

Stressed enclitics are not weak pronouns: a plea for allomorphy

Abstract: The paper compares a morphophonological and a syntactic approach to stress shift and enclisis/proclisis asymmetries. The former analysis envisages the co-occurrence of multiple allomorphs with the same featural content, which are distributed in accordance with phonological rules. The latter analysis, by contrast, is based on the hypothesis that alternations are due to the co-occurrence of items belonging to different classes. I argue that the syntactic analyses put forth so far are not superior previous morphophonological accounts. I acknowledge that the synchronic distribution of allomorphs does not result from productive phonological rules. Nonetheless, this is not *per se* a valid argument in favour of syntactic, class-based accounts, which must be advanced in compliance with Occam's razor.

Keywords: clitics, prosody, syntax, allomorphy

1. Introduction

Many languages exhibit a double series of pronouns: strong pronouns have the same distribution of DPs, while the distribution of weak/clitic pronouns is much more constrained. This often correlates with further prosodic properties, e.g. absence of stress. Pronouns are therefore organised into *classes*, which are modelled in terms of *inner* syntax: strong elements are conceived as extended phrases, while *clitics* correspond – at least in the latter stage of their derivation – to a deprived structure, possibly to a single head exhibiting an affix-like behaviour. The alternation between classes, although modelled in terms of syntactic constituency, is ultimately encoded in the lexicon: functional elements are stored in the lexicon as triplets formed by a *syntactic (sub)tree*, containing a *bundle of ϕ -features*, associated with a *phonological exponent*.¹

In particular, Cardinaletti & Starke 1999 argues that at least three classes of pronouns must be envisaged. Dèchaine & Wiltschko 2002 have reached a similar conclusion, but, building on a different set of diagnostics (predicate/argument asymmetries, binding, obviation, switch reference, etc.), they come up with a classification that cuts across Cardinaletti & Starke's, meaning that the typology is, at best, far more complicated than previously thought.

Besides classificatory issues (How many classes? Are our tests reliable?), a class-based approach poses several theoretical problems. First, the idea that classes are modelled in terms of *inner* syntax is promising but, in the end, difficult to test. The crucial point is how to disentangle properties hinging on the internal structure of pronouns from phenomena attributable to external, clausal factors. Second, almost all studies on the phenomenon build on the intuition that the structure of clitic/weak elements is a subtree corresponding to the lower structure of strong elements. However, as discussed in Poletto 2006, nothing really supports this view. Rather, the fact that clitic pronouns have case morphology seems to indicate that clitic/weak pronouns do in fact spell out outer layers of the DP structure, which strong pronouns do not lexicalise anymore.

In conclusion, the classification criteria, when confronted with an ample dataset, are not always consistent (Pescarini, *forth.*), the taxonomy – if any – is very complicated, the hypotheses that classes result from the inner syntax and that clitic/weak elements are pruned subtrees are, at best, not (completely) grounded. Generally speaking, the overall theory seems far from falsifiable and, as a result, in the current literature, terms like 'weak' or 'strong' are seldom used following the restrictive, technical definition given in works such as Cardinaletti and Starke 1999.

In what follows, I argue for a more conservative approach, in which morphophonological properties of pronominal elements are accounted for without postulating any connection with syntactic properties. Although acknowledging that the mapping of syntactic classes into morphophonological structures is a promising avenue of research, this paper aims to argue that a traditional analysis featuring allomorphs is not inferior to syntactic, class-based accounts.

¹ This work is part of the research project 'A Markedness Account of Romance Clitics'; EU MSCA project 658784-1.

The paper is organised as follows: section 2 deals with the status of clitic pronouns bearing stress; sections 3, 4, and 5 deal with proclisis/enclisis alternations in Neapolitan, Catalan, and French, respectively. Section 6 concludes.

