

# An asymmetry in the acquisition of accusative clitics in child Romanian\*

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## Introduction

In spite of the fact that the distinction between 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns has been acknowledged in the literature for a long time (Benveniste 1966; Postal 1966) most studies dealing with accusative clitics chose to focus on what these pronominals had in common – deficiency and distribution – irrespective of their person value. This focus in the theoretical literature had an immediate resonance in the domain of acquisition. Most studies which analysed the development of accusative clitics on the basis of longitudinal data did not make any (explicit) difference between 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> person, while those relying on experimental data looked exclusively at 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics.<sup>1</sup>

Among the few theoretical studies which explicitly address the differences between 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the domain of deficient pronominals is Kayne (2000). The main claim is that in French and Italian 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics (*m-* and *t-*) belong to a natural class which excludes 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics (*l-*) but which includes the reflexive clitic *s-*. According to Kayne, only 3<sup>rd</sup> person non-reflexive accusative clitics are determiner-pronouns (D-pronouns). Similarly, Uriagereka (1995) argues that 3<sup>rd</sup> person clitics alone are of category D, whereas 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person clitics are DPs. He also notices that reflexive *se* might belong to a category different from D (p. 85).

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1. An anonymous reviewer points out that experimental data were related, in most cases, to binding theory, which might explain the focus on 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics and reflexive clitics. This is indeed the case for several studies (Jakubowicz 1989; Baauw 2000; Hamann 2002, a.m.o.). It is equally true that in some previous studies relying on longitudinal data one can reconstruct from the tables the difference between the acquisition of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics. What we noticed, though, in previous studies is a lack of focus on the relevance for the acquisition process of the distinction between 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics, on the one hand, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, on the other.

The immediate prediction which one can make with respect to acquisition is that there might be developmental differences between 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, on the one hand, and developmental similarities between reflexive clitics and 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person non-reflexive accusative clitics, on the other hand.

The difference between reflexive and non-reflexive accusative clitics has been addressed in the acquisition literature (Jakubowicz 1989; Hamann, Rizzi, and Frauenfelder 1996; Jakubowicz et al. 1998; Crysman and Müller 2000; Zesiger et al. 2010). The results indicate that reflexive clitics are produced more often than non-reflexive accusative clitics, both in longitudinal and in experimental data.

But no acquisition study has explicitly compared the developmental pattern of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics to that of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics or that of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics to reflexives. This is precisely the aim of the present paper. On the basis of empirical data coming from child Romanian we investigate (i) whether there is a difference between the developmental pattern of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and that of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, and (ii) whether one can identify a similar developmental pattern of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and reflexive clitics.

One should mention from the very beginning that, although we invoke cross-linguistic data at various points in our analysis, the focus is on the Romanian data. Consequently, some of the theoretical conclusions may not straightforwardly extend to other Romance languages.

The remaining of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical background and shows in what way the Romanian data can be integrated into previous theoretical analyses. In Section 3 we discuss the developmental facts and in Section 4 we provide an explanation for the observed phenomena. The account proposed here is based on an analysis of accusative clitics in Romanian which follows Uriagereka's (1995) proposal for Romance and on a particular implementation of Rizzi's Relativized Minimality (1990). The conclusions are summarized in Section 5.

## **Romance 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics**

### Kayne's analysis

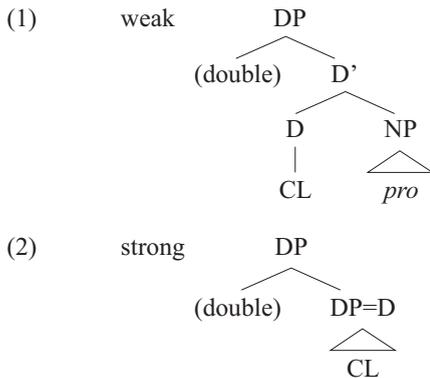
Kayne (2000) argues that in French and Italian the accusative clitics *m-* and *t-* are person morphemes, whereas 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics are “determiner pronouns”, identical to the definite article. The 3<sup>rd</sup> person *l-* is different from

*m-* and *t-* because (i) only *l-* clitics have a word marker reflecting gender; (ii) only *l-* clitics can show number distinction; (iii) in some Italian dialects they behave differently with respect to clitic doubling; (iv) *l-* does not combine with the possessive morpheme which is marked for agreement with the head noun (e.g. French *mon livre* vs. \**lon livre*). Importantly, only *m-* and *t-* are marked for person, whereas *l-*, i.e. the traditional 3<sup>rd</sup> person, is treated, following Benveniste (1966) and Postal (1966), as non-person or as [-1<sup>st</sup> person and -2<sup>nd</sup> person]. So, 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> accusative clitics are specified exclusively for person, whereas 3<sup>rd</sup> accusative clitics are specified as [-1<sup>st</sup> person][-2<sup>nd</sup> person] and can show number and gender agreement.

The reflexive clitic *s-*, on the other hand, belongs – according to Kayne – to the same class as *m-* and *t-*, with which it “patterns strongly”. Some of the arguments are that (i) the clitic forms are morphologically parallel (e.g. *m*, *t*, *s*, *me*, *te*, *se*); (ii) there is no gender or number marking on *s-*; and (iii) the non-clitic forms are parallel in form (e.g. *moi*, *toi*, *soi*).

Uriagereka (1995)

Kayne’s (2000) view is not singular. According to Uriagereka (1995), 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, which he labels “weak determiner clitics”, are D elements, whereas 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics, “strong phrasal clitics”, are DPs (see his footnote 3 and p. 112). The two types of clitic are associated with different syntactic structures:



On this analysis, 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics differ from 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics in several important respects: (i) the former alone are base-generated as heads, as D (see 1 above), whereas the latter are base-generated as DP (see 2); (ii) only 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics have a Specifier position which hosts the double. Within the “strong” DP, the double is adjoined to the DP/D pro-

nominal; (iii) only 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics take a null complement, *pro*; (iv) importantly, 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics are not specified for Person. This deficiency is the one which, in Uriagereka's analysis, motivates their movement to a projection in the C-domain, which he calls F, a projection higher than IP, which allows "attribution of reference" (p. 93), i.e. where they are referentially indexed. The associated null complement can only be licensed if the clitic is assigned referentiality in F.

