

The dative clitic is more than a clitic

Cedric Boeckx
&
Txuss Martín

Edicions de la Universitat de Lleida
Lleida, 2013

Contents

Foreword	9
1. Introduction	11
2. Core Phenomena	13
2.1 Opaque Forms	14
2.2 Flexible Ordering	18
2.3 Combinatorial Constraints.....	29
3. Analysis	39
4. Extension of Analysis	53
5. Conclusion	61
Appendix	63
References	65

Foreword

It is not a coincidence that the study that has won *The 2nd Joan Solà International Prize for Research into Catalan Philology*—an award for a piece of work on syntax—focuses on clitic (or weak) pronouns, one of the aspects dealt with most frequently in the writings of the linguist Joan Solà. Moreover, it is not a coincidence because if there is a topic that has received the attention of Romance grammarians over the years, that topic is clitic pronouns and the restrictions they are subjected to when combined. An overview of linguistic publications appeared during the last decades reveals the many working hours and printed pages devoted to this grammatical theme. In line with this tradition, the book readers have now in their hands focuses mainly on dative clitics in Central Catalan and, with such pronouns as a point of departure, an explanatory proposal is posited to account for all other elements of the paradigm, suggesting valid analyses for pronominal systems in general. Cedric Boeckx and Txuss Martín show in this study how dative pronouns in Catalan offer a unique insight into the nature of clitics. Borrowing Joan Solà's words (*Plantem cara* 2009: 111), Central Catalan datives are “an exceptional ruby,” the kind of constructions that “‘grammarians’ can't or don't know how to analyse, relegating them—indifferent and vain—to the purgatory of ‘colloquial’ language.” The fact is that an understanding of Catalan dative clitics, besides their relevance for the pursuit of a deeper knowledge of our own language, also provides access to a more complete understanding of the clitic system of Romance languages in general. Anfós Par (*Sintaxi catalana* 1923: §84) has already observed that “datives as distinct as ‘li,’ ‘elsi,’ ‘lesi’ are found in no other neo-Latin dialect.”

Boeckx and Martín's work appears at first sight to deal with a marginal issue of Catalan syntax, but it soon becomes clear that the number of questions it raises is huge because it revises, either nearby or from afar, the whole grammar of datives, an important aspect of the syntax of Romance languages. Thus, the interest of this study doesn't properly lay on the novelty of its subject matter, but rather in its resulting theoretical conclusions as well as in the well-argued case for the composite nature of dative clitics. In fact, the authors' deep knowledge of theoretical generative linguistics, and more precisely, the

minimalist program, allows them to go beyond the application of the theory to a single syntactic phenomenon: they discuss previous proposals on Catalan pronouns and those of other Romance languages; they ask the right questions concerning the morphological and syntactic peculiarities of the dative clitics of Central Catalan; and they find answers to the combinatorial opacity and the flexible order that these elements sometimes display. This way, the authors present and defend the main hypothesis of their work with syntactic arguments, namely, that the notion of dative is not a primitive one: dative clitics, unlike their accusative and locative counterparts, are hybrid in nature. Additionally, the results of their analysis are applicable to both noun and determiner phrases.

This is a rigorous piece of work that shows how Catalan, by virtue of its morphosyntactic properties, reveals aspects of the pronominal system that remain covert, hidden, in other Romance languages. Once again, this shows how comparative syntax allows one to discover linguistic correlations and to formulate observations on the properties of languages in general. As the linguist Kenneth Hale asserts, linguistic diversity—and thereby dialectal diversity too—is intimately linked to the creative capacity of the humankind. It is a direct and necessary consequence of the nature of human language.

We hope that this book, ambitious and thought-provoking, will further contribute to our understanding of the faculty of human language a little bit more.

Gemma Rigau