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A comparative analysis of the morphological functions of Clitic Morphemes in Kazakh and English Word Formation

This paper applies a comparative and corpus-based approach to examine the morphological functions of clitic morphemes in two unrelated languages: Kazakh and English. Clitics lack full phonological autonomy and occupy an intermediate position between independent words and bound morphemes, playing a significant role in word formation, grammaticalization, and syntactic organization. Research into this process is significant because it shows how reduced dependent forms contribute to grammatical economy in languages with different structures. The study identifies key differences in the functional distribution of clitics and systematically analyzes their similarities and differences. English clitics primarily serve to simplify grammatical structures, while Kazakh clitics function as multifunctional elements in morphological and syntactic constructions. In this context, clitic behaviour is considered across three main dimensions: morphology, syntax, and prosody. English forms such as «I've», «she'll», and «can't» illustrate reduced dependent forms used in speech, while Kazakh forms such as «ма», «ғой», and «емес» demonstrate broader functional diversity, including interrogation, emphasis, negation, and speaker attitude. The comparison highlights typological differences between analytic and agglutinative languages while revealing shared tendencies in cliticization and grammaticalization. Corpus data were analyzed using AntConc with material from the British National Corpus and the Kazakh language corpus described in the study. The results show that clitics are especially salient in dialogic and informal language and contribute to rhythmic and grammatical economy. In Kazakh, clitic elements also provide pragmatic nuance and interact closely with word forms and sentence structure. Because clitics adapt to different grammatical systems, their comparison contributes to linguistic typology and to the study of interactions among grammar, morphology, syntax, and prosody. Practically, the results may be applied in bilingual education, translation studies, and digital language technologies. By examining the main functions of clitics in the two languages, the study provides material directly relevant to both applied and comparative linguistics.

Key words: clitics, syntax, word forms, morphology, comparative linguistics

Introduction

In contemporary linguistics, clitic morphemes occupy a significant position, as their unique characteristics and functions enable researchers to explore the intricate relationship between morphology and syntax. Clitics represent a distinct category of linguistic units that do not possess phonological autonomy and are unable to function as independent stressed words [1]. Nevertheless, they play a crucial role in shaping word forms and in the development of syntactic structures. Their functional behaviour differs across languages, depending on the specific features of each grammatical system, which makes them an important subject in comparative typological research [2]. This study is motivated by the lack of a consistent and systematic analysis of clitic morphemes in two genetically unrelated languages, as well as by the limited number of comprehensive comparative studies focusing on their functional transformation into bound word forms and syntactic constructions. Furthermore, insufficient attention has been given to the investigation of clitic elements in languages representing different typological groups. For instance, the work of Haspelmath [1] addresses universal properties of clitics across various languages worldwide. In contrast, Avagyan's research concentrates on grammatical abbreviations, and both studies provide only limited coverage of clitics in the Kazakh language [2].

The present study is designed to investigate the morphological characteristics of clitic morphemes, focusing on their similarities and differences in English and Kazakh, as well as the mechanisms through which they participate in word formation. To accomplish this aim, the following objectives are pursued:

- to outline the key properties and classifications of clitic morphemes in both English and Kazakh;
- to analyze the contextual conditions of clitic usage within word forms and syntactic structures;

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– to carry out a comparative examination of the typological features and shared traits of clitics in the two languages.

The scientific novelty of this research lies in its integrated analysis of clitic morphemes across two typologically distinct language systems. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of clitics within the broader linguistic framework and highlight their influence on both morphological and syntactic processes.

A supplementary contribution of this study is that the clitics in English and Kazakh languages are developing towards functionally significant grammatical morphemes, regardless of their different typological origins. In English, the clitic is not only a means of grammatical economy, but also a multifunctional symbol denoting grammatical categories such as person, number, tense, aspect, voice and mood. Forms such as «M» and «ve» retain important grammatical information, despite the phonological reduction. In Kazakh, clitics often express the modality, accent, interrogation, and attitude of the speaker. Thus, in both languages, clitics serve as important morphosyntactic units linking morphology and syntax, and participate in the ongoing grammaticalization processes.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study can be applied in foreign language pedagogy, translation practice, and the advancement of computer-assisted language technologies.

