

Syntactic restrictions on *li* placement in Serbian

The complementizer *li* is a clitic that uniformly targets second position (2P) across Slavic, irrespective of the availability of other 2P clitics in a language, and it displays an interplay of syntactic and prosodic requirements on its placement (see, e.g., [Bošković 2001](#); [Franks 2017](#)). This talk analyzes *syntactic* restrictions imposed by *li* on its host, drawing on [Bošković's \(2001: 27\)](#) observation that in Serbian, *li* occurs only after the clause-initial word, such as the adjective in (1a), in contrast to other clitics (e.g. the auxiliary *je* in 1b), which may be preceded by phrasal material as well. [Bošković \(2001: 32\)](#) attributes the restriction in (1a) to the deficiency of *li*, which in his view is unable to support a specifier; therefore, it may be preceded only by heads, which check the focus feature by head adjunction to *li* in C⁰. Importantly, *li* in Serbian may also be preceded by *wh*-words (thus, presumably XP-elements; see 2a) and finite verbs, but not *l*-participles (see 3). [Marelj et al. \(2024\)](#) re-examine *li* placement in Serbian in a large-scale speaker judgment experiment, and in view of the acceptability of *wh-li* structures, they conclude that the relevant condition for *li* placement is finiteness of the *li* host, rather than its X⁰ status. This talk upholds that *li* is indeed preceded exclusively by heads due to its syntactic deficiency, with additional support for the analysis coming from the apparent grammaticalization of *wh*-hosts of *li* into complementizer-like heads (X⁰) and properties of a related structure in Bulgarian (Bg) and *l*-participle fronting across the auxiliary 'be'. As shown in (2a), *wh*-questions across *li* in Serbian require Left Branch Extraction (LBE) of the *wh*-word. They also have special semantic effects. [Marelj et al.](#) (see also [Mitrović 2018](#)) point out that they presuppose affirmative answers and are clearly not interrogative, as indicated by the translation of (4). Likewise, native speakers inform me that with respect to question (5A), answer (5B) ("The Beatles") and the emotive answer in (5C) ("Really horrible music") are fine, but (5D) ("He didn't like music") is excluded because of the affirmation anticipated by the question. Conversely, in the absence of *li* in question (6), the negative answer is felicitous, and the LBE of the *wh*-word is not required. Given these observations, I suggest that the *wh*-words hosting *li* are losing polar/interrogative semantics and are becoming grammaticalized into complementizer-like elements. This process is also observed in the distribution of *kako* 'how,' which can move across *li* and which then does not necessarily display interrogative semantics, as it can be freely replaced by the complementizer *da* without causing meaning differences (see 7). Moreover, outside the context of *wh-li* questions, *kako* displays different properties depending on whether it functions as an interrogative pronoun or a pseudo-relative. [Frasson \(2024\)](#) shows that in the pseudo-relative function, *kako* does not express interrogation and cannot be combined with interrogative pronouns, such as *gde* 'where' (see 8), and he provides strong evidence that in this usage *kako* does not target Spec, CP but is merged in C⁰ as a complementizer. Notably, related contexts of *wh*-head placement are attested in Bavarian and Alemannic German, where a complex (multi-word) *wh*-phrase may co-occur with a complementizer, but the complementizer is disallowed with single-word *wh*-elements. [Bayer \(2015\)](#) argues that the single-word *wh*-elements target C⁰ as heads (hence the exclusion of the complementizer) and that crucially, they lack clear interrogative semantics, thus on a par with *wh-li* structures in Serbian. For Bayer, this semantic impoverishment reflects the grammaticalization path in (9), analyzed as replacement of *wh*-XP-movement with head movement to C⁰. I propose that this process occurs also in Serbian: as argued by [Bošković \(2001: 31\)](#), the *wh*-word is a non-branching element, so it may move as an XP but end up adjoined as a head to C⁰, where it checks the focus feature of *li*. Such a derivation is more economical than XP movement, as it is shorter by crossing fewer nodes, so it is favored in the grammaticalization path.

