

# Simplification or Complexification: Auxiliary Selection and Anti-agreement Effect in Brazilian Venetan

Roberta D'Alessandro

Utrecht University  
r.dalessandro@uu.nl

Alberto Frasson

University of Wrocław  
alberto.frasson@uwr.edu.pl



Received: February 8, 2022  
Accepted: September 8, 2022

## Abstract

In this paper we discuss a change in the auxiliary selectional pattern of Brazilian Venetan, a heritage Italo-Romance variety spoken in southern Brazil. Venetan varieties display a default form of the past participle in constructions with postverbal subjects and a fully agreeing form in constructions with preverbal subjects: this is true both for the homeland varieties of the language, spoken in northern Italy, as well as for the heritage variety under analysis in this paper, spoken in southern Brazil. A crucial difference emerges in unaccusative constructions: while Italian Venetan uses the same form of the auxiliary BE in presence of preverbal and postverbal subjects, Brazilian Venetan uses a specialized form of the auxiliary in the constructions with default agreement on the past participle, when postverbal subjects are present. We argue that the specialized auxiliary form emerges as a necessary resumption in the case of lack of agreement. The heritage variety becomes, therefore, morphosyntactically more complex than the non-heritage counterpart.

**Keywords:** anti-agreement; auxiliary; heritage; agreement

**Resum.** *Simplificació o complexificació: la selecció de l'auxiliar i els efectes d'anticoncordança en el vènet brasiler*

En aquest article analitzem un canvi en el patró de selecció de l'auxiliar del vènet brasiler, una varietat d'herència italo-romànica parlada al sud del Brasil. Les varietats vènetes mostren una forma predeterminada del participi passat en construccions amb subjectes postverbals i una forma totalment concordada en construccions amb subjectes preverbals: això és cert tant per a les varietats de la llengua nativa, parlades al nord d'Itàlia, com per a la varietat d'herència parlada al sud del Brasil que s'analitza en aquest article. En les construccions inacusatives es produeix una diferència crucial: mentre que el vènet italià fa servir la mateixa forma de l'auxiliar 'ser' en presència de subjectes preverbals i postverbals, el vènet brasiler fa servir una forma especialitzada de l'auxiliar en les construccions amb concordança per defecte del participi passat, amb subjectes postverbals. Argumentem que la forma auxiliar especialitzada sorgeix com una represa necessària en cas de manca de concordança. La varietat d'herència esdevé, doncs, morfosintàcticament més complexa que la variant nativa.

**Paraules clau:** anticoncordança; auxiliar; herència; concordança

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4. Resumptive elements in heritage varieties
2. Past participial agreement and auxiliary in BV	5. Conclusion
3. AAE in Venetan	References

### 1. Introduction

#### *1.1. Auxiliary and past participle in Venetan*

Venetan, together with some other northern and central Italo-Romance varieties, displays an antiagreement effect (AAE henceforth), in that these lack subject-verb agreement for third person in the context of subject inversion, (1):

- (1) a. L-e        tos-e        ze rivade.  
           the-PL.F girls-PL.F are arrived-PL.F  
           ‘The girls have arrived.’
- b. Ze rivà            l-e        tos-e.  
           is arrived.SG.M the-PL.F girls-PL.F  
           ‘The girls have arrived.’

In (1b), the past participle appears in a default third person masculine singular form, while the postverbal subject is third person plural feminine. That is to say, inverted subjects<sup>1</sup> in Venetan trigger AAE in the past participle, which would normally agree with an unaccusative subject, cf. (1a). The two structures allow for the same interpretation.

This peculiar agreement pattern is found in other Italo-Romance varieties (as well as in Arabic, Berber and Turkish, most notably see Ouhalla 1993; Oualla 2005; Ouali 2006<sup>2</sup>), and has been the topic of a number of studies (Rizzi 1986; Brandi & Cordin 1989; Poletto 1993; Benincà 1994; Cardinaletti 2004; Cardinaletti 2018; Schaefer 2020; Bentley & Cennamo 2022). As noted, one of the varieties displaying AAE is Venetan, a northern Italo-Romance variety spoken by ca. 4 million people in north-eastern Italy. Venetan is also spoken in southern Brazil by almost 1 million people, the descendants of emigrants that arrived in Brazil from north-eastern Italy in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Brazilian Venetan (‘BV’ henceforth) displays some interesting innovations in the pronominal system (Frasson 2021) as well as the phonological and prosodic levels (Guzzo & Garcia 2020). In this paper