But, if what drives movement to F is "referentiality", i.e. deficiency with respect to Person, Uriagereka's analysis implies that only 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics move to F for referentiality reasons. Since 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics are specified for Person, the motivation of movement to F, "attribution of reference", can no longer apply. He proposes that these clitics move as phrases via adjunction scrambling (p. 114) to F or another projection (the adjunction site being subject to cross-linguistic variation). Reflexive clitics are assigned to a class different from the class of D-clitics.

In both analyses (Kayne 2000; Uriagereka 1995), 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics are argued to evince morphological and syntactic properties which distinguish them from 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics. Reflexive clitics, at the same time, are analysed as different from 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics. In what follows, we will investigate to what extent this asymmetry is found with accusative clitics in Romanian as well.

### Accusative clitics in Romanian

In Romanian, a null subject language, only 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics are identical in form to the definite article. The only exception is that of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person feminine singular which is identical in form to the indefinite article. The data are summarized in Table 1:

*Table 1.* Article - 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics homophony in Romanian

|                                   |            | singular |     | plural |      |
|-----------------------------------|------------|----------|-----|--------|------|
|                                   |            | masc     | fem | masc   | fem  |
| article                           | indefinite |          | o   |        |      |
|                                   | definite   | -l-      |     | -i-    | -le- |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> person Acc clitic |            | -l-      | o   | -i-    | -le- |

Like their French/Italian counterparts, they are marked for gender and number. In this respect, they differ from 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics, *m-* and *t-*, which pattern with their French and Italian counterparts in showing no gender



obligatorily copy the features of a phonetically null direct object whose antecedent has referential stability and prominence (Avram and Coene 2007) and is retrievable at the interface (8):

- (5) a. *Cartea<sub>i</sub>, am dat* \*(-o<sub>i</sub>).  
 book-the have given- Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> f sg  
 ‘The book, I have given away.’
- b. *Am dat* \*(-o<sub>i</sub>) # *cartea<sub>r</sub>*.  
 have given- Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> f sg book-the  
 ‘I have given the book away.’
- (6) *Pe care<sub>i</sub> l<sub>i</sub>- ai ales?*  
 PE which Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> m sg have chosen  
 ‘Which one have you chosen?’
- (7) \*(*Îl<sub>i</sub>*) *văd pe el<sub>i</sub>/pe acesta<sub>i</sub>.*  
 Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> m sg see PE him /PE that one  
 ‘I see him/that one.’
- (8) A: *Ce ai făcut cu mărul<sub>i</sub>?*  
 ‘What have you done to the apple?’  
 B: \*(*L<sub>i</sub>-*) *am mâncat.*  
 Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> m sg have eaten  
 ‘I have eaten it.’

At clause level, 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics are optional when their associate is an indefinite pronoun (9a), an indefinite DP (9b), a numeral (9c), or a proper name (9d):

- (9) a. (*I<sub>i</sub>-*) *am văzut pe unii<sub>i</sub>.*  
 (Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> m pl) have seen Acc marker some-m pl  
 ‘I have seen some of them.’
- b. (*L<sub>i</sub>-*) *am salutat pe un vecin<sub>i</sub>.*  
 (Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> m sg) have greeted Acc marker a neighbour  
 ‘I have greeted a neighbour.’
- c. (*L<sub>i</sub>-*) *am ales pe al patrulea<sub>i</sub>.*  
 (Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> m sg) have chosen PE the fourth one  
 ‘I have chosen the fourth one.’

- d.  $(O_i)$  *avem aici pe Ruxi<sub>i</sub>.*  
 (Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> fem sg) have here PE Ruxi.  
 ‘We have Ruxi here.’

The data discussed in this section indicate that in Romanian 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics do not form a natural class together with 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics. In particular, only the latter are “determiner pronouns”, homophonous with the article and have a clausal antecedent; the former are inherently marked for Person, like personal pronouns; hence, their deficiency can only be phonologic in nature.

The observed dichotomy between obligatory and optional contexts for accusative clitics gives rise to two important observations: (i) for 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics there is a substantial number of competing contexts in which the clitic can be either obligatory or optional (though, as the data indicate, one cannot speak about true optionality); no such competing contexts are found with 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics. Their use is uniformly obligatory; their “double” is always a strong personal pronoun; (ii) the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics interferes with information structure packaging, since they have an antecedent with referential stability and prominence. 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics are deictic, which excludes the need of any (overt or covert) clausal antecedent. This has important consequences for the properties of the structures in which they occur. According to Uriagereka (1995), 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics are base-generated as the D of a post-verbal null complement, as in (1). 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics, “strong phrasal clitics”, do not take a null complement *pro*, they are DPs (see 2 above). We therefore assume that their feature identification/matching is not related to any null complement; it is anchored into the speech-situation, possibly via null operators in the C-domain (as proposed for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns by Sigurðsson 2005 or Baker 2008, or for any other deictic elements, such as Tense). That this is indeed the case can be seen in clitic structures with an epithet. In Romanian, clitic left dislocations as well as clitic constructions with a hanging topic allow an epithet in post-verbal position:

- (10) *[(Pe) Ion Popescu,] eu una nu -l votez pe prostănac.*  
 [(PE) Ion Popescu] I one<sub>fem</sub> not Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> m sg vote PE stupid one  
 ‘As for Ion Popescu, I for one will not vote for this moron.’

Within a 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person context, such epithets require some adjustment. The N within the epithet DP in (11a) must take a prepositional pronominal complement (*de mine* ‘of me’, 11b and 11c) whose pronominal features will percolate to the whole phrase:

- (11) a. *[Pe mine,] nimeni nu mă ajută \*pe prost.*  
 [PE me] no one not me helps PE stupid
- b. *Nu mă ajută nimeni peprostul \_\_\_\_\_ de mine.*  
 not me helps no one PE stupid.the<sub>masc</sub> of me
- c. *Nu mă ajută nimeni pe proasta \_\_\_\_\_ de mine.*  
 not me helps no one PE stupid.the<sub>fem</sub> of me  
 ‘No one will help me, the fool that I am.’

