Abstract: This paper focuses on Istro-Romanian and argues that the TAM auxiliaries of this variety are not morphophonological clitics. This analysis is supported by the existence of several empirical phenomena (auxiliary-licensed VP-ellipsis, scrambling, and interpolation), some not found in modern Romance, others very rare in modern Romance. This property of Istro-Romanian auxiliary verbs accounts, in conjunction with other features of this variety (e.g., the availability of C-oriented and I-oriented pronominal clitics), for the massive variation in the word order of pronominal clitics, auxiliaries, and the lexical verb found in the Istro-Romanian sentential core. An endangered Romance variety spoken in Istria and in the diaspora, historically related to (Daco-)Romanian, Istro-Romanian has been in contact with Croatian since the settlement of Istro-Romans in the Istrian peninsula. As some of the Istro-Romanian features and phenomena are found both in Croatian and in old Romanian, it appears that contact with Croatian acts as a catalyst of structural convergence engendering the retention of an archaic property of Istro-Romanian auxiliaries: a lower position on the grammaticalization cline, closer to the full word status of their etyma.

Keywords: auxiliary; VP-ellipsis; verb movement; language contact; Istro-Romanian; old Romanian; Croatian; convergence

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Istro-Romanian is an endangered Romance variety spoken in Istria, Croatia, with about 200 speakers at present (cf. Filipi 2002; Vrzić and Doričić 2014), plus émigré speakers in the New York area (Maiden 2016, p. 91). Traditionally considered to be one of the sub-Danubian “historical dialects” of Romanian (alongside Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian), Istro-Romanian displays two tendencies in its syntax: (i) on the one hand, Istro-Romanian displays a series of Romance archaic features, also found in old Romanian (which have been taken to mirror the shape of the language at the moment of the dialectal split, presumed to have finished around the 14th century); (ii) on the other, we observe the influence on the syntax of Istro-Romanian of Croatian (see Kovačec 1966, 1968) and, to a much more limited extent, of Northern Italian dialects, Croatian–Istro-Romanian bilingualism being the norm in the area. While a comprehensive grammar/syntax of Istro-Romanian is not available at present, there exist partial descriptions of this linguistic dialect (Popovici 1914; Puşcariu 1926; Coteanu 1957; Kovačec 1971, 1984, 1998; CaraguMarioteanu 1975; Sărăbu and Frănilă 1998; Hurren 1999; Zegrean 2012; Giusti and Zegrean 2015; Maiden 2016) which offer significant details and insights into its structure. It is also important to mention that ‘old Romanian’ refers to the timespan comprised between the beginning of the 16th c. and the year 1780; the first written attestations of Romanian date back to the beginning of the 16th c.: Neaşcu’s Letter (1521), the first non-translated text written in Romanian, and The Hymns Book of Psalms (1500/1510), the first translation of a foreign (Old Church Slavonic) text in Romanian. See Timotin (2016) for more details on
the periodization of Romanian. Notably, the dialectal split took place prior to the earliest written attestations of Romanian.

1.2. Aim of the Paper and Methodology

The verbal nexus of Istro-Romanian is characterized by massive variation, displaying numerous distinct word order patterns of pronominal clitics, auxiliaries, and the lexical verb—all of them found across Romance, but not at the same time in the same variety. Furthermore, Istro-Romanian also shows instances of auxiliary-licensed verbal ellipsis (=VP-ellipsis), a phenomenon severely restricted in the Romance languages (see Nicolae 2019a: ch. IV for an overview). By using a standard minimalist generative grammar framework (see Section 1.3 below) and by working with the existing written corpora of Istro-Romanian\(^3\), we aim to demonstrate that the paradoxical properties briefly mentioned above (as well as many others, discussed throughout the paper) are best understood under the premises that Istro-Romanian auxiliaries are not clitics (see also Geană 2017). Therefore, in contrast to the auxiliaries of Daco-Romanian, Istro-Romanian auxiliaries are less grammaticalized (closer to full words on the Hopper and Traugott’s (2003) ‘grammaticalization cline’), and this morphophonological property has syntactic relevance. The non-clitic nature of Istro-Romanian auxiliaries will be shown to result from the combined effect of the conservative nature of this idiom (=retention of an archaic feature from an unattested stage of (proto-)Romanian) and language contact with Croatian\(^4\).

1.3. Conceptual Tools

In what follows, we adopt the current generative view on clause structure (I), according to which finite clauses are made up of three domains: the CP-domain, the IP(//TP)-domain and the V_P-domain(//V-VoiceP)-domain. Research in this area has revealed that, cross-linguistically, any of the three domains can be targeted by V-raising/movement. It is well-known that these domains themselves are made up of a relevant number of projections—cf., for example, Rizzi’s (1997) split-CP analysis or Cinque’s (1999) cartographic approach; finer-grained structural details will be provided when necessary.

1. CP > IP > vP
   (continental) Germanic V2 > modern Romance > English
   old Romance V2

It is also necessary to introduce some minimal background on the phenomena relevant for our argumentation.

Consider first auxiliary-licensed VP-ellipsis; the main properties of this phenomenon\(^5\)—which occurs rather rarely cross-linguistically (it productively occurs in English)—are the following:

- it is a type of elliptical construction which is dependent on the existence of a licenser (a TAM auxiliary or a modal auxiliary);
- it is insensitive to clause type (main/embedded clause) and other conditions (e.g., in contrast to ellipses such as gapping, it is not parasitic on coordination);
- there are two conditions which need to be met for the licensing of this type of ellipsis (see Thoms 2010; Authier 2012, i.a.):
  (i) lower verb movement of the lexical verb (movement below I);
  (ii) non-clitic auxiliary verbs.

