

# THE MORPHOSYNTAX OF PRONOMINAL CLITICS IN ISTRO-ROMANIAN<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** This article (part of a bigger project) aims to identify the key elements in the morphosyntactic realization and functioning of Istro-Romanian (IR) pronominal clitics, after carefully scrutinising the corpus (SF, TC, VJ, personal recordings). While clitics have been the subject of previous research (in both traditional and more recent frameworks), cf. Kovačec (1984), Sârbu and Frățilă (1998), Zegrean (2012), our proposal takes a closer look at the distribution of IR pronominal clitics. First, the available literature (most recently, Geană 2020) notes that there is a consistent variation in terms of clitic allomorphy, and southern IR may even have (albeit not generalized) a dative-accusative syncretic paradigm for pronominal clitics. This patterns IR with other Western Romance varieties and sets it apart from the other Eastern Romance varieties. Second, regarding where the clitic attaches, in IR cliticization can occur after a noun, subject pronoun, a subordinate conjunction, a.o. (similar to Daco-Romanian, but unlike other Western Romance varieties). After setting out the inventory of IR (dative and accusative) clitics, we will examine what the morphosyntactic distribution of IR clitics is, while also looking at the (significant) differences between northern and southern IR. Finally, we will focus on what the place of IR pronominal clitics within Romance is.

**Keywords:** Istro-Romanian, pronominal clitics, interpolation, clitic doubling, clitic clusters.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This contribution is part of a larger project, called *Istro-Romanian and Istro-Romanians. Legacy and Heritage*. The overall goal of the project is to give a descriptive account of Istro-Romanian (henceforth IR), a severely endangered Romance variety, as spoken today in Croatia and in the diaspora, and the people who speak this variety, focusing on the following dimensions: linguistic, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, language contact, and multicultural. The main objectives of the project are to make

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available a new collection of texts/data; to update the existing IR vocabulary; to provide a descriptive account of IR word order; and to set up a series of linguistic questionnaires.

Building on a corpus made up of Sârbu and Frățilă (1998) (henceforth SF), Traian Cantemir (1959) (henceforth TC), augmented by an older collection of texts by Pușcariu (1906) (henceforth SP), this article will cover the following topics:

1. What is (not) a pronominal clitic? (§2)
2. An inventory of pronominal IR clitics (§3)
3. Places of cliticization in Istro-Romanian (§4)
4. IR clitic clusters (§5)
5. Clitic doubling and DOM in Istro-Romanian (§6)
6. The place of IR pronominal clitics across (Eastern) Romance and conclusions (§7)

The direction of this article is twofold: on the one hand, data will be shown within/across the Istro-Romanian system (including both the north, and the southern variety), on the other, data will be compared primarily to Daco-Romanian (due to the richer available literature and the known correlations between the two varieties) and also with other (Eastern) Romance varieties.

## **2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON PRONOMINAL CLITICS (IN ROMANCE)**

Let us first make some general remarks on the concept of clitics. In this contribution we will follow the general acceptance *à la* Zwicky and Pullum (1983), and Nevis, Joseph, Wanner and Zwicky (1994) (unsurprisingly, the authors mentioned above do not make any references to the pronominal clitics of Istro-Romanian):

a) the word-clitic combinability is governed by syntax (cliticization is active at surface syntactic structures), hence the implications of cliticization are mostly phonological in nature;

b) clitics exhibit a low degree of selection as to their hosts; clitics can attach to words of virtually any category, (that is, clitics do not select their host – it is enough for the host to end in a vowel); and

c) clitics can attach to structures that already contain another clitic.

Following the definition of clitics given by Pană Dindelegan (2005, in DSL, *s.v. clitic*), they display simultaneously features of both autonomous and non-autonomous words. This lack of autonomy is mainly characterized by the loss of the independent (phonetic) accent and their attachment to a host. In general, a clitic is an unstressed word that needs a stressed word with which to form a single accentual unit. We use the generic term *clitic* for true pronominal clitics and weak pronouns – these categories need a syntactic host. A clitic is a morpheme with the syntactic features of a word; thus, clitics are syntactically independent, but phonologically dependent. From the point of view of the general characterization of clitic pronouns, clitics are functional elements, inherently unaccented, with a fixed position. This functional nature means that they function as a grammatical tool. The referentiality of clitic pronouns has an idiosyncratic distribution in a certain language. In the case of Romance languages, most paradigms of clitic pronouns come from Latin, either from personal pronouns, or demonstratives.

