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TRACING LANGUAGE CONTACT.
PARAMETER HIERARCHIES
AND TORLAK CLITIC DOUBLING

1. *Introduction*

Torlak, a regional variety spoken in southeastern Serbia, northwestern Bulgaria, northeastern North Macedonia and eastern Kosovo, has recently gained much scholarly attention. It is often referred to as Prizren-Timok when confined within Serbian borders, or more broadly as Torlakian. Despite its frequent inclusion in discussions of the *Balkansprachbund* and the claim that it could be intended as a "transitional variety among Serbian, Bulgarian and Macedonian" (Vuković 2020), much of the existing literature presupposes Torlak's genealogical classification and its placement within Balkan areality without providing a detailed critical examination. Assumptions regarding its Balkan characteristics, or Balkanisms, are often taken for granted, leaving its dual identity, Balkan and non-Balkan Slavic, and linguistic variability somewhat underexplored.

Recent research has started to address these gaps, focusing on the internal variation within Torlak and its interactions with neighboring varieties. Vuković et al. (2022), for instance, conducted a quantitative analysis of variation within the Timok subvariety of Torlak. Their study examined the influence of standard Serbian on the Timok speech, analyzing the frequency of five key features: non-standard accent position, the clitic pronoun *si*, omission of the 3rd person auxiliary in the perfect tense, the post-positive definite article and the analytical dative marking of the indirect object and possessive. Using a sample of 67 speakers, the authors employed hierarchical clustering to identify the most standard-like and Torlak-like varieties and used correlation analysis to assess the predictive power of individual features. While

accent position and auxiliary omission emerged as potential indicators of non-standardness, the study highlighted the difficulty of isolating a single predictor of linguistic variability, illustrating the complex nature of Timok's linguistic profile.

Building on a strong empirical ground, this study shifts the focus from linguistic non-standardness to the broader question of Torlak's placement within the *Balkansprachbund*. Specifically, I examine clitic doubling through the lens of parametric hierarchy, as developed by Ledgeway et al. (2025). This theoretical framework organizes linguistic variation into hierarchies of parameters, distinguishing between *endogenous* (language internal) developments and *exogenous* changes (arising from language contact). By applying this framework, I intend to formalize the morphosyntactic variation attested in Torlak subvarieties within a broader Balkan areality and to assess the extent to which contact has shaped this variation. I provide two potential hierarchies for the triggering of doubling, exemplified in (1), on the basis of the existing literature on Torlak.

(1)   *Vikam ga   Igora   da   se   digne…*
       call   him.ACC.CL Igor   COMP   REFL   get_up
       'I'm calling Igor to get up…'
                                               (Milosavljević 2017; 2018)

On the one hand, I apply Runić (2013a; 2013b; 2014), who argues for a relatively rigid partition between DP languages, i.e., Macedonian and Bulgarian, and NP languages, i.e., Neo-Štokavian BCMS and Torlak. DP languages tendentially rely on specificity (though not exclusively) for the licensing of doubling, whereas NP languages that have doubling rely on a combination between specificity and hearer knowledge. On the other hand, I present a mixed approach assuming a universal D (Milosavljević – Živojinović forthcoming) and tripartite typology for the licensing of doubling through specificity, familiar topic and contrastive topic. As it follows, for the purpose of this paper, I only discuss the licensing of (object) clitic doubling by focusing on a comparison of previous studies on Torlak doubling and their empirical ground covering areas represented in Fig. 1. Discussions on its obligatoriness/optionality, clitic vs. agreement morphology or movement vs. Agree relationship (in Anagnostopoulou's 2016

terms) will not be addressed here. With this approach, I aim to refine the methodological tools available for studying linguistic areality and change, offering a structured approach to extend the application of Parameter hierarchies to Slavic.

This paper is structured as follows: in Section 2, I briefly discuss some of the existing approaches defining Torlak in terms of its genealogy and areality; Section 3 presents Parameter hierarchies along with an extension to language contact studies; Section 4 critically assesses clitic doubling in Balkan varieties by presenting two alternative approaches in terms of licensing and Section 5 concludes.
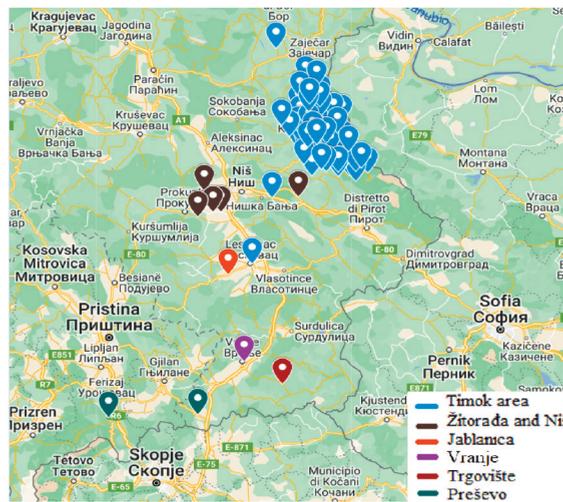
Figure 1. Map of scrutinized Torlak areas[1] (Map data ©2025 Google)

[1] This map illustrates the areas discussed in a series of articles addressing clitic doubling associated with the Torlak or Prizren-Timok dialects, which I use as the empirical ground for this article. This study is based entirely on data from existing literature, drawing from both historical sources and fieldwork-based investigations. The Old Bulgarian examples come from Dimitrova-Vulchanova – Vulchanov's (2008) analysis of the *Codex Suprasliensis*, a 10th-century manuscript. For contemporary Bulgarian and Macedonian, I refer to data presented in Dimitrova-Vulchanova – Vulchanov (2008), Krapova – Cinque (2008), and Runić (2014), all relying on native speaker intuitions and/or grammaticality judgments.

