Feature Spreading and Person Ordering Constraints

Steven Franks
Indiana University

This note examines so-called “Person Case Constraint” (PCC) effects in several Slavic languages. These are ordering restrictions on co-occurring clitic pronouns, where DAT(ive) » ACC(usative) but only certain person combinations are felicitous. It is proposed that there is no PERS(on) node per se, and that person should be characterized in terms of PART(icipant) and AUTH(or), with these features spreading from a higher Appl(licative) node to underspecified clitic pronouns.

1 Four Systems

The observation that certain combinations of clitic pronouns are incompatible goes back in the generative literature at least to Perlmutter (1971). There has been much work since then on what has come to be known as the PCC, examining both its nature and the typology of possible systems.¹ This paper is a small contribution with those same aims.

1.1 The Strong Constraint

The traditional PCC system stipulates that in a combination of weak direct and indirect object pronouns (typically, ACC and DAT), the direct object has to be 3rd person. Since, as I show in Franks (2017), the effect has nothing to do with case, I call this the Person Ordering Constraint (POC), as in (1). According to Stegovec (2016), standard Slovenian (Slvn) instantiates the Strong pattern, as shown in (2):

(1) **Strong POC**: In a combination of clitic pronouns, the last one has to be 3rd person.

(2) a. Sestra mi/ti ga bo predstavila. 1/2.DAT » 3.ACC
   sister me/youDAT himACC FUT3SG introduceF
   ‘The sister will introduce him to me/you.’

   b. *Sestra mu me/te bo predstavila. 3.DAT » 1/2.ACC
   sister himDAT me/youACC FUT3SG introduceF
   ‘The sister will introduce me/you to him.’

   c. *Sestra mi/ti te/me bo predstavila. 1/2.DAT » 2/1.ACC
   sister me/youDAT you/meACC FUT3SG introduceF
   ‘The sister will introduce me/you to you/me.’

1.2 The Weak Constraint

The Weak POC can be described as in (3). This allows (2c) but still rules (2b) out. Stegovec (2016) writes that some Slvn speakers accept (2c), reflecting the Weak pattern.

---

¹ This paper is adapted from ideas in Franks (2017, forthcoming).

(3) **Weak POC:** In a combination of clitic pronouns, if there is a 3\textsuperscript{rd} person, then it has to come last.

1.3 **The Me-First Constraint**

A third fairly common type is given in (4). As described by Runić (2013), Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS) belongs to this system. Her example (5) shows that 3\textsuperscript{rd} person can precede 2\textsuperscript{nd} but not 1\textsuperscript{st}, while her (6) shows that 1\textsuperscript{st} person can precede 2\textsuperscript{nd} but not vice versa:

(4) **Me-First POC:** In a combination of clitic pronouns, if there is a 1\textsuperscript{st} person, then it has to come first.

(5) a. Toplo mu te preporučujem.
   warmly him\textsubscript{DAT} you\textsubscript{ACC} recommend\textsubscript{1SG}
   ‘I warmly recommend you to him.’
   
   b. ??(*)Toplo me preporučuješ.
   warmly him\textsubscript{DAT} me\textsubscript{ACC} recommend\textsubscript{2SG}
   ‘You warmly recommend me to him.’

(6) a. Toplo mi te preporučuje.
   warmly me\textsubscript{DAT} you\textsubscript{ACC} recommend\textsubscript{3SG}
   ‘He warmly recommends you to me.’
   
   b. ??(*)Toplo ti me preporučuje.
   warmly you\textsubscript{DAT} me\textsubscript{ACC} recommend\textsubscript{3SG}
   ‘He warmly recommends me to you.’

1.4 **The Strictly Descending Constraint**

Lastly, there is the type in (7):

(7) **Strictly Descending POC:** In a combination of clitic pronouns, the argument with the “higher” person specification (where 1\textsuperscript{st} » 2\textsuperscript{nd} » 3\textsuperscript{rd}) has to come first.

Within Slavic, Czech is sometimes described this way, but space considerations preclude examples.

2 **Analysis**

This section puts forward an explicit account of these systems.

2.1 **Some background assumptions**

First, I adopt PART and AUTH as privative features which define the various persons, as follows:

(8) **Person features:**
   a. 1\textsuperscript{st} PERSON: PART+AUTH  
   b. 2\textsuperscript{nd} PERSON: PART  
   c. 3\textsuperscript{rd} PERSON: ø
In the spirit of Harley and Ritter (2002) and following a tradition going back to Benveniste (1956), 3rd person is treated as no person.\(^2\) I also contend that (8) can be implemented either by introducing AUTH as a value of PART or by keeping AUTH and PART independent (although AUTH without PART is of course ineffable). That is, using K(ase) as the node for Slavic pronominal clitics, both feature geometries in (9a, b) are viable ways to express 1st person, with languages differing in terms of which one they adopt:

