

# How Weak Pronouns Become Clitics: Dative *Loro* in Old Italian

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## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

It is a basic tenet of generative approaches to historical syntax that an adequate theory of acquisition should provide a principled explanation to syntactic change. Because a child learning a language has no direct access to his parents' grammar, but only to the language usage which is the output of that grammar, the source of a syntactic change should lie in the trigger experience, and hence be external to grammar itself. Such a view leaves no room for a 'diachronic theory' or 'diachronic principles': whatever historical change is attested should be dealt with in terms of acquisition. On this assumption, language learning and historical syntax become two aspects of the same field of research. Parametric resettings assumed to account for historical change must be learnable; therefore, approaches to diachronic change should be judged against theories of acquisition. Conversely, theories of acquisition should take diachronic change into consideration since the generational consequences of acquisition over large time spans can only be observed in the field of historical linguistics. In this article, the consequences of this view

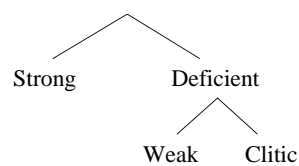
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will be discussed on the basis of a concrete problem: the syntactic status of pronouns, which is seen to vary crosslinguistically and change over time. The problem is the following:

Since Kayne's (1975) seminal work personal pronouns are generally assumed to come in two types: strong and clitic. Later on, a third kind of pronoun has been recognised in the literature: weak ones, introduced in work by Holmberg (1986; 1991). In a more recent study, Cardinaletti & Starke (1999) suggest that personal pronouns be universally classified in terms of the scheme in (1):

(1)



The proposal by Cardinaletti & Starke is built on two dichotomies: first, a distinction between strong and 'deficient' pronouns; second, a further subdivision of deficient pronouns into weak and clitic.

Roberts (1991) holds that there is a universal tendency for pronouns to be diachronically reanalysed in a given order, namely the one stated in (2):

(2) *strong* > *weak* > *clitic*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In addition, Roberts assumes different types of clitic pronouns (following e.g. Rizzi 1986). Here, I will focus on the tripartition illustrated in (1) and set aside the distinction between syntactic and phonological cliticness. Whereas Romance languages generally have syntactic clitics, phonological clitics are attested in several Germanic varieties.

This description appears to be accurate for Romance (e.g. Salvi 1996). ILLE ('he', 'that'), for instance, had strong properties in Latin.<sup>3</sup> The subject *egli/elli* in Mediaeval Italian, derived from ILLE, could be either strong or weak depending on context. Mediaeval *egli/elli* has become *e'* in some modern Italian varieties, where it is a subject clitic. Roughly speaking then, the historical change has gone from strong ILLE to clitic *e'*, through weak *egli*.

The historical change of pronouns from weak to clitic is potentially problematic for a generative theory of language change, as normally conceived (e.g. Lightfoot 1991; 1999). It is not immediately clear what could be a sufficient trigger for a change of the kind illustrated in (2). The present article aims at

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For an overview of the literature on deficient pronouns the reader is referred to Manzini (1998), van Riemsdijk (1999), Hellan & Platzack (1999).

<sup>3</sup> We can safely assume this given that in Classical Latin ILLE is a demonstrative, which eventually takes on the function of a personal pronoun. It is highly plausible, though, that ILLE has partly become a weak pronoun already by the late Latin period (e.g. Grandgent 1914 [1907], 46; Salvi 1996, forthcoming). The switch from strong to clitic in Italian can be illustrated with the following three examples.

- (i) Ed **elli** a me: «Quanto ragion qui vede,/dir ti poss'io... (Dante Com, B300)  
and 'elli' to me: «as far as reason can see/I can tell you = 'and he (said) to me...'
- (ii) **Egli** è ben vero che 'l regno di Cielo senza queste Virtudi non si può conquistare ... (Gmbni LbViz, 28)  
'egli' is true that the reign of heaven without these virtues cannot be won = 'it is true...'

In (i) the subject is necessarily a strong pronoun since it appears in isolation. In (ii) the subject is an expletive, and hence cannot be considered strong for semantic reasons. In (iii), the reduced form *e'* repeated in the second conjunct is an early attestation of what appears to be a subject clitic in Tuscan:

- (iii) ... trentadue navi reali, e molte altre d'incarico o **egli** le prese, o **e'**le sommerse. (Gmbni Stor, 353)  
32 royal ships and many others, either 'egli' lost them or 'e' sank them  
='either he lost them or he sank them'

Subject clitics like the one in (iii) are not frequent in Tuscan texts from the first century.

analysing this problem and providing a plausible solution for it. In section 2, I will first look at the syntactic differences between clitic and weak pronouns. For ease of exposition and reasons of space, I will restrict my discussion to the issue of object pronouns; subject pronouns are left out of the discussion although they are essentially like object pronouns with regard to all the relevant syntactic criteria. In 3, it will be explained in what way the diachronic empirical generalisation stated in (2) is problematic for generative grammar; then, a solution will be outlined which in principle can handle this problem. In section 4, I will give an argument in favour of my approach, based on an actual case of pronominal change attested in Mediaeval Italian texts: the development of dative *loro* in south Tuscan. In 5, finally, I will argue that language-internal factors, such as economy conditions, are insufficient to account for the diachronic development but that an adequate theory of syntactic change ultimately has to make reference to external triggers.

## **2 Weak and clitic pronouns**

As for object pronouns, the distinction between Germanic and Romance is clear: by and large, Germanic has weak object pronouns, Romance has clitic ones. One obvious exception to this generalisation will be discussed in section 4.

