

TYPES OF SYNCRETISM IN THE CLITIC SYSTEMS OF ROMANCE

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Abstract

In this paper I will discuss the hypothesis according to which every clitic system bears an elsewhere item, i.e., a non-specific clitic that can be inserted when the insertion of more specific items is blocked by independent constraints.

In my opinion the insertion of an elsewhere clitic accounts for different phenomena such as synthetic clusters (Bonet 1991, Harris 1994, Pescarini to appear) and absolute syncretisms (Calabrese 1994, Loporcaro 1995). I will support this claim on the basis of the data displayed by some Italian dialects.

0. Introduction

In this paper I present part of a wider research (Pescarini 2005, to appear) dealing with *synthetic clusters*, i.e. sequences of clitics displaying a mismatch between their morphological form and their syntactic functions (Bonet 1991, 1995; Harris 1994, 1997). For example in Italian (1) a cluster formed by a reflexive *si* and an impersonal *si* is not realized with a regular *si si* sequence, but as *ci si*, where an unexpected clitic *ci* appears instead of the reflexive one.

- (1) *Nel medioevo si si lavava raramente.
 √Nel medioevo ci si lavava raramente.
 in the Middle Ages REFL IMP washed rarely
 ‘In the Middle Ages they washed rarely’

In section 1 I will sketch briefly the analysis of synthetic clusters I have already presented and discussed in Pescarini (to appear). According to the basic claim of my analysis, the clitic inserted in the synthetic clusters is a non-specific exponent that is inserted by default when specific items are blocked by independent constraints.

In sections 2-4 I will explore a consequence of this hypothesis on the basis of the data shown by some Italian varieties. The prediction I will test is that the morpheme appearing in synthetic clusters is a syncretic exponent too.

1. Synthetic clusters

In order to account for synthetic clusters, we need to answer two distinct questions:

accounting for the Romance domain would be too wide and heterogeneous. Therefore, I have suggested an alternative explanation (Pescarini, to appear) based on a single and universal principle such as the Subset Principle, following Halle & Marantz (1993). This principle states that

- (4) an item is inserted in a syntactic node when:
 - a. the features representing the item are a subset of the features characterizing the node;
 - b. it is the most specific item among the underspecified ones.

Thus the process of insertion selects a finite number of under-specified candidates and then—in accordance with the second part of the Subset Principle—the most specific item wins.

The Subset principle allows a simple explanation for synthetic clusters: when OCP blocks the insertion of the optimal candidate, a less specific one is automatically inserted. My hypothesis is even stronger: I suggest that we normally insert a clitic without specifications, i.e. a clitic that is characterized by no morpho-syntactic feature. Indeed—in accordance with the Subset Principle—such a clitic is always under-specified, therefore it can be inserted by default in all the contexts where the insertion of more specific exponents is blocked. In accordance with this property, these items are labelled *elsewhere morphemes* (hereafter only *elsewhere*) and their main characteristic is their wide and complex distribution.

For instance, in the paradigm (5) there is no way to capture the distribution of *s* with a single feature matrix, but, if *-s* has no specification, it will be automatically inserted everywhere zero is too specific and the paradigm (5) will be thus economically captured.

(5)

Old French	sg.	pl.
nom.	-s	-s
obl.	-∅	-s

Inventory: -∅ ↔ sg. obl.
 -s ↔ elsewhere

In my opinion, the same machinery can account for synthetic clusters too: when a clitic is blocked by OCP, the elsewhere clitic is automatically inserted (6).

- (6) *clitic + clitic
 ↓
 elsewhere

This hypothesis can be supported by an independent piece of evidence. Indeed, on the basis of the Subset Principle, a diagnostic test can be formulated detecting the elsewhere. I have claimed that an elsewhere can replace other clitics because it lacks a specification, but how can we repair an OCP violation due to the co-occurrence of two elsewhere clitics?

If we replaced an elsewhere with another clitic, we would violate the Subset Principle since we would insert an overspecified clitic as shown in (7).

- (7) *~~elsewhere~~ + elsewhere
 ↓
 *clitic

Therefore, the only available repair is the deletion of an elsewhere (8).

- (8) *~~elsewhere~~ + elsewhere
 ↓
 *clitic

Summing up, this corollary of the Subset Principle entails that the *elsewhere* clitic is the clitic that cannot be replaced, but just deleted when it violates OCP.

