Floating Features in Syntax: Person, Deixis and Agreement in Italo-Romance
Roberta D'Alessandro, Leiden University Centre for Linguistics

According to Chomsky (1995:349), heads encoding exclusively uninterpretable φ-features have no right to exist: "[...]T, C, D, and Agr. The first three have Interpretable features providing "instructions" at either or both interface levels. Agr does not; it consists of -Interpretable formal features only. We therefore have fairly direct evidence from interface relations about T, C, and D, but not Agr. Unlike the other functional categories, Agr is present only for theory-internal reasons." Chomsky's quote refers to the Agr head, which was postulated in order to explain participial agreement in Romance (Kayne 1989, 2000) and was then extended to subject-verb agreement in a Spec-head configuration (Belletti 1990 ff.). Agr was thought of as a purely functional head, which served for agreement to take place. Its presence did not have any impact on the syntax of the clause other than facilitating (or permitting) agreement between two syntactic items that would move onto it (the verb in the head, the subject or the object in the specifier). This head, having no semantic content, could not be interpreted at the CI interface, and as such could not be maintained in the Minimalist framework. Agr was thus "eliminated from UG entirely" (*ibid:*355).

In general: a purely-φ head (call it π) cannot be interpreted at the interface with CI, because of the fact that it does not carry any semantic (interpretable) content. It can also not be selected, having no category. Chomsky's conclusion is that such a head cannot exist under minimalist assumptions.

Π DOES EXIST: CLITICS IN ROMANCE
Romance languages, though, seem to present a large inventory of purely φ-heads (π), namely clitics. Subject clitics in some Northern Italian varieties (1) as well as doubling clitics in Spanish (2) are believed not to provide any semantic contribution to the sentence, and to be purely φ elements (Rizzi 1982, Poletto 2000, Roberts 2010, Torrego 1994, 2013, and many others).

(1)   La Maria la magna   [Venetan]
       the Mary   CL eats.3.SG
       "Mary eats"

(2)   Lo empujaron a Juan.   [Spanish]
       him-pushed to John
       'They pushed John'   [Torrego 1994:199]

Empirical evidence thus tells us that π elements that are not supposed to exist do exist..

This issue can be solved by stating that a π head can and does exist, but in order to be "interpretable" it must have merged/incorporated onto another, semantically non-empy, head, BEFORE the interface with CI is reached. π can be merged to the syntactic spine subject to (3):

(3) CONDITION ON THE MERGER OF Φ HEADS (Π)
A purely φ-head π, i.e. a head encoding only unvalued, uninterpretable φ-features, can be merged into the syntactic spine; for FI conditions, π must be incorporated

into/merged with a semantically non-empty head before the interface with the CI system is reached.

(3) states that if π has not merged with another, non-semantically empty, head, before the interface is reached, the derivation will crash, because the CI will not be able to interpret the semantically vacuous bundle of φ-features. If it has, the derivation will converge.
The merging position of π is determined parametrically, and languages pick one of the many options available.

MORE π
π is not only found in the form of subject clitics, in Romance. It is also found in the form of roots, in the case of person-driven auxiliary selection, as in (4), for the dialect of Pompei (Cennamo, 2001:435):

(4) **so**	kurrut'a'kasə	**si**	kurrut'a'kasə	**a**	kurrut'a'kasə
am-1.SG	run to home	are-2.SG	run to home	has-3SG	run to home
'I have run home'		'You have run home'		'Ha has run home'	

The rest of the talk will be devoted to presenting other instances of π in Italo-Romance varieties, resulting in deictic 3rd person pronouns, person-driven Differential Object Marking, person-driven *rafforzamento fonosintattico* and adverbial agreement.