2. Stressed enclitics

Cardinaletti and Starke 1999: §3.2.8, Cardinaletti 2015a claim that weak elements, unlike clitics, can bear their own stress and be disyllabic. Weak elements, however, are not expected to attract their host's stress. Conversely, this often happens in the case of enclitics, see (1), in particular with combinations of two or more clitics. Furthermore, stress shift may correlate with a morphological asymmetry between proclitic and enclitic forms, as in some cases the latter end up resembling strong pronouns, cf. (2).

- (1) Finir-**lù** (Viozene, Rohlf's 1966: 442)
 To.end=it
 'to end it'
- (2) a. Il **me** le donne (French)
 He to.me= it=gives
 'He gives it to me'
 b. Donne-le-**moi**!
 Give=it=to.me
 'Give it to me!'

The following table, from Ordóñez and Repetti 2006: 168; summarises the patterns in which clitics may receive stress (data from Kenstowicz 1991; Bafile 1992, 1994; Peperkamp 1996, 1997; Monachesi 1996; Loporcaro 2000; a.o.). Similar phenomena are attested in other Romance languages, such as Balearic varieties and Romanian (Martin maiden, p.c.).

(1)	imper.	dat. enclitic	acc. enclitic	two enclitics
I: <i>Stress Stability</i> (Ital, Span, Cat)	nárra	nárra-mi	nárra-la	nárra-mi-la
II: <i>Generalized Penultimate Stress Shift</i> (some Lucanian varieties)	nárra	narrá-mi	narrá-la	narra-mí-la
III: <i>Two-Clitic Penultimate Stress Shift</i> (some S. Ital. varieties, such as the one spoken in Naples)	nárra	nárra-mi	nárra-la	narra-mí-la
IV: <i>Mixed Penultimate Stress Shift</i> (some S. Ital. varieties, such as the one of Calvello)	nárra	nárra-mi narrá-mi	nárra-la narrá-la	narra-mí-la
V: <i>Final Stress Shift</i> (some varieties of Sardinian, Gascon)	nárra	narra-mí	narra-lá	narra-mi-lá

Table 1, from Ordóñez and Repetti 2006: 168

A brief remark is in order concerning present-day Neapolitan (type III), which, according to Ledgeway 2009:34-35, is more akin to southern dialects like Calvello (type IV), where stress shift with a single enclitic is mandatory when the host is proparoxytone, optional otherwise (more on this in fn. 3):

- (3) a. fràveca + **la** → fravəcàllə (Nap.)
 make.IMP it.F
 ‘make it’
 b. àssə + **mə** → àssəmə / assàmmə (Nap.)
 let.IMP me
 ‘let me’

Given the above data, two kinds of explanation can be put forth: one in which clitics affect the prosodic hierarchy, thus triggering stress-shift (Peperkamp 1996, 1997; Loporcaro 2000); alternatively, one may argue that the enclitics in (1), (2), and Table 1 are in fact weak elements bearing their own stress (Laenzlinger 1993, 1994; Ordóñez and Repetti 2006, 2014; Repetti 2016; Cardinaletti 2015a, 2015b).

Under the former approach, Loporcaro 2000 argued convincingly that Romance clitic pronouns, either proclitic or enclitic, can be regarded as syllables sister to a Prosodic Word and dominated by a recursive Prosodic Word, cf. (4) (see Selkirk 1995 for alternative configurations). Stress shift therefore result from a postlexical reassignment of stress.

- (4) (clitic (host)_{PW})_{PW} affixal clitic

A phonological account like (4) has two main advantages. First, it can account straightforwardly for cases in which the stress is dislodged, but does not fall on the clitic. This means that the pronoun does not carry stress *per se*, but its presence triggers prosodic restructuring.² This is particularly true for cases in which stress shift is conditioned by the proparoxytone/paroxytone stress pattern of the inner word, as in (3).

