

Romanian Clitics: Siding with the Serbo-Croatian or the French?

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Abstract:

This article discusses Romanian clitics, a topic previously studied by Farkas, Kazazis, Monachesi and Steriade, among others. I show that Romanian clitics share surprisingly many more features with Serbo-Croatian – a Slavic language, than with French, a Romance language like Romanian itself. This unexpected result raises questions well above and beyond the topic of clitics alone. Why should a Romance language “behave” linguistically closer to a Slavic than to a Romance language? What are the properties shared by Romanian and Serbo-Croatian clitics and how do they differ from French?

Part 1: Introduction

Romanian is a Romance language according to classic linguistic typologies. Geographically it finds itself surrounded by Slavic languages. However strong, the influence of Romance languages is most likely not the sole force acting on Romanian. Culturally, Slavic currents are definitely present. The question which arises is whether they are also present in the linguistics of the language. It is suspected that Romanian shares lexical and morphological properties with other Romance languages, and syntactic ones with Slavic languages. The aim of this essay is to investigate to what extent Romanian pronominal clitics are similar to Romance languages ones and in what way (if any) they resemble Slavic language clitics.

Part 2 discusses language similarities to Romance and Slavic languages, by the way of comparing French and Serbo-Croatian to Romanian. In Section 1 we look to French forms and in Section 2 to Serbo-Croatian ones. The last Section turns to Romanian forms. It will be shown that the types of pronominal clitic forms found in Romanian are similar to Slavic language ones.

Part 3 consists of concluding remarks and aspects which may need further research.

Part 2: Kinds of Pronominal Clitics

Pronominal clitics may vary in form, depending on the kind of language we use. Do Romanian pronominal clitic forms present the same features as those of Romance languages, or do they resemble Slavic language typologies more closely? It may be expected that Romanian might not exhibit an exact copy of either Romance or Slavic languages, but it is interesting to observe whether it shares features from both language types, or whether it leans

towards one side more than the other. For this purpose I will examine pronominal clitic forms from French and Serbo-Croatian.

Section 1: A note about French pronominals

Here are some examples¹ of pronominal clitics in French:

1.1 (Gruneberg and Lacroix, 1987)

Je *peux* *vous* *proposer* *l'hôtel* *du* *Parc.*
 [1stSgNom can 2ndPlDat proposeINF DefArt'hotel of.the Parc]
 I can suggest Hotel Parc to you.

This example shows the forms used for 1st person singular in the nominative case and 2nd person plural in the dative case. The next example illustrates more nominative and accusative forms.

1.2

Il *me* *présente* *à* *Marie.*
 [3rdSgMascNom 1stSgAcc introduces toPREP Marie]
 He introduces me to Marie.

The French pronominal clitic forms are marked for person, number and case. As example 1.1 shows, the pronominal appears after the modal, if there is one present, and before the main verb of the sentence. There is only one form for each given possibility, namely, what we refer to as a “full” form. French does not present shortened or abbreviated forms (we will refer to these kinds of forms as “non-full” forms). Full forms have stress and a similar distribution to that of a noun phrase. All possible French pronominal clitic forms are summarized in the table below, in Figure 1 (Gruneberg and Lacroix, 1987).

French pronominal clitics					
TYPE			CASE		
PERSON	NUMBER	GENDER	NOMINATIVE	ACCUSATIVE or DATIVE	
1 st	Sing.		je	me/ moi	
	Pl.		nous	nous	
2 nd	Sing.		tu	te/ toi	
	Pl.		vous	vous	
				ACCUSATIVE	DATIVE
3 rd	Sing.	Masc.	il	le	lui
	Pl.		ils	les	eux
	Sing.	Fem.	elle	la	elle
	Pl.		elles	les	eux
	Sing.	Impersonal	on	se	soi

Figure 1

¹ All examples are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Accusative and dative pronominals are separated in two different groups: those which have a different form for dative constructions (third person forms), and those which have the same forms for both cases (first person forms⁴). For example, if one wanted to say that someone gives him a book, the dative form “*lui*” is used, as illustrated below:

1.3

Simone lui donne le livre.
 [Simone 3rdMascSgDat gives def.art book]
 Simone gives him the book.

