AN ANALYSIS OF PROCLITICS AND ENCLITICS IN WEST NIAS LANGUAGE: A MORPHOSYNTACTIC STUDY

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Abstract

This study examined the use of proclitics and enclitics in West Nias language from a morphosyntactic perspective. Using a descriptive qualitative approach supported by elicited linguistic data from native speakers, the analysis demonstrated that cliticization in West Nias was not merely a phonological attachment but also played an essential grammatical role in sentence structure. The results of this study indicated that the types of clitics found in West Nias language consist of proclitics, which attach to the beginning of a host word, and enclitics, which attach to the end of a host word. The proclitic forms identified in this language are *a-, i-, ta-, ba-, ö-, u-, la-, and mi-o-*, while the enclitic forms identified are *-gu, -mö, -ma, -mi, -ra, and -nia*. In West Nias, proclitics function as pronominal markers that indicate the actor and primarily attach to verbs, as well as to preverbal elements such as modals and certain prepositions. Enclitics attach to nouns to mark possession, and may also occur on verbs, adjectives, and adverbs when these elements function as the predicate. Therefore, proclitics in West Nias are pronominal because their presence corresponds with the subject of the clause.

Keywords: West Nias Language; Clitics; Proclitics; Enclitics; Morphosyntax

A. Introduction

Language serves as a means of communication that allows humans to interact with each other. It is an inseparable part of human life. As seen in everyday conversations, language functions as a crucial medium for conveying messages and expressing thoughts or intentions.

Every language possesses unique features that distinguish it from others, whether in its sound system, word formation, or additional linguistic elements. As a result, languages vary across regions. One example is the Nias language used by speakers in the Nias area.

The language used for communication is closely tied to its regional context in this case, the Nias language (Li Niha). Li Niha is the native language spoken by the people living on Nias Island and serves as the primary medium for everyday interaction within the community. In addition to its communicative function, the Nias language also acts as an important marker of ethnic identity, distinguishing the Nias

people from other cultural groups. As members of the Nias community, speakers should value and take pride in their local language, as it possesses linguistic characteristics that set it apart from other regional languages. One of its most notable features is the absence of final consonants, resulting in words that consistently end with vowel sounds.

Nias consists of two languages, each with its own dialects and subdialects. The first is North Nias, spoken in North Nias, Nias, West Nias, East Nias, and Central Nias. The Central Nias dialect is considered a subdialect of North Nias. The second is South Nias, spoken in South Nias, the Tello Islands, and Hibala. In practice, North Nias is generally referred to as *Li Niha Yöu* ("Northern language"), while South Nias is called *Li Niha Raya* (Zagoto, 2018).The West Nias dialect, spoken in North Mandrehe District, is one of the dialects that shows interesting linguistic phenomena, especially in its morphological structure.

One of the unique aspects of the Nias language is the used of clitics**.** Clitics are linguistic elements that cannot stand alone but attach to other words, often serving grammatical or syntactic functions such as marking subject, object, or possession. In the Nias language, clitics appear frequently in verbs and nouns, functioning as pronominal markers or indicators of grammatical relationships. For example, forms like fena-gu (my pen)

and manga-do (I eat or I am eating) illustrate how clitics operate both as proclitics appearing before the base word and enclitics appearing after the base word.

Clitics are small grammatical elements that occupy an intermediate position between words and affixes. Research on clitics in the West Nias language, remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the forms and functions of proclitics, enclitics, in the West Nias language and to describe how these clitics contribute to the grammatical structure and meaning of sentences used by native speakers. This research is expected to contribute to the field of linguistics, particularly to a better understanding of the morphological and syntactic features of regional languages in Indonesia.

A clitic is a linguistic element that falls between a fully independent word and an affix. Although it cannot function on its own either phonologically or syntactically, it attaches to a host word while still preserving its semantic or grammatical role. In other words, a clitic is a bound morpheme that relies on another word its host for phonological realization, yet it does not integrate into the host's morphological structure.

Martin Haspelmath (2023) stated that a clitic is a bound morph that is neither an affix nor a root. emphasizes the distinction between affixes and clitics. Affixes

typically attach only to specific word classes e.g., nouns or verbs, whereas clitics do not show word class selectivity and may attach to different types of hosts. He also warns that the definition of clitics should not rely solely on phonological criteria such as being "prosodically deficient," since cross linguistic variation is too wide.