The data on Torlak dialects come from a range of studies, represented by different

2. *Torlak between genealogy and areality*

The genealogical classification of Torlak has historically been contentious, with scholars divided on whether it should be primarily considered a Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian or a Bulgarian (or other) variety. Bulgarian linguists, such as Stojkov – Bernštejn (1975) and Tsonev (1984), classify Torlak as the Belogradchik-Tran dialect of Bulgarian, which is genealogically distant from the Neo-Štokavian varieties, relying on morphological features such as the loss of most cases. Conversely, many Serbian linguists, including Belić (1905) and Ivić (1985), classify Torlak as an Old-Štokavian variety, often referring to it as the Prizren-Timok dialect. More recently, Vuković et al. (2022) affirm that "genealogically, it [Torlak, *J.Ž.*] is intersected by an old bundle of isoglosses differentiating Western and Eastern South Slavic" and that "by their archaic features, mainly phonological and morphological, the Torlak dialects fit in with Serbian in the western range of the South Slavic dialect continuum."

It must be said that all the approaches come with (a set of) issues. On the one hand, as Friedman (2017 [1986]) points out, scholars such as Tsonev lack consistency. Indeed, Tsonev (1984) favors phonetic criteria for the development of a comparatively-formed genealogy; however, when discussing the varieties of the Morava Valley, Tsonev "reverses his position and gives precedence to morphological arguments over phonological, since the phonological evidence favors Serbian" (Friedman 2017 [1986]: 654). On the other hand, the issue with the approaches proposed by Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian

regions on the map. The blue areas, which include the Timok region and adjacent areas near Niš and Leskovac, were analyzed in Escher (2021) and Vuković et al. (2022), and are available at <http://hdl.handle.net/11356/1281> (last access: 08.08.2025). The brown areas (Žitorađa and Niš) represent data collected and analyzed by Runić (2013a; 2013b; 2014). For these varieties, Runić draws on native speaker judgments and field data. The orange and red areas correspond to Jablanica and Trgovište, with data provided by Milosavljević (2017; 2018), Živojinović (2021), and Milosavljević – Živojinović (forthcoming). The Trgovište data, for instance, were collected through guided conversations with native speakers, while the Jablanica data are based on audio recordings, as well as examples provided by Žugić (2005; 2010). The dark green area represents Preševo and Uroševac, as discussed by Trajković (2016). Finally, the purple dot indicates the area of Vranje, for which I rely on data discussed in Stanković – Tasić (2017) and Stanković (2019), both based on field research conducted in the region.

linguists primarily lies in terminology but leads to a potentially broader concern. While the prevailing literature predominantly characterizes Torlak, often equated with the Prizren-Timok dialect, as a dialect of Serbian, this perspective frequently overlooks its geographical distribution beyond Serbia's borders and its position within the broader South Slavic linguistic context.

In addition, Torlak exhibits a considerable degree of internal microvariation and lies in close geographical and linguistic proximity to the Kosovo-Resava area. Dialectal boundaries are not always clearly demarcated, resulting in overlapping isoglosses and transitional features. To account for this variation, Mišeska Tomić (2006; 2008) proposes a framework based on two intersecting axes: a north-south axis and an east-west axis. The north-south axis reflects a gradient of increasing structural convergence with Macedonian and Bulgarian varieties as one moves southward, particularly regarding clitic doubling, analytic case marking and definiteness. The east-west axis, by contrast, captures gradual transitions from more canonical Neo-Štokavian BCMS features in the west to more Balkanized features in the east. The interaction of these axes gives rise to the fine-grained variation observed across different areas. However, while this framework offers a compelling macro-level perspective, more detailed micro-dialectological studies are necessary to clarify how these patterns manifest locally. Recent studies, such as Sobolev et al. (2023), have adopted a more comprehensive approach, examining Torlak's areal embedding and linguistic characteristics across Eastern Serbia, Western Bulgaria and Northern North Macedonia, highlighting some innovative features of Torlak within a broader Balkan linguistic landscape.

The classification adopted here follows Vuković et al. (2022), who base their analysis on a range of comparative diagnostics across Torlak, Neo-Štokavian BCMS and Eastern South Slavic (Macedonian and Bulgarian) to verify the degree of non-standardness of Torlak through (i) accentuation, (ii) the presence or absence of the post-positive definite article, (iii) the realization and placement of object clitics, (iv) the behavior of the 3rd person auxiliary in the perfect tense, and (v) the use of analytic dative constructions. Their results show that non-standard (BCMS) accentuation and the omission of the auxiliary in the perfect are statistically the best predictors for distancing from BCMS.

In the attempt of providing a general and (as much as possible) objective picture of this area, I adopt a slightly revised version of Vu-ković et al. (2022) for the assumption of the Torlak genealogy. Spe-cifically, I consider the vast area intended as Torlak as Old-Štokavian, primarily relying on the lack of shift to the Neo-Štokavian accent. In addition, several morpho-syntactic innovations, such as the gradual loss of the case system (see Kyuseva et al. 2025 for discussion), along-side contact-induced changes, are understood as part of the Old-Štoka-vian zone. This includes not only the Torlak (Prizren–Timok) dialect but also neighboring varieties, such as the Kosovo-Resava dialect. As a result, Torlak should not be classified as a dialect of (Neo-Štokavian) BCMS, but rather as a development of Old-Štokavian that has long been in contact with Eastern South Slavic and Balkan varieties. A very schematic and simplistic (micro)genealogy is represented in Fig. 2. In other words, present-day Torlak and Neo-Štokavian BCMS both developed from the Old Štokavian, but have diverged, as evidenced by the stress innovation of BCMS.[2]

Old Shtokavian

Neo-Shtokavian
BCMS   Torlak
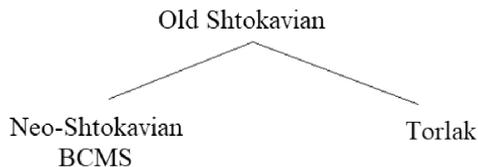
Figure 2. The micro-genealogy of Torlak[3]

From an areal perspective, Torlak represents a relatively unex-plored territory, primarily from a formal viewpoint. Indeed, existing studies provide an overall description of phenomena such as cliti-cization (cf. Runić 2013a; 2013b; 2014; Milosavljević 2017; 2018;

[2] I do, however, acknowledge that the overall situation is more granular on the dialectological level due to internal variation and a layered contact.

