

The best position for object clitics in the history of Romance languages

The position of object clitics in Romance languages shows a great deal of diachronic and diatopic variation: whereas nowadays in most Romance languages clitics occur obligatorily in preverbal position (w.r.t. the finite verb), the postverbal position existed in the medieval period in all languages (Ramsden 1962, Fischer 2002). Today, postposition to the finite verb (in non-imperative sentences) is encountered only in North-Western Ibero-Romance languages (e.g. European Portuguese (EP) – (1a/b)), Spanish, however, patterns like the other Romance languages (2a/b):

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|------|-----|-----------|--------------|------------|
| (1a) | EP | o cão | <u>viu</u> | me |
| | | the dog | saw | -me |
| (1b) | EP | *o cão | me | <u>viu</u> |
| (2a) | Sp. | *el perro | <u>viome</u> | |
| (2b) | Sp. | el perro | me | <u>vio</u> |
| | | the dog | me | saw |

In all medieval Romance varieties postposition was obligatory in verb-first sentences (the famous Tobler-Mussafia Law) but was also a possible solution in unmarked main clauses without the verb in the first position (e.g. Old Portuguese (3a/b); Martins 1994a, b):

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|------|--------|------|-----------------|-----------------|
| (3a) | O.Ptg. | elle | lho | <u>outorgou</u> |
| | | he | him-it | granted |
| (3b) | O.Ptg. | elle | <u>outorgou</u> | lho |
| | | he | granted | him-it |

These word order doublets have been eliminated, giving preference in most languages to the preverbal position. I will distinguish four main types of Romance languages w.r.t. clitic placement (postverbal in V1 sentences, postverbal in unmarked main clauses, or generalized preverbal position) and interpolation, i.e. the separation of clitic and verb. Taking the resulting feature matrix as a starting point, I propose different base-generation positions of clitics: in Old Romance and in Modern European Portuguese, clitics are base-generated in C° and incorporated enclitically into every element in this position, e.g. a complementizer or the finite verb. The interpolation phenomenon clearly indicates the possibility of clitic attachment to another element than the finite verb. In Modern Romance languages (except EP), the clitic is base-generated in I° and attached proclitically to its only possible host, the finite verb.

Based on these assumptions, I formulate five OT constraints relevant for clitic placement and possible separation from the verb: the alignment constraints C°-ENCL (enclisis in C°) and PROCL-I° (proclisis in I°) position the clitic to the right of the host in C° and to the left of the verb in I°. V-ADJ (verb adjacency) requests the clitic to be adjacent to the verb. DIR-HOST (direct host) demands a host to occur in the same phrase where the clitic is realized, thus accounting for forced movement of the finite verb in front of the clitic in V1 sentences. Here the clitic otherwise would occur sentence-initially and without a host in the CP. Finally, the constraint STAY punishes movement. With these constraints, the syntax of clitic placement is shown for different constructions: unmarked main clauses, V1 sentences, and interpolation in subordinates.

My analysis examines the competing grammars of the word order doublets in the medieval varieties and offers a model to explain the grammatical change, in the course of which one possibility is eventually lost, but which leads to two different outcomes: European Portuguese and Spanish.