AN APPARENT 'NUMBER CASE CONSTRAINT' IN ROMANIAN: THE ROLE OF SYNCRETISM[*]

ANDREW NEVINS and OANA SĂVESCU
Harvard University and NYU

Abstract

Romanian pronominal plural clitics differ from their singular clitic counterparts in that they exhibit dative-accusative case syncretism. This contrast correlates with an asymmetry in the combinatorial possibilities of plural vs singular clitics: namely, plural clitics in direct object position in Romanian affect the acceptability of clitic clusters, as confirmed in quantitative acceptability judgements with multiple informants. Rather than invoking a new 'Number Case Constraint' governing the distribution of clitics, we link the Romanian data to familiar facts from Leísta dialects of Spanish, which manifest case syncretism between dative and animate accusative 3rd person clitics. We implement the fact that 1st and 2nd person plural clitics in Romanian are case-syncretic by implicationally marking them as inherently [+animate] in the syntax. The severe degradation of clusters with direct object plural clitics is accounted for by following aspects of Adger & Harbour's (2007) proposal for the connection between syncretism and the Person Case Constraint.

1. Introduction

In this paper we examine the role of a paradigmatic property, namely the existence of clitic case syncretism, on a syntagmatic property, namely clitic co-ocurrence restrictions. We focus our discussion on Romanian, which is unique among modern Romance languages in that its singular pronominal clitics manifest a dative-accusative case distinction: the 1st person singular clitic, for instance, is *mi* in the dative case and *mă* in the accusative. Plural clitics, however,

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are case-syncretic (*ne* is 1st person plural DAT/ACC, *vă* is 2nd person plural DAT/ACC), thus yielding a singular-plural asymmetry in the Romanian clitic paradigm.[1] We show that this asymmetry actually correlates with a contrast in the combinatorial possibilities of singular and plural clitics, and we present evidence for a novel discovery in Romanian: the existence of co-occurrence restrictions on postverbal clitic clusters with accusative clitics that are plural.

The paper is structured as follows: section 2 presents a brief overview of the combinatorial possibilities of singular clitics, which are contrasted in section 3 with the behavior of plural clitic clusters. The latter seem to speak in favor of a new constraint governing the distribution of clitics in Romanian, namely a 'Number Case Constraint' (modeled along the lines of the Person Case Constraint familiar from studies of Romance clitic clusters). The fact that plural clitics in the direct object position significantly affect the grammaticality of clitic clusters is substantiated in section 4 by a quantitative analysis of judgments of 17 native speakers of Romanian. In section 5 we show that the Romanian plural data can be assimilated to familiar facts from Leísta dialects of Spanish, and therefore should not be understood in terms of a Number Case Constraint. Rather, we take the morphological syncretism of Romanian 1st and 2nd person plural clitics and Leísta 3rd person clitics to be evidence for the language learner of an underlying featural identity (animacy) which conditions a shared vocabulary item. The degradation of clusters with direct object plural clitics in Romanian is then accounted for by following aspects of the syntax of Applicatives, interacting with selectional properties of the syntax-semantics interface (Adger and Harbour, 2007), thereby deriving the Number Case Constraint in Romanian and animacy co-occurrence restrictions in Leísta Spanish through the interaction of independently motivated grammatical principles (sections 6 and 7). Section 8 presents a set of general conclusions on the nature of clitic cooccurence restrictions and the role of syncretism.

2. *Combinatorial restrictions of Romanian singular clitics*

In clusters, Romanian pronominal clitics unambiguously exhibit the order dative accusative, both in preverbal and in post-verbal position. However, even when the dative accusative order is respected in Romanian, not all combinations of clitics with respect to person are possible. The data in (1)-(2) show that Romanian is subject to the Me-First combinatorial restriction, which disallows a

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[1] Romanian clitics are independently subject to a vowel-height change in clitic clusters, the same morphological process at work in Italian; cf. for example the allomorphs of the locative clitic *ci* in isolation vs. *ce lo* in a cluster (Cinque, 1994, Cardinaletti, 2008). To factor out this effect and diagnose paradigmatic dative/accusative syncretism, one must look at clitics in isolation.