Second, a phonological analysis accounts for the fact that clitic sequences are more readily stressed than single enclitics, since combinations of two or more clitics form a new foot, see (5):

- (5) ((host)_{PW} (clitic clitic)_{Fi})_{PW}

Conversely, the hypothesis that stressed enclitics are weak pronouns opens the door to a possible account of Type V languages, which are the most puzzling to be accounted for under a purely phonological account. In fact, in dialects spoken at the Ligurian/France border such as Viozene in (6) – but the same holds for Mallorcan Catalan – the stress always falls on the rightmost clitic (Rohlf's 1966: 442) although in these dialects the stress does not necessarily fall on last syllable. This means that the above pattern cannot be easily derived from any language-specific constraint on stress assignment.

- (6) Finir-lù ‘to end it’ (Viozene, Lig.)
 saver-lù ‘to know it’
 portama-rù ‘let us take it’
 vindirù ‘sell it’
 servirsì ‘to help oneself’

This and other facts led Ordóñez and Repetti 2006, 2014 to argue that stressed enclitics are in fact *weak pronouns* (see also Laenzlinger 1993, 1994 on French). The proposal is not straightforward as the above postverbal pronouns do not carry their own stress, but rather attract their hosts’ stress and,

² Bafille (1992, 1994) pointed out that, both the root and the penultimate clitic bear primary stress as the *o* in *pòrtə* is open (and open mid vowels in Neapolitan are allowed only in syllables with primary stress) and the inner enclitic is subject to metaphony, which is typical of tonic vowels.

However, as weak pronouns are more complex than clitics (Cardinaletti & Starke 1999: 178), the hypothesis that stressed enclitics are weak pronouns provides a promising explanation for some proclisis/enclisis asymmetries (more on this below). As weak pronouns are placed in a dedicated position of the clause that does not coincide with the one(s) of clitics (Cardinaletti 1991), Ordóñez and Repetti can account for the fact that stress shift always occur with enclitics, while proclitics are prosodically inert.

$$\{\varphi \text{ features}\} \leftrightarrow \begin{cases} \text{Allomorph 1 / context } \alpha \\ \text{Allomorph 2 / context } \beta \\ \text{Allomorph 3 / context } \gamma \end{cases}$$

3. Neapolitan

(7) t o 'portə (Neapolitan)
you= it= I.bring
'I'll bring it to you'

- ⁴ The data in (7) and (8) are just part of the puzzle. An anonymous reviewer points out that “[t]he phonological approach predicts that in languages like Neapolitan, a form such as /rámmilə/ with antepenultimate stress should be grammatical (but instead is ungrammatical), and a form such as /frávəka-lə/ with pre-antepenultimate stress should be ungrammatical (but instead is grammatical). (NB. Both /frávəka-lə/ and /fravəká-llə/ are attested [...])” On the latter remark, see the extensive discussion in Ledgeway 2009:34–35. Regarding */rámmilə/, Bafille 1994 argues that they result from a ‘paradigmatic extension of the stress pattern typical of sequences containing two clitics’ (the translation is mine).

‘bring her/it.f/them.f for you’

The fact that reflexes of ILLE and INDE attract stress more readily than first or second person clitics is consistent with the etymology. However, why are disyllabic outcomes of Latin pronouns preserved in enclisis? Bafile (1994: 16) argues that disyllabic exponents such as [‘illə] are retained in the functional lexicon because, once combined with another clitic form, they give rise to a paroxytone sequence. As for the contrast between [lə] and [o], it originated from a generalised process of centralisation of final vowels, therefore the former element is found enclitically, i.e. when it occurs at the right edge of a prosodic domain. Hence, even if the prosodic processes that led to the allomorphy are not productive anymore, the synchronic distribution of allomorphs still reflects the original conditions. The list of allomorphs and relevant contexts are illustrated in (9); the order, as customary, goes from the form with the most restrictive distribution (e.g. [‘illə]) to the default form, in compliance with the so-called Elsewhere Principle (or Panini’s Principle).

$$(9) \quad [\text{Pers: 3; Num: sg; Gen: m}] \leftrightarrow \begin{cases} [\text{‘illə}] & / \text{clitic } _)_{\text{PrW}} \\ [lə] & / _)_{\text{PrW}} \\ [o] & \end{cases}$$