[3] It should be noted that the schematic genealogy in Figure 2 is not exhaustive. Other varieties that descend from Old Štokavian, such as Kosovo-Resava, are not represented in the diagram. A more complete treatment would require a detailed dialectological map and historical overview. The figure is thus intended to provide a simplified illustration of the major genealogical split relevant to the discussion.

Stanković – Tasić 2017; Živojinović 2021; Kolaković et al. 2022, a.o.), definite articles (cf. Friedman 2006; Escher 2021; Azzolina et al. 2021; Vuković 2023; 2024; Vuković et al. 2023, a.o.), but also address several contact-induced features within the broader domain of the *Balkansprachbund*[4] (cf. Mišeska Tomić 2006; 2008), providing evidence for contact-induced change in (several subvarieties of) Torlak. Recent work has begun to address these topics from a formal perspective, for instance, Stanković (2019) on the DP vs. NP debate, and Mirić – Arsenijević (2024) on complementizer drop and clitic climbing. The present article seeks to contribute to this growing body of formal research on Torlak.

3. *Parameter hierarchies as testbed for contact-induced change*

Parameter Hierarchies substantially organize the parameters of Universal Grammar into hierarchies, where macroparametric effects emerge as a set of combined microparameters (Roberts – Holmberg 2010; Roberts 2012; 2019).[5] This hierarchical structuring (see Figure 3) provides a systematic way of understanding linguistic variation and change across languages. Specifically, macroparameters determine whether a specific property characterizes a language as a whole and whether it is attested across all functional heads. The subsequent mesoparametric level distinguishes between features that are attributable to natural classes of elements within the language, offering a middle ground between broad and fine-grained variation. Finally, at the microparametric level, variation typically operates on lexically definable features, allowing for more granular distinctions, and this pattern continues further down the hierarchy. For instance, for a given value v_i of a feature F, all heads of the relevant type share v_i (macroparameter); all heads of a given natural class, e.g. [+V] share v_i; a small, lexically definable subclass of functional heads shows v_i (Roberts 2016: 178).

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[4] For a general overview of contact-induced phenomena in the Balkan region see the Atlas of the Balkan Linguistic area (<https://abla.cnrs.fr/>; last access: 08.08.2025).

[5] Roberts (2012; 2019) are some of the many outputs of the ERC-funded *ReCoS* (Rethinking Comparative Syntax) project. Further information on the project is available here: <https://recos-dtal.mmll.cam.ac.uk/> (last access: 08.08.2025).

Does p characterize L?

No = **Macroparametric setting**   Yes

All functional heads?

Yes = **Macroparametric setting**   No

Extended to naturally definable class?

Yes = **Mesoparametric variation**   No

Restricted to lexically definable subclass?

Yes = **Microparametric variation**   No

Limited to idiosyncratic collection of individual lexical items?
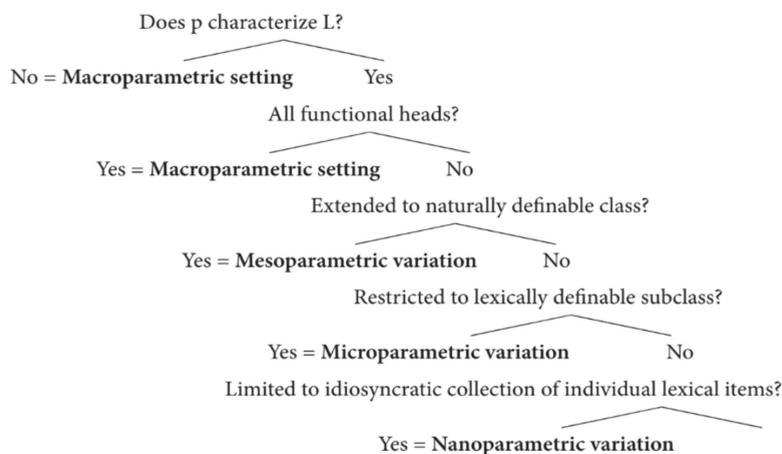
Yes = **Nanoparametric variation**

Figure 3. Parametric hierarchy (Ledgeway 2019: 347)

This theoretical framework, which accounts for variation and change (see Biberauer – Roberts 2016 for examples from a diachronic perspective), was further extended by Ledgeway et al. (2025) to address contact-induced change. Their approach offers a more structured and formalized alternative to earlier theories, such as Thomason – Kaufmann (1988), who advocate for an 'everything goes' model where the effects of language contact are taken as unpredictable. By contrast, the parameter hierarchy framework not only accounts for regular or endogenous change, but also provides a mechanism for understanding the dynamics of exogenous, contact-induced change. It operates through the principle of NONE > ALL > SOME, organizing the interaction of linguistic features into a hierarchical progression from less to more marked and suggests that:

- NONE: No languages in a given group are sensitive to a specific feature;

- ALL: All languages in the group exhibit sensitivity to the feature;

- SOME: Only a subset of languages is sensitive to the feature.

Ledgeway et al. (2025) argue that while regular change operates through 'small steps'—gradual and incremental shifts along the par-

ametric spectrum, either from macroparameters to mesoparameters
and further to microparameters, or vice versa (see Fig. 4)—contact-in-
duced change involves abrupt movements through parametric space.
This phenomenon, named 'the catapult effect' (see Fig. 5), highlights
the transformative impact of language contact on linguistic systems.
For instance, in a typical case of convergence where varieties A and B
belong to the same linguistic branch, one of the varieties may be cata-
pulted across the parametric space due to contact, ultimately aligning
its parametric values with those of the contact variety.
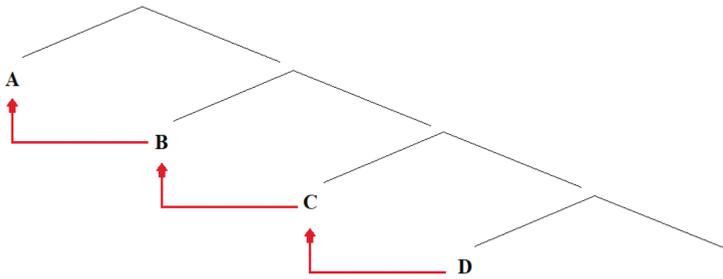
Figure 4. Endogenous or regular change (reproduced on the basis of Ledgeway
et al. 2025)
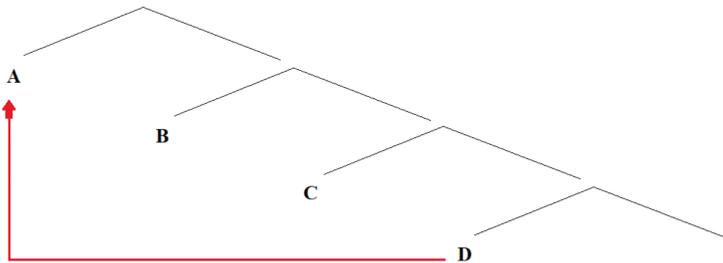
Figure 5. Exogenous or contact-induced change (reproduced on the basis of
Ledgeway et al. 2025)