1. Following established terminology, for this phenomenon we refer to postverbal subjects as “inverted” but in fact they are simply in-situ, as this phenomenon only happens with unaccusatives.
2. Arabic, Berber and Turkish AAE is of a different nature from the “default agreement” effect which is found in Italo-Romance. Specifically, Arabic, Berber and Turkish AAE emerges in the context of subject extraction. In this paper, we will use the term AAE to refer to the Italo-Romance phenomenon, leaving the comparison with Arabic and Berber aside.

we discuss a change in BV unaccusative constructions with post-verbal subjects, involving auxiliary forms and clitics, and targeting AAE constructions. The data for BV were collected during extensive fieldwork in 19 locations in the Brazilian states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul. These data are all taken from spontaneous conversations. The data and methodology used in the fieldwork were described in Andriani et al. (2021); we refer to this work for the methodological details.

In section 1.2 and 1.3 we present the forms of the auxiliary BE and the AAE in Venetan in more detail.

### 1.2. *The auxiliary BE in Venetan*

The present tense of the auxiliary BE in Venetan displays many similarities with other Romance varieties in the first and second persons, which are the continuations of Latin forms. The third persons, however, despite also representing continuations of Latin forms, show a more complex structure. In most Venetan varieties, third person singular and plural are non-distinct and both display an incorporated clitic, which is obligatory and not separable from the verb. The relevance of such incorporated clitic will become evident in sections 2 and 3, in which we will discuss its role in the different anti-agreement patterns displayed by Brazilian and Italian Venetan.

As shown in (2) and (3), the third persons forms of the present tense in Central Venetan varieties such as Trevisano display a *z-* part that evolved from a locative clitic but is now obligatory in all contexts in the third person present form of BE in Trevisano (4).

- (2) Ze rivà Toni.  
 is arrived.SG.M Toni.SG.M  
 ‘Tony has arrived’
- (3) Ze rivà m-e amigh-e.  
 is arrived.SG.M my-PL.F friends-PL.F  
 ‘My friends have arrived’
- (4) 1sg: son  
 2sg: si  
 3sg: ze  
 1pl: semo  
 2pl: se  
 3pl: ze

According to Benincà (2007), until recent times, *z-* functioned as a locative clitic and it appeared in existential contexts. In most modern Venetan varieties, however, the clitic is grammaticalized in the verbal form, bleached of its original meaning.

This being said, the grammaticalized clitic in the third persons of BE is not always a locative. Western Venetan varieties of the Veronese type display a clitic

*l'* in the same contexts in which Central Venetan grammaticalized *z-*; modern Veronese, for instance, makes use of the third person form *l'è*, whereas modern Trevigiano uses *ze*.

- (5) (Poletto 1993: 81)  
*L'è rivà Toni.*  
 is arrived-SG.M Toni-SG.M  
 'Tony has arrived'

On a par with *ze* in archaic Venetan, the form *l'è* is used as an existential in some more isolated Venetan varieties which display a more archaic system:

- (6) (Bentley et al. 2015: 10)  
*Te sti fruti qua l'è tanti semi.*  
 in these fruits here there=is many seeds  
 'There are many seeds in these fruits.'

The clitic *l'* is analyzed by Poletto (1993) as an 'auxiliary clitic', a specific form realized exclusively with third person singular forms of BE. The following examples illustrate this situation:

- (7) a. *L'è capità de tuto.*  
 is happened.SG.M of everything  
 'A lot of things have happened'
- b. *Capita de tuto.*  
 happens of everything  
 'All sorts of things happen.'

The clitic *l'* is realized together with the present tense of BE in (7a), but it is not realized in the same context when the auxiliary is not present (7b). According to Garzonio & Poletto (2011), the fact that, given the same syntactic context, the clitic appears only when the auxiliary is present confirms that its realization is independent of the subject, but may depend on the auxiliary instead.

According to Parry's (1993) analysis of Piedmontese clitics, the *l'* element is the result of the regrammaticalization of a complement clitic; this clitic is reanalyzed as being part of the verbal morphology.