Italian is consistent with this test: indeed, *si* is substituted by *ci* when it co-occurs with another *si*—as in (1)— but when two *ci* co-occur, one of them has to be deleted as shown in (9). (9) shows that a locative *ci* can occur with a 1st person singular pronoun *mi*, while it cannot with a 1st person plural *ci*.

- (9) A Roma mi ci porta Mario.
 A Roma ci (*ci) porta Mario.
 ‘Mario brings me/us to Rome’.

In conclusion, there is a perfect correlation between the pattern displayed in (1) and the test in (9).

2. Prediction

In this section I will explore another independent piece of evidence supporting the main hypothesis just discussed. According to their label, the evident characteristic of the elsewhere morphemes is their distribution: for instance, in the Old French paradigm in (5), the elsewhere exponent is indeed the best candidate for syncretism.

Indeed, we can consider synthetic clusters as cases of contextual syncretism since the same clitic covers different syntactic functions only in certain syntactic contexts. For instance, in Italian the *ci* exponent acquires the function of reflexive, only in the specific context described in (1).

It seems to me that the same process is responsible for absolute syncretism too, i.e. in a given dialect the same clitic can cover syntactic functions that in another dialect are covered by different exponents. For instance in the Brindisino dialect—spoken in the South-East of Italy—the *nci* exponent is used as a 1st person plural, 3rd person dative, locative and partitive clitic, while in the proto-Romance paradigm (and in many contemporary dialects) these functions are expressed by different exponents. Compare the paradigm in (10) and (11), both from Calabrese (1994).

(10)

Proto-Romance	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.					*(i)llu/a	*(i)llus/as
Indir obj.	*me/i	*nos	*te/i	*vos	*(i)lli	*(i)llis
Reflexive	*se					
Partitive	*(i)nde					
Locative	*hic / *(ec)ce+hic / *(i)nc+[i] / *(i)bi					

(11)

Brindisi	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.					lu/la	li/le
Indir obj.	me	nci	te	bbu	nci	
Reflexive	si					
Partitive	nci					
Locative	nci					

According to the Subset Principle, we can account for the distribution of syncretic exponents— like the Brindisino *nci*— assuming that they are elsewhere. On the basis of the discussion above I can indeed sketch the hypothesis that during the evolution from the proto-Romance system to the contemporary Brindisino one, some constraints (cf. Calabrese 1994) blocked the insertion of some etymological forms (usually 1st person plural and 3rd person dative) while the elsewhere clitic—that in Brindisino derives from the Latin locative particle **ince*— automatically replaced the blocked clitics giving rise to the paradigms of the Brindisi type.

Therefore, I am claiming that, if the Subset Principle is correct, there must be a deep relation between the processes responsible for contextual syncretisms (namely synthetic clusters) and those responsible for absolute syncretism: both processes are indeed based on the insertion of an elsewhere morpheme when external and independent reasons block the insertion of the appropriate one.

This correlation entails that the exponent involved in synthetic clusters is a syncretic marker too, in other words I predict that *in each variety there is a single clitic involved in both absolute and contextual syncretisms, namely synthetic clusters*. Italian seems to verify this

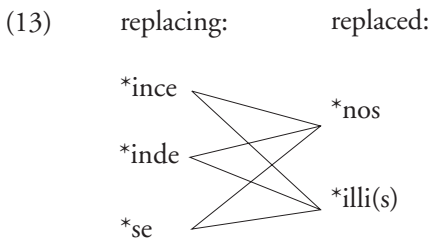
prediction because *ci* is the clitic appearing in synthetic clusters (1), *ci* is deleted when it violates OCP (9) and, finally, *ci* is the syncretic exponent of the Italian paradigm in (12).

(12)

Italian	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.	mi	ci	ti	vi	lo/la	li/le
Indir obj.					gli/le	gli
Reflexive					si	
Partitive	ne					
Locative	ci					

3. Absolute syncretism

Before testing this prediction on the basis of the data I have collected, a general point has to be made on the patterns of absolute syncretism displayed by Italian dialects. Almost all the cases of absolute syncretism can be captured according to a simple scheme like the one in (13) that has to be read in parallel to the Proto-Romance paradigm in (10).



