Acquisition of clitic placement in European Portuguese

GoingRomance
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Goals

- Is the acquisition of clitic placement in European Portuguese similar to other Romance languages?
- Do children master enclitic contexts in the same way as proclitic contexts?
- Is there variability in the acquisition of clitic placement across different proclisis contexts?
- Can acquisition data contribute to the understanding of adult grammar?
Clitic placement in standard European Portuguese

- Clitic placement in EP is not linked to *finiteness* (differently from Spanish or Italian and similarly to Cypriot Greek).

- There are three patterns of clitic placement in finite clauses:
  - *enclisis* (postverbal clitic)
  - *proclisis* (preverbal clitic)
  - *mesoclisis* (clitic within the verb).
Clitic placement in standard EP: *proclisis* in finite contexts

- with negation
  - O João *não se* lavou.
    - the João not CL3refl washed
      - “John did not wash himself”

- with negative subjects
  - Ninguém *se* lavou
    - nobody CL3refl washed
      - “Nobody washed himself”

- with some preverbal quantified subjects
  - Todos os meninos *se* lavaram (vs. Lavaram-se todos os meninos.)
    - All the children CL3refl washed (vs. Washed-CL3refl all the children)
      - “All the children washed themselves”
Clitic placement in standard EP:
proclisis in finite contexts

- with some preverbal adverbs (já, também, sempre, só, ainda...)
  - O João já se lavou (vs. o João lavou-se já)
    the João already CL3refl washed (vs. the João washed-CL3refl already
    “João has already washed himself”)

- in finite subordinate clauses
  - O João disse que se lavava todos os dias.
    the João said that CL3refl washed all the days
    “João said that he washed himself every day”
  - O João cheira bem porque se lava todos os dias.
    the João smells nice because CL3refl washes all the days
    “João smells nice because he washes himself every day”
Clitic placement in standard EP: **proclisis** in finite contexts

- with a filled CP (wh-questions and wh-exclamatives, clefts...)
  - **Quem se** lavou?
    Who CL3refl washed?
    “Who washed himself”
  - **Que bem se** pentearam!
    How well CL3refl combed
    “How well they combed themselves!”

- with fronted focused constituents
  - **Muita água se** perdeu!
    Much water CL3refl lost
    “So much water was lost!”
Clitic placement in standard EP:

*enclisis* in finite contexts

- in simple, matrix or coordinate clauses in the absence of *proclisis* triggers:
  - O João lavou-*se*.
    - the João washed-CL3refl
  - A mãe abriu a torneira e o João lavou-*se*.
    - the mother opened the tap and the João washed-CL3refl
    - “His mother opened the tap and João washed himself”
Clitic placement in standard EP: **mesoclisis** in finite contexts

- only with future and conditional tenses in enclitic contexts (no proclisis triggers):
  - O João lavar-*se-*á.
    the João wash-CL3refl-will
    “João will wash himself”
  - O João lavar-*se-*ia
    the João wash-CL3refl-would
    “João would wash himself”
Variation in clitic placement

- There have been changes in clitic placement in the **history of Portuguese**
  - **Medieval Portuguese**
    - variation between enclisis and proclisis (in current enclitic contexts);
    - proclisis (in current proclisis contexts);
    - wide interpolation (in proclisis contexts)
  - **Classical Portuguese**
    - proclisis is the dominant pattern
    - restricted interpolation
- There is synchronic variation across different national varieties of Portuguese.
  - **Brazilian Portuguese**
    - proclisis is the dominant pattern
    - initial CL can be found

→ There are changes in the enclitic contexts, but proclitic contexts seem to be stable diachronically.
Target clitic placement has been found for most (Romance) languages:

- Italian (cf. Guasti 1993/94)
- Spanish and Catalan (cf. Wexler, Gavarrò & Torrens 2004)
- Standard Greek (Marinis 2000)
Clitic misplacement has been reported for:
- European Portuguese (Duarte et al. 1995)
- Cypriot Greek (Petinou & Terzi 2002; Neokleous 2012)