The findings indicate that the distribution of clitics varies considerably between analytic and agglutinative languages, particularly with regard to their degree of syntactic integration and frequency of occurrence. Moreover, grammaticalization is a key process in the development and transformation of language systems. It involves changes through which lexical or less grammatical expressions acquire more grammatical functions and may become increasingly dependent on surrounding linguistic material. The history and theoretical parameters of grammaticalization have been treated in detail by Lehmann [3, 4]. In this process, a linguistic unit may lose part of its semantic and structural autonomy while becoming more tightly integrated into a grammatical construction.

Grammaticalization commonly involves gradual semantic, morphosyntactic, and phonological changes through which formerly more autonomous expressions become more grammatical and more dependent on their hosts [4]. Cliticization is one pathway within this broader process: reduced forms may preserve important grammatical functions even as their phonological autonomy decreases [5]. These mechanisms are relevant to the comparison of English and Kazakh because they help explain why formally small elements can remain functionally significant in different grammatical systems.

The distinctive characteristics of the grammaticalization of the Kazakh language are considered within the framework of the morphology and semantics of cooperation. However, the approach to grammar in the Kazakh language, in particular, is characterized by insufficient precision in distinguishing these aspects. One of the first fundamental contributions in this area was made in 2009 with the development of a procedural method for morphological analysis in the Kazakh language. The presented method structured the morphological knowledge of the language and step-by-step stages of identifying foundation words, their interactions, and their coordination with the presented morphological feature. In this regard, a systematic characterization of the morphology of the Kazakh language was developed, which became an important step for subsequent linguistic analysis [6].

Clitic morphemes occupy an intermediate position between independent word forms and bound morphology, combining phonological dependence with a degree of syntactic autonomy [7, 8]. In Melchuk's morphological framework, clitics are likewise treated as units whose prosodic dependence distinguishes them from fully independent word forms while their distribution distinguishes them from ordinary affixes [9]. This mixed status explains why clitics are especially useful for examining the interface of morphology, syntax, and prosody.

Innovative research notes three fundamental functions of clitics:

1. Morphological — clitics participate in verb formation and account for words, forming the expression of grammatical constructions of categories.
2. Syntactic — clitics act as a connecting element among sentence parts, which include particles, articles, and negations.
3. Prosodic — clitics impart intonational and rhythmic consistency to sentences.

Clitics show considerable adaptability in syntactic structures [10]. In English, reduced auxiliary forms can become stable grammatical units attached phonologically to a neighboring host. This allows longer grammatical combinations to be realized in compact forms that meet the communicative and prosodic needs of speakers.

A special place in training is occupied by the study of grammar in agglutinative languages, such as Kazakh. Unlike analytical languages, where grammaticalization is often manifested through the simplification of syntactic constructions, in agglutinative languages this process is often associated with the development of complex affix systems. The approach to the grammar of the Kazakh language in modern research suggests a weak relationship between morphology and semantics, which requires detailed analysis. For example, the procedural analyzer of the morphology of the Kazakh language, developed in 2009, allows systematizing morphological knowledge and creating algorithms that take into account the unique features of the Kazakh grammatical system [6].

During the nine-year study of clitics as one of the national grammaticalizations, special attention is paid to their functional and prosodic characteristics [11]. Clitics, like Melchuk's bases, are an intermediate class between morphemes and word forms, which makes them an object of study. They do not take into account accentual independence but are integrated into prosodic unity with other elements of the sentence. For example, in the Kazakh language, clitics can perform the functions of deflection, clarification or provision, while in English they are often used for auxiliary constructions. Melchuk notes that clitics can be freer in sentences than morphemes, but at the same time less autonomous than full word forms. Their ability to move within sentences or form tonal units from other elements makes them an important part of the language structure. For example, in English, clitics such as «I» or «I can't» are the result of the grammar of auxiliary verbs. In Kazakh, clitics such as «емес» (not) or «олардың» (they) include more complex functions related to the grammatical organization of the sentence [12].

