a host of other movements. What is relevant about this line of explanation is that movement becomes potentially associated with a class of operations that includes in particular Object Shift in Germanic languages, as explicitly mentioned by Uriagereka. Cliticization then is the last residual manifestation in some languages of scrambling processes that can be quite general in other languages.

Let us then turn to question (A)(i). An evident difficulty with the Kaynian derivation in (1b) is that while we might expect the sister of V to be a phrasal DP, the clitic in its landing site has all of the properties of a D head. A formal account of this fact is suggested by Chomsky (1995: 228). In essence, he treats head or phrasal status not as an inherent, but as a relative notion. In the structure in (1b) the complement of V is a D which is both a minimal projection and a maximal projection. This means that we can take it that “in its θ -position, the clitic is an XP” and in fact “it is an XP, raising

² For French, Uriagereka entertains an analysis not involving F.

(5) ... [VP *voit* [Dmin/max *le*]]

[illegible]

As concerns the first point, Roberts discusses why exactly object shift would be restricted to cliticization in some languages. Assuming object shift to be driven by an EPP feature (Chomsky 2005, 2015), Roberts (2010: 47) proposes “to make the EPP-feature sensitive to the fact that the moved element is a minimal category”, that is, a head. Note that under his view, the target position of clitics is the edge of $v(P)$, so that some further mechanism would need to be invoked for movement to the edge of $I(P)$ – I will consider this kind of issue separately in section 3. The operation proposed by Roberts (2010: 50) is schematized in (7): “Cliticization consists of the movement of $D^{\min=\max}$ to $v^{*\min}$ from the VP-internal position in which D is first-merged as the complement to the verb”.

$$(7) \quad [{}_{\text{VP}} [{}_{\text{v}} [{}_{\text{D}} \textit{le}] \textit{v}] \quad [{}_{\text{VP}} \textit{V} [{}_{\text{D}} \textit{le}]]]$$

↑ _____|

The discussion of cliticization in Chomsky (1995) and Roberts (2010) is consistent with the Chain Uniformity Condition (Chomsky 1995: 253) to the effect that “A chain is uniform with regard to phrase structure status”. As observed by Harizanov (2019), this constraint ultimately harks back to the Structure Preserving Constraint of Emonds (1976). However, Harizanov and Gribanova (2019) argue that the relevant distinction is not between XP- and X- movement, but rather between two types of X-movement: syntactic head movement and morphological head-movement, i.e. in their terms amalgamation. Once this is done, according to Harizanov (2019: 3) “an implementation of Internal Merge that applies in the same way to both heads and phrases is, in fact, a direct consequence of central minimalist assumptions governing structure building”. In other words, “movement of a head to a specifier position” is predicted by the system. This conclusion means that nothing excludes a variant of the derivation in (7) along the lines of (9).

(8) $[_{vP} [_D \textit{le}] \quad [_{vP} \textit{V}^* \quad [_{vP} \textit{V} [_D \textit{le}]]]]$
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Though Harizanov and Gribanova (2019) do not discuss pronominal clitics, these are discussed in previous work by Harizanov (2014). He treats the fundamental cliticization operation as A-movement of the clitic to the edge of vP, followed by what in his later terminology would be amalgamation. The latter is defined by Harizanov and Gribanova (2019) as “a postsyntactic operation which takes two structurally adjacent heads and outputs a structure in which one is adjoined to the other” either by raising or by lowering.

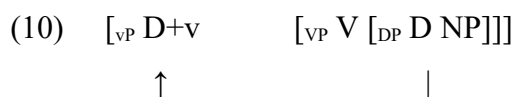
Harizanov (2014) considers a language, Bulgarian, which has clitic doubling, for instance in (9), prompting us to consider how clitic doubling is treated within movement theories of cliticization. Prima facie this phenomenon provides an argument against them, since the source position of movement is independently filled.

(9) Decata ja običat neja.
 the.kids her=love her
 ‘The kids love her.’

Beginning with Uriagereka (1995), much of the literature has assumed the so-called ‘big DP’ analysis of clitic doubling, in which the clitic is the head of DP whose Spec is the DP stranded by clitic

movement, i.e. [DP [Clitic]]. A problem for the big DP account is that the supposed source of movement, i.e. [DP [Clitic]], is unattested, i.e. it is never overtly seen (unlike what happens in other types of movement, e.g. passive or questions, where the constituent moved in a given language can be seen in situ in other languages). Harizanov (2014: 1070) suggests that “clitic doubling of the kind found in Bulgarian involves, descriptively speaking, spelling out both the head and the foot of a movement chain”. The problem is that implementing this account requires precise spell-out principles to be provided – which the literature does not do.

Preminger (2019) present a different version yet of a head movement account of cliticization combined with a multiple spell-out account of clitic doubling. For Preminger (2019: 18), the source of movement is not a ‘big DP’ structure, rather the clitic is the D determiner of an ordinary DP, along the lines of (10).



According to Preminger, the lexical DP presents a pronounced D as well – yielding a clitic doubling structure. The problem is that D extraction with deletion of the lower D copy is ungrammatical (in Romance languages, in Balkan languages) – while under ordinary assumptions about lower copy deletion in movement, this should in fact be the unmarked option.

As an answer to this question, Preminger (2019: 20) proposes two “conditions on phonological chain reduction of head movement”, either one of which must be satisfied for deletion to take place. If X is the moved head, Y is its landing site and α is the in situ copy, either “ α and Y are not separated by a phasal maximal projection” or “X and Y are part of the same extended projection”. In (10), the phase boundary DP separates the moved D and its copy – and the landing site of D is not in the same extended projection as D, making deletion impossible. Preminger himself recognizes the stipulative nature of his account. There are also other issues. For instance, it is not completely clear what happens in ordinary clitic movement, without doubling. This is modelled by Preminger (2019: fn. 14) by assuming that NP within the doubling DP is a pro. But why isn’t D spelled-out as a copy? The locality conditions seem to be exactly the same as in (10), modulo the lexical or non-lexical nature of NP.

Overall, the picture that emerges from the discussion of movement theories of cliticization is fairly consistent, including in particular the conclusions in (B).

- (B) i. cliticization is a kind of residual Object Shift, triggered by the same properties (Roberts 2010, Preminger 2019, cf. Uriagereka 1995)

- ii. cliticization affects a D head and is an instance of head-movement (Roberts 2010, Preminger 2019, cf. Kayne 1991, Chomsky 1995)
- iii. depending on the specific theory chosen, the landing site of head movement is adjunction to a head (Roberts 2010, Preminger 2019) or alternatively heads may target the same positions as phrases (Spec, or phrasal adjunctions, Harizanov and Gribanova 2019, cf. Kayne 1991). A hybrid approach two-step approach is also possible (Matushansky 2006).
- iv. clitic doubling arises when multiple copies of the D movement chain undergo Spell-Out (Harizanov 2014, Preminger 2019).

In the next section, I will outline the main competitor to the movement derivation of clitics – namely so-called base generation analyses.

2. Base generation analyses

A spate of works in the late 70s and early 80s addressed languages which unlike French (Kayne 1975) present clitic doubling phenomena, in particular Spanish (Strozer 1976, Rivas 1977, Jaeggli 1981), cf. example (11), and the Semitic languages (Borer 1984).

- (11) (Ella) lo ama a el
 she him=loves to him
 ‘She loves him’

The basic idea behind the base generation hypothesis is that clitics are merged directly in what is their landing site under movement analyses. The argument position is then taken by an ordinary DP; the clitic and the in situ DP are connected by a construal rule of some sort. The questions to be settled under this analysis parallel to some extent those reviewed for the movement analysis, concerning in particular the categorial status of the clitic, the nature of the DP in situ (if present), and the nature of the relation between the clitic and the DP in situ, as in (C).

- (C) i. what is the base generated clitic? e.g. an affix or a head?
 ii. is a DP associate always present?
 iii. what is the relation between the clitic and the DP in situ (e.g. syntactic, semantic)?

In the early analysis of Rivas (1977), the clitic is introduced by the phrase structure rule $V \rightarrow CL\ V$, so it is adjoined to the verb. At the same time, the selectional restrictions of the verb are satisfied not by the clitic, but by a phrasal NP. A rule of CL/NP agreement then checks whether CL and NP agree in ϕ -features and Case, according to the schema in (12).

