

## Chapter 46: Subject clitics

Cecilia Poletto and Christina Tortora

### 46.1 Introduction

Subject clitics — the topic of this chapter — are limited to a geographically circumscribed (and contiguous) group of varieties, found in the northern half of Italy (including northern Tuscany), southern France, and Switzerland. The fact that subject clitics are confined to a relatively small area should not, however, lead us to conclude that this is a comparatively simple area of syntax. On the contrary, the nature and extent of the variation, and the complexity of the theoretical questions involved, has challenged researchers for decades.

### 46.2 Overview

#### 46.2.1 The object of study

Given the range of categories that the terms ‘subject’ and ‘clitic’ — taken together or separately — might suggest, we begin by clarifying what we take to be the object of study in this chapter.

The term clitic is used to refer to a relatively reduced (or ‘small’) morpheme which depends phonologically and/or syntactically on some other linguistic unit, with which it forms some kind of prosodic and/or syntactic grouping. From the perspective of a generative syntactic framework, clitics are often analysed as syntactic heads, which are either independent, or adjoined to other syntactic heads (either functional, such as Infl (cf. §30.2.2), or lexical, such as a verb). In the Romance realm then, a pronominal clitic is generally understood to be a pronoun which functions as a head element (namely, a relatively reduced morpheme, rather

than a full phrasal category); this is in contrast with pronominal forms which function as full phrases. We illustrate briefly with Italian, where the object pronoun clitic *lo* and the full pronoun *lui* have similar (in this case, identical) possibilities for reference, but different syntactic behaviours, based on their head vs phrasal status (for detailed discussion of object clitic pronouns in Romance, see ch. 47):

(1) a Abbiamo visto **lui**. (It.)

we.have seen him

‘We saw him.’

b **Lo** abbiamo visto. (It.)

him= we.have seen

‘We saw him.’

In relation to the concept of an *object clitic*, the term *subject clitic* often evokes the idea of a series of ‘subject morphemes’ which are in some sense the subject analogues to object clitics. From this perspective, the main difference between a subject clitic and an object clitic is that the former pronominalizes a subject, while the latter pronominalizes an object. Indeed, many northern Italian dialects have subject clitics which seem, by analogy with object clitics, to encode the kinds of features we would expect a pronoun to encode. Consider, for example, the second person subject clitic in the Fiorentino and Trentino varieties discussed by Brandi and Cordin (1989):

(2) Te **tu** parli. (Flo.)

you SCL.2SG= speak

‘You speak.’

(3) *Ti te* parli. (Trn.)

you SCL.2SG= speak

‘You speak.’

The Fiorentino and Trentino subject clitics *tu* and *te* are both obligatory (unlike the etymologically related strong subject pronouns *te* and *ti* ‘you’ also seen in (2) and (3), respectively). In terms of their apparent features (second person singular) and their apparent function (overt realization of an argument?),<sup>1</sup> these subject clitics seem analogous to the second person singular object clitic found in most Romance languages (cf. It. ***Ti*** *vedo* ‘I see **you**’); note for example the formal similarity with the strong subject pronouns. Similarly, to continue to take Trentino as an example, a third person singular verb obligatorily occurs with the unambiguous form *el* or *la*, depending on whether the subject (null or overt) is masculine or feminine:

(4) a *El Mario el* parla. (Trn.)

the Mario SCL.2SGM= speaks

---

<sup>1</sup> The fact that the subject clitics in (2)–(4) seem to ‘double’ an argument already calls into question the idea that these clitics are analogous to object clitics (as the latter in the same languages do not freely double object arguments, but rather, stand in for them). The question of the function of subject clitics is raised in detail in §46.5.

‘Mario speaks.’

b La Maria **la** parla. (Trn.)

the Maria SCL.3SGF= speaks.

‘Maria speaks.’

Here, too, the third person singular forms *el* and *la* seem like subject analogues to Romance object clitic pronouns: they behave like clitics (they cannot be stressed, coordinated, or modified, and they seem to cluster with other clitics), and they encode features that are frequently encoded in object (clitic) pronouns, such as number and gender. Given the nature of the forms in (2)-(4), the term ‘subject clitic’ is an apt term for them.

However, already starting with the seminal work by Benincà (1983) and Renzi and Vanelli (1983), the term ‘subject clitic’ has been used to define a diverse array of elements, only some of which clearly etymologically derive from nominative pronominal forms, and many of which do not display the typical meaning and distribution of ‘subjects’. For example, Benincà (1983:18) shows that the Paduan clitic *a*, which was ‘traditionally considered the clitic for first person singular and plural, and second person plural, is not governed by the same syntactic conditions as those which govern the presence or absence of the other subject clitics’. Rather, as Benincà demonstrates, this clitic has a pragmatic function: it is used to mark the entire sentence as new information, witness (5a–b):

(5) a Piove. (Pad.)

it.rains

‘It’s raining.’

b **A** piove. (Pad.)

a= it.rains

‘It’s raining.’ (entire sentence as new information)

Despite the fact that both (5a–b) are possible, and have the same truth conditions, the clitic *a* should not be characterized as ‘optional’; rather, it is obligatory when the sentence is to be marked as new information. Given the pragmatic function (and the syntax) of the form *a*, Benincà proposes that this clitic is the morphosyntactic instantiation of a Topic head, in the left periphery of the clause (cf. §30.3.4, §33.2).

This proposal, together with Brandi and Cordin’s (1989) proposal that subject clitics in Florentine/Trentino are the overt instantiation of Agr(eement) (and taken together with the issues discussed in the remainder of this chapter), reveals the following: the term ‘subject clitic’ encompasses an assortment of clitic morphemes instantiating a disparate array of functional heads which have in common two things: (a) a history of being grouped together as a class of elements (correctly or not), and (b) their appearance in what we could term ‘the higher functional field’, that is, the portion of the clause in which inflectional (‘higher IP’; cf. discussion of the HAS in §30.2.2.1) and information-structural (‘lower CP’; cf. discussion in §30.3) information is expressed. This chapter, like the vast majority of the literature on the topic, follows the tradition of treating as subject clitics this entire heterogeneous set of elements.

46.2.2 What counts as a subject clitic language?

Subject clitic languages are limited to a geographically circumscribed (and contiguous) group of varieties, found in the northern half of Italy, southern France, and Switzerland. Thus, subject clitics are claimed to be found in northern and southern Gallo-Romance varieties, Francoprovençal, Ræto-Romance, and the dialects of northern Italy and northern Tuscany. However, given that the term subject clitic encompasses a heterogeneous array of elements, linguistic classification becomes a rather non-straightforward task, and deciding whether a particular clitic pronoun or morpheme should count as a subject clitic can become an artifact of how researchers choose their evidence, and how they interpret it.

Atonic subject pronouns have been recognized to be of at least two syntactic categories. Let us consider in this regard French: Kayne (1975) argued that in contrast with object clitics, (standard) French ‘subject clitics’ are not heads, but rather full phrases (later reinterpreted as ‘weak’ pronouns by Cardinaletti and Starke 1999). Brandi and Cordin (1981) supported this by arguing that French ‘subject clitics’ are located in the canonical preverbal subject position, and Rizzi (1986) likewise categorized subject clitics in northern Italian dialects as genuine syntactic heads, setting them apart from French subject pronouns such as *il* ‘he’, which he argued to be phrasal. On the view that a ‘true subject clitic’ is a head (and not a phrase), then French would not count as a subject clitic language.