**Nos* and **illi* (on the right in the scheme) are the target of the syncretism, i.e. the exponents that are usually blocked and replaced, while the exponents on the left are the replacing items, i.e. the potential elsewhere.

We can capture the different patterns of substitution displayed by Italian dialects assuming that **ince*, **inde* and **se* have replaced one or two targets (**nos* and **illi*) giving rise to different and heterogeneous patterns like those in (14), (15) and (16).

(14)

Bologna	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.	<i>m'</i>	<i>s'</i>	<i>t'</i>	<i>v'</i>	<i>al / la</i>	<i>i</i>
Indir obj.					<i>i</i>	
Reflexive					<i>s'</i>	
Partitive	<i>n', in'</i>					
Locative	<i>i</i>					

(15)

Palermo	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.	mi	ni	ti	vi	u/a	i/(le?)
Indir obj.					ci	
Reflexive					si	
Partitive	ni					
Locative	ci					

(16)

Torino	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.	me	ne	te	ve	lu/la	je
Indir. obj.					je	
Reflexive		se			se	
Partitive	ne					
Locative	je					

4. Data

In this section I will test the prediction formulated in section 2 regarding the correlation between absolute and contextual syncretisms. For each variety I will verify:

- a. which clitic appears in the opaque clusters;
- b. which clitic is deleted when it violates OCP;
- c. which clitic is a syncretic exponent.

If these three conditions are satisfied by a single clitic, it will be an important piece of evidence in favour of the main hypothesis discussed in section 1, i.e. the presence of an elsewhere morpheme in the clitic system of each variety.

The first dialects I will analyse are characterized by a single syncretic exponent. For example, the paradigm of the dialect spoken in Sarroch (province of Cagliari, Sardinia) shows a syncretic clitic deriving from the Latin reflexive pronoun **se*. Indeed, in the Sarroch dialect *si* is used as 3rd person reflexive and 1st and 2nd person plural.

(17) Sarroch

	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.	mi	si	ti	si	ddu/dda	Ddus/ddas
Indir. obj.					ddi	
Reflexive					si	
Partitive	ndi					
Locative	(n)ci					

This pattern of absolute syncretism correlates with the patterns of contextual syncretism shown in (18).

- (18) **ddi* + *ddu* → *si ddu* (**ddi ddu*)
 3.dat 3.acc
 ddi* + *ndi* → *si ndi* (ddi ndi*)
 3.dat part.

In the variety of Sarroch the regular form of these clusters would be *ddi ddu* and *ddi ndi*, but —like in Spanish— the dative clitic is replaced by the reflexive one. At the same time, the co-occurrence of two *si* markers is ruled out as predicted by my hypothesis. Indeed the translation of an Italian sentence with a reflexive *si* and an indirect object *si* is impossible.

Also the Vailate dialect (spoken in the province of Cremona, North Italy) shows a clear case of syncretism since the *ga* clitic —that derives from the Latin locative particle **hic*— is used as locative, 1st person plural and 3rd person dative (19).

(19) Vailate

	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.	ma	ga	ta	va	al/la	i /le
Indir. obj.		sa			ga	
Reflexive					sa	
Partitive	no					
Locative	ga					

In this dialect a reflexive + impersonal clitic is realized as *ga sa* where the reflexive clitic is represented by an unexpected *ga* exponent as in the Italian example in (1). At the same time two *ga* cannot co-occur. Therefore I conclude that in the Vailate dialect *ga* is the elsewhere morpheme.

The Fiorentino dialect (20) shows the same syncretism and the same clusters of Italian, therefore I will not repeat here the whole analysis (cf 1, 9, 12) even if I will briefly account for a point I have left open.

(20) Firenze

	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.	mi	ci	ti	vi	lo/la	li/le
Indir. obj.					gli/le	gli
Reflexive					si	
Partitive	ne					
Locative	ci					

In accordance with my proposal, the Italian cluster *le lo* should be realized as *ce lo*, because the elsewhere clitic of Italian is *ci*, cf. (9). But, actually, the spell out is *glielo* where *gli* (/ʎ/) is an allomorph of the pan-Romance 3rd person exponent *l*.

