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The unbearable lightness of clitics

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusion and future prospects

6.1 Summary and conclusions

This dissertation has shed new light on the interaction between ellipsis and clitics in various aspects. The main focus of my work is on what this interaction can reveal about the timing of ellipsis and cliticisation.

In chapters 3 and 4 I explored how VP-ellipsis affects the placement of second position clitics. Surprisingly, although on the surface the systems of second position cliticisation is quite similar in Serbo-Croatian and Slovenian, clitics behave completely differently under VP-ellipsis. My experimental studies show that while in Serbo-Croatian they must be elided, in Slovenian they must remain outside the ellipsis site:

(1) 2P clitics and VP-ellipsis: Serbo-Croatian

- a. *Mi *smo ih* videli, a i oni *su ih*,
we AUX.1PL them seen and also they AUX.3PL them
takodje.
too
'We saw them, and they did, too.'
- b. Mi *smo ih* videli, a i oni *su,* takodje.
we AUX.1PL them seen and also they AUX.3PL too

(2) 2P clitics and VP-ellipsis: Slovenian

- a. Maja *jih* *je* videla in jaz *sem* ***jih*** tudi.
 Maja them AUX.3SG seen and I AUX.1SG them too
 ‘Maja have seen them and I have, too.’
- b. *Maja *jih* *je* videla in jaz *sem* tudi.
 Maja them AUX.3SG seen and I AUX.1SG too

Based on this and some other factors reported in the previous literature, I conclude that the 2P clitic placement is phonological in nature in SC but syntactic in Slvn. That means that in Serbo-Croatian clitics are placed into the second position post-syntactically. I propose that clitics and their strong counterparts are different Vocabulary Items, and clitics have lexical requirement to appear in the second position. In Slovenian, on the other hand, clitics occupy a high position in the syntactic structure (which I have identified as as the Polarity Phrase).

The main line of my reasoning is as follows. For Serbo-Croatian second position clitics, there is in fact no motivation for postulating any kind of special syntactic properties. While clitics in this language are sensitive to their prosodic environment (such as the Intonational Phrase boundaries), there appears to be no syntactic restrictions on clitic placement that cannot be explained via the rules of syntax-prosody mapping.

In Slvn, on the other hand, second position clitics show no sensitivity to the prosodic organisation of an utterance: they can be either proclitics or enclitics, can appear right after a prosodic break and can even receive stress in some cases (in particular under verum focus). These characteristics, especially the last one, indicate that Slovenian second position clitics appear in a particular syntactic position and can later adjust to their prosodic environment.

Importantly, the comparison between Serbo-Croatian and Slovenian reveals characteristics of second position cliticisation that could remain unnoticed or be misanalysed when considering each language in isolation. Given that the studies that I carried out for both languages are similar and that I keep the theoretical assumptions about ellipsis the same, the fact that SC and Slvn do not behave the same is unquestionably related to the nature of cliticisation in the two languages.

In chapter 5, I explore a different phenomenon: preposition omission under sluicing. As it is clear from the discussion, P-omission in Russian cannot be accounted for by assuming that the omitted preposition is stranded in the ellipsis site since Russian is a non-P-stranding language and the pseudo-sluicing account cannot be applied to it either. After rejecting various morphosyntactic characteristics of prepositions potentially affecting P-omission, based on the results of the survey, I conclude that

P-omission is sensitive to the prosodic status of the omitted preposition and that the preposition is in fact deleted post-syntactically.

I suggest that there are in fact three prosodic types of prepositions in Russian: light ones, which are clitics and do not form independent ω s (3a), heavy ones, which are independent ω s (3c), and intermediate ones, which are ω s embedded under another ω (3b).

Based on the results of my acceptability survey, I formulate the condition on P-omission: the domain of P-omission is minimally a ω .