The syntactic criteria usually referred to for distinguishing between strong and clitic pronouns are well known (Kayne 1975). Weak pronouns and clitics share several of the relevant properties: in particular, they may not be focused, modified or conjoined, and they cannot appear in isolation. At the same time, there are some differences in distribution between weak

and clitic pronouns, listed below under **2.1-2.5**:

**2.1.** In Romance, clitics are immediately pre- or postverbal depending on the form of the verb. Normally (as in Italian and Spanish), the finite-nonfinite distinction is decisive, in the sense that clitics precede the finite verb and follow the nonfinite verb, like *gli* ‘to him’, in Modern Italian (3)-(4):<sup>4</sup>

- (3) **Gli** darò il libro.  
*him (I) will give the book*
- (4) Dand**gli** il libro ...  
*giving him the book*

In English, a weak dative pronoun such as *them* in (5)-(6) is always postverbal:

- (5) I gave **them** the book.
- (6) I want to give **them** the book.

Crucially, the distribution of weak pronouns is not directly related to verb form.<sup>5</sup>

**2.2.** A clitic may be separated from its host only by another clitic. Dative *gli* can be separated from the verb by clitic *lo* ‘it’ (8), not by an adverb (7):

- (7) \***Gli** forse parlo.

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<sup>4</sup> The criterion is not always finiteness: in French, for instance, clitics generally precede the verb except for the imperative. Furthermore, in Old Romance and Modern Portuguese, the picture is slightly more complex because of the general ban on clitics in sentence initial position (Mussafia 1983 [1886] for more recent references, Salvi 1990; Benincà 1995, among others).

<sup>5</sup> In Germanic, on the other hand, there are crosslinguistic variations having to do with the SOV/SVO distinction (irrelevant here); in all Germanic SVO languages, weak pronouns are postverbal, as in English.

- him maybe (I) speak*
- (8) **Glielo** do.
- him-it (I) give*

In Germanic, there is no general ban on separating weak pronouns from the verb. Thus, a weak dative object may be separated from the finite verb in a Scandinavian language such as Swedish, (9):<sup>6</sup>

- (9) Jag gav gärna **honom** boken.
- I gave readily him the book*

The separating element is preferably an adverb or negation; it is impossible, however, to insert the direct object between the verb and the weak dative.

**2.3.** Clitic pronouns are known to appear in clusters, whereas weak pronouns generally do not. In the Swedish sentence (10), there are two object pronouns:

- (10) Johan ger **mig den** inte.
- John gives me it not* ‘John doesn’t give it to me’

The two pronouns are readily separated by an adverb such as *förmodligen* ‘probably’:

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<sup>6</sup> The reason for why *them* in (5)-(6) needs to be adjacent to the verb has nothing to do with the character of the pronoun *them* itself. Instead, it is due to the fact that in English the verb stays in situ, while elsewhere in Germanic the finite verb of a main clause is raised to higher positions. The requirement on clitic-verb adjacency in Romance is totally different in nature. Certain very light adverbs (such as French *bien* or Italian *pure*) may intervene, in particular in written (not modern) French and Italian (Rohlf's 1968 [1949], § 986; Kayne 1991; Benincà & Cinque 1993, 2324-2325). On the other hand, Rivero (1992, 244) shows that Old Spanish pronominal objects could be separated from their hosts by XP elements. She argues that such pronouns in Old Spanish were phrasal, which in our terms means that they then had weak properties rather than clitic ones.

- (11) Johan ger **mig** förmodligen **den** inte.  
*John gives me probably it not*

Since the weak pronouns *mig* and *den* may be separated by full constituents, they cannot be adjoined to the same head.

**2.4.** A clitic may not be the object of two coordinated verbs:

- (12) \*Vorrei comprare\_ e leggerlo.  
*I want to buy \_ and read it*

This is possible for a weak pronoun:

- (13) Jag vill köpa\_ och läsa **den**.  
*I want to buy \_ and read it*

Hence, when coordinated, weak pronouns and clitics behave alike; yet, they differ in their ability to be objects (or subjects) of coordinated verbs.

**2.5.** A final, curious difference between weak pronouns and clitics is that the former generally have the same phonological form as their strong counterparts; that is, weak and strong pronouns are morphophonologically identical: *ME-me*, *HIM-him*, etc. In contrast, clitic pronouns are generally seen to be phonologically different, reduced or somehow ‘smaller’ as compared to the other forms, as in the Italian paradigm of object pronouns: *ME-mi/m*’, *TE-ti/t*’, *LUI-lo/l*’, *LEI-la/l*’, *NOI-ci/c*’, *VOI-vi/v*’, *LORO-li*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Only clitic pronouns undergo elision when the following word begins with a vowel. Note that the strong and the clitic form do not always have the same historical origin.



The driving force behind parametric resetting and historical change, then, lies in usage. Applying this to the case of a change in pronominal status, in particular the switch from weak to clitic, theoretically interesting problems arise which call for explanation. They can be summarised in two major points:

First, the child's grammar is set on a trigger experience based on his or her parents' output. Thus, although G1, the adult grammar, has weak pronouns, something in the adults' productions makes it possible for their children to reinterpret weak pronouns as clitic ones. It is not obvious a priori what could be a sufficient trigger for a syntactic change of that kind. Crucially, the most evident syntactic restrictions on deficient pronouns (their inability to be focused, modified, conjoined or to appear in isolation) hold for weak and clitic pronouns alike. If a given pronoun is indeed weak in the adult grammar, it may be separated from the verb by adverbs as in (9) above, or from other pronouns as in (11); how, then, can the child reanalyse such a pronoun as clitic, reaching the conclusion that it has to be strictly adjacent to the verb and cluster with other pronouns? Likewise, if the pronoun is weak it is possible for it to be the object of two coordinated main verbs as in (13). In order to reanalyse it as clitic, however, the child must reach the conclusion that such a conjunction is impossible. In brief, the historical switch from weak to clitic must be attributed to some kind of trigger, and given that negative evidence is not available it is not obvious what kind of trigger this could be.