However, for “Simone sees **him**”, the accusative form is used.

1.4

Simone le voit.
 [Simone 3rdSgMascAcc sees]
 Simone sees him.

In contrast, for the second person plural, one and the same form appears in both cases:

1.5

Simone vous donne le livre.
 [Simone 2ndPlDat gives defArt book]
 Simone gives you the book.

1.6

Simone vous voit.
 [Simone 2ndPlAcc see]
 Simone sees you.

The table shows two different pronominals for the first and second person singular forms, “*me/moi, te/toi*”. The first form is used when the clitic occurs before the verb and the second if the clitic follows it. The latter form is often used in imperative constructions, as the example below shows:

1.7

(a) *Écoutes-moi!* (b) **Écoutes-me!*
 [listen-1stSgAccForm2] [listen-1stSgAccForm1]
 Listen to me!

The first form from the table cannot be used, as sentence (b) demonstrates, because the pronominal follows the verb. Instead, the second form gives a grammatical sentence, as in (a). However, in the example below, it is the first form that works within the given sentence, since the clitic comes before the verb.

1.8

Marie me prendra demain.
 [Marie 1stSgAcc take tomorrow]
 Marie will take you tomorrow.

² Historically, the third person pronominals may be demonstratives and this could be one explanation why they behave differently from the rest of the pronominals (Uriagereka, 1995).

Having already said that French does not have any non-full forms, it is important to mention that there are some forms which greatly resemble the concept of a non-full form. Example 1.9 demonstrates this:

1.9 (Sportiche, draft yet to appear)

<i>Jean</i>	<i>l'a</i>	<i>peinte.</i>
[John	3 rd SgFemAcc'beAUX	painted]

John painted it.

First thing to notice is that the pronominal is positioned before the auxiliary in French. In this example the form of the auxiliary “to be” starts with a vowel (in fact it is represented by a single vowel sound) and thus forces the clitic pronominal preceding it to drop its vowel. Could this be a non-full clitic or does this phenomenon happen elsewhere in the language? Indeed, this is not the only case where a vowel is dropped. The following example contains the conjunction “*que*” (that) which loses its vowel too, in order to accommodate French phonology.

1.10

<i>Qu'est-ce</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>fais</i>	<i>maintenant?</i>
[What'is-this	that	2 nd SgNom	doing	now]

What are you doing now?

The conjunction is forced to drop the last vowel, because the form of the verb “to be” starts with a vowel. It is impossible to pronounce two vowels consecutively without a pause. French phonology avoids this by dropping the last vowel of the first word in the sequence. Hence, this “vowel-dropping rule” is not specific to clitic pronouns, but applies across the entire linguistics field in French. Due to this fact, the shortened clitic versions mentioned in example 1.9 are not considered to be non-full forms. They are full clitic pronominals, on which the “vowel-dropping rule” was applied at a later stage.

Section 2: A note about Serbo-Croatian pronominals

This is the Serbo-Croatian version of examples 1.1 and 1.2:

2.1³

<i>Mogu</i>	<i>da</i>	<i>vam</i>	<i>preporučim</i>	<i>Hotel</i>	<i>Parc.</i>
[can.1 st SgNom	to	2 nd SgDatNon-full	suggest	Hotel	Parc]

I can suggest Hotel Parc to you.

<i>On</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>predstavlja</i>	<i>Mariji.</i>
[3 rd SgMascNomFull	1 st SgAccNon-full	introduce	Maria.Dat]

He introduces me to Marie.

At first glance, it may seem that French and Serbo-Croatian have similar pronominal constructions. However, this is not the case. One difference is that the pronominal occurs before the modal, if there is one present. In contrast to French, Serbo-Croatian pronominal clitics are more complex and present a larger number of forms. Apart from the full forms, which are marked for person, number and case, just as in French, Serbo-Croatian has non-full forms. These forms are unstressed and their distribution does not resemble that of noun phrases. In fact, Serbo-Croatian is not the only Slavic language to have such forms, Czech also

³ This example, as well as examples 2.2 up to 2.6 and 2.9 were provided by a native Serbo-Croatian speaker.

has them (Toman, 1986). All non-full forms are enclitic in Serbo-Croatian (Browne, 1974). It is interesting to note that all nominative clitics are full forms. All the other cases (accusative, dative and genitive) present both types. The table below summarizes the Serbo-Croatian pronominal forms (Browne, 1974).

