

Non-verbal predicate proforms: Category, case and ϕ -feature concord

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How to cite: Den Dikken, Marcel. 2025. Non-verbal predicate proforms: Category, case and ϕ -feature concord. RLLT 26, eds. Pilar Barbosa, Cristina Flores, Esther Rinke, Eva-Maria Roessler. Special Issue of *Isogloss*. *Open Journal of Romance Linguistics* 11(7)/13,1–12.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/isogloss.568>

Abstract

Throughout the Romance languages, a definite clitic serving as a pro-predicate for an adjectival or indefinite nominal predicate is insensitive to the category and ϕ -features of its antecedent and local subject, resisting concord. This is remarkable in light of the obligatory ϕ -feature concord with its antecedent when the clitic serves as an argument, and the robustness of ϕ -feature concord between a [+N] full predicate and its subject in Romance. In this short paper, Déchaine & Wiltschko's (2002) analysis of French *le* will be amended for Romance pro-predicate definite clitics, which will be shown to be best treated as pro-N rather than pro- ϕ elements. The Romance data are analysed here against the background of the properties of predicate proforms in Hungarian.

Keywords: predicate proform, category, case, ϕ -feature concord.

1. English predicate proforms

In order to provide a baseline for the discussion of Romance and Hungarian predicate proforms that is at the core of this paper, I will start with a brief note about English predicate pronominalisation. English uses *so* (which, in finite copular sentences, is typically fronted via predicate inversion) or *the same* as a stand-in for predicates, as in (1a) and (1b), respectively. Using the pronoun *it* or the demonstrative *that* would be much less natural here. (It is also possible to elide the predicate instead of replacing it

with a proform: *your daughters will be, too*). But since this paper is about predicate proforms rather than predicate ellipsis, I will set this aside.)

- (1) a. you are beautiful/a teacher; *so* will be your daughters
 b. you are beautiful/a teacher; your daughters will be
 {*the same*/**it, too*?/that, too}

2. Hungarian predicate proforms

Hungarian, by contrast, uses as its predicate replacement precisely the definite proform *az*, which corresponds to the English pronoun *it* and to the distal demonstrative *that*:

- (2) Hungarian
 gyönyörű/oktató vagy;
 beautiful/teacher you.are
 a lányaid is *az-ok*/**az*/**úgy*/**ugyanaz(ok)* lesznek
 the daughter.PL.2SG also it-PL/ it/ so/ same(PL) will.be.3PL
 ‘you_{SG} are beautiful/a teacher; your daughters will be, too’

What (2) also illustrates is that *az* ‘it/that’ must show number concord when it is case-concordial with its antecedent: as a reflex of the fact that the subject of the second conjunct is plural, *az* in (2) must host the plural marker *-k* (accompanied by the epenthetic vowel *o*; in front-harmonising contexts, this vowel is *e*: see (2’)).

Number concord is strongly dispreferred when the pro-predicate differs from its antecedent in case. In (3), the predicate occurs in an agreeing infinitive (*lenni-ük*, where *-ük* is the third person plural marker agreeing with the silent subject of the infinitive), and must be dative-marked (*-nak*), while its antecedent (*drágák*) is in the (unmarked) nominative. Here, singular *annak* is much better than plural *azoknak*.

- (3) Hungarian
 az élelmiszerek nagyon drágák,
 the groceries (are) very expensive-PL
 de nem kell *an-nak*/?*az-ok-nak* lenni-ük
 but not need it-DAT/ it-PL-DAT to.be-3PL
 ‘groceries are very expensive, but they don’t need to be’

The number concord facts seen in (2) and (3) are not peculiar to predicate proforms: non-proform predicates behave the same way with respect to plural inflection.

- (2’) Hungarian
 gyönyörű/oktató vagy;
 beautiful/teacher you.are
 a lányaid is gyönyörű-*(*ek*)/oktató-*(*k*) lesznek
 the daughter.PL.2SG also beautiful-*(PL) teacher-*(PL) will.be.3PL
 ‘you_{SG} are beautiful/a teacher; your daughters will be beautiful/teachers, too’

- (3') Hungarian
 az élelmiszerek nagyon drágák,
 the groceries (are) very expensive
 de nem kell drágá-(^{??}k)-nak lenni-ük
 but not need expensive-(^{??}PL)-DAT be-3PL
 'groceries are very expensive, but they don't need to be expensive'

I will address the question of why case concord and number concord interact in this way in section 7.