Secondly, a minimal background on verb morphosyntax in (Daco-)Romanian is also necessary; this provides a starting point for understanding the Istro-Romanian data. Up to the present point, research on old and modern (Daco-)Romanian has established the following:

- modern Romanian auxiliaries are clitics (Avram 1999); the same characteristic carries over to old Romanian too (Nicolae 2019b);
• modern Romanian synthetic finite verbs are characterized by V-to-I movement (Dobrovie-Sorin 1994; Cornilescu 2000; Ledgeway 2015, i.a.);
  o in a framework that assumes a finer-grained cartographic structure of the IP in the tradition of Cinque (1999) (distinguishing a Mood field, a Tense field, and an Aspect field), synthetic finite verbs raise to the top-most I-field, Mood (Nicolae 2015; Schifano 2018);
  o in periphrastic constructions, both the auxiliary/auxiliaries and the lexical verb reside in the IP-domain (Alboiu and Motapanyane 2000; Nicolae 2015);
• V-to-C movement is restricted to imperatives, conditional imprecations, and gerunds in modern Romanian—and it always takes the shape of Rivero’s (1992, 1994) Balkan ‘Long Head Movement’ (=LHM) rule, by which it is the lexical verb, not the auxiliary that moves to C;
• although statistically V-to-I movement is the dominant option (Nicolae 2015), V-to-C movement is more widespread in old Romanian (also occurring in finite non-imperative clauses), and (English-type) low(er) verb movement (on the surface manifested as scrambling and interpolation) is also found in old Romanian finite clauses (Nicolae 2019b);
• pronominal clitics are I-oriented in both old and modern Romanian (cf. Săvescu Ciucicvara 2011; Hill and Alboiu 2016, i.a.), and occupy dedicated projections at the edge of the IP-domain; in correlation with other syntactic diagnostics, the proclisis/enclisis alternation is relevant for assessing the level of verb movement (V-to-I/V-to-C).
Some terminological clarifications are also necessary.
• Interpolation represents the separation of the clitic pronoun from the finite verb by (an) intervening XP(s), while scrambling refers to the separation of the auxiliary verb from the lexical verb by (an) intervening XP(s). It has been shown that in the Romance languages multiple processes may lie behind the derivation of interpolation and scrambling; thus, while on the surface, each of these phenomena, in its own right, may appear to be a unified phenomenon, from a structural point of view, they are based on different processes (see also Poole 2007, p. 188, n. 1, who makes similar comments in the analysis of old Spanish). Hence, in what follows, we use the terms interpolation and scrambling to refer to the word order patterns described above; their structural analysis is assessed on the basis of syntactic diagnostics for each of the varieties examined here (Istro-Romanian, old Romanian, and Croatian).
• We use the label ‘Long Head Movement’ (LHM) (Rivero 1992, 1994) conventionally, to describe an empirical phenomenon specific (but not limited) to the Balkan languages: the displacement of a non-finite lexical verb across the auxiliary. Technical details on the derivation of LHM structures will be provided below.

In what follows, we set out to bring evidence for the main claim of the paper, namely that Istro-Romanian auxiliaries are not clitics. Viewed from a diachronic, Latin-to-Romance perspective, this property translates as the preservation of a more archaic status of Istro-Romanian auxiliaries: while these verbs become functional elements showing the typical phenomena of auxiliation—(morpho)phonological reduction (in comparison to their etyma), loss of thematic structure, loss of morphosyntactic features (see, i.a., Roberts and Roussou 2003, ch. 3; Ledgeway 2016, p. 768)—from the perspective of Hopper and Traugott’s (2003) grammaticalization cline, their status is that of full words (neither clitics, nor affixes). We argue that contact with Croatian acts as a catalyst of structural convergence engendering the retention of an archaic feature. As will be seen, the hypothesis that this is an archaic feature is supported by old Romanian data, as early old Romanian shows a few clear instances of auxiliary-licensed VP-ellipsis and related phenomena (interpolation and scrambling).
2. Three Phenomena Showing the Non-Clitic Nature of Istro-Romanian Auxiliaries

2.1. Auxiliary-Licensed VP-Ellipsis

The availability of VP-ellipsis in Istro-Romanian is a phenomenon which has not been discussed in the literature (Zegrean 2012, p. 122 briefly mentions it). From a comparative Romance perspective, this feature of Istro-Romanian is unexpected: in contrast to the other Romance languages, Istro-Romanian auxiliary-licensed VP-ellipsis brings this idiom closer to languages such as English. The following data, extracted from the corpora, show that the phenomenon is frequent. In what follows, we present the distribution of auxiliary-licensed VP-ellipsis in Istro-Romanian.

(i) The auxiliary licenses ellipsis in main clauses. Ellipsis is found with the perfect auxiliary (2a–e), the future auxiliary (2f), and the conditional auxiliary (2g,h). The symbol √ marks the ellipsis site; in situations in which the antecedent is not immediately obvious from the immediate context, it is represented in brackets < >.