1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics cannot have a non-pronominal associate, not even when that is an epithet. This is due to the fact that lexical DPs cannot be 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person (Baker 2008). Such structures show, once again, that the relationship between the speech act participant and the ‘semi-pronominal’ epithet is anchored into the speech-situation. Notice that in (11b) and (11c) there is gender marking on the epithet. Gender marking in this case can only be the copy of the features associated with the discourse participant, since 1<sup>st</sup> person pronominals do not mark gender. With 3<sup>rd</sup> person constructions, gender marking is the copy of the *phi*-features of the clausal/discourse topic antecedent:

- (12) a. *Pe Ion Popescu, nimeni nu îl \_\_\_\_\_ ajută pe fraieru’*  
 PE Ion Popescu, no one not Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> m sg helps PE fool. the<sub>masc</sub>  
*ăla.*  
 that<sub>masc</sub>  
 ‘Ion Popescu, no one will help that fool.’
- b. *Pe Vasilica, nimeni nu o \_\_\_\_\_ ajută pe fraiera aia.*  
 PE Vasilica, no one not Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> f sg helps PE fool.the<sub>fem</sub> that<sub>fem</sub>  
 ‘Vasilica, no one will help that fool.’

1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics are specified for Person and do not have a clausal antecedent. Their interpretation is anchored into the speech-situation. One could then assume that they are interpreted via Match with an operator in the C-domain ( $\Lambda_A / \Lambda_P$ )<sup>3</sup> like any other pronoun (under the assumption that the person of a pronoun is computed in syntax under  $\Lambda$ -matching, Sigurðsson 2005) or, along the same line, as in Baker (2008), where  $\Lambda_A$  and  $\Lambda_P$  correspond to the silent operators for speaker (Agent) and hearer (Patient) in the C domain as part of the inherent speech event (Sigurðsson 2005). There is no clitic – null complement/antecedent linking at stake since they do not have a null complement.

3. In Baker’s system S (=speaker) and A (=addressee) are null arguments generated within the CP. When there is no overriding control relationship, S will designate the person who produced the CP and A the person to whom the CP was addressed.

Following Uriagereka (1995), Avram and Coene (2007, 2009) analyse Romanian accusative clitics as base-generated as the D of a post-verbal null complement, as in (13) below:

- (13)  $[_{FP} \text{ (Topic) } F [_{IP} [_{VP} \text{ DP } V [_{DP} \text{ D-}i\textit{pro} ]]]]$

The properties of the two types of accusative clitics indicate, however, that the representation in (13) can be correct only for 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics. The post-verbal complement in the case of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics is a Person-marked DP:

- (14)  $[_{FP} \text{ (Topic) } F [_{IP} [_{VP} \text{ DP } V [_{DP} \text{ DP } ]]]]$

The D-Structure of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics then is different from the one of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, D(eterminer)-clitics, base-generated as heads of a null DP. We adopt the analysis in Avram and Coene (2007, 2009), restricting it to 3<sup>rd</sup> person clitics. In a nutshell, we assume that the D-clitic spells-out the *phi*-features of a null argument, i.e. it is a copy of the null DP in complement position, whose referential stability and topic feature it inherits. The null object has an antecedent at the left periphery of the clause (the topic, which can be overt – as in dislocation structures, or null – when the antecedent was mentioned in previous discourse.)<sup>4</sup> The identification of the features of the null complement is ensured via a chain which contains the antecedent (null or overt) in the left periphery of the clause and the null complement in post-verbal position. Identification along a chain requires feature matching. In Romanian, Agreement in Inflection is pronominal, allowing *pro* subjects; there will always be a potential barrier between the features of the antecedent in the left periphery and those of the null DP containing the clitic. The D-clitic in post-verbal position must match the features of its antecedent over two clusters of *phi*-features, whose make up may be identical with the make up of the features of the antecedent: the *phi*-features of AgrS {person, number} and the *phi*-features of the VP-internally base-generated DP subject {person, gender, number}:

- (15) *O vede Maria.*  
 Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> f sg sees Maria  
 ‘Maria sees her.’

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4. A similar analysis, according to which clitic constructions are hidden clitic left dislocation constructions with a null topic was put forth in Baauw (2000) and in Delfitto (2002).

(15')  $[_{FP} (\text{Topic}_{3rd\ f\ sg}) F [_{IP} \text{Agrs}_{3rd\ sg} [_{VP} \text{Maria}_{3rd\ f\ sg} V [_{DP} D\text{-}pro ]]]]$

The structure in (15') has the flavour of Relativized Minimality configurations (Rizzi 1990), where a local relation between X and Y is disturbed when Z, a potential candidate for the local relation, intervenes. The intervention (-like) effects of the *phi*-features of the overt subject DP and those of AgrS in the functional domain disrupt the feature matching relation between the null complement and the antecedent. That is why the clitic has to move to a position higher than the intervening features, possibly Uriagereka's FP (whose Specifier hosts, among other things, dislocated material, non-contrastive topics, emphasis phrases). The clitic moves for identification reasons, for "referentiality", i.e. so that the referential index of the null DP be rescued via matching with the antecedent. For Romanian clitics, there is one more factor which may be the driving force for movement. The empirical data (presented in 2.3) show that accusative clitic constructions always involve a referentially stable antecedent, which is interpreted as a topic. Movement of the D-clitic to a higher projection is forced by identification requirements as well as by the topic feature with which it is associated. It has to move to a position higher than the intervening feature(s), where the topic feature can be checked. In Romanian, accusative clitics have a [+topic] feature which requires checking. 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics move out of the DP for referentiality reasons and also in order to check their topic feature.

1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics are marked for Person, they are not referentially deficient. However, they surface in front of the verb, on a par with 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, there are no distribution differences: all accusative clitics will surface in front of the lexical verb in finite constructions, irrespective of their person feature. The question which arises is why 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics, if base-generated in post-verbal position on a par with their 3<sup>rd</sup> person counterpart, move to a position in front of the lexical verb. Notice that the intervention effects which force movement in the case of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics do not arise, since no *phi*-feature matching between a null DP and an antecedent is at stake. We assume that all clitic constructions have a [+topic] feature; 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics will only move to a higher projection to check their [+topic] feature.

Summing up, in Romanian the syntactic derivation of 1st/2nd person accusative clitics differs from the derivation of 3rd person accusative clitics. The latter are base-generated as the D of a null complement and move to FP to check their *phi*-features and their topic feature. The former start as full DPs, marked for Person, in post-verbal position and move to FP to check a topic feature. The two types of non-reflexive clitics evince different morphological, syntactic, and referential properties (see Table 2 below).