2nd person dative clitic in the presence of a 1st person accusative clitic:

(1)   *Ţi   m-   a   prezentat Ion   la petrecere.
       2sg.dat 1sg.acc has introduced John at party
       'John has introduced me to you at the party'. (✗ 2sg.dat > 1sg.acc)

(2)   Mi   te-   a   prezentat Ion   la petrecere.
       1sg.dat 2sg.acc has introduced John at party.
       'John has introduced you to me at the party'. (✓ 1sg.dat > 2sg.acc)

One exceptional property of Romanian singular clitic clusters is that no such person restrictions govern their distribution in post-verbal position, when clitics appear after true imperatives and gerunds (Săvescu, 2007). The unacceptable example in (1) above thus contrasts sharply with the acceptable examples in (3)-(4), in which the cluster is post-verbal.[2]

(3)   a.   Dându- ţi-   mă   de nevastă, tata   a   câştigat mulţi bani
             giving 2sg.dat 1sg.acc of wife,   father has gained much money
             'Giving me to you in marriage, my father has gained a lot of money'.
             (✓ 2sg.dat > 1sg.acc)
       b.   Ia- ţi-   mă   drept martor, şi   vei   câştiga procesul!
             take 2sg.dat 1sg.acc as   witness, and will.2nd win   trial.the
             'Take me as a witness (for yourself) and you will win the trial!'
             (✓ 2sg.dat > 1sg.acc)

In what follows we will restrict our attention to post-verbal clitic clusters, which are thus less restrictive with respect to the combinatorial possibilities they allow.

3.   An apparent Number Case Constraint in Romanian

When we consider combinations of plural clitics, a different picture emerges. While a singular 2nd person dative clitic can freely combine in nonfinite environments with a singular accusative 1st person clitic, changing the number of clitics to the plural results in severe degradation:

(4)   ??/*Dându- vi-   ne   in grijă, tata   s- a   simţit uşurat
       giving   2pl.dat 1pl.acc in care, father se has felt   relieved
       'Entrusting us to y'all, my father felt relieved.'

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[2] Nevins (2007) argues that the Romanian *2>1 restriction is due to an Agreement intervention for a marked [+author] feature. Gerunds and Imperatives lack Tense and hence do not agree for a Person feature.

(5)   ??/*Dându- ţi-   ne   in grijă, tata   s- a   simţit uşurat
      giving   2sg.dat 1pl.acc in care, father se has felt   relieved
      'Entrusting us to you, my father felt relieved.'

The fact that clitics should be subject to restrictions of case and *person* (e.g.
(1)-(2)) is now a familiar fact in clitic languages, as previous accounts dealing
with the Person Case Constraint have revealed (Perlmutter, 1971, Kayne, 1975,
Bonet, 1991, Anagnostopoulou, 2003)). The contrast between the data in (3)/(4)
and (5)/(6), however, is quite striking, because its seem to suggest that Romanian
exhibits a new type of restriction on its clitic clusters, namely one that is sensitive
to number (and independent of person):

(6)   *Apparent 'Number Case Constraint' in Romanian*: A dative-accusative
      clitic cluster is unacceptable if the second clitic is 1st or 2nd person and
      plural.

The existence of a so-called 'Number Case Constraint' has actually not been
documented before in the clitics literature outside of Romanian, where it re-
ceived a brief treatment in terms of empathy in Farkas and Kazazis (1980), who
note the ungrammaticality of plural 2Dat-1Acc combinations in pre-verbal po-
sition. In view of the already-existing person restrictions on pre-verbal singular
clusters (cf. (2) above), the data documented by Farkas and Kazazis (1980) are
not as surprising as the fact that the plurality of the clitics should still have an
effect on the grammaticality of a post-verbal cluster, given that in such non-finite
environments singular clitics typically show significantly less co-occurrence re-
strictions. Moreover, as we show in a more fined-grain analysis of the pattern of
quantitative acceptability judgements in the next section, in post-verbal position,
the effect of number in the second clitic position is independent of the person
specifications on each clitic.

4. *Quantitative Acceptability judgments*

Since these are a new observations and also pragmatically infrequent combi-
nations in non-finite clauses, we attempted to confirm the judgements in (5) and
(6) on a larger scale.[3] We tested the following 6 combinations, with 17 speakers,
who rated the acceptability of the forms from 1-5 (5 highest).