- (12) $[_{VP}\ CL+V\ \quad NP]$
|_____| CL/NP agreement

The last ingredient of the analysis is deletion. For Rivas (1977: 155) “the basic syntactic processes that take place are common to the Romance languages. The surface distribution of CL/NP pairs is obtained by a last rule of CL/NP Deletion, and is language-and-dialect dependent”. French obligatorily deletes NP, while Spanish rules are more complex yielding sometimes doubling, sometimes deletion, and sometimes optionality.

The observation that in Spanish clitic doubling correlates with Differential Object Marking (DOM) of the internal argument, cf. (11), deeply influenced GB theories of clitic doubling. Therefore Jaeggli (1981), Borer (1983) theorize that the crucial role of the clitic is to absorb Case. In reality, clitic doubling normally occurs without DOM for instance in Balkan languages, including Bulgarian (9), and vice versa the phenomenon of DOM does not depend on clitic doubling (Manzini and Franco 2016 for some examples). Nevertheless, an interesting consequence follows from the fact that the NP associate of the clitic is Case-less in the absence of DOM, for Jaeggli (1981), namely that NP can only be the pronominal empty category PRO. Substituting PRO with its standard GB counterpart, i.e. *pro* (Chomsky 1982), we then obtain (13). In other words, clitics double argumental NPs which may either be spelled out or correspond to instances of object pro-drop.

- (13) $[_{VP}\ CL+V\ \quad pro/NP]$

Though only object clitics have been reviewed so far, it is important to note that an analysis along the lines of (13) is standardly adopted for subject clitics, as exemplified in particular by North Italo-Romance varieties (so called dialects, NID). NID subject clitics can appear alone or doubling a lexical subject, as in Florentine (14a). The analysis of Brandi and Cordin (1989), Rizzi (1986) is that the subject clitic is merged with I, and from that position it licenses a null subject (*pro*) in Spec, IP, as in (14) – or alternatively it doubles an overt subject.

- (14) a. (la maria) la viene

the Maria she=comes

‘Mary/she comes’

b. [IP *pro*/NP [I' CL+I ...]

In short, clitics are first merged in a position adjoined to V or to I from where they enter an agreement(-like) relation with either a lexical NP or a *pro* which discharges a theta-role of the predicate. Some further refinements are introduced into the base generation analysis within broadly minimalist models. In keeping with developments concerning the functional articulation of the sentence, Sportiche (1996) proposes generating clitics not as adjuncts to V or to some verb-related head, but rather as autonomous functional heads in the v-field of the sentence, which he characterizes as Voice heads (Accusative Voice, etc.). Head-movement operations are evidently needed to shift clitics from the v-area of the sentence to the I-area, where they surface. More importantly, Sportiche argues that the *pro* or DP associate of the clitic moves to the Spec of Cl/VoiceP in order to establish an agreement relation with it in a Spec-head configuration, along the lines of (15).

(15) [AccVoiceP DP [AccVoice' *le* [VP *voit* DP]]
 ↑ _____|

I leave the DP-movement part of Sportiche's analysis aside for the time being, in view of the fact that in the minimalist model, Spec-head agreement (motivated here by a Clitic Criterion, cf. Rizzi's 1996 Wh-Criterion) has largely been superseded by agreement at a distance as defined by Chomsky's (2000, 2001) rule of Agree, see (16a) below. Treating clitics as independent heads is advantageous when dealing with their varying positions in the sentence (e.g. enclisis/proclisis alternations, section 3), since merging them as affixes would seem to imply making use of excorporation. The treatment of clitics as functional heads is furthermore adopted by Manzini and Savoia (2005, 2007) in their account of microvariation in clitic clusters, under which clitics are merged as a functional sequence directly above I (more on this in section 5).

In fact, it has long been known that, even just looking at the restricted empirical domain of Romance, it is accidental that in the examples considered so far clitics are immediately adjacent to the verb, i.e., adverbial. It is perfectly possible for clitics to be separated from the verb, typical by modifiers. Kayne (1991: 653) already exemplifies the possibility of sequences *clitic-adverb-verb* in literary French (e.g. *en bien parler* 'speak well of them'). In (16), I reproduce an example from a Southern Italo-Romance variety, Cosentino, for which Ledgeway and Lombardi (2005) propose that clitics are positioned at the edge of IP, while the verb remains slightly lower, roughly in vP (see

Pescarini 2021 for data and discussion).

- (16) un mi cchiù parra
 not me=any more he-speaks
 ‘He doesn’t speak to me anymore’

From a theoretical point of view, interpolation tends to exclude models (whether movement or base generation ones) where the clitic is incorporated to the verb or to a verb-related head – favouring models where it is adjoined at the edge of a verb-related projection (Kayne 1991) or it projects an independent functional category (Sportiche 1996).

Going back to the base generated analysis of clitics, we note that it is potentially affected by minimalist developments in the analysis of (pronominal) empty categories. The minimalist framework adopts a Copy construal of movement (Chomsky 1995); Chomsky (2021, 2024) further suggests that Obligatory Control (hence the empty category PRO) reduces to a Copy operation followed by deletion of the lower copy. In this theoretical environment, Holmberg (2005) points out that (subject) *pro* need not be merged as a pronominal empty category. Rather it can be construed as a pronominal deletion site, licensed as usual by Agree with rich I. This deletion approach to *pro* is further developed by Saab (2008). He adopts Late Insertion of lexical items, proposing that ellipsis is No Transfer, i.e. lack of lexical insertion under an abstract terminal under usual licensing conditions, hence Agree with rich I in the case of a pronominal subject.³

By extension, in subject clitic languages like (14), we may assume that deletion of a subject pronoun is licenced by Agree with the subject clitics. Moreover, there is no reason why this couldn’t be extended to object clitics. If so, French (1a) may be construed as having the derivation in (17), where an actual pronoun DP is merged in θ -position, providing the goal of the ϕ -feature probe on v^* . Agree with v^* is not sufficient to license deletion/No Transfer of the pronoun. The latter is however licensed, as in (17b), if a clitic is merged at the edge of v^* probing the object pronoun in turn, as in (17a).

- (17) a. ... [_{CIP/vP} *le* [_{vP} v^* [_{vP} *voit* DP]]] Agree
 b. ... [_{CIP/vP} *le* [_{vP} v^* [_{vP} V $\overline{DP}$]]] Deletion/No Transfer

³ Late Insertion of Vocabulary Items was originally proposed as part of the Distributed Morphology (DM) framework. However, Late Insertion does not have to be tied to other assumptions of DM, and specifically to the morphological operations of Halle & Marantz (1993).

Before drawing some sums on the state of the art in base generation models of clitics, we need to go back to a question that was left open in (15). Sportiche (1996) takes movement to Spec, VoiceP of an argument DP/*pro* to be necessary for the clitic and the DP/*pro* to Agree in a head-Spec configuration. I already commented that by adopting the minimalist rule of Agree, as for instance in (17), the necessity for movement is circumvented. Nevertheless recently Angelopoulos and Sportiche (2021) argue at length that movement is in fact necessary. Two key examples (Angelopoulos and Sportiche 2021: 973) are reproduced in (18).

- (18) a. On a présenté chaque professeur_j aux parents de son_j meilleur étudiant.
 one has introduced every professor to-the parents of his best student
 ‘We have introduced every professor to the parents of his best student.’
 b. * [Aux parents de son_j meilleur étudiant]_k on leur_k a présenté chaque professeur_j
 to-the parents of his best student one 3PL.DAT has introduced every professor
 ‘To the parents of his best student, we have introduced every professor.’

Example (18a) shows that the DO c-commands the IO *in situ* so that a quantifier in the former can bind a pronoun in the latter. Consider however (18b), which differs from (18a) only in that the IO has undergone Clitic Left Dislocation (CLLD). Binding of the pronoun contained in the IO by the quantifier in the DO is impossible. Angelopoulos and Sportiche point out that reconstruction is generally allowed with A’ movement and hence with topicalization. Therefore, they conclude that the source of the ungrammaticality of (17) must reside in the fact that the IO passes through an A-position – from which it cannot reconstruct. I will return to their further assumption that the clitic is simply a referentially inert agreement marker in section 4.

