

Third clitic effect in SerBoCroatian

In Serbo-Croatian, and South Slavic in general, as well as in the majority of other Slavic languages with similar ‘special’ clitic systems, when there are more than one clitics in a clause, forming a cluster, they are generally assumed to occupy predefined positions in a templatic manner (cf. Franks & King 2000, Bošković 2001, 2004, Popović 2004: 289-290, Milićević 2009, *inter alia*), as in (1).

(1) *SCr. clitic template*

comp > aux ≠ *je* > dat > acc/gen > refl > *je*

Not all logically conceivable combinations of clitics in (1) are actually attested, however (see Franks 2017, 2019). In addition, at least some speakers of Serbo-Croatian may display variation in the usual order of clitics in several clusters, under conditions that are not yet fully understood.

In this paper, the variation in the order of clitics is traced in data collected from Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian web corpora (Ljubešić & Klubička 2014). It is shown that there is a systemic split between clitics whose cluster-internal placement is invariable and those that feature more than one possible placement within clitic cluster. This variation, however, is only observable in the presence of at least two other clitics, as in (2c) and (2d) in contrast to (2a) and (2b), where the pronominal clitic *ih* shows variable placement in relation to an accusative clitic only where there is another, third clitic present in the cluster.

- (2) a. Koliko *ih* *ga* poznaje?
 how many them.gen him.acc know
 ‘How many of them know him?’
- b. *Koliko *ga* *ih* poznaje?
- c. Koliko *ih* *ga* *se* sjeća?
 how many them.gen him.acc refl remember
 ‘How many of them remember him?’
- d. Koliko *ga* *ih* *se* sjeća?
 how many him.acc them.gen refl remember
 ‘How many of them remember him?’

This is termed the third clitic effect (not to be confused with “clitic third”, a clause-level phenomenon where otherwise 2P clitics surface in a third position in clause, as described by e.g. Ćavar & Wilder 1999). This effect is discussed in the context of internal structure of the clitic cluster and its spell-out, which is argued to be phase-derived rather than templatic and epiphenomenal in nature.

References

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