(7)   Combinations tested in acceptability judgement study:

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[3] We did not test 2pl > 1sg or 1pl > 2sg but will do so in future work; the second author's
judgement is that these are much better than sg>pl.

dându	mi te...	1sg > 2sg
dându	ți mă...	2sg > 1sg
dându	ni vă...	1pl > 2pl
dându	vi ne...	2pl > 1pl
dându	mi vă...	1sg > 2pl
dându	ți ne ...	2sg > 1pl

The mean ratings and standard deviations are shown in the table below. The worst combinations were **pl-pl**.

(8)   Summary of acceptability judgements:

Number	Person	Mean rating	St.Dev
sg-sg	1 > 2	4.911765	0.3638034
sg-sg	2 > 1	4.088235	1.7341721
sg-pl	1 > 2	3.647059	1.9102086
sg-pl	2 > 1	3.441176	2.1056646
pl-pl	1 > 2	2.970588	2.1247837
pl-pl	2 > 1	2.176471	2.0228474

Statistical effects conducted by ANOVAs revealed a highly significant effect of **Number**: $F(2,96) = 9.546$, $p < 0.0001$. ANOVAs also revealed a non-significant effect for Person: $F(1,96) = 2.850$, $p>0.09$ (n.s.), as well as a non-significant effect for Number×Person Interaction: $F(2,96) = 0.312$, $p>0.74$ (n.s.). Concluding from these results, one can observe that the presence of plural clitic in the cluster, in particular in DO position, is the strongest factor affecting acceptability of Postverbal Clusters, with little to no role for Person Case effects postverbally, as expected from the discussion above.

In the following sections we will propose an account for the unacceptability of plural clitics in the direct object position of ditransitive constructions, without actually relying upon the postulation of a wholly new Number Case Constraint as a component of universal grammar. As a first step towards the analysis, we show in the following section that the behavior of Romanian plural clitics is reminiscent of already familiar facts from Leísta dialects of Spanish.

5. *A tangent: Leísta Spanish*

Leísta dialects of Spanish (Landa, 1995, Bleam, 1999, Ormazabal and Romero, 2007) exhibit syncretism between dative and accusative animate 3rd person clitics: they are both *le*.

(9)   **Le**   dí   un reloj
        3.Dat.Anim gave-1sg a   watch

"I gave him a watch"

(10)   **Le**   vi
       3.Acc.Anim saw-1sg
       "I saw him"

Compare thus (10) with (11) below, in which the accusative clitic is inanimate:

(11)   **Lo**   vi
       3.Acc.Inan saw-1sg
       "I saw it"

We propose that the syncretism exemplified in (9) and (10) provides evidence for the Leísta language learner of an underlying featural identity; this allows him to 'map backwards' what the phonological exponent is realizing. Syncretism of A & B when A & B have different case features (and different syntactic functions/patterns) must mean that A & B share some other feature that phonological realization is eventually sensitive to. The syncretism of the two uses of *le* is due to a shared feature: [+animate], giving rise to the Leísta Spanish Spellout Rule below:

(12)   Leísta Spanish spellout Rule:
       [+anim] 3rd clitic → /le/

The result of (12) is accomplished only upon completion of the syntax, when terminal nodes are supplied with phonological content (Halle and Marantz, 1993). Clitic nodes with different case, if they are specified for [+animate], will be ultimately realized with the same phonological form.

5.1 Romanian clitic case syncretism

Returning to Romanian, recall that plural clitics, unlike singular ones, are case-syncretic. The form of the 2nd plural dative clitic *vi* in examples such as (4) above is to a certain extent misleading – while *i* is clearly a dative marker for singular clitics[4], the same is not true for plural clitics, which only exhibit the vowel *i* when they appear in a cluster due to a morphophonological rule (see footnote 1). Syncretism with plural clitics must then be diagnosed in isolation, as illustrated in (13)-(14) below for plural 1st person clitics:

(13)   **Ne**   vede
       1pl.acc sees

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[4] Romanian is thus different from Italian, where the vowel *-i* which appears on certain singular clitics is epenthetic (cf. Kayne (2000, p.131-162), Cardinaletti (2008)).