Mohhamad Amir (2024) said that, clitics are linguistic elements that share characteristics with both words and affixes. Clitics rely on their hosts for pronunciation and meaning, distinguishing themselves as an essential yet often overlooked grammatical feature.

A clitic is a linguistic unit that occupies a position between a fully independent word and a bound affix. The term originates from the Greek word *klinein*, meaning "to lean" or "to incline," which perfectly captures its essential nature. Harris & Samuel (2024) reject the longstanding claim that enclitics are more frequent cross linguistically due to processing ease. Their experiments found no consistent cognitive or production advantage for enclitics over proclitics. Koshy (2024) proposes the construction sensitive clitic theory, emphasizing that the boundary between affixes and clitics is fluid and context dependent. Discuss how cliticization involves both phonological and morphological processes. They argue that clitics behave as "prosodic words" that attach phonologically to hosts but have their own morphophonemic rules (Hyman & Inkelas 2022).

Haspelmath (2023) classifies clitics into two main typological categories based on their position relative to the host word:

1. Proclitic is a clitic that appears before its host word and attaches to the beginning of that word. It is phonologically dependent on the following host but syntactically behaves as a separate element. Proclitics typically introduce the main word often a verb or noun and are used to express grammatical relations such as person, number, or case.
2. Enclitic is a clitic that appears after its host word and attaches to the end of that word. It depends phonologically on the preceding host. Enclitics often convey grammatical features such as tense, person, negation, or focus, attaching to the last word of a syntactic phrase rather than a specific lexical category.

In West Nias, the proclitic and enclitic systems are far more productive. Proclitics typically mark aspect or pronominal subjects, indicating person or number distinctions, while enclitics mark objects or add emphasis to the predicate or subject. This distribution reflects a morphosyntactic pattern distinct from that of Standard Indonesian.

This study, entitled "An Analysis of Clitics in the West Nias Language: A Morphosyntactic Study," aims to analyze the forms, functions, and distribution of

clitics in West Nias. The focus lies on understanding how clitics operate within the morphosyntactic structure of the language, and how their characteristics correspond to or diverge from general linguistic theories of cliticization. Therefore, this research seeks to contribute to the field of descriptive and typological linguistics, providing a deeper understanding of clitic systems in Austronesian languages, particularly within the context of Indonesia's linguistic diversity.

B. Methodology

1. Research Design

This study applies a qualitative descriptive research design. The descriptive method is employed to systematically document and analyze the forms, functions, and syntactic distribution of clitics in the West Nias language, without altering their natural linguistic environment. This design is appropriate, as the research aims to describe and interpret linguistic patterns rather than examine or test predetermined hypotheses. As noted by Creswell (2023), qualitative descriptive inquiry is particularly suitable for exploring naturally occurring linguistic phenomena within real communicative contexts.

The analysis integrates morphological and syntactic frameworks. The morphological component focuses on identifying clitic forms and their attachment patterns, while the syntactic component examines their grammatical roles and interactions within clause

structure. Together, these analytical perspectives establish a comprehensive morphosyntactic approach to understanding cliticization in the West Nias language.

2. Research Location and Participants

The research was conducted in West Nias Regency, where native speakers of the West Nias language are concentrated. Participants consisted of twenty native speakers, ten males and ten females aged between 30 and 60 years old, all of whom were fluent in West Nias and used it actively in daily communication. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that they represented different age groups and speech styles within the same dialect area.

3. Data Sources

The data of this study were derived from two main sources, primary data were obtained directly from native speakers through interviews, recorded conversations, and elicitation of example sentences. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), primary data collection in qualitative linguistic research allows researchers to capture authentic speech patterns, contextual meanings, and spontaneous use of grammatical features. Secondary data were drawn from existing written materials, including traditional stories, church publications, and regional linguistic documentation. As stated by Paltridge and Phakiti (2023), secondary linguistic data such as texts, folklore, and written records are essential for supporting qualitative analysis because

they provide stable evidence of language use and preserve historical variations of grammatical structures.

Both data sources were used to identify the occurrence and distribution of proclitics, enclitics. This triangulation of oral and written data follows the principle of data validation described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2024), which emphasizes comparing multiple forms of data to enhance the credibility and consistency of linguistic findings.