In addition to convergence, Ledgeway et al. (2025) identify two
additional parametric approaches to contact-induced change, namely
layering and hybridism.[6] Specifically, layering captures the cumula-

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[6] Ledgeway et al. (2025) illustrate layering and hybridism with examples from

tive effect of two or more changes, where at least one is exogenous and is temporally linked to another change, while hybridism refers to instances of linguistic approximation, where two varieties surface on successive branches of a hierarchy rather than converging on the same branch. In the remaining part of this article, I will apply this theory to the Torlak data to explore the interplay between endogenous and exogenous change.

4. *Clitic doubling*

Most of the studies on clitic doubling so far have focused on its syntactic structure, claiming that the doubled clitic is[7]:

a) a clitic Voice head with XP* to XP^ movement (cf. Sportiche 1993; 1996; 1998);

b) a determiner head with movement to the host (cf. Torrego 1988, Uriagereka 1995);

c) the spell out of the D/φ-features of a DP which moves to the host (Anagnostopoulou 2003);

d) a copy of a DP moving to the host (cf. Anagnostopoulou 2003; later reproposed by Harizanov 2014 and Kramer 2014);

e) an argument undergoing XP/X_{max} movement, just like A-scrambling, to a position lower than SpecTP (Angelopoulos 2019).

Despite significant progress in understanding its structure, the licensing of clitic doubling remains an area of considerable variation. Within the Slavic context, (object) clitic doubling is widely recognized as a feature of the *Balkansprachbund* (likely deriving from Vulgar Latin though contact with Greek, cf. Kallulli – Tasmowski 2008:

Romance–Greek contact in Southern Italy. For layering, they discuss the development of the Greek-style dative constructions in Calabrese, where an initial exogenous reanalysis of indirect object marking under Greek influence is followed by an endogenous Romance-internal restructuring of argument structure (e.g. dative shift). For hybridism, they point to Salentino clitic doubling, which shows partial convergence with Greek object marking strategies without fully aligning on the same parametric branch, instead reflecting features from both the Romance base system and the contact-influenced grammar.

[7] This is an updated list based on Anagnostopoulou (2016: 12-13).

9), which spread out in a set of non-directly related varieties through language contact. As such, it is not an inherent feature of (South) Slavic languages but rather specific to certain Balkan Slavic varieties. This view is supported by evidence that Old Church Slavonic and Old Slavic did not exhibit true clitic doubling as defined by Krapova – Cinque (2008). However, Old Bulgarian shows instances of clitic left dislocation and potentially clitic doubling proper (2), which appear to be conditioned by [+contrastive topic] (cf. Dimitrova-Vulchano-va – Vulchanov 2008), suggesting some sort of late Slavic-internal development.

(2) себѣ   си   одеждж   сътвори
     self.DAT CL.DAT   clothing.ACC.F make.AOR.3SG
     '(He) made a dress for himself.'
     (CS 347: 30; cf. Dimitrova-Vulchanova – Vulchanov 2008: 127)

Dimitrova-Vulchanova – Vulchanov (2008) argue that, although their data are drawn exclusively from the *Codex Suprasliensis*, these examples are representative of the Old Bulgarian stage due to its continuity with Modern Bulgarian (3). Modern Bulgarian, just like the earlier stages, licenses clitic doubling through [+contrastive topic], marked by discourse prominence.[8] The key difference between the two stages lies in the obligatory nature of clitic doubling in Modern Bulgarian, which contrasts with its optional status in Old Bulgarian.

(3) *Ivan*   *ja*   *pročete*   *knigata*[9]
     Ivan   it.CL.ACC.F   read   book-the
     'Ivan read the book'
     (Dimitrova-Vulchanova – Vulchanov 2008: 125)

Clitic doubling exhibits significant variation across the *Balkansprachbund*, with its lexical-structural-semantic-pragmatic properties differing widely. This variation can be conceptualized along an axis, ranging from strict grammatical constraints in the South-West

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[8] This view is not shared by all scholars working on Bulgarian (see for instance Krapova – Cinque 2008). An overview of the Bulgarian data is presented in Section 4.2 of this paper.

[9] In order for this example to be grammatical, it should be intended as a reply to *Kakvo napravi Ivan s knigata?* 'What did Ivan do with the book?'.

to discourse-pragmatically conditioned doubling in the North-East (Lopašov 1979; cited from Kallulli – Tasmowski: 9-10). This scale is as follows: Macedonian > Albanian > Romanian > Greek > Bulgarian. Importantly, this axis reflects multiple levels of analysis, including syntax, semantics and pragmatics. As such, it does not align with the binary framework of parameter hierarchies, which typically operate within a set of narrowly defined contrasts.

In the remaining portion of this section, I will focus on the semantic effects that trigger clitic doubling rather than on its syntactic behavior or obligatoriness vs. optionality. For the purpose of establishing a parametric hierarchy, I draw on the following two approaches, which have been proposed for specific (sub-)varieties of Torlak and Balkan Slavic more broadly and appear to be rather contrastive:

1. Clitic doubling is attested in both DP and NP languages. In DP languages, it is licensed by [+/– specific referent, +/– topic], whereas in NP languages such as Torlak, it is licensed by [+/– specific referent, +/– hearer knowledge] (cf. Runić 2013a; 2013b; 2014);

2. Clitic doubling relies on the presence of a universal D layer and is licensed by specificity (Milosavljević – Živojinović forthcoming) and the presence or absence of topicality (cf. Rudin 1997; Dimitrova-Vulchanova – Vulchanov 2008).

