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Pronouns in Gascon: Clitic or Weak?

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Abstract There are two possible realizations of the third person masculine singular accusative (ACC) pronoun in Gascon: /u/ and /lu/. While /u/ can appear in proclisis or in enclisis, the distribution of /lu/ is more restricted: it can only appear in enclisis. Similarly, the first person singular dative (DAT) pronoun is realized as /m/ or /me/; the consonantal form is attested in pre- or post-verbal position, while the latter is only found post-verbally. We account for these facts by proposing that these pronouns are morphosyntactically distinct elements: /u/ and /m/ are clitics, and /lu/ and /me/ are weak pronouns. We support this proposal with the stress patterns found in the data and with related data from other Romance languages.

Keywords Weak pronoun. Clitic pronoun. Gascon. Enclisis. Imperatives. Stress shift.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Background. – 3 Proposal. – 4 Syntactic Account of Clitic /u/, /m/ and Weak /lu/, /me/. – 5 Phonological Evidence. – 6 Conclusion.

1 Introduction

In the variety of Gascon spoken in Bearn the third person masculine singular accusative (ACC) pronoun has two possible realizations: /u/ and /lu/. We find the former (/u/) in proclisis with indicative verbs or in enclisis with second-person singular (2sg) imperative verbs, but the distribution of /lu/ is more restricted: it can only appear in enclisis. We find a parallel distribution of the first-person singular

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dative (DAT) pronoun which is realized as /m/ or /me/ (with variation in the quality of the vowel: /me/, /mi/, /mə/, etc.). The former – the consonantal form /m/ – is found in proclisis or enclisis, and the latter – the CV form – is restricted to post-verbal position. In this paper, we follow Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) and analyze these pronouns as morphosyntactically distinct elements: /u/ and /m/ are clitics, and /lu/ and /me/ are weak pronouns. This proposal is corroborated by phonological data involving stress patterns and by cross-linguistic data from other Romance languages. This paper is organized as follows. In §2 we present the data and background information, along with a review of the literature on the topic, and we move on to our proposal in §3. We then provide a syntactic account of our proposal (§4) and supporting evidence from phonological patterns (§5). We conclude the paper in §6.

2 Background

Gascon is one of the varieties of Occitan (*langue d'oc*) or the Southern Gallo-Romance varieties of France (Oliviéri, Sauzet 2016; Mooney 2021; Kristol 2023; Miró Lozano 2024). The data that we use come from fieldwork conducted in January 2009 by Francisco Ordóñez who interviewed 6 native speakers of Gascon. They were all born in the Bearn region (Pau and areas around Pau) before 1945 and grew up speaking Gascon; they were also all fluent in French. At the time of the interviews, they were all 65 years or older. We recruited participants through contacts made at the Center for Occitan Studies and the University of Pau and the Adour Region (UPPA), and the interview consisted of a translation task (French-Gascon) of 100-200 utterances designed to elicit pronominal forms in different verbal contexts. Demographic information was also collected, and the interviews were recorded and coded. Each utterance was coded for over 40 grammatical properties: for the verb we coded person, number, tense, etc., and for the pronoun we indicated its form (accusative, dative, locative, etc.) and, where relevant, its gender, number, and person. The phonological properties include position of stress and gemination. All data are available on the freely accessible *Clitics of Romance Languages* database (Repetti, Ordóñez 2011). All data in this article come from this database, and the number after each utterance refers to the speaker and utterance number in the database. For consistency we only include verbs in the indicative mood with proclitics, and second person singular positive imperative verbs with enclitics.

In the first column in (1), we list the four pronouns under study. In the second column, they are presented in proclitic position, and in the third column in enclitic position in different phonotactic

environments (after a vowel-final verb and after a consonant-final verb). We see that /u/ and /m/ can appear in proclisis or in enclisis, while /lu/ and /me/ can only appear in enclisis. The data in (1) only include verbs with a single pronoun, not pronominal clusters (which we discuss below). The distribution is puzzling: why do we not find /lu/ and /me/ preverbally?