It has also been noted that while French ‘subject clitics’ are morphologically distinct from one another, northern Italian dialects (prototypical subject clitic languages) often have gaps in the paradigm (see Renzi and Vanelli 1983 for the empirical generalizations that describe the distribution of the gaps). Even in varieties where there are no gaps in the paradigm, there are two or three persons that display exactly the same form of subject clitic (i.e., the subject clitic

does not always uniquely identify the person of the verb).<sup>2</sup> This difference has also been claimed to set French ‘subject clitics’ apart from ‘true subject clitics’.

However, many of the tests used in the literature to distinguish between the two types of ‘subject clitic’ (head vs phrase) can be called into question. For example, it has been shown that while French subject clitics always occur to the left of the preverbal negative marker, subject clitics of the northern Italian type occur to its right (see Kayne 1975 for French, and Rizzi 1986 for a comparison with northern Italian dialects). This test has been used to establish that only the latter type are true clitics, as they are found within the domain of clitic heads. The test however has a number of problems: one is that it presupposes that the preverbal negative marker is the same type of structural ‘beast’ in all varieties investigated. However, as Zanuttini (1997) has shown, there are at least two different positions for the preverbal negative marker, and crucially, it turns out that the French preverbal negative marker *ne* is syntactically distinct from the northern Italian preverbal negative marker (i.e., in Trentino varieties). Therefore, the alleged difference between French and Trentino subject clitics might simply be an artifact of the difference between the two types of negative marker. That the negative marker test is unreliable is further evidenced by the fact that there are several northern Italian dialects (e.g., Emilian) which have a French-type preverbal negative marker that appears to the right of subject clitics (as in French); this can be seen for example in the dialect of Bologna in (6) (where the relevant subject clitic *i* and negative marker *n* are in bold):

---

<sup>2</sup> The only alleged subject clitic varieties which display six different forms in declarative clauses are Francoprovençal dialects and Ræto-Romance. These varieties probably have a standard French-style subject clitic, as witnessed by the fact that they can occupy the first position in V2 dialects, indicating phrasal status.

(6) Nueter avan da partir, s **i** **n** vegnan brisa, l è l istass. (Bol.)

we have of leave, if **SCL= NEG** they.come **NEG SCL=** is the same

‘We have to leave, if they don’t come, it’s all the same.’

Moreover, there are dialects (e.g., Ligurian dialects of the Savona area and the Tuscan variety of Incisa Val d’Arno) which have a Trentino-type negative marker, but which unexpectedly exhibit the French order between negation and the subject clitic. This can be seen for example in the Ligurian dialect of Alassio:

(7) E me so **i** **nu** cattan mai da fruta. (Alassio, Lig.)

the my sisters **SCL= NEG** they.buy never of fruit

‘My sisters never buy fruit.’

Nevertheless, these dialects are still considered to be subject clitic languages in contrast to French. Thus, use of the negation test to determine whether an atonic subject pronoun is a subject clitic or not is not fool-proof.

There is another test, the VP-coordination test, originally used by Rizzi (1986) in his comparison between French and northern Italian dialects. Rizzi observed that in the latter coordination of two complete VPs (i.e., a verb and its object) requires the repetition of the subject clitic; see, for example, (10a) below. In French, however, this is not the case. The conclusion is that full phrasal subjects are not repeated under coordination, while reduced subject heads do. However, this test too proves to be inconclusive, as there are subject clitics in

northern Italian dialects which are not necessarily repeated in the second conjunct of any sort of coordination (see, for instance, (19) below), yet they can still be shown to be heads. It turns out that the coordination test is only valid for that class of subject clitics that are located in the immediate structural proximity of the verb (cf. §46.3).

The distinction between French and northern Italian varieties is therefore not so clear-cut. Indeed, there are French dialects that have a northern Italian-like subject clitic system, such as the Gruyère dialect studied by Shlonsky and de Crousaz (2003), where some persons of the verb display the same *i* form while others have distinct morphology. Even spoken French (the colloquial variety corresponding to the written standard widespread throughout France) has been analysed by Culbertson (2010) and Culbertson and Legendre (2008) as a pro-drop language, where subject clitics are argued to be heads: they show that the form of the subject clitic is reduced and that there is obligatory doubling of noun phrases. As noted in footnote 20 below, some authors (Loporcaro 2012a; Giorgi and Sorrisi 2012) have demonstrated the presence of subject clitics even in Sicilian varieties.

#### 46.3 Types of subject clitics

As noted in §46.2.1, the term subject clitic encompasses a disparate array of head (reduced) elements found in the higher portion of the clause. In their survey of thirty northern Italian dialects, Renzi and Vanelli (1983) note that there exists a series of implications in the occurrence of subject clitics across dialects. Specifically, the occurrence of subject clitics for some persons implies the presence of subject clitics for others (for instance, dialects that have subject clitics for the first persons also have it for second singular and third person). We will see at the end of this section that Renzi and Vanelli's generalizations can be derived by a

theory that divides subject clitics into different classes, which occur in distinct syntactic positions. Following Poletto (2000), we can classify four basic types of subject clitic pronoun as follows: the person clitic, the number clitic, the deictic clitic, and the invariable clitic. The set of subject clitics discussed here is certainly not exhaustive; Poletto's (2000) study has been enriched and elaborated by numerous subsequent studies (see among others Chinellato 2004; Manzini and Savoia 2005; 2011; Cattaneo 2009; Tortora 2014), to which we refer the reader. Our purpose here is to provide a base-line description to give a general idea of the possible types found in declarative clauses. We defer discussion of subject clitics that appear to be sensitive to clause type (e.g., interrogative vs declarative) to §46.4, and a discussion of auxiliary clitics to §46.5.2.1.1.

#### 46.3.1 Person subject clitics

The person subject clitic encodes a distinction between second and third person. Given the very specific information encoded by these clitics, they are not found throughout the paradigm:

(8)	1	2	3M	4	5	6
	–	t+V	V+l	–	–	–

Poletto identifies the person feature encoded in the person subject clitics as [hearer], such that the second singular person subject clitic expresses the feature [+hearer], while the third singular person clitic expresses the feature [-hearer]. The following examples illustrate the second singular (9a,b) and third singular (9c) person subject clitics:

(9) a Te **tu** parli. (Flo.)

you SCL<sub>pers</sub>= speak

‘You speak.’

b I **ti** mangis. (San Michele al Tagliamento, Ven.)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>= SCL<sub>pers</sub>= you.eat

‘You’re eating.’

c A **l** mangia. (San Michele al Tagliamento, Ven.)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>= SCL<sub>pers</sub>= he.eats

‘He’s eating.’

The examples in (9b,c) also contain deictic subject clitics, which we discuss in §46.3.3.