2. a. - ˘Uai dus?
   have-AUX.PERF.2SG bring-PTCP
   - ˘Uam √. (TC, 8)
   have-AUX.PERF.1SG
   ‘- Did you bring/take away/- I did.’

b. - [ . . . ] ˘uat, vezut iuva-i cea mare hruve?
   have-AUX.PERF.2PL see-PTCP where-is the big pear.tree
   - ˘Uam √. (TC, 46)
   have-AUX.PERF.1PL
   ‘- Did you see where the big pear tree is?- We did.’

c. - Ce, ˘uai pogodit?
   Q-PRT have-AUX.PERF.2SG guess-PTCP
   - ˘Uam √. cum ˘uai zis. (TC, 51)
   have-AUX.PERF.1SG how have-AUX.PERF.2SG say-PTCP
   ‘- Did you guess/- I did, as you said.’

d. - Ce, ˘uai specit tot?
   Q-PRT have-AUX.PERF.2SG grill-PTCP everything
   - ˘Uam √. (TC, 52)
   have-AUX.PERF.1SG
   ‘- Why, did you grill everything/- Yes, I did.’

   - Ai cea facut tu zis?
   have-AUX.PERF.2SG you-SG that do-PTCP
c-eai what-have-AUX.PERF.2SG say-PTCP
   - ˘Uam √! (LM, 138)
   have-AUX.PERF.1SG
   ‘- Did you do what you said/- I did!’

e. - Ai verit, frate?
   have-AUX.PERF.2SG come-PTCP brother-VOC
   - ˘Am √! (LM, 169)
   have-AUX.PERF.1SG
   ‘- Did you come, brother/- I did.’
f. - Grofu av urdineit che io me mores count have-AUX.PERF.3SG order-PTCP that I CL.REFL.1SG have.to ānsura c-alui (…) fil’e, e io sām ānsurat; nu marry with-his daughter and I marry-PTCP poc. Ver √ that I have.to te tu. can-IND.PRES.1SG will-AUX.FUT.2SG CL.ACC.2SG you-ŠG oucearule? shepherd-VOC - Io voi √, io! (LM, 123)
I will-AUX.FUT.1SG I ‘- The count ordered that I have to marry his daughter, but I am married; I can’t. Will you, shepherd?/- I will.’
g. Ke l’a ziș – Res ție: that CL.ACC.3SG=have-AUX.PERF.3SG say-PTCP would-AUX.COND.2SG te tu marită dupa mire? CL.REFL.2SG you-ŠG marry-INF after me ța zițe;
she says - Res ✓. (AK, 338) would-AUX.COND.1SG ‘and he said—would you marry me? She says: - I would.’
h. - Rei borebit pocini?
would-AUX.COND.2SG maybe rest-INF - Res ✓. (TC, 57)
would-AUX.COND.1SG ‘- Would you rest?/- I would.’

(ii) The auxiliary licenses ellipsis in embedded clauses. In our corpus survey, we have identified the perfect auxiliary (3a) and the future auxiliary (3b) in these contexts.

3. a. - Cuheit-țai?
cook-PTCP=have-AUX.PERF.2SG
e le zis-a che a ✓, ma he say-PTCP=have-AUX.PERF.3SG that have-AUX.PERF.3SG but c-a zadurmit și that=have-AUX.PERF.3SG fell.asleep-PTCP and nuscarle … (TC, 71) someone ‘- Did you cook?/He said that he had, but he fell asleep and someone . . . ’
b. Zis-au cela tireru che va √
say-PTCP=have-AUX.PERF.3SG that young.DEF that will-AUX.FUT.3SG <insura> (LM, 137) marry ‘The young one said that he would <get married>.’

(iii) Auxiliary-licensed VP-ellipsis is also available in negative clauses:
4. a. - Vezi, tu-i zadurmit.
   see-IND.PRES.2SG you-2SG=have-AUX.PERF.2SG fall.asleep-PTCP
   - Nu ūam √. (TC, 36)
   NEG have=AUX.PERF.1SG
   ‘- See, you fell asleep./ - No, I did not.’

   b. Ma ur fost-a ansurat, e ur
   but one be-PTCP=have-AUX.PERF.3SG marry-PTCP and one
   n-av √. (LM, 77)
   not=have-AUX.PERF.3SG
   ‘But one got married, and the other did not.’

(iv) In other cases (5), the auxiliary licenser is also followed by remnants:

5. a. - Cum ūai sta nopте durmit?
   how have-AUX.PERF.2SG this night sleep-PTCP
   - Ūam √
   have=AUX.PERF.1SG well
   ‘- How did you sleep last night?/- I did <sleep> well.’

   b. Se-i tu utat,
   if=have-AUX.PERF.2SG you-2SG forget-PTCP
   n-ūam √
   not=have-AUX.PERF.1SG me
   ‘Even if you have forgotten, I have not.’

   c. Ali ia cunoscut-a ie. ia
   but she recognize.PTCP=have-AUX.PERF.3SG him he
   n-av √. (TC, 45)
   not=have-AUX.PERF.3SG
   ‘She recognized him, but he did not <recognize> her.’

The features in (i)–(iv) show that the auxiliary-licensed VP-ellipsis in Istro-Romanian has the same properties as its English counterpart (see Section 1.3 above).

2.2. Discontiguous Verbal Clusters as Evidence for Low Verb Movement

In previous work, we have brought evidence in favour of the hypothesis that, in contrast to modern Daco-Romanian, Istro-Romanian shows numerous instances of low verb movement (Dragomirescu and Nicolae 2018). Low(er) verb movement is also found in old Romanian (Nicolae 2019b) (see also Section 3.2.1 below). The tools for diagnosing low(er) verb movement are the diagnostic adverbs for V-movement (Section 2.2.1) in Cinque’s (1999) hierarchy (see Schifano 2018 for an update and revised hierarchy) and other patterns of discontiguity in the verbal cluster—scrambling for periphrastic structures and interpolation for synthetic structures (Section 2.2.2).

The existence of low(er) verb movement is directly relevant to our argumentation: it is a property which directly correlates with the availability of auxiliary-licensed VP-ellipsis, which, in its turn, acts in correlation with non-clitic auxiliaries.