Reflexive vs. non-reflexive accusative clitics in Romanian

Reflexive clitics behave like 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics with respect to lack of gender (16) and number (17) marking, accepting both singular and plural antecedents:

- (16) a. *Narcis se admiră în apa lacului.*  
 Narcis REFL admires in water.the lake.<sub>Gen</sub>  
 ‘Narcis is admiring himself in the water of the lake.’
- b. *Fata se admiră în apa lacului.*  
 girl.the REFL admires in water.the lake.<sub>Gen</sub>  
 ‘The girl is admiring herself in the water of the lake.’
- (17) a. *Copilul se admiră în apa lacului.*  
 child.the REFL admires in water.the lake.the.<sub>Gen</sub>  
 ‘The child is admiring himself/herself in the water of the lake.’
- b. *Copiii se admiră în apa lacului.*  
 children.the REFL admire in water.the lake.the.<sub>Gen</sub>  
 ‘The children are admiring themselves in the water of the lake.’

The clitic and the non-clitic forms of reflexives and those of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics are morphologically parallel, as are their counterparts in French and Italian. Unlike 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, reflexive clitics are never optional. In their case, intervention effects do not arise since they require identity of *phi*-features with the subject DP. Moreover, Romance reflexive clitics have been analysed as markers of reflexivity (Dobrovie-Sorin 1998) and as such base-generated in pre-verbal position from where they can feature match with the subject DP. In this case, there are no intervention effects of potential identical feature clusters.

Predictions for acquisition

The brief analysis of Romanian clitics reveals that 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics do not form a class with 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics; they seem to pattern rather with reflexive clitics, on a par with their French and Italian counterparts. The data are summarized in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Main properties of accusative clitics

| Properties                                | 1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> person<br>non-reflexives | 3 <sup>rd</sup> person non-<br>reflexives | reflexives |
|---|---|---|------------|
| Determiner-like/pronominal                | Pronominal  | determiner-like                           | pronominal |
| homophonous with the article              | –   | +   | –          |
| marked for gender                         | –   | +   | –          |
| marked for number                         | –   | +   | –          |
| marked for person                         | +   | –   | +          |
| can combine with a possessive<br>morpheme | +   | –   | +          |
| status (head/maximal projection)          | DP  | D   | DP         |
| take a null complement                    | –   | +   | –          |
| movement to check referentiality          | –   | +   | –          |
| movement to check a topic feature         | +   | +   | +          |
| feature intervention effects              | –   | +   | –          |
| optional (in well-defined contexts)       | –   | +   | –          |

In terms of acquisition, the data indicate that we have every reason to assume that there might be an asymmetry between 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics. As summarized in Table 2 above, they differ in terms of morphological complexity, syntactic status, referentiality, optionality and feature intervention effects. In particular, 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics are morphologically more complex than the other two types of clitics and their configuration involves feature intervention effects.

The intervention (-like) effects of the *phi*-features of the subject DP and those of AgrS in the functional domain make the feature matching relation between the null complement and the antecedent computationally complex. 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics involve a higher computational load since feature matching with their antecedent has to be accomplished across two sets of identical features.<sup>5</sup> During the early stages, children's computational capacity is limited. We therefore predict a developmental delay of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics due to morphological complexity and (feature) intervention effects. A higher computational load induced by intervention effects has also been argued to be the main reason of the delay in the acquisition of other structures, such as (some) direct object relative clauses (Friedmann, Belletti, and Rizzi 2009; Adani et al. 2009) or *wh*-questions (Guasti, Arosio, and Branchini 2008).

5. Zesiger et al. (2010) put forth an analysis similar to the one in the present paper. According to them, accusative clitics involve a crossing chain, along which the subject features can have intervention effects. We thank a reviewer for pointing this out to us.

However, one should point out that some 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics might be less computationally costly. Compare (15) above to (18):

- (18) *Le vede Maria.*  
 Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> f pl sees Maria  
 ‘Maria sees them.’

- (18’) [FP (Topic<sub>3rd f pl</sub>) F [IP **Agrs**<sub>3rd sg</sub> [VP **Maria**<sub>3rd f sg</sub> V [DP *D-pro* ]]]

In (18) the intervening feature make up of the antecedent and the one of the intervening elements is the same, i.e. number, gender, person, but the value of one of the features is different (plural number for the antecedent and singular number for AgrS in Inflection and for the subject DP). The same can be seen in (19) below, where the value of more than one feature is different and where the feature make up is also different (only the make up of the antecedent has gender):

- (19) (*Pe Maria*) *noi o vedem.*  
 (*pe Maria*) we clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> f sg see 1<sup>st</sup> pl  
 ‘Maria, we see her.’

- (19’) [FP (Topic<sub>3rd fem sg</sub>) F [IP **Agrs**<sub>1st pl</sub> [VP **we**<sub>1st pl</sub> V [DP *D-pro* ]]]

The intervention effects in configurations like those in (15), (18) and (19) involve different degrees of computational complexity. We therefore expect those which involve full identity of feature value to be more problematic for children. For example, one would expect a higher number of non-target-like structures in contexts like the one illustrated in (15), where the *phi*-features of the subject have the same make up and the same values as the *phi*-features of the antecedent (3<sup>rd</sup> person feminine singular) and can, therefore, act as a (strong) intervener in the feature matching process. Such errors are also expected to last longer. Identity of feature make up with partial or no identity of feature value should be less problematic or not problematic at all.<sup>6</sup>

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6. This difference in computational load may be more obvious for comprehension; however, our present study does not address the comprehension of accusative clitics.

In the case of reflexive clitics, there are no feature intervention effects; in their case there is always total identity of features between the clitic, the subject and the *phi*-features on AgrS.<sup>7</sup>

The predictions for acquisition are straightforward: (i) we expect to find an asymmetry between the acquisition of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics; (ii) since some feature intervention effects may be stronger/weaker than other, we expect this difference to be reflected in the acquisition of clitic structures; (iii) we expect to find developmental differences between reflexive clitics and 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics.