4. Data Collection Techniques

The researcher applied three main techniques in data collection:

1. Observation and recording, natural speech from daily conversations was observed and recorded to capture authentic language use.
2. Interview, participants were asked to provide example sentences and to translate Indonesian sentences into West Nias. This technique helped identify the grammatical functions of clitics and their syntactic positions.
   3. Documentation, written materials in the West Nias language (e.g., local folktales and church texts) were reviewed to find additional examples of clitic use in written form.

5. Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis followed several steps adapted from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2024). Data reduction, selecting and classifying utterances containing clitic elements. Data display, organizing data into tables showing the forms, positions, and functions of clitics (proclitic, enclitic, and mesoclitic).Conclusion drawing and verification, interpreting the data in relation to morphosyntactic theories and confirming consistency with cross-linguistic typologies.

6. Realibility and validity

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, triangulation techniques were used: source triangulation by comparing spoken and written data. Methodological triangulation through observation, interviews, and documentation. Researcher triangulation by consulting local linguists and native speakers for cross checking the interpretation of clitic forms. This process ensured that the findings are both linguistically valid and contextually grounded in actual language use.

C. Result And Discussion

The purpose of this research is to examined the structural forms, functional roles, and syntactic distribution of proclitics and enclitics in the West Nias language within a morphosyntactic framework. Data for the study were obtained through systematic observation, note-based documentation, consultation with native speaker informants, and analysis of supporting literature. The results demonstrate that West Nias employs two major categories of pronominal clitics proclitic and enclitic forms which contribute significantly to

clause organization and the encoding of grammatical relations.

Cliticization in West Nias

The analysis revealed that the clitic system in West Nias is highly productive, especially in verbal morphology. Proclitics and enclitics serve distinct syntactic and semantic functions. Consistent with Haspelmath's (2023) typological claim that proclitics and enclitics dominate across the world's languages, the West Nias data confirm that clitics in this language operate as bound grammatical markers attached to phonological hosts rather than as independent words.

Clitic attachment is sensitive to morphosyntactic context rather than phonological shape supporting Amir's (2024) view that clitics occupy an intermediate status between words and affixes, depending on their hosts for phonetic realization and meaning.

1. Proclitics in West Nias Language

Proclitics in West Nias attach to verbs to indicate actor voice or subject agreement**.** They cannot stand alone and are phonologically dependent on the verb. In this study, six forms of proclitic were found, namely *a-, i-, ta-,ba-, ö-, u-,la, mi-o-.* Proklitik yang terdapat dalam Bahasa Nias Barat a-'I', i-'she/he/we', ta-'we', ba-'I/you', ö-,'you', u-'I', la-'we/they', mi-'they/we', o-.

Proclitics *a-'I'*

Form	Category (verb, noun, adjective)	Word Formation
a-	manö	*amanö,* just eat
a-	alabudo	*alabudo,* I fell
a-	alimbadudo	*alimbadudo,* I felt breathless
a-	ataudo	*ataudo,* I am scared

Examples:

Iwa'ö khögu amanö kue daö
"He told me to just eat the cake"
No alabudo ba motor mege
"I fell off the motorbike earlier"
Alimbadudo bakha ba mobil daö
"I felt breathless in the car"
Ataudo namofönu ia khögu
"I'm scared he's angry."

Proclitic, *i-'she/he'*

Form	Category (verb)	Word Formation
i-	taba	*itaba,* he cut
i-	tanö	*itanö,* he planted
i-	fake	*ifake,* he wear
i-	i'a	*i'a,* he eat

Examples:
Itaba manu
"He cuts the chicken"
Itanö wakhe
"He planted rice"
Ifake nukha nia
"He wears clothes"
I'a gö nia
"He eats his food"

Proclitic, *ta-'we'*

Form	Category (verb)	Word Formation
ta-	baseö	*tabaseö,* we wait

ta-	fajawa	*tafajawa*, we lift	
ta-	fofanö	*tafofanö*, we told to leave	
ta-	sifa	*tasifa*, we kick	

Examples:

Tabaseö ira balala

"We wait on the road"

Tafajawa gara daö

"We lift the stone"

