Subject Clitics and Verb-second in Surmiran Rumantsch

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Surmiran is a language of the Rumantsch group, spoken in parts of the canton of Graubünden in Switzerland. This paper deals with two central aspects of its syntax and their interaction: (a) the phenomena that lead to the description of Surmiran (and Rumantsch more generally) as "verb-second", and (b) a set of subject clitics associated specifically with such verb inversion. The unusual behavior of an indefinite subject element in is described against this background, and it is concluded that this word has been re-analyzed as a verbal clitic. Finally, the question is raised of what constitutes the "verb-second" property in Surmiran.

Two topics which have been the basis of vast amounts of attention within the literature on syntax are the analysis of pronominal clitics on the one hand, and of verb-second constructions on the other. In each case, the material available for examination shows significant asymmetries. Discussions of pronominal clitics have focused largely on the languages of the Romance and Slavic families, though examples from a variety of quite unrelated languages (e.g., Tagalog) have played a role as well. In nearly all instances, it is only object pronouns which have figured in theoretical treatments, and indeed some have considered special clitics\(^1\) to be particularly associated with object positions. In some forms of northern Italian (Poletto 1993) and Franco-Provençal (Roberts 1993), however, special clitics associated with subject position have been observed, and further exploration of this phenomenon is clearly warranted.

With respect to verb-second, the asymmetry resides in the range of languages that have contributed to our knowledge of the phenomenon. Virtually all of the literature on verb-second has been concerned with languages of the Germanic family, and it is hard to know how much of what emerges is characteristic of

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\(^1\)Following a distinction originally due to Zwicky (1977), I distinguish *simple* clitics (elements whose unusual property is phonological in nature, and based on their prosodic organization) from *special* clitics. The latter are the stuff of the syntactic literature on clitics, since they appear in positions which are different from those occupied by corresponding non-clitic elements. Special clitics are typically (but not always) prosodically weak and thus simple clitics as well, though there are many simple clitics that are otherwise unremarkable syntactically. The phonological and morphosyntactic dimensions of clitic behavior are quite independent from a logical and theoretical point of view.
verb-second (a construct of grammatical theory) and how much is based on the
historic closeness of the languages involved. This paper discusses these two topics
and their interaction in a language where both are central to syntactic structure:
Surmiran [surmiran], one of the Rumanisch languages of Switzerland.

“Rumanisch” is one of Switzerland’s (four) official languages. There
is considerable dispute over whether it forms part of a larger Rhaeto-Romance
family together with Friulian and Dolomitic Ladin (see Heiman and Benincà
1992, Liver 1999), but it is clearly distinct within Romance from the various
languages referred to as “Italian,” as well as from French, Franco-Provençal, and
others. The name covers a variety of distinct linguistic forms—as we might
expect, given that “Rumanisch” is spoken in a number of individually somewhat
isolated mountain communities and the fact that despite its status as an “official
national language,” it is nowhere on a par with German, Italian and French as the
language of education and administration. Most speakers of Rumanisch live in
the canton of Graubünden, and nearly all are at least bilingual (mostly in German,
though Italian is important in some parts of the canton). In the 1990 census, about
66,000 people indicated that Rumanisch was the language of which they had the
best command or which they most used, of whom 41,000 lived in Graubünden.

Five different literary standards correspond roughly to linguistically distin-
guishable dialect areas: Surselvan, Sutselvan, Surm(e)iran, Pütscher and Vallader.
In addition, a cross-dialectal compromise known as Rumanisch Grischun, created
in 1982, is in fairly wide use as a uniform written standard, though it does not
correspond directly to any spoken form of the language. Of these, Surselvan is
probably the best known and best described, with the Engadine dialects Pütscher
and Vallader (sometimes grouped as “Ladin”) coming next. Surmiran is thus a
minority language even within the minority Rumanisch community, with about
3200 speakers (Simeon 1996). In specific communities in the region where it is
spoken (see Figure 1), however, Surmiran is the principal language, spoken by
as many as 89.7% of the population (in Salouf, where I conducted field work
during the summers of 2002 and 2003), and still being acquired as a first language
by children. There is no doubt that the language is endangered, especially as a
result of the dominance of German (and Swiss German) in the larger surrounding
community, but it is not yet moribund by any means.

Even the name Surmiran conceals a good deal of linguistic diversity.
The languages spoken in Vaz (Ebnet 1981) and Bergün (Lutta 1923) differ in
interesting and important ways phonologically and lexically from that spoken in
Salouf and Savognin (described here), though all are referred to as Surmiran.
In recent years, a standard form of Surmiran has emerged for teaching in the
schools and for newspapers and other written forms. This form of the language
has been codified in large part by Signorelli et al. (1987) (written in Surmiran). It is
closest to the languages of the villages of Mon and Stierva, near Salouf, but lacks
some of the distinctive phonological features of this and other forms of Surmiran.
Syntactic features, our interest here, do not seem to vary nearly as much among

2Spellings with e reflect the fact this is the language of Surmiran [surmiran]. In the adjectival form
Surmiran, however, stress is final, and the vowel of the penultimate syllable is therefore reduced to i,
as reflected in the spelling which I adopt here on the basis of the Surmiran written standard.
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Figure 1: Map of Surmeir (from Grisch 1939)
forms of Surmiran, however. Apart from Signorelli et al. (1987), I should also mention Grisch (1939) (a traditional description concentrating on phonology) and Thôni (1969) (a pedagogical description written partly in German and partly in Surmiran), as well as other pedagogical material currently in use in the area, as sources for the study of Surmiran.