Serbo-Croatian pronominal clitics										
TYPE			CASE							
PERSON	NUMBER	GENDER	NOMINATIVE		ACCUSATIVE		DATIVE		GENITIVE	
			FULL	NON-FULL	FULL	NON-FULL	FULL	NON-FULL	FULL	NON-FULL
1 st	Sing.		ja	-	mene	me	meni	mi	mene	me
	Pl.		mî	-	nâs	nas	nama	nam	nâs	nas
2 nd	Sing.		ti	-	tebe	te	tebi	ti	tebe	te
	Pl.		vi	-	vâs	va	vama	vam	vâs	va
3 rd	Sing.	Masc./Neut.	on/ono	-	njega	ga	njemu	mu	njega	ga
	Pl.		oni/ona	-	njih	ih	njima	im	njih	ih
	Sing.	Fem.	ona	-	nju	je	njoj	joj ⁴	nje	je
	Pl.		one	-	njih	ih	njima	im	njih	ih

Figure 2

Another contrast to the French data is that Serbo-Croatian dative and accusative pronominals are all different – for all persons, 3rd as well as 1st and 2nd. The distinction is reflected in both their full and non-full forms.

Serbo-Croatian could translate the French example 1.9 in two ways:

2.2

(a) *John ga je naslikao.*
 [John 3rdSgMascAccNon-full AUX painted]
 John painted it.

(b) *John je naslikao njega.*
 [John AUX painted 3rd SgMascAccFull]
 John painted it.

First, notice that the non-full pronominal is placed before the auxiliary (as in French), if there is one present, or after the main verb, in the case of a full pronominal. In a later example we will see that this is not the only possibility (see example 2.4 (b)). Secondly, Serbo-Croatian has free order and consequently, the pronominal may precede (as in (a)) or follow (sentence (b))

⁴ The dative singular feminine forms are different from the genitive ones. This is the only difference between genitive and dative forms.

the verb. The only condition imposed is that after the verb, the clitic appears in its full form. Non-full clitics are placed before the verb. In fact, both sentences (c) and (d) in example 2.3 demonstrate that no other possibilities are grammatical – i.e., interchanging the full and non-full forms is not allowed.

2.3

(c)* <i>John</i> [John	<i>je</i> AUX	<i>naslikao</i> painted	<i>ga.</i> 3 rd SgMascAccNon-full]
(d)* <i>John</i> [John	<i>njega</i> 3 rd SgMascAccFull	<i>je</i> AUX	<i>naslikoa.</i> painted]

Accusative, dative and genitive pronominals have full forms which are all distinct from their non-full counterparts. The genitive and dative clitics form a special group because they have the same distribution of forms, except for the third person singular feminine. The dative has “*joj*” or “*njoj*” and the genitive “*je*” or “*nje*”. The example below shows this:

2.4

(a) <i>Nema</i> [have.not(IDIOM) She isn't here.	<i>je.</i> 3 rd SgFemGenNon-full]
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(b) <i>Ja</i> [1 st SgNomFull I gave her the book.	<i>sam</i> beAUX	<i>joj</i> 3 rd SgFemNon-full	<i>dala</i> gave	<i>knjigu.</i> book]
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First thing to note is that the non-full form appears after the auxiliary in Serbo-Croatian (see sentence (b)). Hence, examples 2.2 (a) and 2.4 (b) show that in Serbo-Croatian the non-full forms can appear before and after the auxiliary. This poses the question whether the same happens with modal verbs. However, due to the incomplete data available, this question is left for investigation in later research. Sentence (a) uses the genitive non-full form, whereas, sentence (b) has the dative one. According to Browne (1974), full forms are always used after a preposition. The next example illustrates this fact:

2.5

<i>Ona</i> [1 st SgNom She is underneath me.	<i>je</i> is	<i>ispod</i> underneathPREP	<i>mene.</i> 2 st SgAccFull]
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The presence of the preposition “*ispod*” (underneath) forces the clitic pronominal to appear in its full form “*mene*” (me). Further evidence is provided by example 2.6 which shows that using the non-full form produces ungrammaticality:

