

Clitics: Clitics are a type of "half word" that are attached before or after the verb and which have particular grammatical constraints that "normal" words don't have. English **-n't-** as in **don't, can't-** is sometimes described as a clitic.

Clitics in Spanish generally function as pronouns or as a preposition-plus-pronoun combination. That is, they have a similar meaning and function to the English series of pronouns *me, you, him* when used as the object of the verb. Informally, clitics in Spanish (and other Romance languages such as French) are often called "object pronouns"¹. The following sentence contains an example of a clitic underlined: **lo vi=I saw him**

The clitics in Spanish are as follows:

Clitic	Corresponding subject	Common English translation
me	yo	me
te	tú	you
lo	él	him
la	ella	her
nos	nosotros, -as	us
os	vosotros, -as	you
los	ellos	them
las	ellas	them
le	él, ella	(to) him/her
les	ellos, ellas	(to) them
se	él, ella, ellos, ellas, uno	himself, herself, themselves, oneself

Clitics for *usted(es)*

The *third-person* clitics (**lo(s), la(s), le(s)**) can also function as *second-person*, referring to a person or people that would be addressed as **usted(es)**.

Direct vs indirect

Most clitics can represent either the *direct* or *indirect* object of the verb. So Spanish **me**, as well as meaning *me* as in "he saw me", can also mean *to me* as in *he gave me the book*.

Reflexivity

Most clitics can also be *reflexive*: that is, have the *-self* meaning (e.g. **me** can mean *myself*, as either indirect or direct object). However, the *third-person* pronouns **lo(s), la(s), le(s)** are never used reflectively; instead, **se** replaces them with a reflexive meaning.

Position

With a "normal" conjugated verb, clitics always come *before* the verb as in the example above. On the other hand, clitics are always attached to the *end* of other forms: infinitives, participles and positive imperatives.

Variation in the use of third-person clitics

In both Peninsular and Latin American varieties of Spanish, there is variation in how different Spanish speakers use the third-person clitics. A common variation is to use **le** instead of **lo** for a human masculine direct object.

1. The description of "object pronouns" works more or less in Spanish, but is a poorer description of clitics such as French **y/en** or Italian **ne**.