What may interest the syntactician about Surmiran is the fact that (like other forms of Swiss Rumsch) the language is strongly verb-second, although it is clearly Romance and not Germanic. Opinions differ as to the origin of the verb-second structure: one of the authors of Haiman and Benincà (1992) believes it was borrowed from German, while the other argues it originated as an independent common northern Italian medieval pattern. Regardless of its origins, however, verb-second is a pervasive and thoroughly assimilated aspect of the syntactic structure of this Romance language, offering us the possibility of studying it under conditions that are largely independent of the history of Germanic.

In addition to verb second, Surmiran has a system of pronominal clitics. As opposed to what is the case in most Romance languages, however, these are not limited to object arguments. Under quite specific conditions, post-verbal clitic elements appear that refer to the subject. These are not simply phonologically reduced forms of the full pronouns that can serve as subjects, since they do not replace but rather may double the subject nominal. Similar subject clitics are found (under slightly different conditions) in Engadine Rumsch (Puter and Vallader); their occurrence in Surselvan is much more limited and associated with "non-standard" speech. These pronouns are one of the topics of Linder (1987), though the Surmiran data there are quite limited and not taken from current usage.

These two phenomena are closely connected, in that the Surmiran subject clitic elements only occur when the full subject is inverted with the verb, as a consequence of the verb-second requirement or in questions. Subject clitics and the grammatical mechanisms that implement verb-second thus form part of a single complex whose utility needs to be explained.

A final factor in this situation is provided by the impersonal subject element ins, which at first glance appears simply to be a pronominal equivalent to German man or French on. The interaction of ins with verb-second, however, suggests that it has the properties of a special clitic rather than those of a simple pronominal. It also shows us something about just what "verb-second" means in this language.

The discussion here is primarily descriptive, not theoretical. While I have my own views on the proper analysis both of verb-second and of special clitics, I am more concerned in this paper to make the facts of Surmiran known to a wider audience of syntacticians than to advocate a particular analysis of those facts.

1. Some basic facts of Surmiran syntax

I will assume without explicit argument that the basic structure of the clause in Surmiran is SVO, as illustrated in (1).3

3Since this paper is concerned with syntax, not phonology, I will not describe the sound system of Surmiran in any detail. Examples are presented in the standard orthography, which is based on
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(1) Ursus discorra stupent rumantsch
Ursus speaks-3sg excellently Rumantsch
Ursus speaks Rumantsch very well

In both main and subordinate clauses, the major constituents appear consistently in this order and are not subject to scrambling or other variation, with one exception. In main clauses, a single focused non-subject element (either an argument of the verb or an adverbial) can appear in initial position. When this happens, the verb and the subject invert, so as to leave the verb in second position. The remainder of the clause preserves the same order as in uninverted sentences.

(2) a. Rumantsch discorra Ursus stupent
Rumantsch speaks-3sg Ursus excellently
Ursus speaks *Rumantsch very well

b. Stupent discorra Ursus rumantsch excellently speaks-3sg Ursus Rumantsch
Ursus speaks Rumantsch very well

Thus far everything is straightforward, but an additional possibility exists in the case of sentences with subject-verb inversion such as those in (2). When the subject is post-verbal, it can be doubled with a clitic element. Such a clitic is not possible when the subject remains in initial, uninverted position.

(3) a. Rumantsch discorra’l Ursus stupent
Rumantsch speaks-3sg=3sgm Ursus excellently
Ursus speaks Rumantsch very well

b. *Ursus discorra’l stupent rumantsch
Ursus speaks-3sg=3sgm excellently Rumantsch
Ursus speaks Rumantsch very well

Sentences like (3) where a clitic appears along with an overt subject have a mildly emphatic interpretation. The presence of the clitic, however, licenses the deletion of the subject (subject to referential recoverability in discourse, naturally) as in (4).

(4) Rumantsch discorra’l stupent
Rumantsch speaks-3sg=3sgm excellently
He speaks Rumantsch very well

German and Italian conventions. The digraphs gl and gr generally represent palatal lateral [ɫ] and nasal [n] as in Italian. Tsch represents a lateral of voopalatal affricate [tʃ], as in German; ɐ is a similar but distinct affricate [tʃ] articulated apically, corresponding to a palatal stop in some other Rumanisch languages. The voiced correspondent of ɐ is written as ɐ before front vowels. Voiced and voiceless coronal fricatives are distinguished phonologically but not orthographically, as are open and closed e and o (as in Italian). Stress is generally on the final syllable if this contains a full vowel, or on the penult if the last vowel is schwa.
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Surmiran is not a pro-drop language in general, and the subject cannot be omitted in the absence of the clitic; whether or not the conditions for inversion are present.

(5) a. *Discorra rumantsch stupent
   speaks-3sg Rumantsch excellently
   He speaks Rumantsch very well

b. *Rumantsch discorra stupent
   Rumantsch speaks-3sg excellently
   He speaks Rumantsch very well

These facts are not limited to sentences with third person nominal subjects—the same pattern shows up in other persons as well, as illustrated in (6).