In my opinion this pattern is consistent with the second part of the Subset Principle stating that the most specific vocabulary item (among the underspecified ones) is inserted. Indeed, when *l* violates OCP, it is substituted by its allomorph *gli* instead of the elsewhere clitic *ci* because the former is, by definition, more specific than the latter. From this observation we can set different strategies of substitution. When OCP is violated, a clitic is substituted by:

- a. an allomorph, e.g. the Italian *gli*;
- b. an elsewhere clitic, e.g. *ci* in Italian, *si* in Sarroch, *ga* in Vailate;
- c. \emptyset , if the clitic is an elsewhere.

The main point is that the ranking of these strategies is not a stipulation, but it is due to the Subset Principle.

The Napoli paradigm and clusters—in (21) and (22)— show the same pattern of Fiorentino and Standard Italian, but with an interesting complication. Indeed the item inserted in the synthetic clusters (*nce*) is slightly different from the syncretic item of the paradigm that is *ce*.

(21) Napoli

	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.					l _o – l _a	l _e
Indir. obj.	me	ce	te	ve	le – la	le - lloro
Reflexive					se	
Partitive	ne					
Locative	ce					

- (22) *le + l_o → nce lo
 3.dat 3.acc
- *le + ne → nce ne
 3.dat part.
- *se + se → nce se
 rifl. imp.

The presence of a nasal phoneme in the exponent in (22) would indeed suggest that the clustered item inserted in the clusters is more conservative than the one in isolation, as shown by the process in (23).

- (23) *ince > nce > ce

This situation is similar to the one displayed by two dialects spoken in Puglia (in the South East, examples in (24) and (25)); indeed, in the Barletta and Alberobello

dialects the form of the locative clitic is *ci* in isolation and *nci* in the clusters. At the moment I cannot account for this asymmetry.

- (24) ...ma nessuna *nge ne* dave (Barletta)
 ...annucite a veste ccu bbelle e mmettitangille. mettitece n-anedde u disete...
- (25) ...ma nessuna *ci* vulei da. (Alberobello)
 ...a cc-agge a ddice...
 ...a ggokka ccu bbelle mettitanigille. mettitece n-aniedde u disete...

The next dialects show two potential elsewheres in their paradigms, therefore they do not allow us to make a clear prediction, but they offer a piece of negative evidence. Indeed, a paradigm presenting two syncretic exponents (e.g. **ince* and **se*) allows us to exclude the third item (namely **inde*) as a potential elsewhere item. For instance, in the Arce dialect (spoken in Southern Italy, (26) the reflexive exponent is not a syncretic one, therefore —if my hypothesis is correct— I can exclude the possibility that it will be inserted in synthetic clusters. The contrary would be a strong counterexample falsifying my prediction and weakening the general hypothesis discussed in section 1.

(26) Arce

	1		2		3	
	Sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.		ne			glie/la	glie/le
Indir. obj.	me	ci	te	ve	glie	
Reflexive					se	
Partitive	ne					
Locative	ce					

Fortunately, Arce does not show clitic clusters where an unexpected reflexive marker is inserted, therefore there is a correlation between the clitic appearing in the clusters and one of the two candidates indicated by the paradigm (*ci* and *ne*).

- (27) **glie glie* → *ce glie*
 3.dat 3.acc
**gliene* → *ce ne*
 3.dat 3.acc

It is worth noting that both Napoli and Arce —(21,22) and (26,27)— replace the third person marker *l* with a locative elsewhere while Italian inserts the *gli* allomorph. These patterns are consistent with the discussion above since Napoli and Arce, unlike Italian, do not have any third person allomorph, therefore they must exploit the elsewhere.

Also the paradigm of the Catanzaro dialect (28) is characterized by two syncretic exponents.

(28)

	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.		(n)ci			(l)u/(l)a	i/li
Indir. obj.	mi	ndi	ti	vi	(n)ci	
Reflexive					si	
Partitive	ndi/nda					
Locative	ci					

Moreover, Catanzarese shows two interesting clusters: in (29) the clusters are not repaired by a substitution, but one of the clitics is completely deleted.

- (29) *ⁿci + ^lu → ⁿci
 3.dat 3.acc
- *ⁿci + ndi → ⁿci
 3.dat part.

This pattern resembles those displayed by the dialect of Mascioni (Manzini & Savoia 2004) and by Barceloni, the Catalan variety analysed by Bonet (1991). At the moment, I have not sketched a single model accounting for both substitution (Sarroch, Vailate, Napoli, Arce, etc.) and deletions (Catanzaro, Mascioni, Barceloni), but, on the basis of the data I have collected, I can make a generalization: indeed, *the substitution always affects the clitic on the left of the cluster, while the deletion always affects the one on the right*. A model accounting for this descriptive generalization is still in progress.