3. Romance predicate proforms

Throughout the Romance language family, definite clitics serve as pro-predicates for an adjectival or indefinite nominal predicate. These clitics are entirely insensitive to the category and ϕ -features of their antecedent and the local subject. Concord for gender and number is strictly impossible. I illustrate this for French in (4), for Italian in (5), for European Portuguese in (6), and for Catalan in (7).

- (4) French
 tu es belle/enseignante;
 you are beautiful.F.SG/teacher.F.SG
 tes filles le/*la/*les seront aussi
 your daughters CL.M.SG/*F.SG/*PL will.be also
- (5) Italian
 tu sei bella/maestra;
 you are beautiful.F.SG/teacher.F.SG
 lo/*la/*le saranno anche le tue figlie
 CL.M.SG/*F.SG/*F.PL will.be also the your daughters
- (6) European Portuguese
 tu és bonita/professora;
 you are beautiful.F.SG/teacher.F.SG
 as tuas filhas sê-lo/*la/*las-ão também
 the your daughters be-CL.M.SG/*F.SG/*PL-will also
- (7) Catalan
 tu ets bonica/mestra;
 you are beautiful.F.SG/teacher.F.SG
 les teves filles també ho/*la/*les/en seran
 the your daughters also CL.M.SG/*F.SG/*PL/INDEF will.be
 all: 'you_{SG} are beautiful/a teacher; your daughters will be, too'

The complete absence of gender and number marking on the predicate proform is remarkable in light of two other facts about the Romance languages. First, Romance definite clitics exhibit obligatory gender and number concord with their antecedent when they serve as arguments: *Louis, je le connais* 'Louis, I CL.M.SG know', *Louise,*

je la connais ‘Louise, I CL.F.SG know’, *les voisins, je les connais* ‘the neighbours, I CL.PL know’ (French; the same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the other Romance languages). Secondly, ϕ -feature concord between a nominal or adjectival predicate and its subject is otherwise very robust in the Romance languages, as we see in the first conjuncts of the examples in (4)–(7), which were constructed with a female referent for the second-person subject pronoun in mind.

Catalan adds two further twists to this picture. Espinal & Giusti (2023) point out that when the predicate is definite, it can be replaced with a ϕ -concordial definite clitic, matching the ϕ -features of its subject. And the predicates in (7) can alternatively be replaced by the partitive/indefinite clitic *en*, as shown. I will come back to these Catalan-specific properties of pro-predicate clitics in section 8.

4. Pronoun typology

There are two prominent proposals regarding pronoun typology on the market in morphosyntactic theory.

The influential proposal by Cardinaletti & Starke (1999) defends a three-way typology of pronouns based on deficiency. Deficiency is recast syntactically in such a way that non-deficient (‘strong’) pronouns are treated as phrasal elements originating in θ -positions, while deficient pronouns are taken to come in two types: weak pronouns are phrasal but do not occupy θ -positions, and clitics are heads in non- θ -positions.

Déchaine & Wiltschko’s (2002) three-way typology of pronouns, by contrast, is rooted in reference and the predicate/ argument dichotomy, also recast syntactically, in terms of size. What they call pro-DPs are referential expressions and can only be arguments. Their pro- ϕ Ps are variables, which can be either arguments or predicates. And pronouns that are no larger than pro-NPs are constants and cannot be arguments.

Cardinaletti & Starke’s (1999) and Déchaine & Wiltschko’s (2002) proposals have different though partially intersecting aims. For Déchaine & Wiltschko, the proposed difference in size between the three pronominal types cross-cuts the distinction between strong, weak and clitic pronouns, as well as agreement. While for Cardinaletti & Starke, strong pronouns are always larger than weak pronouns, which in turn are always larger than clitics, for Déchaine & Wiltschko each of the three (pro)nominal types can in principle be of any plumage; the differences between the three (pro)nominal types postulated by Déchaine & Wiltschko concern their external syntactico-semantic construal, not their deficiency.