2.2.1. Scrambled and Interpolated Adverbs

The most significant argument for low verb movement is the position of Cinque’s diagnostic adverbs for V-movement. In particular, we observe that the lexical verb occurs to the right of the adverbs ‘well’, ‘already’, ‘then’ (6a-e), themselves preceded by the auxiliary; it is well known that these adverbs lexicalize various specifiers in Cinque’s (1999) hierarchy: ‘well’ marks the boundary between the IP-domain and the vP-domain, ‘already’ and ‘then’ are T-oriented adverbs. Other (circumstantial) adverbs (6f-g) may also occur in between the auxiliary and the lexical verb.
6. a. Åm have-AUX.PERF.1SG bire say-PTCP zis? (SF, 91)
     ‘Did I say it well?’

   b. io not=have-AUX.PERF.1SG bire-nțelēs (SF, 168)
     ‘I did not understand well.’

   c. ke CL..REFL..3SG=have-AUX.PERF.3SG tetˇ opit (AK, 338)
     ‘That he already got drunk’

   d. lel’i CL..REFL..3PL=have-AUX.PERF.3PL atince ustrăsît (SF, 187)
     ‘And then they got scared’

   e. vor will-AUX.FUT.3PL atunčê cuvîntă (SF, 158)
     ‘They will speak then’

   f. si 1-av CL..ACC..M.3SG=have-AUX.PERF.3SG musât
     ‘And she thanked them a lot’

   g. Sī che s-a che CL..REFL..3SG=have-AUX.PERF.3SG chiaro priˇ cudit.
     ‘And he was very astonished, because he had never seen something like this, anywhere in
     the world.’

   h. io not=have-AUX.PERF.1SG colè fos (SF, 155)
     ‘I wasn’t there.’

   Moreover, in structures without auxiliaries, these adverbs occur in preverbal position;
   notice (7a) in particular, where the ‘well’-adverbial is trapped between the subject and the
   synthetic lexical verb, clearly indicating a low position of the lexical verb on the spine.

7. a. ke that voi you-PL bire say-PTCP stîț (SF, 177)
     ‘That you know well’

   b. și CL..ACC..M.3SG=have-AUX.PERF.3SG musât zehvales (TC, 11)
     ‘And I thank you a lot’

   The position of the lexical verb with respect to adverbials is an indicator for a lower
   position of the lexical verb on the clausal spine.

2.2.2. Other Patterns of Scrambling

   The scrambling of several types of constituents in between the auxiliary and the lexical
   verb has a double significance: on the one hand, it is a supplementary argument for low
   verb movement; on the other hand, it shows that Istro-Romanian auxiliaries show a lower
   degree of grammaticalization being self-standing verbal elements, at least when compared
to Daco-Romanian (Dragomirescu and Nicolae 2016, 2018). The constituents that can occur
in between the auxiliary and the lexical verb are: the subject realized as a simple nominal
phrase (8a) or as a complex one (8b), the prepositional object (8c), the temporal adverbial
and the direct object (8d), the pronominal subject and the manner adverbial (8e), etc.

8. a. Când acesarudozneit (TC, 23)
   when have-AUX.PERF.3SG emperor-NOM find.out-PTCP
   ‘when the emperor found out’

b. Când au mul’era lu cesta ţom verit cu merinda (TI, 146)
   when have-AUX.PERF.3SG wife GEN this man come-PTCP with lunch
   ‘When this man’s wife brought lunch’

c. Iel’ a zehvalit pozdravit (TC, 12)
   they.NOM have-AUX.PERF.3PL thank-PTCP cu ie niţom
   si s-a CL.REFL.3PL=have.AUX.PERF.3PL with her-ACC greet-PTCP
   ‘They thanked her and greeted her.’

d. şi inche n-Ďam vezut (TC, 26)
   not=have-AUX.PERF.1SG see-PTCP
   and yet pozdravit
   ‘and I did not see any human anywhere’

e. cum ţom bire zis (TC, 45)
   as have-AUX.PERF.1SG I-NOM well say-PTCP
   ‘as I said well’

Scrambling is also found in old Romanian, alongside interpolation (see Dragomirescu 2013; Nicolae 2019b, ch. 3). As shown in Nicolae (2019b), there is no evidence for Aux-to-C movement in old Romanian; therefore, strings of the form Aux—(scrambled) XP(s)—V (in conjunction with other properties of old Romanian) constitute convincing evidence in favour of a lower position of the verb on the clausal spine. By contrast, as argued in previous work (Dragomirescu and Nicolae 2020) and as will also be shown below, Aux-to-C movement is available in Istro-Romanian; from this perspective, scrambling is compatible in Istro-Romanian with two structural analyses (being an instance of parametric ambiguity in the sense of Clark and Roberts 1993)—one in which the Aux resides in the IP and another with Aux-to-C movement—hence, it only represents partial evidence for low verb movement. However, due to the particular word order of the scrambled elements, there are examples such as (8e) which clearly favour an analysis in which the verb occupies a lower position on the clausal spine. In this example, the nominative subject io (‘I’) precedes the vP-edge adverbial bine (‘well’), which in its turn precedes the lexical verb; the most plausible analysis takes the subject to be in the canonical Spec,TP position and the adverbial in its base position, thus with the lexical verb occupying a lower position (presumably on the edge of the vP-domain), irrespective of the position of the auxiliary.

To sum up, Istro-Romanian scrambling also provides indirect evidence for low verb movement.

