

Diagnosing syntax-morphology interactions from clitic restrictions: The case of Maltese

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Many languages restrict the space of possible pronominal clitic clusters (through bans on identical clitic sequences, bans on certain combinations of person and case values, etc.). Current theories attribute these restrictions to both sides of the syntax-morphology interface: while bans on identical clitic sequences are often argued to be a morphological well-formedness violation, person-case prohibitions have been argued to have a partially syntactic origin. In this talk I discuss data from Maltese (Semitic; Republic of Malta) which shows a collection of restrictions based on the person and case values of clitic cluster members. I argue that these person-case restrictions are best understood as morphological in origin given several observations: (1) they apply to argument clitics not case-licensed by the the same head, (2) they apply to nonargumental datives and (3) they appear in constructions where syntactic approaches predict no restrictions should apply. I develop an account which takes illicit clitic clusters to be a failure of morphological exponence and not syntactic agreement. I then discuss similar data in two varieties of Arabic, including the classical language, one of which shows both person-based restrictions as well as bans on identical sequences of clitics. I show that these other languages can be understood in a unified way if a morphological approach is taken for all such clitic phenomena in the broader cross-linguistic context. Finally, I relate these effects to other person-based restrictions on argument realization in languages with obviation and/or the Person Case Constraint, arguing that clitic restrictions should be seen as heterogeneous phenomenon