Forbidden clitic clusters in Zapotec: Implications for the Person–Case Constraint

The following line of reasoning is often advanced in the literature on the Person–Case Constraint (PCC): If an impossible combination of clitic arguments is subject to a syntactic repair, such as periphrasis, there must be something syntactic wrong with it; by contrast, if an impossible clitic cluster is subject to a morphological repair, such as deletion, there must be something morphological wrong with it (Anagnostopoulou 2003, Nevins 2007, 2011, Rezac 2011, a.o.). Combinations of third-person clitics in several Northern Zapotec varieties (Oto–Manguean: Oaxaca) challenge this well-accepted view. In these languages, we argue that clitic clusters with totally identical phi-features are forbidden because of a *morphological* constraint on haplology even though violations are repaired through *syntactic* means.

In these Zapotec languages, pronominal clitics exhibit a four-way gender distinction — elder human vs. non-elder human vs. animal vs. inanimate — which restricts possible clitic clusters. In addition to a *Gender–Case Constraint*, a version of the PCC that prohibits certain clusters based on a gender hierarchy, these languages generally also forbid clitic clusters with completely identical gender (and person) features. With one exception: across these varieties, the elder human clitic can take different forms depending on context. While conditioning environments vary from language to language, the following generalization holds absolutely: Two elder human clitics cannot appear in a cluster just in case they are identical in form (i.e., if the cluster is haplological). Nonetheless, violations of this *X–X Constraint* are repaired syntactically: the second argument is realized periphrastically as an independent pronoun.

For forbidden clitic clusters, then, the character of their repair does not necessarily indicate the source of their ill-formedness. This suggests, moreover, that the GCC — and, by analogy, the PCC — should be maintained as a distinct grammatical principle that treats featurally-identical clitic clusters as syntactically well-formed (Anagnostopoulou 2005, Nevins 2007, 2011, contra Béjar and Rezac 2003, Walkow 2012).

Many languages exhibit Person–Case Constraints (PCCs): bans on certain combinations of clitic arguments based on their person features (Perlmutter 1971). Take the "Strong" PCC in Spanish, which rules out clitic clusters containing a first or second person direct object and any kind of indirect object (i.e., *IO > 1/2.DO; Ormazabal & Romero 2007). Argument combinations in violation of the PCC are repaired through periphrasis: the offensive indirect object is expressed as a strong pronoun, in a PP (1). In Spanish, it happens to be the case that all syntactically-repaired clusters involve clitics with non-identical φ-features. We'll notate such a combination X>Y. Spanish 3.IO>3.DO (i.e., X>X) clusters are also subject to a repair, but a *morphological* one: the indirect object surfaces as a spurious reflexive clitic, rather than the dative clitic found elsewhere (2) (Bonet 1991, Nevins 2007).

This asymmetry between X>X and X>Y cluster repairs leads Nevins (2007) to conclude that the PCC is a fundamentally syntactic phenomenon, stemming from a limitation on Agree to license different arrays of φ-features (cf. similar approaches by Anagnostopoulou 2005, Preminger 2014, and Arregi [& Nevins] ??). This syntactic constraint does not effect X>X combinations, so the 'spurious-*se*' effect must be fundamentally morphological one (e.g., due to impoverishment, Bonet 1991). In other words, a syntactic repair means a syntactic problem; a morphological repair means a morphological problem.

(1) **3.IO>1.DO → Syntactic repair**
    {*le}   me   enviaron {a   él}
    {*3SG.DAT.CL} 1SG.ACC.CL sent.3PL   {to   3SG.M.STRONG}
    'They sent me to him/her.'
(2) **3.IO>3.DO → Morphological repair**
    {*le,   se}   lo   enviaron.
    {*3SG.DAT.CL, 3.REFL.CL} 3SG.M.ACC.CL sent.3PL
    'They sent him to him/her.'

Similar clitic cluster repairs occur in a number of sierra Zapotec languages (Oto–Manguean, Oaxaca). Here, the *gender* features of clitic arguments restricts the set of legal clitic clusters. In Guiloxi/Yalina Zapotec, for instance, an elder human (3EL) subject pronoun and an animal (3AN) object pronoun may both cliticize to the verb (3), but the reverse combination is ruled out (*3AN.S.CL>3EL.O.CL). As in Spanish, an illegal X>Y cluster like this is repair through periphrasis, with the object pronoun appearing in its strong form (4).

(3) **3EL.S>3AN.O → Clitic cluster allowed**
    Bdel=e'=b.
    hugged=3EL.CL=3AN.CL
    'S/he [elder] hugged it [animal].'   (Guiloxi/Yalina Zapotec: RM, GZYZ014-s.9)
(4) **3AN.S>3EL.O → Clitic cluster repaired**
    Ba   bdi'in=b{=e'}   {le'}.*
    already   bit=3AN.CL{*=3EL.CL}   {3EL.STRONG}
    'It [animal] bit him/her [elder].'   (Guiloxi/Yalina Zapotec: RM, GZYZ012-s.19)

In these languages, X>X clusters are also repaired through periphrasis. By Nevin (2007)'s logic, then, these clitic clusters must be syntactically ill-formed in some way. However, examining variation across Zapotec varieties, it's clear that X>X combinations are actually ruled out by a haplology filter: that is, they are ill-formed for a fundamentally morphological, not syntactic, reason. More precisely, across

several Zaptec varieties, elder clitic pronoun are unique among the third person in having several different forms depending their morphosyntactic/morphophonological context. While the precise conditioning environments differ language to language, the following generalization holds absolutely: if two identical forms of the 3EL clitic appear together in a clitic cluster (i.e., if the cluster is haplological), it must be repaired through periphrasis. If two different forms appear in a cluster, though, it is licit.

(5) **3EL.S>3EL.O → Clitic cluster repaired only if haplological**
    a. *Chle'i=ne'={*ne'}*   *{<u>le'</u>}*
        sees=3EL.CL=3EL.CL
        'S/he [elder] sees him/her [elder]'
    b. *Chlo'=e'=ne'.*
        teaches=3EL.CL=3EL.CL
        'S/he [elder] teaches him/her [elder]'   (Yatzachi Zapotec: Butler 1980)

The fact that Zapotec employs a syntactic repair for a morphological problem has the following implications for broader theories of clitic licensing and the PCC. First, the character of a given repair is not necessarily indicative of the nature of the problem it solves. Second, the optimal theory of the PCC should be able to rule X>X combinations in *syntactically*, so specifically morphological conditions may later filter them out (*pace* Walkow 2012).

Outline from Friday's meeting (4/28)
Most PCC theories claim a syntactic role in ruling out clitc clusters with local person clitics.
    Repaired by periphrasis.
On the other hand, X>X clusters are repaired morphologically (Arregi, Preminger, Anangostopoulou).
    Repaired by deletion/coalescence/impoverishment.
However, in Zapotec, X>X are ruled out by virtue of their morphology (*haplology) and the repair is periphrasis (show an example).
    Richer array of third person pronouns allows you to plumb this domain more sophisticatedly.
Methodological upshot: inference from repair to theory is untennable.
Theoretical upshot: Theory of the PCC must not have to rule out X>X combinations (Nevins, Preminger, Anagnostopoulou; pace Walkow).