Clitics in a parallel architecture

The term ‘clitic’ is generally used for elements that are not really fully-fledged words but also not really affixes. Beyond this obviously rather vague characterisation, there are very few properties shared by all elements to which the label ‘clitics’ is applied. Elements such as the Romance object clitics, English reduced auxiliaries, so-called phrasal clitics (e.g., English possessive ‘s), second-place clitics such as Serbo-Croatian copulas or Latin -que, etc., all have very different characteristics.

This fact has led to various lists of clitic properties and parameters along which they can vary (e.g., Zwicky & Pullum 1983, Aikhenvald 2002). While such lists are useful from a descriptive point of view, they do not provide a theoretical explanation of the differences. To do so, we need to carefully distinguish between the semantic, morphosyntactic and phonological properties of the elements involved (cf. also Klavans 1985), so that we can state restrictions on each of these separately. A parallel grammar architecture (e.g., Jackendoff 1997) allows us to do this.

In this way, we can distinguish affixes from words, as demonstrated in (1) vs. (2). Compared with «man», the entry for «ing» has two additional requirements: in syntax, «ing» selects a verb (indicated by the uninterpretable V feature) and in phonology, «ing» requires right-alignment with a prosodic word (indicated with the p-word boundary \)œ). That is, a suffix has a prosodic requirement and as such is similar to prosodic morphemes in Semitic. To meet this prosodic requirement, «ing» may undergo dislocation under certain conditions (to be specified in the presentation).

Crucially, just like «man», «ing» is an association between semantic, morphosyntactic and phonological features. Clitics can be treated in the same way. For example, English ‘ll (for will) can be represented as in (3). Unlike the suffix, ‘ll has no prosodic requirement. However, /l/ is just a segment, which means that general phonological requirements force it to be syllabified with a (preceding) word, causing the clitic behaviour.

A second-place clitic such as Latin -que can be represented as in (4). Like «ing», -que has a prosodic requirement in its phonology: it must attach at the end of a (prosodic) word, causing its suffix-like behaviour. Unlike regular suffixes, however, it does not have a morphosyntactic selectional requirement, which means it can attach to any kind of host. Note that the prosodic nature of the placement of -que is confirmed by the data in (5) (cf. also Agbayani & Golston 2010).

Separating out the different kinds of features of clitics allows us to account for their disparate behaviour as the result of the interaction between their morphosyntactic and phonological make-up and, additionally, the interaction with general syntactic and phonological principles. Based on these properties, I will reformulate Aikhenvald’s list of clitic characteristics and categorise the discussed clitics within this system.
Examples

(1)  \text{MAN} \leftrightarrow \{\text{N, sg}\} \leftrightarrow /\text{mæn}/

(2)  \text{GERUND} \leftrightarrow \{\text{N, sg, uV}\} \leftrightarrow /\text{n}/_o

(3)  \text{FUT} \leftrightarrow \{\text{Aux, fut, uV}\} \leftrightarrow /l/

(4)  \text{CONJ} \leftrightarrow &' \leftrightarrow /k'o]/_o

(5)  -\text{que} \text{ placed after first prosodic word (marked in bold face):}

a.  \textit{circum-que ea loca}
    around-and those places

b.  \textit{in rebus-que}
    in things-and

References