2.3. Aux-to-C and Other Word Order Patterns with Pronominal Clitics and Auxiliaries

As extensively shown in Dragomirescu and Nicolae (2020), Istro-Romanian also shows instances of Aux-to-C movement, reflected by the Aux-Cl ordering. It is highly likely that Aux-to-C is, in part, an effect of language contact, as it is well known that Croatian displays Wackernagel cliticization (Čamdžić and Hudson 2007; Schütze 1994; Migdalski 2009). However, there are examples such as (9b) that show that Aux-to-C also occurs when the clause-initial position is occupied by another prosodically integrated constituent.
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9. a. ău have-aux.perf.3pl se cl.refl.pass dus take-ptcp la ea (SF, 96)
‘they were taken to her’

b. măla have-aux.perf.3sg=cl.acc.f.3sg ay-o sproçălnit (AK, 327)
mother curse-ptcp

‘Her mother cursed her’

c. și have-1sg ăum le cl.acc.f.3pl dus bring-ptcp ăn iame (TC, 47)
‘and I brought them in the pit’

‘and I brought them in the pit’

d. șet-ăl will-aux.fut.2pl=cl.acc.m.3sg cuñoște? (SF, 55)
‘Will you know him?’

e. Se nu, will-aux.fut.1sg voi te cl.acc.2sg ucide (TC, 90)
‘If not, I will kill you’

f. voi will-aux.fut.1sg o cl.acc.f.3sg là take-inf cu mine (TC, 40)
‘I will take her with me’

‘I will take her with me’

g. iel’ will-aux.fut.3pl=cl.acc.f.3sg vor-o ask-inf tere (SP, 8)
‘they will look for her’

h. Cine will-aux.fut.3sg cl.acc.f.3sg va bring-inf porta? (TC, 47)
who cl-aux-cl

‘Who will bring this?’

The fact that Aux-to-C in Istro-Romanian may be partially determined by Wackernagel’s law (either imported from Croatian as an effect of language contact, or preserved in Istro-Romanian from a medieval Romance phase in the form of the Tobler-Mussafia law10, “ultimately a Romance-specific reanalysis of the Wackernagel Law”, as characterized by Ledgeway 2012, p. 161) is in itself a supplementary piece of evidence in favour of the non-clitic nature of Istro-Romanian auxiliaries: auxiliaries are good candidates for occupying a clause-initial position; hence, they are not clitics.

Moreover, in clusters with pronominal clitics, auxiliaries, and lexical verbs, virtually every word order possibility is attested: besides Aux-Cl-V (9), we find Aux-V-Cl (10a), Cl-Aux-V (10b); Cl-V-Aux (10c); V-Cl-Aux (10d); V-Aux-Cl (10e). This flexibility shows that Istro-Romanian patterns both with Daco-Romanian and the Balkan languages more generally—in displaying LHM patterns (Rivero 1994) such as (10d) and (10e)—and with the (older stages of the) Western Romance languages11—through the availability of Aux-to-C movement (9), (10a). Thus, both the lexical verb and the auxiliary are equally good candidates for movement to C.
Relevance for the status of Istro-Romanian auxiliaries. We believe that this word order flexibility is highly relevant for the status of Istro-Romanian auxiliaries.

In previous work, Nicolae (2015, 2019b) has argued that lexical verbs, not auxiliaries, may undergo movement to C in old Romanian, and that this is determined by their morphophonological nature. To be more precise, it is shown that Rivero’s (1994) LHM pattern is derived by Vicente’s (2007) (cf. also Kayne 1991) V⁰-to-Spec analysis (an analysis also adopted by (Harizanov 2016) in the derivation of Bulgarian participle fronting). Old Romanian auxiliaries (which are clitics) remain in situ, while lexical verbs move to C; evidence that clitics themselves cannot move to C, while non-clitic elements may undergo movement to C comes from the incorporation of clitic adverbs (clitic adverbials incorporate into the structure of the lexical verb and move along with it, but cannot themselves move) and from the blocking effects of phrasal negation on V-to-C movement. Turning now to Istro-Romanian, from the sets of examples in (9) and (10), it appears that both lexical verbs and auxiliaries may undergo movement to C. Applying the same logic as for old Romanian, it follows that in Istro-Romanian auxiliaries too may be categorized as non-clitic elements, this ensuring their eligibility for movement to C.

As a side note, it is important to specify that, up to the present movement, we have not been able to identify a clear trigger of verb movement to C (be it an auxiliary or the lexical verb) in Istro-Romanian. On the Croatian pattern, Wackernagel requirements might be one of the causes, but this does not hold for all the situations where we find verb movement to C. This state of affairs strongly resembles old Romanian, where a clear trigger for V-to-C movement could not be identified either, a fact which lead to interpreting old Romanian V-to-C movement as an instance of old Romance “relaxed” V₂, whereby movement to C is triggered by a formal feature in the C-domain, which does not have a clear functional correlation.

To sum up, Aux-to-C movement is relevant for assessing the status of Istro-Romanian auxiliaries: if we agree that, as in old Romanian, only non-clitic elements many undergo movement to C, then the fact that Istro-Romanian auxiliaries may undergo movement to C indicates that they are not clitics.

2.4. Summary: Non-Clitic Auxiliaries in Istro-Romanian

In this section, we have reviewed the evidence in favour of analysing Istro-Romanian auxiliaries as full words (non-clitic elements); this consists in the following:
ability of auxiliaries to license VP-ellipsis;
scrambling and interpolation, formally analysed as instances of low(er) verb movement on the clausal spine;
Aux-to-C movement; Istro-Romanian auxiliaries may undergo movement to C just as the lexical verb of Daco-Romanian and other Balkan languages that display LHM.