Returning to modern Venetan dialects, it should be noted that those varieties that use the form *ze* generally lack *l'è* and viceversa. Compare for instance Trevigiano (8) and Veronese (9):

- (8) Trevigiano  
*Ze / (\*L'è) rivà me fradeo.*  
 is / is arrived.SG.M my brother  
 'My brother has arrived.'

- (9) Veronese  
 L'è / (\*Ze) rivà me fradel.  
 is / is arrived.SG.M my brother  
 'My brother has arrived.'

In the two varieties, only one form of the third person is allowed, regardless of whether the verb functions as an auxiliary or a copula. The distribution of auxiliary forms for the 3rd person in Venetan varieties in Italy is areal; each variety selects its own preferred form of the third-person present tense BE between *ze* or *l'è*.

## 2. Past participial agreement and auxiliary in BV

The system of BV presents some differences with respect to what is found in the Italian Venetan varieties. While first and second persons of the auxiliary BE are identical to those of modern Italian Venetan varieties, there is intra-speaker variation concerning the realization of third person present tense forms. Three forms are available to speakers and are apparently used in free distribution: *ze*, *l'è* and *è* (though see below for a refinement of this view).

- (10) BV  
 1sg: son  
 2sg: si  
 3sg: l'è / ze / è  
 1pl: semo  
 2pl: se  
 3pl: l'è / ze / è

The three forms of the 3rd person, in complementary distribution in Italian Venetan varieties, are all available to the speakers of BV. This variation is explained by the peculiar conditions in which BV developed. BV is described by Frosi & Mioranza (1975) as a *koine* variety, in which elements from different Venetan varieties have converged. Immigrants arrived in Brazil from different parts of the Venetan-speaking area in Italy, speaking Trevigiano or Veronese, as well as some more archaic Venetan varieties. While in Italy these varieties are geographically divided, they converged into one system in Brazil, where speakers of Venetan formed extended communities where all the different dialects were spoken. This resulted in a series of mutual interferences between the grammars, leading to the development of a *koine* in which features from different systems coexist. It is therefore possible to explain intra-speaker variation in BV as a reflex of the co-existence of different grammars or lects (Tortora 2014). We will return to this in section 4.

A first superficial glance at the data seems to suggest that the three options available to BV speakers for the realization of third person BE encode the same formal features and have identical functions. However, an analysis of the distribution of the three forms highlights that the “multiple grammars” hypothesis is untenable for the case under analysis.

### 2.1. The distribution of BE forms in BV

BV displays a situation that could, at a first glance, seem like a case of free distribution between three forms for BE in the 3rd person of the present tense. This is however not the case, as the distribution of *l'è*, *ze* and *è* is determined by the position and the type of subject with which the verb agrees.

The *l'è* form mainly appears with subjects in post-verbal position, regardless of their number or gender. Recall that post-verbal subjects generally trigger AAE in Venetan.<sup>3</sup>

#### (11) BV

- a. *L'è vegnest-o/ ???vegnest-a l-a non-a.*  
 is come-SG.M/ come-SG.F the-SG.F grandmother-SG.F  
 'My grandmother came.'
- b. *L'è rivà i bisnon-i qua tal Brasil.*  
 is arrived-SG.M the great-grandparents-PL.M here to.the Brazil  
 'The great-grandparents arrived here in Brazil.'

The form *l'è* appears with different types of overt subjects (pronouns and lexical subjects), with different gender and number, both in copular sentences and in unaccusative constructions. However, as stated, the use of *l'è* is limited to postverbal subjects in BV, i.e. in AAE contexts.

The situation with *ze* and *è* is quite different, in that they mainly occur with preverbal referential subjects, regardless of their gender. However, while *ze* can be used both with third person singular and plural, *è* tends to be used with third person plural subjects only:

#### (12) BV

- a. *La so mare ze nasest-a in Italia.*  
 the his mother is born-SG.F in Italy  
 'His mother was born in Italy.'
- b. *El pì zovine ze vegnest-o dopo.*  
 the.SG.M most young is come-SG.M later  
 'The youngest one came later.'
- c. *I non-i è vegnest-i de navio.*  
 the grandparents-PL.M be.3 come-PL.M by ship  
 'The grandparents came by ship.'