'He sees us/you'

(14)   **Ne**   dă   bomboane
       1pl.dat give candy
       'He is giving us candy'

This syncretism occurs when the Dat/Acc clitics are [+Participant, +Plural]. The learner who observes this syncretism must posit a featural basis for it in order to "map backwards" what the phonological exponent is realizing. (In other words, we assume that learners strive to find a "shared form implies shared features" basis for syncretism). Romanian has syncretism of two distinct uses of *ne*, which differ in their case features, and this means that the Dat and Acc 1pl and 2pl must share some other feature: [+animate]. Learners that posit a featural basis for syncretism must do so only based on the universal inventory of phi-features, and [+animate] is available among them, and moreover an interpretively "grounded" feature present among 1st and 2nd person clitics, due to the nature of 1st and 2nd person. Overt morphological syncretism among the plural [+participant] clitics is evidence for the language learner of an underlying featural identity, implemented by the implicational statement in (15).

(15)   Implicational Statement for Romanian clitics:
         [+Participant, +Plural] → [+animate]

This feature co-occurrence requirement is part of the clitic terminal nodes that enter the syntax. All 1st and 2nd Plural clitics must be syntactically [+animate]. Singular 1st and 2nd plural clitics are also interpretively animate, of course, but are not syntactically required to bear this feature. It is the syncretism among the [+participant] plurals, coupled with the learning of syncretism as due to an interpretively grounded available phi-feature, that compels only these clitics to obligatorily bear [+animate].
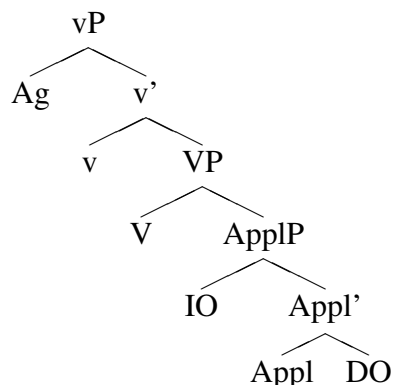
The contribution of this syncretism and its feature-theoretic implementation to the apparent number case constraint of Romanian clitics is that there is nothing special about "plural number" in Romanian, per se, and no need to invoke a reasoning in which plural is for some reason especially marked in Romanian. The only thing special about plural clitics is that they are syncretic between dative and accusative. It is the syncretism of these particular clitics (and the more general effect of syncretism on clitic clusters), and not their value for [± plural] per se that is responsible for the effect.

While (15) requires that all clitic nodes bearing the features [+Part,+Pl] must also bear [+animate], the syntax itself sees only the result of this statement (i.e. the feature [+animate]), and not the eventual fact that post-syntactically,

this shared feature will condition syncretism. In other words, since the syntactic computation does not see the phonological form of clitics, the effect of syncretism within the syntax is indirectly mediated by morphosyntactic features.

6.   *The Syntax of Ditransitives, specifically ApplP*

We turn to the syntax of double object constructions and the role of clausal structure, agreement, and economy conditions in deriving the clitic combination restrictions observed in Romanian and in Leísta Spanish. There are many proposals for the internal structure of double object constructions, and we adopt the specific proposal that double object constructions are introduced by the functional head ApplP (Pylkkänen 2002, p.19; Cuervo 2003), in which the IO is higher than the DO. Pronominal clitics are generated in argumental positions:

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              vP
            /    \
          Ag      v'
                /    \
              v       VP
                    /    \
                   V      ApplP
                        /      \
                      IO       Appl'
                             /      \
                           Appl     DO
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The projection ApplP takes the indirect object in its specifier and the direct object in its complement. Following the spirit of Adger and Harbour (2007), we adopt the selectional requirement on the specifier of Appl:

(16)   **Selectional Requirement**: Applicative head has a selectional requirement that its specifier be [+animate], implemented as a feature-checking process.