Thus, the study of clitics as a manifestation of grammaticalization deepens our understanding of general mechanisms of language change while also revealing language-specific typological features. Analysis of grammaticalization in English and Kazakh therefore provides a basis for comparing the interaction of morphology, syntax, and prosody in the two systems.

4. Materials and Methods

The study used data from two linguistic corpora: the British National Corpus (BNC) [13] and the National Corpus of the Kazakh Language [14]. The corpora include materials from multiple genres and registers and provide the empirical basis for comparing clitic use in English and Kazakh. The analysis also included a review of academic research on clitic phenomena in the two languages. A comparative method was used to identify structural and functional similarities and differences, while corpus analysis was used to examine the contextual distribution of the selected clitic forms. The data were systematized with AntConc and Python, and the summarized patterns were visualized for comparison.

Clitics have been analyzed from several complementary perspectives, including language change, morphosyntactic structure, phrase-structure grammar, and cross-linguistic typology [15, 16, 17, 18]. These approaches emphasize that clitics occupy a boundary area between words and affixes and that their behaviour depends on the interaction of morphology, syntax, and prosody. Structural classifications of weak and clitic-like elements also provide a useful comparative background for describing different degrees of dependence [19]. In the present study, these theoretical perspectives are used to interpret the corpus patterns rather than to impose a single universal classification on both languages.

5. Results and Discussion

The results of the frequency analysis show that English clitic forms are especially frequent in informal and dialogic material. In the analyzed dialogue data, their reported frequency exceeds 60 % among the grammatical markers considered. In English, clitics contribute to economy of expression and help maintain the rhythm of connected speech [20]. In Kazakh, an agglutinative language, the reported frequency is lower in the corresponding dialogue material, but the functional range is broader. Forms discussed in the corpus perform grammatical and pragmatic functions, including negation, interrogation, emphasis, and clarification. The reported frequency of clitic forms in Kazakh dialogues is about 50 % of the grammatical elements counted in the study. These differences reflect the contrasting typological organization of the two languages and the different ways in which grammatical relations are expressed.

Functional differences are also evident in the English–Kazakh comparison. In English, clitics frequently arise through phonological reduction of auxiliaries and negation, as in «I've», «she'll», and «can't». Such forms make spoken constructions more compact while preserving grammatical information and prosodic continuity [21]. In Kazakh, clitic-like particles perform a broader range of discourse and modal functions. For example, «ғой» and «ма» can contribute emphasis, speaker attitude, or interrogation depending on context. This makes Kazakh clitic elements relevant not only to grammatical structure but also to pragmatic or-

ganization. Their integration into syntactic constructions reflects the interaction of morphology, syntax, and discourse typical of the language’s agglutinative structure [22].

For the purposes of the present comparison, the analyzed items are organized into three descriptive categories: true clitics, semi-clitics, and quasi-clitics. In the English material, contracted forms such as «’ve», «’ll», and «n’t» represent highly grammaticalized dependent forms, whereas the Kazakh material includes particles such as «Ғой» and «Ма», whose distribution is more closely connected with discourse and prosody [10, 11]. The semi-clitic and quasi-clitic labels are used in the study to capture intermediate degrees of phonological dependence and syntactic freedom rather than to imply that the same forms behave identically in both languages.

To summarize the English–Kazakh comparison, Diagram 1 visualizes the principal corpus metrics used in the study and their distribution across the two languages. The figure combines the reported percentages for informal texts, dialogues, grammatical and emphasis/clarification functions, and the three descriptive clitic categories. The values were derived from the corpus analysis conducted with AntConc and are presented as a compact overview of the patterns discussed above.

Diagram 1 below provides a comparative analysis of the frequency of clitics in English and Kazakh, as well as their typological differences. The data presented show that in English, clitics perform the main role of separating grammatical forms, while in Kazakh, they are integrated into syntactic constructions and perform more complex functions.