(1) single pronoun:
- /u/ and /m/ can appear in proclisis or in enclisis
- /lu/ and /me/ can only appear in enclisis, but not in proclisis

	proclisis	**enclisis**
/u/	/ke u-kuneʃ/ 'he knows him' (80.163)	• /krumpe-u/ 'buy it!' (80.54) • /—C-u/[1]
/lu/		• /krumpe-lu/ 'buy it!' (80.55) • /pren-lu/ 'take it!' (80.3)
/m/	/kɛ m-dits/ 'he tells me …' (80.169)	• /bajɛ-m/ 'give me …!' (80.19) • /dig-m/ > /dig-o̲m/[2] 'tell me!' (82.10)
/me/		• /da-me/ 'tell me …!' (80.18) • /pren-me/ 'take me!' (83.6)

There is little information in the literature on the morphosyntactic properties of clitics in Gascon, and much of it is inconsistent or incomplete.[3] For example, some sources state that the masculine singular ACC pronoun is /lu/, but then include examples of /u/ (Buckenmaier 1934). Some references list combinations of pronouns without any information on variants or restrictions on the position of the clusters relative to the verb or relative to each other (Rohlfs 1977; Ronjat 1908; Séguy 1954). A recent and welcome exception is Miró Lozano (2024) who provides a detailed analysis of clitics in Gascon based on more recent data from Bianchi and Romieu (2005) and Guilhemjoan (2006). Their findings partially coincide with ours.

Patterns similar to those found in Gascon are found in many Romance varieties. For example, in Pigna (Imperia, Italy) the masculine singular ACC is realized as /u/ preverbally (/e u-pøʃu faɹ/ 'I can do it' (93_54)) and /u/ or /ɹu/ in enclisis (/da-u-me/ 'give.2sg it to me!' (93_1b); /da:-ɹu/ 'give.2sg it!' (93_5)). Crucially, /ɹu/ is not

1 We do not have data with postverbal /u/ following a consonant. This is probably due to a limitation of our data, as we have very few consonant-final verbs inflected in the second person singular imperative form. Similarly, we do not have data with consonant-final verbs and enclitic clusters.

2 We analyze the /o/ as an epenthetic vowel inserted for syllabification purposes. Its quality is rounded because it is adjacent to a labial consonant.

3 We will discuss the literature on their phonological patterning in section 5.

attested in proclisis (*/e ɹu-pøʃu faɹ/ 'I can do it'). See Manzini, Savoia 2017 for more examples from different Romance varieties.

In the next section we present our proposal to account for this surprising distribution.

3 Proposal

Given the limited precedent in the literature for accounting for the patterns in (1), we begin our analysis by questioning whether a purely phonological approach can explain our data. Postverbally, all forms are found, while preverbally the distribution of the pronouns is restricted to /u/ and /m/. However, there is no phonological reason for banning /lu/ and /me/ in preverbal position: they consist of CV syllables that generally have an unrestricted distribution. We conclude that phonology alone is not the reason for the particular patterns in (1).

A more conservative approach would argue that these are merely cases of allomorphy, with a stipulation of which allomorph is realized in which context, and similar patterns in other Romance languages have been argued to be cases of allomorphy (Manzini, Savoia 2017; Pescarini 2018). While an allomorphic approach can describe the patterns, it does so in an ad hoc way, and does not provide an explanation for the patterns or for the syntactic correlations. Furthermore, it leaves the cross-linguistic similarities unaccounted for.

If phonology and allomorphy cannot account for the patterns, what can? We propose an alternative approach: the traditional distinction "clitic" vs. "strong pronoun" is too broad and needs to be further refined. There is not one uniform category of "clitic", and so-called "clitics" might actually correspond to two (or more) groups of pronouns that are morphosyntactically distinct: "true clitics" and "weak pronouns" (Cardinaletti, Starke 1999). We propose that the Gascon data can be better understood if we divide these pronouns into two categories: /u/ and /m/ are true clitics, and /lu/ and /me/ are weak pronouns.

One characteristic of clitic vs. weak pronouns identified by Cardinaletti, Starke (1999) and Cardinaletti (2008) applies to the pronouns under investigation in Gascon.[4]

(2) Weak pronouns are morphologically more complex than clitics (Cardinaletti, Starke 1999, 178).