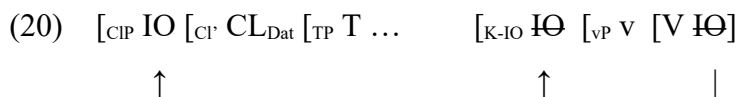
Another argument towards the same conclusion comes from the examples in (19) (Angelopoulos and Sportiche 2021: 983-984).

- (19) a. On a décrit la voisine de Jean_m qu’à lui_m
 one has described the neighbor of John only to him
 ‘One/we described John’s neighbor only to him’
 b. *On lui_m a décrit la voisine de Jean_m
 one 3S.DAT has described the neighbor of John
 ‘One/we described John’s neighbor to him’

The sentence in (19a) shows that the IO does not c-command the DO, so that coreference of the IO

lui with *Jean* (embedded in the DO) is not a principle C violation. Suppose however the pronoun *in situ* is replaced by a clitic, as in (19b). Coreference of *Jean* and *lui* yields a principle C violation. Recall that by hypothesis the clitic is just a referentially inert object marker. Therefore, according to Angelopoulos and Sportiche the ungrammaticality of (19b) must be due to the fact that the *pro* associate of the IO clitic moves to an A-position higher than the DO, from where it cannot reconstruct.

At this point, it may be helpful to reproduce the overall picture of cliticization that Angelopoulos and Sportiche (2021: 997) seek to motivate, namely (20). CliticP projections, hosting the clitic functional heads, are merged immediately above TP. However clitics on their way to CliticP land in intermediate KP (Case) positions, for instance K_{IO} in (20) which is the position from which the IO cannot reconstruct.



It was important to mention the work of Angelopoulos and Sportiche, in that it raises the radical question whether all accounts of clitics must in fact contain a movement component. Nevertheless I will leave any comment to their evidence to later sections. Specifically in section 4, I will address the question whether clitics are referentially inert. In section 5, when I consider clitic clusters, and therefore different types of clitics, I will come back to the fact that the data in (18)-(19) crucially involve IOs.

We are now in a position to summarize the answers that base generated theories of clitics provide to the questions in (C). As for movement approaches, the answers are essentially uniform, as indicated in (D).

- (D)
- i. a clitic is best construed as an independent head – as opposed to a V(-projection) affix (Sportiche 1996, Manzini and Savoia 2005, 2007) (cf. section 3)
 - ii. a DP associate of the clitic is always present in thematic position, in the form of a lexical DP doubled by the clitic or of a pronominal empty category (i.e. a deleted pronoun) that the clitic licenses (Jaeggli 1981, Sportiche 1996, cf. Holmberg 2005, Saab 2008 on *pro*)
 - iii. the licensing relation between the clitic and the DP associate is syntactic: the clitic enters Agree with its DP associate (in the sense of Chomsky 2001); or alternatively, DP moves to the Spec of CliticP yielding Spec-head agreement (Sportiche 1996, Angelopoulos and Sportiche 2021).

At this point of the discussion, we may be ready to draw some intermediate conclusions. Because of the weight of tradition, and also for presentational purposes, it was useful to divide generative approaches to cliticization into movement and base generation approaches. In reality, a great deal of results achieved in one framework can usefully be applied to the other, see for instance the discussion of the landing site/point of merge of clitics or of the role played by the *v* phase head in Agree/probed movement ('Object Shift'). This kind of interplay between the two approaches means that a number of properties of cliticization can be considered theory-neutrally, for instance locality (section 3). Similarly, the fact that both the copy of clitic movement and the empty pronominal associate of base generated clitics are deletion sites means that the two approaches are essentially equivalent at Spell-Out (Manzini and Scheer 2025). This is not to say that movement and base generation analyses are notational variants. My personal conclusion is that clitic doubling, i.e. the set of data around which the movement/base-generation approaches crystallized in early generative frameworks, still discriminates between them, favoring base generation. Doubling is difficult to account for under movement, requiring either 'big DP' structures or a D-movement process, both of which are difficult to motivate independently. By contrast, base generation accounts for doubling in exactly the same way as bare cliticization. As a bonus, it also straightforwardly connects the theory of object and subject clitics – which is not necessarily the case for movement accounts.

3. The locality domain of clitics

3.1 Edge of $v(P)$ vs. edge of $I(P)$

As indicated above, some issues in the generative theory of clitics are essentially independent of the movement/base generation divide, in particular locality conditions attaching to cliticization. Indeed Minimality and the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC, Chomsky 2001, 2021) apply to all syntactic operations, hence both to movement (or Internal Merge, IM) and to Agree. A quick glance at the discussion in sections 1-2 reveals that there are essentially two serious contenders for the target position of clitics in the sentence (whether resulting from IM or from External merge, EM). Kayne (1991) identifies the landing site of cliticization with an $I(P)$ adjoined position, as in (2b), based on the strong empirical motivation that the verb in Romance is in I (Pollock 1989).

There are however equally strong theoretical reasons to identify the target position of cliticization with a $v(P)$ adjunction. Recall that according to many authors upholding a movement derivation (e.g., Roberts 2010), cliticization in Romance languages is a surface realization of the same

underlying process that manifests itself as Object Shift/scrambling in Germanic languages. Given current theories of Object Shift, a unification of the two phenomena would imply that cliticization targets the edge of vP. More importantly, clitic placement at the edge of vP is consistent with generally accepted locality principles, and in particular with the PIC, which forces either IM or Agree to be phase internal in the presence of a phasal v* head.

Let us then ask whether there is empirical evidence for a vP-adjoined position for clitics. This requires us to take a detour into enclisis/proclisis alternations in Romance.⁴ In languages like Italian or Spanish, the alternation between enclisis and proclisis is governed by whether the verb is finite or non-finite. In Italian (21a), the clitic precedes the finite verb (proclisis), while in (21b) it follows the infinitival (enclisis).

- (21) a. Gianni lo vede
 Gianni him=sees
 ‘Gianni sees him’
 b. E’ facile vederlo
 is easy see=him
 ‘It is easy to see him’

Recall that according to Kayne (1991) the landing site of clitic movement is in IP, at least when proclisis to the finite verb is concerned as in (21a). His proposal concerning enclisis, as in (21b), is that the clitic also targets IP, while the verb that moves around the clitic targets C. This yields (22) as the structure of enclisis.

- (22) [_{CP} *veder* [_{IP} *lo* [_{IP} I ...

Roberts (2010: 84) notes that a different construal of enclisis is possible. For him, object clitics target the immediately superordinate phase head, hence v*. If so, enclisis follows automatically from this positioning of the clitic independently of whether the infinitive is positioned in I or in C, see the structure in (23).

- (23) [_{CP/IP} *veder* [_{vP} *lo* ...

If evidence can be found that the verb is in I in Italian infinitives, then potentially we have an

⁴ Readers interested in the overall theoretical picture may want to proceed directly to the conclusions in (E).

argument in favor of the positioning of the clitic at v(P). Adverb positions are standardly used as a test of the verb positioning in Romance languages. Already Belletti (1990: 70ff.) observes that infinitives in Italian raise as high as finite verbs. Cinque (1999) reports her examples in (24), where it can be seen that a low temporal adverb like *spesso* ‘often’ cannot precede an infinitive (24a), while higher epistemic adverbs can precede it (24b). Since the same distribution of adverbs is observed with finite verbs, these examples suggest that the infinitive has the same position as the finite verb, namely I. As Cinque (1999: 145), puts it “the head to which the infinitive raises ... has thus to be in the complement of C”.⁵

- (24) a. *?Ho trovato qualcuno a cui spesso affidarlo, questo tipo di incarico
 I have found someone to whom often to assign (it) this kind of task
 b. Cerco un uomo al quale forse presentarla, Maria.
 I seek a man to whom perhaps to introduce (her) Maria

Let us then conclude that the Italian verb has a fixed position in I, whether finite or non-finite. If so, the position of enclitics must be identified with the edge of vP, as shown in (23) or more explicitly in (25), from Manzini and Scheer (2025). In (25), the lower deleted pronoun could be the trace of movement of *lo* (movement analysis) – or equivalently, the clitic and the deleted pronoun could both undergo EM, followed by Agree. What is relevant under either derivation is that since the enclitic is at the edge of the v* phase, the PIC is respected.