Metric	English (%)	Kazakh (%)
Frequency of Clitics in Informal Texts	55	45
Frequency of Clitics in Dialogues	65	50
Grammatical Function	40	60
Emphasis/Clarification Function	20	40
True Clitics	70	30
Semi-Clitics	20	50
Quasi-Clitics	10	20

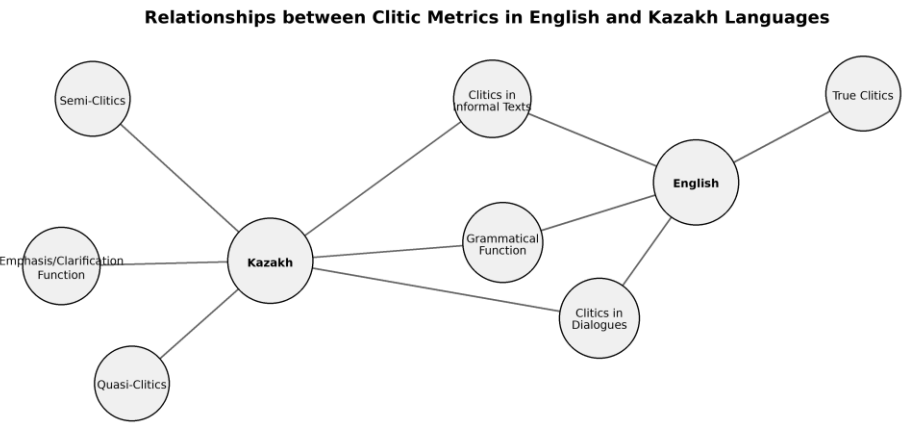


Diagram 1. Network representation of clitic feature distribution in English and Kazakh

A comparative investigation of clitic elements in Kazakh and English demonstrates that, although both languages employ clitics, their distribution and functional roles differ in accordance with their typological characteristics. In English, clitics primarily operate as devices that reduce structural complexity, thereby facilitating smoother and more natural spoken interaction. In contrast, Kazakh clitics tend to occur within more elaborate syntactic frameworks, where they contribute significantly to both semantic nuance and syntactic organization.

These distinctions, however, do not diminish their shared importance. In both languages, clitics serve as integral components of linguistic structure, playing a crucial role in shaping meaning and supporting the formation of grammatically and pragmatically coherent utterances.

The present analysis also allows for a more precise interpretation of how clitics function as authentic elements of speech. Expanding this line of inquiry to include a wider range of discourse types, as well as additional analytic and agglutinative languages, would offer valuable insights for future research.

Conclusion

This study set out to provide a comparative account of clitic morphemes in Kazakh and English, focusing on their occurrence rates, structural classifications, and functional roles across grammatical environments, informal communication, and dialogic contexts. Through the use of corpus-based analysis combined with an in-depth examination of linguistic literature, clitic forms in both languages were systematically identified and categorized.

The outcomes of this research enhance our understanding of clitic phenomena by highlighting both cross-linguistic parallels and language-specific distinctions. In English, forms such as «I've», «she'll», and «can't» illustrate how clitics contribute to brevity and communicative efficiency, particularly in informal settings [11, 20]. Conversely, in Kazakh, clitic elements demonstrate a wider range of discourse and morphosyntactic functions, including negation, interrogation, emphasis, and semantic specification.

An important conclusion of this study is that English clitics should be viewed not only as mechanisms of linguistic economy but also as morphosyntactic markers that carry essential grammatical information. Although phonologically dependent, forms such as «m», «ve», «re», and «ll» retain the categories of person, number, tense, aspect, and mood. This multifunctionality allows English clitics to serve as a link between syntactic structure and morphological expression. In comparison, Kazakh clitics are more strongly associated with modality, stress, and interrogative meanings, reflecting the typological features of an agglutinative language. Despite these differences, both systems exhibit common tendencies toward grammaticalization and functional specialization.

The Kazakh examples discussed in the study illustrate how clitic-like elements participate in morphosyntactic and pragmatic organization, while typological research shows that clitic behaviour varies substantially across languages [1, 10]. The practical relevance of such analysis extends to language teaching: research on grammar pedagogy supports explicit attention to grammatical form when it is integrated with meaningful language use [23]. For linguists, clitic analysis is valuable because these units link morphological expression with syntactic structure. Cross-linguistic studies of clitic placement and morphology likewise show that their behaviour emerges from interactions among syntax, morphology, and phonology [24].