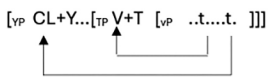
4 Other characteristics of weak pronouns, but not clitics, include the fact that they can be stressed and that clitics precede weak pronouns in clusters (Cardinaletti, Starke 1999). We address these claims below.

The presence or absence of /l/ in ACC reflects morphological complexity, so /lu/ is more complex than /u/. Similarly, the presence/absence of a non-epenthetic vowel in DAT reflects morphological complexity, so /me/ is more complex than /m/. Hence, we conclude that /lu/ and /me/ are weak pronouns.

4 Syntactic Account of Clitic /u/, /m/ and Weak /lu/, /me/

In this section we examine the asymmetries between proclisis and enclisis in the distribution of clitics and weak pronouns. First, we make explicit what theory of proclisis and enclisis we are adopting. According to wide consensus (since Kayne 1991; Rizzi 2000), it is assumed that enclisis (clitics or weak pronouns) is the product of the movement of the verb to the left of the final position where the clitic or the weak pronoun is in the structure.

(3) Schema of proclisis



(4) Schema of enclisis (with verb movement)

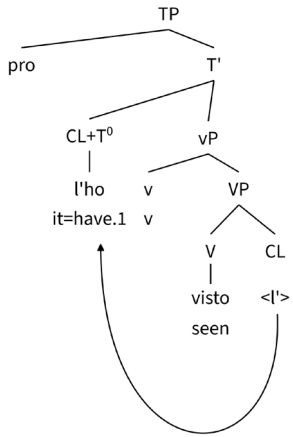


The idea that there is obligatory verb movement when there is enclisis is inspired by the first proposals of verb movement in French vs. English (Jackendoff 1972; Emonds 1978) in finite contexts. The basic hypothesis is that the differences in the distribution of adverbs and verbs (adverb-verb in English and verb-adverb in French) can be explained by assuming that verbs move past adverbs in French, but not in English. Thus, the difference is reduced to a parameter of verb movement. This proposal has further support because it can also account for the differences in distribution of verbs with floating quantifiers and negation in English vs. French. Similarly, the difference between verb-clitic and clitic-verb order can be explained by assuming further verb movement in verb-clitic order, but not in clitic-verb order.

Another important claim in our proposal is that clitics and weak pronouns have different landing sites: clitics are heads X and adjoin to a head, while weak pronouns are XPs and land in a specifier

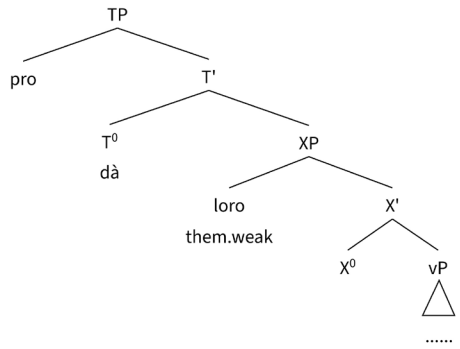
position (Cardinaletti, Starke 1999). We assume that these two types of pronouns have moved from their respective argument positions. According to Kayne (1991), tense is the head where clitics move to in finite clauses (see also Corver, Delfitto 1999); since clitics are heads, they adjoin to a tense head.

(5) tree with clitic adjoining to T: Italian *l'ho visto* 'I have seen it'



Weak pronouns are able to move to the specifier of a functional projection XP above the vP and below Tense (Cardinaletti 1991).

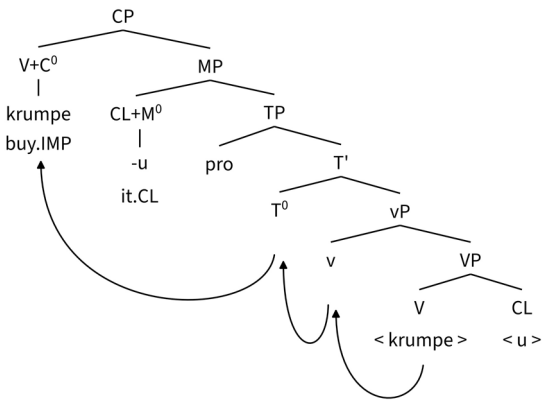
(6) tree with weak pronoun: Italian *dà loro* 's/he gives them'