- (25) [_{IP} *veder* [_{vP} *lo* [_{vP} v* [_{vP} V ~~lo~~]]]]

At this point however, we face the question of proclisis at the edge of IP, hence outside the vP-phase, as in (2b). Various solutions to this problem are possible. Roberts (2010) seeks to maintain the Kaynian conclusion that proclisis in I represents the default outcome of a movement derivation, being the result of head-movement of the whole v* complex into which the clitic is incorporated to I. In order to derive enclisis in infinitives, Roberts (2010: 84) then assumes that non-finite verbs do not incorporate into v*, but rather move directly to I. He suggests that this may be due to the fact that infinitives “represent a neutralized category, not true verbs” – presumably in reference to the use of infinitives in nominalizations. Yet, without entering into the merit of the proposal itself, note that it does not seem to be extendable even to enclisis in imperatives, as in (26), since imperatives surely must count as ‘true verbs’.

⁵ Examples are slightly modified to overtly display the presence of enclisis.

- (26) a. Prendilo
 take=it
 ‘Take it!’
 b. Prendetelo
 take.2pl=it

Another possible solution to proclisis in I, neutral with respect to the movement/base generation divide, makes use of mechanisms of phase extension (den Dikken 2007) or phase sliding (Gallego 2010). Gallego connects phase extension in Romance with verb movement to I. Manzini and Scheer (2025) propose that phase sliding is connected to the presence of an Agree probe on I. In finite sentences, I probes the external argument of the embedded vP, entering Agree with it, as in (27a). The Agree relation between I and the subject extends the edge of the vP phase to include I and its periphery (of course, phase extension must exclude the next phase head up, namely C). Therefore, whether treated as a moved constituent or as an agreement probe, the clitic can target the edge of IP, as in (27b), without violating the PIC.

- (27) a. ... [_{IP} I [_{vP} EA [_{vP} v*
 |_____|]]] Agree

 b. ... [_{IP} lo [_{IP} I [_{vP} EA [_{vP} v* [V *to*]]]]] Agree/IM

According to Manzini and Scheer, phase extension does not hold in infinitives, precisely because no Agree relation holds the I head and the vP-internal subject. If phase extension is not licensed, then the position of the clitic at the edge of v* is forced – corresponding to enclisis. I mentioned above that imperatives are a problem for Roberts (2010). They also are a problem for Manzini and Scheer (2025), since imperatives do have finite inflections, e.g. in (26) above. However, in imperatives it has been independently argued that inflectional properties do not pick up the subject of the sentence, but the addressee (Zanuttini et al. 2012). Hence the crucial configuration in (27a) is not realized, and clitics are forced to the default enclitic position.⁶

In short, *prima facie* evidence in the Romance languages may seem to force the conclusion that cliticization is not phase internal. However, the rather long detour into enclisis/proclisis alternations may provide some evidence that the default position of Italian/French/Spanish clitics is

⁶ Formally, we may assume that a ϕ -probe is associated with a Jussive head (Zanuttini et al 2012) or in any event with a higher functional projection (perhaps C itself) taking a formal representation of the Addressee as its goal.

in fact at the edge of $v(P)$ – as expected under the PIC. We may summarize the state of the art on the domain of cliticization (whether construed as clitic movement or as base generation and Agree) along the lines of (E).

- (E) The span of clitic constructions is consistent with the PIC:
- (i) The natural locus of object clitics is the edge of the vP -phase (whether they are IMed in that position or EMed there, probing an argument DP) (Roberts 2010, Manzini and Scheer 2025)
 - (ii) Edge of IP positioning is the result of additional mechanism (e.g. phase extension, Gallego 2010, Manzini and Scheer 2025)

It is outside the scope of this chapter to discuss issues of variation (see the introductory remarks). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge their existence, insofar as it may bear on general theoretical conclusions, such as (E). In an alternative Romance system, which characterizes in particular Western Romance (European Portuguese), clitics are postverbal (enclitics) as a default, however they are preverbal (proclitic) in the presence of interrogative, Focus or negation properties associated with the C phase head, as well as generally in subordinate clauses (Pescarini 2021 for data and discussion). Following Benincà (1994, 1995) on Medieval Romance, a widely held account of this distribution is based on movement of V to C, yielding enclisis if the clitic is adjoined to I(P). Proclisis follows from the positioning of V in I. Given the obvious typological and genetic continuum between Western Romance and other Romance languages, under (E) the challenge is to show that this kind of structural alternation is consistent with phase internal movement of clitics.

In other Indo-European languages, including the Slavic languages (Bošković 2001), the position of clitics appears to be governed by Wackernagel's Law, originally formulated for Ancient Greek, namely "enclitics occupy second position" (Walkden 2020). Language families displaying the same typology include Pama-Nyungam and Uto-Aztecan (Bošković 2016). Bošković (2016) contrasts second position clitics with clitics of the Romance type, based on the assumption that the latter incorporate with the verb. However, note that interpolation phenomena, e.g. in (16), call into question the conclusion that clitics which do not display second position behavior incorporate with the verb. Vice versa, as is well-known, Bantu clitics (e.g. Riedel 2009) have a fixed position in the verbal template and are therefore better candidates for incorporation. All of these important typological issues are left open here, having duly mentioned them. As far as I can tell, none of them calls into question (E), namely that cliticization is a phase-internal process. The potential challenge posed by clitic climbing forms the object of the next section.

3.2 *Clitic climbing*

One set of facts that could potentially undermine the conclusion that clitics move or Agree locally concerns so-called clitic climbing. In clitic climbing, the clitic is associated not with (a projection of) the verb of which it is an argument, but with a superordinate verb. Examples of this include causative constructions (Kayne 1975), as in French (29), and so-called restructuring (Rizzi 1982) – essentially infinitival embeddings under a set of modal aspectual and other obligatory control verbs, e.g. Italian (29), or under raising verbs, e.g. (30).

- (28) Je l'ai fait faire à Paul
I it=have made do to Paul
'I made Paul do it'
- (29) a. Gianni lo può/deve fare
Gianni it=can/must do
'Gianni can/must do it'
- b. Gianni lo finisce di fare
Gianni it=finishes to do
'Gianni finishes doing it'
- c. Gianni lo prova a fare
Gianni it=tries to do
'Gianni tries to do it'
- (30) Gianni lo sembra aver fatto'
Gianni it=seems have done
'Gianni seems to have done it'

There are various ways to explain clitic climbing in the literature. First, one could try iterating clitic movement, for instance from a lower IP-adjoined position to a higher one. This is the solution envisaged by Kayne (1991). Note however that we cannot simply let clitics move successive-cyclically, for in that case we would expect cliticization to have the same long distance range observed for instance for topicalization. This is clearly not the case. Since clitic climbing never crosses finite sentence boundaries, Kayne (1991) is careful to restrict the possibility of further movement of clitics to contexts lacking notably an embedded complementizer.

This latter restriction suggests that clitic climbing can apply across sentential domains only if the embedded sentential complement lacks a C phase head. This observation in turn paves the way to the analysis of clitic climbing that is more usually adopted in current theories. This is that in (29)–(31) the clitic moves directly to the matrix IP position – or it is merged directly in that position probing the embedded object, without violating locality conditions and in particular the PIC. In other words, the size of sentential embedding varies (Wurmbrand 2001, Wurmbrand and Lohninger 2023) in terms specifically of intervening phase heads, and cliticization is simply one of the diagnostics (or reflexes) of this state of affairs.

(31) Gianni [_{IP} lo sembra [_{VP} V [_{IP} aver [_{VP} Gianni fatto ~~lo~~/pro]]]

It remains for us to consider causatives, as in (28). Available analyses include the classical VP-movement account (Rouveret and Vergnaud 1980, Burzio 1986, cf. Guasti 2017a for a survey), under which the embedded VP of causatives moves to Spec, CP. This has recently been revived in

minimalist terms of smuggling by Belletti (2020). Another possible alternative is argued for by Manzini (2022), namely that the complement of causative verbs is radically reduced to a vP – an idea close to earlier treatments in terms of small clause embedding. Against this background, it is unnecessary to have recourse to the stronger hypothesis that analytical causatives or restructuring predicates are monoclausal – i.e. the causative or restructuring verb is a sort of auxiliary (Folli and Harley 2007 for causatives, Cinque 2006 for restructuring generally) of the lexical verb.