Series of both pronominal clitic and non-clitic forms are typical for Eastern Romance. Non-clitic forms are characterized by their syntactic and phonetic independence. Subject clitics, although possibly present in IR (see Dragomirescu and Nicolae 2018b), are beyond the scope of our paper.<sup>3</sup>

The position of clitics is generally fixed or fixed in standardized languages, which means that clitics either precede or follow their (phonological) host: clitics can be in proclitic position – the clitic appears before its host (fr. *je t'aime*, it. *ti amo*, ro. *te iubesc*, IR. *iuva nu te conoște* (TC 91)); or enclitic position – the clitic appears after its host. Mesoclis is appears between the lexical verb and the auxiliary (*pus-le-a ăn barche* (TC 36) 'he put them in the boat'). There is a high degree of variation as to the pronominal clitic position in different Romance dialects and varieties.

Combinations of clitic pronouns (one in the accusative, the other one in the dative) are generally governed by strict rules: syntactic-referential and syntactic-phonological. In the succession of two clitic forms, the form in the dative case precedes that in the accusative case. Data we will introduce later will show that the *\*me-lui/I-II* constraint, presumably universal following Bonet i Alsina (1991:177), is either inactive, or functions with different characteristics in Istro-Romanian.

### 3. PRONOMINAL CLITICS IN ISTRO-ROMANIAN

Consider these examples with Istro-Romanian pronominal datives: 1<sup>st</sup> person singular in (1), 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular in (2), and 3<sup>rd</sup> person (masculine) plural in (3):

- (1) a. *Miie fost-a sila* (TC 40)  
me.DAT be.PPLE=AUX hurry.NOM  
'I was in a hurry'
- b. *Nu mń-a niș dăt* (TC 23)  
NEG CL.DAT.1SG=AUX nothing give.PPLE  
'He gave me nothing'
- (2) a. *Frăierița lui ganę* (TC 7)  
fiancée.DEF he.DAT tells  
'His fiancée tells him'
- b. *Ie-I ganę* (TC 6)  
he=CL.DAT.3SG tells  
'He tells her'
- (3) a. *Lucifer ganę lor* (TC 19)  
Lucifer tells they.DAT  
'Lucifer tells them'
- b. *Mărtin le ganę* (TC 18)  
Martin CL.DAT.3PL tells  
'Martin tells them'

<sup>3</sup> See also Pescarini (2016: 745-8) for detailed examples and analysis of subject clitics in Romance.

Here are some examples involving accusative pronominal forms: 1<sup>st</sup> person singular in (4) and 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular in (5):

- (4) a. *Ver tu mire lă cu tire?* (TC 69)  
 AUX.FUT.2SG you.SG me.ACC take.INF with you.ACC  
 ‘Will you take me with you?’
- b. *Nu m-a vrut ničur luă* (SF 237)  
 NEG CL.ACC.1SG=AUX.3SG want.PPLE nobody take  
 ‘Nobody wanted to take me’
- (5) a. *Av și tire bătu stucit?* (TC 20)  
 AUX.3SG and you.SG.ACC stick.DEF hit.PPLE  
 ‘Has the stick hit you as well?’
- b. *Io t-oi lă cu mire* (TC 69)  
 I CL.ACC.2SG=AUX.FUT.1SG take.INF with me.ACC  
 ‘I will take you with me’

It is worth mentioning at this point that, for no apparent reason, Istro-Romanian employs two sets of pronominal forms to mark the oblique. This is unlike Daco-Romanian (and most of the rest of Romance, for that matter), which operates with a strict stressed vs non-stressed set of pronouns for specific syntactic contexts: stressed forms when used after a preposition or when they are the only answer to a question, and non-stressed/weak forms when cliticizing to various hosts. For the purposes of this paper, we will not deal with the (1a), (2a), (3a), (4a), (5a), given that *mîie*, *lui*, *lor* (for the dative), and *mire*, *tire* (for the accusative) belong to the class of stressed pronouns. The complete table of stressed forms for both the dative and the accusative is given in Tables 1 and 2 (simplified from Kovaceč 1984: 572):