Imperatives do not have obvious tense projection since they do not have forms in the past or future. This lack of obvious specification has been taken by some linguists to indicate that there is no tense in imperatives. It is therefore possible to think that clitics adjoin to a

different kind of projection in imperatives. Some linguists assume they adjoin to C or M (Mode) (Rivero, Terzi 1995). Gascon second person imperatives have the order verb-pronoun (clitic or weak pronoun) as many other Romance languages. If we follow the hypothesis of verb movement above, we will assume that the verb must move to a projection higher than the landing sites of the pronoun. Rivero and Terzi (1995) have proposed that the verb moves to C.

(7) tree with verb movement to C and enclisis in imperatives: Gascon /krumpe-u/ 'buy it!'

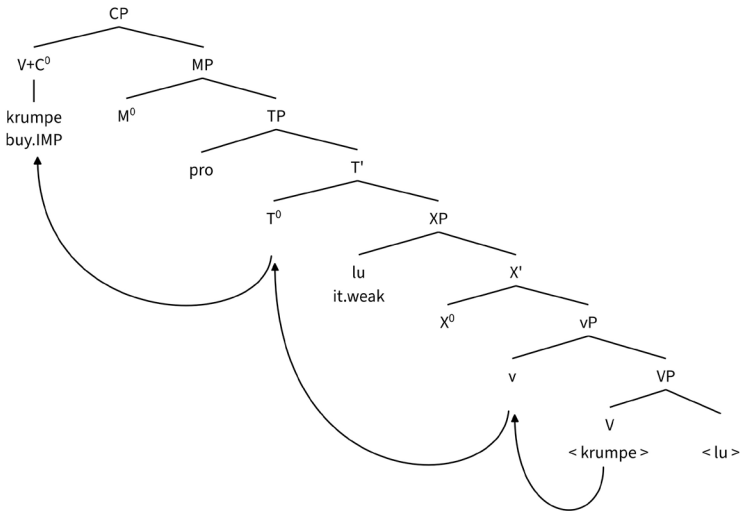


In some of the examples of enclisis, Gascon has weak pronouns and not clitics. We link the presence of weak pronouns in those contexts to the special nature of imperatives with respect to tense. In those special conditions we propose that weak pronouns meet the conditions for being realized. Below we present the two choices for 3rd person ACC and 1st person DAT pronouns: in some cases the clitic is chosen, and in others the weak pronoun is.

(8)	post-verbal clitic pronoun	post-verbal weak pronoun
3rd person ACC	/krumpe-u/ 'buy it!' (80.54)	/krumpe-lu/ 'buy it!' (80.55)
1st person DAT	/bajɛ-m/ 'give me …!' (80.19)	/da-me/ 'give me …!' (80.18)

The distribution of clitics and weak pronouns must be explained by the specific condition that requires one or the other in the syntactic tree. Some contexts permit clitics and others do not.

(9) tree with weak pronoun: Gascon /krumpe-lu/ 'buy it!'



The crucial question is why weak pronouns are not made available in regular tense clauses in Gascon (our first observation about the lack of weak pronouns in proclisis). For that we invoke a principle of Economy of Representation (Cardinaletti, Starke 1999, 198). In finite contexts, weak and clitic pronouns compete under the same syntactic configuration, and a principle of Economy of Representation requires the clitic to be made available.

(10) Economy of Representations: Minimise Structure (Cardinaletti, Starke 1999, 198)

This generalization reduces to the statement that a "smaller structure" is obligatorily chosen when possible. This means clitics are chosen over weak pronouns in finite clauses, where all speakers are consistent in having only clitics. However, contrary to finite clauses, in imperatives (and for some speakers, in infinitives) weak pronouns are made available. Not all clitics are banned from imperatives, and we get a mixed system with some speakers, as shown previously. Clitics are made available based on very complex factors like when pronouns appear in a cluster, and there is intra- as well as inter-speaker variation. But imperatives are somehow exceptional in allowing weak pronouns in these languages. Standard Catalan and Standard Spanish do not have any weak pronouns available in their inventory, and languages that have lost weak pronouns require the insertion of clitics in imperatives.