If causative and restructuring constructions are monoclausal, we evidently predict positioning of clitics in the (sole) IP position of the sentence. At the same time, monoclausal structures raise a number of problems. One of them is that even within Romance there are languages where clitic climbing characterize constructions where a finite sentential complement is embedded under an aspectual/modal verb, as in (32), from an Apulian variety. The presence of two finite verbs in (32) would seem to imply the embedding of an IP under another IP and hence a biclausal structure.

- (32) u stek a ffattsə
 it=am to do.1SG.PRES
 ‘I am doing it’

Despite the ingenious accounts of monoclausal theorists (Cardinaletti and Giusti 2003, Cruschina 2013, Ledgeway 2016) a simpler approach is available along the lines suggested before. Since (32) is an obligatory control structure, this implies the absence of a phasal C head in the embedded sentence, creating a suitable local domain for cliticization (Manzini and Lorusso 2022).⁷

We can then reasonably conclude that clitic climbing does not interfere with the conclusion in the previous section that cliticization (construed in terms of either IM or Agree) is a phase internal process. For, there are independent reasons to believe that all contexts that allow clitic climbing involve the embedding of a non-phasal sentential complement, as stated in (F).

- (F) The span of clitic constructions is consistent with the PIC. In particular clitic climbing environments involve the embedding of a non-phasal sentential complement.

If anything, under conclusion (F) we may wonder why clitic climbing is not extended to all languages where it could in principle be found, for instance in French modal/aspectual/raising environments, where there is no reason to believe that locality conditions are any different from that sketched here

⁷ Assuming examples like (32) to be biclausal, they pose the problem of how to account for obligatory control into finite clauses. This problem is well-known from Balkan languages (e.g. Greek, Romanian) and goes beyond the scope of the present chapter.

for Italian (based for instance on the presence of obligatory control). This is a classical issue in language variation, complicated by the fact that in earlier stages of French did have clitic climbing in restructuring contexts and that in Italian, clitic climbing is optional in (29)-(30). A statement like (F) is simply meant to fix the locality boundaries on this variation.

4. Referential pronouns vs. agreement markers

Let us go to the initial theme of the two major derivational models currently being proposed, i.e. movement and base generation. The two models in principle make partially different predictions as to the referential status of the clitic. Under movement theories, the clitic is predicted to have referential properties – it is quite simply a referential pronoun first merged in argument position. On the other hand, under the base generation theory, referential properties are associated with the DP in situ, so that the clitic could double them – but it could equally be referentially inert. In this respect, the questions that we need to address, following the generative literature, are essentially two, as indicated in (G). On the one hand we need to establish whether clitics can be distinguished in terms of referentiality from agreements – and on the other hand we need to consider whether the answer to (i) has any implications for the choice between movement and base generation theories.

- (G) i. Do clitics have referential properties or are they referentially inert agreements?
 ii. What are the consequences for movement vs. base generation accounts?

Question (i) is introduced relatively early into the generative literature in works considering the referential status of Romance subject clitics, especially Rizzi (1986). It is more systematically pursued in recent works, especially Baker and Kramer (2018) and Angelopoulos and Sportiche (2021), which take opposite sides on the question. One key fact discussed by both works is the doubling of anaphors by a clitic in Greek. The data are not uncontroversial. According to Baker and Kramer (2018), example (33a) is degraded or ungrammatical. For Angelopoulos and Sportiche (2021), example (33b) is well-formed. If the correct judgement is (33a), then doubling of the anaphor by the clitic is easily excluded by Binding Principle B (no local binding of pronouns) – provided of course the clitic is a referring pronoun. If the correct judgement is (33b), then we have an indication that the clitic is referentially inert, since coreference between the subject and the object anaphor can be successfully established and is not disrupted by the clitic.

- (33) a. O Janis (??ton) peripiithike ton eafto tu
 the Janis 3MS.ACC took.good.care.of the self his
 ‘John took good care of himself’
- b. I Maria dhen (ton) perighrafi ton eafto tis opos prepi.
 the Maria not 3MS.ACC describes the self her like is required
 ‘Maria does not describe herself like as she should.’

It seems to me that crosslinguistic evidence favours the conclusion that clitics are referential pronouns. Doubling of a reflexive by a pronominal clitic is impossible in Amharic according to Baker and Kramer (2018). In the Romance languages, the equivalent of examples like (33) are ill-formed. Doubling of an anaphor obligatorily requires the reflexive *se* clitic, as in (34).

- (34) a. Sé, non si/*li guardano in TV
 self not REFL/3MP.ACC watch in TV
 ‘They don’t watch themselves on TV’
- b. A sé, non si/*gli piacciono
 to self, not REFL/3DAT like
 ‘They do not like themselves’

It would appear that the internal form of the lexical anaphor is somehow involved in the uncertain status of the Greek examples, since *ton eafto tu/tis* involves an invariable DP *ton eafto* ‘the self’ with which the clitic agrees (in the masculine singular), while the anaphoric element agreeing with the antecedent is the genitive *tu/tis* ‘his/her’. Entering into the debate on Greek is of course outside the scope of the present chapter.

Let us agree to leave (33) aside. Angelopoulos and Sportiche (2021) present two other arguments in favor of the referential inertness of the clitic. The first one has to do with the fact that clitics are systematically found in environments where they have no argumental content – referring back to predicates such APs in (35a), or to propositional content, (35b) (my examples). Note that though APs obligatorily agree with the DP of which they are predicated, the clitic in (35a) takes on default singular masculine features.

- (35) a. Bella, Maria non lo è mai stata
 beautiful-FS Mary not 3MS is never been
 ‘Maria has never been beautiful’

- b. Che Maria sia bella, non lo penso
that Maria is beautiful not 3MS I.think
'I don't think that Maria is beautiful'

This line of argument points to very interesting issues – but seems to me not decisive for the question under discussion. The reason is that full pronouns also occur as pro-predicative or pro-sentential elements, as shown in (36). Note that the predicate in (36b) only selects sentences and excludes DPs.

- (36) a. Maria è bella, ma non è solo questo
Maria is beautiful, but not is only this.MS
'Maria is beautiful but not only this'
- b. Maria pensa questo/che Paolo menta/*la menzogna di Paolo
Mary thinks this/ that Paolo lies/ the lie of Paolo'
'Mary thinks this/that Paolo lies/*Paolo's lie'

This leaves a third argument deployed by Sportiche and Angelopoulos (2021). They point out that though clitics appear have definite reference when they do not double an overt DP, when it comes to doubling, they can equally double a true indefinite DP, cf. (37).

- (37) a. La cercano
3FS.ACC they.seek
'They are looking for her'
- b. Una segretaria, la cercano anche ora
a secretary 3FS.ACC seek even now
'They are looking for a secretary (whatsoever) even now'

For Angelopoulos and Sportiche facts like (37) mean that the DP associate of the clitic entirely determines the referential properties of the clitic construction, which is definite in (37b) because the associate DP is *pro*. They reason that if the clitic bore definiteness in (37a), then (37b) would be excluded.

This leads us to an (indirectly) opposed argument advanced by Baker and Kramer in favour of the referential status of clitics. They argue that in Amharic clitics are excluded from doubling not only reflexives, cf. the discussion surrounding (33), but also true indefinites, such as (non D-linked) wh-phrases and universal quantifiers in (38). Similar data are well-known from other languages,

beginning at least with Jaeggli (1981) on Rioplatense Spanish, Dobrovie-Sorin (1990) on Romanian for the relevance of D-linking.

- (38) a. Lämma wiſſa y- ay (*-äw) -all.
 Lemma.M dog.M 3MS.S -see (-3MS.O)-3MS.S
 ‘Lemma sees a dog.’
- b. Mann-in ayy- iſ (*-iw)
 who.M saw -2FS.S (-3MS.O)
 ‘Who did you (feminine) see?’
- c. Lämma hullu-n-imm säw ayy- ä (*-w)
 Lemma.M every person saw -3MS.S (-3 MS.O)
 ‘Lemma saw everyone.’

The explanation adopted by Baker and Kramer depends on Safir’s (2004) account of Cross-Over. The latter in turn relies on the idea that if a quantifier binds both a pronoun and a variable (a copy), then (no constituent containing) the pronoun can c-command the variable. The important point here is that the explanation requires the clitic to be computed as a (referential) pronoun.

