

Zrinka Kolaković, Sanja Perić Gavrančić, Marijana Horvat

Language Change, Language Planning, and the Fate of the Pronominal Clitic ‘ju’ in Croatian. A Diachronic Perspective

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1. Introduction

As will become evident in the following lines, the Croatian pronominal inventory has undergone significant changes in both functions and forms (cf. Mamić 1995: 183; Kolaković et al. 2022: 93–95, 136–144). At the end of the 19th century, in his *Gramatika i stilistika hrvatskoga ili srpskoga književnog jezika* Maretić (1899: 186) prescriptively limited the usage of the clitic (CL) *ju*.3SG.F.ACC only to contexts where it was followed by the auxiliary CL *je*, cf. ex. (1).

- (1) [...] da **ju** **je** često pevao.
 [...] that her.ACC be.3SG often sing.PTCP.SG.M

‘[...] that he used to sing it often.’

(Maretić 1899: 186)

In all other contexts, he declared the usage of the CL *ju* to be dialectal and advised its replacement with the pronominal CL *je* (2a–b) (cf. Maretić 1899: 186; Maretić 1924: 39).¹

- (2a) [...] dok **ju** svu prevede.
 [...] until her.ACC all.ACC translate.3PRS.SG

1 Due to his authority, this state, with some minor changes, has been maintained in many language manuals to this day (Zoričić 1998: 98). A detailed empirical analysis of the current state regarding this issue in both standard and colloquial varieties of Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian can be found in Kolaković et al. (2023).

(2b)	dok	je	svu	prevede.
	until	her.ACC	all.ACC	translate.3PRS.SG

‘[...] until he has translated it completely.’

(Maretić 1899: 186)

Later scholarly literature (e.g., Mamić 1995: 185–186), however, suggests that Maretić’s recommendation was neither in line with older Croatian grammarians nor with the usage in Croatian texts before him. Moreover, from a diachronic point of view, the original accusative CL form was *ju* (Matasović 2008: 239). As some older grammarians refer to in their descriptions (e.g. Veber 1873: 41), over time, in certain linguistic areas, authors began to replace the CL *ju* with the originally genitive feminine CL *je* of the third person singular.

2. Research Questions, Methods, and Materials

Given this background, our talk addresses the following three research questions (RQs) regarding the variation and language change in the usage of the two competing accusative CL forms:

RQ1: What does a thorough examination of older Croatian grammar books tell us about the usage of the CL forms *ju* and *je* in the accusative case?

RQ2: How are the accusative CLs *ju* and *je* distributed in older Croatian texts? Does their distribution depend on the co-occurrence of the auxiliary CL *je*?

RQ3: Can factors stimulating the spread of the originally 3SG.F.GEN CL *je* in accusative contexts be detected?

To answer these RQs, in the first step, we inspected 17 grammar books, most of which have recently been digitized (Horvat et al. 2024), to find information on the described language usage regarding the two forms. In the second step we turned to the traditionally compiled diachronic corpus CroDi (Hansack et al. 2016), which contains language material covering the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Since CroDi is not lemmatized, the corpus queries relied on the target accusative word forms, ["je"], ["Je"], ["ju"], and ["Ju"], respectively. The mentioned procedure required manual cleanup of false positives, i.e. contextual disambiguation of non-target homograph forms and further manual annotation.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents a summarized answer to RQ1: this is how grammarians described the usage of the CLs *ju* and *je* in Croatian varieties from the 17th to the 19th century. It is worth pointing out that the usage of the CLs *ju* and *je* in the accusative case still varies across dialectal varieties today, which was presumably even more pronounced in earlier centuries (Kolaković et al. 2022: 216). Given that some grammarians did not write a grammar book for their own L1 variety, Table 1 also offers metadata regarding the target variety of the grammar book in question, an approximation of the author's L1 variety,² as well as information on their most significant residencies throughout their lives.

Table 1: CLs *ju* and *je* and their usage (17th–19th century) as recorded in grammar books

Period	Author	<i>ju</i>	<i>je</i>	Described variety	Author's L1 variety	Residencies
17 th century	Kašić (1604)	+	–	Štok/Čak	Čak	Pag
	Della Bella (1728)	+	–	Štok	Štok/Čak	Dubrovnik/ Split
18 th century	Lanosović (1778)	+	–	Štok	Štok	Osijek
	Szentmartony (1783)	+	–	Kajk	Kajk	Varaždin
	Kornig (1795)	+	–	Kajk	Kajk	Slovenia/ Samobor
	Appendini (1808)	+	++	Štok	Štok	Dubrovnik
	Starčević (1812)	+	(+)	Štok	Štok/Kajk/ Čak	Gospić/ Varaždin
19 th century	Babukić (1836)	+	–	Štok	Štok/Kajk	Požega/ Zagreb
	Babukić (1854)	+	(+)	Štok	Štok/Kajk	Požega/ Zagreb
	Volarić (1852)	+	–	Štok	Čak	Krk
	Mažuranić (1859)	+	–	Štok	Čak/Kajk	Vinodolski/ Zagreb

2 As a matter of fact, some grammarians (e.g., Della Bella, Appendini) were not L1 speakers of any Croatian variety. In such cases, the variety spoken in their primary place of residency was considered their L1.