Table 1

	IR dative stressed pronominal forms			
	1 <sup>st</sup> person	2 <sup>nd</sup> person	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	
			masculine	feminine
Singular	<i>mîie</i>	<i>țîie</i>	(a) <sup>4</sup> <i>lui</i>	(a) <i>l’ei</i>
Plural	(a) <i>nó</i>	(a) <i>vó</i>	(a) <i>lor</i>	

<sup>4</sup> The brackets in this graph relate to the fact that the prepositional marker *a* is optional in the north and missing in the south (Kovaceč 1984: 572). Sârbu and Frățilă (1998: 24) use the brackets without providing an explanation (which would indicate? an optional use, although we believe this is not the case). See a discussion on the use of IR *a* in the oblique (dative and genitive) in Dragomirescu and Nicolae (2018a) and Geană (2020).

Table 2

IR accusative stressed pronominal forms<sup>5</sup>

	1 <sup>st</sup> person	2 <sup>nd</sup> person	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	
			masculine	feminine
Singular	<i>míre</i>	<i>tíre</i>	<i>ǎ́</i>	<i>ǎ́i</i>
Plural	<i>nóǐ</i>	<i>vóǐ</i>	<i>ǎ́l</i>	<i>ǎ́le</i>

The forms of interest for us in this article are those in (1b), (2b), (3b), (4b), and (5b), the so-called non-stressed/weak (or, in the Romanian literature, conjunct) forms. These forms fall under our understanding of pronominal clitics. Here is the complete table of pronominal clitics in IR (again simplified from Kovaceč 1984: 572):

Table 3

## IR dative clitic pronominal forms

	1 <sup>st</sup> person	2 <sup>nd</sup> person	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	
			masculine	feminine
Singular	<i>â<sup>m</sup></i>	<i>â<sup>t</sup></i>	<i>â<sup>l</sup></i>	
Plural	<i>na</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>le</i>	

Table 4

## IR accusative clitic pronominal forms

	1 <sup>st</sup> person	2 <sup>nd</sup> person	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	
			masculine	feminine
Singular	<i>me</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>â<sup>l</sup></i>	<i>o (vo)</i>
Plural	<i>na</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>â<sup>l</sup></i>	<i>le<sup>6</sup></i>

There is a great degree of heterogeneity in these forms. Depending on where they are placed in a phrase or on their use in the north vs south varieties, they can have different (phonetic) forms. Such heterogeneity may (accidentally) give rise to a perfectly syncretic dative-accusative paradigm (Geană 2020):

<sup>5</sup> Note that only the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular have forms different from the nominative. For the other persons, the accusative and the nominative are homonymous (obviously, the context helps decode the exact use/meaning). This is also the case in Daco-Romanian.

<sup>6</sup> Kovaceč (1984: 572) uses in his chart the form *la* for the dative plural pronominal clitic, but this is presumably a typographical error, since no evidence of the use of *la* with this value is attested.

- (6) a. *Pure-m* *uocli!* (TC 8)  
 put.IMPERATIVE=CL.POS-DAT.1SG eyes.DEF  
 ‘Put my eyes’
- b. *T-oi* *spure* *nuște* (TC 6)  
 CL.DAT.2SG=AUX.FUT.1SG say.INF something  
 ‘I will tell you something’
- (7) a. *Preftu m-a-ntrebât* (TC 111)  
 priest.DEF CL.ACC.1.SG=AUX=ask.PPLE  
 ‘The priest asked me’
- b. *Cum t-oi* *io cea votę conoște?* (TC 39)  
 how CL.ACC.2SG=AUX.FUT.1SG I that time know.INF  
 ‘How will I know you then?’