(6) a. Ia/*ʃl discorr mal rumantsch
   (I) speak-1sg badly Rumantsch
   I speak Rumantsch badly

b. Rumantsch discorr ia/*ʃl mal
   Rumantsch speak-1sg (I) badly
   I speak Rumantsch badly

c. Rumantsch discorr-a⁴ mal
   Rumantsch speak-1sg=1sg badly
   I speak Rumantsch badly

d. Rumantsch discorr-a ia mal
   Rumantsch speak-1sg=1sg I badly
   I speak Rumantsch badly

2. The nature of the subject clitics

The full set of post-verbal subject clitics is given in (7). These are overt in all cases except the second person plural.

⁴Here I have separated the clitic element -a from the preceding verb with a hyphen, to distinguish the first singular form plus a clitic from the third person singular with no clitic (as in example (1) for example). The standard orthography does not make such a distinction.
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(7) Person/Number/Gender | Subject clitic
---|---
1sg | วล
2sg | วล
3sg masc. | วล
3sg fem. | วล
3sg impersonal | วล
1pl | วล
2pl | วล
3pl masc/fem | วล

Why do I call these elements "clitics," rather than treating them as aspects of the morphology of the verb? They do meet standard criteria for analysis as clitics, such as those of Zwicky and Pullum (1983): for instance, they are not sensitive to lexical (as opposed to purely phonological) properties of their hosts, and they are attached "outside of" clearly affixal material. But is this sufficient? And if they are clitics, what is their nature? Do they have a referential function, like the object clitics of various Romance languages (including Surmiran), or do they simply register the person, number and gender of the subject, like the pre-auxiliary subject clitics of Franco-Provençal Valdôtain (Roberts 1993)?

The post-verbal elements in (7) cannot simply be morphology registering the properties of the subject, like agreement markers. One piece of evidence in support of this is the fact that they play an essential role in sanctioning the omission of a pronominal subject. As we have seen in (5) and the corresponding first person examples in (6), subjects cannot in general be omitted, despite the presence of relatively "rich" agreement on the verb. It is only the presence of a post-verbal clitic that allows (though it does not require) the subject to be omitted. This argues that these elements have an essential referential function which is absent from ordinary agreement, and thus that they are more like clitic pronouns.

The referential nature of the clitics is also supported by the fact that they cannot appear in association with non-referential subjects, such as navor ‘nothing’, nixa ‘none, no one’, etc., as in (8).

(8) Ossa n’äm q*(=$l/*la) nign anvido
today neg-me has-3sg(=3sg-m/f) no one invited

Another difference between the clitic elements in (7) and verbal agreement is a phonological one, which shows up in the second person singular form. The regular second person singular desinence in all tense forms in Surmiran end in -s (e.g., cantast ‘you (sg.) sing’). A very general rule of Surmiran phonology replaces /s/ by /ʃ/ before all consonants except /l/; we would expect the form cantast ‘sing-2sg=2sg’ to be pronounced [ʃántəʃt], parallel to scelast [ʃelloʃt] ‘teacher’. This does not happen, however: cantast is pronounced [ʃántəʃt], with

5The first person plural clitic is *-s following verbs which have final stress in the 1pl form. The clitic appears as just -s after those verbs whose first person plural is (exceptionally) stressed on the penultimate, such as (maas) iثمان ‘we are’, as well as in tenses other than the present indicative where the 1pl form has penultimate stress, such as the conditional (man) cantèsean ‘we would sing’.

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/s/ unchanged. In this respect, it is comparable to compound forms like (Ias)
claus-iggesa [klás-iğgesa] '(the) house-keys', not *klás-iğgesa. Evidently, the pre-
consonantal s→f rule is a rule of the lexical phonology which is no longer active at
the point post-verbal clitics are introduced (or when compounds are formed). This
suggests that the elements in (7) are added post-lexically, as would be expected of
clitics (though not of inflectional agreement markers).

I conclude, then, that the elements in (7) are clitics rather than verbal
morphology. They are introduced optionally (and post-lexically) in constructions
that call for subject-verb inversion,6 and when present, sanction the otherwise
ungrammatical omission of pronominal subjects. Such omission is not obligatory,
however, and the clitics can be doubled by an overt nominal or pronominal subject
phrase.

3. The inversion construction

The realization of verb-second in Surmiran, as we have seen, is the inversion of
subject and object which occurs when some other constituent precedes the subject.
This happens when a single (non-subject) nominal phrase, PP or adverbial appears
in initial position, yielding an interpretation on which the phrase in question has a
mildly topicalized or focused interpretation.7

(9) a. La steiva o Ursus nattagea bagn
the living room has-3sg Ursus cleaned well
Ursus cleaned the living room well

b. Tar igl gi da Rummy vala igl joker
in the game of rummy is-worth-3sg the joker
adeguna 25 puncts
always 25 points
In the game of rummy, the joker is always worth 25 points

c. Giord ier a spass o Ursus scuntrto Ladina
going yesterday for a walk has-3sg Ursus met Ladina
While walking yesterday, Ursus met Ladina

Only one such topicalized phrase is possible:

(10) *ier la steiva o Ursus nattagea
Yesterday the living room has Ursus cleaned

Under the conditions of inversion, the (main or auxiliary) finite verb
precedes the subject, accompanied by any clitic elements dependent on it. In

6Thus far, we have only seen inversion when called for to preserve verb-second in the presence of
sentence-initial non-subject constituent. In section 4 below we will see other instances of inversion,
in which the post-verbal clitics can also appear.