While Angelopoulos and Sportiche exemplify CLLD constructions (in both Romance and Greek), the Amharic example in (38c) involves clitic doubling with the DP in situ (generally referred to as Clitic Doubling, CD). The issue of quantifiers in CLLD examples is touched upon by Rizzi (1986), who judges CLLD with bare quantifiers (universal, negative) to be ill-formed, as in (39).

- (39) a. *Nessuno lo conosco in questa città
 nobody, him=I.know in this town
 ‘I know nobody in this town’
- b. *Tutto lo dirò alla polizia
 all it=I.will.tell to the police
 ‘I will tell the police everything’

What actually interests Rizzi is to establish that doubling of a bare quantifier (negative, universal) is possible when North Italian subject clitics are involved. Therefore the latter would instantiate pure agreements, while the data in (39)-(40) would confirm the referential status of Romance object clitics, and of French subject clitics. Subsequent empirical work has brought to light the presence of considerable variation within North Italian varieties. Poletto (2000) highlights mutual

exclusion between the subject clitic and a bare quantifier in Veneto varieties. Manzini and Savoia (2005, I: 62-66) list alternations between bare negative quantifiers doubled or not doubled by an agreeing subject clitic within the same variety. In (40) I exemplify just one Ligurian variety characterized by optionality.

- (40) *nifin* (l) a *drumiù*
 nobody he=has slept
 ‘Nobody slept’

As for the standard Italian examples (39), they are not really ill-formed according to Manzini and Savoia (*ibid.*), they are just pragmatically infelicitous. For instance (39b) improves if ‘the police’ is focused – while (39a) improves if the stative verb is substituted with an eventive verb (and again a focus). In (41) I provide a couple of examples that seem to be acceptable.

- (41) a. Tutto, lo dirò solo alla polizia
 all it=I.will.say only to the police
 ‘I will say all, only to the police’
 b. Nessuno, lo trasferiscono in questa città senza raccomandazioni
 nobody him=they.transfer to this town without recommendations
 ‘They move nobody to this town without some recommendation’

The judgements in (41), while not aligned with those of Rizzi (1986), are of course compatible with the acceptability of CLLD with true indefinites, as in (37b).

In presenting the issue of clitic referential properties, I have made reference only to syntax-based arguments. Let me mention at least the alternative suggestion by Nevins (2011) that elements co-varying with TMA properties of the verb be identified as agreements – while elements not displaying such properties would be identified as clitics. However, we know that much literature on pro-drop treats inflections in pro-drop languages as endowed with a D-feature (see Barbosa 2019 for a recent review), and hence more akin to subject clitics than to the inflections of non-pro-drop languages – despite the fact that of course they vary according to TMA properties.

Even keeping to narrow syntax, it is evident that the discussion has many ramifications that cannot be pursued here. CD generally presents considerable restrictions (Anagnostopoulou 2017 for a survey), which are furthermore heavily parametrized, as witnessed by Romance. Romance CD is clearly governed by the animacy/definiteness scale (Dixon 1994, Kiparsky 2008), namely *participant*

> *pronoun* > *proper noun* > *definite and animate N* > *indefinite/inanimate N*. Thus, standard Spanish has a much higher cut-off point in the scale than Rioplatense Spanish as regards CD of direct objects (Jaeggli 1981, Suner 1988). At the same time, the standard definiteness/animacy hierarchy interacts with the *dative* > *accusative* hierarchy. Once fine parametrization is taken into account, even spoken Italian turns out to have CD with participant/pronominal datives (cf. Cordin 1993, Poletto and Pinzin 2014 for a survey).⁸

Because of the finely parametrized restrictions on CD just reviewed, CLLD may ultimately presents a more realistic picture of which DPs can be doubled by clitics, namely any DP. At the same time, some caution is in order as to what this latter fact implies for the referential status of clitics. Angelopoulos and Sportiche (2021) argue that in clitic constructions with *pro* associates, the referential contribution is made by *pro*. This amounts to saying that *pro* is an inherently definite empty category, as opposed to being merely a deletion site, licensed by the clitic. Adopting the deletion account, the clitic must have (definite) D properties as well as agreement properties licensing the null object. Data where the clitic resumes a true indefinite, as in (37), or a universal quantifier, as in (41), raise questions that are not necessarily connected to cliticization. Full lexical pronouns have definite denotation in isolation, but can also be bound by quantifiers, in which case their reading is that of a bound variable. It seems to me that clitics work along similar lines

The observations that precede suggests the tentative answers in (H) to the questions in (G) above. As stated in (i), I see no grounds to deny D referential content to clitics. As for (ii), I anticipated the answer at the beginning of this section. The referential status of clitics is compatible with their movement construal – but also with their construal as base generated heads, as also concluded by Baker and Kramer (2018).

- (H) i. Clitics are endowed with D and phi-features, i.e. they are pronouns, as opposed to pure agreements, construed as phi-feature bundles
- ii. The referential status of clitics is compatible with movement and with base generation accounts.

In other words, if (i) holds, we have once again no ground to tell apart movement and base generation approaches to clitics. A differentiation between the two derivations may on the other hand be introduced by order facts, which will be reviewed in the next section.

⁸ The acquisition literature is also relevant. Gavarrò et al. (2010), Guasti (2017b) point to a correlation between the presence of CD in a language and early onset of 3rd person accusative clitics (e.g. in Spanish or in Greek) – as opposed to a later onset for languages without CD or perhaps residual CD (e.g. French or Italian). See Arosio and Guasti (2025) for a revision of the nature of the correlation.

5. Clitic clusters and the question of order

5.1 *Movement theories*

So far, I have considered sentences involving a single clitic. Nevertheless, cliticization often involves two or more clitics, raising yet another issue relevant for syntactic theory, that of the relative order of clitics, understood both as dominance and as linear order. Recall that different generative frameworks entertain different hypotheses as to linear order, which is determined syntactically via the LCA algorithm and movement parameters according to Kayne (1994) and introduced by a Linearization algorithm in the PF branch of grammar according to Chomsky (2013). Either way, the questions in (I) arise. Question (i) regards dominance order in the syntax and whether the order of clitics is (at least partially) predicted by that of the corresponding phrasal constituents. Under a movement derivation we expect the order of clitics and the order of their phrasal counterparts to be the same or to mirror one another. The base generation hypothesis is weaker in this respect, especially if clitics are heads, which could be ordered by an independent functional hierarchy. These different predicted outcomes lead us to formulate question (ii), as to whether order favours movement or base generation. Finally, question (iii) concerns the role played by the Externalization (EXT) procedure in the PF branch of grammar in determining the surface linear order of clitics. This question arises of course if linear order is part of EXT (Chomsky 2013), but in different forms it has been discussed since the earliest works in generative grammar (Perlmutter 1972), since surface linear order of clitics may not correspond to underlying syntactic order.

- (I)
- i. Are clitics ordered by dominance syntactically – and is their order derived from that of the corresponding phrasal constituents?
 - ii. Does the answer to (i) favour movement or base generation derivations?
 - iii. Is linear order determined by dominance in the syntax or by Spell-Out operations?

In what follows I will discuss these questions with reference first to the movement analysis of clitics (in this section), and then to base generation analyses (in the next section).

I will proceed by considering combinations of dative and accusative clitics, and compare them with phrasal structures involving a direct and an indirect object. In Italian and in French, direct object and indirect object DPs in phrasal syntax are in a reciprocal c-command relation (Giorgi and

Longobardi 1991: 42-43, Pescarini 2014, Boneh and Nash 2012, Angelopoulos and Sportiche 2021). This is shown in (42)-(43) by the fact that a quantified DO can bind a pronoun inside the IO, as in the (a) examples, or vice versa a quantified IO can bind a pronoun inside the DO in the (b) examples.

- (42) a. La maestra rende ciascuna cartella al suo proprietario
the teacher gives back each schoolbag to its owner
b. La maestra rende la sua cartella a ciascun alunno
the teacher gives back the his schoolbag to each student
- (43) a. La maîtresse a rendu son cartable à chaque élève.
the teacher has given-back his schoolbag to every pupil
b. La maîtresse a rendu chaque cartable à son propriétaire.
the teacher gave-back every schoolbag to its owner

Now, despite the similarity of their phrasal syntax it is well-known that Italian and French have opposite orders of 3rd dative and accusative clitics. In fact, French is especially interesting in that it has both the Dat>Acc and the Acc>Dat order as in (45), depending on the Person (participant vs. non-participant) of the dative clitic.