3. The ??? here indicates that the form is very rare. Venetan does not have a standard variety and it is not taught at school. A certain degree of variability is always present in speakers of Venetan, regardless of the place in which the language is spoken: both Venetan speakers in Italy and in Brazil are bilingual and use the language in informal contexts. Consider also that our data come from a corpus of semi-guided production, in which the identified pattern corresponds to a tendency. It is not possible to exclude the agreeing form, but the tendency is against its use.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the third person BE forms with singular subjects (preverbal and postverbal). N. of sentences: 73

	<i>l'è</i>	<i>ze</i>	<i>è</i>	Total
Preverbal	1	37	5	43
Postverbal	27	2	1	30

**Table 2.** Distribution of the third person BE forms with plural subjects (preverbal and postverbal). N. of sentences: 30

	<i>l'è</i>	<i>ze</i>	<i>è</i>	Total
Preverbal	2	7	8	18
Postverbal	10	1	1	12

Tables 1 and 2 show the total number of third person BE forms that we found and their distribution.<sup>4</sup> The occurrences listed in Tables 1 and 2 appear in spontaneous conversation.

### 3. AAE in Venetan

Before tackling the question regarding the interaction of specified auxiliaries with the syntax of subjects, let us briefly consider AAE in Venetan, which we see exemplified in (1b), here repeated as (13).

- (13) *Ze rivà l-e tos-e.*  
 is arrived.SG.M the-PL.F girls-PL.F  
 'The girls have arrived.'

Brandi & Cordin (1989) argue that the AAE in northern Italo-Romance varieties depends on the presence of a preverbal null expletive pronoun, carrying a default agreement feature, which blocks agreement of the verb with the postverbal subject. However, it is unclear how the presence of an expletive subject would ever affect participial agreement, and where the overt subject would be located in this case. Regarding the position of the subject, there is no evidence to claim that the subject is extraposed in this context. We, therefore, assume that *le tose* is a subject in-situ, in postverbal argumental position as expected with unaccusative verbs.

To account for the lack of agreement between the past participle and the subject in a context in which one would normally expect it, we follow D'Alessandro & Roberts's (2008) analysis of participial agreement in Italian. According to

4. As noted in footnote 3, Venetan is a non-standard language and, especially in Brazil, inter-speaker variation is possible with respect to the realization of different auxiliary forms. In this paper, we selected data from speakers using the three auxiliary forms (see the *koine* hypothesis referred to in Section 2). We are aware of the limitations of the adopted methodology; the use of different methods of data elicitation, in particular acceptability judgments, can however be equally problematic and even counterproductive (Andriani et al. 2021).

D'Alessandro & Roberts, overt agreement marking is only possible if the elements in agreement belong to the same prosodic phrase at PF. Prosodic phrases are determined directly from Transfer domains; the piece of structure which is transferred to PF as a result of Transfer (Chomsky 2001) constitutes a prosodic phrase at PF. Assuming therefore that PIC-determined domains (i.e. Transfer domains) map directly into prosodic phrases, D'Alessandro & Roberts (2008: 482) propose the following algorithm for morphological agreement assignment:

- (14) a. Given an Agree relation A between Probe P and Goal G, morphophonological agreement between P and G is realized iff P and G are contained in the complement of the minimal phase head H.
- b. XP is the complement of a minimal phase head H iff there is no distinct phase head H' contained in XP whose complement YP contains P and G.

According to the rule proposed by (14), a probe and a goal can show morphophonological agreement only if they are contained in the same Transfer domain. When they Agree (Chomsky 2001) at Narrow Syntax, they establish a dependency that results in unvalued features being “recorded” as valued at Narrow Syntax; their actual morphological realization will only be completed at PF, where the value of the features on the goal will be copied into that of the probe (see also Preminger 2011 and Preminger 2014, for agreement failures not determining derivation crashes). At Transfer, the probe will be interpretable because it is in an Agree relation with a valued goal, but the insertion of the exact morphological endings will depend on whether the value of the features that are present on the goal can be retrieved at PF. The value can be retrieved only if probe and goal belong to the same prosodic phrase. In other words, if P and G belong into the same Transfer domain, they will also belong to the same prosodic phrase. Two elements belonging to the same prosodic phrase can “see” each other at PF, so it will be possible for P to retrieve the exact value of the features on G. If, however, P and G belong to two different Transfer domains, P will be unable to retrieve the exact value of the features on G because it will belong to a different PF domain/prosodic phrase. At that point, Agree has taken place and therefore the derivation will not have crashed at the interface; P will result as a valued and interpretable element, but the exact value will not be available for morphological insertion. A default agreement morpheme will therefore be inserted.