The X⁰-status of *li* hosts in Serbian is predicted on the assumption that the *l*-participle undergoes XP-movement via predicate inversion to Spec, TP, as advocated by [Migdalski \(2006\)](#) for Bg and Serbian (see 10b/c). In this analysis, the auxiliary 'be' conditions the inversion as the linker (in the sense of [Den Dikken 2006](#)), while the subject and the *l*-participle compete for the same position (Spec, TP) to check the *phi*-features of T⁰, which explains the impossibility of clause-initial subjects in participle-aux orders (see 10). In Bg, where *li* can be preceded by XPs, the *l*-participle may move higher, across *li*, targeting Spec, CP (see 11). As expected, the movement is excluded in Serbian, as *li* does not support the specifier, though X⁰-movement of finite verbs is possible (see 3). [Dadan \(2019: 61\)](#) argues that *li* deficiency exemplifies a diachronic tendency to lose a specifier, which is due to the dispreferred configuration of the phrase-phrase merger. I suggest that this tendency has also a repercussion for participle movement: in Serbian, the participle may not raise across *li* due to its deficiency, while in Polish, where the auxiliary 'be' is reduced into an affix, the participle undergoes X⁰-movement to T⁰ rather than predicate inversion, as indicated by the position of the subject, which may precede the fronted participle (see 12).

- (1) a. Skupe (*li*) knjige (**li*) Ana čita?
expensive Q books Q Ana reads
“Does Ana read expensive books?”
b. Skupe (*je*) knjige (*je*) Ana čitala
expensive is_{AUX} books is_{AUX} Ana read
“Ana read expensive books” (Bošković 2001: 27)
- (2) a. Kakvu *li* (to) knjigu Veljko kupuje?
which Q that book Veljko buys?
“What kind of books is Veljko buying?”
b. *Kakvu knjigu *li*(to) Veljko kupuje? (Progovac 2005: 165)
- (3) a. Daješ *li* mu ih?
give_{2SG} Q him_{DAT} them_{ACC} “Are you giving them to him?”
b. *Dala *li* si mu ih?
give_{PART.F.SG} Q are_{AUX.2SG} him_{DAT} them_{ACC}
“Did you give them to him?” (Franks 2017: 198)
- (4) Pitam se, pitam, šta *li* si mi kupio?
wonder_{1SG} REFL wonder_{1SG} what Q are_{AUX.2SG} me_{DAT} buy_{PART.M.SG}
“I wonder what you got for me!” (Marelj et al. 2024: 88)
- (5) A. Kakvu *li* je muziku voleo?
what Q is_{AUX.3SG} music like_{PART.M.SG} “What music did he like?”
B. The Beatles /C. Zaista lošu /D. #Nije voleo muziku
B. “The Beatles”/C. “Really horrible music”/D. #“He didn’t like music”
- (6) A. Kakvu (je) muziku (je) voleo?
B. Nije voleo muziku
- (7) a. Vidim kako brzo jede
see_{PRES.1SG} how fast eats “I see how she eats fast”
b. Vidim da brzo jede
see_{PRES.1SG} that fast eats “I see that she eats fast”
- (8) a. Gledamo **gde** **i** **kako** ptice lete [interrogative *kako*]
watch_{PRES.1PL} where and how birds fly_{PRES.3PL}
“We are watching where and how the birds fly”
b. Gledamo ptice **kako** (***i kada**) kruže visoko po vazduhu [*kako* as a pseudo-relative]
watch_{PRES.1PL} birds how and when fly_{PRES.3PL} high in air
“We are watching the birds circling high in the air” (Frasson 2024)
- (9) +wh phrase > +wh head > polar interrogative head > –wh head (Bayer 2015: 29)
- (10) a. Ja sam/bejaše čitao knjigu
I am_{AUX.PRES}/was_{AUX.PAST.1SG} read_{PART.M.SG} book
b. (*Ja) čitao sam/bejaše knjigu [participle fronting across ‘be’]
I read_{PART.M.SG} am_{AUX.PRES}/was_{AUX.PAST.1SG} book
“I read/had read the book” (Serbian; Bg works in the same way, Migdalski 2006)
c. [TP [PartP čitao _{t_k}] [T sam/bejaše_j ... [Aux _{t_j} [AgrO knjigu_k [_{VP} ja [_{+φ}] V [t_{PartP} _{t_k}]]]]]
- (11) a. Novata (*li*) kola (*li*) prodade?
new-the Q car Q sold
“Was it the new car that he/she/you sold?” (Bg, Bošković 2001: 226)
b. Kupil *li* e knjigata?
buy_{PART.M.SG} Q is_{AUX.3SG} book-the
“Has he bought the book?” (Bg)
- (12) (Ty) czytał-eś książkę [the subject is OK, unlike in Bg/Serbian]
you read_{PART.M.SG+AUX.PRES.2SG} book
“You have read the book” (Polish)