3. Retention of an Archaic Feature vs. Contact: Old Romanian and Croatian

In this section, we examine the phenomena discussed above with respect to old Romanian and Croatian, in order to formulate a proper analysis of the Istro-Romanian data. One of the important goals of this paper is to determine the weight played by heritage vs. language contact in the syntax of Istro-Romanian, and VP-ellipsis and the other word order phenomena discussed here offer the perfect setting to carry out this investigation.

3.1. VP-Ellipsis

3.1.1. Old Romanian

In old Romanian, VP-ellipsis is very rarely attested (the five examples in (11)—see Nicolae 2019b, p. 85; Zamfir 2007, pp. 163, 320; Carabulea 2007, p. 45). In four of these examples, (11a), (11b), (11d), (11e), the ellipsis is co-licensed: the auxiliary is accompanied by functional material with which it makes up a cluster. Co-licensing is a form of phonological enhancement that bypasses the morphophonological licensing problem of auxiliaries: it indicates that old Romanian auxiliaries are transitioning from a full word status to a clitic status.

As will be shown below (see Section 3.2.1), the other condition on VP-ellipsis licensing is met: old Romanian shows evidence for low(er) verb movement on the clausal spine.

3.1.2. Croatian

Auxiliary-licensed VP-ellipsis is also attested in BCS (12) (Stjepanović 1998), as shown in (12). Arguing that clitics are located in different projections in syntax, Stjepanović (1998) shows that the size of the ellipsis site is variable: in (12b), ellipsis targets both the dative and the accusative clitic (along with the lexical verb), while in (12c), in the same configuration...
under VP-ellipsis, the accusative clitic is elided along with the lexical verb and the dative clitic is preserved. However, (12d) shows that ellipsis cannot operate discontinuously by deleting, along with lexical verb, the dative clitic and preserving the accusative clitic.

12. a. Oni su kupili novine, a i vi ste (takodje) you 2PL also
   ‘They bought newspaper and you did so, too.’

b. Mi smo mu ga dali, a i vi ste <mu ga dali> (takodje).
   ‘We gave it to him, and you did so, too.’

c. Mi smo mu ga dali, a i vi ste <mu> ga <dali> (takodje).
   ‘We gave it to him, and you did so, too.’

d. *Mi smo mu ga dali, a i vi ste mu ga dali, a i vi ste <mu> ga <dali> (takodje).
   ‘We gave it to him, and you did so, too.’

While it is not entirely clear whether the same formal analysis can be given to this type of ellipsis in Croatian and Istro-Romanian (and old Romanian, see Section 3.1.1 above), what is relevant is the existence of surface string identity in the two idioms in contact: just as in Croatian, in Istro-Romanian, an auxiliary can also license the ellipsis of the lexical verb with which it is associated.

3.2. Discontiguous Verbal Clusters and Their Relevance
3.2.1. Old Romanian Interpolation and Scrambling: Low Verb Movement

Low(er) verb movement on the clausal spine is also found in old Romanian. The different patterns of scrambling and interpolation, with and without Cinque’s diagnostic adverbs for V-movement, represent empirical evidence in favour of this analysis. For the limited purposes of this paper, we illustrate the phenomenon with a few relevant examples, but the reader is referred to Nicolae (2019b: ch. 3) for an extensive discussion which brings to the fore more phenomena and data, more than those presented here.

In synthetic structures, adverbs (13) are among the constituents interpolated; note that pururea (‘always’) (13a) and iară (‘again’) (13b) are part of the set of Cinquean diagnostic adverbs for V-movement (merging in the lower pre-VP area and lexicalizing an Asp\textit{perfect} specifier and, respectively, an Asp\textit{repetitive} specifier). (Floating) quantifier subjects may also be interpolated (13c).

13. a. ce se pururea pomenea
twhich CL-REFL PASS always mention.IND.PRES.3SG
   ‘which is always mentioned’ (Prav.1581:258r)

b. Să nu te iară în pată răstorni
   SA.SUBJ not CL-REFL 2SG again in bed return-SUBJ.2SG
   ‘you should not go back to bed again’ (CC2.1581:146)

c. Și așa fui a se toți mântui
   and so be-IND.PS.3SG A.INF CL-REFL.3PL all save-INF
   ‘and this is how they all found salvation’ (CV.1563-83:48r)
In analytic structures, the interposition of adverbials in between the auxiliary and the lexical verb is well represented. Thus, the following V-movement diagnostic adverbials are found: low adverbs such as *bine* (‘well’) (14), high adverbs such as *amu* (‘now’) (lexicalizing a T-related specifier) (15), and adverbial expressions such as *acumusi, de sârg* (‘quickly’) (16), which are ambiguous between an Asp-event reading and Asp-process reading, occupying different positions in Cinque’s hierarchy (the high adverb space and the low adverb space, respectively). (Floating) quantifier subjects may also break the auxiliary-lexical verb cluster (17).