The existence of (16) is responsible for the animacy requirements on the goal in double object constructions (Bresnan, 1978, Mazurkewich and White, 1984, Pesetsky, 1995):[5], responsible for the contrasts in (17):

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[5] We put aside cases of benefactive scenarios involving tables and cakes (e.g. the clitic-based ditransitive equivalents of 'I mended the table its leg', 'I gave the cake some sugar', and assume that such cases involve coercion of animacy via a notion of affectedness. Placement of inanimates into goal position forces assignment of [+animate] to them, yielding the interpretive effect of affectedness.

a.   *I sent the border a package (cf. I sent the boarder a package)

b.   *I showed the door you (cf. I showed you to the door)

Finally, while [+animate] is a necessary on certain DPs (due to the lexical and syntactic requirements of (15) and (16)), and can be optionally specified on other DPs upon their entry into the syntax, the logical form (LF) component can deal with underspecification, and can still interpret an element that is underspecified as [± animate]. The effects of various animacy requirements in distinct components of the lexicon, the syntax, and logical form are summarized in (17):

(17)   Summary of animacy conditions in Romanian:

      a.   Due to Implicational Statement (15), all 1st.pl/2nd.pl clitics must be syntactically [+animate]

      b.   Due to Selectional Requirement (16) the specifier of Appl must be syntactically [+animate]

      c.   *Underspecification is okay at LF*: if an argument lacks a syntactic [+animate] feature marking, this does not entail that the argument is inanimate

Having presented the requirements of [+animate] marking in the lexicon and syntax, we turn to the details of case assignment in ditransitive constructions. We adopt the following syntactic requirement on Case assignment:

(18)   **Agree with DO**: Appl must establish an Agree relation with the DO in its complement domain in order to value its Accusative case

Finally, we adopt the following economy principle (Adger & Harbour 2007:26, see also Abels (2003)) :

(19)   **Spec-Comp Distinctness**: The features which a functional head requires its specifier to bear cannot be used as probes in the head's complement domain

This economy principle dictates that a feature already checked within the complement domain of a functional head cannot be used again in the case of interaction with the same head's specifier. In other words, if the feature [+animate] is already probed within the complement of Appl, then it cannot be used as a selectional feature in order to assign a thematic interpretation to the specifier of Appl.

7. *Deriving the "Number Case Constraint" of Romanian*

Recall the preliminary statement of the apparent Number Case Constraint (repeated in (20)), formulated as the result of judgements on clusters such as those in (21).

(20)   *Apparent 'Number Case Constraint' in Romanian*: A dative-accusative clitic cluster is unacceptable if the second clitic is 1st or 2nd person and plural.

The ungrammatical (4) is repeated below, with a tree representing the ApplP domain below it.

(21)   ??/*Dându- vi-   ne   in grijă, tata   s- a   simţit uşurat
          giving   2pl.dat 1pl.acc in care, father se has felt   relieved
          'Entrusting us to y'all, my father felt relieved.'
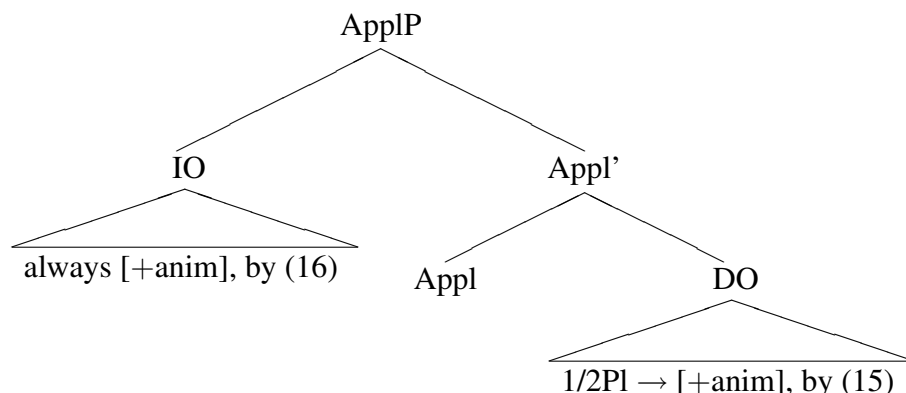
The DO above must enter the syntax as [+animate], due to the syncretism-yielding implicational statement of (15). The IO is required to be [+animate], due to the selectional requirement of (16). However, as the DO is Agreed-with by Appl first (18), Appl cannot unify its selectional requirement with its specifier (19).

