

Clitics in Slovak with(out) restraint

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1 Introduction: definitions and formulation of the problem

Clitics represent one of the most specific and intricate phenomena within the word order of many languages. Slovak, which is usually described as having so-called free word order, allows for positional permutations of phrases depending on information structure, but the position of clitics is fixed within the clause. Slovak belongs to those languages which follow Wackernagel's Law and its clitic elements belong to the category of second-position clitics (2P). Clitic elements are typical of having "dual citizenship" (Hana 2007): within the sentence, they follow an initial element called prosodic host (anchor), a clause-initial unit, usually the first sentence constituent. However, morphologically, lexically, or syntactically they belong to the verb or verb base, the position of which within the sentence is not conditioned prosodically. The fact that the prosodic host of the clitic component and its lexical base or syntactic governor do not necessarily correspond may lead to the emergence of constituent discontinuity: separation of the clitic item from its lexical base or syntactic governor (which means the necessity of linear detachment of conceptually united entity).

However, Wackernagel's Rule is not always applicable without exception and the pattern of clitic placement undergoes systematic variations under certain conditions. Depending on the information structure, morphological features, and syntactic patterns within the clause, clitic components can be placed at positions different than 2P within the clause. As Franks et al. (2004: 12) argue, the study of clitics is thus not limited to research on prosodical conditions in a clause, but it "can shed light on the interfaces between syntactic, morphological, and phonological linguistic representations." As a result, even languages which share a great many similarities may differ in clitic placement, as was pointed out by Uhlířová (1987) regarding Czech, Slovak, and Polish or by Hana & Rosen (2017).

2 The present-day state of research on clitics in Slovak

Slovak lacks usage-based theoretical and practical investigation into word order, which would show preferential word order patterns in contemporary Slovak texts including clitic components. The only work on this topic in the Slovak context is *Slovosled a vetosled v slovenčine* which was published in 1966 by J. Mistrík; other works concerning Slovak word order focus mostly on syntagmatic word order (cf. Kačala 2013) and are not based on corpus data. Investigation of clitics in Slovak as L2 can be found in works by Ivanová, Kysel'ová & Gálišová (2021a, 2021b), Ivanová & Bashir Gěčová (2021) and Ivanová (2022). The description of Slovak enclitics and their linear ordering within the Slavic context can be found in Frank & King (2000) and Beličová & Uhlířová (1996). The situation in Slovak is largely at odds with that of Czech in which word order behaviour of clitics has attracted significant attention both in investigation of Czech as L1 (Uhlířová 1987, Junghanns 2002, Avgustinova & Oliva 1995, Hana 2007, Kosek 2011, etc.) as well as L2 (Starý Kořánová 2017). The same holds for the situation in South-Slavic languages where clitics have been investigated with respect to US-based linguistics, formal grammar theories, or prescriptive and stylistic aspects (cf. Kolaković et al. 2022).

3 Methodology

The paper is a data-oriented, empirical in-depth study of the preferential placement of clitic components in Slovak. Slovak clitics are subject to various degrees of word order variations within a clause. The prescriptive norms and theoretical claims as presented in theoretical studies are thus confronted with real language usage as found in observable language data. The paper

adopts a multi-methodological approach to linguistic research, employing statistical corpus analysis and acceptability rating task by native speakers to show how introspection and the analysis of authentic corpus data can converge or diverge in different types of constructions and even brings the evidence of noticeable differences between judgments and actual use as well as between the judgments of individual users (even linguistic experts).

Positional variations of clitics are investigated with regard to different types of hosts (complementizers, conjunctions), different types of complement clauses, phenomena like delayed placement, clitic climbing with control complement-taking predicates, word order templates “light verb + noun + infinitive complement of the noun” and other types of constructions, in which the departure from expected placement of clitic component may occur. It is shown that Slovak clitics can exhibit complex ways of interaction with information structure and syntactic patterns of a clause. At the same time, some word order matrices are preferentially associated with specific registers in which certain permutations of clitics are favoured or disfavoured.

The idea that empirical evidence for theoretical claims should be gathered from multiple sources is becoming increasingly important for linguistic research. It is shown that each method adds to better understanding of the studied phenomenon, thus overcoming the possible shortcomings of methods if used independently. At the same time, it is shown that the relative rareness of a particular word order matrix in a corpus can be associated with non-preference in selection, but such infrequency does not categorically always entail substantially lower acceptability, and vice versa, lower acceptability does not always go hand in hand with the scant evidence of a particular word order matrix in the corpus data. The investigation shows that grammaticality is not a dichotomous notion and grammatical constructions are not simply environments or non-environments for rules; rather they may be environments to a degree and form hierarchies along which different speakers have different acceptability thresholds (cf. Schütze 2019).

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