The empirical data also revealed an asymmetry with respect to optionality: 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and reflexive clitics are always obligatory, whereas 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics may be optional in some well-defined contexts. This asymmetry can have consequences for the acquisition process. It is plausible to assume that the obligatoriness of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and of reflexive clitics could favour early acquisition.

### **The developmental pattern of accusative clitics in Romanian**

#### Subjects and data

In this study, the predictions advanced in Section 2 are verified against longitudinal data coming from two corpora of monolingual child Romanian. For the present analysis, we analysed 32 transcripts of monthly 60 minute recordings of spontaneous speech between a child and a caregiver. Both child speech and child-directed speech have been transcribed in CHAT format (MacWhinney 2000). The overall number of files examined for the present analysis are given in Table 3:

*Table 3.* The data

| Child | Age         | MLU           | Nr of files |
|-------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| B.    | 1;09 – 2;11 | 1.091 – 2.790 | 16          |
| A.    | 1;09 – 3;00 | 1.514 – 3.174 | 16          |

7. Crysman and Müller (2000) also adopt an analysis of object clitics according to which only non-reflexives license and identify a *pro* object in syntax, whereas reflexives are created via argument absorption, a pre-syntactic process; hence, reflexives should not interact with computational complexity.

For the B. corpus, an additional analysis was performed on the child-directed speech (i.e. the mother or father speaking with the child) covering 10,706 utterances.

For coding and counting, following the method used in Avram and Coene (2007), a detailed examination of each file was conducted in order to identify all the obligatory clitic contexts. The omissions which involved a definite pronoun antecedent (clitics included) were the only ones counted as deviant. All the other situations (proper names included) were evaluated as adult-like. A small number of null objects in transitive environments not rescued by a clitic were considered target-like because they can be found in adult productions as well. Imitations, poetry or song fragments, as well as repetitions did not enter the analysis. Omission rates as well as rates of clitics used were calculated against the number of identified obligatory clitic contexts. Errors were calculated against the total number of clitics used. Importantly, reflexive clitics were counted separately.

## Results

The data show that 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics emerge several months before 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and reflexive clitics.<sup>8</sup> In the A. corpus, 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics (the feminine clitic *o*) are attested as early as the first recording session, at 1;09 (MLU 1.392). The first 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and reflexive clitics are attested at 2;04 (MLU 2.136). In the B. corpus, the first 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics (the feminine clitic *o*) is attested at 1;10 (MLU 1.091), in post-verbal position. The first reflexive clitic is attested at 1;11 (MLU 1.406) but no other reflexive is attested until 2;01. One should, however, notice that all the instances of reflexive clitics in the examined files until 2;01 (4 tokens) are all 2<sup>nd</sup> person sg reflexives which occur with the same verb used in a formulaic-like imperative (*du-te* ‘go-refl 2<sup>nd</sup> sg’). Therefore, we believe that the first “genuine” reflexives actually emerge at 2;02. 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics also emerge at 1;11, but they are first attested in the formulaic *te rog* (‘please’-Acc clitic 2<sup>nd</sup> sg) and no other 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitic is attested until 2;01 (MLU 1.734).

There is almost no omission of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics or reflexive clitics after their emergence in both corpora (apart from an incidental increase in the A. corpus at 2;05). 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, on the other hand, in spite

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8. The data from child Romanian differ in this respect from what has been reported for child French on the basis of the Ivar corpus (Crysman and Müller 2000), where reflexives are attested earlier than all non-reflexive accusative clitics.

of very early emergence, continue to be omitted (even though at a low rate) at a time when 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics as well as reflexive clitics are used adult-like. The omission of reflexives decreases to 0% at an early stage: at 2;03 (MLU 1.821) in the B. corpus and at 2;08 (MLU 3.099) in the A. corpus. In both corpora, the decrease in the omission of reflexives coincides with the decrease in the omission of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics. The statistical analysis (non-parametric paired-sample Friedman test) of the data shows that the observed differences in omission rate are highly significant in the B. corpus ( $p = .001$ ). For the A. corpus, the data are less robust (the number of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitic contexts is very low in some transcripts) and did not reach significance. Figure 1 below presents the omission rates of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics in the B. corpus and Figure 2 in the A. corpus:

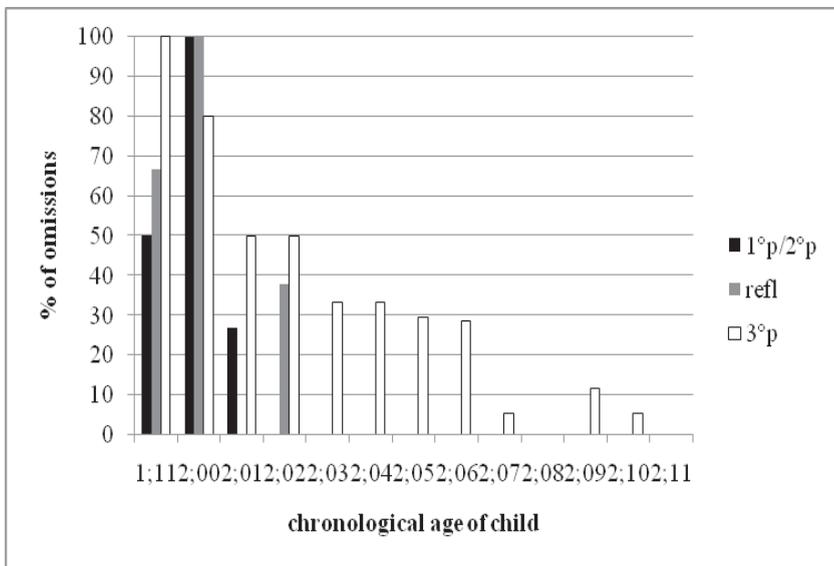


Figure 1. Omission of accusative clitics – B. corpus

Studies of accusative clitics in longitudinal data for French also indicate a slight advantage for 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics during the early stages. In the Augustin corpus (Hamann 2002, Table 7 p. 35), the first attested object clitic is a 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitic (at 2;2.13), but in between 2;04.01–2;06.16, only reflexive clitics and 1<sup>st</sup> person accusative clitics are attested (see also Rasetti 2003, Table 23). In the Marie corpus, after a file where 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics are attested (at 1;8.26), one notices a time span