2.6

* <i>Ona</i> [1 st SgNom	<i>je</i> is	<i>ispod</i> underneathPREP	<i>me.</i> 2 st SgAccNon-full]
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Furthermore, full clitic forms are used when there is no room for enclitics. The following example illustrates this:

2.7 (Browne, 1974)

<i>Njoj,</i> [to3 rd .SgFemDat He gave her a book.	<i>dao</i> gave	<i>je</i> 3 rd SgMasNom	<i>knjigu</i> a.book]
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The word order places the pronominal first in the sentence, therefore not allowing it to be an enclitic, since it does not follow anything. Hence a full form of the clitic is used.

The semantic purpose of using full forms in Serbo-Croatian is that of contrast. Such a form will be used in order to emphasize the meaning expressed by the clitic.

2.8 (Browne, 1974)

<i>Da</i>	<i>kam</i>	<i>knjigu</i>	<i>tebi.</i>
[conj]	1 st SgNom.give	book.the	2 nd SgDat]
Should I give YOU the book?			

In the example above, the clitic form representing 2nd person singular, in the dative case is emphasized. The meaning of the sentence concentrates on **whom** the book should be given to, rather than the actual **giving** of the book

Section 3: Romanian

Below is an account of how examples 1.1 and 1.2 would be expressed in Romanian:

3.1

<i>Eu</i>	<i>vă</i>	<i>pot</i>	<i>sugera</i>	<i>Hotel</i>	<i>Parc.</i>
[1 st SgNom	2 nd PlDatAccFullNon-accented	can	suggest	Hotel	Parc]
I can suggest Hotel Parc to you.					

<i>El</i>	<i>mă</i>	<i>prezintă</i>	<i>Mariei.</i>
[3 rd SgMascNom	1 st SgAccFullNon-accented	introduces	Marie.to]
He introduces me to Marie.			

Romanian clitic pronominals are full and non-full, accentuated and unaccentuated. Similarly to Serbo-Croatian, nominative clitics only have full forms. The accentuated forms are different from both full and non-full forms. I have not been able to find any accounts of accentuated and unaccentuated forms for Serbo-Croatian. Example 3.1 shows that Romanian places pronominals before modal verbs (in contrast to French data). The table below (Figure 3 (Avram, 1986)) summarizes the complete sets of forms found in Romanian.

Romanian pronominal clitics														
TYPE			CASE											
PERSON	NO.	GENDER	NOMINATIVE			ACCUSATIVE			DATIVE			GENITIVE		
			FULL		NON-FULL	FULL		NON-FULL	FULL		NON-FULL	FULL		NON-FULL
			Accented	Non-Acc.		Accented	Non-Acc.		Accented	Non-Acc.		Accented	Non-Acc.	
1 st	Sing.		eu	-	-	mine	mă	m	mie	îmi	mi	-	-	-
	Pl.		noi	-	-	noi	ne	ne	nouă	ne/ni	ne	-	-	-
2 nd	Sing.		tu	-	-	tine	te	te	ție	îți	ți	-	-	-
	Pl.		voi	-	-	voi	vă	v	vouă	vă/vi	v	-	-	-
3 rd	Sing.	Masc./ Neu.	el	-	-	el	îl	l	lui	îi	i	lui	-	-
	Pl.		ei	-	-	-	îi	i	lor	le/li	li	lor	-	-
	Sing.	Fem.	ea	-	-	ea	o	o	ei	îi	i	ei	-	-
	Pl.		ele	-	-	-	le	le	lor	le/li	li	lor	-	-

Figure 3

The first thing to notice is that unlike French, accusative forms are all drastically different from dative ones. In fact, the next example shows that using an accusative form in a dative construction produces ungrammaticality.

3.2

(a) **Te* *dau* *cartea*.
 [2ndSgAccFullNon-accented give book.defart]
 I give you the book.

(b) *Îți* *dau* *cartea*.
 [2ndSgDatFullNon-accented give book.defart]
 I give you the book.