Although we have not made any mention so far of the reflexive pronouns, IR employs reflexives in a wide range of verbs (largely like Daco-Romanian) and exhibits both stressed forms: *sie* for the dative (8a), *sire* for the accusative (8b), and non-stressed forms: *ăș* for the dative (both singular and plural) in (8a) rebranded as (9a), *se* for the accusative (both singular and plural) for 3<sup>rd</sup> person in (9b); for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person it uses the same forms as the personal pronoun. Interestingly, the reflexive pronoun does not show the same complementarity as in (1a) and (1b), probably due to the traditionally and predominantly non-stressed feature of the reflexive (the stressed forms are rather rare, and the examples with *sire* can be shown to function as a marked third person accusative, on a par with *mire*, *tire*):

- (8) a. *Samo castăvți* *cu castelu* *facut*  
 only people.of.Castăv with castle.DEF make.PPLE  
*ș-av* *ăși* *siie* *slăbo*  
 CL.REFL.DAT.3PL=AUX alone/themselves REFL.DAT.3PL bad  
 ‘Only the Castaveans from the castle hurt themselves’ (TC 150)
- b. *Omeri* *če-s* *din seliște* *ântru* *sire*  
 people.DEF who=are from village among REFL.ACC.3PL  
*večinom* *cuvintu* *po jeiânski* (SF 158)  
 mostly speak.3PL in Žejânski  
 ‘The people from the village mostly speak Žejânski among themselves’
- (9) a. *Samo castăvți* *cu castelu* *facut*  
 only people.of.Castăv with castle.DEF make.PPLE  
*ș-av* *ăși* *siie* *slăbo*  
 CL.REFL.DAT.3PL=AUX alone/themselves REFL.DAT.3PL bad  
 ‘Only the Castaveans from the castle hurt themselves’ (TC 150)
- b. *E-a lu* *Sergio* *se* *kiâma* *Iasmina*  
 and=GEN Sergio REFL.3.SG call.PR.3.SG Iasmina  
 ‘And Sergio’s [daughter] is called Iasmina’ (SF 76)

#### 4. PLACES OF CLITICIZATION

The phonological host of a pronominal clitic in Istro-Romanian can be virtually any category (as opposed to the syntactic host, which is, in most cases, a verb). While this could be a general feature of clitics, the particular situation of Romance pronominal clitics is somewhat different (in discussing Romance pronominal clitics, Pescarini (2016) does not make a specific reference to the place of cliticization). In a paper on European Portuguese clitics, Vigário (1999: 221) makes the general assumption that Romance clitics may only attach to elements belonging to V. While syntactically we do admit that clitics are generated somewhere within the VP<sup>7</sup> (higher or lower depending on the variety), the phonological host of an Istro-Romanian pronominal clitic can vary to a significant degree<sup>8</sup>, although on the basis of our corpus most cases confirm the above theory, as shown in (10)–(22). As a tentative empirical observation, the pronominal clitic in IR tends to be expressed either before the verb, or shortly after the verb spell-out (after the lexical verb or the auxiliary, whichever comes last). Some examples are needed at this point; thus, a pronominal clitic (both an accusative and a dative clitic) can be hosted by:

- **verbs** (expected, similar to other Romance varieties):

– in a simple/non-compound tense:

- (10) a. *Mi-i* *ruşire* (TC 56)  
 CL.DAT.1SG=IS shame  
 ‘I’m ashamed’
- b. *Mărtin le* *ganę* (TC 18)  
 Martin CL.DAT.3PL tells  
 ‘Martin tells them’

– in a compound tense (in most cases identified in the corpus, the host is the auxiliary verb); note also the cases with interpolation:

- (11) a. *T-oi* *spure* *nuşte* (TC 6)  
 CL.DAT.2SG=AUX.FUT.1SG say.INF something  
 ‘I will tell you something’
- b. *Uina l-a* *fi a lui* *muiăre*  
 aunt.DEF CL.DAT.3SG.M=AUX be A.he.GEN wife  
 ‘[If his<sub>j</sub> uncle<sub>i</sub> married] his<sub>i</sub> wife would be his<sub>j</sub> aunt’ (SF 61)
- c. *Nu mŃ-a* *niş* *dă* (TC 23)  
 NEG CL.DAT=AUX nothing give.PPLE  
 ‘He gave me nothing’
- d. *Zadărjit-m-ăm* *c-ur* *priatel* (SF 225)  
 spend.PPLE=CL.REFL.1SG=AUX.1.SG with=INDEF friend  
 ‘I spent some time with a friend’
- e. *(Iuva-i muiăra?) – Vândut-ăm-vo* (SF 61)  
 where=IS wife.DEF sell.PPLE=AUX=CL.ACC.3SG.F  
 ‘(Where is your wife?) I sold her’ [this is a joke]

<sup>7</sup> But see Ledgeway and Lombardi (2005), Tortora (2014).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Sanvalentine (Benincà and Pescarini 2014; Pescarini 2020:9f).