Ordóñez and Repetti 2014 argue for an alternative analysis in which Neapolitan clitics fall into three classes: besides ‘morphologically complex’ (*lə*) and ‘morphologically simple’ clitics (*‘o*), Neapolitan exhibits stressed, disyllabic weak pronouns (*illə*):

- (10) weak: *illə*
 complex clitic: *lə*
 simple clitic: *‘o*

In Cardinaletti & Starke’s 1999, Cardinaletti’s 2008 formulation, complex/simple clitics and weak pronouns differ with respect to their syntactic make up and, consequently, in terms of their featural content. According to Cardinaletti & Starke 1999, strong pronouns feature an outer layer C, which allows the pronoun to be coordinated, modified, contrasted, etc. Clitics differ from weak elements in lacking a further layer (namely, Σ), whose absence correlates with syntactic and morphophonological properties, e.g. doubling, prosodic deficiency, etc. One can extend the same approach to the distinction between complex and simple clitics, which lack the *l* formative “marking definiteness” (Ordóñez and Repetti 2014: 176). For the sake of clarity, let us assume the following representation of the four classes introduced so far (I am slightly departing here from Ordóñez and Repetti’s own analysis):

- (11) a. Strong b. Weak c. Complex Clitic d. Simple Clitic
 [C [Σ [D [Φ]]]] [Σ [D [Φ]]] [D [Φ]] [Φ]

Hence, a tentative representation of Neapolitan ‘clitics’ is as follows:

- (12) [Σ [D [Φ]]] ↔ *illə*
 [D [Φ]] ↔ *lə*
 [Φ] ↔ *‘o*

The elements in (12) are eventually attracted by different kinds of probes located in the functional spine of the clause. Crucially, weak elements are attracted to functional projections that are located below the probes attracting clitics, yielding the order *imperative clitic weak*. In Ordóñez and Repetti’s 2014 analysis, T and C probe clitics, while v is a probe for weak pronouns. For imperatives, they assume v-to-C movement and cliticisation in C. Furthermore, to account for Neapolitan they assume

a language-specific restriction constraining the number of clitics occurring in C: if a clitic is incorporated to a moved-to-C verb, then the other pronoun must be expressed by a weak element in v (“When C is not a possible probe for clitics in a given language, then v becomes a possible probe and triggers attraction of weak pronouns.” Ordóñez and Repetti 2014: 190). The derivation is as follows:

- (13) a. [_C *ra=mm* [_v *=illə*]]
 b. * [_C *ra=m=lə* [_v ...]]
 Give=to.me=it

The constraint against the co-occurrence of two clitics sounds rather ad hoc. Moreover, given (13), one may wonder about the position of aspectual adverbs corresponding to English *already*, *just*, *often*, etc. These adverbs occur at the v/T boundary and, in Italian, some of them precede the weak pronoun *loro*, cf (14) (Cardinaletti 1991). Under the analysis in (13)a, one might expect certain aspectual adverbs such as *mai* (‘never’) to occur between the clitic and weak pronouns, but, to the best of my knowledge, the prediction is not borne out

- (14) Non ho dato mai loro un libro.
 not I.have given ever to.them a book
 ‘I never gave them a book.’

To conclude, the synchronic distribution of Neapolitan forms follows from phonological rules that are not productive anymore. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily mean that the distribution of present-day allomorphs is conditioned by syntactic factors. In particular, the above data do not support the claim that allomorphs belong to different classes.

4. Catalan

To bring further support to a class-based analysis of allomorphs, Ordóñez and Repetti 2014 focus on Catalan masculine accusative clitics: *el* and *lo*. The former contains an epenthetic vowel and occurs in proclisis, while the latter features a masculine singular ending and occurs in enclisis.

- (15) a. El/*lo vol comprar
 cl wants to buy
 b. Vol comprar-lo/*el
 wants to buy-cl

Again, Ordóñez and Repetti 2014 claim that “this restriction is not due to a phonological restriction [...] in fact, this form [*el*] is required with infinitives ending in *-re*.”