Sentence 3.2 (a) is ungrammatical because an accusative pronominal was used in place of the required dative one. Sentence (b) shows the desired grammatical construction. Analogously, it can be shown that using a dative pronominal in an accusative position also produces ungrammaticality. Example 3.3 proves this:

3.3

(a) **Maria* *vine* *la* *ție*.
 [Maria comes toPREP 2ndSgDatFullAccented]
 *Maria comes to you place.

(b) *Maria* *vine* *la* *tine*.
 [Maria comes toPREP 2nd SgAccFullAccented]

Maria comes to your place.

Another contrast to French is that in Romanian there is no elision rule and therefore two consecutive vowels are supported by phonological rules:

3.4

<i>Ne-am</i>	<i>salutat</i>	<i>ieri.</i>
[1 st PlAccNon-fullNon-accented-beAUX	greeted	yesterday]

We greeted each other.

Example 3.4 also shows that non-full pronominals are placed before the auxiliary. This is similar to French structures.

However, there are some parallels to Serbo-Croatian. Romanian also uses full pronominal forms after prepositions. The following examples demonstrate this:

3.5

<i>Ea</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>sub</i>	<i>mine.</i>
[3 rd SgFemNom	is	underneathPREP	1 st SgAccFullAccented]

She is underneath me.

3.6

<i>A</i>	<i>fost</i>	<i>văzut</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>mine.</i>
[beAUX	bePAST	seen	byPREP	1 st SgAccFullAccented]

He/She was seen by me.

The prepositions “*sub*” (underneath) and “*de*” (by) forced the use of full pronominals. The use of the non-full forms produces ungrammaticality, as shown in example 3.7.

3.7

* <i>A</i>	<i>fost</i>	<i>văzut</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>m.</i>
[beAUX	bePAST	seen	byPREP	1 st SgAccNon-FullAccented]

In fact, it seems that the only forms accepted after a preposition are full accented forms. If the preposition is preceded by a full form and this form is unaccented, then the sentence becomes ungrammatical, according to example 3.8⁵:

3.8

* <i>A</i>	<i>fost</i>	<i>văzut</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>mă.</i>
[beAUX	bePAST	seen	byPREP	1 st SgAccFullNon-accented]

Serbo-Croatian forces full forms to appear where there is no room for enclitics. However, Romanian pronominal clitics may attach either enclitically, inclitically, or proclitically. Taking the 3rd person singular, feminine non-full form “*i*” we can form the following structures:

3.9 (Avram, 1986)

Proclitic	Inclitic	Enclitic
<i>i-aduc</i>	<i>dă-i-o</i>	<i>nu-i</i>
[3 rd SgFemDat-bring]	[give-3 rd SgFemDat-3 rd SgFemAcc]	[negationParticle-3 rd SgFemDat]
I bring her	give it to her	Don't to her

⁵ This could be a consequence of the syntactic rules acting on noun phrases.

There are four exceptions to this. The forms: 1st Singular, Non-Full, accusative, 2nd Plural, Non-Full, accusative and dative and 3rd Plural, Non-Full, dative cannot attach to the end of any lexical items. They can be used proclitically and enclitically, but not enclitically. Instead, the full form is used, where there is no room for enclitics.

3.10 (Avram, 1986)

<i>Dîndu-vă</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>carte.</i>
[giving-2 nd PIDatFullNon-accented]	indefArticle	book]
Giving you a book.		

The gap left by the enclitic is filled in by a full pronominal form. In this respect, Romanian behaves similarly to Serbo-Croatian (please see examples 2.5 and 2.6).

Romanian has free word order. In spite of this, it does not allow the clitic to move around in the sentence. The example below shows this:

3.11

(a) <i>Îi</i>	<i>dau</i>	<i>cartea.</i>
[3 rd SgMascDatNon-fullNon-accented]	give	book.defart]
I give him the book.		

(b) * <i>Dau</i>	<i>îi</i>	<i>cartea.</i>
[give	3 rd SgMascDatNon-fullNon-accented]	book.defart]
I give him the book.		

(c) * <i>Dau</i>	<i>lui</i>	<i>cartea.</i>
[give	3 rd SgMascDatFullNon-accented]	book.defart]
I give him the book.		