Since the discussion in this paper is concerned with the difference between argumental and predicative uses of proforms, the Déchaine & Wiltschko (2002) proposal is more suitable for our purposes here than Cardinaletti & Starke’s (1999) typology. I will therefore cast the ensuing discussion in Déchaine & Wiltschko’s mould, henceforth setting the strong/weak/clitic distinction aside as a tool for answering the questions that this paper’s dataset poses.¹

¹ Another important three-way typology is presented in Roy (2013), which provides a comprehensive analysis of the syntax and semantics of non-verbal predicates. Roy distinguishes between defining, characterizing and situation-descriptive predicates, using the semantic properties of maximality and density as the active ingredients underlying this typology. For Roy, the semantic properties of predicates correlate with their internal syntactic structure. Though in what follows I will not directly avail myself of Roy’s analysis (basing

5. pro-D~pro- ϕ

Romance definite clitics can be used as referential arguments (as in French (8a)) and as pro-predicates (as in the examples given in section 3). They can also serve as bound variables, as is shown in (8b).

- (8) French
- a. je l'aime
I CL.love
'I love him/her'
 - b. chaque homme pense que je l'aime
every man thinks that I CL.love
'every man thinks I love him'

This combination of properties leads Déchaine & Wiltschko (2002) to conclude that French *l*-clitics are not D-elements. For them, the distribution of D is tied to argumenthood and the impossibility of serving as a bound variable. Déchaine & Wiltschko instead treat French definite *l*-clitics as pro- ϕ elements, representing a lower functional domain within the structure of the complex nominal phrase in (9): the ϕ P — a functional domain which is not the privilege of arguments and which allows binding.

- (9) [DP D [ϕ P ϕ [NP N]]]

The conclusion that French *l*-clitics are not D-elements may come as a surprise in light of the fact that *l*-clitics double as definite articles (as in (10)), which are usually treated as exponents of the D-head.

- (10) French
- | | |
|-----------|-------------|
| l'homme | la femme |
| 'the man' | 'the woman' |

Having concluded that pro-predicate *l*-clitics are pro- ϕ , not pro-D, and faced with the morphophonological identity of pro-predicate *l*- and the definite articles, Déchaine & Wiltschko (2002) are thus led to deny that French definite articles are D-heads: they must be heads of ϕ P instead.

Déchaine & Wiltschko show that an advantage of their conclusion that French definite articles are not D-elements is that it provides an immediate understanding of the so-called 'expletive' use of French definite articles: (11) is ambiguous between a referential reading of *le vin* ('the/this wine'), paraphrased in (11*i*), and a generic one ('wine'), paraphrased in (11*ii*).

myself on Déchaine & Wiltschko's typology instead), it seems to me that the proposal advanced in this paper is directly compatible with her outlook on the syntax of predicates and the distribution of the French definite article.

- (11) French
 Jean aime *le* vin
 Jean loves the wine
 (i) ‘Jean loves the wine’
 (ii) ‘Jean loves wine’

The generic reading in (11ii), where *le* does not contribute definiteness, would be difficult to reconcile (on Déchaine & Wiltschko’s assumptions) with an analysis of *le* as a D-filler. It fits in, however, if the French definite article represents ϕ , not D. Déchaine & Wiltschko (2002) thus procure a uniform analysis of *l*-elements in French, treated as ϕ -elements, not D’s.²

Hungarian is not among the languages discussed by Déchaine & Wiltschko (2002). But it actually fits their analysis better than does French. The Hungarian proform *az* is in several ways very much like French *le*: apart its construal as a proform for referential arguments, *az* can be used both as a pro-predicate (as we already saw in (2) and (3)) and as a bound variable (illustrated in (12)); and the definite article *a(z)* also supports a generic reading (as shown in (13)).

- (12) Hungarian
 (mindenki) aki iszik, *az* meghal;
 everyone who drinks that dies
 aki nem, *az* is
 who not that also
 ‘who drinks will die; who doesn’t will, too’
- (13) Hungarian
 János szereti a bort
 János loves the wine
 (i) ‘János loves the wine’
 (ii) ‘János loves wine’

Taking Déchaine & Wiltschko’s lead, one takes away from (2), (3), (12) and (13) that Hungarian *az* is a pro- ϕ element.

But if Hungarian *az* is a pro- ϕ element and if Déchaine & Wiltschko (2002) are right that French *le* is likewise pro- ϕ , the contrast between Hungarian (2) (where *az-ok* must be plural-marked) and French (4) (where the pro-predicate clitic cannot be ϕ -inflected) is difficult to understand.