- (3) a. *Ban on deletion of a sub- ω*
 * On ženilsja na kom-to, no nikto ne znaet,
 He married on somebody.PREP but nobody not know
 (na (kom) ω) ω .
 on who.PREP
 ‘He married somebody, but nobody knows who.’
- b. *Degraded deletion of an embedded ω*
 ? Ona sidela okolo čego-to, no ja ne videla,
 she sat near something.GEN but I not saw
 ((okolo) ω (čego) ω) ω .
 near what.GEN
 ‘She was sitting near something, but I didn’t see what’
- c. *Deletion of an independent ω*
 Oni sovetovališ’ po povodu čego-to, no ja ne
 they consulted concerning something.GEN but I not
 znaju, (po povodu) ω (čego) ω .
 know concerning what.GEN
 ‘They consulted about something, but I don’t know what.’

Both the cliticisation studies and the Russian P-omission study show the importance of consulting considerable amount of native speakers for grammaticality judgements. To give an example, it has been an open debate for two decades whether Serbo-Croatian clitics can survive ellipsis. Using the methodology of systematic collection of acceptability judgements, my study has shown that even though there is quite a lot of variation in this respect, there also is indisputable strong preference for eliding clitics under VP-ellipsis.

Online grammaticality judgement surveys, however, have their drawbacks. First, it is not always easy to find a required amount of speakers and, more importantly, it is almost impossible to control for the amount of attention they put into filling out the questionnaire. Second, it is also challenging to control for every potentially intervening factor while designing the stimuli, since it would lead to almost identical experimental sentences, which

would in turn lead to the syntactic satiation effect, when ungrammatical sentences appear acceptable to speakers after a number of repeated exposures (Snyder 2000). This problem can potentially be avoided by using a great number of fillers in a survey, but this solution would create a problem of its own if carried out in the (preferred) within-subject design: the survey would become too long and speakers would lose their concentration and possibly would not even complete the questionnaire.

One solution to these issues, as I see it, is going one step at a time and starting with establishing the baseline for a particular phenomenon by first exploring its simplest aspects (such as P-omission with simple *wh*-phrases and prepositions that only assign a particular case to its complement). This is the approach I adopt in my research presented in this dissertation.

6.2 Future prospects

The interaction of phonologically weak items and ellipsis, to my knowledge, has not received proper attention in linguistic research. In this dissertation I have tried to expand our knowledge on this interaction but a considerable amount of issues remain open.

First of all, a logical continuation of the research on the interaction of second position clitics and ellipsis would be to investigate other types of ellipsis more closely. Here I focus mostly on VP-ellipsis but I also provide some initial data for other arguably elliptical processes, such as gapping and right node raising. The results for Serbo-Croatian, for example, show that unlike VP-ellipsis, right node raising allows both stranding or deletion of pronominal second position clitics:

- (4) Ana (*ga*) nije, a Nada *ga* jeste poljubila.
 Ana he.ACC AUX.3SG.NEG but Nada he.ACC AUX.3SG kissed
 ‘Ana didn’t but Nada did kiss him.’

The behaviour of clitics has potential to inform us about the differences between various types of ellipsis unnoticed before, including the differences in their timing. Right node raising has been argued to be a post-syntactic deletion process by Hartmann (2000). That potentially can explain the behaviour of clitics in (4): both being post-syntactic process, clitic placement in SC and right node raising might not be strictly ordered with respect to each other. More data need to be obtained, however, before any conclusions can be made.

Another aspect of the interaction of second position clitics which needs to be explored further is what happens with clusters containing more than

one pronominal clitics. In my research I focus on the most simple cases with one pronominal and one auxiliary clitic. According to Stjepanović (1998), one of the two pronominal clitics can be elided, as long as it is the lower one, compare (5a) and (5b).

(5) Stjepanović (1998:532)

- a. Mi *smo* *mu* *ga* dali, a i vi *ste*
 we AUX.1PL he.DAT it.ACC given and also you AUX.2PL
~~*mu ga dali.*~~
 he.DAT it.ACC given
 ‘We gave it to him, and you did, too.’
- b. *Mi *smo* *mu* *ga* dali, a i vi *ste*
 we AUX.1PL he.DAT it.ACC given and also you AUX.2PL
~~*mu ga dali.*~~
 he.DAT it.ACC given
 ‘We gave it to him, and you did, too.’