In 3.11 (b) the pronominal has moved to follow the verb. This produces ungrammaticality. Sentence (c) shows that even if the full clitic form is used, the sentence still remains ungrammatical. Unlike in Serbo-Croatian, changing the order of clitics is not supported in Romanian.

Now we turn our attention to the issue of semantics. The use of full forms is a way of emphasizing the meaning of the pronominal. Suddenly, the “person” expressed by the clitic becomes topical in the sentence. The example below illustrates the difference in meaning of two sentences which only differ in the form of the clitic used.

3.12

(a)	<i>Ne-au</i>	<i>chemat.</i>
	[1 st PIAccNon-FullNon-accented]	called]
We were called.		

(b) <i>Pe</i>	<i>noi</i>	<i>ne-au</i>	<i>chemat.</i>
[onPREP	1 st PIAccFullAccented]	1 st PIAccNon-FullNon-accented]	called]
We were called.			

Sentence 3.12 (a) suggests that someone called on us. It is important that we were **called upon**. 3.12 (b) however, stresses the fact that it was **us** that was called upon, as opposed to someone else being called. The act of calling is merely a part of the sentence and it is a given that the addressee already knows or expects that someone would be calling. It is **who** they are calling that matters most. This is once again similar to Serbo-Croatian (examples 2.8 and 2.9).

Part 3: Concluding remarks

As seen in Section 1, French has full pronominal clitics. They are always in this form, except for the case when phonological rules apply – however this is regarded as a separate process occurring independently from their structure as clitics. The dative and accusative forms are the same except for 1st and 2nd person singular. In turn, there are two different forms for each one of these persons: one used in the event that the clitic precedes the verb and the other when it follows it. French pronominals occur before the auxiliary and after the modal verb (if these are present in the sentence).

In contrast, Section 2 shows that Serbo-Croatian has entirely distinctive forms for accusative and dative case. Furthermore, it has full and non-full forms for all cases, excepting the nominative case. There are some restrictions on the usage of these forms. The full forms are always used when the clitics occur after prepositions or when there is no room for them. Non-full pronominal clitics are enclitics in Serbo-Croatian. If a sentence starts with a clitic, the full form has to be used, as the non-full form has nothing to attach to. Due to its free order, Serbo-Croatian allows pronominal clitics to appear before (non-full forms used) or after the verb (full form used in this case). They can occur before or after the auxiliary if there is one present and before the modal verb (it still remains to be investigated if they can ever appear after it). Semantically, full clitics are used as opposed to non-full forms, for contrastive purposes. A full pronominal will act as a kind of topicalization marker – attracting attention to itself, rather than other elements in the sentence.

Surprisingly, Romanian cliticization has more in common with Serbo-Croatian clitic structures, than with French ones. It does not have the same dative and accusative forms and furthermore, it does have full and non-full forms. Consecutive vowels are allowed by phonological rules. However, unlike both French and Serbo-Croatian, Romanian has another distinction: accentuated and non-accentuated forms. These are distinct from the other full and non-full forms, and are in fact a kind of subdivision of full forms. These latter forms are used before prepositions, just as in Serbo-Croatian. However, Romanian is different with respect to the fact that non-full forms are not only enclitic, but also inclitic and proclitic. In spite of this difference, there is a similarity regarding the rule of placing full forms where there is no room for non-full ones. Romanian has free order, but it does not allow the movement of pronominal clitics in various positions throughout the sentence (e.g., before or after the verb). Romanian pronominals occur before the auxiliary if there is one present (this is similar to French and different from Serbo-Croatian, which allows free movement around the auxiliary) and before the modal (in contrast to French, but similar to Serbo-Croatian). From the point of view of semantics, full clitics are also used for emphasis and contrast in Romanian, in the same way as they are in Serbo-Croatian.

This analysis shows that in spite of its usual classification, Romanian shares a surprisingly large number of similarities with Slavic linguistic patterns in regard to pronominal clitics. The result poses a number of interesting questions: How could we account for this conclusion? Why should Romanian share features with Slavic languages? Is Romanian really a Romance language, or should it be classified somewhere on a “neutral” ground between Slavic and Romance boundaries? Are there more syntactic, morphologic or phonologic elements that need to be investigated in the light of comparison between Slavic and Romance typologies?

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