Tafofanö ira dania bajibongi

'We told them to leave tonight"

Tasifa bola na aekhu khöda

"We'll kick the ball if it comes to us"

Proclitic, *ba-*'we'

Form	Category (noun)	Word Formation
ba-	fasa	*bafasa*, in the market
ba-	ndraso	*bandraso*, in the garden
ba-	hulu	*bahulu*, upriver
ba-	luaha	*baluaha*, downriver

Examples:

Moi ita bafasa mahemolu

"Let's go to the market tomorrow"

Moi ita bandraso mahemolu sihulöwongi

″ Let's go to the garden tomorrow morning"

Moi ita ta'alui gi'a bahulu nidanö

"Let's go look for fish upriver"

Moi ita manusuli gi'a baluaha nidanö

"Let's go look for fish downriver"

Proclitic, *ö-*'you'

Form	Category (verb)	Word Formation
ö-	ö'a	*ö'a*, you eat
ö-	fake	*öfake*, you wear

ö-	lalau/ ö'fagamöi	*ölalau*,	you make
ö-	böbö	*öböbö*, you tie	

Examples:

Hana lö ö'a gö daö?

"Why haven't you eaten this food?"

Böi ö'fake nalö möi khömö

"Don't wear it if it doesn't fit you"

Hadia tola ö'lalau dadaoma?

"Are you able to make a chair?"

Ö'böbö manö ba daö sisa

"Just tie it over there"

Proclitic, *u-*'I'

Form	Category (verb)	Word Formation
u-	u'a	*u'a*, I eat
u-	sasai	*utebu*, I wash
u-	teu	*uteu*, I climb
u-	erai	*uerai*, I count

Examples:

U'a yawa hambae daa

"I'll eat this crab upstairs"

U'sasai nukhagu

"I'll wash my clothes"

U'teu ögu mbua ndrima

"I'll climb the orange tree"

U'erai hauga gefegu sino owulo

"I'm going to count how much money i've saved"

Proclitic, *la-*'in/to'

Form	Category (verb)	Word Formation
la-	böji	*laböji*, to be hit
la-	tawi	*lalatatawi*, to be cut
la-	khao	*lakhao*, to granted
la-	faga	*lafaga*, to grill

Examples:

Böi mi ae ba daö laböji mi

"Don't go there, later there will be someone who hits you"

Latatawi tou nagole mbawi daö

"Cut the pork into small pieces"

Hadia tola lakhao mbanio daa

"Can this coconut be grated?"

Bajibongi mi ae bakhöma, börö lafaga gia siso ba kola

"Come to our house tonight, we're having a fish grill from the pond!"

Proclitic, *mi-*'you/we'

Form	Category (verb)	Word Formation
mi-	okhoi'*ö*	*miokhoi'ö*, you dry
mi-	tabu	*mi*tabu, let's go
mi-	taisa	*mitaisa*, let's go first
mi-	boa	*miboa*, you smash

Examples:

Miokhoi'*ö bajino nukha daö*

"You hang those clothes out to dry under the blazing sun"

Mitabu talau manaba gitö

" Let's go tap rubber trees"

Mitaisa khöda ma o'ö dania

"You go first, we'll come after"

Miboa gara daö

" You guys smash the stone"

Proclitic, *o-*

Form	Category (verb, adj)	Word Formation
o-	köli	*oköli, have dried*
o-	siliö	*osiliö, very tasty*
o-	nekhe	*onekhe*, so smart
o-	kafu	*okafu*, the rain

Examples:

No ok*öli-köli mbulu geu daa*

"The vegetables have dried already

Osiliö siaikö mbua geu daa

"This tree's fruit is very tasty*

Omasido na onekhe nonogu

"I'll be happy if my child is smart."

Okafu ita ba deu daa

" We're feeling cold because of the rain"

The analysis of proclitics in the West Nias language demonstrates that these forms play a crucial role in marking grammatical relations, particularly subject reference, directionality, and aspectual meaning. Proclitics attach to verbs, adjectives, or nouns depending on their function and are phonologically dependent, confirming their status as clitics rather than full affixes. The nine identified forms *a-, i-, ta-, ba-, ö-, u-, la-, mi-, and o-*reflect a systematic structure that distinguishes person, number, and semantic roles. Overall, the proclitic system in West Nias contributes to an efficient morphosyntactic framework, representing a unique linguistic feature that helps maintain both grammatical clarity and cultural identity among its speakers.