5. Types of absolute syncretism

Neapolitan and the Arce dialect show the same kind of substitution displayed by standard Italian, even if their patterns of syncretism involve two clitics. This situation is quite frequent: in general when a dialect shows the co-occurrence of two syncretic exponents, the locative morpheme is preferred as elsewhere clitic.

This generalization is consistent with the patterns shown by the dialects of Puglia (South East). The syncretisms of these dialects can be described as a competition between two replacing items: the locative *nci* and the partitive (*ndi*, *nde* or *ni*). In few cases one of the competitors wins as happens in Barese and Otrantino (30 and 31, from Calabrese 1994) where large portions of the paradigms are neutralized. But usually the paradigms of Puglia display a mixed distribution like the one in (32), from Calabrese (1994).

(30) Bari

	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.					u/la	lə
Indir. obj.	mə	nǧə	tə	və	nǧə	
Reflexive					sə	
Partitive	nnə					
Locative	nǧə					

(31) Otranto

	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.					lu/la	li/le
Indir. obj.	me	nde	te	bbu	nde	
Reflexive					si	
Partitive	nde					
Locative	nci					

(32) Campi - LE

	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.					lu/la	li/le
Indir. obj.	me	nne	te	bbu	nci	
Reflexive					si	
Partitive	nne					
Locative	nci					

The main point is that, although the paradigms are characterized by this competition, synthetic clusters show a consistent preference for the locative clitic. Indeed, in almost all the dialects listed in table (33), the third dative clitic *li* is replaced by the locative *nci*.

(33)

<i>variety</i>	3.dat+3.acc	Spinazzola	nille, le_
Vico Garganico	ce le	Laterza	ngi-i/ci le
Vieste	cille	Martina Franca	ngille, ce ne
Monte S. Angelo	celle	Grottaglie	nilo
S. Marco la Catola	cele	Taranto	ncc ne
Trinitapoli	ce/nge le	Maruggio	nci lu, nci ni
Cerignola	ce li	Oria	nciulu, ncini
Candela	ngille, nge ne	Maglie	sela
Molfetta	ngiuue (?), ngere		

Only in three dialects —in grey in table (33)— the replacing clitics do not derive from **ince*. I have not collected the paradigms of these dialects yet, but my prediction is

that here the elsewhere clitics are *ne* and *si* respectively. Other cases of substitution from *li* to *ni* are displayed by some dialects of Calabria as Castrovillari, see Loporca (1995).

This evidence allows me to restrict the area of my research: indeed, it seems to me that the dialects that have developed a *ne* elsewhere are spoken in the so-called Lausberg area, where cases of syncretic *ne* and *si* are actually found. Therefore, I can suggest that the lack of evidence showing an elsewhere *ne* is mainly due to a lack in the sample of dialects I have analysed.

However, there are theoretical reasons suggesting that, in general, the *ne* exponent is not a good candidate for the role of elsewhere. Firstly, I have already suggested (Pescarini 2005) that it can be due to the feature representation of these exponents, since in my opinion the partitive clitic is more specific than the locative one, therefore the locative is a better candidate in accordance with the Subset Principle.

But there is another point that has to be considered: maybe in some dialects the **nos* exponent has not been replaced by the partitive one —deriving from **inde*— but **nos* and **inde* have converged towards a common phonological form. In some dialects this process of mutual attraction is still in progress as shown by the Lecce and the Palermo dialects, (34) and (35). In these varieties there are indeed phonological differences between the form of the partitive clitic and the 1st person plural one: in Lecce (see the paradigm 34) the partitive displays a conservative *-nd-* consonantal cluster from **inde*, while Palermitan (35), that has assimilated *-nd-*, marks the distinction through the gemination of the nasal phoneme. The output of this diachronic process —in (37)— is represented by some Veneto dialects —in (36)— showing a perfect syncretism. My hypothesis is that in this case the syncretism is not due to a morphological substitution like those analysed in section 4, but it is caused by a phonological process giving rise to homophony.