The second problem has to do with the fact that the aforementioned pronominal switch, as we know it from Romance, is unidirectional and irreversible. There are strong pronouns which over time become clitic, but there is no known ex-

ample of a clitic becoming strong. The historical change, thus, always goes in one and the same direction; once completed, it is not ‘undone’ by some diachronic process bringing things back to the original status. The universal validity of this, however, is a matter open for discussion. As convincingly argued by e.g. Newmeyer (1998, 263-275), there are several cases among natural languages of grammaticalisation processes being inverted. It would probably be wrong to invoke universal properties of language or language change to explain the unidirectionality in the case of change in pronoun status in Romance. It does not seem promising to look for any principled reason as to why an element with clitic status in G1 could not acquire ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ properties in G2. Rather, the reason for irreversability must lie in the nature of the input, in language usage, or somehow be external to syntax.

In the following, I will hypothesise that the key to understanding lies in what was listed as the fifth difference between clitics and weak pronouns: the change in pronoun status usually implies that the element whose grammatical status is being altered, is phonetically reduced. This is a rather well-known correlation for which there has been no principled explanation until quite recently. If it is the case that clitic pronouns are phonetically reduced as compared to weak ones (whereas, generally speaking, weak and strong pronouns are morphophonologically identical), this is quite a coincidence on a traditional generative view.

Following Cardinaletti & Starke (1999) (henceforth C&S), I assume there are more principled reasons behind such correlations between phonetic form and syntactic status of a pronoun. C&S take the view that the DP projected by the noun is struc-

turally strictly parallel to the CP projected by the verb: the lexical projection, be it N or V, is immediately selected by a functional category IP, in turn a complement of a higher functional projection P (also cf. Laka 1990):

(14) [ C<sub>L</sub>P [ L<sub>P</sub> [ I<sub>L</sub>P [ LP ] ] ] ]

In (14), L(exical) can be V or N. Depending on whether L is nominal or verbal, the highest projection of (14) is equivalent to CP or DP. C&S assume that the difference between pronominal categories is properly explained as a difference in structure: a strong pronoun is like a referential DP, and thus has the full structure illustrated in (15); a weak pronoun lacks the highest level, the Determiner (16); the clitic pronoun, finally, comprehends merely the lowest projection (17):

(15) Strong pronoun (=DP): [ C<sub>L</sub>P [ L<sub>P</sub> [ I<sub>L</sub>P [ LP ] ] ] ]

(16) Weak pronoun: [ L<sub>P</sub> [ I<sub>L</sub>P [ LP ] ] ]

(17) Clitic pronoun: [ I<sub>L</sub>P [ LP ] ]

The crucial difference between weak and clitic pronouns is structural and consists of the presence vs absence of P. C&S assume that P has to do with ‘prosody-related features’ of the lexical category among other things, and that clitic pronouns are phonetically reduced because of the lack of this piece of structure: crucially, clitics are ‘smaller’ because there is less structure to be spelled out.

From a learnability viewpoint, this analysis must be highly advantageous. The phonological make-up of a pronoun be-

comes a decisive trigger: if the child is exposed to pronominal forms of various lengths, say (in a given variety of Romance) *ella* along with *la* in the same grammatical function, then the child has positive evidence for the assumption that *la* is a clitic. Therefore, phonetic reduction of the pronoun would by itself suffice as an explanation for why the language learner reanalyses weak pronouns as clitics. The differences stated in 2.1.-2.4. will follow. At the same time, alternation between two forms (input ambiguous between *ella* and *la* in our example) will not necessarily lead the child to this kind of conclusion. Whether reanalysis actually takes place is likely to depend on frequency in the input; if the evidence for *la* is solid enough, the conclusion may be reached and the switch from weak to clitic will take place. If occurrences of *la* are sporadic, a syntactic reanalysis does not need to take place.

The driving force behind the historical reduction of pronouns, then, lies in phonology: general phonological processes such as truncation may account for why a weak pronoun in a given grammar may be reanalysed as clitic in the grammar of a subsequent generation. Thus, a plausible answer has been given to the problem of unidirectionality. Whereas language use provides a natural (and fairly frequent) trigger that may induce reanalysis of weak pronouns, turning them into clitics, it will be more difficult to find a cue for the opposite conclusion: only processes of, say, phonological lengthening or doubling would make the language learner reanalyse a clitic as a weak pronoun. Such evidence could exist in principle, but the development from Latin to Mediaeval Romance happens to be characterised by a massive loss of phonetic material in final positions. Diachronic development, then, will be irreversible not because the

syntactic change itself is so in principle, but because the kind of trigger that governs the process is mostly of one kind.<sup>8</sup>

We have thus arrived at an explanation of change in pronoun status which gives a theoretically satisfying answer as to how the switch from weak to clitic comes about. Are there any decisive empirical arguments in favour of this view? One problem is that the crucial switch from weak to clitic is beyond reach: generally speaking, it took place at some point between Classical Latin and Mediaeval Romance, a period without texts to be investigated.

In the history of Italian, though, there is one candidate for such a study, namely dative *loro* ‘to-them’, which during the 13th and 14th centuries underwent changes that corroborate our hypothesis in an interesting way. Section 4 will be dedicated to this particular case of change in pronoun status.