The ‘V’ seen in the paradigm in (8) indicates that the vowel which occurs with person subject clitics is epenthetic; as such, we are to take the forms *tu* and *ti* in (9a,b) to involve the consonant *t* plus the vowel that is used for epenthesis in the variety in question. As can be seen, the person clitic *l* in (9c) does not involve an epenthetic vowel, arguably because the deictic clitic *a* preceding it does the job of acting as a syllable nucleus for this subject clitic cluster.<sup>3</sup> Subject clitics which fall into the ‘person’ class display the following properties: (a) they always occur to the right of the preverbal negative marker; (b) they must be repeated in all types of coordination (see footnote 6); (c) they never interact with left-peripheral elements

---

<sup>3</sup> The paradigm in (8) implies that for varieties which only have person clitics, there is no independent form for the feminine in the third person singular. See §46.3.2 for the feminine ‘number clitic’.

(such as the complementizer);<sup>4</sup> (d) they are never found in enclisis (see §46.4); and (e) they occur to the right of all other types of subject clitics (see §46.3.3 and §46.3.4).<sup>5</sup> We give a sense of (b) with the following examples from Venetian (see footnote 6 for a description of these three types of coordination):

(10) a **Ti** magni patate e **\*\**(ti)*** bevi vin. (Vnz., Type 1 coordination)

SCL<sub>pers</sub>=eat potatoes and SCL<sub>pers</sub>= drink wine

‘You eat potatoes and drink wine.’

b **Ti** canti e **\*\**(ti)*** bali sempre. (Vnz., Type 2 coordination)

SCL<sub>pers</sub>= sing and SCL<sub>pers</sub>= dance always

‘You always sing and dance.’

c **Ti** lesi e **\*\**(ti)*** rilesi sempre el stesso libro. (Vnz., Type 3 coordination)

SCL<sub>pers</sub>=read and SCL<sub>pers</sub>=reread always the same book

‘You read and reread always the same book.’

---

<sup>4</sup> Any apparent clustering with the complementizer is arguably a phonological phenomenon, associated with fast speech.

<sup>5</sup> This ordering can be seen for example in (9b), where the person clitic *ti* follows the deictic clitic *i*.

As can be seen in (10a-c), the person clitic is repeated in the second conjunct of each one of the coordination types.<sup>6</sup> This behaviour is not exhibited by the other subject clitic types (see §§46.3.2–3.4).

#### 46.3.2 Number subject clitics

The number subject clitic encodes person and number. Like the person clitic, this clitic-type is not found throughout the paradigm:

(11)	1	2	3f	4	5	6m	6f
	–	–	l+a	–	–	(l)+i	l+e

Number clitics are like person clitics in that they, too, encode the feature [hearer] (specifically, [-hearer]). However, they differ from person subject clitics in that they also encode number and gender features (Poletto 2000:14). This can be seen by the fact that there is a specific form for feminine, both in the singular and in the plural. The *l* morpheme seen in (11) encodes the person feature (i.e., [-hearer]), while the vowel which follows expresses number and gender; thus, in contrast with the vowel found with the person subject clitic seen in

---

<sup>6</sup> In a Type 1 coordination, the verb + object in the second conjunct is distinct from that in the first; thus we are dealing with an entirely referentially distinct verb phrase. In a Type 2 coordination, the verbs in the two conjuncts are distinct, but they share the same object (if there is one). In a Type 3 coordination, the verbs in both conjuncts are identical (and share the same object), differing only in aspect.

(8), it is not epenthetic. Venetian provides an example of a variety which has number subject clitics, which we illustrate in (12) from Poletto (2000):

(12) a **La** magna. (Vnz., third singular feminine)

SCL<sub>num</sub>= she.eats

‘She’s eating.’

b **I** magna. (Vnz., third plural masculine)

SCL<sub>num</sub>= they.M.eat

‘They (M) are eating.’

c **Le** magna. (Vnz., third plural feminine)

SCL<sub>num</sub>= they.F.eat

‘They (F) are eating.’

As with all the clitic paradigms presented in §§46.3.1–3.4, the paradigm in (11) should be taken as an abstraction, not necessarily indicating that every variety that has number subject clitics has them in all the numbers/persons indicated in (9). Consider, for example, the Friulian dialect of Felettis di Palmanova (Benincà and Vanelli 1984) in (13) which has a third singular (feminine) number subject clitic (13b), but which does not have two distinct masculine/feminine subject clitics in the third plural:

(13) a **Al** ven. (Felettis di Palmanova, third singular masculine)

SCL<sub>pers</sub>= he.comes

‘He’s coming.’

b **E** ven. (Felettis di Palmanova, third singular feminine)

SCL<sub>num</sub>= she.comes

‘She’s coming.’

c **E** vegnin. (Felettis di Palmanova, third plural masculine and feminine)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>= they.come

‘They’re coming.’

In (13c), the third plural clitic *e* is used for both masculine and feminine (in contrast with Venetian in (12b) and (12c)). Since third plural *e* in the dialect of Felettis di Palmanova does not distinguish gender, we must conclude it is not a number clitic, as number clitics by definition also encode a gender distinction (as indicated by the gloss, it is a deictic clitic; see §46.3.3)

Subject clitics which fall into the ‘number’ class display the following properties: (a) they can be found either to the right or to the left of the negative marker; (b) they must be repeated in the second conjunct of Type 1 or Type 2 coordination, but not in Type 3 coordination (see footnote 6); (c) like person clitics, they do not interact with left-peripheral elements, but unlike person clitics, they do cluster with the complementizer in embedded clauses; (d) in contrast with person clitics, they are found in enclisis in interrogatives;<sup>7</sup> (e) if they co-occur with invariable or deictic subject clitics (§§46.3.3–3.4), they always occur to their right. Here again we give a sense of (b) with the following examples from Cereda dialect (Veneto):

---

<sup>7</sup> They are also found in enclisis in other constructions where subject clitic inversion obtains, such as optative clauses, disjunctions, and counterfactual contexts (see Munaro 2010b on the hierarchy of structures that allow subject clitic inversion). See §46.4 below.

(14) a **La** magna patate e **\*\**(la)*** beve vin. (Cereda, Type 1 coordination)

SCL<sub>num</sub>=eats potatoes and SCL<sub>num</sub>=drinks wine

‘She eats potatoes and drinks wine.’

b **La** canta e **\*\**(la)*** bala sempre. (Cereda, Type 2 coordination)

SCL<sub>num</sub>=sings and SCL<sub>num</sub>=dances always

‘She always sings and dances.’

c **La** lese e    rilese sempre el steso libro. (Cereda, Type 3 coordination)

SCL<sub>num</sub>=reads and rereads always the same book

‘She reads and rereads always the same book.’

The number clitic gets repeated in the second conjunct of Type 1 and Type 2 coordination, but not in Type 3.

### 46.3.3 Deictic subject clitics

The deictic subject clitic encodes a participant feature. There are thus only two morphological forms, distinguishing between first and second persons on the one hand (with a participant feature), and third persons on the other (lacking a participant feature).

(15) 1 2 3 4 5 6

i i a i i a

For illustration, consider the Friulian dialect of San Michele al Tagliamento (Poletto 2000):

(16)a **I** mangi. (first singular)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>= I.eat

‘I’m eating.’

b **I** ti mangis. (second singular)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>= SCL<sub>pers</sub>= you.eat

‘You’re eating.’

c **A** l mangia. (third singular)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>= SCL<sub>pers</sub>= he.eats

‘He’s eating.’

d **I** mangin. (first plural)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>= we.eat

‘We’re eating.’

e **I** mangè. (second plural)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>= you.PL.eat

‘You’re eating.’

f **A** mangin.(third plural)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>=they.eat.