- (16) Podries veure’l/*lo
 you could see it

Then, they claim that the *el/lo* alternation depends on the probing features occurring with tensed and untensed verbs. With the former, clitics are attracted by a probe endowed with a definite feature, but with no gender/number specification (this is the reason why only the simple clitic *el* is attracted). Conversely, with infinitives “ending in *-re*”, the probe has a richer set of feature attracting the complex form *lo* (but why should verbs ending in *-re* exhibit a peculiar syntactic behaviour?).

Alternatively, I argue that the distribution of the above outcomes was phonologically regular as it ultimately follows from the so-called Gröber Law (after Gröber 1877). A similar alternation occurs

in Alguer Catalan (Loporaro 1997) or occurred in several northern Italo-Romance vernaculars (Gröber 1877; Vanelli 1992/1998: 169-214).

Medieval Romance vernaculars featured a rule of apocope, by which word-final *-o/-e* are dropped after a single sonorant⁵. Apocope also targets the *-o* of the clitic element *lo* (< ILLUM), yielding the form *l* in preconsonantal position (while in prevocalic position the allomorph *l* resulted from elision). Later on, the apocopated *l* was resyllabified by means of a prosthetic vowel *e* – yielding *el* – in proclisis and before consonants. Hence, the diachronic evolution is as follows: **(il)lo > l(o) > el / _C*.

The *l(o)/el* alternation was eventually morphologised once the conditions ruling apocope and prosthesis ceased to exist. However, the conditions on the distribution of the various allomorphs in present-day languages still reflect the conditions under which apocope was triggered or blocked. Hence, I am not claiming that (synchronic) phonology is sufficient to account for the distribution of allomorphs; rather, I am suggesting that the synchronic distribution of allomorphs results from phonological conditions even if, synchronically, they do not hold anymore.

With this in mind, let us address the case of sequences formed by the enclitic *lo* and an infinitive. In early Romance, both elements – namely, the clitic and the preceding verb – may be subject to apocope. Therefore, a sequence formed by an infinitive, e.g. *fare* ‘to make’ and *lo* ‘it/him,’ could display two possible patterns of apocope: apocope of the infinitive or apocope of the clitic, cf (17).

As a matter of fact, the former pattern is more likely attested because apocope targets the verb first (e.g. *fare* → *far*) and then apocope cannot target the prosodic constituent (verb+clitic)_{PrW} otherwise the resulting output would be syllabically illicit, e.g. **farl*. This in turn explains why the non-apocopated form *lo* in languages such as central Catalan occurs only in enclisis after apocopated verbal forms.

- (17) a. *far(e)* *lo*
 b. *fare* *l(o)*
 do.INF =it/him.ACC
 ‘to do it/him’

Hence, apocope can target the enclitic pronoun if and only if the infinitive has not been apocopated, as in (17)b. In central Catalan, in fact, the clitic that is obligatorily apocopated after infinitives “ending with *-re*”:

- (18) *Podries veure’l/*lo*
 you could see it

To conclude, the enclitic *lo* resists apocope after an apocopated infinitive, as in (17)a, and undergoes apocope after non-apocopated infinitives. In proclisis (and the same holds for the definite article), apocope is mandatory and the *l* formative is eventually syllabified by means of a prosthetic vowel, e.g. *el*. This state of affairs resulted in stage in which apocope was productive. Nowadays, the distribution of *lo*, *el*, *l* allomorphs follows the same conditions although apocope is not active anymore. Then, given a sound historical explanation, I cannot see how the synchronic analysis would be improved by postulating the co-occurrence of different classes of elements, corresponding to different layers of structures, and probed by different syntactic heads.