#### **4 Dative *loro* in Old Tuscan**

It has been shown that dative *loro* has the properties of a weak pronoun in Modern Italian (Cardinaletti 1991; also, Calabrese 1988). For instance, like a weak pronoun in English, dative *loro*

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<sup>8</sup> Newmeyer makes a similar point when he discusses the diachronic tendency to affixation in terms of less effort: «Less effort is required on the part of the speaker to produce an affix than a full form. Add the element of frequency-caused predictability to the extreme amount of redundancy in grammatical codings, and it is not difficult to see why the quick-and-easy option of affixation is frequently chosen. Other downgradings can readily be interpreted as least-effort effects as well. Functional categories require less coding material - and hence less production effort - than lexical categories.» (Newmeyer 1998, 276) What I am arguing for here is different in principle from Newmeyer’s way of reasoning. It must be pointed out that even if less effort would favour a smaller pronominal form over a bigger one, the systematic syntactic differences holding between clitics and weak pronouns would not follow automatically if there is not some kind of principled link between the length of the pronoun and its syntactic status. As for the idea of economy driven language change, see section 5.

obligatorily appears after the verb, be it finite as in (18) or non-finite as in (19):

- (18) Darò loro il libro.  
*(I) will give (to-)them the book*
- (19) Dando loro il libro, ...  
*giving (to-)them the book*
- (20) \*Loro darò il libro.  
*(to-)them (I) will give the book*
- (21) \*Loro dando il libro, ...  
*(to-)them giving the book*

However, this weak dative use of *loro* is rather archaic in modern language, or quite limited to the written register. It is reminiscent of 13th and 14th century Italian, where *loro* has undoubtedly weak properties and is used in quite a productive fashion. The following examples (22)-(27) are Old Florentine:<sup>9</sup>

- (22) Lo 'mperadore diede **loro** risposta e disse: ...  
*the emperor gave them answer and said ... (An Novl, 122)*

In (22), the dative immediately follows the finite verb. However, the pronoun may actually be separated from the verb by adverbial elements, as can be seen in (23) and (24):

- (23) ... e dirai *così* **loro**: ch'elle non consentano a neuno, ...  
*and (you) will say so **them**: that they do not permit anyone*  
... (An Novl, 211)

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<sup>9</sup> The examples from Old Italian are taken from the TLIO (*Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini*) searched via Italnet.

- (24) ... cominciassi monna Agnesina alle più sfacciate, e  
domandò *prima loro*  
*began Agnesina in an impertinent way, and asked first*  
*them.* (An Novl, 249)

Likewise, dative *loro* does not form a cluster together with clitic pronouns such as *la* and *il* in (25)-(27):

- (25) E com' elli avea aquistata la Sardingna a'Pisani, così **lla**  
rubellò **loro**,  
*and as he had conquered Sardinia for the Pisani, so it (he)*  
*stole them...* (An CrFior, 149)
- (26) E quelli **il** raccontò **loro** a motto a motto  
*and he it told them word by word.* (An Novl, 140)
- (27) La giovane tra con parole e con atti **il** mostrò **loro**;  
*the young woman with words and with gestures it showed*  
*them.* (Bocc Dec, 254)

Note that in the 13th century when Italian becomes a written language, practically all other object pronouns are clitic.<sup>10</sup>

In some Old Italian central varieties, above all in the town of Siena, a pronominal form *lo'* emerged, apparently a truncated form of *loro*:

- (28) Allora **lo'** donò una pietra di grossezza d'una nocella, ...  
*'then them (he) gave a stone big as a hazel-nut'*  
(An FatCes, Page 118) 1291-1300

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<sup>10</sup> Apart from *loro*, dative *lui* 'to him' maintains some weak properties in the texts from the 13th century. Dative *lui*, however, is much less frequent in this use and does not survive in the modern literary language.

The diachronic process that changes a pronoun from weak to clitic may be studied for exactly this case. Dative *lo* is essentially the only Italian object pronoun which turned into a clitic during a relatively late period. Unlike the others, its development is thus late enough to be traced in written texts.

In the following, it will be argued (a) that the form *lo*' in 14th century Senese was a clitic, and not a weak pronoun, (b) that *lo*' at an initial stage, corresponding roughly to the 13th century, was in a rather free variation with *loro*. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 are dedicated to these issues. The implications of this will be discussed under 5.<sup>11 12</sup>

#### 4.1. Evidence for the clitic status of *lo*' in the 14th century Senese

4.1.1. The first argument in favour of a clitic analysis of *lo*' comes from word order. The pronoun *lo*' typically appears before the finite verb:

(29) Spesse volte l'aspra tempesta del mare **lo**' diede impedimento,  
*many times the hard tempest on the sea **them** gave hindrance*  
(CmpMUg EnVirvol, 40; a 1340)

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<sup>11</sup> The data are the results of an electronic search, based on the corpus of the *Opera del Vocabolario Italiano* (OVI). *Lo*' occurs 716 times in 59 prose texts, and to these another 49 cases can be added from 12 poetry texts. In sum, the material consists of 765 occurrences of *lo*' in a total of 71 texts.

<sup>12</sup> The truncation of *loro* to *lo*' has been noted and discussed by several scholars, going back to Salvioni (1899, 196); Castellani (1952, 44; 1956, 29-30; 2000, 350, 357-358, 362); Rohlfs (1968 [1949], §§ 463-464); Della Valle (1982, 224-225); Aurigemma (1988, 97); Renzi (1998, 23).

- (30) ... el priore **lo'** faccia pagare per uno, secondo la sua  
disc[r]etione  
*and the prior **them** made pay for each, according to his  
judgment* (StCapComSD, 150; 1341-1348)
- (31) Però che senza spirituale intenzione nulla **lo'** varrebbe.  
*because without the intention of the spirit nothing **them**  
(it) would be worth* (CatSie LbDD, 348; 1378)
- (32) ... unde egli non vuole che **lo'** sia impedito questo lume ...  
*therefore he does not want that **them** is blocked this light*  
(CatSie LbDD, 375; 1378)

When the predicate is an infinitive (33)-(34), a past participle (35)-(36), an imperative (37)-(38), or a gerund (39)-(40), the verb is followed by *lo'*:

- (33) ... et dar **lo'** quella parte di quello che dinuntiaranno  
ch'esso credarà convenirsi...  
*and give **them** the share of what they claim that he finds  
suitable* (StArSp1, 29; 1357-1372)
- (34) ...e tosto andossen, senza far **lo'** motto, ...  
*and soon he went away without making **them** a word*  
(NrPgl LegSG, 132; 1351-1400)
- (35) et fatto **lo'** l'embasciate vostre, (...) ci risposero e conse-  
gliaro.  
*and made-**them** your embassies they answered us and  
gave us advice* (DocLetAmb, Page 152; 1367)
- (36) Perché la clemenzia mia dello Spirito santo, (...) dato **lo'**  
da me per la mia bontá, ...  
*because my mercy of the Holy Gost, given-**them** by me for  
my goodness* (CatSie LbDD, Page 323; 1378)