The results of my study presented in chapter 3 show that stranding of one of the two pronominal clitics (6a) is equally ungrammatical to stranding of both pronominal clitics (6b); both clitics must be elided (6c).¹

(6) Results of my study

- a. *Mi *smo* *mu* *ga* dali, a i vi *ste*
 we AUX.1PL he.DAT it.ACC given and also you AUX.2PL
~~*mu ga dali.*~~
 he.DAT it.ACC given
 ‘We gave it to him, and you did, too.’
- b. *Mi *smo* *mu* *ga* dali, a i vi *ste*
 we AUX.1PL he.DAT it.ACC given and also you AUX.2PL
~~*mu ga dali.*~~
 he.DAT it.ACC given
 ‘We gave it to him, and you did, too.’
- c. Mi *smo* *mu* *ga* dali, a i vi *ste*
 we AUX.1PL he.DAT it.ACC given and also you AUX.2PL
~~*mu ga dali.*~~
 he.DAT it.ACC given
 ‘We gave it to him, and you did, too.’

Further research is therefore required to determine the nature of the variation. While Serbo-Croatian clitics have been studied quite thoroughly in previous works, I am not aware of any research exploring the

¹The survey was not designed to investigate complex clitic cluster and therefore only contained one example with two pronominal clitics in a cluster.

variation within the systems of second position cliticisation. As discussed in chapter 3, there is a great deal of variation in the data. The factors affecting the variation in clitic stranding under VP-ellipsis and other elliptical operations are one of the topics that must be investigated further. At this point, it is not quite clear if the variation is caused by dialectal or other factors.

Slovenian second position clitics are also an under-researched topic, despite their unique ability to serve as an elliptical answer to a polarity question. One of the facts that I only briefly mention here but that deserves further exploration is that while normally pronominal and auxiliary second position clitics must survive predicate ellipsis in Slovenian, they only appear optionally when the particle *pa* is present, compare (7a) and (7b).

- (7) a. V Ljubljano *ga je* poslala, v Zagreb *pa ne*.
 to Ljubljana it AUX.3SG sent to Zagreb PA NEG
 ‘To Ljubljana, she sent it, to Zagreb, she didn’t.’
- b. V Ljubljano *ga je* poslala, v Zagreb *pa ga*
 to Ljubljana it.ACC AUX.3SG sent to Zagreb PA it.ACC
 ni.
 AUX.3SG.NEG
 ‘To Ljubljana, she sent it, to Zagreb, she didn’t.’

It is clear from the discussion in chapter 4 that second position clitics are closely connected with polarity in Slovenian. The exact nature of this connection however needs to be established.

Apart from the above, the interaction of clitics and ellipsis has to be researched cross-linguistically, both in other languages with second position clitics (such as Czech, Slovak, and a number of non-Slavic languages) and languages with other clitic systems (such as Bulgarian and Macedonian, for example, in which clausal clitics have to be adjacent to the verb).

With respect to P-omission under sluicing, many questions remain unanswered as well. First of all, experimental phonetic studies are necessary to confirm my hypothesis about the three distinct types of prepositions in Russian. While sometimes descriptively the prepositions that I call intermediate are described as “weakly stressed”, I am not aware of any strict definition of what weak stress is or explanations of what its phonetic correlates are and how they are different from “normal” stress. Second, the effect of the prosodic status of a preposition in P-omission has to be tested for other non-P-stranding languages.

More generally, there are various other prospects for future research in the area of relative timing of ellipsis and other processes. Ellipsis can be potentially used as a diagnostic tool for the timing of other types of

movement (besides clitic movement) and reordering or other operations the timing of which is debatable.

Finally, some operations of deletion might need to be re-evaluated with respect to their timing, just like P-omission under sluicing. Explaining P-omission as a separate post-syntactic deletion (instead of a result of sluicing) of a preposition not only accounts for the facts better but also allows us to avoid complicating the operation of sluicing itself. P-omission and left edge deletion together form a group of purely post-syntactic deletion processes; whether or not there are more operations of the same kind and how to constrain such operations remains a subject for further research.