- (44) Gianni me/glie-lo rende
Gianni me/him=it=gives back
'Gianni gives it back to me/to him'
- (45) a. Jean le lui rend
Jean it=him=gives back
'Gianni gives it back to him'
b. Jean me le rend
Jean me=it=gives back
'Gianni gives it back to me'

What is interesting is not simply the fact that the same phrasal syntax yields different clitic orders, but also the fact that the same clitic order may corresponds to different phrasal orders, as in (46)-(49) below. In phrasal syntax, selected and unselected datives (or low and high Applicatives, if preferred) have different orders with respect to accusatives in both Italian and French (Folli and Harley 2006, Boneh and Nash 2012). The unselected datives (benefactives) are higher than direct objects, as shown in (46)-(47), and therefore higher than selected datives.

- (46) a. I proprietari ridipingono il suo appartamento a ogni inquilino
the owners repaint his apartment to each tenant
- b. *I proprietari ridipingono ogni appartamento al suo inquilino
the owners repaint each apartment to its tenant
- (47) a. Marie a peint à chaque locataire sa maison.
Mary has painted to every tenant his house
- b. *Marie a peint à son locataire chaque maison.
Mary painted to its tenant every house

Now, in both Italian and French, the same order found with indirect object clitics in (44)-(45), is found with benefactive clitics in (48)-(49). Note that in French, the availability of two different Dat positions in the string would in principle allow the ordering of clitics according to thematic hierarchies. This is not the case however, since the two positions are ordered according to Participant/non-Participant status (which is irrelevant in phrasal syntax).

- (48) Gianni me lo/glielo ridipinge
Gianni me=it/him=it=repaints
'Gianni repaints it for me/him'
- (49) a. Jean le lui repeint
Jean it=him=repaints
'Gianni repaints it to his benefit'
- b. Jean me le repeint
Jean me=it=repaints
'Gianni repaints it to my benefit'

An independent indication that selected vs. unselected dative is a distinction systematically missing from clitic orders come from strings of two datives (a goal and a benefactive), which are acceptable to some extent in some languages. An example is Italian (50) where the linear order 1DAT > 2DAT is forced. The order has no implication for the thematic interpretation of 1DAT vs. 2DAT. Both of them can either be the goal or the benefactive; in other words, the sentence is ambiguous.

- (50) mi ti scrivo due righe
me=you=writes two lines

‘He writes a couple of lines to me for your benefit/to you for my benefit’

In short, the clitic string varies in ways which do not reflect variation in phrasal syntax; vice versa, order asymmetries in phrasal syntax are not preserved in the clitic string. As Manzini and Pescarini (2022) argue in some detail, this double dissociation between clitic and phrasal order can be construed as an argument against movement theories of cliticization. It is a hallmark of movement derivations that they either preserve the base order (crossing dependencies) or they mirror it (nesting dependencies). Multiple movement involving crossing dependencies preserves the base order (as in the well-known case of multiple *wh*-movement in South Slavic, Richards 2001, Bošković 2002 a.o.). Alternatively, the derived order may mirror the base order if the dependencies are nested (more rarely claimed, e.g. Preminger 2010 on multiple *wh*-questions in Hebrew). As it turns out, no relation of the sort holds between clitic sequences and sequences of arguments that they are supposedly been derived from.

Two possible avenues of explanation are open to movement accounts of cliticization, roughly syntactic and morphological in nature. Roberts (2010) provides an account of the French/Italian parameter *Acc*>*Dat* vs. *Dat*>*Acc* internal to syntax. In his terms, different movement sequences are responsible for yielding the two clitic orders in Italian and French. An empirical problem with this solution is that it captures only half of the double dissociation described above. In other words, it does not address the other half of the issue, i.e., we are not told whether the same technique deployed for dative goals would work for benefactive datives. A more general potential problem is that Roberts evidently assumes that movement parameters may be justified solely on the basis of linear order considerations. This line of explanation is typical of Kayne’s (1994) approach to linear order and its parameters, but is incompatible with other minimalist frameworks (Chomsky 2013). In other words, even assuming empirical adequacy, the approach of Roberts requires a framework of assumptions that are not generally accepted.

The other obvious way to adjust the double dissociation between phrasal order and clitic order is to have recourse to morphology. Nothing in principle prevents the syntactic derivation from yielding an order of clitics matching that of phrasal constituents, as long as the morphological component intervenes to scramble this order. Classical accounts of morphological reordering along these lines are found in particular in the Distributed Morphology (DM) framework, from the early account of Bonet (19912) in terms of templates, to the already quoted account of Matushansky (2006) in terms of *m*-merger. However, from a purely theoretical point of view, the question arises as to why the morphological component would opacify syntactic structures that are in themselves perfectly transparent – in other words, what independent properties of the Externalization procedure would

force reordering. As pointed out by Manzini and Savoia (2016: 23) “devices traditionally considered to be morphological simply disrupt the underlying regularity of syntactico-semantic structure” where on the contrary we expect them “to optimize visibility at the [Sensory-Motor] interface”. We cannot exclude that the intervention of external forces of various nature (historical or other) may force this anti-economical result.

A different, though not unconnected problem is that DM-type approaches can certainly describe (though perhaps not explain) how clitic and phrasal order may turn out to differ on a more or less accidental (externally-conditioned) basis. What they cannot predict is that the reordering would be pretty much exceptionless, at least based on movement analyses of clitics. In particular, the evidence presented above shows that order asymmetries between selected and unselected datives are systematically cancelled out in the clitic string. On the basis of purely external and accidental factors, such systematicity is difficult to explain.

In a nutshell, clitic strings and phrasal structures seem to be governed by two different principles of order – not on a parametric basis, but systematically. This is unexpected if one is derived from the other. This does not imply the impossibility of a movement theory of cliticization – but deprives it of explanatory force. We turn to the question whether base generation theories fare better in the next section.

5.2 *Base generation theories*

Under the base generation hypothesis, principles of order applying to clitics can in principle be independent of those applying to phrasal structures. If clitics are Externally Merge heads they can in principle be ordered independently of the phrasal structures they are connected to by Agree. This may also result in a reduced role for morphological reordering. However, while generative theory provides us with a standardized account of phrasal order, we still need to establish what are the principles of order that govern clitic heads.

Sportiche (1996), Angelopoulos and Sportiche (2021) argue in favour of syntactically ordered clitic structures, where syntactic order is determined essentially by the order of functional projections such as KP and CliticP hosting clitics and/or their associates. I will dwell at length on Angelopoulos and Sportiche (2021) because this allows me to pick up a thread left hanging in section 2, i.e. whether cliticization necessarily implies movement – not of the clitic, but of the associate DP. Recall that according to Angelopoulos and Sportiche a dative clitic prevents construction of a CLLDed IO in the scope of a DO. Their key example (18a), reproduced below as (51a), points to an

asymmetry between IO and DO clitics which does not necessarily characterize phrasal structures. As it turns out, no such effect is found when an accusative undergoes CLLD, as in (51b).

- (51) a. * [Aux parents de son_j meilleur étudiant]_k on leur_k a présenté chaque professeur_j
to-the parents of his best student one 3PL.DAT has introduced every professor
‘To the parents of his best student, we have introduced every professor.’
b. [La note de son_j dernier devoir]_k le professeur l_k’a rendue à chaque élève_j.
the grade of his last assignment the professor 3FS.ACC has given to every student
‘The grade on his last assignment, the professor has given to every student.’

In section 2, the data in (61a) were discussed in relation to Angelopoulos and Sportiche’s conclusion that lack of reconstruction points to movement of the associate DP of the clitic DP via an A-position, from which it cannot reconstruct. In order to explain the IO/DO asymmetry, they introduce a possible Applicative/Logophoric position distinct from the KP and Clitic positions targeted by direct object as well as indirect objects, cf. (20) above. Now, independently of cliticization we know from the grammar of English that while normally in this language DO > IO, a process of Dative Shift yields the reverse order (dominance-wise) IO > DO, cf. (52).