- (37) ... e di **lo'** che tengano più caro Cristo, ...  
*and say **them** that they hold Christ more dear*  
 (GvnCmpl Let, Page 194; 1367)
- (38) Dona **lo'** dunque il pane della vita, ...  
*give **them** thus the bread of life*  
 (CatSie LbDD, Page 300; 1378)
- (39) e sempre avendo **lo'** compassione, e pregare Dio per  
 loro...  
*and always having **them** compassion, and pray God for  
 them* (GvnCmpl Let, 249; 1367)
- (40) ... per confortare il popolo con le profezie, dando **lo'**  
 speranza che la mia Verità, ...  
*in order to comfort the people with prophecies giving  
**them** hope that my Truth ...* (CatSie LbDD, 309; 1378)

Thus, *lo'* had the distribution of a clitic pronoun: in Old Senese, the placement of *lo'* is perfectly analogous with that of a clitic such as *gli* 'to-him' in Modern Italian.

Exceptions to this generalisation appear in a systematic fashion, and turn out to corroborate the hypothesis. They are of the kind illustrated in (41) and (42):

- (41) E'Fiorentini furo sconfitti alla porta a Chamolia (...) e fu  
**lo'** tolta Martinella.  
*and the Florentines were defeated at the gate of Chamolia  
 and was **them** taken Martinella* (An CrSen02, 49; 1362)
- (42) Iddio **lo'** dia più conoscimento che non ànno; ò **lo'**scritto,  
 non so se mi scivaranno.  
*God **them** gives more knowledge than they have; (I) have  
**them** written, I do not know if they will write to me*  
 (GvnCmpl Let, 163; 1367)

These cases may be subsumed under a well-known generalisation (Mussafia 1983 [1886]), according to which a clitic pronoun cannot introduce a main clause. In this regard, *lo'* behaves like a clitic pronoun as well.

**4.1.2.** The distribution of *lo'* in relation to negation *non* is of course of interest. Clitic object pronouns in Modern Italian are placed between the negation and the verb. The negation in Italian is itself a clitic element (Belletti 1990, among others), and in the normal case at least, a clitic can be separated from its host only by another clitic (cf (7)-(8) above):

- (43) \*Non forse leggo.  
*not maybe (I) read*
- (44) Non lo leggo.  
*not it-(I)-read*

In a negated sentence, the only position where we find preverbal *lo'* in Old Senese is between the negation and the verb:

- (45) ... se voi in prima *no lo'* deste quello che dimandaro.  
*if you first not them give what they ask*  
(GucSan LetGoS, 76)
- (46) ... mandono più e più volte enbasciate al papa e mai *no lo'*  
volsse dare udienza.  
*(they) sent many times embassies to the pope and never*  
*(he) not them wanted to give audience*  
(An CrSen02, 70)

- (47) ... uno odor lieve/escia sù grande, c'a que', di que'siti,/a  
 sostener **non lo'** pareva griève, ...  
*a scent/came out so big that for them, in those places/to  
 endure not **them** seemed difficult* (NrPgl LegSG, 187)
- (48) ... **non lo'** venne mai meno la sustanzia temporale ...  
*not **them** lacked ever the temporal substance*  
 (CatSie LbDD, 373)

This circumstance, too, is a clear indication of the clitic status of *lo'* in Old Senese.

**4.1.3.** The third argument has to do with the distribution of *lo'* in relation to other clitics. Unlike *loro* in Old Florentine, *lo'* in Old Senese formed clusters with other pronominal elements. The sequence 'to-them - it' (dative-accusative) is generally realised as *lo' 'l*, witness (49)-(52):

- (49)... e conosco che mala volontà che ànno verso di me **lo'** ...  
**lo** fa fare.  
*and I know that bad feelings that they have towards me  
**them it** make do '... make them do it'*  
 (GonSan LetGoS, 91; first half of 14th century)
- (50) ... e'Parmigiani **lo'** 'l fecero sapere el dì che volevano  
 assaltare al chanpo ...  
*the Parmigiani **them it** let know the day when they wanted  
 to assault the camp* (An CrSen02, 53; 1362)
- (51) E 'l filosafo savio disse a quelli/che volentier sù **lo'** 'l vorrà  
 insegnare;  
*the wise philosopher told them that willingly **them it** (he)  
 would like to teach* (NrPgl LegSG, 21; 1351-1400)

- (52) Sai chi **lo'** 'l dimostra che l'amore loro è imperfetto?  
*do you know who **them it** shows that their love is imperfect*  
 (CatSie LbDD, 110; 1378)

In all of (49)-(52), we have the order *dative-accusative*, which is the normal pattern in modern Italian. Other clusters found are *me + lo'*, (53), *ci + lo'*, (54), partitive/genitive *ne + lo'*, (55)-(56):

- (53) Cristo mai non **me lo'** parta dall'anima.  
*Christ never not **me them** take away from the soul* 'May Christ never make them forget me' (GvnCmpl Let, 105)
- (54) Faccian**ci lo'** dinanzi voluntarosamente all' onda, ...  
*Let (us) make **us them** in front of bravely on the wave,...*  
 'Let us block their way...' (CmpMUg EnVirvol, 330)
- (55) anzi che Dio **ne lo'** renda guidardone e ch'elli li sentenzi.  
*that God **for-this them** gives reward and that he judges them*  
 'that God rewards them for this...' (An CoMoAnSZ, 64)
- (56) ... stando nella carcere del corpo, **ne lo'** pare essere di fuore  
*staying in the prison of the body, '**ne' them** (it) seems to be out*  
 '... it seems to them to be outside of it'  
 (CatSie LbDD, 336)

