

Clitics at the Interfaces of Grammar: Defining the “first position” in Czech

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Second-position clitics in Czech

Special clitics, i.e. those that appear in a designated position, have been an issue of linguistic analysis and debate for decades, as their placement cannot easily be attributed to just one module of language. In this context, Slavic languages, which are notorious for their rich inventory of special clitics, have received much attention, especially South Slavic. This body of research can be exploited to investigate related languages more thoroughly. In West Slavic Czech, the past auxiliary (as well as the conditional auxiliary and some of the pronouns) is clitic:

- (1) a. *Dobrou knihu jsi jistě četl.*
good book AUX.2SG certainly read
b. *Četl jsi jistě dobrou knihu.*
read AUX.2SG certainly good book
c. *Jistě jsi četl dobrou knihu.*
certainly AUX.2SG read good book
‘You have certainly read a good book.’

Czech clitic placement appears very straightforward at first glance: the clitics are located after the first constituent of their clause. Indeed, restrictions on potential clitic hosts mostly derive from independent principles of the grammar, such as what can form a constituent, and what can appear sentence-initially. It thus seems that Czech clitic placement refers exclusively to syntactic constituency. This is at odds with the general view that second position clitics require a host to their left due to their *prosodic* deficiency (e.g. Franks, 2016). Since Czech clitics do not appear to be enclitic in the phonological sense, a purely syntactic analysis might appear attractive – however, it is notoriously difficult to define a syntactic position that the clitics occupy (cf. Bošković, 2004), and, as will be shown, the above-described rule of clitic placement is an oversimplification.

The general question I want to address in this talk is how exactly the first position is defined: are restrictions on what precedes the clitic cluster due to the clitics’ (prosodic) properties, or do they solely derive from independent syntactic restrictions?

Verbal material preceding the clitics

An interesting area to study in this context is the placement of verbal material. There is an asymmetry between verbs and phrasal constituents such as DPs with respect to the phenomenon of clitics in third position, as illustrated in 2a, where in addition to a complementiser, a focused or topicalised constituent precedes the clitic auxiliary. Sentence 2b shows that the regular second-position order is also grammatical, i.e. that the clitic

can directly follow the complementiser. However, and crucially, a verb cannot appear in second position, as shown in 2c:

- (2) a. *že knihu jsi četl.*
 that book AUX.2SG read
 b. *že jsi četl knihu.*
 that AUX.2SG read book
 c. **že četl jsi knihu.*
 that read AUX.2SG book
 ‘...that you have read a book.’

This immediately raises the question what it is that bans verbs from these positions. A closer investigation of different verbal structures is thus called for. Based on speakers’ judgments and corpus data, I survey the grammaticality of different verbal configurations preceding the clitic cluster, both in main and embedded clauses. The results show that with respect to pre-clitic positions, the absence or presence of a complementiser as well as the verb type are relevant. Whilst, as shown above, finite verbs and past participles cannot occupy the position between complementiser and clitic, infinitives can, especially when accompanied by an object:

- (3) a. *?Říkají, že udělit mu chceme cenu tajně.*
 say.3PL that award him want.1PL price secretly
 b. *Říkají, že udělit cenu mu chceme tajně.*
 say.3PL that award price him want.1PL secretly
 ‘They say that we want to award him the price secretly.’

The above-mentioned asymmetry between main and embedded clauses does not hold for infinitives: The structures in 3a and 3b are just as grammatical as main clauses, thus without complementiser. The question is whether the observed differences are due to the elements’ differing syntax, information structure, or prosody.

I will show that the contrast found in the data is due to the nature of left-peripheral focus in Czech, in connection with syntactic differences between the different verb types. Additionally, the fact that both verbal and nominal elements preceding the clitics can, but must not, have undergone information-structure related movement shows that the “first position” is in fact not one position, but the result of interacting requirements of the syntax and the clitics. I will illustrate this using an Optimality Theoretic approach in the spirit of Richardson (1997) and Anderson (2000).

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