3. Enclitics in West Nias Language

This study focuses exclusively on possessive enclitics in the West Nias language, enabling a precise exploration

of their form and function. Enclitics are attached to nouns or verbs, marking possession or object reference. enclitics in the West Nias language primarily consist of personal pronominal clitics that attach to the end of their host word. Their main functions are to mark possession and patient/absolutive object or intransitive subject.

In the West Nias language, possessive relationships are commonly expressed through the use of pronominal enclitics attached to nouns. These enclitics do not function independently but rely on a lexical host to convey meaning. The system reflects a highly grammaticalized structure in which possession is encoded morphosyntactically rather than through separate possessive pronouns.

Common forms of pronominal enclitics in West Nias language *"gu-mö-,ra-,mi-,ma-,nia-"*

Form	Category (noun)	Word Formation
gu-	saraewa	*saraewagu,* my pants
mö-	jufo	*Jufomö, your mat*
ra-	nomo	*nomora,* their house
mi-	gejoi	*gejoimi,* your/our broom
ma-	fetolo	*fetolama,* our pencil
nia-	tofi	*Tofinia,* his/her/their

Examples:

Saraewagu masi abasö börö melö muokhöi'ö

"My pants are still wet because they haven't been dried"

Nobaga-baga jufomö

"Your mat is very beautiful"

Ebua siikö nomora we

"Their house is very big"

Ae mihalö gejoimi

"Please take your broom"

Fetoloma daa he

"This is our pencil"

No'usöndra dofi nia ba dete meja

"I found his hat on the table"

The analysis demonstrates that pronominal enclitics in the West Nias language serve as a central component of its morphosyntactic system. These enclitics function primarily as possessive markers that attach to nouns without altering the base form of the host, forming the pattern Noun + Enclitic (N+CL). This structure indicates that the West Nias language relies on a clitic-based grammatical strategy rather than morphological inflection to express relational meanings such as possession.

The variation in enclitic forms, including *-gu, -mö, -ma, -mi, -ra, and -nia,* reflects a well-defined system of person marking, distinguishing first, second, and third persons as well as singular and plural categories. These enclitics are used consistently within syntactic structures to mark ownership directly, as seen in examples such as *saraewagu* ("my pants") and *nomora* ("their house").Syntactically, the enclitics act as grammatical markers that encode relational meaning, while

morphologically they illustrate the language's tendency toward light agglutination. This demonstrates linguistic efficiency, where grammatical roles are encoded without the need for additional free pronouns or internal word modification.

Overall, the system of pronominal enclitics in the West Nias language represents a distinctive linguistic feature that differentiates it from surrounding languages and contributes to the unique linguistic identity of its speakers.

4. Morphosyntactic Implications

The analysis of the forms and distributions of proclitics and enclitics demonstrates that the presence of clitics in the West Nias language is not merely a phonological phenomenon but is closely connected to the morphosyntactic system and the marking of argument relations within the clause. Proclitics function as markers of the agent, whereas enclitics mark the absolutive participant (object or intransitive subject). This phenomenon indicates that, the host lexeme does not undergo morphological modification; instead, its syntactic function shifts through the attachment of clitics, clitics serve as a morphosyntactic strategy for encoding grammatical relations without lexical inflection. Thus, the clitic system in West Nias plays a crucial structural role functionally comparable to inflectional morphology in other languages.

D. Conclusion

1. Conclusion

This study concludes that proclitics and enclitics are essential components of the morphosyntactic structure of the West Nias language. Proclitics function primarily as subject markers attached to verbs, while enclitics serve as possessive markers attached to nouns. Their consistent usage reflects a well-structured grammatical system that relies on clitic attachment rather than morphological inflection. The findings highlight the linguistic uniqueness of West Nias and contribute to the documentation and preservation of this regional language.

2. Suggestions

1. Future research should include more diverse natural speech data to strengthen the analysis of clitic usage.
2. Research comparing West Nias with other Austronesian languages is also recommended to clarify its typological characteristics.
3. Further investigation into the pragmatic and discourse functions of clitics is suggested to complement the morphosyntactic findings.

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