The relative ordering of elements within these clusters shows basically no variation; thus, dative *lo'* precedes the accusative *lo* as in (49)-(52), *mi* and *ci* precede *lo'*, as in (53)-(54), and the cluster *ne lo'* invariably appears in that order, as one would expect if these are indeed clitic clusters. As for *si*, there is at

least a tendency for *lo'* to precede impersonal *si*, as in (57)-(58), but to follow reflexive *si*, as in (59)-(60):

- (57) Che ciascuno frate d'andare a servire a li infermi, al suono de la campanella, quando **lo' se** porta mangiare.  
*That each friar should go and serve the invalids, at the sound of the bell, when **them 'se'** brings to eat*  
'when food should be brought to them' (StVolSpSMV, 7)
- (58)... e se ce fossero sacerdoti o vero cavaliere e giudice sì **lo' se** degga fare onore.  
*and if there were priests or real knights and judges then **them 'se'** should make honour*  
'one must honour them' (StCostDis, 12)
- (59) ... Simone nostro chapitano **se lo'** fece in chontra e favellò chol chapitano di questa gente ...  
*Simone our captain 'se' **them** made forward and spoke with the captain of that people*  
'... went up to them...'  
(An CrSen02, 132)
- (60) ... e quando da loro ci partimmo parve che 'l cuore **se lo'** schiantasse ...  
*and when from them we departed it seemed as if the heart 'se' **them** broke*  
'as if their heart broke' (GvnCmpl Let, 66)

Although exceptions are found, these data suggest that the orderings *lo' si* and *se lo'* depended on different functions of *si*, and the predominant ordering appears to have been reflexive *si* > dative *lo'* > impersonal *si*. This kind of distinction, too, is quite a well-known pattern of modern Italian, where we have the ordering reflexive *si* > accusative *lo* > impersonal *si*.

**4.1.4.** In poetic contexts we find evidence of a slightly different sort. From rhyme patterns we may deduce how the unit verb-*lo'* was actually pronounced. Note that in (61), the infinitive + dative *lo'* rhymes with the infinitive + accusative *lo*:

- (61) ... c'umana mente non potrie *soffrirlo*:  
*that a human mind cannot suffer it*  
ciascuna è lieta, quanto esser più ponne,  
*everyone is happy as can be*  
del ben che Iesù fe'di sé *sentir lo'*;  
*for the good that Jesus made feel them* (NcCic Risur, 420)

Judging from the rhyme, the two forms ought to have been homophonous. Consider also (62):

- (62) Iesù Assèr e 'suo chiamò e *fa lo'onore*,  
*Jesus called Asser and his and makes them honour*  
e passaron con lieto *ballo*.  
*and they passed with a merry dance* (NcCic Risur, 394)

In this case, *fa lo'* 'makes to-them' with enclitic dative rhymes with the noun *ballo* 'dance', a fact which suggests that *fa lo'* in Old Senese is pronounced more or less like *fallo!* 'do it!' in Modern Italian.

On the basis of the arguments listed in **4.1.1-4.1.4**, I conclude that *lo'* in 14th century Senese is a lexicalised dative clitic; in other words just like *gli* 'to-him' in modern Italian.

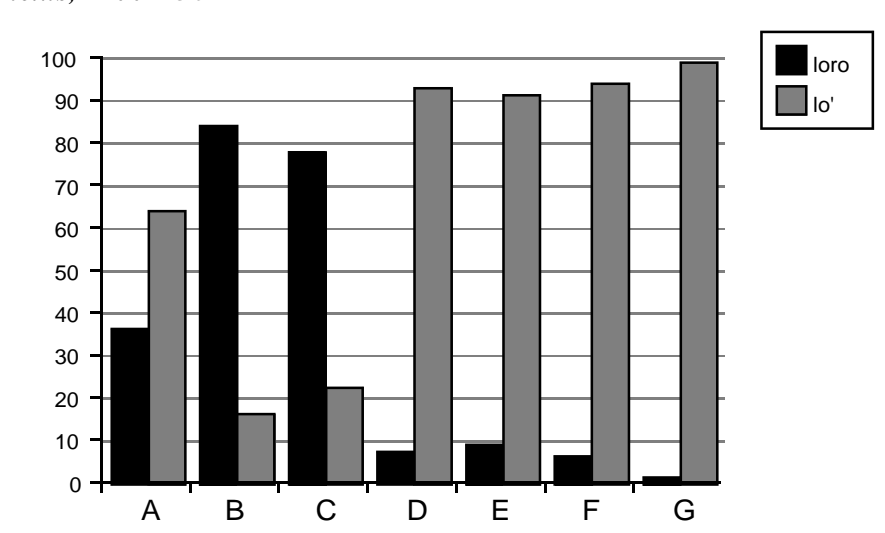
## **4.2. Alternation between *loro* and *lo'***

What needs to be investigated is how this lexicalised form emerges, alternates and competes with the form *loro* for the same grammatical function. Two cases must be considered: the

use of *loro* as a dative, and the use of *lo'* in grammatical functions other than the dative.

**4.2.1.** Already in the earliest period of written Senese, i.e. the late 13th century, *lo'* is used as a dative pronoun along with *loro*. Hence, there is competition between the two forms for the same grammatical function. When studying this alternation over one century, a neat picture emerges: diagram I gives percentages of the two forms for a number of texts, indicated as A-G:<sup>13</sup>

*Diagram I: frequency of loro and lo' in dative contexts in Senese texts, 1277-1362*



<sup>13</sup> In the first decades, these texts are too short to give any reliable indication of the usage. A consists of four smaller texts, covering a period of thirty years, namely DocLbEnUs (1277-1282), DocCtDivCBU (1281-1282), StCoMoArd (1280-1297), An TratVirM (1291-1310); text B is Egidio Romano (1288); text C is An FatCes (1291-1300); text D StUnArtSie (1298); E An ChioSel (1321-1337); F CmpMUg EnVirvol (a. 1340); G An CrSen02 (1362). The reader is referred to the bibliography of ancient texts.