7Examples of inversion below will be given with either a post-verbal clitic or a full nominal subject
following the verb. As we have seen, the two can also co-occur, with an emphatic interpretation.
addition to clitic object pronouns these also include the element *n(a)*, a negative particle which occurs together with postverbal *betg* ‘not’ and other negatives. This particle is quite often omitted in spoken Surmiran, similar to the common omission of *ne* in spoken French. Apart from the position of the finite verb, other elements of the clause remain in the same relative position as in uninvverted sentences.

(11)  

a. *Claramaing* n’o’l  
    *Ursus* *betg* savia chegl
    Obviously, *neg*=has-3sg=*m.*  
    *Ursus* not known that
    Obviously *Ursus* didn’t know that

b. *Ier seira n’an* o *Maria* *betg* telefonon
    *Yesterday evening* *neg*=1pl= has-3sg  
    *Yesterday evening* Maria didn’t telephone us

As we saw in (10), no more than a single constituent can precede the inverted verb. From (11) we can see that the clitics associated with this verb do not constitute an additional constituent in the relevant sense.

Another construction that also triggers inversion is subtly different. In compound tenses, the verbal past participle alone can appear at the beginning of the sentence. Although the participle represents the main verb of its clause, and arguably heads a verbal phrase, complements or adverbs associated with this verb cannot accompany it in initial position. They remain where they would be in an uninvverted clause.

(12)  

a. *Máglea* va ia *en* *tracho* *cu*n *caschiel  
    *I ate a sandwich with cheese*
    *I ate a cheese sandwich*

b. *Máglea en* *tracho* *cu n* *caschiel* va ia
    *I ate a sandwich with cheese* *have-1sg I*

c. *La* *nog* *passada* o *Gion* *durma* malamaing
    *Last night* has-3sg *John* slept badly
    *Last night John slept badly*

d. *Durma o* *Gion* malamaing *la* *nog* *passada
    *John* has-3sg *John* badly last night
    *John slept badly last night*

e. *?du* *durma* malamaing o *Gion* *la* *nog* *passada
    *John* has-3sg *John* last night
    *John last night*

The restriction to a single word is reminiscent of the Icelandic construction known as “stylistic fronting” (Maling 1980), as in example (13).

(13)  

*Þetta er bærinn, þar sem flæði eru margir frægir Íslendingar*
*This is the town where born are many famous Icelanders*

*This is the town where many famous Icelanders were born*
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A variety of other differences between Surmiran and Icelandic, however, make it difficult to establish a clear parallel.

Yet another possibility triggering inversion is a construction used to emphasize the lexical main verb of the sentence. This verb can appear as an infinitive in initial position, effectively ‘doubling’ the verb of the main clause. As with the construction in (12), the fronted infinitive cannot be accompanied by complements.

(14)  a. Cantar canta’l Ursus ena canzung to-sing sings-3sg=3sg.m. Ursus a song Ursus is singing a song

b. Scrieiver vaia screig en codesch to-write have-1sg=1sg written a book I wrote a book

c. *cantar ena canzung canta’l Ursus to-sing a song sings-3sg Ursus

Again there is a parallel in another language. In Breton (another verb-second language, incidentally), the topicalization construction also allows the lexical verb to appear in initial position as an infinitive (Anderson 1981).

(15) Debrëñ en deus graet Yann e voued er wetur to-eat he-has done Yann his food in the car Yann has eaten his food in the car

There are two differences between the Surmiran and Breton constructions. First, where Surmiran doubles the main verb with the fronted infinitive, Breton replaces the finite form with a form of the verb ober ‘do’. This is impossible in Surmiran:

(16) *screiver fätsch ia en codesch to-write do-1sg I a book

Secondly, Breton allows the infinitive to be accompanied by a complement, which we saw above in (14c) is impossible in Surmiran.

(17) Debrëñ e voued en deus graet Yann er wetur to-eat his food he-has done Yann in the car Yann has eaten his food in the car

On the other hand, Breton shares with Surmiran the possibility of having a verbal participle in sentence initial position, and also the restriction that such a fronted participle cannot be accompanied by a complement.

(18) a. Kollet am eus ma hent lost I-have my road I have lost my way
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b. *kollet ma hent am eus
lost my road I-have

The possible significance of these partial parallels among verb-second languages from three distinct families within Indo-European must remain a topic for future research.

4. Inversion and subject clitics in other clause types

Thus far, we have considered only simple declarative main clauses in connection with the inversion construction in Surmiran. It is well known that languages with verb-second can differ in the class of clauses in which these effects can appear. In German, for example, verb-second characterizes only main clauses (and subordinate dass clauses with no overt complementizer), while most subordinate clauses have the finite verb in final position. In this respect, German contrasts with Icelandic, which shows verb-second effects in both subordinate and main clauses.