(9) a. \[\text{K} \quad \text{[=1}^{\text{st}}\text{]} \quad \text{PART} \]
    \[\text{AUTH} \quad \text{PART} \]

    b. \[\text{K} \quad \text{[=1}^{\text{st}}\text{]} \quad \text{PART} \quad \text{AUTH} \]

    c. \[\text{K} \quad \text{[=2}^{\text{nd}}\text{]} \quad \text{PART} \]

Next comes the idea that clitics, as minimal lexical items, may lack specifications enjoyed by contentful words. In particular, in addition to their hallmark property of being prosodically deficient and their semantic limitation to instantiating grammatical features, clitics may be underspecified for person, with the following additional restrictions on what morphosyntactic information they contain:

(10) **Overlay Restrictions:**
    a. *Restriction*\(_{\text{PART+AUTH}}\): Clitics contain neither PART nor AUTH features.
    b. *Restriction*\(_{\text{PART}}\): Clitics do not contain PART, but can contain AUTH.
    c. *Restriction*\(_{\text{AUTH}}\): Clitics do not contain AUTH, but can contain PART.

The last component of the analysis concerns how person is supplied to clitics when underspecified as in (10). I adapt the multiattachment model of Franks (2017), so that the errant features spread to the clitics from a higher functional projection. In Franks (2017) this projection was Agr, but here I will modify that account. Following Charnavel and Mateu (2015), who understand the PCC as an antilogophoricity effect deriving from a conflict of perspective between indirect and direct objects, the projection establishes a logophoric (or point-of-view) center. Pancheva and Zubizarreta (2017) build on their insight, employing Appl(icative) for the purpose of introducing the indirect object as a perspectival center. Since, however, spreading is only down the tree, I need to employ a higher node to provide person features and a lower one to merge the indirect object into the structure. It is therefore the so-called “high” ApplP—which I situate between vP and VP (i.e., like ertswhile AgrP)—that does the needed work in terms of providing person features, and it is the “low” one that introduces the indirect object as its specifier:\(^3\)

(11) \[vP \quad \text{Subj} \quad [\text{ApplP} \quad \text{Appl} \quad [\text{VP} \quad [\text{ApplP Ind-Obj} \quad [\text{Appl Appl [D-Obj]]]}]]] \]

Clitics derive the featural content that specifies their person values from Appl in (11), as it searches down the tree for a target. Crucially, when there is more than one clitic, it is the

---

\(^2\) Thus, contrary to the system in Franks (2017), there is no PERS(on) feature for PART and AUTH to be values of. While my concern here is with pronouns, nouns intrinsically do not vary by person hence should not express such a category in the first place. So, rather than saying that nouns are always specified as 3rd person, we can say that they are always “3rd person” because they embody the absence of person.

\(^3\) See McGinnis (2008) and references therein for discussion of ApplP. Note that non-argument datives (ethical, benefactive, etc.) are introduced by the high ApplP, and these do not enter into the Person Ordering Constraints.
highest (=first) that is reached first and provided with person features. Since potential targets cannot be skipped, the lower clitic can only be accessed once the person features have already spread to the higher clitic.

2.2 Deriving the systems
The effect of these restrictions in deriving the various POC patterns is demonstrated in this section. In the Strong system, clitics respect (10a), meaning that they have no specification for person. In addition, in the Strong system AUTH is an optional feature of PART, hence can only spread together with it. Thus, 1st and 2nd person spread as in (12a) and (12b), respectively:

(12) Strong System (10a): Spreading of PART (geometry (9a))

\[\text{PART}\] \text{AUTH}

\[\text{PART}\] \text{AUTH}

The result is that the second clitic, K_B, can only surface as a person-less form, i.e., it must be 3rd person.\(^4\)

In the Weak system, 1st and 2nd person clitics can cooccur but, if there is a 3rd person clitic, then that must come last. This means, as in (10b), clitics can bear the AUTH feature but PART must spread:

(13) Weak System (10b): Spreading of PART AND clitics can contain AUTH

\[\text{PART}\] \text{AUTH}

\[\text{PART}\] \text{AUTH}

With respect to (2c), (13a) gives the order mi te ‘me\text{_{DAT}} you\text{_{ACC}}’ and (13b) gives ti me ‘you\text{_{DAT}} me\text{_{ACC}}’. Spreading is optional, so if it stops at K_A in (13a), then K_B will be 3rd person. What is not derivable, however, is an order in which 3rd person precedes 1st or 2nd, since K_A cannot be skipped in reaching K_B.