14. șî *va* *bine* orând<sub>u>i* lucrurile tale
and will-AUX.FUT.3SG well organize-INF your and he will organize your things well’ (DVT.1679-99:323v)

15. a. de *vâmû* *amu* pune stiintele noastra
if will-AUX.FUT.1PL now put-INF knowledge.PL.DEF our
‘if we now put our knowledge before God’ (CC2.1581:19–20)

b. De *veri* *amu* vârsa lacrâmi pre fata ta
if will-AUX.FUT.2SG now shed.INF tears on face.DEF your
‘if you now have tears shedding on your face’ (CC2.1581:52)

16. a. că vei *acmu¸ su* muri
that will-AUX.FUT.2SG quickly die-INF
‘that you will quickly die’ (FT.1571-5:1v)

b. de s-*au* de sârgu lâjit
so,that CL.REFL.3SG=have.AUX.PERF.3SG quickly expand-PTCP
‘so that it (=Moldova) quickly expanded’ (ULM.~1725:A-1f.2v)

17. din a cui sfânt* iesfint*',*i tot, i sfânt, i all hallow-INF
from AL.F.5G whose holiness CL.REFL.PASS will-AUX.FUT.1PL
‘from whose holiness we will all be hallowed’ (CM.1567:241r)

Multiple interpolated and scrambled constituents are possible:

18. a. se *nu se* *cumva* fără socotință
SĂ.SUBJ noKL.REFL.3PL somehow without judgement
*meastece* fără leage
mix.up-SUBJ.3PL without judgement
‘they should not recklessly interfere without judgement’ (Prav.1581:243v)

b. cum *au* Cristus noauă *dzis*
as have-AUX.PERF.3SG Christ us.DAT tell-PTCP
as Christ told us’ (FT.1571-5:1v)

Nicolae (2019b: ch. 3) documents the entire range of interpolated and scrambled constituents; for the purposes of the present argument, the interpolation and scrambling of adverbials and of quantifiers represent good empirical evidence for the existence of the low(er) verb movement option in the grammar of old Romanian.

Furthermore, the statistical examination of interpolation and scrambling (see Nicolae 2019b, ch. 3) has shown that, in old Romanian, these phenomena preponderantly occur in embedded clauses. From a diachronic comparative Romance perspective, this distribution confirms the formal analysis based on low verb movement: it is expected for low verb movement to mostly occur in embedded clauses where V-to-C movement (i.e., V2) is generally blocked by the lexicalization of complementizers or wh-elements.

3.2.2. Croatian Interpolation and Scrambling, and Their Relevance

Defined as above (Section 1.3) (i.e., the separation of the clitic pronoun/auxiliary verb from the (finite) lexical verb), interpolation and scrambling are also found in BCS. Thus, in
(19a–b), we see the adverbial ‘always’ separating the clitic pronoun from the synthetic verb, while in (19c–d), we see temporal and manner adverbs intervening between the auxiliary and the lexical verb.

19. a. Jelena me stalno nešto zapitkuje.
   ‘Jelena is always asking me something.’

b. Jelena me stalno zapitkuje nešto.
   ‘Jelena is always asking me something.’

c. Marko je tek juče nešto saznao.
   ‘Marko found out something only yesterday.’

d. Javi mi ako se nečega iznenada setio.
   ‘Let me know if you suddenly remember anything.’

(Stojanović 1997, pp. 307, 313–14)

Note that more than one constituent can be interpolated (19a) or scrambled ((19c), (20)). Interpolation and scrambling occur both in main clauses (20a–b) and in embedded clauses (20c).

20. a. Juče mi je Marija nešto ispričala.
   ‘Marija told me something yesterday.’

b. Marko je tek juče Jelenu upoznao.
   ‘Marko met Jelena only yesterday.’

c. Jasna mi je rekla da Petar nešto kupio.
   ‘Jasna told me that Peter had bought something.’

(Stojanović 1997, pp. 307–8)

While it is clear that, on the surface, the phenomena in (18) to (20) are very similar to their Istro-Romanian and old Romanian counterparts, it is hard to determine whether these data can be analysed relying on the same rich clausal structure as that employed for Istro-Romanian and old Romanian, two Romance varieties. Given the C-orientation (and Wackernagel nature) of Croatian pronominal clitics (Mišeska Tomić 1996; Rivero 1997; Migdalski 2009), a formal analysis of interpolation based on low(er) verb movement is uncertain—at most speculative. On the other hand, Stojanović (1997, p. 310) observes that BCS main (i.e., lexical) verbs in periphrastic tenses do not raise out of the VP; thus, low(er) verb movement can be invoked, at least in the analysis of scrambling.

What is important for the purposes of the present analysis is the existence of these surface string identities in Croatian, Istro-Romanian, and old Romanian: this supports the idea that convergence obtains, even though it is limited to surface phenomena, not to deep structural properties.

4. Analysis and Conclusions

Putting aside the issue of what the correct formal analysis of the Croatian data is, what we unequivocally observe is the existence of surface string-identity: identical word order phenomena are found in old Romanian, Istro-Romanian (which shares the same ancestry as
old Romanian), and Croatian/BCS (the contact language). From this perspective, language contact with Croatian appears to have acted as a catalyst: several word order patterns of the contact language overlap with similar patterns of the target language, even though they might not have the same syntactic structure. This overlap generates convergence (cf. Hickey 2010), ensuring the preservation of several archaic properties: in the particular case of auxiliaries, they retain the full word status, i.e., they do not move further up on Hopper and Traugott’s (2003) grammaticalization cline. The representation below (Figure 1) summarizes the relation between Istro-Romanian, old Romanian, and Croatian:

![Diagram showing the relation between languages](image)

**Figure 1.** The relation between Istro-Romanian, old Romanian, and Croatian.

The existence of auxiliary-licensed VPE along with low verb movement represents convincing evidence for the non-clitic nature of auxiliaries. We believe that this is not a trivial property, limited to (morpho)phonological component. Since it occurs along with correlation with other properties, the non-clitic nature of auxiliaries is a feature that genuinely reflects some central properties of Istro-Romanian syntax. Secondly, it explains the massive variation found in the Istro-Romanian verbal nexus: being categorised as non-clitic elements, auxiliaries show the same displacement properties like full lexical verbs. Thus, along with the double setting of pronominal clitics, I-oriented (the Romance parameter setting) and C-oriented/Wackernagel (a setting resulting from contact with Croatian) (see Dragomirescu and Nicolae 2018, 2020), the word order freedom of auxiliary verbs, lexical verbs, and pronominal clitics described in Section 2.3 above derives from the fact that auxiliaries are equally good candidates for movement to C; Rivero’s LHM rule may therefore affect auxiliaries too.