- (2) Hungarian
 gyönyörű/oktató vagy;
 beautiful/teacher you.are
 a lányaid is *az-ok*/**az*/**úgy*/**ugyanaz(ok)* lesznek
 the daughter.PL.2SG also it-PL/ it/ so/ same(PL) will.be.3PL

² A reviewer of this paper suggests a link between the generic vs specific readings of noun phrases introduced by the definite article (French *le vin* in (11), Hungarian *a bort* in (13)) and Kratzer’s (1995) recasting of the stage-level vs individual-level distinction for predicates.

- (4) French
 tu es belle/enseignante;
 you are beautiful.F.SG/teacher.F.SG
 tes filles le/*la/*les seront aussi
 your daughters CL.M.SG/*F.SG/*PL will.be also
 both: ‘you_{SG} are beautiful/a teacher; your daughters will be, too’

How do we explain the fact that *le* and *az*, when they are used as pro-predicates, behave very differently regarding ϕ -feature concord, such that Hungarian (2) forces pro-predicate *az* to ϕ -inflect for number while ϕ -inflection is impossible for French pro-predicate *le* in (4)? This is the question I will focus on in section 6.

6. ϕ -Concord

From the ban on ϕ -concord, it emerges that Déchaine & Wiltschko’s (2002) pro- ϕ analysis is not optimal for French proforms for adjectival or nominal predicates. I propose that French pro-predicate clitics are even smaller in size than pro- ϕ Ps, and treat them as pro-N elements, showing no ϕ -inflection and representing the smallest possible size a non-verbal predicate can be. From (14), we know that French allows predicate nominals to be ‘bare-NPs’. This is the smallest a nominal predicate can be in French — and since even ‘bare NP’ predicates can be replaced with an *l*-clitic, this tells us that pro-predicate *l*-clitics are pro-N elements. Being pro-N, they do not ϕ -inflect.

- (14) French
 s’il était président
 if he were president

A treatment of French *l*-clitics as pro-N can still take care of the ϕ -inflecting argumental uses of these elements. Although the *l*-clitics are themselves never larger than pro-N, they can be enveloped in a larger nominal superstructure, including ϕ P, under the right circumstances. Those circumstances do not present themselves in the case of pro-predicate *l*-clitics, but they do in their argumental uses.

Like French (14), Hungarian also allows ‘bare-NP’ predicate nominals. These occur in the verbal modifier (VM) position, to the left of the verb, as illustrated in (15).

- (15) Hungarian
 ha [elnök]_{VM} lenne
 if president were
 ‘if (s)he were president’

But now consider (16). Here, as in French (14), the predicate is an occupational nominal denoting a function unique in the universe of discourse. The subject of predication is contrastively focused in (16) and therefore finds itself in the immediately preverbal position. Consequently, the predicate cannot be placed in the verbal modifier position (to the immediate left of the verb) that ‘bare’ *elnök* finds itself in in (15).

Under these circumstances, the nominal predicate cannot remain article-less in Hungarian: the definite article *az* must be used in (16).

- (16) Hungarian
 ha ő lenne ?*(*az*) elnök
 if (S)HE were the president
 ‘if (S)HE were the president’

One of the ingredients of (16) is that the subject is focused. The subject of a copular sentence with a pro-predicate is inevitably focused: the pro-predicate is focusable, and so is the copula; since something must be focused in every informative utterance, focus must target the subject. From (16), we know that when the subject is focused and the predicate is uniquely identified, the nominal predicate must be larger than NP in Hungarian. In (2), repeated once more below, the subject is inevitably focused, and the predicate is again uniquely identified (by its antecedent). From this, in combination with what we saw in (16), it follows that the pro-predicate of (2) must be larger than a pro-NP: minimally as large as a pro- ϕ P. The obligatory presence of ϕ P immediately explains the obligatoriness of number concord with the subject in (2).

- (2) Hungarian
 gyönyörű/oktató vagy;
 beautiful/teacher you.are
 a lányaid is *az-ok/*az/*úgy/*ugyanaz(ok)* lesznek
 the daughter.PL.2SG also it-PL/ it/ so/ same(PL) will.be.3PL
 ‘you_{SG} are beautiful/a teacher; your daughters will be, too’

Ultimately, then, the difference between Hungarian and French in this regard turns on the Hungarian-specific fact that (16) requires the use of a non-bare predicate nominal.

