

From Linguistic Geography to Feature Geometry: Structural Markedness and Variable Clitic Strings

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How Romance clitic pronouns get ordered into fixed sequences has been a problem which has troubled generative linguistics for more than 30 years. While templatic approaches beginning with Perlmutter's (1971) original proposal have been criticized as too unconstrained, analyses based on syntactic movement have been able to capture only part of the relevant data. An 'inconvenient detail' which has been mostly overlooked or ignored during these three decades of debate is that Romance clitic sequences **are not always completely fixed**: in a number of nonstandard Spanish varieties, there is a subgroup of clitic pronouns which can appear with **variable** orders. This paper focuses on this often-ignored area of variability as a way to shed new lighter on the broader (but still quite intractable) problem of the more common clitic orders which are fixed.

The data in 1ab and 2ab are drawn from Rural Murcian Spanish, but are representative of many other vernacular varieties where reflexive *se* can either precede or follow the first person singular pronoun *me* (as in 1ab) or the second person singular *te* (as in 2ab).

1. a. Si no riego, *me se* seca todo.
b. Si no riego, *se me* seca todo.
'If I don't irrigate, everything dries up on me.'

- a. La he atado para que no *te se* caiga.
b. La he atado para que no *se te* caiga.
'I tied it so it wouldn't go and fall.'

By referring to the (underspecified) internal morphological structure of these clitics, or their Feature Geometry (Harley & Ritter 1998, 2002) it has been proposed that clitics are sequenced according to their structural markedness, from least marked on the left to most marked on the right (Heap 1998). Crucially, this hypothesis implies that the first person *me* is more marked than the second person *te*, since in the same nonstandard Spanish varieties the latter must be invariably ordered before the former.

This asymmetrical markedness relationship predicts that there should be grammars with variation between nonstandard *te se* and standard *se te*, but where standard *se me* does not vary. In order to test this prediction, over 1000 tokens are drawn from a wide range of vernacular Spanish varieties, using the recently rediscovered field notebooks from the *Atlas Lingüístico de la Península Ibérica* survey, 1930-1957. The relative geolinguistic distribution of *se* sequences with *me* and those with *te* are compared in order to test the asymmetrical markedness relationships predicted by the Feature Geometry. Initial results suggest that nonstandard *te se* sequences not only occur more widely than nonstandard *me se* sequences, the latter tend to occur only where the former also do, thus confirming the hypothesis the structural markedness can be directly reflected by the areal distribution of nonstandard variants.

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