Mixed clitics in Udi: The lexical verb as interface

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Clitics constitute a classical problem at the morphology-syntax interface, sharing properties with morphologically bound affixes, while enjoying some degree of syntactic mobility. Person markers in Udi (Harris, 2002) present a particularly challenging case of mixed clitics (Spencer & Luis, 2012): when realized as part of the verb, they provide strong evidence in favour of lexical affixes, including infixation (1). However, when realized externally, their attachment properties show the typical behaviour of post-lexical clitics (2), attaching to the edge of a focused constituent.

(1) äyel-en a-**t'u**-k'-e   k'uč'an-ax
    child-ERG see$_1$-INV3SG-see$_2$-AORII puppy-DAT
    'The child saw the puppy.'   (Harris, 2002)

(2) met'in-al   burim   sa yärävgä q'əzəl-**le**   aq'sa
    this.ERG-AND apparently one bag.ABS gold.ABS-3SG take
    'She also apparently takes a BAG OF GOLD.'   (Harris, 2002)

On closer inspection, complementary distribution between (1) and (2) is controlled by the verb: verb-internal placement constitutes the default (focus-neutral contexts or predicate focus); likewise, suffixal attachment to the verb is triggered by specific TAM properties (e.g. FUTUREII), preempting focus-driven placement. Furthermore, the verb class decides on the set of allomorphs: the inverse set (1) or the general set (2). This allomorphy applies to internal and external realizations alike.

Currently, no formal account addresses both sides of the coin: while the endoclisis approach of Harris (2002) essentially plays down the morphological side of the problem, the mixed clitic approach (Spencer & Luis, 2012) does not make explicit the interplay between morphology and syntax. Here, we provide this missing link, suggesting that the lexical verb assumes a pivotal role between internal and external realization.

Analyzing Sorani Kurdish mixed clitics, Salehi & Koenig (2023) combine a morphological approach to verb-internal realisation with edge inflection (Miller, 1992; Halpern, 1995) verb-externally. They argue that the verb may delegate part of its morphosyntactic properties to a prominent dependent, the least oblique NP complement, via a selectional requirement. Building on this, we analyze the Udi focus position left-adjacent to the verb as a prominent dependent. To capture this positional restriction in HPSG, we assume that Udi focused dependents are initial elements of the complements list. For arguments, this means placement at the front of the list, whereas for modifiers, we adopt type shifting of an adjunct to first complement (Bouma et al., 2001). Thus, we can lexically control the syntactic distribution of Udi person markers, account for their morphological properties and capture the complementary distribution between focus marking and verb-internal morphological realization.

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