4.1. *Clitic doubling following Runić (2013a; 2013b; 2014)*

The first working hypothesis relies on a well-known work by Runić (2013a; 2013b; 2014), who argues that both DP (Bulgarian and Macedonian) and NP languages (Žitorađa and Niš Torlak, along with Gorica Slovenian) display clitic doubling, in contrast to previous studies such as Bošković (2008), who argues that clitic doubling is only attested in DP languages. However, doubling in these two types operates in very distinct ways and relies on different sets of binary features. Specifically, Bulgarian (4) and Macedonian (5) display proper clitic doubling [+/- specific referent, +/- topicality]. Both varieties rely on specificity, whereas only Bulgarian requires topicality as well.

(4)   Bulgarian [+specific referent, +topical]
        Mene   me   e   jad

me.ACC me.CL.ACC   is   angry
'I am angry.'
(cf. Runić 2014: 73, retrieved from Franks – King 2000: 54)

(5)   Macedonian [+specific referent]
         Kučeto ja   *kasa   mačkata*
         dog-the her.CL.ACC   bites   cat-the
         'The dog bites the cat.'
         (cf. Runić 2014: 70; retrieved from Friedman 2001: 50)

The Torlak data gathered by Runić in the areas of Žitorađa and Niš, on the contrary, fall within the NP languages without an overt definite article, lacking specificity. To account for these data within the framework proposed by Bošković (2008), Runić draws a parallel between Torlak and Iroquoian languages, which allow overt clitic doubling in non-specific contexts as well. This implies that Torlak does not have a standard clitic doubling and is either in the state of contact-induced change in progress with both D and N elements or does not have a fully lexicalized D feature yet. Indeed, as the licensing of doubling goes beyond specificity, Runić postulates it is based on [+/– specific referent, +/– hearer knowledge] as in (6), (7), (8) and (9):

(6)   Žitorađa and Niš Torlak; [–specific referent, –hearer knowledge]
         Izvin'te.   Imate   (gu)   salvetu?[10]
         Sorry   have.2SG   it.CL.ACC   napkin
         'Excuse me. Do you have a napkin?'

(7)   Žitorađa and Niš Torlak; [+specific referent, –hearer knowledge]
         Ne sekiraj se,   tatko. Ću   da nađem   posao.
         not worry CL.REFL dad   AUX.1SG to find   job
         Imam   (gu)   jednu   debelu   vezu
         have.1SG   it.CL.ACC   one   strong   connection
         'Dad, don't worry. I'll find a job. I have very good connections.'

(8)   Žitorađa and Niš Torlak; [+specific referent, +hearer knowledge]

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[10] As Runić (2014: 78) suggests, this example is to be contextualized within a situation in which one is at a wedding party eating roast meat and the waiter forgot to bring the napkin.

Ma   *razbij*   *(gu)*   *čašu!*[11]
PTCL   break.2.IMP   it.CL.ACC   glass
'Break the glass!'

(9)   Žitorađa and Niš Torlak; [–specific referent, +hearer knowledge]
Ja (gu)   *kafu*   *volim da popijem*   *s*   *komšiju.*
I   it.CL.ACC   coffee   like.1SG to drink.1SG with neighbor
'I like having coffee with my neighbor.'

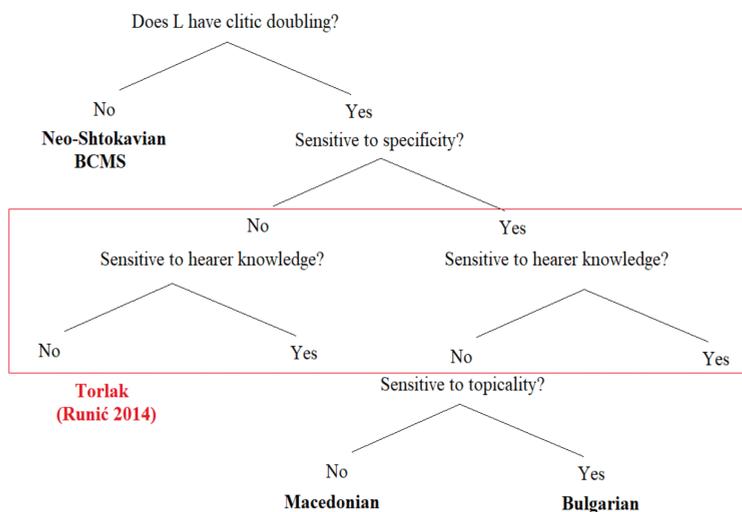On the basis of Runić (2014), I provide the following tentative hierarchy:

Figure 6. The clitic doubling hierarchy, following Runić (2014)

The hierarchy of clitic doubling in Figure 6 is to be interpreted as follows. The general principle which I apply is a slightly modified version of the Parameter hierarchies (Roberts 2012; 2019; Ledgeway et al. (2025), according to which the top layer distinguishes all varieties having object doubling (all sub-varieties of Torlak, Macedonian

[11] The context provided by Runić (2014: 80) is the following: *You are at a wedding party and the atmosphere is very cheerful. The person opposite of you is then telling you* [ex. (8)].

and Bulgarian) from varieties which do not display it (Neo-Štokavian BCMS). The second layer captures variation between varieties which are sensitive to the feature of specificity. The following layers attempt to capture the intersection between specificity and hearer knowledge, i.e. whether the given nominal phrase is known from the previous discourse or from context to the person who is listening or reading the sentence. Runić (2014) affirms that her Torlak data potentially capture all possible combinations of this intersection, i.e. [+/- specific referent, +/- hearer knowledge], while Bulgarian and Macedonian data are both sensitive to specificity, but not to hearer knowledge. Bulgarian is, however, also sensitive to topicality, whereas Macedonian does not seem to be, again, following Runić's claims. It follows that Torlak, and more specifically, Žitorađa and Niš Torlak, does not converge with either Neo-Štokavian BCMS or Bulgarian/Macedonian according to her data. This entails that this sub-variety of Torlak may be seen as a transitional variety which is however somewhat 'closer' in parametric terms to the Balkan Slavic varieties.