At the beginning, *loro* and *lo'* seem to be in free variation, though in B (1288) and C (1291-1300) *loro* prevails over *lo'*. C and D are practically contemporary, but in D (1298) there appears to be a drastic change. In the 14th century, from E (1321-1337) to G (1362), the grammar settles for *lo'* as a clitic dative, and as a consequence weak dative *loro* disappears.

**4.2.2.** There are some few examples of *lo'* in grammatical functions other than the dative; *lo'* is attested as a possessive pronoun (63)-(65), and as a prepositional complement (66)-(67):

(63) ... et li altri due rimangono et stieno sopra lo **lo'** officio fare.

*and the other two remain and stay upon **their** work make 'and continue to do their work'*

(Gang CstCmSn, A439; 1309-10)

(64) De la elezione de'rectori e del **lo'** officio.

*About the election of the rectors and about **their** office*

(65) ... e ch'e'rectori e kamarlengo vechi siano tenuti e debbiano, compito loro officio, di dare e

*and the old rectors and chamberlains are obliged, ended their office, to give and*

d'arassegnare a'rectori e al camarlengo nuovi tucta la pecunia la quale per lo lore officio fusse remasa

*assign to the new rectors and chamberlains all the money which because of their office was left*

per la decta Università e per cagione del **lo'** officio infra VIII dì.

*for the mentioned university and because of **their** office within eight days*

(StUniArC, 285; 1329)

(66) ... *et siccome per lo' diffinito sarà, cosie si mandi a essecutione.*

*and as by **them** decided it will be, thus it will be carried out*  
(StAMerSen, 122; 1343)

(67) ... *ssi richiamasse d'essi banchieri overo d'alcuno di lo' ...*  
*... they called for these bankers or anyone of **them** ...*

(StAMerSen, 182;1343)

Possessive *lo'* is essentially limited to a fixed expression, *lo' ufficio* 'their office', used in administrative documents; also note that in (65), *lo' ufficio* alternates with *loro officio*. (66)-(67) are the only two examples of *lo'* governed by a preposition. Moreover, all these cases are from texts from the first part of the 14th century; they are not attested in the later texts. This fact supports the assumption that there was a period of a rather free variation between *loro* and *lo'*, though further back in time than we can follow in the Senese texts.

At this point, it is interesting to compare the Senese data with some other varieties of Italian in which *lo'* is sporadically attested. In the Florentine texts, we have a total of eight examples of *lo'* out of which five are dative and three are prepositional complements. From western Tuscany and Liguria, we have only two occurrences of *lo'*, one being a prepositional complement and the other a possessive pronoun. The only example from the Venetian area is a dative. Thus, in other dialectal areas, reduction of *loro* to *lo'* is extremely rare, considering that the period of time covers more than one century. Furthermore, it appears to be random, in the sense that truncation may apply in virtually any context: possessive, dative, or prepositional. In sum, the form *lo'* in Old Italian dialects other than Senese is infrequent and not linked to any

particular grammatical function. With this in mind, we now turn to our final observations considering language change.

## **5 The Reasons for Language Change**

**5.1.** The case of pronominal change from weak to clitic gives support to a widespread assumption concerning language change, advocated within the generative framework by e.g. Lightfoot (1999), i.e. that its causes are external and not internal. It is in fact easy to indicate possible external triggers for the kind of change observed. In a number of Italian varieties in modern as well as ancient times, truncation is a well-known phenomenon. Limitations of space prevent us from going into too much detail, but some striking facts ought to be mentioned.

In mediaeval usage, truncation of certain verbal forms appears to have been fairly frequent. In the Senese texts, a form such as *fe* is ambiguous between *fede* 'faith' and *fece* 'he did'; *vo*, which in regional style usually appears as a reduced form of *vado* 'I go', could also have the meaning of *voglio* 'I want' in Siena. As for the work of St. Catherine, Aurigemma (1988) mentions the fact that the 1st person singular of the verb *essere* 'to be' is frequently truncated to *so* instead of *sono*, which is typical of Florentine and hence for the standard usage in Modern Italian.

A general tendency of writers and copyists to adapt their local tongue to regional Tuscan may sometimes have caused the elimination of these dialectal features in the manuscripts. However, in a 16th-century Senese novelistic text, which to some extent simulates spoken language, a certain number of truncated forms are found which set this variety apart from Florentine. Thus, we have frequent truncation of adjectives such

as *simi*' for *simile* 'similar' and *piacevo*' for *piacevole* 'pleasant', nouns like *mari*' for *mariti* 'husbands', as well as the interrogative *co*' for *come* 'how'.<sup>14</sup> These truncated forms normally have no syntactic effect at all: they do not result in any kind of language change. By chance, however, truncation of the pronominal form *lo(ro)* had a syntactic consequence; at some point of development it became frequent enough to trigger a syntactic 'reanalysis' with the consequence that a clitic form emerged and replaced the old weak one.

This view of historical change as being slightly accidental contrasts with the idea that language may change for internal reasons. Now the concept of 'internal reasons' in this connection could be interpreted in two ways: either we actually assume some kind of diachronic economy conditions to explain the data, or we assume that the change is attributable to economy principles guiding acquisition, a claim which would need to be independently motivated with data from child language. The second of these intuitions might be viable in a generative framework, depending on how it is carried out. The first one should be rejected. In the following two paragraphs I will consider them in turn.