It is difficult to explore inversion, the Surmiran realization of verb-second, in subordinate clauses, because this construction relies on the presence of an initial topic element. Since topicalization is in general a root phenomenon, it is pragmatically unusual to have the conditions for inversion in a subordinate clause. Nonetheless, in examples where initial topics are well-formed in subordinate clauses, we do find inversion.

(19) a. Carez tg’igl setember turnans
believe-2pl that-ARR September return-subjunctive=1pl=1pl
aïten chel hotel
in this hotel

Do you think in September we’ll come back to this hotel?

b. Ia pains tgî dultscem’s vegia
I think-I-sg that sweets have-subjunctive-3sg
Corinna gugent
Corinna gladly

I think Corinna likes sweets

Apart from declaratives, inversion also shows up in interrogative clauses in Surmiran. This occurs with content questions of all sorts when the questioned argument is not the subject:

(20) a. Tge o’la Ladina cumpro?
what has-3sg =3sg.f Ladina bought
What did Ladina buy?

b. Cura o’la Ladina cumpro en auto?
when has-3sg =3sg.f Ladina a car
When did Ladina buy a car?
c. Igl auto da tgi o'la Ladina cumpro?
   the car of whom has-3sg=3sg.f. Ladina bought
   Whose car did Ladina buy?

In all of these cases, we can tell not only from the word order but also from the possibility of a subject clitic that inversion has taken place. When the questioned element is the subject, the word order alone would not be sufficient, but the fact that subject clitics are ungrammatical here shows that the verb has not been displaced from its base position. This shows us that subject wh-phrases do not in themselves trigger the effects of inversion.

(21) Tgi q*(l'/*l) cumporo en auto?
   who has-3sg(=3sg.m./f) bought a car
   Who bought a car?

When a non-subject wh-phrase is fronted, it might be taken to count as ‘preceding’ the subject within the relevant domain, thus triggering inversion and the possible introduction of a subject clitic. We can tell that these effects are associated with the configuration that results from the movement, and not with the movement itself, because a wh-phrase fronted out of a complement clause produces them not in the clause from which the movement takes place but rather in the matrix clause. This appears to be because the wh-phrase comes to precede the matrix subject, but is no longer within the complement clause domain at all.

(22) Tge manegias te tgi Ladina
   what think-2sg you that Ladina
   vega(=*la) cumporo?
   have-3sg-subjunctive(=*3sg.f.) bought
   What do you think that Ladina bought?

Thus far, a simple generalization seems to govern the occurrence of inversion. When some element of the clause (a topic phrase, a wh-phrase, a preposed participle or verb-doubling infinitive) comes to precede the subject, the verb and the subject invert. When this happens, the verb may be accompanied by a subject clitic; and if this is present, the subject may be deleted if pronominal.

We need to specify the domain within which such a pre-subject element must occur in order to provoke inversion. Sentences such as (22) show that the complementizer tgi ‘that’ is outside of the relevant domain, since it does not trigger inversion. Multi-word complementizer expressions behave in the same way.

(23) Siva tgi'els on en unfant, stat el pi
   since that-they have-3pl a child is-3sg he more
   savent a tgesa
   often at home
   Since they have a child, he is home more often
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This example also shows us that an initial subordinate clause can itself trigger inversion in the main clause of which it is a modifier.

Relative clause constructions do not in general show inversion, regardless of whether the relativized element is subject or non-subject.

(24) a. Igl codesch tgi è sen meisa sast aevir
the book which is on the table can-2sg=2sg have
The book which is on the table you can have

b. Igl velo tgi Ursus ò cumpro nè beg nov
the bike which Ursus has bought neg=i-s-3sg not new
The bike which Ursus bought is not new

c. Igl gioven aql qual ia va screg
The youngster to-the which I have-1sg written
e-3sg sto iql mies scutar
is-3sg been the my student
The youngster to whom I wrote was my student

d. La marta dalla qualla te ast survagnà en canamastr
the girl from-the which you have-2sg received a basket
mareida proximamaing
marries-3sg in the near future
The girl from whom you got a basket is getting married soon

Relative pronoun expressions thus appear to be unlike wh-question phrases in being located outside of the domain within which inversion takes place, since they do not trigger it.

There is another condition under which we find inversion, however, which suggests that this structural difference between relative pronouns and question words may only be an apparent one. In fact, inversion takes place not only when the subject is non-initial, but also in yes/no questions.

(25) a. É igl viadi sto tger?
is-3sg the trip been expensive
Was the trip expensive?

b. Ast er te gost da neir?
have-2sg also you desire to come
Do you want to come too?

c. Lainsa nous eir cugl tren?
want-1pl=1pl we go with the train
Do we want to take the train?

d. At ogl plaschia an Sicilia?
2sg= has-3sg=it pleased in Sicily
Did you like Sicily?
Inversion in these cases cannot be associated with a requirement that the verb appear in second position, since its effect is precisely to make it initial. We conclude that inversion is triggered not only by the presence of a pre-subject element within the clause, but also by the presence of an interrogative operator. If this operator is present not only in yes/no questions like (25) but also in _wh_-questions like (20), it seems plausible that both _wh_-expressions and relative pronouns appear in a position outside of the clausal domain within which inversion takes place.