– other personal pronouns:

- (16) *Miie-m piiaje ân pemint lucrâ* (SF 249)  
 I.DAT=CL.DAT.1SG like.3SG in land work.INF  
 ‘I like to work the land’

• **adverbs:**

– the standard negation

- (17) *Mâmo, nu-ț ție treba niș* (SF 124)  
 mother.VOC NEG=CL.SG.DAT.2SG you.SG.DAT need.3SG nothing  
 ‘Mom, you don’t need anything [to worry about]’

– an adverb of manner (18a):

- (18) *Ceâ cum țî-ũâm zis, șâ-ț*  
 that how CL.DAT.2SG=AUX tell.PPLE like.that=CL.DAT.2SG  
*va fi* (TC 15)  
 AUX.FUT.3SG be.INF  
 ‘As I told you, that’s exactly what’s going to happen to you’

• **conjunctions:**

– coordinating conjunctions:

- (19) *Io-m o britvę micșę și-ț voi*  
 I=have.PS.1SG INDEF knife little and=CL.DAT-POS.2SG AUX.FUT.1SG  
*limba obri cu ceâ britvę* (TC 48)  
 tongue.DEF shave.INF with that knife  
 ‘I have a little knife and I’ll cut your tongue with it’

– subordinating conjunctions:

- (20) *Ma se-ț reș dâ o fâșię,*  
 but if=CL.DAT.2SG COND.1SG give.INF a little.ribbon  
*ręi fi mai mușâțe!* (TC 50)  
 COND.2SG be.INF more beautiful.F  
 ‘But if I gave you a little ribbon, you would be more beautiful’

• **interjections:**

- (21) *Nâ-ț zlatin crilâș* (TC 8)  
 here.you.have=cl.dat.2g golden hat  
 ‘Here, take this golden hat’



- (24) a. *Acmo mi te ponuiuiş* (SF 173)  
 now CL.DAT.1SG CL.ACC.2SG offer.PS.2SG  
 ‘You are offering yourself to me now’
- b. *Nu mi te-âi vrut obeçi*  
 NEG CL.DAT.1SG CL.REFL.ACC=AUX.2.SG want.PPLE promise  
 ‘You didn’t want to become my fiancée’ (SF 116)

In (24b), we have a case of clitic climbing. The reflexive is needed for the verb *obeçi* ‘promise’, under Croatian influence. A similar example with raising (but without a clitic cluster) is given in (15c), with the same verb *vrę* ‘want’. However, raising is optional; here is an example with a reflexive after the same verb:

- (25) *Iă vrę maritâ-se dupa ęesaru* (SP 9)  
 she wants marry.INF-CL.REFL.3SG after emperor.DEF  
 ‘She wants to marry the emperor’

## 6. CLITIC DOUBLING AND DOM

A phenomenon widely discussed in Romance literature for Romanian and Spanish regards clitic doubling and DOM. In IR, DOM is said to be absent in the accusative (Kovačec 1984: 587, Sârbu and Frăţilă 1998: 22), although we were able to identify in the corpus such examples as:

- (26) *Gvârđiia Ń-a ucis pre iel’* (TC 73)  
 guard.DEF CL.ACC.3PL=AUX kill.PPLE DOM they.ACC  
 ‘The guard killed them’

This is the only example we could find with clitic doubling. But we were able to identify a series of examples with a direct object headed by *pre* (similar to Daco-Romanian *pe* DOM):

- (27) a. *Uâm ăntrebât pre domnu che se*  
 have.AUX ask.PPLE DOM lord.DEF that if  
*va dă cărstu za lu ęiăęe* (TC 93)  
 FUT.AUX.3SG give.INF christening.DEF DAT father  
 ‘I asked God if he would christen my father’
- b. *N-a nici ur conoşcut pre iel’* (TC 9)  
 NEG=has.AUX no one know.PPLE DOM they.ACC  
 ‘No one knew them’

Given the scarcity of examples, our preliminary conclusion is that DOM is at most peripheral to Istro-Romanian (in both varieties) and probably an influence of Daco-Romanian(s).

