

Chapter 4 Morphology

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“Delving Deeper”

Clitics

Clitics are elements that need to attach to a host. In other words, they are not independent words. At the same time, they are not affixes because they have important roles to play in the structure of sentences (syntax). In English most contractions are clitics (1a), as is the possessive –‘s (1b,c). In the examples, the clitics are in bold.

- (1) a. They’**re** happy.
b. the boy’**s** hat.
c. the king of Spain’**s** daughter

In languages such as French, pronouns can be clitics. In (2a) the subject pronoun is a clitic, in (2b) and (c) the object pronoun is a clitic. None of these pronouns are clitics in English.

- (2) a. **Je** bois du café.
I drink *du* coffee
‘I drink coffee.’

b. Je **le** vois.
I it see
‘I see it.’

c. Je **lui** parle.
I him speak
‘I speak to him.’

In the table below, we compare object pronouns in English and French in order to illustrate some of the properties of clitics. The relevant pronouns are in bold and capital letters show emphasis.

English	French
a. I see you .	Je te vois/*Je vois te
b. I see him and her .	*Je le et la vois.
c. I see HER .	*Je LA vois.
d. Who did you see? Her .	Qui as tu vu? * La .

1. In French, clitics attach to a verb. In example (a), the pronoun follows the verb in English. In fact, it can be separated from it in sentences such as *I see John and you*. In French, the

clitic *te* has to attach at the beginning of the verb and cannot be separated from it. Putting the clitic after the verb as in English leads to an ungrammatical sentence.

2. Clitics cannot be conjoined by the conjunctions *and* or *but*. In English, it is possible to say *him and her*, as in example (b) in the table, but this is not possible with the equivalent French clitics.
3. Clitics cannot carry stress. In example (c), stress is indicated by capitals. One can loudly proclaim that the person seen is HER, but one cannot do this using a clitic in French.
4. Clitics cannot stand alone. In (d) *her* can be the answer to a question in English, but the equivalent is not possible in French.

Clitics exist in many languages. Occasionally clitics may become affixes over time. For example, in Danish and Norwegian some clitics used to attach to the end of the host, and they have now become bound morphemes.

Remember that morphology can interact with phonology as seen in the case of allomorphs. Morphology and syntax can also interact, as we see with clitics in French. We refer to this interaction as **morphosyntax**. Other areas of morphosyntactic interaction are gender and number agreement between nouns, adjectives, and determiners in languages such as French, Italian and Portuguese, as illustrated in (3), and agreement between the subject and the verb (4).

- (3)
- | | |
|----|---|
| a. | Ma jolie peinture.
my-fem pretty-fem painting
'My pretty painting.' |
| b. | Mon joli dessin.
my-masc pretty-masc drawing
'My pretty drawing.' |
- (4)
- | | |
|----|------------|
| a. | I sing. |
| b. | She sings. |

Linguistic Tidbits: Clitics and their hosts

When a clitic attaches before the host, as in the French examples above, we call it **proclisis**. Clitics can also attach to the end of the host, as in the Spanish example in (i), in which case we speak of **enclisis**. Surprisingly, it is also possible for the clitic to attach before inflectional morphology, as in the Portuguese example in (ii). This is referred to as **mesoclis**.

- | | |
|-----|---|
| i. | Quiero ver lo . (Spanish)
want-I see-him
'I want to see him.' |
| ii. | Dar- lho -ia (Portuguese)
give-it-conditional
'I would give it to him.' |