(34) Lecce

	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.	me	ni	te	bu	lu/la	li/le
Indir. obj.					ni	
Reflexive					se	
Partitive	nde					
Locative	nci					

(35) Palermo

	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.	mi	ni	ti	vi	u/a	i/(le?)
Indir. obj.					ci	
Reflexive					si	
Partitive	nni					
Locative	ci					

(36) Veneto

	1		2		3	
	sg	pl	sg	pl	sg	pl
Dir. obj.					o/a	i/e
Indir obj.	me	ne	te	ve	ghe	
Reflexive	se					
Partitive	ne					
Locative	ghe					

(37)

stage 1	stage 2	stage 3	stage 4
proto-Rom.	Lecce type	Palermo type	Veneto type
*nos >	ne >	ne >	ne
*inde >	nde >	nne >	ne

On the basis of these data I can suggest that sometimes the *ne* exponent is not an elsewhere clitic even if it is involved in syncretic patterns. The answer to this apparent paradox is that the syncretism of *ne* is due to a phonological evolution and not to the presence of an elsewhere morpheme.

This can account nicely for the *ne* vs *nci* asymmetry: since the *nci* syncretism is due to morphology, *nci* is a real elsewhere, therefore there is a high correlation between absolute and contextual syncretism because both require the insertion of an elsewhere clitic.

On the contrary, since some cases of *ne* syncretism are due to phonology, *ne* is not a real elsewhere and therefore it does not appear in synthetic clusters.

6. Paradigms without syncretisms

Finally, I will give some remarks on some Sardinian dialects even if they do not show any case of syncretism. Indeed, they are characterized by a conservative clitic paradigm, similar to the Proto-Romance one shown in (10). However, the Sardinian dialects I have observed show frequent cases of synthetic clusters as those in (38).

(38)

Nende. <i>bi.lu</i>	appo fattu un ibbagliu	(Ossi - SS)
Nanne. <i>bi.lu</i>	appo attu unu irbagliu	(Bitti - NU)
Nende. <i>bi.lu</i>	appo isbagliadu	(Posada - NU)
Narando. <i>si.ddu</i>	happo fattu unu sbagliu	(Baunei - NU)
Telling. <i>to-him.it</i>	aux make a mistake	

In three varieties the dative *li* is replaced by the locative *bi* deriving from the Latin locative **ibi*, while in Baunei the same exponent is replaced by the reflexive marker as in the Spanish *spurious se* phenomenon. These patterns are fully consistent with the cases presented by the Italian dialects examined above.

Maybe the Sardinian dialects represent an early stage of the evolution of Romance showing contextual syncretisms without absolute ones. But the synchronic data do not support this claim since you can find dialects characterized by the oppo-

site pattern as well. Perhaps trying to derive one phenomenon from the other is not very promising because they can be independent processes due to the same general principle that do not feed each other. Moreover they seem to operate in competition: indeed absolute syncretisms would be enhanced by contextual ones (both phonologically and morphologically based), while the presence of syncretic items in a system automatically increases the number of contexts violating OCP.

From a theoretical point of view, this competition is highly desirable, because it allows us to postulate a markedness constraint like OCP. Indeed, OCP would not make sense in a system without a tendency to assimilation. But, when the system— as in the case of Romance clitics —developes patterns of phonological attraction and morphological substitution, a markedness constraint arises as a natural counter reaction.

7. Conclusion

In this paper I have explored some consequences of a general hypothesis according to which every clitic system bears an elsewhere item, i.e. a non-specific clitic that can be inserted when the insertion of more specific items is blocked by independent constraints.

This repairing strategy accounts for synthetic clusters that, in synchrony, give rise to contextual syncretisms like those discussed in section 1. Moreover, in diachrony, it accounts for absolute syncretisms too (cf. section 2). Indeed, in my opinion, both contextual and absolute syncretisms are due to the insertion of an elsewhere clitic where independent constraints block the insertion of the appropriate item.

This claim is supported by the data presented and discussed in section 4 showing that in many Italian dialects there is a single clitic involved in both contextual and absolute syncretisms.

Finally, I have suggested that sometimes patterns of absolute syncretism are not due to a morphological substitution replacing an item with an elsewhere morpheme, but that they can be due to a phonological process giving rise to homophony. This hypothesis accounts for patterns of absolute syncretisms that do not involve any elsewhere clitics.

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