From pronoun to agreement: diachrony and typology of pronominal clitics

Michael Cysouw
MPI-EVA Linguistics
‘Agreement arises via topic-shifting constructions in which the topicalised NP is coreferential to one argument of the verb. ... When a language reanalysed the topic constituent as the normal subject or object of the neutral, non-topicalised sentence pattern, it per-force also has reanalyzed subject-topic agreement as subject agreement and object-topic agreement as object agreement.’ (Givón 1976: 151)
Grammaticalization à la Givón

‘Agreement arises via topic-shifting constructions in which the topicalised NP is coreferential to one argument of the verb. ... When a language reanalysed the topic constituent as the normal subject or object of the neutral, non-topicalised sentence pattern, it per-force also has reanalyzed subject-topic agreement as subject agreement and object-topic agreement as object agreement.’ (Givón 1976: 151)
“I think you should be more explicit here in step two.”

from What’s so Funny about Science? by Sidney Harris (1977)
Grammaticalization of person markers
(not necessarily in this order)

• Rise in frequency of use
• Phonological reduction
• Loss of morphological independence
• Become associated with a lexical class
• Become obligatory with this lexical class
Questions

• How do person markers find their way to the lexical predicate/verb?

• How do they become obligatory part of the morphology of a lexical class of verbs?

Note the use of ‘how’: I am basically interested what diachronic steps were taken for a particular situation to occur.
Approach

- Investigate the intermediate stage ‘clitics’
- Typological survey of person clitics
- Reconstruction of diachrony in selected cases

- Romance
- (South) Slavic
- Iranian
- Munda (Austro-Asiatic)
- Sulawesi (Austronesian)
- Ngumpin (Pama-Nyungan)
- Salish
- Uto-Aztecan
The intermediate stage: clitics

- No consensus about the definition of clitics
- Something in between a free word and an affix
- My interests:
  - **floating clitics:** no unitary lexical class as host for person markers (phrasal clitics?)
  - **non-obligatory affixes:** person markers on predicate, but overt marking depends on contextual factors
Northern Talyshi (Iranian, Indo-European)
Konjo (South Sulawesi, Austronesian)
Observation A:

Loss of independence precedes fixed position on the verb

• Pronouns cliticize in various positions and on various hosts

• Hardly evidence for cliticization directly on the verb
Lotuho (Southern Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan)
Word order and person affixes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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(Siewierska 2004: 165)
### Word order and person affixes

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(Siewierska 2004: 165)
Word order and person affixes

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<th>V-p O</th>
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Order of Agent and Patient affixes

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(Siewierska 2004: 167)
Order of Agent and Patient affixes

Preferred order in line with relevance (Bybee 1985)

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(Siewierska 2004: 167)
### Order of Agent and Patient affixes

Diachronically older forms are closer to stems (Bybee 1991)

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(Siewierska 2004: 167)
Summary of person affixation

• There are typological preferences attested as for the placement of person affixes

• However: all possible orders are well attested

• Every explanation for ordering-preferences gets at least some support (syntactic, semantic, diachronic, processing, etc.)

• Morphology does not represent yesterday’s word-order
Observation B:

Person clitics show ‘wanderlust’

• Cross-linguistically: large variation in the kinds of hosts

• Diachronically: different kinds of host in closely related languages

• Information structure seems to play a role: clitics are often attached to ‘emphatic’ constituents
Cypriot Greek (Greek, Indo-European)
Portuguese (Romance, Indo-European)
Ngumpin family (Pama-Nyungan)
Cliticization away from verb

Negation, WH-pronouns

Focused NPs

Clause linkers, Adverbs of time/place

Indefinite/quantified NPs

... (?)

Irrealis, Future

Imperative/hortative

Cliticization on the verb
Observation C:

Where have all the proclitics gone?

- Enclitic person markers are widespread
- In contrast: proclitic person markers appear to be exceedingly rare
- More precise: proclitics always (?) are ‘non-obligatory affixes’ (cf. Konjo)
Suffixing preference for person affixes?

- 426 prefixed (26%) vs. 1236 suffixed (74%) grams (Bybee et al. 1990: 4)
- 240 prefixed (40%) vs. 354 suffixed (60%) person grams (Bybee et al. 1990: 9, 13, 15)
- 89 prefixal (53%) vs. 80 suffixal (47%) person paradigms (Cysouw 2003: 316)
## Suffixing Preference for Person Affixes?

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<tr>
<th>No. of Person Distinctions</th>
<th>2-3</th>
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7-8</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prefixal</strong></td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Suffixal</strong></td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% Prefixal</strong></td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>48%</td>
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**Suffixing preference for person affixes?**

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Origin of prefixes

- Reanalysis: **X-clitic Verb → X clitic-Verb**

- Cases with comparative evidence available:
  - Salish (Kroeber 1999: 16)
  - Uto-Aztecan (Steele 1977, 1995)
  - Munda (Cysouw 2004 Ms.)
  - Iranian
  - Sulawesi
Lari (Iranian, Indo-European)
Padoe (Bungku-Tolaki, Austronesian)
From pronouns to agreement

- Pronouns can grammaticalize into verb agreement

- However: this development is generally not straightforward

- Pronouns first cliticize, then float, and eventually attach to the verb
The End