We follow the logic of Cardinaletti and Starke's (1999) explanation of the distribution of the weak pronoun *loro* vs. clitic *gli* in Italian, both of which are third person plural datives. Weak pronoun *loro* is

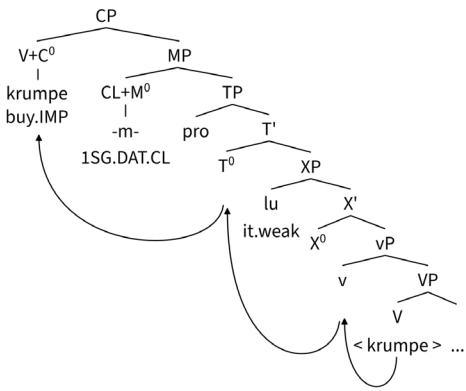
possible when a given clitic position in T is not available. If clitic *gli* is not available (the reason for this is beyond the scope of this paper), then *loro* is possible. Thus, Italian allows these two configurations: one with clitics and the other one with weak pronouns. This can also explain the use of one or the other in Gascon.

(11) two configurations of Italian 'I have given them the book'

(a)	ho	dato	*loro*	il	libro
	have.1sg	given	them.dat	the	book
(b)	*gli*	ho	dato	il	libro
	them.dat	have.1sg	given	the	book

This accounts for our finding that weak pronouns /lu/ and /me/ can only appear in enclisis, but not in proclisis. We identify another generalization that can be accounted for in a similar way: pronoun combination DAT-ACC /m-lu/ is also only found in enclisis. The cluster /m-lu/ involves weak pronoun /lu/ in combination with clitic /m/.[5] This is a similar structure to what Ordóñez and Repetti (2014) found with the DAT-ACC cluster /millə/ in Neapolitan, which was analyzed as a combination of a clitic (/m/) with a weak pronoun (/illə/). In the trees above for imperatives, clitics are higher than weak pronouns; therefore, it is not surprising that the order of pronouns found in enclisis in Gascon (and Neapolitan) is clitic-weak: /m-lu/ (and /m-illə/).

(12) tree with verb-clitic-weak in imperatives: Gascon /krumpe-m-lu/ 'buy it for me!'



5 Another cluster attested in the data is ACC /u/ (clitic) followed by DAT /me/ (weak): /u-me/. We do not address this split-clitic structure in the paper.

This analysis is also consistent with another property of weak pronouns identified by Cardinaletti (2008, 64): a morphologically complex pronoun (weak pronoun) cannot be the first constituent in a cluster. According to this analysis, the /m/ in the cluster /m-lu/ cannot be a weak pronoun; therefore, it must be a clitic. Not surprisingly, we do not find weak /me/ or /lu/ as the first element in a cluster.

Finally, if we think about the diachronic evolution of clitics and weak pronouns, our system makes an interesting prediction. It has been assumed that weak pronouns first appeared in Late Latin, and weak pronouns lead to clitics. In systems in which clitics and weak pronouns are both available, clitics take precedence over weak pronouns when the licensing conditions are equal. We propose that clitics first appeared in Romance languages in finite clauses with tense, and later they started to appear in other contexts. We have not yet found any counter-evidence to this hypothesis.

5 Phonological Evidence

We return to phonology. Stress in Occitan is somewhat predictable: one of the final two syllables of a word is usually stressed. The final syllable is stressed if it is heavy, and the penultimate syllable is stressed if the final syllable is light (Mooney 2021). The literature on stress with enclitics in Romance is vast, and for Occitan, two patterns are reported: either the final clitic is stressed,[6] or stress is shifted to the penultimate syllable when there is an enclitic pronoun (Sauzet 1986). We found each of these patterns in the Gascon data, but not for all enclitics (13)-(14). We indicate the stressed syllable of the verb and the quality of the vowels of the verb in isolation in the underlying form.[7]

(13) stress shift to the final enclitic

(a) /u/ —[8]
(b) /lu/ /krúmpa-lu/ > [krúmpe-lú] ‘buy it!’ (80.55)
(c) /m/ —[9]