- (52) a. We gave every book to its author to revise
b. *We gave its author every book to revise

Note that Dative Shift in English is quite routinely analyzed in terms of an alternation between two base generated structures (Pesetsky 1995, Harley 2002, Beck and Johnson 2004). An informal rendering of this range of theories is provided in (53), using the applicative notation (Pylkkanen 2008 and much subsequent work).

- (53) a. [_{VP} give [_{PredP} every book [_{PP} to its author]]]
b. [_{AppIP} its author [_{VP} give every book]]

If we say that dative clitics trigger Dative Shift, i.e. essentially structure (53b), then we have a unified approach to the similar Romance and English data. In fact, precisely this approach is advocated by Cuervo (2003) who identifies the dative clitic (in Spanish CD) with the head of ApplP. The important observation with respect to the theory of cliticization is that since there is a large consent that Dative Shift structures are base generated, there is no need for movement of the associate DP of the clitic to

a position higher than the DO to yield IO > DO order. In other words the argument of Angelopoulos and Sportiche in favour of (obligatory) movement of the DP associate of the clitic results weakened. This is further consistent with the idea that in base generated analyses of cliticization, the relation between the clitic and its associated DP is simply Agree (at distance), cf. the conclusions of section 2.

Besides the argument in (51) based on bound variable readings, Angelopoulos and Sportiche (2021) also deploy arguments based on principle C in favour of their conclusion that all clitic associates move to agree with the clitic in a Spec-head configuration. Let us begin with IOs. Recall that examples like (19a), repeated below as (54a), do not yield a principle C violations, because *lui* does not c-command the DO and hence *Jean*. However dative cliticization creates a principle C violation, as in (54b) (reproducing (19b)), implying that the pro associate of the clitic does c-command the DO and hence *Jean*.

- (54) a. On a décrit la voisine de Jean_m qu'à lui_m
 one has described the neighbor of John only to him
 'We described John's neighbor only to him'
- b. *On lui_m a décrit la voisine de Jean_m
 one 3S.DAT has described the neighbor of John
 'We described John's neighbor to him'

The data in (54) can now be accounted for along the lines deployed above, namely that the dative clitic triggers a Dative Shift structure, where the *pro* associate of the clitic in (54b) c-command *Jean*. Angelopoulos and Sportiche add a third member of the paradigm, namely (55a), where the DO is CLLed. That removes the violation of principle C. The same result is observed in (55b) where the CLLDed DO is forced to reconstruct under the subject (because of the bound variable reading of the possessive).

- (55) a. [La voisine de Jean_m]_k Marie la_k lui_m a présenté.
 the neighbor of John, Marie 3SF.ACC 3SM.DAT has presented
 'John's neighbor, Marie introduced to him'
- b. [Les notes de [son_m fils]_k]_p chaque parent_m les_p lui_k a montré.
 the grades of his son each parent 3SF.ACC 3SM.DAT has shown
 'The grades of his son, each parent showed to him.'

In (55), then, the CLLDed DO can in principle reconstruct, for instance below the subject in (55b), but it cannot reconstruct below the IO in (54b). From these data, Angelopoulos and Sportiche (2021) conclude that there must be an intermediate position between the in situ position and the CLLD position of the DO where the latter can reconstruct and still be above the IO. Their candidate for this position is a Spec, KP position, cf. structure (20) in section 2; more precisely they assume the order $KP_{DO} > KP_{IO}$. It seems to me however that standard successive-cyclic movement of the CLLDed DP via the edge of vP may be sufficient to ensure that it reconstructs below the subject, but never below the IO – as desired.

In short, a possible syntactic account of clitic order is that clitics are functional heads and that these functional heads have their own principles of order, which do not necessarily match or mirror those of phrasal complements. Sportiche (1996) assumes that the clitic hierarchy is stipulated (cf. also Manzini and Savoia 2005, 2007). The evidence presented by Angelopoulos and Sportiche (2021) involving movement of DP associates to clitic-related functional projections, could in principle improve our understanding of the order of these clitic-related positions. In reviewing their work, however, I have expressed doubts as to whether movement of the associate is actually necessary – and indirectly also on whether all of the positions they postulate are actually motivated.

Still remaining within recent accounts, Manzini (2021) tries to motivate the conclusion that the order of clitics mimics that of verbal functional heads (v, Appl heads, Voice). The main difference is that phrasal syntax may order applicative arguments both below and above themes, yielding low and high applicatives. However each clitic in a given language can be associated with a single structural position, yielding alternations between Dat > Acc in Italian vs. Acc > 3Dat or 1/2Dat > Acc in French. A great deal of subtle Romance variation data can be compressed within this frame – which goes to show that clitic order is far from completely arbitrary. Nevertheless, the analysis has the same problem that I imputed above to movement theories, namely it lacks an explanation as to why the observed asymmetries between clitics and phrasal constituents should hold.

In general, base generation analyses on the other hand seem to me to face a general question currently open in minimalist models, concerning incorporation or amalgamation (Harizanov and Gribanova 2019, Chomsky 2019), i.e. how complex heads (e.g. V+I) come to externalize what are scattered structures in syntax (e.g. [I ...[V]]). If clitics define a functional sequence, then this sequence must undergo some form of amalgamation, in order to explain why it behaves as a single syntactic object. Since Kayne (1991) it is an established fact that clitic clusters never split, even when potentially a structure allows for different loci of clitic placement (and even for the doubling of clitic clusters), e.g. in clitic climbing/restructuring contexts – and, we may add, even in languages that allow interpolation, cf. (16) above.

In this connection, Manzini and Pescarini (2022) introduce a further formal construct into the syntactic debate on clitic order, namely Form Sequence, as proposed by Chomsky (2021). In essence, rather than assuming a hierarchy of functional heads, they assume an ordered sequence of heads, merged with vP/IP as a single syntactic object – yielding the impossibility of clitics surfacing as scattered head. However, Manzini and Pescarini offer no new insight as to the principle(s) ordering the clitic. In addition, in more recent work, Chomsky (2024) excludes the construct of Form Sequence in favor of FormSet, i.e. n-ary Merge. Following his arguments, and accepting Manzini and Pescarini’s (2022) conclusion that the clitic cluster should be merged as a single syntactic object, we would be then be faced with the radical option of a syntactically unordered set – ordered only by Externalization principles.

In conclusion, the order question – understood not as the descriptive question of stating the correct order of clitics – but in the theoretically interesting terms of deriving the relation (or lack thereof) between phrasal and head/morphological order, as in (I) above, remains essentially open. I will nevertheless state some partial conclusions in (J), before proceeding to a general summary of this chapter.

- (J)
- i. Order of clitics may be (partially) syntactic – however it is not connected by any straightforward algorithm to the order of the corresponding phrasal arguments
 - ii. The conclusion in (i) removes a potential argument for movement analyses of cliticization and indirectly favours base generation approaches
 - iii. Linear reordering of clitics in the morphology is possible but stipulated

6. Conclusions

As already remarked, this chapter on generative syntactic approaches to cliticization has kept to a very narrow path. In essence, I have focused on the two possible derivations for clitic structures, namely movement from argument position (section 1) and base generation, i.e. EM of clitics in a V/I peripheral position from there they agree with their associate argument DPs (section 2). I have highlighted how several important theoretical issues are derivation-neutral, such as the locality domain of the clitic construction (section 3) – or at least partially theory-neutral, such as the question whether clitics are pronominal in nature or mere agreements. Finally, a question that has generally been relegated to morphology, i.e. the sequencing of clitic clusters, may in fact pose syntactic problems (section 5).

Hornstein (2024: 5-6) argues that the fundamental question of the Minimalist Program (MP, Chomsky 1995 and subsequent work) is “why does [the Faculty of Language] have the properties that Generative/GB research over the last sixty years has discovered it to have?” and proceeds to argue that taken in these terms, it is a successful research programme. This chapter illustrates how the empirical picture of cliticization, while becoming considerably more detailed, has remained essentially stable in its fundamental outline. At the same time, progress is being made in what Hornstein correctly identifies as the main goal of the MP: “the program is to simplify the GB picture of FL so that the remaining principles are either cognitively/computationally general or they are bespoke but very few in number (in the best case just one!) and very simple (in a way to be determined)”.

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