5. The strange case of _ins_

On the basis of the facts considered in the sections above, the grammatical system surrounding inversion and subject clitics in Surmiran seems fairly clear. Complications that apparently contradict the generalizations uncovered so far, however, arise in connection with a class of impersonal sentences.

The element _ins_ 'one' (from Latin _UNUS_ 'one') is similar in its interpretation to French _on_ and German _man_. It indicates an impersonal subject, in sentences like (26). Not surprisingly, sentences with _ins_ as subject take third person singular agreement.

(26) _Ins_ pò eir quant spert tg'ins vot
    _ins_ can-3sg go as fast that-_ins_ wants-3sg
    sen las autostradas svizras
    on the freeways Swiss
    You can go as fast as you want on the Swiss freeways

Like _on_ and _man_, _ins_ only occurs as a subject, and not as an object or oblique.

(27) a. *Ghis pulizists na pon betg veir ins da lò
    the policemen neg can-3sg not see _ins_ from there
    The police can’t see one from there

    b. *Mingtign digls guidis ó la sia moda
each of-the guides has-3sg the his way
da trattar cun _ins_
of to-deal with _ins_
    Each of the guides has his way of dealing with one

Thus far, _ins_ seems simply to be an indefinite pronoun. Just like any subject, it precedes the verb, and is otherwise sentence initial. But surprisingly, when something else precedes _ins_, the verb does not invert with it.

(28) a. Dalla derivanza digls rets _ins_ so
    of-the origin of-the Rhaeti _ins_ knows-3sg
    tant scu navot
    so-much as nothing
    Of the origins of the Rhaeti\(^8\) we know almost nothing.
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b. D’anviern ins pó eir sur tot igls pass cun auto
In winter ins can-3sg go over all the passes with car
In the winter you can go over all of the passes by car

Similarly, in questions, ins still precedes the verb.

(29) a. Ins viagia pi bagh cugl tren o
ins travels more good with-the train or
cugl auto sch’ins fô viadis pi lungs?
with-the car if-ins makes trips more long
Does one travel better by train or by car when making longer trips?

b. Tge meis digl onn ins døra pneus
what month of-the year ins needs-3sg tires
d’anviern aint igl Grischun?
of-winter in the Graubünden
What month of the year do you need winter tires in Graubünden?

Apparently, then, ins does not undergo inversion with a following finite verb, unlike every other possible nominal subject in Surmiran.

This is still not the end of the story, however. Although ins does not itself invert with a following verb, the verb may itself be followed by a subject clitic in inversion contexts only. When ‘subject’ ins is preceded by another element within the clause, or in questions, the verb can be followed by the clitic element =/@gl. This is otherwise the subject clitic for impersonals (weather it, etc).

(30) a. Ainen chell’ustareia ins na magligl betg
in this-inn ins neg eat-3sg=impers not
schi bagh, onigl deg
so well have-3pl=3pl said
In this inn you don’t eat so well, they said

b. Ins pogl fimar có?
ins can-3sg=impers to-smoke here
Can you smoke here?

c. Cun tge tren ins vogl igl migler
with what train ins goes-3sg=impers the better
per eir da Sargans a Wien?
to go from Sargans to Vienna
Which train is better to go from Sargans to Vienna?

Contemporary Surmiran usage allows the introduction of the impersonal clitic =/@gl in inversion contexts when the subject is indicated by ins. Apparently,

8Early indigenous people of the Rumanisch area.
earlier speakers used the personal subject clitic ='l instead: examples given in Grisch (1939), p. 209 (orthographically adapted from phonetic transcription there) show this clitic in inverted forms instead of the special impersonal form.

(31) a. Chel ins dei’l daperot
de indifferent that ins says-3sg=m. everywhere
That they say everywhere

b. Ena schi greva lavour ins sto’l
A so hard job ins should-3sg=m.
be §ar far tot sulet
not do all alone
Such a hard job one shouldn’t do all alone

As we expect, the examples cited in Grisch (1939) show no clitic in forms where inversion would not be motivated.

(32) a. Ins dei daperot ti g . . .
ins says-3sg everywhere that
They say everywhere that . . .

b. Ins sto’l be §ar far tot sulet ena schi greva lavour
ins should-3sg not do all alone a so hard job
One shouldn’t do such a hard job all alone

Although ins seems like an indefinite subject pronoun, its behavior is actually more like that of a clitic. Like the negative element na and the object pronominal clitics, it appears in a fixed position in relation to the finite verb and does not invert with it. Its presence, however, does satisfy the verb’s need for a subject. This pattern resembles that of impersonal se in Spanish or (perhaps more relevantly) si in Italian.

