

Are there optional rules in syntax ? Evidence from clitic climbing in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian

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One instance where optional (syntactic) mechanisms may be called for is the phenomenon of clitic climbing which arises in so-called restructuring configurations. The behavior of clitics in these configurations is unusual in that they seem to be free to choose between two positions. Indeed, it has often been argued that clitics climb optionally. The view that clitic climbing is really optional raises some serious conceptual and empirical problems though, rendering any unified theory of cliticization impossible: Zwicky's (1977) "special" clitics **must** appear in special positions, and any account of cliticization aims at discovering a mechanism (or mechanisms) that will **force** clitics to appear in their special positions. At the same time, various (ad-hoc) solutions would be needed to account for the fact that in certain contexts (i.e. under restructuring), clitic placement is optional, while in others (non-restructuring contexts), it is not. And accounting for optional clitic placement would inevitably call for some optional mechanisms in the grammar. Besides, the view that clitic climbing is optional fails to predict (and needs special solutions for) cases of obligatory climbing. In this paper I examine Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS) clitic climbing and show that there is no valid empirical motivation supporting the hypothesis that it obtains optionally (as originally proposed by Progovac 1993).

The puzzle. In certain well-defined configurations, clitics seem to be able to appear in two different positions: this situation typically arises in so-called restructuring configurations where the clitics can stay with the embedded verb or "climb" onto the matrix verb, as in the Italian example in (1); braces indicate two possible but uncombinable clitic positions:

- (1) Mario {lo} vuole risolver{lo} da solo [Rizzi 1982 : 11, p. 4]
Mario it wants to solve it by himself

The two positions of the clitics in (1a,b) could be assumed to derive from the structural ambiguity of the embedded infinitive (*restructuring* vs. *non-restructuring*). However, the data in (2a,b) have usually been taken to indicate that clitics can be hosted **within** restructuring infinitives (e.g. Cardinaletty & Shlonsky 2004): although the choice of the auxiliary *è* (*essere*) (selected by the embedded verb) in (2) suggests that restructuring has taken place, the clitic may remain in the embedded clause:

- (2) a. Maria c'è dovuta venire molte volte aux : *essere* → restructuring + clitic cl.
Maria there is had (to) come many times
b. Maria è dovuta venirei molte volte aux : *essere* → restructuring but no clitic cl.
'Maria had to come there many times'

Similar cases have been reported to exist in BCS with respect to four processes thought to obtain across transparent (i.e. restructuring) complement clauses introduced by *da* (that), as illustrated in (3a-d):

- (3) a. Mila {mu} ne želi [da {mu} posudi ništa] *ni-Negative Polarity Item licensing*
M. to-him neg. wants that to-him lends nothing
'Mila does not want to lend him anything'
b. To {mu} ne želim [da {mu} posudim] *long preposing*
this to-him neg. wish-1sg that to-him lend-1sg
'This, I don't want to lend him'
c. Šta {mu} ne želiš [da {mu} posudiš] ? *long wh-movement*
whom to-him neg. want-2sg that to-him lend-2sg
'Who don't you want to visit?'
d. Ovakvi putevi su {se} morali/pokušali [da {se} izgrade u tom gradu] *object promoting*
such roads aux. *se* had-to/tried that *se* build in that city
'One had to/tried to build such roads in that town.'

The proposal. I propose an account of such cases as (3a-d) which does not make use of an optional rule of clitic climbing. I will show that clitic climbing is different from, and not fully coextensive with, the other four processes in (3a-d), (as illustrated below with respect to *ni*-NPI licensing). Four sets of data will be shown to support this view. First, some matrix verbs do not allow clitic climbing out of their (subjunctive-like) *da*-clausal complements; significantly, these can contain *ni*-NPIs, cf.

(4a,b). *Da*-complements of such verbs are therefore domains which block clitic climbing but not *ni*-NPI licensing. Second, the same matrix verbs do not allow infinitival complements at all, which otherwise behave as restructuring complements in BCS (clitic climbing is obligatory out of infinitivals), cf. (4c); in other words, these verbs do not allow restructuring complements, and clitics climb out of restructuring complements only.

- (4) a. *Mila ga traži da posjeti clitic climbing
 Mila him asks that visits
 ‘Mila asks to visit him’
 b. Mila ne traži da vidi nikoga ni-NPI licensing
 Mila not asks that visits nobody
 ‘Mila doesn’t ask to visit anybody’
 c. *Mila traži posjetiti Marka.
 ‘Mila asks to-visit Marko’

Third, *da*-clausal complements of the same matrix verbs can be shown not to be CP domains either: the absence of weak cross-over effects in (5) signals the absence of an A’ position within the embedded clause. This suggests that domains which block clitic climbing are smaller than CP, and are likely to be TPs. Taken together the data in (4) and (5) seem to indicate that *ni*-NPI licensing, unlike clitic climbing, is available across a TP boundary.

- (5) Svakoga_i njegovai/k majka traži [da vidi t] no wxo
 everybody his mather demands that sees
 ‘Everybody, his mother demands to see’

Fourth, object promoting in BCS (3d) is available even across a CP boundary, unlike climbing, cf. (6a,b) (CP is signalled by the availability of *i*-NPI *igdje* ‘anywhere’ which is licensed by matrix negation, and illegitimate in the presence of clause-mate negation). It is not surprising then that the clitic in (3d) or (6a) can be hosted within the embedded clause. Crucially, *ni*-NPI licensing (as well as the other three processes illustrated in 3 above) obtains across (a subset of) non-restructuring complements, and not only across domains that allow clitics to raise. This leads to the following conclusion: when clitics occupy the positions within the embedded clauses in (3a-d, 6a), this does not mean that they are hosted within restructuring complements, i.e. that restructuring complements **can** host clitics; in other words, these data do not show that clitic climbing is optional.

- (6) a. Ovakvi mostovi ne bi smjeli [da se igdje grade]
 such bridges neg.-aux(cond) could that se anywhere build
 ‘One shouldn’t (be allowed to) build such bridges anywhere.’
 b. *Ovakvi mostovi **se** ne bi smjeli [da igdje grade]

Additional evidence against optionality of clitic climbing comes from cases (in Romance, BCS and Czech) where it obtains obligatory.

Implications. Three major implications of this analysis are the following: Firstly, the view adopted here that clitic climbing is obligatory implies that this process is not a special case of clitic placement: whatever triggers clitic placement in a non-restructuring configuration, triggers “clitic climbing” as well. Besides, cases of obligatory climbing naturally follow under this view, and need no special mechanisms to force clitics to climb. The proposed account thus allows for a unified theory of cliticization. Secondly, by demonstrating that neither TP nor CP should be considered as *restructuring* complements, the present account of clitic climbing in BCS supports some recent mono-clausal views of restructuring phenomena proposed in Wurmbrand 1998, 2001, according to which the restructuring complement is reduced to the thematic domain of the verb. Finally, to the extent that it is on the right track, the present analysis avoids postulating any optional rules/mechanisms in the grammar.

References:

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