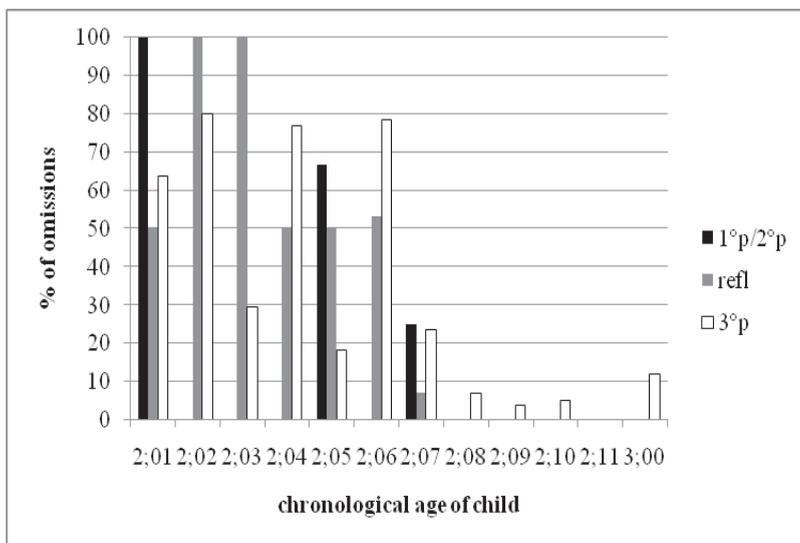


Figure 2. Omission of accusative clitics – A. corpus

(1;09.03–1;11.5) when 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics outnumber 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics (Rasetti 2003, Table 23).

Dominguez (2003) examines the emergence of clitics in child Spanish on the basis of longitudinal data: the Maria corpus (age 1;07–3;11). The results indicate that the forms *me*, *te* (used both as reflexives and as non-reflexives) and *se* are acquired at approximately the same time and are used at a similar rate, i.e. in early Spanish as well the reflexive *se* patterns with 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics.

The results for reflexives in child Romanian are far from being singular. Several previous studies reported lower omission rates for reflexive clitics than for accusative clitics in French (Jakubowicz 1989; Jakubowicz et al. 1996; Hamann, Rizzi, and Frauenfelder 1996; Crysman and Müller 2000; Rasetti 2003). Similar findings are reported in Zesiger et al. (2010) on the basis of experimental data; they show that reflexive *se* patterns with subject clitics, not with accusative clitics.

A qualitative analysis of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics in our corpus reveals some agreement errors (illustrated in 20):

- (20) a. *Unde sînt piticii ca să \*le pun aicea?*  
 where are dwarfs.the<sub>m pl</sub> that Acc clitic 3<sup>rd</sup> f pl put here  
 ‘Where are the dwarfs so that I can put them here?’ [B. 2;8]

b. Adult: *ce' ai făcut cu ligheanu(l) ăla?*  
 what have<sub>2nd sg</sub> done with bowl.the<sub>masc sg</sub> that<sub>masc sg</sub>  
 'What have you done to that bowl?'

Child: *a spart -o.*  
 has broken clitic Acc 3<sup>rd</sup> fem sg  
 '(S/he) has broken it.'

[A 1;9]

Both omission and agreement errors with 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics in child Romanian have also been reported in studies dealing with experimental data (age 2;5–4;0) (Avram 2001).

The longitudinal corpus also contains rare 1<sup>st</sup> person accusative clitics used instead of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics in clauses with a 1<sup>st</sup> person subject. Such errors are attested only in the B. corpus, during a very short period of time, immediately after the emergence of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics:

(21) Adult: *Ce-ai făcut cu cartea?*  
 'What have you done with the book?'

Child: *M- am pus la Kiki.*  
 Acc clitic 1<sup>st</sup> sg have<sub>1st sg</sub> put at Kiki  
 'I have put myself to Kiki.'

Adult: *Ce-ai făcut?*  
 'What did you do?'

Child: *M- am pus.*  
 Acc clitic 1<sup>st</sup> sg have<sub>1st sg</sub> put

[B. 2;2]

The results from child Romanian indicate that there is a difference between the developmental pattern of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, as predicted. The data also reveal that the developmental pattern of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics is similar to that of reflexives, also in accordance with the predictions which we started from.

### An effect of the input?

As discussed in Section 2, the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics is subject to optionality in a significant number of contexts. This raises the question of whether the observed difference between the early target-like use of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person clitics compared to the extended omission of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics in child language may not be a reflex of the use of these clitics in the input. In order to answer this question, we examined all parental child-directed speech in

the B. files used in the present analysis, with a view to identifying (i) whether the observed omission of 3<sup>rd</sup> accusative clitics in child speech may result from a difference in frequency of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics in the input, and (ii) whether the use of accusative clitics in child-directed speech shows any longitudinal effects, i.e. if there is an increase in the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics over time that compares to the increase found in child speech. The parental data indeed show significant differences with respect to the production rate of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics (Friedman paired samples,  $p < .001$ ). However, in contrast to child speech, parental speech seems to favour 3<sup>rd</sup> person over 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person clitics. Post-hoc Wilcoxon paired-sample tests reveal a significantly higher number of 3<sup>rd</sup> accusative clitics (1<sup>st</sup> vs 3<sup>rd</sup>:  $p = .003$ , and 2<sup>nd</sup> vs. 3<sup>rd</sup>:  $p = .003$ ). There are no longitudinal effects with respect to the production rate of different type of accusative clitics in child-directed speech. In addition, one should also mention that no case or agreement errors were found on any type of accusative clitic.