→ in both cases, variable clitic placement is not linked to the finite/non finite distinction
Variation in clitic omission:*
- almost no clitic omission
  - European Spanish (Wexler, Gavarrò & Torrens 2004)
  - Greek (Tsakali & Wexler 2003)
  - Roumanian (Babyonymshev & Marin 2006)
- clitic omission
  - Italian (Schaeffer 1997)
  - French (Jakubowicz et al. 1996)
  - Catalan (Wexler, Gavarrò & Torrens 2004)
  - Colombian Spanish (Castilla & Peréz-Leroux 2010)
  - Roumanian (Avram 2000)
  - European Portuguese (Costa & Lobo 2006; Silva 2008)

*but contradictory results from different sources
Background: clitic omission in EP L1 acquisition

• European Portuguese:
  - clitic omission lasts longer than in other languages
  - linked to availability of null object construction
  - variation in clitic omission across contexts

(Costa & Lobo 2008)
**Data from acquisition/language development**

- **Clitic misplacement in children’s speech:**
  - enclisis is found in proclisis contexts
    → subordinate clauses:
      - Foste tu *que* daste-*me* (J. 4; 8)
        Were you that gave-CL1sg
        “Was it you that gave it to me?”
      - Foi a Mariana *que* deu-*me* este. (Sandra 3;0.21, Soares 2006: 375)
        Was the Mariana that gave-CL1sg this
        “It was Mariana that gave me this one”
      - foi alguém *que* meteu-*me* nesta fotografia (J. G. 3;3 - Duarte et al. 1995)
        was someone that put-CL1sg in_this picture
        “It was someone that put me in this picture”
Clitic misplacement in children’s speech:
  - enclisis is found in proclisis contexts
    - negation
      - O mano não deixa-me dormir (J. 3; 8)
        The brother not let-CL1sg sleep
        “My brother does not let me sleep”
      - não chama-se nada (M. 20 months; Duarte et al. 1995)
        not call-CL nothing
        “It isn’t called anything”
    - wh-questions
      - Porque partiu-se, mãe? (J. 3; 4)
        Why broke-CL3refl, mom
        “Why did it break, mom?”
      - Porque é que foste-me interromper? (R., 2;5 – Duarte et al. 1995)
        why is that went-CL1sg interrupt
        “Why did you interrupt me?”
Data from acquisition/language development

- Clitic misplacement in children’s speech:
  - proclisis is found in enclisis contexts
    - Uma carta *me* caiu, do pokémon (J. 4; 8)
      A letter CL₁sg fell, from_the pokemon
      “A letter fell from my pokemon”
  - Se queres levar isto, eu *te* empresto. (J. 3;6)
    If want2sg to_take this, I CL₂sg borrow
    “If you want to take this, I will borrow it to you”
  - Eu *te* empresto um, pai. (J. 3;7)
    I CL₂sg borrow one, daddy
    “I will borrow you one, daddy”
Data from acquisition/language development

- Deviant productions in children spontaneous production:
  - clitic doubling (both proclisis and enclisis) in proclitic contexts:
    - Eu disse que não se põe-se em pé. (J. 3; 4)
      I said that not CL3refl put-CL3refl in foot
      “I said that it doesn’t stand up”
    - não te engasgas-te nada! (R. 2;5 – Duarte et al. 1995)
      not CL2sg choke-CL2sg nothing
      “You don’t choke at all!”
Data from acquisition/language development

- Deviant productions in children spontaneous production:
  - enclitic preceding verbal agreement
    - Dá-me-s uma moeda no meu porquinho? (J. 3; 4)
      Give-CL1sg-Agr2sg a coin in_the my little_pig
      “Will you give me a coin for my little pig?”