‘They’re eating.’

As seen in (16b) and (16c), the deictic subject clitic can co-occur with other subject clitics (in the second singular it co-occurs with the person clitic *ti*, and in the third singular it co-occurs with the person clitic *l*).

This type of subject clitic can be found across the entire paradigm in some varieties, as in (16), while other varieties do not necessarily exhibit this clitic type throughout the paradigm (e.g., Friulian dialect of Felettis di Palmanova). Subject clitics which fall into the ‘deictic’ class (a) always occur to the left of the preverbal negative marker; (b) can be omitted in Type 2 and Type 3 coordination; (c) unlike person and number clitics, interact with left-peripheral elements;<sup>8</sup> but unlike person clitics, do cluster with the complementizer in embedded clauses; (d) in contrast with number clitics, are never found in enclisis in interrogatives; (e) like invariable clitics (§46.3.4), always appear to the left of person and number clitics. As with the other clitic types, we give a sense of (b) with some examples from the dialect of Cervignano (Friuli):

(17) a **I** cianti cun te e **\*\**i*** bali cun lui. (Type 1 coordination)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>= sing with you and SCL<sub>deic</sub>= dance with him

‘I sing with you and dance with him.’

b **I** cianti e \_\_\_ bali. (Type 2 coordination)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>=sing and dance

‘I sing and dance.’

c **I** cianti e \_\_\_ rianti. (Type 3 coordination)

SCL<sub>deic</sub>= sing and re-sing

‘I keep on singing.’

---

<sup>8</sup> In this regard they do however contrast with the behaviour of invariable clitics (see §46.3.4), which also interact with left-peripheral elements. For example, they are compatible with some classes of wh-items, and can occur with left-dislocated items.

#### 46.3.4 Invariable subject clitics

The invariable subject clitic ‘does not encode any subject feature at all’ (Poletto 2000:12);<sup>9</sup> The morphological form is the same for all persons and numbers This type is found for example in Lugano (18):

(18)a **A** vegni mi. first singular

SCL<sub>inv</sub>= I.come I

‘I’m coming.’

b **A** ta vegnat ti. (second singular)

SCL<sub>inv</sub>= SCL<sub>pers</sub>= you.come you.

‘You’re coming.’

c **A** vegn luu. (third singular)

SCL<sub>inv</sub>=he.comes he

‘He’s coming.’

d **A** vegnum. (first plural)

SCL<sub>inv</sub>= we.come

‘We’re coming.’

e **A** vegnuf.(second plural)

---

<sup>9</sup> Recalling our discussion of Paduan *a* in §46.2.1, this underscores the fact that the term subject clitic does not entail an element related to the subject (position). In fact, the term should not even imply an element that is etymologically derived from a nominative subject pronoun; see our discussion in §5 on Provençal *ke* (from Benincà 2013).

SCL<sub>inv</sub>= you.PL.come

‘You (plural) are coming.’

As Tortora (2014) notes, the persons with which this type of subject clitic can occur vary across dialects: there are dialects that have an invariable subject clitic for all persons (e.g., Lukanese), others that have it only for the first and second persons singular and plural and yet others that have it only in the first persons singular and plural and the second person plural; and there are others still have it only in the first person singular, and all plural persons (the Piedmontese dialect of Borgomanero is argued to be an example of this last case).<sup>10</sup>

Subject clitics which fall into the ‘invariable’ class display the following properties: (a) like deictic clitics, they always occur to the left of the preverbal negative marker; (b) they can be omitted in all types of coordination; (c) unlike person and number clitics (but like deictic clitics), they interact with left-peripheral elements;<sup>11</sup> (d) like deictic clitics, they are never found in enclisis in interrogatives or in any other construction where subject clitic inversion is known to occur; (e) like deictic clitics, they always appear to the left of person and number clitics. We give a sense of (b) from the dialect of Loreo:

---

<sup>10</sup> All the paradigms in §46.3.2 through to §46.3.4 are in fact idealizations; it is common for varieties exhibiting any of these clitic types to not instantiate the entire paradigm. See Tortora (2014:ch. 5) for detailed discussion.

<sup>11</sup> They are omitted with some or all wh-items in interrogative clauses (see for instance the Friulian varieties of San Michele al Tagliamento), and they are banned from structures where a focus or a left dislocated topic is realized in the left periphery (see Benincà 1983 for Paduan).

(19) a **A** canto co ti e \_\_\_ balo co lu. (Type 1 coordination)

SCL<sub>inv</sub>=sing with you and dance with him

‘I sing with you and dance with him.’

b **A** canto e \_\_\_ balo. (Type 2 coordination)

SCL<sub>inv</sub>= sing and dance

‘I sing and dance.’

c **A** canto e \_\_\_ ricanto. (Type 3 coordination)

SCL<sub>inv</sub>= sing and re-sing

‘I keep on singing.’

### 46.3.5 Summary

Table 46.1 sums up the results:

[Insert Table 46.1 about here]

While some tests that single out just one class of subject clitic (for instance enclisis or V-coordination), others only go as far as splitting subject clitics into two classes (the ‘higher’ invariable and deictic clitics versus the ‘lower’ person and number clitics).

The basic idea maintained across all studies of this phenomenon (e.g., Gorla 2004; Cardinaletti and Repetti 2008; Cattaneo 2009; Tortora 2014) is that originally proposed by Benincà (1983) who argued that subject clitics do not form a homogeneous class.<sup>12</sup>

The summary in Table 46.1 shows that the different classes of subject clitic occur in different syntactic positions (Poletto 200), starting from a lowest position within the agreement field of the inflectional domain (person clitics), and progressing all the way to the highest position within the complementizer field of the left periphery (invariable clitics). This can explain the distributional generalizations discovered by Renzi and Vanelli (1983): all subject clitic dialects start from the structurally lowest class of subject clitics (namely, those which are closer to the inflected verb); varieties then progressively proceed in activating the structurally higher classes.

As we see in §46.5, the fact that subject clitics in northern Italian dialects have often developed into left peripheral elements is not surprising. As Poletto (2006b) and Benincà (1983) propose, this fact must be related to the diachronic evolution of those varieties in which the licensing of a null subject depended on the V2 position of the inflected verb in main clauses in the medieval period (when these languages still had the V2 property; cf. §30.3.3, §61.REF). The development of subject clitics would thus be a consequence of a long standing property of the pro-drop system of the western Romània, which was (and remains) different from standard

---

<sup>12</sup> Cardinaletti and Repetti (2008) investigate subject clitics in Emilian, showing that there are cases where what might at first glance look like an invariable clitic is actually either (a) an epenthetic vowel inserted for syllable structure reasons, or (b) an interrogative marker (§§46.4–5).

Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian. See footnote 20 for the claim that some Sicilian dialects also exhibit subject clitics.