**5.2.** The problems for a 'Diachronic Economy approach' are numerous (for a general discussion, see Lightfoot 1991; 1999). First and foremost, the claim that diachronic change generally leads towards more economical grammars is dubious in itself. Second, if any principle of economy is diachronic, we have a

<sup>14</sup> The examples are from Pietro Fortini, *Le giornate delle novelle dei novizi*. A cura di Adriana Mauriello, Salerno, Rome 1988. The numerous cases of truncation are mostly found in dialogues and not in the narrative text, a fact of some significance, given that novel writers of that time were quite sensitive to the characteristics of spoken style, which they deliberately imitated in their writings.

serious problem explaining why the principle in question only enters into play in certain moments of history and in certain languages. Germanic weak pronouns have mostly resisted diachronic reanalysis, remaining weak for the entire period that can be followed in written sources. It is not clear why a principle of economy would remain diachronically inoperative for centuries. Third, an economy principle fails to shed light on the more fine-grained dialectal variation which is relevant for the present case: it is far from obvious why diachronic reanalysis of *loro* would take place in Siena and not in Florence or any other dialectal area of Italian, if it were caused by a universal principle of economy, especially since all other object pronouns in Florentine as well as Senese were clitics during the relevant period of time.

**5.3.** The idea to look for the reasons for diachronic change in some kind of economy conditions on acquisition is more interesting and deserves more attention. It has been frequently suggested that children acquiring their L1 are guided by original hypotheses of economy, e.g. Platzack's Initial Hypothesis of Syntax (1994, 64), or Rizzi's Principle of Structural Economy (1998, 33). Cardinaletti & Starke's Minimise Structure (1999) could also be advanced as an acquisitional strategy, although this is not explicitly claimed by the authors. These approaches are compatible with the observation that children acquiring the pronominal systems of Romance easily identify cliticness: both deficient objects (generally in Romance) and deficient subjects (in French) display clitic properties from the moment they appear in child language, and are treated in a targetlike fashion (Meisel 1990; Kaiser 1994; Cardinaletti & Starke 2000). Of particular interest is the somewhat ambiguous status of French

deficient subjects: in standard grammar these are usually ascribed some weak properties. However, it has been observed that children from the outset generally treat them as clitics; for instance, in early child language there is a strong tendency to double DP subjects with a deficient pronoun, a property which is subsequently ‘corrected’ by the children, but only at a later stage of acquisition (e. g. Jisa 2000).

Furthermore, Granfeldt & Schlyter (in press) attest some tendency among Swedish monolingual children to treat Swedish deficient pronouns as clitics at an early stage, hence, in a non targetlike fashion. The tendency is observed to hold for subjects and, according to the authors, needs to be further corroborated.

If the research in the field is on the right track, it has interesting implications for the issue at hand: there may be a general tendency in child language to prefer clitics over weak pronouns, regardless of whether pronouns in the target language are weak or clitic. If this is true, weak pronouns would be in danger of being reanalysed as clitics for each new generation of learners. In fact, if deficient pronouns in child language are clitics by default (by virtue of some principle such as Minimise Structure), then children will reach the conclusion that pronouns are weak only if there is positive evidence available in favour of such a conclusion. But again, the positive evidence in question will have to be of a phonological kind: the phonological make-up of pronominal forms is likely to be the only feature evident enough to offer a substantial trigger. Therefore, a discussion along these lines still ends up with the same kind of conclusion, namely that the decisive factor behind the acquisition of pronominal systems and the relevant diachronic changes, lies in the input. Also, recall that there is no actual ground for the

claim that weak pronominal systems should be diachronically unstable, as we have already said.

**5.4.** In sum, in a theory which looks for the reasons behind syntactic change in language-internal economy conditions, language change is law-bound, driven almost by necessity. A theory which ascribes the change exclusively to usage is more likely to capture what we actually observe, namely that change happens in a non-predictable, rather accidental fashion. It may very well be that some of the truncation processes we mentioned above were more frequent in the Senese area than in the nearby area of Florentine. For present purposes, this can remain an open question. The crucial point is that truncation is not a phenomenon unique for Senese: it is attested extensively among Italian dialects, but only in Senese it ended up having the syntactic consequences it did. An explanation in terms of an external trigger, basically of a phonological or morphological kind, which may provoke a change of syntax but does not have to, seems to be superior to a theory-internal alternative.

## **6 Conclusions**

The diachronic reanalysis which changes weak pronouns into clitics may find a natural explanation within a generative approach to language change, if it is assumed that the trigger for such a change lies in phonology. For such an explanation to work, it is necessary to assume a tight link between the phonological make-up of pronouns and their syntactic status, along the lines of Cardinaletti & Starke (1999). The case of dative object *loro* of the Old Italian variety of Siena supports this view. At the same time, it casts doubts on a possible

alternative based on language-internal factors for the change, such as diachronic economy conditions. Arguably, an approach in terms of external triggering is theoretically and empirically preferable. Whatever role L1 learning strategies play in the diachronic change remains an open question.

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- An Novl**, Anonimo, Novellino (II), 1281/1300 (a c. di G. Favati,  
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- Bocc Dec**, Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron, 1370 (a c. di Vittore  
Branca, Firenze, Acc. della Crusca, 1976)
- Dante Com**, Dante Alighieri, Commedia , a. 1321 (in D. A., La  
Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata, a cura di G. Petrocchi, vol.  
II Inferno, vol. III Purgatorio, vol. IV Paradiso, Mondadori,  
Verona 1966-67)
- Gmbni LbViz**, Bono Giamboni, Il Libro de' Vizî e delle Virtudi ,  
a. 1292 (in Il Libro de' Vizî e delle Virtudi e Il Trattato di Virtù  
e Vizî, a c. di C. Segre, Einaudi, Torino 1968, pp. 3-120)
- Gmbni Stor**, Bono Giamboni, Delle Storie contra i Pagani di  
Paolo  
Orosio libri VII, 1292 (a c. di Francesco Tassi, Firenze,  
Baracchi, 1849.)

#### *Senese*

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