The results indicate the broader significance of clitic analysis within linguistic typology. Comparing Kazakh and English illustrates how different grammatical systems realize dependent forms through different combinations of morphology, syntax, and prosody, a pattern consistent with cross-linguistic analyses of clitic placement and structure [24, 10]. Future studies could extend the corpus to additional text types and compare the observed patterns with other analytic and agglutinative languages.

Comparative analysis also shows that clitics cannot be interpreted only as abbreviated grammatical forms. In English, clitics often act as carriers of mandatory grammatical meanings and serve as markers of predicativity, while in Kazakh they often serve as modal and discursive — oriented elements. Despite differences in their historical development, clitics in both languages reveal similar trends towards grammaticalization and increasing functional specialization. This observation expands the typological understanding of clitic systems and highlights their role as a link between morphological and syntactic organization.

The comparative approach adopted in this study demonstrates that clitics occupy an intermediate position between morphology and syntax in both languages. Their functional evolution reflects broader processes of grammaticalization, as a result of which reduced linguistic forms acquire increasingly specialized grammatical functions. This observation contributes to contemporary typological research and provides further evidence of the dynamic nature of morphosyntactic change.

The findings provide a more in-depth understanding of the complexities associated with clitic morphemes and highlight their significance in the linguistic systems of Kazakh and English [25, 17]. Combining theoretical and practical aspects of linguistics, the results confirm that clitics, despite their small formal size, can play an important role in the construction and interpretation of grammatical meaning.

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Д.Ж. Толуспаева, Ж.А. Есказинова, М.Д. Бортебаев, Т. Хоссейн

Қазақ және ағылшын тіліндегі сөзжасамдағы клитикалық морфемалардың морфологиялық қызметіне салыстырмалы талдау жасау

Мақалада қазақ және ағылшын тілдеріндегі клитикалық морфемалардың морфологиялық функцияларын зерттеу үшін корпус және салыстырмалы талдау қолданылды. Клитикалық морфемалардың лингвистикалық маңызы тәуелсіз лексикалық мағынаға ие емес; олар морфемалар мен сөздер арасында өмір сүреді, сөзжасамда, грамматикада және біртіндеп синтаксистік эволюцияда рөл атқарады. Бұл процесті зерттеу маңызды, себебі ол клитикалық морфемалардың әртүрлі құрылымды тілдердегі грамматикалық қысқалығын қалай шешетінін көрсетеді. Мақаланың жаңалығы