Crucially, I do not assume a strict unidirectional influence from Bulgarian or Macedonian onto Torlak, as we lack diachronic evidence to establish a clear chronology of the emergence of clitic doubling across these varieties. Instead, I propose that language contact, primarily involving influence from Balkan Slavic, may have contributed to the development of clitic doubling in Torlak alongside internal developments. Žitorađa and Niš Torlak have overt object doubling, which is optional, but only sensitive to some features. Since Žitorađa and Niš Torlak has overcome the partition between varieties having no doubling and all varieties having doubling (NONE > SOME), I intend this distinction between the two parametric levels as a 'mini catapult', triggered by contact, where Torlak acquires a [+specific] optional doubling, though not in all contexts. As a result, Žitorađa and Niš Torlak were 'catapulted' from the level of varieties having no clitic doubling to having some features of doubling and displaying it overtly.[12] Although there is no full convergence with any of the Balkan Slavic

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[12] Recall Section 2 where I provide the micro-genealogy of Torlak. Because of a closer genealogical relationship between Neo-Štokavian BCMS and Torlak, as opposed to Bulgarian/Macedonian and Torlak, I assume that the catapult effect is to be intended as a movement across the parametric space from Neo-Štokavian BCMS.

varieties, this mini catapult may still be considered as proof of contact. Such results are partially confirmed by Runić as well, who explicitly argues that the presence of clitic doubling in Žitorađa and Niš Torlak is not purely an internal syntactic innovation, but rather the result of contact with neighboring DP languages such as Bulgarian and Macedonian. She sees the partial emergence of D-related features (e.g., definiteness and discourse anchoring) in Torlak as a reflection of contact-induced grammaticalization. In this sense, clitic doubling functions as a syntactic reflex of a broader shift toward DP-like behavior, even in a traditionally NP-language setting.

4.2. *An alternative hierarchy for clitic doubling*

This second attempt of a hierarchy intends to overcome some issues related to Runić (2014),[13] primarily linked to the need of a feature-geometry-like hierarchy.[14] Here, I do not strictly comply with a specific approach, but rather incorporate a set of studies on different sub-varieties of Torlak, in relation to studies on Balkan Slavic varieties, i.e., Macedonian and Bulgarian.[15] Contrary to Runić (2014) who emphasizes the role of hearer knowledge alongside specificity in licensing clitic doubling, other accounts suggest that specificity/definiteness is the primary feature driving this phenomenon in Torlak. Specifically, some studies treat definiteness as the relevant licensing condition for CD (e.g., Mišeska Tomić 2006 for Macedonian, a.o.), while others emphasize specificity (e.g. Milosavljević – Živojinović forthcoming).

[13] See Stanković (2019) and Milosavljević – Živojinović (forthcoming), among others, for a theoretical overview of clitic doubling related to the DP vs. NP debate with a comparison with Runić (2014).

[14] See Harley – Ritter (2002) for an overview of the feature geometric analysis.

[15] Reviewer 2 has suggested broadening the scope of the comparison to include additional Balkan varieties such as Romani, Romanian, Albanian or Greek. While such a comprehensive overview would certainly be valuable, this article restricts its focus due to space limits to those contact varieties that may have directly or indirectly influenced the development of object doubling in Torlak. For instance, minority languages such as Romani, Megleno-Romanian and Aromanian are therefore not addressed here, as the direction of influence in these cases is likely the reverse. For discussion of object doubling in these varieties, but also in Albanian, Romanian and Modern Greek, see Kallulli – Tasmowski (2008). See Mirić – Ćirković (2022: 78-79) for a specific overview of clitic doubling in Gurbet Romani.

This discrepancy often depends on whether the analysis is framed semantically or syntactically. I follow Bošković's (2008) generalization arguing that "only languages with overt articles may allow clitic doubling", which entails a tight relation between the presence of a D layer and object doubling. Since all varieties examined here have a D layer (this is also valid for Torlak; see Milosavljević – Živojinović forthcoming), I assume definiteness is a necessary background condition, but not an active trigger.

Concerning Torlak, Stanković – Tasić (2017) and Stanković (2019)[16] argue that optional clitic doubling in the Vranje area unequivocally marks definiteness and specificity. This perspective aligns with Mišeska Tomić (2008), Trajković (2016) and partly with Milosavljević – Živojinović (forthcoming), who also emphasize the importance of specificity in their analysis. However, while the area of Trgovište represented in (10) seems to be sensitive to [+ specific], the variety of Jablanica represented in (11) is likely to have doubling which is licensed by topic familiarity as well[17] (Milosavljević – Živojinović forthcoming). In a similar fashion, Escher (2021) argues that the Timok variety has topicality/familiarity as one of the factors for object doubling licensing,[18] see (12):

[16] As Reviewer 2 points out, it must be noted that Trajković (2016) and Stanković – Tasić (2017) affirm that the distinction between urban and rural vernaculars may affect different behaviors of some investigated varieties in terms of clitic doubling.

[17] While this analysis could potentially be extended to the Trgovište area, current studies do not address the role of topicality in this variety. For the purposes of the hierarchy presented here, I therefore restrict the licensing of Trgovište doubling to specificity alone, but acknowledge that additional work from a theoretical perspective, which falls beyond the scope of this paper, is needed.

[18] It should be mentioned that Escher (2021) explores different options for triggering doubling, such as animacy, but also pragmatic and prosodic factors. She ultimately concludes that the most common condition for doubling is that of a derhematized and highly individualized Patient, i.e., an argument which is specific and identifiable, but also backgrounded in discourse. However, this work treats all of the potentially triggering features of doubling in isolation and does not provide an exhaustive account.