Consider next the Me-First system, as in BCS. Here, 1st person is required to precede 2nd or 3rd, but that is all. Such clitics respect (10c) in that they can contain PART but not AUTH, which must spread. This produces 1st \(\rightarrow\) 2nd and 1st \(\rightarrow\) 3rd, as shown in (14a) and (14b), respectively:

(14) Me-First System (10c): Spreading of AUTH AND clitics can contain PART

\(^4\) One might ask why PART could not continue to spread, identifying the second clitic, K_B, as 1st or 2nd person, just like K_A. Indeed nothing prevents this; the only issue, as discussed in Franks (2017: 277–279), is whether the result would lead to a subsequent Binding Condition B violation.
Since clitics can only acquire AUTH from above, 1\textsuperscript{st} person clitics must come first in any sequence that involves them. But in the absence of AUTH anything is possible—i.e., 2\textsuperscript{nd} » 3\textsuperscript{rd} and even 3\textsuperscript{rd} » 2\textsuperscript{nd}, as in BCS (5a), which should be compared to impossible Slvn (2b). What cannot happen, however, is for AUTH to skip over KA, whether or not that bears PART (i.e., is 3\textsuperscript{rd} or 2\textsuperscript{nd} person):

(15) **Me-First System: Failed derivations of 3\textsuperscript{rd} » 1\textsuperscript{st} (5b) and 2\textsuperscript{nd} » 1\textsuperscript{st} (6b)**

The most striking aspect of this analysis is that it allows for 3\textsuperscript{rd} person to precede 2\textsuperscript{nd}, as in BCMS (5a), something impossible in all the other POC systems. This is what emerges if Appl adds no person values to either clitic,\(^5\) and if clitic\(_B\) bears PART (i.e., is 2\textsuperscript{nd} person). On the other hand, any combination in which 1\textsuperscript{st} person accusative follows a 3\textsuperscript{rd} or 2\textsuperscript{nd} person dative clitic, as attempted in (15a) and (15b), respectively, cannot be derived if AUTH is removed from the clitics and placed under Appl. The fact that clitic\(_A\) cannot be skipped in accessing clitics ensures that, if there is a 1\textsuperscript{st} person clitic, then it must precede all others. This is, after all, what the **Me-First Person Ordering Constraint** means.

We turn finally to the Strictly Descending pattern.\(^6\) The difference between Strictly Descending and Strong lies in the fact that the latter does not allow 1\textsuperscript{st} person to precede 2\textsuperscript{nd} person, as in (16c):

(16) **Strictly Descending POC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1\textsuperscript{st} » 3\textsuperscript{rd}</th>
<th>1\textsuperscript{st} » 2\textsuperscript{nd}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st} » 3\textsuperscript{rd}</td>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st} » 2\textsuperscript{nd}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} » 3\textsuperscript{rd}</td>
<td>*1\textsuperscript{st} » 2\textsuperscript{nd}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st} » 2\textsuperscript{nd}</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} » 3\textsuperscript{rd}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I see this system as a variant of the Strong POC, but one in which, although the clitics contain neither PART nor AUTH features as stated in (10a), PART and AUTH are able to operate independently. This entails that the needed feature geometry for 1\textsuperscript{st} person must be as in (9b). Here is the derivation of (16c):

(17) **Strictly Descending System (10a): Spreading of PART AND AUTH [geometry (9b)]**

---

\(^5\) Since it would play no role, presumably in the structure there is in this instance no high Applicative Phrase.

\(^6\) According to Pancheva and Zubizarreta (2017) this pattern (also called "Ultra-Strong" by Nevins 2007), has been documented for Classical Arabic (cf. e.g. Walkow 2012), for some speakers of Spanish (cf. e.g. Perlmutter 1971), and for some speakers of Catalan (cf. e.g. Bonet 1991). Sturgeon et al. (2012) also describe Czech this way.
This sort of spreading clearly would be impossible if AUTH were a feature of PART, as it is in the Strong system, which makes use of the geometry in (9a). The ordering $1^{st} \rightarrow 3^{rd}$, as in (16a), is derived as follows:

\begin{equation}
\text{(18) Strictly Descending System: Derivation of $1^{st} \rightarrow 3^{rd}$}
\end{equation}

Here, since $K_B$ ends up as $3^{rd}$ person, the fact that AUTH and PART are independent is irrelevant. Lastly, the ordering in (16b) is derived exactly as depicted for the Strong POC in (12b). Thus, both systems share the fact that what defines them is the overlay restriction in (10a), namely that the clitics do not come with person values. The difference is one of feature geometry: in the Strictly Descending system, but not in the Strong one, AUTH is not dependent on PART.\footnote{This differs from the analysis in Franks (forthcoming), which maintains the feature geometry in (9b) for all POC systems but requires an explicit PERS node (the proposal there being that clitics have no PERS node in the Strong system but do have one in Strictly Descending). I now see PERS as both unwarranted and technically problematic.} The result is that clitic$_A$ can be $1^{st}$ person and clitic$_B$ can be $2^{nd}$. This is precisely what is needed to derive the Strictly Descending POC order in (16c) and to make it diverge from the Strong PCC in just this one way.

References


franks@indiana.edu