#### 46.4. Syntactic environments

In §46.3 we outlined some very basic observations regarding some of the possible types of subject clitic found in simple declarative clauses. The plot thickens, however, when investigating other kinds of syntactic environments which can affect occurrence (whether or not the clitic is present), position (whether the clitic is pre- or post-verbal), and even featural make-up. In this section we provide a brief sketch of four different syntactic constructions where subject clitics are either (a) banned (imperative clauses); (b) change their position – and sometimes form (interrogative clauses) –; (c) change their features (expletive constructions); or (d) change their requirements (according to the argument structure of the verb, and where the verb’s argument is placed). There are other syntactic environments beyond these four which merit discussion; we address some of these in §46.5, where we highlight separately the nature of the function of different clitics.

##### 46.4.1 Lack of subject clitics in imperatives

Subject clitics occur essentially with all forms of inflected verbs except imperatives. To our knowledge, without exception. The lack of subject clitics in imperatives however cannot be due to some general ban on clitics in this clause type; as with infinitivals, gerunds, and absolute participial clauses, object clitics are found in all ‘true’ and ‘ambiguous’ imperative verb forms (see Zanuttini 1997, and §56.REF). Therefore, the explanation for this rather robust ban on

subject clitics in imperatives must be more subtle than a supposed ‘deficiency’ of the clitic field.

Given that subject clitics are absent with non-finite verbs (infinitival, gerund, and absolute participial clauses), the absence of subject clitics in imperative clauses suggests that imperatives are in fact uninflected forms (cf. Tortora 2014). Note that even in non- pro-drop languages (such as English), imperatives always allow for null subjects, which suggests that an ‘imperative null subject’ is not of the same type as the standard-issue null subject found in inflected clauses in genuine pro-drop languages (such as Italian, Spanish, Catalan). Looked at the other way around, the lack of subject clitics in infinitival, gerund, absolute participial clauses, and imperatives suggests that the ‘imperative null subject’ may be similar to that found in non-finite clauses more generally.<sup>13</sup> Whatever the particular nature of the non-finite null subject, this might be the source of the ban on subject clitics in imperatives.

---

<sup>13</sup> Tortora (2014:ch. 3) argues that the robust absence of subject clitics in imperatives indicates the lack of a higher functional field in this construction, which itself is related to the idea that imperatives are non-finite. The contrasting ability of imperatives to host object clitics is further argued to be the result of their relatively low placement, in the ‘lower functional field’ of imperative clauses (i.e., the left periphery of the functional field right outside of the VP; cf. §30.2.1). Dialects which exhibit proclisis of object clitics in negative imperatives with a preverbal negative marker (and therefore which seem to present a counterexample to the claim that object clitics are always enclitic in imperatives) suggest the presence of a silent (inflected) modal, whose own higher functional field attracts the object clitic (à la Kayne (1992)). See §47. **REF** for a discussion of object clitic placement.

#### 46.4.2 Enclisis of subject clitics in interrogatives and other non-declarative clauses

The phenomenon of subject clitic inversion is attested in several northern Italian dialects, including Ræto-Romance, Francoprovençal, and also in (formal) standard French (if one considers French to be a subject clitic language; cf. §46.2.2). Syntactic environments where subject clitics change their form and/or position are root interrogative clauses, optative constructions, and disjunction clauses.<sup>14</sup> In these clause types, subject clitics may be enclitic on the verb, giving the appearance of verb movement to the left of the clitic, as in (20b):

(20) a **La** magna. (Loreo, Ven.)

SCL= eats

‘She is eating.’

b Magna-**la**? (Loreo, Ven.)

eats=SCL

‘Is she eating?’

Furthermore, in several dialects there are enclitic forms which do not correspond to any proclitic form in declaratives (see, among others, Benincà and Vanelli 1986; Poletto 1993a;

---

<sup>14</sup> Inversion in these languages is however gradually giving way to other syntactic strategies for marking interrogative force which vary according to dialect (§30.3.2.2, §52.REF). Among alternative structures we find: (a) *wh*-in-situ (in French as well as in some northern Italian dialects such as northern Lombard); (b) *wh*-in-situ still maintaining subject clitic inversion (as in eastern Lombard and northern Veneto dialects); (c) cleft constructions; (d) *wh*-complementizer in main interrogatives; and (d) standard-issue non-inverted subject clitics.

2000; Cardinaletti and Repetti 2008). Consider the following examples (cf. Cardinaletti and Repetti 2008):

(21) a Buvi (Donceto, Eml.)

drink.2PL

‘You.PL are drinking.’

b Buvi-**v**?

drink.2PL=SCL.2PL

‘Are you drinking?’

(22) a Go da fare. (Scorzè, CVen.)

I.have to do.INF

‘I have something to do.’

b Cossa go-**i** da fare? (Scorzè, CVen.)

What I.have=SCL to do.INF

‘What should I do?’

The sentences in (21b) and (22b) are the interrogative counterparts of the declarative sentences in (21a) and (22a) (*yes-no* in the former and *wh* in the latter). The interrogatives each exhibit a subject clitic (enclitic on the finite verb) which is absent in the corresponding declarative sentences.

The following are examples of subject clitic inversion in counterfactual, optative, exclamative, and disjunctive constructions:

(23) a Fusse-**lo** rivà! (Scorzè, CVen.)

were=SCL arrived

‘Had he come!’

b Vinisi-**al** tjo pari, o podaresin là. (Clauzetto, Frl.)

came=SCL your father we could go

‘If your father came, we could leave.’

c Quanto belo se-**lo**! (Pad.)

how nice is=SCL

‘How nice it is!’

d Sedi-**al** puar o sedi-**al** sior, no m’ impuarte. (Clauzetto, Frl.)

be=SCL poor or be=SCL rich, not me= is.important

‘I do not care whether he is rich or poor.’

As noted in footnote 14, subject clitic inversion is disappearing, and follows an implicational scale (see Munaro 2010b). It seems that interrogatives are more resistant to the loss than other contexts such as optative clauses, with *wh*-interrogatives being the final environment in which subject clitic inversion persists. Parry (2003) reports Piedmontese dialects where subject clitic inversion in main interrogatives is possible in so-called special questions (e.g., rhetorical questions, surprise/disapproval questions, and modal questions), but not in ‘true’ (pure information-seeking) questions. This suggests that Piedmontese has undergone a reanalysis whereby subject clitic inversion marks special questions, and not the subject function (see §46.5 for the non-subject functions of subject clitics).

While many northern Italian dialects and French seem to be progressively losing inversion, there are dialects that have actually extended it to embedded interrogatives and modal contexts (see Loporcaro and Vigolo 2000; Loporcaro 2001b). In some Lombard and Ræto-Romance varieties the subject enclitic has become obligatory even in declarative clauses with first and second person subject clitics (never third persons). Consider the following Lombard examples (for Ræto-Romance, see Adami 2008):

(24) a te            mange-**t**. (Lmb.)

SCL.2SG= eat=SCL.2SG

‘You eat.’

b mangiu-**f**. (Lmb.)

eat=SCL2PL

‘You.PL eat.’

c A n lisi-**v**            mai di livar. (Lmb.)

SCL= not read=SCL.2PL never of books

‘You never read books.’

