**Syncretism Meets Word Order: the Case of Clitics**

1. **Introduction.** This paper investigates the relation between clitic case syncretism and word order in Italian and Romanian and provides a syntactic account of the following empirical observation:

   (i) *When at least one clitic in a clitic cluster does not exhibit case syncretism, the order of clitics is unambiguously dative accusative.*

2. **The data.** Italian 1st and 2nd person clitics, unlike 3rd person clitics, are case syncretic. When 1st and 2nd person clitics can co-occur in certain Italian dialects, they are interpreted in the order accusative dative (Cardinaletti 2008) (1). However, when a 3rd person clitic is present, the order of clitics is dative accusative (2). Romanian, on the other hand, is unique among Romance languages in that all of its singular clitics show a morphological dative accusative case distinction. Plural clitics, however, are case syncretic. This correlates with a difference in word order: Romanian clusters of singular clitics behave just like Italian clitic clusters in which a 3rd person clitic is present, in that they are interpreted in the order dative accusative (3) (compare (2)); clusters of Romanian plural clitics, on the other hand, similarly with 1st and 2nd person clitics in Italian, show accusative dative word order (4) (compare (1)).

3. **Analysis.** My account for the empirical observation in (i), exemplified in (1)-(4), follows Bianchi (2006) and Săvescu (2007), in that I maintain that clitics originate in post verbal argument position and subsequently undergo movement to designated Person projections, where clitics check their Person features. I furthermore propose that the presence vs absence of case syncretism with Italian clitics correlates with a difference in their categorial status: (syncretic) 1st and 2nd person clitics ultimately undergo movement to PersonP as heads, while (non syncretic) 3rd person clitics move as XPs. The same will be argued to hold of Romanian syncretic vs non syncretic clitics: plural (syncretic) clitics move as heads to PersonPs, while singular (non syncretic) clitics undergo XP movement. This difference in the categorial status of clitics, coupled with specific locality constraints on movement, allows us to explain the differences in word order exemplified above: assuming that (some version of) Relativized Minimality is violated when whole chains rather than intervening sub-chains are being crossed, the movements of clitics to the Person projections have to undergo crossing paths. I furthermore propose that this requirement only holds of clitics of the same type (heads or XPs) and does not affect the interaction of two clitics with different status.

Specifically, the Italian *mi*\textsubscript{acc} *ti*\textsubscript{dat} and the Romanian *ne*\textsubscript{acc} *vă*\textsubscript{dat} orders are derived as follows (shown in (5) for Italian): the DO clitic first undergoes XP-movement to SpecvP, where accusative case is being checked. Subsequent movements of the two clitics to the PersonPs are head movements, and crossing paths give us the desired accusative dative order. The dative accusative order with *me*\textsubscript{lo} (2) is obtained when *me* moves as a head to Pers1P, and *lo* undergoes XP movement (nesting allowed) (6). Deriving the word order with singular Romanian clitics involves an extra step: the morphologically marked dative clitic (*mi*) undergoes movement to a Kase (adposition-like) projection, where it will check dative case\textsuperscript{2} (7). Further on, both clitics move as XPs to the specifiers of the Person projections, in crossing dependencies; this results in dative accusative word order, as desired.

4. **Conclusion** An elaboration of the present system and a close investigation of the internal make-up of clitics beyond Romanian and Italian could account for similar correlations between case syncretism and word order in other Romance languages as well. If our proposal is on the right track, we predict that across Romance (and possibly beyond), there are only two ways in which the accusative dative word order can be obtained with clitics: (i) the two clitics are case syncretic, and (ii) one of the ‘clitics’ is actually a weak pronoun. The latter case will presumably account for the accusative dative word order of French clusters of two 3rd person clitics (*le lui*).

---

1 Some speakers also marginally allow the dative accusative word order pre-verbally. However, in post verbal position, only the accusative-dative word order is possible (Cardinaletti 2008).

2 Unlike in Italian, the vowel –i present on dative clitics is a morphological dative case marker in Romanian; the same marker appears on dative DPs as well.
(1) Gianni mi ti presentò.  
John 1ACC 2DAT introduced  
‘John introduced me to you’. 

(2) Me lo ha affidato.  
1DAT 3ACC has entrusted  
‘He has entrusted him to me’ 

(3) Mi te – a prezentat.  
1DAT 2ACC has presented  
‘He has introduced you to me’ 

(4) Dându – ne - vă în grijă, s-a eliberat  
giving 1ACC.pl 2DAT.pl in care, SE freed  
‘Entrusting us to you, he felt free’. 

(5) Italian mi te 

(6) Italian me lo 

(7) Romanian mi te 