7. Case matters

The pro-predicate in the second conjunct of (3) (repeated below) is marked with dative case, as is standardly the case for nominal and adjectival predicates of Hungarian inflected infinitives (here *lenni-ük*). The thing to note is that there is no ϕ -inflection on the pro-predicate (*an-nak*), despite the fact that ϕ -inflection occurs on the infinitive, in the form of the suffix *-ük*, and on *an-nak*’s antecedent (*drágák* ‘expensive-PL’).

- (3) Hungarian
 az élelmiszerek nagyon drágák,
 the groceries (are) very expensive-PL
 de nem kell *an-nak*/?*az-ok-nak* lenni-ük
 but not need it-DAT/ it-PL-DAT to.be-3PL
 ‘groceries are very expensive, but they don’t need to be’

In Den Dikken (1999), it is argued that the inflected infinitive agrees with a silent *pro* in the structural subject position. This *pro* can co-occur with an overt associate sitting either in the left periphery of the infinitival clause or outside it, as in

(17). It is the *pro* in the structural subject position of the inflected infinitive that controls ϕ -agreement with the infinitival verb.

- (17) Hungarian
őnekik (...) pro nem kell menni-ük
 they.DAT.PL not need go-3PL
 ‘they don’t need to go’

The dative case form of the predicate in (3) is not a function of concord with the *pro* that controls ϕ -agreement. This *pro* is unmarked for case (‘nominative’), while the dative associate is marked for dative. This makes the dative associate a more specific target for case concord than *pro*. So Pāṇinian specificity causes case concord to be a relationship between the pro-predicate and the dative associate of the subject — hence the dative form of the pro-predicate in (3).

For concreteness, I assume that dative-marked nominals are structured as in (18), with a KP (‘Kase Phrase’) layer on top of the nominal core.

- (18) [KP K_[DAT] (...) [ϕ P ϕ [NP N]]]

The ϕ -features of the nominal constituent in (18) are embedded too low in the structure to be accessible to subject–predicate concord. These ϕ -features do not percolate up to KP either. So case concord with KP is possible and obligatory in (3) (hence the pro-predicate must be dative) but ϕ -concord between the pro-predicate and the KP-contained ϕ P is impossible in inflected infinitives. Concord is controlled by something that has the structure in (18). The ϕ -features embedded within (18) are invisible to concord. The result for (3) is obligatory dative case concord but lack of ϕ -concord.

8. Definiteness

After this interlude on the interaction of case concord and ϕ -concord in Hungarian, I return to Romance — in particular, to Catalan. Espinal & Giusti (2023) report that Catalan can use its ϕ -inflecting definite clitics *el/la/els/les* as pro-predicates when their associate is definite. This is illustrated in (19).³

- (19) Catalan
 a. en Joan, *¿l’* és o no *l’* és, l’arquitecte municipal?
 the Joan CL.DEF.M is or not CL.DEF.M is the architect municipal
 ‘Joan, is he or isn’t he the municipal architect?’
 b. la Joana i la Maria són les germanes d’ em Pere
 the Joana and the Maria are the sisters of the Pere
 ‘Joana and Maria are Pere’s sisters’
 → *les* són
 CL.DEF.PL are
 ‘so they are’

³ The examples in (19) were kindly constructed for me by Teresa Espinal.

- c. són les 8
 are the 8
 ‘it is 8 a.m.’
 → les són
 CL.DEF.PL are
 ‘so it is’

One might question whether the definite clitics in (19) and their associates are indeed predicates. For (19c), in particular, a treatment of the time-telling expression as a predicate nominal is not the first thing that comes to mind: for English *it is 8 a.m.*, such an analysis is called into question by the poor status of *with*-absolutes such as **with [it 8 a.m.], we need to hurry up*. But for (19a,b), it does seem plausible that the definite clitics connected to the definite common noun phrases *l’arquitecte municipal* ‘the municipal architect’ and *les germanes d’en Pere* ‘Pere’s sisters’ are predicates. Espinal & Giusti (2023) treat the use of pro-predicate *el/la/els/les* when their associate is definite as a case of definiteness concord.

Espinal & Giusti (2023) also take concord to be behind another interesting fact about pro-predicates in Catalan: when a left- or right-dislocated predicate is introduced by *de* ‘of’, the pro-predicate resumptive clitic can be partitive/indefinite *en*, as in (20a) and (20b).