The phenomenon of subject clitic inversion has been interpreted by various authors as a sort of interrogative inflection, but as can be seen, subject clitic inversion is not restricted to interrogative clauses. This fact, together with the (widespread) fact that enclitics in inversion do not always correspond to the proclitic forms (see (21) and (22) vs (20)), suggests that the phenomenon has nothing to do with interrogative syntactic structure *per se*. Rather, it may be indicative of a more general phenomenon of verb movement to a higher clausal position, the

‘activation’ of which gets signalled by the presence of a morpheme we normally take to be a subject clitic. Contrary to what the term ‘subject clitic inversion’ suggests then, the order verb+subject clitic may not be the result of any real ‘inversion’ process (inverting verb and clitic) at all. Indeed, the following interrogative structure from Provençal, with both pre- and a post-verbal subject clitics (identical in form), is suggestive of this (see also (24a)):

(25) **la** bagn-**la**? (Pra del Torno, Prv.)

SCL= rains=SCL

‘Is it raining?’

The idea that so-called subject clitic inversion is the morphological manifestation of higher-than-normal verb movement however raises the question of how to analyse enclitic subject clitics in declaratives such as (24). From the discussion above, it is clear that in interrogative clauses subject clitics are of different types as well: subject clitics like those in (20b) are identical to the proclitic ones found in declaratives (20a), but the examples in (21) and (22) exhibit enclitic forms that do not have a corresponding proclitic element. In addition, the pro- and enclitics seen in (24a) are clearly distinct in form (proclitic *te* vs enclitic *t*); even in (25), where the pro- and enclitic forms are identical (*la* in both cases), they are not literally the same clitic, as the two co-occur.

#### 46.4.3 Subject relative clauses

Subject relative clauses are another syntactic structure in which variation in subject clitic behaviour is observed. As originally shown by Benincà and Vanelli (1984), subject clitics in Paduan never occur in restrictive subject relatives, while in Friulian they do:

(26)a Il fantat ch **al** ven / \*\*Il fantat che ven. (Frl.)

the boy that SCL= comes the boy that comes

b El toso che \_\_ vien. / \*\*El toso che **el** vien. (Pad.)

the boy that comes the boy that SCL= comes

A fact which at first might seem relevant to the difference exhibited in (26) is that the same pattern occurs in root *wh*-interrogatives questioning the subject. This might suggest that Paduan and Friulian differ in terms of their inability and ability, respectively, to ‘double’ the base position of *wh*-moved nominal. However, this cannot be entirely correct, as there also seem to be dialects which exhibit the presence of a subject clitic in subject relatives, but not necessarily in *wh*-interrogatives questioning subjects. Consider the Piedmontese dialect of Borgomanero (Tortora 2014:ch. 5):

(27)a La dona [c **la** pulissa ‘l scali] l’ è malavja. (Borgomanero)

the woman that SCL= cleans the stairs SCL= is ill

‘The woman [that cleans the stairs] is ill.’

b Chi \_\_ parla ‘d mè? (Borgomanero)

who \_\_ speaks of me

‘Who’s talking about me?’

Poletto (1993a) proposes that the difference between Venetan dialects (like Paduan) and Friulian seen in (26) derives from the fact that in Venetan subject clitics represent arguments, while in Friulian they are just agreement markers. This would account not only for the difference exhibited in relative clauses, but also for the fact that Paduan never allows for subject clitics when there is a clause internal subject already present (either a noun phrase, quantifier phrase, or the base position of a *wh*-moved nominal, both in pre and postverbal position).<sup>15</sup> Note however that this hypothesis does not account for the Borgomanerese facts in (27), which represent a kind of ‘intermediate’ situation; nor does it account for the fact that even in Friulian it is possible to omit third person masculine singular subject clitics in the presence of an object clitic or negative marker (see §46.5 for examples). Given that agreement morphemes are never deleted in the verb morphology, Friulian subject clitics cannot be equated *tout court* with agreement morphemes. The rather intricate pattern of variation can be made sense of only if we assume that in different dialects, subject clitics are sensitive to different features of nominal expressions.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> The only cases of doubling with Paduan are those where the nominal subject is either left or right dislocated.

<sup>16</sup> In some dialects a subject clitic can only occur if the subject is a topic (topics are always the first case in which subject clitic doubling occurs). In other cases, the presence of a subject clitic depends on the definiteness and specificity of the subject (which also both play a role in triggering doubling; for instance definite noun phrases are more prone to be doubled than indefinites, and specific quantifiers are more prone than non-specific ones to be doubled by a

#### 46.4.4 Expletive environments

There are dialects which never exhibit a subject clitic in expletive environments, others which always do, and others still in which the expletive subject clitic is sensitive to the construction type. Consider the following two sets of examples from Trentino and Friulian which illustrate that the subject clitic in an expletive construction is sensitive to the declarative versus interrogative context:

(28) a Piove. (Montesover, Trentino)

rains

‘It’s raining.’

b Piove-I? (Montesover, Trn.)

rains=SCL

‘Is it raining?’

(29) a **Al** plof. (Collina, Frl.)

SCL= rains

‘It’s raining.’

b Plof?

rains?

---

subject clitic; see Poletto 2008). The pre- or postverbal position of the nominal subject also plays a role in doubling of a nominal subject through a subject clitic. This is illustrated in detail in §46.5.

‘Is it raining?’

These two dialects display exactly the opposite pattern in relation to the distribution of expletive subjects with meteorological verbs. Some dialects also display sensitivity to the class of the verb; for instance the modal verb *bisogna* ‘it is necessary’ often occurs without a subject clitic in dialects which otherwise usually display them (see Benincà and Poletto 1994).

#### 46.4.5 Verb class

Yet another circumstance under which the distribution of subject clitics can vary has to do with verb class. Benincà (2001) reports that Monnese (Lombardy) displays a non-agreeing subject clitic just in case (a) the verb is unaccusative, and (b) its single argument is postverbal.

As seen in (30), when the subject of an unaccusative is preverbal, the subject clitic must agree (in person, number, and gender; in this example there is a third person singular feminine subject):

(30) La Maria **la** va domà. (Monnese, Lmb.)

the Maria SCL.FSG= goes tomorrow

‘Mary is going tomorrow.’

However, when the subject is postverbal such as the third singular feminine subject *la nona* ‘grandma’ in (31) the subject clitic does not agree:

(31) Prima ke **I** rya la nona... (Monnese, Lmb.)

before that SCL= arrives the grandma

‘Before Grandma arrives.’

Note that this is only true for unaccusatives. As the following example with unergative *telefona* ‘she phones’ shows, when the feminine subject *la Maria* is postverbal, the subject clitic agrees (cf. 31):

(32) **La** telefona la Maria. (Monnese, Lmb.)

SCL.FSG= phones the Maria

‘Maria is phoning (someone).’

This pattern interacts with clause type. Benincà notes that in Monnese the non-agreeing subject clitic (in conjunction with a postverbal unaccusative subject) becomes a full agreeing subject clitic when the sentence is an interrogative; compare (31) with (33):

(33) i m a domandà ngo **la** fus andata la Maria. (Monnese, Lmb.)

SCL= me=have asked where SCL.FSG= were gone the Maria

‘They asked me where Maria had gone.’