The interaction of each of these independent principles (many of coming from different modules of the grammar, e.g. the syntax-semantics interface (16), the morphosyntax-phonology interface (15)), and purely syntactic computational principles (19)) thus derives the apparent "Number Case Constraint" of Romanian with no direct reference to where Number and Case co-occur.[6] The seem-

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[6] The ditransitive clitic co-occurrence restrictions on two [+animate] clitics that these principles generate do not subsume *all* PCC effects, such as preverbal *2sg > 1sg in Romanian, or the weak vs. strong PCC. See Nevins (2007) for an approach to PCC microvariation based on sensitivity to marked and contrastive Person features.

ingly idiosyncratic effects of plural number on clitic cluster acceptability fall out from the interaction of universal grammatical principles with the distribution of syncretism in the Romanian clitic paradigm.

7.1 Returning to Leísta Spanish

In this subsection we show how the account developed above, in part motivated by the role of dative-accusative syncretism among [+animate] clitics in Leísta Spanish, can be extended immediately to explain an interesting restriction in Leísta Spanish.

As noted by Ormazabal and Romero (2007), in Leísta Spanish, the one place that *le* cannot be used for a [+animate] accusative is in the presence of dative clitics (22), with the corresponding ApplP shown below.
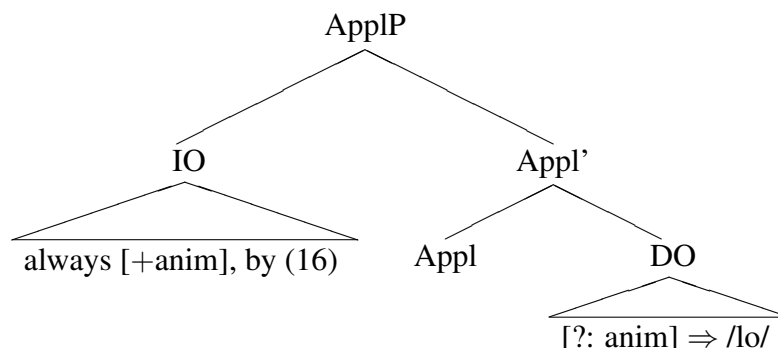
(22)   *Te le   dí
        2.dat 3.Acc.Anim gave.1sg
        'I gave him to you'
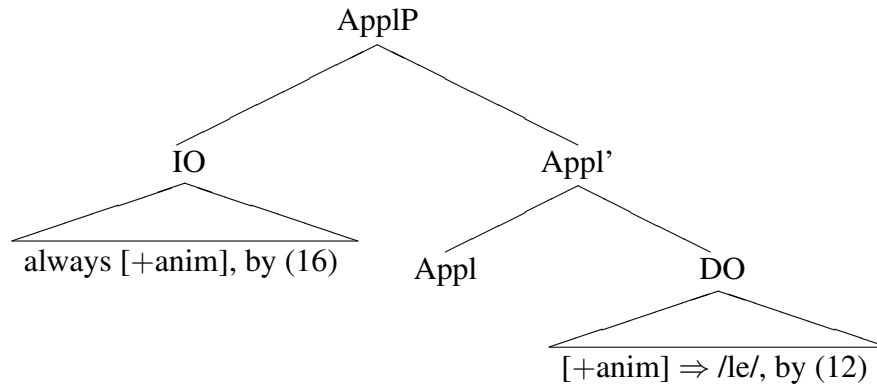
The unacceptability of (22) can be derived by a now-familar set of interactions. The choice of a DO specified as [+animate] (leading to phonological spellout as *le*, by (12)), in combination with the selectional requirement of Appl for a [+animate] specifier, will lead to a crash due to Spec-Comp distinctness.