    - Ai, duas pessoas a agarrar-me-m! (J. 3; 5)
      Oh, two people to grab-CL1sg-Agr3pl
      “Oh, two people grabbing me!”

    - Pai, deixa-me-s comer a sopa? (J. 3; 5)
      Daddy, let-CL1sg-Agr2sg eat the soup
      “Daddy will you let me eat the soup?”
Written elicitation data - teenagers

- Clitic misplacement in written productions of students from different grades (cf. F. Santos 2002; A. Costa 2012):
  - almost no problems with enclisis (12 and 14 years old: over 95% enclisis; adults: 100%)
  - low rates of enclisis in proclitic contexts (12 and 14 years old: over 90% proclisis; adults: almost 100%)
  - problems with mesoclisis (12 years old: less than 5%; 14 years old: c. 15%; adults: c. 70%)

→ For most children, mesoclisis is not acquired spontaneously, but learnt at school.
What triggers clitic placement in EP?

According to different authors, clitic placement is conditioned by:

- properties of high functional domain:
- specific syntactic triggers:
  - Duarte 1993, Duarte & Matos 2000
- syntactic and prosodic factors:
  - Frota & Vigário 1996, Barbosa 1996
Theoretical analyses

- Proclisis is the default pattern; enclisis is a more complex derivation (V movement to higher position):
  - Martins 1996; among others
- Enclisis is the default pattern; proclisis is driven by specific triggers:
  - Duarte 1983; Duarte et al. 1995; Duarte & Matos 2000
Until now...

- No systematic study on clitic placement with young children.
- No quantified data on rates of proclisis and enclisis in different syntactic contexts.
Hypothesis and predictions

- If the acquisition of clitic placement is difficult only because of variable input, we expect to find deviant patterns both in enclisis contexts and in proclisis contexts.
- If the acquisition path is determined by complexity factors and enclisis and proclisis are derived differently, we expect the problems to go in one direction only.
- If complexity plays a role, sensitivity to contextual variation should emerge.
- If the acquisition of clitic placement is dependent on defining specific features of functional items, we expect to find differences between contexts.
Elicitation of clitics in enclitic and proclitic contexts in pre-school and 1st grade children

Only simple past contexts were used
- to avoid the introduction of another variable – Aux + V – and additional positions for clitics

To minimize omission, only SE clitics were elicited
- SE clitics are less omitted (cf. Costa & Lobo 2007; Silva 2008)
Method:
- A picture was shown to the child and the researcher asked a question about the picture.
- The child was asked to answer or complete a sentence.
- No clitics were used in the prompts.

The answers were audiotaped and transcribed (they were also annotated during the session)
Experiment - methodology

Groups:
- 42 children (22: 5 y.o.; 20: 6 y.o.) monolingual EP speakers with no diagnosed language impairment
- 20 adults (control group)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Mean age</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
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<td>5;0.17 - 5;11.8</td>
<td>5;4</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>6 y.o.</td>
<td>6;0.22 – 6;10.14</td>
<td>6;4</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>adults</td>
<td>19 - 40</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Experiment - methodology

- Conditions:
  - Simple clauses with no proclisis trigger (enclisis) – 8 items
  - Coordinate clauses with no proclisis trigger (enclisis) – 4 items
  - Simple clauses with negation (proclisis) – 4 items
  - Simple clauses with negative subjects (proclisis) – 4 items
  - Simple clauses with DP quantified subjects (proclisis) – 4 items
  - Simple clauses with adverb ‘já’ – already (proclisis) – 4 items
  - Complement subordinate clauses (proclisis) – 4 items
  - Adverbial subordinate clauses (proclisis) – 4 items

Total: 36 items
Experiment - methodology

• Example of test item for simple clauses

[picture 1] *Este menino está todo despenteado. Mas tem um pente na mão.*
“This boy is all untidy. But he has a comb.”

[picture 2] *O que é que o menino fez?*
“What did the boy do?”