6 Kelly 1973, 93, 200; Oliviéri, Sauzet 2016, 331; Séguy 1954; Sauzet 1986.

7 Note that the unstressed final vowel of the verb may raise from /a/ > /e/ when an enclitic is added (13b), and from /a/ > /é/ when stress is shifted to it ((13e), (14a), (14c), (14d)). We limit ourselves to noting the occasional change in vowel quality without proposing an explanation, and to noting similar changes in other Romance varieties, such as Friulian in which the unstressed final /e/ of the verb raises to /i/ when an enclitic is added: *clame* ‘call.2sg!’ > *clami-mi* ‘call.2sg me!’.

8 The one case of prominence on final clitic /u/ in [krumpe-u] ‘buy it!’ (80.110) involves rising intonation in a question-like contour.

9 We cannot check this for clitic /m/ since it is asyllabic.

(d) /me/ /prén-me/ > [prén-mé] ‘take me!’ (83.6)
(e) /m-lu/ /bája-m-lu/ > [bajé-m-lú] ‘give it to me!’ (80.20)

(14) stress shift to vowel before the enclitic

(a) /u/ /krúmpa-u/ > [krumpé-u] ([krum.péw]) ‘buy it!’ (80.54)
(b) /lu/ /prén-lu/ > [prén-lu] ‘take it!’ (80.3)
(c) /m/ /bája-m/ > [bajé-m] ‘give me…!’ (80.25)
(d) /me/ /krúmpa-me/ > [krumpé-mə] ‘buy me…!’ (80.58)
(e) /m lu/ /bája-m-lu/ > [bajá-m-lu] ‘give it to me!’ (80.29b)

One of the diagnostics that Cardinaletti and Starke (1999, 172) propose for distinguishing weak vs clitic pronouns is the presence vs absence of stress: weak pronouns attract or affect stress, while true clitics are unstressed. We can test our proposal that in Gascon /u/ and /m/ are clitics, and /lu/ and /me/ are weak pronouns, by checking if /u/ and /m/ are unstressed, while /lu/ and /me/ attract stress. We find this prediction borne out in the data in (13) in which stress is realized on the post-verbal weak pronoun (/lu/ and /me/), but not on the post-verbal clitic /u/ (see footnotes 7-8).

What about the stress shift in (14)? We attribute that to the metrical structure of the verb + enclitic unit. We saw above that stress in Occitan is predictable: a heavy final syllable attracts stress, else the penult is stressed. In (14a) and (14c) the final VV and VC sequence, respectively, attract stress, while in (14d)-(14e), the final syllable of the verb + enclitic unit is light, and the penultimate syllable is stressed. For final /lu/ (14b), the only attested forms in our database involve a monosyllabic verb, making it impossible to see if there is a stress shift to the penultimate syllable; we attribute this gap to the limited data available. In the data in (14), the metrical pattern of the language – which does not regularly allow for final stressed light syllables – takes precedence over the requirement for final weak pronouns to be stressed.

One may question the role of intonation in the patterns in (13)-(14). Intonation of Occitan varieties, including Gascon, has been studied in detail (Sichel-Bazin, Meisenburg, Prieto 2015; Prieto, Sichel-Bazin, Meisenburg 2007-14; Lai, Rilliard 2007; Lai 2005; Hualde 2003), and our data are consistent with the findings. First, commands are associated with a rising-falling intonation (Sichel-Bazin, Meisenburg, Prieto 2015), and we found that in our data as well. Second, it has also been noted that the intonational patterns of some varieties of Occitan have been influenced by French, the neighboring and superstrate prestige variety. In those varieties, the pitch accent is aligned with the last stressed syllable of the Accentual Phrase (AP), which includes verb + enclitic units, and there may be a shift in prominence, so that

the lexically stressed syllable is deaccented and the AP-final syllable is stressed (Sichel-Bazin, Meisenburg, Prieto 2015; Mooney 2021). That claim is also consistent with our observations.