5. French

⁵ It is worth noting that apocope cannot be considered a merely phonological process since in many cases it is sensitive to the morpho-syntactic nature of the final vowel: in early Italian, for instance, if *-e* is a feminine plural ending, it never undergoes apocope, while apocope can take place if *-e* derives from the thematic vowel of the Latin 3rd declension. As the rule can discriminate between different kinds of inflectional endings, it means that the rule of apocope, even in Early Italo-romance, has a morpho-phonological nature. More on this in Pescarini 2013.

In many languages, enclitic pronouns tend to be ‘heavier’ than proclitics even in absence of stress shift phenomena (see also Renzi and Vanelli 1983 on subject clitics). Several asymmetries can be accounted for under trivial phonological accounts, but other alternations are more puzzling. For instance, in modern French first and second person enclitics are expressed by an exponent identical to that of strong forms:

- (19) a. Il **me le** donne
 He to.me it gives
 ‘He gives it to me’
 b. Donne-**le-moi**!
 Give-it-to.me
 ‘Give it to me!’

Laenzlinger (1993), Kayne (2003), Cardinaletti (2008) argue that proclitics are monomorphemic, while enclitics such as *moi* have a bipartite structure (e.g. *m-oi*) although, phonologically speaking, both forms are regular outcomes of the same monomorphemic Latin form *ME* in stressed and unstressed position respectively. Laenzlinger (1993), in particular, argues that the *me/moi* alternation cannot depend on the assignment of stress to the word-final syllable (Foulet 1924). In fact, the same alternation is observed in non-standard varieties displaying the opposite order of clitics, e.g., *donne=moi=le*.

Moreover, while *me/te* cannot occur enclitically, the third person clitic *le* is free to follow imperatives, see (20). According to Laenzlinger, this means that no phonological constraint requires enclitics to bear stress.

- (20) Invite-le/*me
 ‘invite him/*me’

Laenzlinger (1993) put forth the hypothesis that enclitics like *moi* are in fact weak pronouns, while Ordóñez and Repetti 2014 argue that forms like *moi/toi* are complex clitics (hence, bimorphemic elements, but not XPs) and that the elements probing clitics in French imperatives cannot attract simple clitics.

As in the case of Neapolitan and Catalan, however, the nature of the ban remains rather obscure and neither syntactic classification is supported by independent evidence. However, unlike the above data from Neapolitan and Catalan, the French situation is far more complicated as, to the best of my knowledge, no historical explanation can account for the current distribution of allomorphs.

6. Conclusions

In the previous sections I have compared a traditional/morphophonological analysis with an alternative syntactic approach to stress shift and enclisis/proclisis asymmetries. The former analysis envisages the co-occurrence of multiple allomorphs (having the same featural content) distributed in accordance with phonological rules. The latter analysis, by contrast, is based on the hypothesis that alternations are due to the co-occurrence of items belonging to different classes (thus, having different featural contents), while the nature and location of probes (subject to crosslinguistic variation) rule the distribution of clitic/weak elements.

First of all, it is worth noting that the alternation between weak, complex clitics, and simple clitics never gives rise to any peculiar semantic/pragmatic reading. Hence, although we end up postulating a different array of interpretable features for each allomorph, no relevant semantic import has been detected. Moreover, the nature and position of the probes giving rise to linguistic variation cannot be

ascertained by means of independent evidence. In conclusion, the syntactic analyses put forth so far does not seem to be more elegant or solve more puzzles than previous phonological accounts as the number of variables at play is very high and few of them can be controlled in order to verify or falsify the hypothesis.

On the contrary, a more traditional model can cope with the data once we abandon the (trivial) idea that synchronically active phonological rules can account for all the puzzles. In fact, many processes have been eventually morphologised, yielding alternations between lexical formatives, e.g. *le/il*, *li/lui*, *me/moi*, *el/lo* etc. that are synchronically opaque.

This, however, is not *per se* an argument in favour of syntactic, class-based accounts, which must be advanced in compliance with Occam's razor. I therefore do not exclude that the distribution of allomorphic variants is subject to syntactic factors, but I suggest that syntactic analyses should account for puzzling distributions, not for patterns that, from a historical point of view, are regular.

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