Interestingly, a ditransitive with two interpretively animate objects can be saved if the second one is not *syntactically* [+animate]. In other words, if the second DO is underspecified for [±animate] (and no well-formedness requirement forces its specification), ApplP can successfully check the selectional requirement of its specifier without interference:

(23)   Te lo   dí
        2.dat 3.Acc gave.1sg
        'I gave it/him to you'

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                              ApplP
                        ╱            ╲
                   IO                  Appl'
              ╱─────────╲          ╱        ╲
      always [+anim], by (16)   Appl        DO
                                          ╱──────╲
                                       [?: anim] ⇒ /lo/
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In (23), the DO clitic node is underspecified for [± animate], passes through
the syntax without violating Spec-Comp distinctness, and is ultimately spelled
out as *lo*. LF can provides the interpretation of animacy of the direct object
without requiring syntactic specification for this feature, and the interaction of
syntactic underspecification with LF interpretation and PF use of a less-specific
clitic form ultimately renders this configuration acceptable in place of the in-
tended (22).

The fact that the same ban on [+animate] direct objects is found in Leísta
Spanish and Romanian is an encouraging confirmation of the generality of (16)
and (19). In fact, the same derivation for (22) can be extended to KiRimi, in
which "definite animate NPs cannot appear as O2" (Hualde, 1989, p.180) – in
other words, in double object constructions co-indexed by pronominal clitics on
the verb, the theme argument cannot be [+animate,+definite], presumably due
to the same sort of "competition" for agreement with Appl.

The role of Spec-Comp distinctness for [+animate] may more generally
relate to Ormazabal & Romero's (2007) Object Agreement Constraint, which
holds in what Kittilä (2006) calls "animacy-prominent" languages such as Lango,
in which the computation of Agree of Appl looks first at whether the lower
DP is syntactically animate or not. Jeong (2004) notes that, in case of multi-
ple accusative case checking in Korean, the accusative possessor NP cannot be
[+animate] if the accusative possessee object NP is [+animate]:

(24)   John-i   Swuni-lul   meri-lul hair-Acc   cla-ass-ta
        John-Nom Swuni-Gen/Acc hair-Acc cut-Pst-Dcl
        'John cut Swuni's hair'

(25)   *?John-i   Swuni-lul   yetongsayng-ul ttayly-ess-ta
        John-Nom Swuni-Acc sister-Acc   hit-Pst-Decl
        'John hit Swuni's sister'

Jeong (2004, 107) proposes a 'General PCC': Two NPs cannot be [+animate]

if they check that feature against the same functional head. This formulation and the Korean data point to a more general basis for an interpretation of the Leísta facts, and the Romanian pattern in turn, as part of a series of grammatical interactions banning two [+animate] arguments checking this feature against the same head, argued here to be the functional node Appl, responsible for the thematic and case properties of ditransitive and possessor-raising constructions.

8. *General Conclusions*

In this paper, we presented a previously unreported set of data related to postverbal clitic clusters, based on quantitative analysis of numerous acceptability judgements. The sudden emergence of a syntagmatic PCC effect in Romanian with postverbal *plural* DOs but not postverbal singular DOs is related to the fact that the former are inherently specified [+animate] in the syntax, a paradigmatic property independently available to the learner by virtue of its syncretism in IO and DO contexts. In this respect, this study reinforces a more general characteristic of morphology and perhaps human language more generally: the effect of a paradigmatic property of an item on that item's syntagmatic possibilities in combinations.

The contribution of Romanian, in which singular [+Participant] clitics are *not* syncretic, constrains the space of previous PCC accounts invoking syncretism (e.g. Laenzlinger 1993): it's specifically syncretism in the DO position that matters for Person-Case type effects. Importantly, in the implementation developed here, there is no phonological content within the syntax, i.e. the syntax does not "see the syncretism" directly; rather, the existence of a shared phonological form for seemingly disparate syntactic functions is accomplished by an implicational well-formedness statement on the features that must co-occur on clitic nodes that enter the syntax.

Returning to the scare quotes in the title of our paper, despite initial appearances, there is no actual "Number Case Constraint" in Romanian (and nothing special about the morphosyntax of plural in Romanian per se; only the morphophonological fact of plural clitics' syncretism). The ban on [+participant,+plural] clitics in Romanian ditransitives is instead derived from the way that [+animate] (arguably a subtype of Person feature) is checked in ApplP, through the interaction of complement-based Agree and feature economy, parallel to independent restrictions in Leísta Spanish and beyond.

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