Period	Author	<i>ju</i>	<i>je</i>	Described variety	Author's L1 variety	Residencies
19 th century	Veber (1862)	+	–	Štok	Čak/Kajk	Bakar/ Zagreb
	Veber (1873)	+	(+)	Štok	Čak/Kajk	Bakar/ Zagreb
	Pacel (1865)	(+)	+	Štok	Kajk/Čak	Karlovac/ Rijeka
	Danilo (1873)	+	++	Štok	Čak	Zadar/Split
	Vitanović (1872)	+	–	Štok	Štok	Osijek
	Vitanović (1880)	+	–	Štok	Štok	Osijek

In the first Croatian grammar book written by Čakavian L1 speaker Bartol Kašić (1604: 75), who predominantly relied on the Štokavian dialect (with some Čakavian elements), there is no single mention of the CL *je* being used in the accusative case for the third person feminine singular. The same applies to the two 18th-century grammar books that describe Štokavian varieties in the South and North, respectively (cf. Della Bella 1728: 13; Lanosović 1778: 34), as well as to those offering a description of the Kajkavian variety in the North (Szentmartony 1783: 37; Kornig 1795: 37). Preliminary analysis of 17 grammar books indicates that starting from the 19th century, the CL *je* spread from southern Štokavian to northern Štokavian and potentially to other varieties in the North (cf. Appendini 1808: 60, 174; Danilo 1873: 46; Pacel 1865: 19, 50). Notably, comparisons across some northern editions written by the same author show that newer editions mention changes in usage, i.e., allowing not only the CL *ju* but also the usage of the CL *je* in accusative contexts (cf. Babukić 1836: 35–36; Babukić 1854: 223–228; Veber 1862: 25; Veber 1873: 41). Finally, whereas in the 19th century, the Štokavian South unequivocally preferred the CL *je* over *ju*, the latter still seems to be the only option in the Štokavian North (cf. Appendini 1808: 174; Vitanović 1872: 73; Vitanović 1880).

Data from CroDi complement the meta-analysis based on grammar books, answering the RQ2 and shedding new light on the studied language change, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of competing pronominal accusative clitic forms *ju* and *je* in 16th–18th century Croatian

Period	Croatian variety	CL <i>ju</i>		CL <i>je</i>	
		Absolute frequency	%	Absolute frequency	%
16 th century	Čakavian	93	100	0	0
17 th century	Štokavian	109	78.42	29	20.86
	Kajkavian	1	0.72	0	0
18 th century	Štokavian	0	0	69	51.11
	Kajkavian	64	47.41	2	1.48
Σ		267		100	367

Specifically, 367 sentences containing the pronominal accusative CLs reveal that, even though less frequent than *ju*, the CL *je* was attested as early as the 17th century in Štokavian. Moreover, although not as frequent in the 17th as in the 18th century, the CL *je* was attested in both southern and northern Štokavian texts, see ex. (3)–(4). In contrast, the same pronominal CL is not attested in Kajkavian texts before the mid-18th century, see ex. (5).

- (3) [...] i nemoj ništa **je** huliti [...].
 and neg.IMP.2SG nothing her.ACC criticize.INF

‘[...] and do not criticize it for anything [...].’

(Mikalja 1649)

- (4) [...] da bi **je** pomogla po koji način.
 that COND.AUX.3SG her.ACC help.PTCP.SG.F at which.ACC way.ACC

‘[...] that she help her in any way possible.’

(Divković 1611)

- (5) [...] stališu vendar betežnika prikladna kakti **je** postavemo [...].
 class.DAT very patient.GEN suitable.NOM how her.ACC put.1PRS.PL

‘[...] very suitable for patients, as we put it [...].’

(Lalange 1776)

Furthermore, regarding RQ3, although not thoroughly examined, our data indicates that contexts containing the auxiliary CL *je* might not have worked as preservers of the CL *ju*, since the strings *je je* were also attested (cf. Ridjanović 2012: 434), cf. (6a–b).

(6a)	[...] i	kako	je	je	Blažena	Gospa
	and	how	her.ACC	be.3SG	blessed.NOM	Lady.NOM
	opet	povratila [...].				
	again	return.PTCP.SG.F				

‘[...] and how the Blessed Lady returned her again [...].’

(6b)	[...] i	kako	ju	je	ozloglasio.
	and	how	her.ACC	be.3SG	defame.PTCP.SG.M

‘[...] and how he defamed her.’

(Divković 1611)

The CroDi data suggests that, in contrast to northern Bosnian Štokavian, in the 17th century, the pronominal CL *je* was more common than *ju* in South Štokavian, leading to the disappearance of the latter by the end of the 18th century.

4. Conclusion and Further Perspectives

The variation and change in the usage of the accusative pronominal CLs *ju* and *je* ‘her’ in Croatian was approached in two steps: first, 17 grammar books published from the 17th to the 19th century were inspected regarding the described language usage. Second, the information found was compared with authentic usage data from the CroDi diachronic corpus, comprising language material from the 16th to the 18th century. Corpus data revealed that the pronominal CL *je* was attested in accusative contexts long before it found its way into grammar books (17th vs. 19th century). Moreover, the corpus data suggest that the pronominal CL *je* was most probably spreading from 17th-century South Štokavian to North Štokavian, as well as to other Croatian varieties, replacing the original accusative CL *ju*. However, the presented study has certain limita-

tions. Initial inspection revealed that texts written in the three major branches of Croatian dialects (Čakavian, Štokavian, and Kajkavian) were not equally present throughout the 16th to 18th centuries in CroDi. Moreover, the CroDi data does not provide enough variation, meaning that in the texts – with some exceptions, such as Divković (1611) – either *ju* or *je* prevails. To find out more about the factors governing the language change (RQ3), the database must be expanded. Following the observations in Maretić (1917–1922: 942), we envisage the compilation of a custom-tailored corpus comprising South Štokavian texts from the 15th and 16th centuries, and ideally, North Štokavian texts from Bosnia and Slavonia from the 17th to 19th centuries. The future corpus could be enriched with texts written in the Ozalj hybrid variety and 19th-century Kajkavian.

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