

On ‘free’ clitic placement in production

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Less obvious examples displaying ‘free’ operations or ‘optional’ variations in grammar would be speakers that seemingly switch between pre- and post-verbal placement of a pronominal object clitic. The rationale why this would not really be expected is clear: Languages pattern as either proclitic or enclitic, possibly allowing the other under certain syntactic conditions. So most Romance languages, for example, require proclisis by ‘default’ (say, in an indicative declarative clause) but exhibit enclisis in *wh*-questions. European Portuguese is different in setting the default to enclisis, with proclisis reserved for special circumstances (such as negation, interrogatives, focus, etc.). We also know from child language that (i) not only are clitics acquired relatively early (around age 2), but (ii) once acquired, children do not make any placement errors. That is, children do not go through a stage in which they would produce proclisis in an indicative declarative clause where enclisis is required or the other way around. This holds for monolingual first language acquisition. We will provide an overview of our vast research on the acquisition and development of pronominal object clitics for several subsets of speaker communities: bilectal Greek Cypriot children compared to their bidialectal Hellenic–Cypriot and monolingual Hellenic Greek peers as well as Russian–Greek bilingual children. In addition, we tested developmentally impaired bilectal Greek Cypriot children to compare errors to their typically developing peers and to bilingual children. Emphasis will be put on the different cliticization sites, proclisis in Standard Modern Greek indicative declarative contexts vs. enclisis in their Cypriot Greek counterparts. The same tool was administered to a total of 727 children and 60 teenagers and adults, spread across the above-mentioned populations. The basic pattern that can be observed is that, while typically developing Greek Cypriot children use exclusively enclisis at age 3 and 4, at around age 5 a change occurs—or rather: with the onset of formal schooling in H, they switch increasingly to proclisis until grade 3. We will report patterns of switching to and from, or even mixing, the placement strategies and we will put forth the Socio-Syntax of Development Hypothesis to address grammatical variation in post-critical period language development: Children growing up in diglossia take on properties of the sociolinguistically High variety (H) in their L(ow) speech in unstable environments. These environments include competing motivations, competition of grammars, and, primarily, the transition into formal schooling when reading and writing are introduced in H to speakers of L—crucially, they do not involve ‘free’ choice of clitic placement site or ‘optional’ cliticization rules, which we will expand on in the talk.