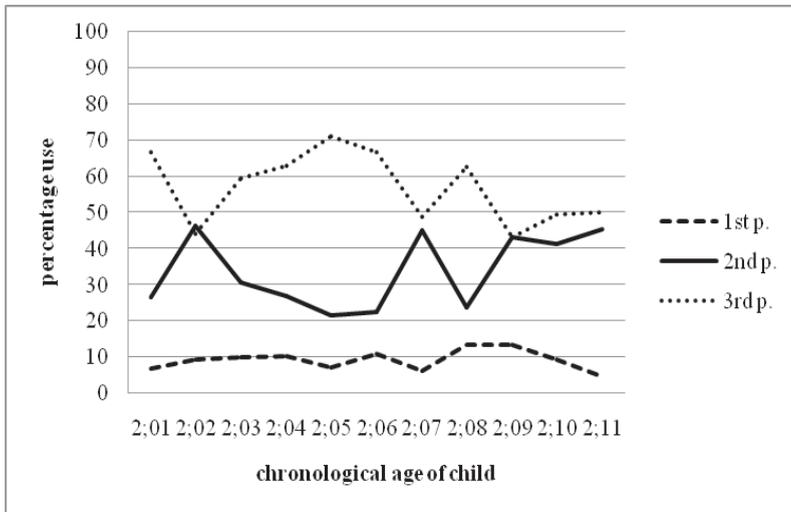


Figure 3. The use of accusative object clitics: child-directed speech (B. corpus)

## A possible account

Previous accounts and the 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> person asymmetry

### *Morphological complexity*

The analysis of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics indicates that they are morphologically more complex (they are marked for number and gender). This may suggest that the reason for which one finds an asymmetry in acquisition could also be rooted in the different morphological properties of the various types of accusative clitics. Actually, Dominguez (2003) offers a morphological account for the Spanish data. She associates the observed difference in the acquisition of accusative clitics to morphological complexity: 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics are morphologically more complex than 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics or some reflexives; in particular, only 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics have number and gender features. Jakubowicz et al. (1998) also account for the higher frequency of *se* in terms of morphological complexity.

At first sight, the morphological complexity account seems to be supported by the Romanian data as well. As pointed out in Section 3.2, children omit 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics (which are morphologically more complex) at a higher frequency and for a longer period of time. However, though morphological complexity may play a part, there are several reasons to believe that it cannot be the prime determinant of the developmental asymmetry under discussion. Several acquisition studies argue that similarity/difference in morphological complexity will not necessarily result in similar/different developmental patterns. Jakubowicz et al. (1996), for example, show that in both child German and child French one finds clear pronominal object/ pronominal subject asymmetries, in spite of the fact that French uniformly uses clitics and German weak pronouns.

Also, if one adopts an analysis according to which 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics are morphologically identical to articles, i.e. the two D elements evince the same degree of morphological complexity, one would expect their acquisition pattern to be similar. However, data coming from various languages, Romanian included, indicate that accusative clitics emerge later than definite articles and children (in both monolingual and bilingual settings, both TD and SLI children) continue to omit clitics at a stage when they no longer drop articles (French: Jakubowicz et al. 1998; Hamann 2002; Greek: Marinis 2005; Italian: Bottari et al. 1993/1994, Romanian: Avram and Coene 2004). Whereas there might be some similarity in the acquisition pattern of their *phi*-features, articles and clitics follow different paths. Such data indicate that the acquisition of clitics

cannot be driven by the morphological properties of the respective pronominals alone. Though morphological complexity may indeed play a role, we do not think we can conclude that it provides an explanation for the asymmetry under discussion.

### *Syntactic accounts*

One possible syntactic account (see, among many others, Tsakali and Wexler 2003) of early clitic omission is rooted in Wexler's (1998) Unique Checking Constraint (UCC), according to which the D-feature of a moving DP can check only against one functional category during an early stage in acquisition. For accusative clitics, Sportiche's (1996) non-movement analysis is adopted. The clitic is base-generated in a CliticP higher than TenseP, while its associate is base-generated in direct object position, in the VP domain. In the derivation, the associate (which can be either phonetically null – a *pro*, or a full lexical DP) raises to SpecCliticP, where it enters a feature-checking relation with the clitic. The Unique Checking Constraint account predicts early clitic omission in French-like languages, which have past participle agreement, and where the moving associate has to check its D-feature twice: in AgroP and in CliticP. At a stage when the Unique Checking Constraint constrains the early grammar, children will either omit the CliticP or the AgroP. On the other hand, one expects no clitic omission in Spanish-like languages, which lack past participle agreement, i.e. where the associate will check its D-feature only in SpecCliticP. But, as we have already seen, the data indicate an asymmetry between 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics in both French (which has past participle agreement) and Romanian and Spanish (which lack past participle agreement). The Unique Checking Constraint account does not seem to be able to explain why the omission rate for 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics is lower than for 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics in the early stages in both French and Romanian, or why reflexive clitics pattern rather with the former.<sup>9</sup>

The missing CP-account (see, among many others, Müller, Crysmann and Kaiser 1996, Crysmann and Müller 2000) relates the early omission of clitics to the optionality of the CP domain during the early stages (in accordance with Rizzi's 1993/1994 truncation account). clitics and weak pronouns, analysed as occupying a position in the C-domain, are omitted at a stage when the C-domain is optionally projected. There is indeed a relationship between the emergence of the C-layer of the clause and the use of early clitics. For Romanian, the acti-

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9. As one reviewer points out, it is not clear either whether Agro and AgrPartP are one and the same projection.

vation of the C-system seems to be a prerequisite for the emergence of object clitics (Avram and Coene 2006). But Romanian clitics continue to be omitted after the CP becomes active. Both longitudinal and experimental data show that Romanian children still omit clitics at a stage when they already produce interrogative and relative clauses. In our longitudinal data, by age 2;2 complementizers, displaced *wh*-phrases and relative clauses are all attested. But accusative clitics continue to be omitted. Experimental data provide similar results. In a direct object relative clause elicitation task, 5;06–7;00 year old subjects still omitted accusative clitics at a low rate of 3.5% (Sevcenco, Stoicescu, and Avram 2009). Even though the optionality of the CP could explain early clitic omission, it nevertheless fails to explain why 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics are not omitted at a stage when their 3<sup>rd</sup> person counterparts continue to be occasionally dropped.

#### *4.1.3 Accessibility accounts*

Some recent acquisition studies show that children tend to omit arguments when their referents are maximally clear from the context (discourse or situational) (Allen 2006 in Tedeschi 2007), or highly accessible. Clitic pronouns have an antecedent which is prominent in discourse, i.e. it is highly accessible. On such an analysis, if they are omitted, the missing information can be provided by discourse. But 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person arguments are highly accessible by definition. Speaker and addressee are higher than non-participant (3<sup>rd</sup> person) on a cognitive accessibility scale (Sierwierska 2004: 46). In spite of that, the acquisition data indicate a higher percentage of omissions with 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics. Another argument against the accessibility account comes, as one reviewer suggests, from the subject/object clitics asymmetry: subject clitics, which are highly accessible, are not dropped at a time when object clitics are still omitted (see, for example, Zesiger et al. 2010).