(33) Spanish: En México se trabaja mucho
in Mexico se works-3sg much
In Mexico one works a lot

Italian: Si lavora sempre troppo
si works-3sg always too much
One always works too much

In some other forms of Rumantsch, particularly those spoken in the Engadine, we find a much more direct correspondence with the pattern of (33) found in other Romance languages. Engadine Rumantsch has adopted the clitic reflexive pronoun as for impersonals. For Vallader, Ganzoni (1983), p. 69, gives the following:

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(34) Passand tras il desert as chatta qualchevoutas
Passing across the desert 3sg-refl. finds-3sg sometimes
skeletons
skeletons
Crossing the desert, one sometimes finds skeletons

In his parallel grammar of Puter, Ganzoni (1977), p. 69, cites virtually the same example, but also gives the following as a variant:

(35) Passand tres il desert chatta ún qualchevoutas
passing across the desert finds-3sg man sometimes
skeletons
skeletons
Crossing the desert, one sometimes finds skeletons

The form ún in Puter (like Surmân in a reflex of Latin unus) behaves like German man in occupying the subject position and inverting with the verb under the appropriate circumstances. Surselvan also has this construction, using the pronoun ins (homophonous with Surmân and derived from the same source) which inverts with the verb when required.

(36) Nut ein ins cun la lavur? Ins ei
where is-3sg ins with the work ins is-3sg
alla fin. Na, alla fin ein ins mai.
at-the end no at-the end is-3sg ins never

Where are we with the job? We’re finished. No, we’re never finished.

The unusual failure of ins to invert with the verb in examples such as (28) and (29) is not a uniform property of Surmân usage. Grisch (1939), p. 209, cites the following example (with inversion), which she describes as typical of Surmân usage in Sotsoš (Casti [Tiefencassel], Alvæschagn).

(37) Chel dei ins daperiot
That says-3sg ins everywhere
That they say everywhere

Speakers in the Sotsoš area of Surmân also accept sentences with inverted ins as grammatical, though in the region roughly between Mon and Marmorera, and also in the normative description of Signorelli et al. (1987), uninvited ins is the rule. Speakers who do not invert ins characterize sentences with inversion as initiative of German usage.

In any event, the structure with inverted ins calls for no particular comment, since that is just what we would expect of an impersonal pronoun occupying the subject position. What is much more remarkable is the possibility of the uninvited structure.

As noted above, uninvited ins patterns structurally as a clitic, similar to Spanish se, Italian si, or Vallader as, despite origins which would lead us to expect
it to be treated as a non-clitic pronoun. We must ask, naturally, how reasonable it
is to propose that ins has been reanalyzed from a full indefinite pronoun to a clitic,
and what might have led to that development.

The plausibility of this account is enhanced by the fact that the phonetic
form in which ins appears in Grisch (1939) is actually [ins]. This would be
homophonous with the first person plural object clitic pronoun ans, which might
in turn lead to a conflation of the two. Note that in French and Italian, the
impersonal forms on and si are often used with first person plural reference, as
in (38).

(38) **French:** Nous on fait pas ça ici

"we on does-3sg not that here"

We don’t do that here

**Italian:** Non si poteva ubriacare ogni mattina

neg si could-3sg get-drunk=1pl every morning

One could not get ourselves drunk every morning

To the extent ins from unus was pronounced [ans], it could readily be
confused with the first person plural object clitic ans. Despite the fact that ins
and ans are clearly distinct elements in contemporary Surmiran, the possibility
of confusing them is apparently still alive. This is suggested by the fact that the
normative description of the language contains a remarkable (and quite isolated)
warning that “1pl pronom subject ‘ins’ è da disfrazigare bagn digl pronom ‘ans’
tgi serva sce pronom reflexivo pronom personal object dall’amprema persunga
plural”⁹ (Signorelli et al. 1987, p. 120).

The distinctness of these two pronouns is supported by a number of facts.
First, apart from the difference in spelling, ins is generally pronounced [ins] while
ans is phonemically [ans]. Second, while ans immediately precedes the verb and is
itself preceded by the negative particle na if that is present, ins itself precedes na.

(39) Da lò ins n’ans vei beg cleramantg

from there ins neg-1pl sees-3sg not clearly

From there one doesn’t see us clearly

Thirdly, ins always precedes the inflected finite verb whose subject is
indefinite. In contrast, object pronouns such as ans precede the infinitive in modal
constructions.

(40) El vot ans tarmetter ena factura dumang

He wants-3sg 1pl to-send a bill tomorrow

He wants to send us a bill tomorrow

In compound tenses such as the perfect, object pronoun clitics can appear
either before the (inflected) auxiliary or before the participle, but ins always
precedes the auxiliary.

⁹“The subject pronoun ins must be clearly distinguished from the pronoun ans which serves as the
reflexive pronoun and the object personal pronoun of the first person plural.”

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For these reasons (among others), *inis* and *ans* must be treated as quite distinct grammatical elements. Nonetheless, it appears that at some point in the history of the language, they were at least partially confused, and *inis* came to be treated as if it were a clitic like *ans*. This confusion was probably encouraged by the fact that in Italian, a language with which many Surmiran speakers are at least somewhat familiar, the indefinite subject interpretation provided by *inis* is supplied by a construction with no overt subject and a clitic pronoun *ṣi*—which can also have first person plural reference.

As a result, *inis* has taken on the behavior of a clitic associated with the finite verb, rather than that of an autonomous nominal expression. This has the strange consequence that the subject position in *inis*-sentences is not overtly filled: strange, because Surmiran normally only allows the subjects of finite verbs to be unexpressed when they are doubled by a subject clitic in the inversion construction. Other impersonals, weather verbs, etc. all require overt subjects (typically the pronoun *iṯi* in these cases), just like French or English.