Expected answer: *Penteou-se.*
Combed-CL “He combed himself”
Experiment - methodology

Example of test item for negation contexts

Estas duas meninas usaram o pente e estão agora penteadas. Mas esta menina continua despenteada. O que é que ela não fez?

These two girls used their comb and they are now combed. But this girl is still not combed. What didn’t she do?

Expected answer: Não se penteou.

Not CL combed “She didn’t comb herself”
Experiment - methodology

- Example of test item for adverb contexts

[picture 1] *Aqui estão três meninos sentados. Um menino está cansado de ficar tanto tempo sentado.*
There are three boys sitting. One of the boys is tired of being sat for so long.

[picture 2] *Aqui já não está sentado. O que é que ele já fez? Já…*
Here he is not sat anymore. What has he already done?

Expected answer: *(já) **se levantou.***
Already CL rose “He has already got up”
Experiment - methodology

- Example of test item for negative subject contexts

Olha! O príncipe, o avô e a menina estão cansados e há duas cadeiras. O que é que ninguém fez? Ninguém…
Look! The prince, the grandfather and the girl are tired and there are two chairs. What has nobody done? Nobody…

Expected answer: *Ninguém se sentou.*

Nobody CL sat.
Experiment - methodology

- Example of test item for embedded complement clauses

Este menino foi ao parque e ficou todo sujo. O pai deu uma toalha ao menino. O que é que o pai quer que o menino faça? O pai quer…

This boy went to the park and is all dirty. His daddy gave a towel to the boy. What does his daddy want him to do? His daddy wants…

Expected answer: que o menino se limpe.

that the boy CL cleans “that the boy cleans himself”
Example of test item for embedded adverbial clauses

[picture 1] *Olha a porta está fechada.*
Look the door is closed.

[picture 2] *De repente ficou frio. Porque é que ficou frio? Ficou frio porque…*
Suddenly it became cold. Why did it become cold? It became cold because...

Expected answer: …*a porta se abriu.*
the door CL opened “the door opened itself”
Experiment – Global Results

Types of answers:

- proclisis
- enclisis

- doubling (only 5 y.o., very rare: 3/792 – 0,4%)
  - não se escondeu-se/já se levantou-se/a avó foi-se pentear-se
    - not CL hid CL /already CL rose CL / granny went CL comb CL

- omission:
  - 5 years old: 68/792 – 8,6%
  - 6 years old: 15/720 – 2%
  - adults: 3/720 – 0,4 %

- other answers
Experiment – Global Results

![Bar chart showing the results of different linguistic phenomena across different age groups. The chart includes bars for omission, enclisis, proclisis, other, and doubling. The bars are color-coded and the chart is labeled with age groups: 5 year old, 6 year old, and adults.](chart.png)
**Experiment – Global Results**

Adults (responses with clitics – 217/240 for enclisis; 465/480 for proclisis)

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<th></th>
<th>enclisis</th>
<th>proclisis</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Enclisis contexts</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Proclisis contexts</strong></td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
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*considering only answers with clitics*
Experiment – Global Results*

Children 5 years old (responses with clitics – 186/264 for enclisis; 408/528 for proclisis)

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<th>Enclisis</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Enclisis contexts</strong></td>
<td>99.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Proclisis contexts</strong></td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>36%</td>
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*considering only answers with clitics
Children 6 years old (responses with clitics – 214/240 for enclisis; 444/480 for proclisis)

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<th></th>
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<td><strong>Enclisis Contexts</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Proclisis Contexts</strong></td>
<td><strong>46.2%</strong></td>
<td><strong>53.8%</strong></td>
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*considering only answers with clitics*
Experiment – Global Results*

% of target answers in enclisis and proclisis contexts

*considering only answers with clitics
Global Results

- Only proclisis is problematic for children.
- There is development from 5 to 6 years old.
- Even adults do not have ceiling performances with proclisis.
- For this reason, it is important to look closer into proclitic contexts.
Proclisis results per condition – % proclisis*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>6 y.o.</th>
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*considering only answers with clitics
Proclisis results: ranking of contexts - 3 groups
## Individual results – adults

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# Individual results – 5 years old

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Discussion

- Proclisis is acquired earlier in some contexts:

Discussion

• The variation in the results indicates that there is overuse of enclisis (cf. lack of proclisis-pro-enclisis).
• There is, however, sensitivity to specific contexts.