(20) Catalan

- a. (*d’*) alegres, les criatures *ho/en* son
 of happy.PL the children CL.DEF/INDEF are
 ‘happy, the children are’
 b. en Joan *n’* és un, *d’* arquitecte bo
 the Joan CL.INDEF is one, of architect good
 ‘Joan is one, a good architect’

But implicating concord for *en* is dubious, for two reasons. First, the use of *en* does not require the presence of *de* on the antecedent — we see this not only in (20a) but also in (7), repeated below.

(7) Catalan

- tu ets bonica/mestra;
 you are beautiful.F.SG/teacher.F.SG
 les teves filles també *ho/*la/*les/en* seran
 the your daughters also CL.M.SG/*F.SG/*PL/INDEF will.be
 all: ‘you_{SG} are beautiful/a teacher; your daughters will be, too’

Secondly, on the flipside, the overt use of *de* does not actually exclude the clitic *ho* as the pro-predicate: in (20a), using the neuter definite proform *ho* is perfectly legitimate even when *de* is present on *alegres*.

Déchaine & Wiltschko (2002) treat French partitive/indefinite *en* as pro-N. This is in itself sufficient for Catalan (7): it yields the desired free variation between the predicate proforms *ho* and *en*, which are both pro-N (assuming that my pro-N treatment of French pro-predicate *le* carries over to Catalan *ho*, as is the null

hypothesis). But why then are French *en* and Italian *ne* ungrammatical as stand-ins for adjectival or nominal predicates in copular sentences, as we see in (21) and (22)?

- (21) French
 tu es belle/enseignante;
 you are beautiful.F.SG/teacher.F.SG
 tes filles *le/*en* seront aussi
 your daughters CL.M.SG/*INDEF will.be also
- (22) Italian
 tu sei bella/maestra;
 you are beautiful.F.SG/teacher.F.SG
*lo/*ne* saranno anche le tue figlie
 CL.M.SG/*INDEF will.be also the your daughters

That fact that (21) and (22) are ungrammatical with *en/ne* is probably rooted in the fact that French *en* and Italian *ne* primarily serve as pro-predicates in partitive complex noun phrases, representing the part in the part–whole relation, which is a predication relation (the phrase harbouring the part is the predicate of the phrase expressing the whole: ‘one (out) of many’). This may suggest that the licensing of French *en* and Italian *ne* qua pro-predicates requires the presence of nominal functional structure in their local domain.⁴ For a technical translation of this statement, assume that *en* and *ne* have an unvalued feature that only a functional head in the nominal functional sequence can value. Why Catalan *en* is different in this respect (and/or possibly (also) in its categorial specification: see fn. 4) is something I have no answer for at this time.

9. Conclusion

Having covered all the aspects of the dataset from which I started out, let me conclude. Déchaine & Wiltschko’s (2002) pro- ϕ analysis of French *le* and its ilk may very well be sound for their argumental uses, but it needs to be amended for Romance pro-predicate definite clitics. I have treated these as pro-N. But for Hungarian *az*, a pro- ϕ treatment is fully adequate — even for the use of *az* as a pro-predicate. We have found that, with the necessary tweaks in place, Déchaine & Wiltschko’s nominal typology adequately accounts for the variation in the realm of pro-predicate proforms in a variety of languages. We have also encountered empirical material affirming that agreement and concord are formally distinct and cannot be conflated.

⁴ There is also what is usually called an ‘adverbial’ use of *en* and *ne* (cf. French *elle vient de Paris ~ elle en vient* ‘she comes from Paris ~ she comes from there’). Here *en/ne* represents a PP. This, too, may be an ingredient of the puzzle regarding the difference in distribution between French *en* and Italian *ne*, on the one hand, and Catalan *en*, on the other: it may be that replacing a nominal or adjectival predicate with a PP proform (French *en*, Italian *ne*) is problematic, and that Catalan *en* has the comparative advantage of not being inherently prepositional in nature.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank audiences at the Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics, the 5th conference on the Syntax of Uralic Languages (SOUL5) at the University of Hamburg, the 40th Encontro da Associação Portuguesa de Linguística at the University of the Azores, and the 38th edition of Going Romance at the University of Minho in Braga, as well as the two anonymous reviewers for *Isogloss*, for their constructive comments on this paper.

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