(10) Trgovište Torlak; [+specific][19]
      Nas   ni   sestrata iz   ambulantu
      us.ACC   us.ACC.CL   nurse.DEF   from   clinic
      gleda   kroz   naočare
      watch.PRES.3SG   through   glasses
      i   ne   ni   pušta   unutra.
      and   not   us.CL   let.PRS.3SG   in
      'The nurse from the clinic stares at us through her glasses and
      does not let us in.'
      (Milosavljević – Živojinović forthcoming)

(11) Jablanica Torlak; [+specific, +familiar topic]
      Na   mene   mi   gu   zablagni kafu, ja
      on   me.ACC me.DAT.CL it.ACC.CL   sweeten   coffee I
      pijem   blagu.
      drink.PRES.1SG   sweet
      'Sweeten my coffee, I drink it sweet.'
      (Milosavljević – Živojinović forthcoming)

(12) Timok [+specific, +familiar topic][20]
      Kako   vi   ga   zovu   deteto?
      how   you.DAT.PL.CL him.ACC.CL call.3PL.PRS child.DEF
      'What is your child's name?'
      (Timok; cf. Escher 2021)

The role of specificity is particularly relevant in Macedonian, where clitic doubling is tied to definiteness, obligatory with [+specific] DPs,[21] but disallowed with non-specific indefinites. The contrast in

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[19] Due to the limitations of this article, I do not include examples from every sub-variety of Torlak, as doing so would result in an overabundance of largely similar data. Moreover, I do not advance any broader theoretical claims regarding the potential role of topicality as a core trigger for clitic doubling across all varieties, alongside specificity. This question remains open for future research.

[20] Escher (2021) presents (12) as an example of a definite direct object with reduplication. The proposal to interpret the construction as involving [+specific, +familiar topic] is my further addition based on her findings.

[21] According to Mišeska Tomić (2006: 252) some marginal examples may be interpreted as non-specific, as in (i), where Jana is looking for the movie-director, i.e., a. namely, looking for X, who happens to be the movie-director or b. whoever it may be.

the minimal pair in (13) illustrates this:

(13)   Macedonian
   a.   [+specific], obligatory doubling
        *(*Go*)   *vidov*   *profesorot*.
        him.ACC.CL   see.1SG   professor.DEF
        'I saw the professor.'

   b.   [–specific], ungrammatical doubling
        (*Go*)   *vidov*   (*eden*)   *profesor*.
        him.ACC.CL   see.1SG   a   professor
        'I saw a professor.'
        (cf. Chidambaram 2018)

In contrast, Bulgarian clitic doubling shows a complex interaction between specificity and discourse-related features. Rudin (1997) and Dimitrova-Vulchanova – Vulchanov (2008) argue that topicality and more specifically, contrastive topic[22] licenses doubling. Although they do not directly discuss specificity as a licensing feature of doubling, they affirm that the referent must be specific. Under this interpretation, doubling tends to occur when the object is both discourse-linked and referentially anchored, as illustrated in (14):

(14)   Bulgarian [+specific, +contrastive topic]
        *Knigata**   (*ja*)   *pročete*   *Ivan*.
        book.DEF   it.ACC.CL   read   Ivan
        'Ivan read the book.'
        (cf. Dimitrova-Vulchanova – Vulchanov 2008: 125)

However, Krapova – Cinque (2008) propose a narrower view. They argue that true clitic doubling in Bulgarian occurs only when

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   (i)   *Jana*   *go*   *bara*   *režiserot*.
          Jana 3SG.M.DAT.CL   look.for.3SG   movie.director.DEF
          'Jana is looking for the movie-director.'
          (cf. Mišeska Tomić 2006: 252)

[22] Unlike familiar topics, contrastive topics are not prosodically neutral and are characterized by a marked intonation. Moreover, the discourse status is given and is part of a contrast set, i.e. the speaker picks out one element from a set of alternatives (cf. Alexopoulou – Kolliakou 2002 on contrastive links). In other words, contrastive topics are a subtype of familiar topics.

a postverbal full DP co-occurs with a coreferential clitic in a specific group of predicates, such as psych and physical perception with dative experiencers (e.g. *lipsva mi* 'I miss'). In contrast, structures involving preverbal topicalized or focused DPs with clitics (as in (15)) are not cases of doubling in the strict morphosyntactic sense. Instead, such clitics are analyzed as dislocation phenomena.

(15)   Bulgarian [+topic]
       Poznavam   *go*   *nego.*
       know.1SG   him.ACC.CL   him.ACC
       'I know him'

In what follows, I adopt a broader perspective and treat all constructions where a clitic co-occurs with a coreferential DP as instances of clitic doubling, insofar as they involve syntactic dependencies between the two elements.

To sum up, the distribution of features licensing clitic doubling in the area of the distribution of Torlak and Balkan Slavic is the following:[23]

TYPE 1:   [+specific, –familiar topic, –contrastive topic]
          Macedonian (cf. Rudin 1997; Franks – King 2000), Preševo Torlak (cf. Trajković 2016), Vranje Torlak (cf. Stanković – Tasić 2017; Stanković 2019), Trgovište Torlak (cf. Milosavljević – Živojinović forthcoming);

TYPE 2:   [+specific, +familiar topic, –contrastive topic]
          Jablanica Torlak (cf. Milosavljević 2018; Milosavljević – Živojinović forthcoming), Timok Torlak (cf. Escher 2021);

TYPE 3:   [+specific, -familiar topic, +contrastive topic]
          Bulgarian (cf. Dimitrova-Vulchanova – Vulchanov 2008).

Building on these insights, we can construct a tentative parameter hierarchy for clitic doubling (see Figure 7) that reflects the importance of specificity and other related features and ranks the type of doubling

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[23] It is important to note that the present overview of the licensing of clitic doubling is preliminary and should not be considered exhaustive. Further research is necessary to determine the role of topicality in other varieties as well. In other words, all features should be tested across various dialects to achieve a comprehensive understanding. For now, topichood seems to be the licensing feature in other Balkan varieties such as Albanian (cf. Kallulli – Tasmowski 2008).

from less to more marked. Following the principle of NONE > ALL > SOME, we can categorize varieties based on their sensitivity to these parameters:

– NONE: Varieties without any form of clitic doubling (Neo-Što-kavian BCMS);

– ALL: Varieties exhibiting clitic doubling that is sensitive to specificity (all Torlak varieties, plus Balkan Slavic);

– SOME: Varieties that display clitic doubling licensed by, e.g., topic familiarity in addition to specificity (Jablanica and Timok Torlak).