What this complex set of data seems to indicate is that the term ‘postverbal subject’ can be misleading, and that the postverbal subject of an embedded interrogative probably occupies the

same position as a preverbal subject (while this is not the case for postverbal subjects in declarative clauses).<sup>17</sup>

#### 46.5. Subject clitic functions

As seen in §46.2 through to §46.4, subject clitics come in different syntactic and morphological types, have distinct behaviours in different syntactic environments, and have different functions in the clause. In this section, we focus on the possible functions of a subject clitic.

As Benincà (2013) notes, there is a fundamental difference between object and subject clitics: subject clitics do not always compete with the subject noun phrase for case and thematic role; indeed, they often assume functions unrelated to the subject itself.<sup>18</sup> We can therefore classify the functions of subject clitics according to two major types: (a) those

---

<sup>17</sup> The basic idea behind Benincà's observation is that in the case of 'real' postverbal unaccusative subjects, the argument is in a non-agreeing position. In contrast, postverbal subjects of interrogative clauses are actually in the preverbal position (while the rest of the VP has been moved to the left of this position).

<sup>18</sup> Benincà's generalization reflects the fact that the subject behaves differently from other arguments. This special behaviour of elements that are etymologically subjects may have to do with the high clausal position(s) in which subjects find themselves. That is, the 'subject' position (which itself is not easily definable) is in close proximity to the higher pieces of functional architecture that are related to information structure; thus, when a morpheme (which was historically a subject pronoun) becomes reduced, learners can reinterpret the form as an instantiation of some other part of the higher functional field, which itself does not directly relate to the subject.

functions which are related to the etymological source of subject clitics (that is, functions that pertain to the realization and formal identification of the subject), and (b) those functions that are not related to the realization / identification of the subject.

We further note (following Benincà) that whether a clitic functions in one way or the other is not directly related to its etymological source. There are in fact clitics which etymologically derive from pronominal subjects, but whose functions are unrelated to the identification of the subject. We saw an example of this in (21b) from (Cardinaletti and Repetti 2008), where the Donceto enclitic *-v* in the second person plural *yes-no* interrogative is arguably a signal of activation of the complementizer domain (due to verb movement), and not any kind of identifier of the second plural null subject (despite the clear etymological source of the *v* form; cf. Lat. *UOS* ‘you’). Conversely, there are clitics which clearly do not derive etymologically from pronominal subjects (or even pronouns), but whose functions are directly related to the identification of the subject. A specific case in point is the clitic *ke* in Occitan varieties, treated in Benincà (2013). Benincà convincingly argues that this form derives etymologically from the complementizer, yet interestingly, *ke* in Gascon serves to formally license the null subject, much like the Flo. subject clitic *tu* seen in (2) (which in contrast with Gsc. *ke*, does derive from a pronominal subject).<sup>19</sup> Thus, on the one hand there are subject clitics that can take up functions completely unrelated to their etymology as subject pronouns (such as the second plural form *-v* in Donceto), and on the other hand there are clitics etymologically derived from

---

<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Benincà (2013) shows that *ke* in the Occitan dialect of Les Ramats (spoken in the province of Turin, Piedmont) serves to express the point of view of the speaker. Thus, here we see that one in the same morphological form is in some grammars related to subject licensing, but in others to speaker-oriented (i.e., non-subject) functions.

non-subject elements (such as the complementizer), which can take on the function of licensing null subjects.<sup>20</sup>

In §46.5.1 we discuss subject clitics as subject ‘identifiers’, and in §46.5.2 subject clitics whose function is unrelated to the identification of a subject.

#### 46.5.1 Subject identification

There are actually a number of different conditions under which it seems that a subject clitic functions as a subject ‘identifier’. These can be divided roughly into two sorts: subject position, and subject type. In either case, for convenience let us refer to the co-occurrence of a subject clitic and an overt subject as a doubling configuration.

The phenomenon of doubling has been analysed as part of a feature-identification procedure, which has to do either with nominative case assignment to the subject, or with the spell-out of the subject features onto the verbal head. We will limit ourselves here to listing the contexts which condition subject clitic doubling.

##### 46.5.1.1 Position of the subject

---

<sup>20</sup> Recently Loporcaro (2012a) has reported that Pantisco, spoken on the Sicilian island of Pantelleria, uses subject clitics to mark progressive aspect, and Giorgi and Sorrisi (2012) analyse the enclitic *-vu* in Palermitan Sicilian as an evaluative marker. Therefore, subject clitics can even express features of aspect and modality, which is otherwise typically expressed by verbal morphology.

The position of the subject in a sentence can influence the presence or absence of a doubling subject clitic. Specifically, there are dialects (for example, some Emilian varieties) which require the presence of a subject clitic only when the subject is preverbal.. Conversely, there are dialects which require the presence of a subject clitic only when the subject is postverbal, for instance in the Ræto-Romance dialect of San Leonardo (in the Badia Valley). It would appear that preverbal subjects are more readily doubled by subject clitics than are postverbal subjects.

#### 46.5.1.2 Type of subject

There seems to be an implicational scale according to the type of subjects which require a doubling subject clitic. This implicational scale cuts across the pre- vs postverbal distinction discussed in §46.5.1.1.

##### 46.5.1.2.1 Null subject (*pro*)

The highest probability for the occurrence of a subject clitic is when the subject itself is a null subject (*viz. pro*). In other words, if a dialect has at least one subject clitic, it will appear in this context. (Despite our appeal to the notion of ‘doubling’ in §46.5.1.2, however, we might not wish to characterize this as a case of doubling, as ‘doubling’ descriptively refers to the occurrence of the subject clitic with an overt noun phrase.) This is found for instance in the Ladin dialect of San Leonardo in the Badia valley.

(34) **Al** va. (S. Leonardo di Badia)

SCL= goes

‘He is going.’

#### 46.5.1.2.2 Tonic pronoun

The second most likely context in which a subject clitic will occur is in the presence of a tonic pronoun ‘doubling’ the tonic pronoun. Within the class of tonic pronouns, the second person singular is the one most frequently doubled (a generalization which strongly recalls the one by Renzi and Vanelli 1983 discussed in §46.3). Paduan is a dialect of this type:

(35) Ti    **te**    vien. (Pad.)

you    SCL= come

‘You are coming.’

#### 46.5.1.2.3 Full noun phrase

The third most likely context in which a subject clitic will occur is in the doubling of full noun phrases. Trentino is one such dialect, where we find subject clitics when the subject is null, when it is a full pronoun, and when it is a noun phrase. Note that this type of grammar is also exhibited in colloquial French, where doubling of a noun phrase is extremely frequent, while doubling of a quantifier is very rare.<sup>21</sup> For example:

(36) La Maria    **la**    magna. (Montesover, Trn.)

The Mary    SCL= eats

---

<sup>21</sup> This observation is based on the analysis of corpus data; there are no speaker judgments. See Culbertson (2010) for a justification for the choice of this methodology for French.

‘Mary is eating.’