QUESTION:

What explains the earlier target behavior in some contexts only?

HYPOTHESIS:

Variation in the context delays acquisition (Costa & Lobo 2011 for null objects).
Discussion

• The contexts where proclisis is acquired are contexts where:
  ○ there is more variation between specific items
  ○ there was some degree of variation in older stages of Portuguese
    → see Martins (2011)

• Also in Cypriot Greek, there seem to be:
  ○ contexts where proclisis is categorical
  ○ contexts where there is variation between proclisis and enclisis - with
    the causal subordinator *epidi* and the complementizer *oti*
    (Chatzikiyriakidis 2012).
Proclisis in old stages of Portuguese

- only proclisis with negation and negative subjects
- enclisis may occur in the other contexts (quantified subjects, adverbs, complement clauses, adverbial clauses):
  - Et **todos** aqueles que erã presos **mâdoos** soltar [Ogando 1980: 258]
    and **all** those that were emprisoned **sent CL them** release
  - et el **outrosi asanauase** cõtra ellas moy mal [Ogando 1980]
    and he **instead raise CL** against them very badly
  - olhade cá filha amiga / feiticeira haveis mister / **porque** quereis que vos diga / **ver-vos-edes** em fadiga / se vosso pai cá vier. [16th c. Martins 2011]
    look here daughter friend / sorceress have need / **because** want that you say / **see-you-will** in fatigue / if your father here comes.
  - **Já fizessem-me** ora bispo, / siquer do ilhéu de Peniche, / pois sam frade pera isso [16th c. Martins 2011]
    **Already make-me** now bishop / ...
  - Ora escutade lá / seredes João de Tomar / que depois de morto já / diz **que punha-se** a mijar? [16th c. Martins 2011]
    Well listen there / **will be** João de Tomar / who after of death already / say **that put-CL** to piss?
Discussion

- **Negation**: no variation.
- **Negative subjects**: variation in different types of subjects, but no negative subjects induce enclisis.
- **Embedded complement clauses**: variation between finite and non-finite, but possibly no subjunctive with enclisis (subjunctive more clearly associated to subordination contexts).
- **Adverbs**: only a restricted set of preverbal adverbs induces proclisis (Castro & Costa 2003).
- **Quantified subjects**: variation between different types of quantified subjects (Martins 1994).
- **Adverbial clauses**: variation in the status of reason adverbial clauses – closer or further from clear cases of subordination (Lobo 2003).
Discussion

- Variation is context-sensitive, and can be explained in terms of specification – the least lexically specified contexts are less categorical.

- Adult performance and diachronic data are two independent sources for testifying the same tendency for variation.

- Acquisition path mirrors the adult tendencies. More than an effect of frequency, acquisition mirrors the input variability associated with specific contexts.
Conclusions

• Clitic placement in Portuguese contrasts with other cases in which word order is acquired very early.
• Variation/specificity of lexical items may be the factor explaining the delay in acquisition.
• The role of variation is confirmed by the sensitivity to contexts with more or less variation between lexical items.
• The one-way tendency shows that this is not a reflex of a general variable input, but it is conditioned by grammatical and lexical factors.
• An overall explanation for the generalization of enclisis (e.g. less complex derivation or change in the status of the clitic) is not plausible.
Acknowledgments:

Stéphanie Dias Vaz and Mariana Silva for help with data collection

Children and staff at Centro Social Quinta do Anjo