We have not yet examined the phonetics of these phrases in detail, but we can make a prediction. If final prominence is an intonational artifact, we would expect it with both weak pronouns and true clitics; on the other hand, if final prominence is due to metrical stress, we would expect it with weak pronouns only, but not true clitics. In order to check this, we need to see if there are any data with prominence on final enclitic /u/. The intonational analysis would predict that such data should exist, while the weak pronoun vs. true clitic approach that we are pursuing would predict that such data should not exist. In fact, we do not find stress on final clitic /u/, except in an interrogative intonation context (see footnote 7). These facts support our analysis of /lu/ and /me/ as weak pronouns, and /u/ and /m/ as clitic pronouns, but they also suggest a complex interplay of metrical structure and intonation that is beyond the scope of this article.

Finally, note that the patterns described in (13)-(14) are optional, and we also find a few cases in which enclisis does not affect stress assignment (15). These patterns are much less frequent, and we have no data for lack of stress shift with enclitic /m-lu/ (15e), in other words, stress is always shifted with enclitic /m-lu/. In the cases in which stress is not shifted with enclisis (15a-d), we can argue that maintaining the original metrical structure of the verb is more important than accommodating the metrical structure of the post-verbal weak pronoun or the derived metrical structure of the verb + enclitic unit. It is important to note that the data in (15b) and (15d) involve monosyllabic verbs, so it is impossible to differentiate between no shift and stress shift to the penultimate syllable.

(15) no stress shift with enclisis

(a) /u/	/pórta-u/ > [pórta-u] ‘carry it’ (81.49)
(b) /lu/	/prén-lu/ > [prén-lu] ‘take it!’ (80.3)
(c) /m/	/krúmpa-m/ > [krúmpe-m] ‘buy me...!’ (80.82)
(d) /me/	/dá-me/ > [dá-me] ‘give me…!’ (80.18)
(e) /m-lu/	—

The correlation between stress and the type of post-verbal pronoun is found in many Romance varieties. Ordóñez and Repetti (2014, 175) analyze the Lucanian post-verbal unstressed ACC pronoun /u/ as a clitic (/fá-mm-u:/ ‘do.2sg it for me!’), and the post-verbal stressed ACC pronoun /illə/ as a weak pronoun (/fa-mm-íllə/ ‘do.2sg it to me!’). Others have analyzed these alternations as cases of allomorphy (Pescarini 2018) or as having a syntactic and semantic motivation

(Manzini, Savoia 2017). See Repetti 2016 for more on stress and post-verbal pronouns in Romance.

6 Conclusion

We have argued for an analysis of pronouns in Gascon whereby they fall into at least two different morphosyntactic categories: clitic pronouns and weak pronouns. In (16) we summarize the data in light of Cardinaletti's (2008) and Cardinaletti and Starke's (1999) diagnostics for clitic vs. weak pronouns.

(16) clitic vs. weak pronoun

diagnostic	Gascon	proposal
1. The presence/lack of /l/ reflects morphological complexity, and weak pronouns are morphologically more complex than clitics (Cardinaletti, Starke 1999, 178).	/lu/ is morphologically more complex than /u/.	/lu/ is a weak pronoun, and /u/ is a clitic.
2. A weak pronoun never precedes a clitic in a cluster (Cardinaletti 2008).	/me/ and /lu/ are never the first element in a cluster.	/me/ and /lu/ are weak pronouns.
3. The lack/presence of stress on a pronoun is a diagnostic of the clitic/weak distinction (Cardinaletti, Starke 1999, 172).	/lu/ and /me/ can be stressed, while /u/ is not stressed.	/lu/ and /me/ are weak pronouns, and /u/ is a clitic.

While the data we analyze consistently point in the direction we propose, further research would strengthen our conclusions. The sample size is not particularly small (see Repetti, Ordóñez 2011 for more examples); however, the questionnaire was identical for all informants, limiting the range of contexts examined. In particular, the number of verbs used was small, and monosyllabic verbs are overrepresented. Additional data and a broader range of forms would therefore be desirable to further corroborate our findings.

In conclusion, we propose that analyzing pronouns in this way allows us to better understand their distribution and phonological properties and provides a more straightforward account of the different realizations of the same pronoun – in preverbal vs. postverbal position, stressed or unstressed forms, and with varying degrees of morphological complexity – while constraining cross-linguistic variation to a limited range of patterns.

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