#### 46.5.1.2.4 Quantifier Phrases

The fourth most likely context for appearance of a subject clitic is in the doubling of quantifier phrases; thus, appearance of a subject clitic with a quantifier phrase entails the first three contexts above. Note furthermore that specific quantifier phrases are more likely to be doubled than non-specific quantifier phrases. Some Lombard dialects exhibit subject clitic doubling with quantifier phrases:

(37) Un quidun **el** riverà in ritart. (Mil.)

a somebody SCL= will.arrive in late

‘Somebody will arrive late.’

#### 46.5.1.2.5 Other

Finally, subject clitic doubling can be found with all types of subjects, including *wh*-variables of restrictive relative clauses and *wh*-interrogatives. Friulian and Piedmontese dialects are of this type (cf. 26a). At present, we do not know whether the pattern exhibited by Borgomanerese (seen in §46.4, i.e., doubling in relatives but not in interrogatives) is a general one, or whether the opposite pattern is also possible.

The implicational scale of doubling presented in this section reveals that there are different mechanisms for ‘identifying’ different types of subject. Thus, what is often referred to as ‘nominative case assignment’ might actually be a cluster of different properties.

## 46.5.2 Functions unrelated to the identification of a subject

As noted in §46.5, there are subject clitics whose function is unrelated to the identification of a subject. We now look at the phenomenon of auxiliary clitics (§46.5.2.1), as well as subject clitics with what we shall call ‘left-peripheral functions’ (§46.5.2.2). We use the term ‘place holder’ for both types.

### 46.5.2.1 Place holders

#### 46.5.2.1.1 Auxiliary clitics

Auxiliary forms can display a set of additional clitics not found with non-auxiliary verbs. The phenomenon is more frequent in the cases of monosyllabic forms of auxiliaries or in cases where the auxiliary starts with a vowel (see Poletto 1993; Benincà 2007a; Garzonio and Poletto 2011; Tortora 2014:ch.5). The most common case is the *l* clitic form on the third person singular present indicative auxiliary:

(38) a Nisun **l** è rivà. (Cornuda, province of Treviso)

nobody SCL= is arrived

‘Nobody arrived.’

b\*\*Nisun **el** riva. (Cornuda, province of Treviso)

nobody SCL= arrives

c Nisun riva. (Cornuda, province of Treviso)

nobody arrives

‘Nobody is arriving.’

Interestingly, this *l* clitic is not sensitive to the type of subject (either preverbal or postverbal, or any of the classes discussed in §46.5.1.2). Rather, it seems to be a ‘dummy clitic’ for a position which needs to be realized once some phonological conditions (which differ across dialects) are met. One striking fact about auxiliary clitics is that they are not always etymologically subject clitics: the other typical case found in Venetan, Piedmontese, and Lombard dialects is of the form *g* or *j* (sometimes followed by a vowel). Although these forms appear to be locative in origin, they are considered auxiliary subject clitics in that they seem to serve the same function as the clitic *l* found in other dialects.<sup>22</sup>

The other interesting observation is that auxiliary clitics often (though not always; see for instance Venetian) disappear when a complement proclitic is realized; they thus have been analysed as ‘place holders’ for a clitic position, as their function clearly has nothing to do with subject realization. See Burzio (1986) for some discussion of the phonological conditions that must be met in order for the auxiliary clitic to be used, and Benincà (2007a) and Tortora (2014)

---

<sup>22</sup> Given the wide and disparate array of morphemes under the purview of ‘subject clitic’, the fact that some ‘subject clitic’ morphemes are homophonous with complement clitics should not deter us from considering them subject clitics. If we define subject clitic as we have in this chapter (a head which instantiates some functional head in the higher functional field of the clause, and which serves some licensing function either related to the subject or to some other element in this higher portion of the clause), then *g* and *j*, like *l* should be considered subject clitics (especially since, in contrast to object clitics, they do not occur with non-finite verb forms). In this sense, even ‘impersonal *si*’ should be considered a subject clitic. It is furthermore unclear whether even the form *l* is to be etymologically related to a complement clitic.

for discussion of the interaction between the phonological, morphological, and syntactic conditions for these clitics across Piedmontese, Lombard, and Venetan dialects.

#### 46.5.2.1.2 The ‘OCL-for-SCL’ phenomenon

The phenomenon of auxiliary clitics as place holders recalls another (under-investigated) phenomenon pointed out by Benincà and Vanelli (1986) for Friulian, and by Roberts (1993c) for Francoprovençal: here a subject clitic is always obligatory not only with auxiliaries, but with all verbs, unless another clitic is present – even an object clitic, in which case the subject clitic simply does not appear. Consider the following Friulian example:

(39) a **E** a mangiat. (Frl.)

SCL= has eaten

‘He/she ate.’

b **Lu** a mangiat. (Frl.)

OCL= has eaten

‘He/she ate **it**.’

As seen in (39), the otherwise obligatory subject clitic *e* disappears in the presence of the proclitic object *lu*. Friulian exhibits this phenomenon of OCL-for-SCL both with object clitics (as the name of the phenomenon suggests), and also with the preverbal negative marker (Francoprovençal having no preverbal negative marker, the context does not arise in Roberts’ study). While in Friulian this type of phenomenon involves only some subject clitics (never

second person singular clitics), in Francoprovençal it extends to the entire subject clitic paradigm.

Both auxiliary clitics and OCL-for-SCL have been analysed as cases in which the subject clitic does not really have the function of identifying the subject features, but is simply (again) a ‘place holder’ for a clitic position which must always be expressed. Why some languages require the higher clitic field to be lexically filled by some clitic (either in the presence of auxiliaries or also in the presence of main verbs), while others do not, remains mysterious; we can speculate that the variation might be related to the extent of verb movement (cf. §30.2.2.2), inasmuch as the ‘place holder’ clitic in a higher position substitutes for the verb in varieties where the verb moves to a relatively low position).

#### 46.5.2.2 Left-peripheral functions

Here we briefly mention some of the subject clitics whose function is related to the left periphery of the clause (cf. §30.3).<sup>23</sup>

The first example is already noted in §2.1, namely Paduan *a* in (5b). Although etymologically related to the Latin pronoun EGO ‘I’, it marks a sentence as new information. Thus, as Benincà (1983) observes, *a* is incompatible with both left dislocation and contrastive focus. Several northern Italian dialects have this type of subject clitic, as does Flo. *e* (discussed by Brandi and Cordin 1981).

---

<sup>23</sup> There are surely many other cases that have not been thoroughly investigated yet (see Torcolacci 2011 for the occurrence of subject clitics as ‘sentence typers’ in some Marchigiano dialects).

The second example of a clitic with ‘left-peripheral function’ is the Donceto clitic [ə] analysed by Cardinaletti and Repetti (2008): they convincingly argue that it is to be analysed as an interrogative marker unrelated to the subject. Vai (1999) reports a similar case in the Milanese of Affori, where *a* marks either exclamative clauses or rhetorical questions (which, according to his analysis, both entail a presupposition).

Additionally, Poletto (2000) reports that some Friulian subject clitics interact with *wh*-items; specifically, there are some subject clitics which are compatible only with tonic *wh*-phrases (like tonic *dulà* ‘where?’), and not with clitic *wh*-words (such as clitic *do* ‘where?’). In sum, subject clitics can mark pragmatic functions such as topic and focus, can function as sentence-typers, and can also interact with elements such as *wh*-items, which also crucially contribute to sentence typing.