Informativeness can certainly play a role in our understanding of early clitics and of clitics in general, but we believe that it cannot account, all by itself, for the developmental asymmetry under discussion.

#### *A pragmatic account*

Schaeffer (2000) argues that children omit object clitics because they lack the concept of shared knowledge: they make no difference between discourse-related and non-discourse related referentiality. Thus, children assume that the referent is always part of the shared knowledge of speaker and hearer and they choose the easy way out, marking referentiality through a non-linguistic

mechanism. This results in object clitic omission. While Schaeffer's analysis can account for the early omission of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, it cannot straightforwardly explain why 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics behave differently or why they seem to pattern with reflexives.

### Our account

We believe that the developmental asymmetry under discussion is rooted in the different properties of the three types of clitics. We propose that the asymmetry between 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics can be best explained in terms of computational load, in particular in terms of feature intervention effects. We therefore propose that the developmental delay of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics is due to (feature) intervention effects. The main difference between the three classes of accusative clitics discussed in this paper is related to intervention effects, which might increase the computational load. Since children's early syntactic computational capacity is limited, we suggest that the developmental delay of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics when compared to 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and reflexive clitics boils down to intervention effects which arise only with 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics. This can explain why omissions are much more frequent and last longer with the latter. The agreement errors, however, cannot be straightforwardly accounted for as an effect of intervention effects due to two factors: (i) the obvious impossibility of manipulating gender/number in longitudinal data, so that one creates situations in which there is total/partial/no identity of feature value between the antecedent and the null DP in post-verbal position and (ii) the relatively small number of clitics. In Section 2 we also predicted that partial/no identity of feature value should be either less problematic than total identity (i.e. smaller number of omissions, smaller number of errors, problematic only during earlier stages, when the child's computational capacity is even more reduced) or not problematic at all. But one would expect a higher number of omissions in contexts where the *phi*-features of the subject have the same values as the *phi*-features of the antecedent, i.e. where they can act as a (strong) intervener in the feature matching process:

- (22)      *că*            *doare*    *burta*                    *pe Bianca.*  
           because    hurts      tummy.the<sub>f sg</sub>        *pe Bianca*<sub>f sg</sub>  
           'Because Bianca has a tummy ache.'[B. 2;2]

Unfortunately, such a prediction is also difficult (if not impossible) to test fully against early longitudinal data for at least two reasons: the low number

of attested accusative clitics and the significant number of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verbal forms used – in the early stages – in contexts where other inflected forms are targeted. But a qualitative analysis of the longitudinal data, corroborated by experimental results reveals that identity of feature make up is problematic only very early and over a very short period of time. The weaker intervention effects of partial/no identity of features are reflected in the extremely small number of 1<sup>st</sup> person accusative clitics used instead of 3<sup>rd</sup> accusative clitics in clauses with a 1<sup>st</sup> person subject.

Data from experimental studies provide some interesting evidence in favour of our prediction, i.e. that when the *phi*-features of the DP subject are different from those of the antecedent, a higher number of clitics should be attested and a smaller number of errors. Tedeschi (2006, 2007) shows that Italian children (age 2;06–6;05) have problems linking the clitic to its antecedent in an elicitation task using a 3<sup>rd</sup> person subject: object clitics occasionally agree with the subject (instead of the object) which indicates that children treat the accusative clitic as a sort of reflexive. Pîrvulescu and Belzil (2008) used an acting task with tangible objects and the 2<sup>nd</sup> person *tu* ‘you’ instead of 3<sup>rd</sup> person in subject position. The results show that there is almost no clitic omission for 3–5 year old French children in this task, while in a task using a 3<sup>rd</sup> person subject children omit the clitic 30–50%.

In 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitic configurations, we saw that no intervention effects arise. 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics establish a relationship with a speech situation participant, not with a clausal or discourse antecedent. We also suggested that an alternative analysis of these clitics might base-generate them in FP, i.e. on this analysis there would be no movement, which suggests an even lower computational load. Whichever analysis one adopts for these clitics (movement vs. non-movement), no intervention effects arise and the computational load is less heavy.

Reflexive clitics require identity of *phi*-features with the subject. They are base-generated in pre-verbal position from where they can feature match with the subject DP. In this case, there are no intervention effects of potential identical feature clusters.

## Conclusions

In the theoretical literature, a distinction has always been made between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns, on the one hand, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns, on the other (Uriagereka 1995; Kayne 2000). 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics belong to a class which excludes 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics but which includes reflexive

clitics. Accusative clitics in Romanian support this distinction. We investigated longitudinal data of child Romanian with a view to testing whether this asymmetry is reflected in a difference between the developmental path of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and that of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, on the one hand, and whether the developmental path of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics is similar to that of reflexive clitics, on the other hand. The data revealed a difference between 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics and 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics: the former emerge slightly later but are practically target-like from the very beginning. 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics, in spite of very early emergence, continue to be omitted at a stage when 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics are used in an adult-like manner. The developmental path of reflexive clitics is similar to that of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics: they emerge at approximately the same time and are used target-like immediately after emergence.

The starting point of our account was Uriagereka's (1995) distinction between "strong" and "weak" clitics, which we translated into a person distinction: 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics. Only the latter are D elements which take a null complement, and have to move to a left periphery F projection to check their referentiality (because they lack a Person feature). Since they are base-generated in complement position as the D of a null direct object, we argued that the feature matching relation between this null DP and its antecedent "crosses" over two potential interveners, the *phi*-features of AgrS and those of the subject DP. This increases the computational complexity of those configurations where there is identity between the *phi*-features of the antecedent and those of the DP subject. On the other hand, 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person accusative clitics are DPs, i.e. they behave like pronouns. They are specified for Person and are interpreted via Match with a silent operator in the C-domain, like any other pronoun. They are not subject to intervention effects. Following Dobrovie-Sorin (1998), we analysed reflexive clitics as base-generated in preverbal position, from where they can feature match with the subject DP. No intervention effects arise in their case either.

We proposed that the developmental delay of 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitics is due to feature intervention effects which plausibly cause greater computational difficulty.

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