Possessive clitics: Rethinking their syntactic status & parameterisation
Evidence from the diachrony of Greek

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1. Questions and aims

❑ **A phenomenon with unclear typological correlations:**

(1) Some languages license possessives as bound morphemes cliticising on the noun or another stressed element. (see Longobardi & Guardiano 2013)

Aims:

- To shed light on some lesser-noticed **dimensions of variation** in this domain and their potential **correlations**, in search of appropriate parameters.
- To explore the interaction of variation in possessive clitics with other independently known **parameters** and its implications for the proper formulation of these parameters, in the light of evidence from Greek and its diachrony.

2. Dimensions of variation and correlations

At least superficially, the behaviour of possessive clitics can vary as follows (see also Pancheva 2004):

- Kinds of semantic/theta-roles expressed: kinship/inalienable possession only (cf. Silvestri 2013) vs. (any kind of) possessors, agents, themes.

(2) a. *(*a) mammata* (Catanzarese, Calabria, from Manzini & Savoia 2000)
      the mother-your
   b ja *(tin) {mama/tsada/niki/apolisi}   tu (Standard Modern Greek)
     for the {mom / bag / win / dismissal} his.CL
     'for his mom/bag/win/dismissal'

- Placement within the DP: post-nominal only (Italian dialects) vs. second-position (Bulgarian, Macedonian, Romanian) vs. variable enclitic, post-N/post-A (Standard Modern Greek – SMG).

- Form: same as (all Balkan)/different from (Italian dialects, Classical Greek) indirect object/dative clitics.

- DP-internal only (SMG, Italian dialects) vs. external only (Serbo-Croatian, but also French/Spanish) vs. both (Classical Greek, Bulgarian, Romanian, Macedonian).

- ±clitic doubling: no clitic doubling in SMG, but clitic doubling (by a full DP possessor) is possible in all other Balkan languages.

Some correlations:
- The availability of external possessive clitics seems to imply that the dative (whether identical with the genitive or not) can encode possession.
- The availability of clitic doubling also seems to be possible in languages which (have clitic doubling and) allow possessors (including full DPs) to be dative.
- ➤ Either of these two properties, then, can distinguish those languages in which possessive clitics are underlyingly dative from those in which there is a purely morphological genitive/dative syncretism.

Potential parameters:

(3) Possessive clitics ±require Case licensing (i.e. the clitic may/may not appear in Case licensing positions in/outside the DP): captures (some) placement facts and the availability of external possessors.

(4) (presupposes +3) The Case required is genitive (truly syncretic languages)/dative (French, Serbo-Croatian).

(5) The dative can (Slavic Balkan/French)/cannot (SMG) denote possession.

➤ Is (1) really an (irreducible) parameter?

➤ Given (3), possessive clitics are expected to interact with the availability of licensing positions such as **GenS** and **GenO** (Longobardi 2001, Longobardi & Silvestri 2013).

➤ Also, it is worth testing whether/how they are affected by the presence of an understood/overt subject (S) in a deverbal nominal, as are possessivised DPs in languages like English:

3. The intervening S parameter

An intervening S (implicit or overt) may (English, 7)/may not (Italian, 8) block possessivisation of the object (O), i.e. its movement to a Gen position. (Longobardi 2001, Longobardi & Silvestri 2013).

(6) [**1** GenS **2** AP* **3** GenO **4** [$_a$ Poss [S [O ... N ...]]$_a$]]

- Implicit subjects controlling into rationale clauses:

(7) a. The sinking S_i of the ship (PRO$_i$ to collect the insurance)
    b. The ship's sinking S_i (*PRO$_i$ to collect the insurance)

(8) Il suo affondamento S_i per PRO$_i$ riscuotere l'assicurazione

- 'unaffected themes' (Jaeggli 1986: S is obligatorily projected):

(9) *The problem's perception/knowledge

(10) La sua percezione/conoscenza

4. Possessive clitics and intervening S

SMG can independently be shown to possess just one Case licensing position for genitive DPs, GenO. SMG genitive DPs and post-N clitics pattern with Italian but post-A clitics pattern with English!

- Understood S controlling into absolute gerunds:

(11) a. I   sichni   chrisi farmakon, PRO odhighondas
        The frequent use   drugs.GEN   driving
        'The frequent use of drugs, while driving'
     b. I   sichni   chrisi tus,   PRO odhighondas
        The frequent use   their.CL   driving
     c. I   sichni   tus   chrisi, (?* PRO odhighondas)
        The frequent their.CL use   driving
     d. I   dhiki tus   sichni   chrisi, (* PRO odhighondas)
        The own their.CL frequent use   driving
        'Their frequent use, while driving'

- Unaffected themes:

(12) a. I   ghnosi   / katanoisi   {tis   / tis   theorias}$_i$
        The knowledge / understanindg {her.CL/ the theory.GEN}
        'The knowledge/understanding of it/the problem'
     b. ?*I kali tis$_i$ ghnosi   / katanoisi
        The good her.CL knowledge / understanding
     c. *I   dhiki tis$_i$ ghnosi   / katanoisi
        The own her.CL knowledge / understanding
        (in b-c, only a subject reading of the clitic would be possible)

➤ **A tentative account.** The intervention of S gives rise to minimality effects relativised to its features: S blocks movement of X across it if the features of X are a subset of those of S. Implicit S may only comprise φ-features but not D, so it allows movement of DPs to GenO but blocks movement of (φ-)clitics to a higher position.

→**Post-N** clitics cliticise **directly to N** without passing through GenO;
  post-A clitics pass through a **higher licensing position** before cliticising.
→Expression of both the external and the internal argument is possible when S is a post-A clitic and O a DP but not vice-versa.

5. A licensing position for high clitics: diachronic evidence

Alexiadou (2005) argues that the emphatic possessive adjective *dhik-os/-i/-o*+poss.cl (cf. 11d, 12c) derives from the ancient/medieval *idhi(k)os* 'own'. She also points out that it is (and was) in complementary distribution with the highest adjectives, namely evaluative As, suggesting that it originates in the same position. Also, being emphatic itself it was not compatible with very high genitives (in GenS), which were also emphatic already in early texts. So, it was compatible with genitives in GenO and free GenS (or could be bare, referring to an ARB antecedent):

(13) Ton (*aute:s) idion (aute:s) agron (aute:s)(adapted from Brixhe 1994)
     The her   own her   land her

➤ After a parametric change that gave Greek the value [+N over GenO] (see Guardiano 2011), D-Adj-Gen-N strings were reanalysed as involving a high genitive position/GenS. In parallel, pre-N genitive DPs got lost, so that only clitics appeared in such strings (=GenS lost its Case assigning capacity). This was arguably facilitated by the fact that *(i)dhi(k)os* lost its ARB reading and requires a clitic specifying the possessor.

➤ A high position, corresponding to (the lost) GenS attracts clitics for emphatic purposes (cf. Alexiadou & Stavrou 2000) but no longer assigns Case, hence no DPs in GenS. Therefore, SMG has a negative value for (3).

➤ The highest adjective also incorporates into that position to provide a phonological host for the enclitic.

6. Conclusions

- In the light of the above, it turns out that possessive clitics interact with a number of parameters and their interaction may lead us to the need to refine some of them. Also, the possibility of micro-/nano-parameters specific to possessive clitics was not excluded.

- Possessive clitics may move to/through functional/licensing positions or may cliticise directly; in the latter case, there may be a distinction between *n*-cliticisation (post-N clitics in SMG) and N-cliticisation (N-complements only, i.e. inalienable possession only if we follow Alexiadou 2003 – Italian dialects)

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