Interaction of Phonology and Morphology in Maltese and Makassarese Clitics

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Recent research on the interface between morphology and phonology has claimed that these modules of grammar are strictly separated. Bye and Svenonius (2012) claim that the phonology is unable to make use of any morphosyntactic information. Similarly, structural level approaches, such as Stratal OT (Bermúdez-Otero 2012, etc.), have morphological information built into the architecture so that the phonology does not reference morphosyntactic information directly. The empirical questions of when and how much of each other the morphological and phonological components need to see is centrally important to research on this interface. This paper presents two case studies in which clitics have morphophonological effects which are contextually dependent on the phonology of the host to which they attach. This suggests that it is necessary for the morphosyntactic information of the clitics to interact with the phonological information of the hosts.

Maltese and Makassarese both have clitics whose attachment creates phonological changes dependent on the phonological shape of the host. In Maltese (1), all hosts show show syncope of the first vowel when the 1pl subject agreement suffix is added, but the 1pl object clitic only causes syncope in V-final hosts, not C-final hosts. Similarly, in Makassarese (2), both C-final and V-final hosts show stress shift when the comparative suffix is added, but the determiner clitic causes stress shift in V-final hosts only. With the absolutive clitic, neither stem undergoes stress shift.

Although one can account for the difference between the subject agreement and object clitic behaviors in Maltese with a stratal system (Kiparsky 2011), there is no morphosyntactic difference in the C- and V-final hosts that can account for the difference in syncope between them when the object clitic is attached. Likewise, there is no structural difference with the determiner clitic in Makassarese that can account for the difference in the behavior of stress. Since a clitic ought to be the same, both morphosyntactically and phonologically, regardless of whether it is attached to a V- or C-final stem, it must be the case that the mechanism for combining the host and clitic is somehow different in the two cases.

This paper proposes that the difference is in the level of attachment of the clitic to the host. Using the definitions of M-Words (heads not dominated by further head-projections) and Subwords (terminal nodes within an M-Word) from Embick and Noyer (2001), we propose that the clitic attaches to with V-final hosts at the Subword level but to C-final hosts at the M-Word level. Because the clitic is attached at the Subword level to V-final hosts, it participates in the word-level phonological processes of stress assignment in Makassarese and syncope in Maltese. These processes do not apply to the clitic when attached to C-final hosts because it attaches at the M-Word level.

This analysis requires the assignment of level of attachment of the clitic to be sensitive to the phonology of the host (or at least the right edge of the phonology). This assignment is also clearly clitic-specific because it does not happen with the absolutive clitic in Makassarese. It must therefore be the case that the process which determines which level a clitic attaches to is sensitive to both morphosyntactic feature of the clitic and phonological features of the host. This type of process suggests an architecture of the morphology-phonology interface that allows for processes to make reference to both morphological and phonological information.

(1) Maltese first-person plural subject suffix and object clitic (Brame 1974; Odden 1993)

	C-final	V-final	
	ħátaf "he snatched"	ʔára "he read"	
1pl Subject Agr. Suffix /-na/	ħtáf-na "we snatched"	ʔráj-na "we read"	← syncope
1pl Object Clitic /-na/	ħatáf-na "he snatched us"	ʔráː-na "he read us"	← asymmetrical

(2) Makassarese determiner clitic, absolutive clitic and comparative suffix (Basri et al. 2000)

	C-final	V-final	
	gássiŋ "strong"	lómpo "big"	
Comparative Suffix /-aŋ/	gassíŋ-aŋ "stronger"	lompó-aŋ "bigger"	← stress shift
Absolutive Clitic /-aʔ/	gássiŋ-aʔ "I am strong"	lómpo-aʔ "I am big"	← no stress shift
Determiner Clitic /-a/	gássiŋ-a "the strong . . ."	lompó-a "the big . . ."	← asymmetrical

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