екі тілдегі клитикалық морфемаларын жүйелі талдауда, олардың ұқсастықтары мен айырмашылықтарын анықтауда жатыр. Нақтырақ айтқанда, ағылшын клитикалық морфемалар сигналдар мен грамматиканы жеңілдетуге қызмет етеді, ал қазақ клитикалық морфемалар морфологиялық және синтаксистік құрылымдарда көп функциялы конъюнктуралар ретінде әрекет етеді. Осы тұрғыда клитикалық морфемалардың тәртібі үш негізгі функцияға әсер етеді: морфология, синтаксис және просодия. «I've», «she'll» және «can't» сияқты ағылшын клитикалары күрделі грамматикалық құрылымдарды жеңілдетеді, осылайша ауызекі тілдің жылдамдығы мен ырғағын жақсартады. «ма», «ғой» және «емес» сияқты қазақ клитикалары кең функционалды әртүрлілікті көрсетеді. Оларды терістеу үшін де, эмоциялар мен сезімдерді білдіру үшін де пайдалануға болады. Жоғарыдағы салыстыру аналитикалық және агглютинативті тілдер арасындағы типологиялық айырмашылықтарды көрсетеді, клитикалану үдерісінің ортақ үлгілерін ашады. Қазақ тілі корпусы мен British National Corpus (BNC) материалдарындағы клитика жиіліктері AntConc көмегімен талданды. Нәтижелер клитикалардың негізінен диалогтық және бейресми ауызекі тілде кездесетінін, қайталануды азайтып, интонациялық ырғақты жақсартатынын көрсетеді. Клитикалар қазақ сөз формаларына біріктіріліп, семантикалық дәлдік пен прагматикалық нәзіктік береді. Клитикалар әртүрлі грамматикалық жүйелерге бейімделе алатындықтан, бұл лингвистикалық типология мен рефлексияға да айтарлықтай үлес қосады. Теориялық тұрғыдан алғанда, бұл процесс өзара әрекеттесудегі грамматиканы, морфологияны және синтаксисті тереңірек түсінуге ықпал етеді. Практикалық тұрғыдан алғанда, бұл зерттеу костілді білім беру әдістеріне, аударма зерттеулеріне және цифрлық тіл технологияларына айтарлықтай үлес қосады. Екі түрлі елдегі клитикалардың негізгі функцияларын зерттеу арқылы бұл зерттеу қолданбалы лингвистика мен салыстырмалы лингвистикада қолдануға болатын ақпарат береді. Зерттеу барысында клитикалардың морфологиялық, синтаксистік және просодиялық қызметтері салыстырылып, олардың аналитикалық және агглютинативті тілдердегі функционалдық таралу ерекшеліктері жүйеленді. Бұл салыстыру екі тілдегі клитикалардың грамматикалану үдерісіндегі ортақ және тілге тән белгілерін нақтылауға мүмкіндік береді.

Кілт сөздер: клитика, морфология, синтаксис, сөз формалары, салыстырмалы лингвистика.

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Сравнительный анализ морфологических функций клитических морфем в казахском и английском словообразовании

В данной статье с помощью корпусного и сравнительного анализа изучаются морфологические функции клитических морфем в казахском и английском языках. Клитические морфемы не имеют самостоятельного лексического значения; они занимают промежуточное положение между морфемами и словами, играя роль в словообразовании, грамматикализации и постепенной синтаксической эволюции. Изучение этого процесса важно, поскольку оно показывает, как клитические морфемы решают проблему грамматической краткости в языках с различной структурой. Новизна данной статьи заключается в систематическом анализе клитических морфем в двух языках, выявляющем их сходства и различия. В частности, английские клитические морфемы служат для упрощения сигналов и грамматики, в то время как казахские клитические морфемы выступают в качестве многофункциональных конъюнктов в морфологических и синтаксических структурах. В этом контексте поведение клитических морфем влияет на три основные функции: морфологию, синтаксис и просодию. Английские клитики упрощают сложные грамматические структуры, тем самым улучшая скорость и ритм устной речи. Казахские клитики, такие как «-ма», «ғой» и «эмес», демонстрируют широкое функциональное разнообразие. Они могут использоваться как для отрицания, так и для выражения эмоций и чувств. Приведенное выше сравнение подчеркивает типологические различия между аналитическими и агглютинативными языками, выявляя общие модели клитикализации. Для анализа частоты клитик с помощью AntConc использованы материалы Национального корпуса казахского языка и British National Corpus (BNC). Результаты показывают, что клитики встречаются преимущественно в диалогической и неформальной устной речи, уменьшая повторение и улучшая ритмичность интонации. Клитики интегрированы в казахские словоформы, обеспечивая семантическую точность и прагматическую тонкость. Поскольку клитики могут адаптироваться к различным грамматическим системам, это также вносит значительный вклад в лингвистическую типологию и рефлексию. Теоретически, этот процесс способствует более глубокому пониманию грамматики, морфологии и синтаксиса во взаимодействии. С практической точки зрения, данное исследование вносит значительный вклад в методы двуязычного обучения, переводоведения и цифровые языковые технологии. Изучая основные функции клитик в двух разных языках, это исследование предоставляет информацию, которая может быть использована в прикладной лингвистике и сравнительной лингвистике. Полученные результаты уточняют роль клитик в морфосинтаксической организации языков двух разных типологических систем.

Ключевые слова: клитика, морфология, синтаксис, словоформы, сравнительная лингвистика.

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