

Clitic Climbing in Serbian Viewed From a Syntactic Dependency Perspective

The paper describes clitic climbing [= CC] in Serbian, illustrated in (1):

(1) *Lepo*_{Host} [**te, je**]_{CLITIC CLUSTER} [*videti*_{Governor} ____i]_{Inf-phrase} lit. ‘Nice you_{SGJ-ACC}’ is to.see.’

The infinitive-controlled pronominal clitic has “climbed out” of the infinitive phrase and joined the clause-level auxiliary clitic; the two form a single cluster, hosted by the adjective; cf. (2), where the pronominal clitic “remains in situ”, hosted by the infinitive:

(2) *Lepo* [**je**]_{CLITIC CLUSTER-1} [*videti*_{Governor&Host} [**te**]_{CLITIC CLUSTER-2}]_{Inf-phrase} lit. ‘Nice is to.see you_{SGJ-ACC}.’

CC in Serbian is not a prominent phenomenon: first, CC out of completive clauses is only marginally possible (it will not be considered here); second, while CC from infinitive phrases is possible and even quasi-obligatory in some cases, the use of the infinitive is restricted.

An infinitive can function as: 1) a complement of phasic, modal, mental state and emotion verbs; 2) a complement of emotion, mental state and evaluative nouns and adjectives; 3) the subject of copular verbs. CC out of the infinitive phrase is possible in all of these environments, albeit with different preferences. Its acceptability depends both on the properties of the infinitive phrase (its linear position within the clause, its constitution/prosody) and that of the clitics involved (their type/form and number).

- If the infinitive phrase is not clause-initial, CC out of it is either (quasi-)obligatory or possible, provided some specific conditions are met; cf.:

(3) *Nisi mu ih smeo* [*dati* **(mu ih)*] lit. ‘You.should.not to.him them have.dared [to.give (to.him them)].’ | *Bojao sam* ?*(mu) se* [*reći (mu) svoje mišljenje*] lit. ‘Having.feared I.am (to.him) REFL [to.tell (to.him) my opinion].’ | *Nemam ti nameru* [*više (ti) odgovarati*] lit. ‘I.do.not.have (to.you) intention [further (to.you) to.respond].’

- If the infinitive phrase is clause-initial, CC is blocked; clause-level clitics in most cases do not immediately follow the infinitive phrase; cf.:

(4) [*Reći mu svoje mišljenje*] **(sam se) bojao* lit. ‘[To.tell to.him my opinion] I.am REFL having.feared.’ | [*Lagati ga*] **mi je neprihvaljivo* lit. [To.lie him] to.me is unacceptable.’ vs. [*Lagati je neprihvaljivo*] lit. [To.lie] is unacceptable.’

To my knowledge, there are no papers fully dedicated to CC in Serbian (or Croatian or Bosnian). The most complete accounts of the phenomenon remain Browne (1975: 273-276) and Popović (1997: 342-350); more recently, it has been discussed, e.g., in Progovac (2005: 146ff), Aljović (2006) and Franks (2010). In this paper, I will provide a formalized description of the facts illustrated above, in the form of rules allowing for synthesizing Serbian sentences containing climbed clitics; the description will be carried out within the Meaning-Text style dependency syntax (Mel’čuk 1988, 2013).

References

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