Clitic doubling with the dative is in any case clearly more common. So far, we have not looked at the pragmatic effects of such constructions, but these examples show IR

patterning with Daco-Romanian (and Spanish, alongside the other varieties where such phenomena are attested):

– clitic doubling with a reflexive pronoun (here is (8a) again, rebranded as (28)):

- (28) *Samo castăvfi*                      *cu*    *castelu*            *facut*  
 only people.of.Castăv            with    castle.DEF            make.PPLE  
*ș-av*    *ânși*                      *siie*                                      *slăbo*  
 CL.REFL.DAT.3PL=have.AUX            themselves            REFL.DAT.3PL            bad  
 ‘Only the Castaveans from the castle harmed themselves’ (TC 150)

– with personal pronouns, with the surface order strong pronoun + clitic in (28) and clitic + strong pronoun in (29):

- (29) a.    ***Miie-m***                      *piiaje*                      *ân*    *pemint*                      *lucră* (SF 249)  
           I.DAT=CL.DAT.1SG    like.3SG                      in            land                      work.INF  
           ‘I like to plough’  
 b.    ***Mie-m***                      *dăvu*                      *dița* (SF 91)  
           I.DAT=CL.DAT.1SG    give.3PL                      children  
           ‘Children give me [money]’
- (30) a.    *Čela*    ***mi-e***                      *măi*    *bur*                      ***miie*** (SF 74)  
           that    CL.DAT=is                      more    good                      1SG.DAT  
           ‘That one is better for me’  
 b.    *Mămo,*                      ***nu-ț***                                      ***ție***                      *treba*  
           mother.VOC                      NEG=CL.SG.DAT.2SG    2SG.DAT                      need.3SG  
           *niș* (SF 124)  
           nothing  
           ‘Mum, you don’t have to [worry about] anything’

– doubling of a dative-possessive, similar to (sub-)standard Daco-Romanian, but unlike other Romance varieties that have dative-possessive constructions):

- (31) *Namaje-ț*                                      ***ta***                                      *ușița* (SF 294)  
 grease.IMP=you.SG.DAT.POS            you.POS                      little.door  
 ‘Oil your little gate’

The (redundant) repetition of the same clitic within the same context/VP is attested. We rule them out as structures with clitic doubling and as accidents (given their attestation in regional Daco-Romanian, old Romanian and Italian dialects), and claim that they act as reinforcers, especially given the fact that a clitic cannot double another clitic.

- (32) a.    *Čela-l*                                      *săkile-l*                                      *póte*  
           that.M=CL.ACC.3SG.M            anyone=CL.ACC.3SG.M            can.PS.3SG  
           *učiđe* (SF 64)  
           kill.INF  
           ‘Anyone could kill it [the wolf]’

- b. *Lât-a tota sę roba ce-a vut*  
 take.PPLE=AUX all his clothing.DEF which=AUX have.PPLE  
*și vo dus-o ăn*  
 and CL.ACC.3SG.F take.PPLE=CL.ACC.3SG.F in  
*sę căsę (TC 16)*  
 his house  
 ‘He took all his clothes and brought them into his house’

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

To sum up, for most aspects concerning pronominal clitics, Istro-Romanian patterns with Daco-Romanian, nevertheless:

- DOM is standard in DR, but (at most) peripheral in northern IR;
- the partially dative-accusative syncretic pronominal clitics in the singular in southern IR is absent from all varieties of DR.

The analysis of pronominal clusters in Romance (*à la Săvescu Ciucivara* 2011) still needs to include data from Istro-Romanian, and from the other Eastern Romance varieties (Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian). Also, although we have had some empirical evidence that some IR cliticizations can be explained in relation to Croatian pronominal clitics (Croatian has Wackernagel clitics), this aspect is worth separate research. Last but not least, a comparison with the situation in old Romanian is particularly needed.

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