Our findings are consonant with recent scholarship on the effects of language contact in syntax. In the analysis of the Judeo-Spanish spoken in Bulgaria, besides confirming the fact that in language contact settings structures and elements belonging to narrow syntax are stable, while interface phenomena are vulnerable, Fischer (forthcoming) also shows that equivalence relations are important: “in order for these structures to be retained or innovated equivalence relations between languages in contact are relevant”. The non-clitic auxiliaries of Istro-Romanian are a perfect illustration of this idea: a morphophonological property which has syntactic effects is retained as it instantiates an equivalence relation between the two languages—particularly, features associated with non-clitic auxiliaries are found both in Croatian and Istro-Romanian.

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There is a distinction between Northern and Southern Istro-Romanian, two mutually comprehensible yet distinct varieties. 

When referring to empirical phenomena common to Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, we use the conventional abbreviation BCS.

The corpus is based on a subset of the texts surveyed in Pană Pană Dindeleanu’s (2016) Syntax of Old Romanian. The abbreviation is followed by the year marking the date of the text. An interval is marked when the dating is not precise. Each example cited is followed by a reference to the folio ([f].)

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Notes
1 There is a distinction between Northern and Southern Istro-Romanian, two mutually comprehensible yet distinct varieties which diverge in verb inflections and in other grammatical and phonological respects (see Kovačec 1984, especially pp. 550–54, and Maiden 2016, p. 91, a.o.); Northern Istro-Romanian is spoken to the north of Mount Učka (in the village of Žejane), while Southern Istro-Romanian is spoken in several villages and hamlets (Šušnjevica, Brdo, Noselo, etc.) to the south of Mount Učka. The grammatical properties relevant for the phenomena discussed in this paper are present both in the north and in the south; henceforth, by Istro-Romanian, we refer to all the possible varieties present on the territory.

2 When referring to empirical phenomena common to Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, we use the conventional abbreviation BCS.

3 For Istro-Romanian, we have used the corpora collected in the 20th century by Sextil Puşcaru, Leca Morariu, Traian Cantemir, Richard Sárbu and Vasile Frătiţă, and August Kovačec; we have preserved the transcription conventions used in these sources. With respect to the other idioms discussed here (old Romanian and Croatian/BCS), most of the old Romanian examples used for illustration are taken from personal previous work (Dragomirescu 2013; Nicolae 2015, 2019b), and the Croatian examples are taken over from the reference literature.

4 As pointed out by one of the reviewers, since the settlement of the Istro-Romanians in Istria, the speakers of this idiom have been in contact with (standard) Croatian and the Čakavian variety (cf. Kalsbeek 1998 for a descriptive account of the Čakavian variety spoken in Orbanići). The fieldwork carried out in Istria (particularly in Šušnjevica, Žejane and Brdo, as well as in other places not traditionally inhabited by Istro-Romanians, but where Istro-Romanians have migrated—e.g., Brseć or Rijeka) in August–September 2021 (by a team of researchers which includes the authors of the present article) has revealed that the current Istro-Romanian speakers no longer speak the Čakavian variety, but rather standard Croatian.
Auxiliary-licensed VP-ellipsis should be properly distinguished from verb-stranding VP-ellipsis (cf. Martins 1994, and see Goldberg 2005 for a comprehensive analysis), which is a different type of ellipsis.

There is empirical evidence for the fact that in old Romanian a low, v-oriented pronominal cliticization site is also residually active (cf. Nicolae 2019c for details); other Romance varieties also show instances of low cliticization (see Ledgeway and Lombardi 2005; Tortora 2014). However, none of the diagnostic features for this low site discussed by Nicolae (2019c) for old Romanian is found in Istro-Romanian, hence a potential low position for pronominal clitics in this idiom is excluded by default.

The abbreviation list for the source of the Istro-Romanian and old Romanian examples is present at the end of the article.

Notably, LHM with auxiliaries is also available in BCS/Croatian. The following paradigm (i) from Wilder and Čavar (1994, p. 1) is illustrative in this respect; here, in the past perfect (ib) (made up of the combination of both a finite form and a participial form of the auxiliary be (bili) plus the participle of the main verb), we see the auxiliary bili undergoing LHM (ib) (witness the ungrammaticality of (9c));

(i)  a. Marija i Ivan su bili čitali knjigu.
    b. Bili su čitali knjigu. (ii) a. Ja ho´ cu ˇ citati knjigu.
       b. ‘they (Maria and Ivan) had read the book’

The notion “relaxed V2” was introduced by Ledgeway (2007) to characterize old Romance V2 grammars (except for Old French, which exhibits continental Germanic-type strict V2, cf. Roberts 1993). Thus, in these varieties, the verb in finite matrix clauses is required to move to C, this movement operation being “generally, though not invariably, accompanied by a further movement rule which fronts one (or more) salient constituent(s)” (Ledgeway 2007, p. 122).

IRR stands for ‘irrealis’. Fischer (forthcoming) focuses only on syntax–information structure phenomena (stylistic fronting and clitic doubling) in a contact setting, but clearly stresses that her account extends to the other interface (the syntax–phonology/prosody interface) as well.

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