

Etymologically, clitic is from Greek *klinein* ‘to lean’, and refers to the tendency of clitics which cannot stand on their own, but which have to attach to a neighboring word. In an English sentence like *John’d’ve helped them*, ‘John would have helped them’ for instance, ‘d and ‘ve are attached to another word, its host. This type of behavior makes ‘d and ‘ve typical instances of clitics. In English, the auxiliary clitics appear in the same position in the sentence that their full counterparts appear. In Serbian and Croatian, the position of the clitics is determined according to strict rules which are totally different from the rules governing the rest of the sentence. Zwicky (1977) called the first type ‘simple clitics’ and the second type ‘special clitics’. The second class constitutes a theoretical challenge because there are no free forms with the same distribution. Some Iranian languages have a very interesting and theoretically important set of special clitics in past tense constructions. In the Old Iranian period, there was no such pattern, but rather a consistent distribution in all tenses. Accordingly, the first issue to be addressed is why do the past transitive constructions break away from the rest of the grammar? Furthermore, those Iranian languages that have special clitics in the past transitive construction show a curious distribution. Subject clitics are distributed in the leftmost position of the verb phrase in Kurdish, Balochi, Larestani, Talyshi, Vafsi, Naini, and Tati, but not in Davani. When the complications of clitics in every single language are additionally taken into consideration, the number of theoretically possible alignment types rises considerably. Since the status of clitics is a topic of much debate in phonology, morphology, and syntax, as well as in the respective interfaces, clitics are becoming more and more of a focus in linguistic research. The complex clitic system of the aforementioned Iranian languages makes them the perfect “laboratory” for investigating the structure and distribution of clitics.

The theoretical framework employed in this research project is that of the Minimalist Program, namely phase theory, a relatively recent development of the theory known as Generative Grammar. Pushing the reduction of computational complexity, Chomsky (2000, 2001) proposed that the derivation of the sentence proceeds in small derivational steps known as “phases”. Some scholars, in particular, have proposed that phases should be taken as the domains relevant for the distribution of clitics (e.g., Kahnemuyipour and Megerdumian 2011, 2017). In my doctoral dissertation entitled “The Study of Phases in the Structure of Kurdish Sentences: A Syntactic and Semantic Analysis”, I argue that the distribution of Kurdish subject clitics, a pronominal clitic cross-referencing the subject, refers to phases and, as such, can be used as phasehood diagnostics. The behavior of clitics in various Iranian languages, such as Balochi, Davani, Larestani, Talyshi, Vafsi, Naini, and Tati, can be studied using the same methodology used to examine Kurdish clitic location. In my postdoctoral project, I will create the first database of clitics that spans multiple Iranian languages and then provide a review of the aforementioned literature on clitics in selected Iranian languages. Second, based on a thorough examination of the clitics’ characteristics in different languages, I offer a cross-classification of clitics in Iranian languages. I then investigate the placement of the pronominal clitics in a phase-constrained framework. Thirdly, I investigate the same tendency which is observable in the syntax of clitics diachronically; Old Iranian clitics and Middle Iranian clitics tend towards the leftmost position of the clause. Nevertheless, this tendency has been abandoned in the New Iranian languages with only a very small number of exceptions, such as Davani. My specific hypothesis is that the rich evidence from the synchronic behavior of Iranian languages with respect to clitics illuminates diachronic changes in these languages.

Starting with the better-studied Kurdish case, the research does a thorough comparative analysis of different Iranian languages to determine the characteristics of pronominal clitics in each of these languages. In the Kurdish sentence in (1), the object clitic follows the indirect object, if there is one; the nonverbal component of the complicated predicate, if there is no indirect object; and the verb itself if none of these elements are present. Placing object clitics in the highest position, leads to ungrammaticality (marked with an asterisk) as in (1).

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|---------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1) Emæ(*=yan) | bo memani(=yan)=man | dæ'wæt(=yan) | kird-Ø(=yan). |
| 1PL | for party= | OCL.3PL=SCL.1PL | invitation |
| 'We invited them to the party.' | | | |

The question that is raised here is what constitutes the element that the object clitic follows? This is a central issue in developing an adequate theory of special clitics. Some startling facts about Kurdish lend credence to the idea that the lower phasal domain is where pronominal clitics are distributed. This pattern begs the question of why object clitics are freely placed in the lower phase. Matters are actually much more complicated than the Kurdish example suggests. In Balochi, Larestani, Talyshi, Vafsi, Naini, and Tati, subject clitics are distributed in the lower phase, whereas in Davani, they are routinely found in the higher domain as in (2):

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|----------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 2) Mæ(=m) | ketav-æku(=m) | ese(=m) |
| 1SG=SCL.SG | book-DEF | buy.PST-3SG |
| 'I bought the book.' | | |

The above-described statement raises the following queries: why do we find a language in which clitics are placed in a higher position? What causes the clitic to move to the clause's leftmost position as in (2)? Why are clitics found in the leftmost position of the verb phrase in more languages than that of clause? Rightward drift is a trend that can be seen in the synchronic and diachronic syntax of clitics. The reason why speakers' preferences alter throughout time has been addressed with regard to the Iranian languages mentioned above. This detailed analysis of the distribution of clitics across a number of Iranian languages in this microvariationist study will pave the way for a better understanding of the distribution of clitics in human language.

The abbreviations below are used in the examples:

SCL = subject clitics, OCL = object clitic, SG = singular, PL = plural, PST = past, PROG= progressive, IMPRF = imperfective, PRS = present, DEF = definite, Ø= default third person

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