Although Torlak does not uniformly conform to a single type, both Jablanica and Timok Torlak (Type 2) and the varieties from Preševo, Vranje, and Trgovište (Type 1) occupy distinct positions within the parametric space. Jablanica and Timok Torlak are positioned lower in the hierarchy compared to other varieties, while the sub-varieties from Preševo, Vranje, and Trgovište show convergence with Macedonian. It is evident that both subgroups have developed features that facilitate object doubling as a result of language contact, as discussed by Ledgeway et
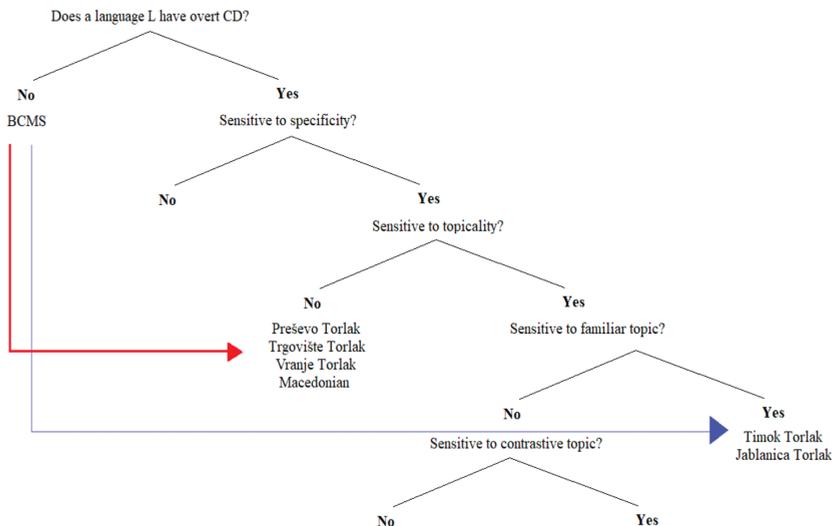
Figure 7. Alternative parametric hierarchy for clitic doubling with the catapult effect.

al. (2025) and were 'catapulted' from Neo-Štokavian BCMS. However, the overall subvarieties of Torlak could perhaps also be viewed under the lens of hybridism, where both endogenous and exogenous changes have taken place. This would entail a catapult effect to consolidate Type 1, a partial convergence of some subvarieties with Macedonian and a subsequent Torlak-internal development of the Timok and Jablanica subvarieties that acquired [+ topic familiarity] to determine Type 2.

5. *Conclusion*

In this article, I have proposed two tentative hierarchies to capture the internal and contact-induced development of doubling in Torlak, with the broader aim of contributing to the typology of clitic doubling in Balkan Slavic. These hierarchies are preliminary, but they already point to key patterns of variation and raise important theoretical questions. It is evident that the various Torlak subvarieties have undergone significant contact-induced change if compared to the baseline of Neo-Štokavian BCMS, with the so-called *catapult effect* (cf. Ledgeway et al. 2025) being particularly visible. Specifically, we observe a convergence between Preševo, Trgovište, Vranje Torlak and Macedonian, where doubling is consistently sensitive to specificity. In contrast, Jablanica and Timok Torlak show further Torlak-internal developments, in which topic familiarity plays a central role in the licensing of doubling, on top of specificity. These developments do not show convergence with Bulgarian, suggesting differentiated contact trajectories.

This evidence supports the idea that parameter hierarchies are a promising tool for the study of contact-induced syntactic change. However, further research is required, both from an empirical and theoretical perspective. On the theoretical side, additional investigation is needed to assess whether a feature-geometry-like model is necessary to accommodate the interplay between interpretive features such as [+/– specific] and [+/– hearer knowledge] or whether an alternative approach might better account for these interactions. The hierarchies in Figures 6-7 are thus best viewed as exploratory, i.e. they offer a structured hypothesis for future inquiry rather than definitive conclusions. Moreover, further fine-grained research is needed to refine the proposed doubling types and investigate whether topicality plays a

role in sub-varieties such as Preševo, Trgovište and Vranje Torlak as well. Future research should also incorporate other Balkan varieties in order to develop a broader parameter hierarchy that captures the syntactic convergence and divergence within the *Balkansprachbund*.

Abbreviations

ACC = accusative	F = feminine
AUX = auxiliary	IMP = imperative
AOR = aorist	PL = plural
CL = clitic	PRS = present
COMP = complementizer	PTCL = particle
DAT = dative	REFL = reflexive
DEF = definite	SG = singular

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Sulle vie del contatto linguistico.
Gerarchie parametriche e il raddoppiamento del clitico in torlacco

Questo articolo esamina il raddoppiamento del clitico (RC) nel torlacco, una varietà antico štokava (slavo del sud) che non ha subito lo shift accentuale tipico del ne-oštokavo (cfr. Vuković – Escher – Sonnenhauser 2022), ma che presenta numerosi fenomeni dovuti al contatto linguistico. Partendo da studi teorico-descrittivi prece-denti (in particolare Runić 2014 e Milosavljević – Živojinović in stampa), questo lavoro propone una nuova interpretazione della microvariazione nei pattern di RC nelle diverse sottovarietà del torlacco alla luce delle Gerarchie parametriche (Roberts – Holmberg 2010; Roberts 2012; 2019; Ledgeway et al. 2025). Dall'analisi emerge che sottovarietà quali Vranje, Trgovište e Preševo presentano un RC esclusivamente legato alla specificità – come il macedone – mentre altre, quali Jablanica, Timok, Žitorađa e Niš, mostrano ulteriori condizioni di licensing, indicando uno sviluppo ulteriore interno post contatto linguistico. Questo approccio permette un confronto formale con il neoštokavo BCMS e rafforza l'ipotesi di un'interpretazione del raddop-piamento clitico nel continuum del torlacco come esito di contatto linguistico.

Keywords: clitic doubling, parameter hierarchies, language contact, catapult effect, Torlak, South Slavic.

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