This ought to mean that under the circumstances that call for inversion, there is nothing to invert with the verb, and we have seen that the word order in these cases remains fixed when *inis* represents the subject. We also saw, however (in (30)) that a subject clitic = *iṯi*, normally a diagnostic of inversion, can appear under these circumstances. We must therefore conclude either that a phonologically empty subject position undergoes inversion with the verb, or that the clitic is generated independently of the operation of inversion, despite the fact that both are triggered by the same conditions.

6. Conclusion: the nature and origin of verb-second in Surmiran

I conclude this discussion of the basic syntax of Surmiran by asking what it means to say that this is a "verb-second" language. What, that is, is the nature of the generalization concerning the position of the verb? And does "verb-second" in the Surmiran sense designate the same property as the one we refer to in describing other languages such as German, Icelandic, Breton or Kashmiri as "verb-second" languages?

Generative accounts of verb-second phenomena in the 1990's, focusing especially on the analysis of German, tried to reduce the generalization to the obligatory nature of a particular movement. Assuming that (except in questions) the position SPEC_C is always filled by exactly one constituent, uniform movement of the verb (from I to C) will have the effect of making the verb second. Where such movement is impossible, as in embedded clauses with overt complementizers, the verb will remain in (final) I position, resulting in the observed limitation of "verb-second" to main clauses and subordinate clauses without a complementizer.

The problem with this account was always the motivation for requiring the verb to move from I to C. A variety of more or less convoluted proposals were made to accomplish this, but none of them actually succeeded in explaining (as opposed to stipulating) the required movement.

It is unlikely that "verb-second" in Surmiran can be equated with a requirement that the verb move in some uniform way. We have seen that the verb
does indeed undergo movement under some circumstances: when the subject is preceded by another element within the clause, the verb inverts with it. But when there is no such element present, the verb does not undergo this movement, as shown by the fact that no subject clitic appears in association with verbs in their basic order.

Furthermore, in sentences with *ins*, we have seen that the subject position must be empty. As a result, the verb itself appears to be initial, but still does not undergo any particular movement. Since movement (subject-verb inversion) is associated with some but not all sentences that apparently satisfy the Surmiran notion of “verb-second,” this cannot be reduced to a specific, uniform movement operation. For similar reasons, it seems highly unlikely that the Surmiran notion of “verb-second” can be equated with the appearance of the verb in some specific, hierarchically defined structural position (such as C or I).

In Anderson (2000a), I suggested that the real nature of the “verb-second” generalization in Icelandic (and perhaps in German as well) was exactly what the name would imply: a requirement that the verb occupy exactly the second position within the clause. The formal implementation of this was suggested to be a system of constraints on surface syntactic form, construed within the general perspective of Optimality Theory. The relevant constraints are ones requiring (a) that the locus of realization of the functional features of the clause, namely the finite verb, be as close as possible to the left edge of the clause; while (b) even more importantly, the finite verb must not actually be in absolute initial position within the clause. Taken together with appropriate notions of what sorts of unit are interruptible in the language, this yields a definition of “verb-second” that is based on exactly the same apparatus as that which plays a role in the placement of second position clitics in a variety of languages.

However appropriate this may be for languages like Icelandic (and German, and also Breton: see Anderson 2000b), it cannot be the answer (or at least not all of the answer) for Surmiran. This is because the verb is not always in second position in Surmiran. We saw above that in sentences with *ins*, the subject position must be structurally empty, with *ins* itself occupying the position of a verbal clitic. This means that the constraint *NonInitial(V)* would necessarily be violated in such sentences. Now of course within Optimality Theory, constraints are violable when there is no less costly way to avoid violating them, but in this case that cannot be true. Surmiran has several constructions that put other elements in front of the verb, and if the “second position constraint” story were the correct one, we would expect to find pressure to have a topic, or a fronted participle, or an infinitival copy of the verb in the position before (*ins*) the finite verb. But there is no evidence for that.

We seem to come down to the conclusion that the “verb-second” property in Surmiran is not really a requirement that the verb be in second position at all, or indeed in any structurally uniform place. What gives rise to that impression is the combination of two facts: (a) the basic word order in the language is SVO; and (b) a rule specifies that in any construction in which some other element comes to precede the subject within the clause, subject and verb invert (producing an optional subject clitic on the verb). That is really all there is to it, and the “verb-second” property thus comes down to the presence of conditioned subject-verb
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inversion.

While perhaps less inspiring than some other possible analyses of verb-second, this account has one additional factor in its favor. If, indeed, as many (though not all) scholars assume, "verb-second" in Surmiran (and Rumantsch more generally) was borrowed from German, we need to ask how that could happen. It is difficult to see how an abstract notion such as "the verb moves from I to C" could have been borrowed directly, given that these categories are not structurally parallel in the two languages. Similarly, the constraint-based account does not lend itself directly to borrowing, since its terms are not true generalizations about surface data that might be transferred directly from one language to another.

The regularity "invert the subject and the verb from their expected order when something else precedes," however, is something that is directly observable in the surface forms of sentences. Indeed, when Surmiran speakers reflect on German, this is precisely the generalization they see as common to the two languages. As such, it is the sort of thing that might plausibly be borrowed—if, indeed, that is the correct account of the historical origin of "verb-second" in Rumantsch.

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