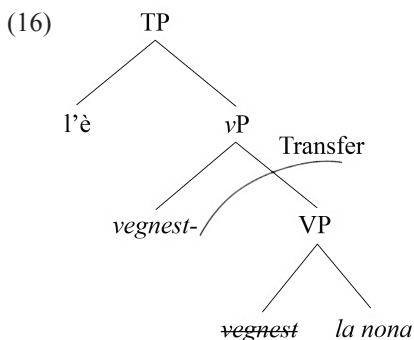
Applying D'Alessandro & Robert's analysis to the Venetan data, AAE can be thought to obtain because a default masculine singular agreement ending is inserted at PF if the subject (the goal) and the participle (the probe) belong to different Transfer domains. This is illustrated in the diagram in (16) for example (15):

- (15) L'è vegnest-o / ???vegnest-a l-a non-a.  
 is come-SG.M / come-SG.F the-SG.F grandmother-SG.F  
 'My grandmother came.'

The derivation proceeds as follows:



- The past participle is merged with the internal argument (the subject)
- The unvalued features of the participle, number and gender, Agree with the [sg.f] internal argument
- The past participle *vegnest-* remerges with *v*
- *v* is phasal, the VP is Transferred
- At PF, lexical insertion must take place. The past participle is not part of the same prosodic phrase as the subject<sup>5</sup>, therefore a default masculine singular morpheme is inserted. AAE arises.
- The auxiliary is merged, and it probes for the subject in order to get its feature. However, the probe is already specified for 3rd person, given that it includes a 3rd person clitic (see below). In this case, this doubling is rather a checking process, making sure that the subject and the auxiliary are both 3rd person. This also explains why these constructions are only found in the 3rd person: the incorporated 3rd person clitic restricts the person feature value on the object.<sup>6</sup>



There is, however, a complication regarding this analysis, owing to the fact that unaccusatives are considered to be defective verbs, i.e. verbs with a defective *v* or no *v* at all (Chomsky 2001). If that's the case, *v* cannot be a phase head, and its complement will not be Transferred to PF in a separate cycle. In Italian, for instance, unaccusatives have a defective *v*, and this results in the agreement of the past participle with the subject internal argument, as in (17), adapted from (D'Alessandro & Roberts 2008: 478):

5. That the PIC-induced domain (and not an XP, see Nespor & Vogel 1986 and following) translates directly into a prosodic phrase is assumed by D'Alessandro & Roberts (2008), as well as Ackema & Neeleman (2003) in a different fashion. The validity of this direct-mapping assumption is debated at length in Cheng & Downing (2012), D'Alessandro & Scheer (2015), and Bonet, Cheng, Downing & Mascaró (2019).
6. These mechanisms recall the “feature-uniformity” requirement proposed by Anagnostopoulou (1998) for the PCC: in that case the verb receives a value from one of the arguments and this value needs to be the same on the other argument, since there is a one probe-2 goals configuration. In the case of Venetan, we see something similar: the auxiliary has the person feature already valued; this value must match that of the subject, and therefore 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person subjects are excluded. We wish to thank one of the reviewers for suggesting this to us.

- (17) Sono arrivat-e l-e ragazz-e.  
 are.PL arrived-PL.F the-PL.F girls-PL.F  
 'The girls have arrived.'

The phasal status of *v* is however different from that of Italian; specifically, Venetan unaccusative *v* are phase heads. This is not an exception: as shown in D'Alessandro & Scheer (2015), many other Italo-Romance varieties have a phasal unaccusative *v* (see also Ledgeway 2019; Ledgeway 2021). The evidence presented by D'Alessandro and Scheer, as well as Ledgeway, is phonological in nature, and cannot be directly applied to Venetan, which lacks the phonosyntactic phenomenon of phono-syntactic gemination (*Rafforzamento fonosintattico*) generating a gemination between items belonging to the same phase. However, that unaccusatives can be phasal is also shown by Legate (2003) and McGinnis (2004). On the basis of reconstruction effects, Legate (2003) argues for instance that unaccusative and passive subjects undergoing EPP-driven movement cross a phasal boundary. There is not much way to apply the "reconstruction" test directly to Venetan, given the fact that non-standard varieties and heritage speakers do not perform well with long-distance dependencies and movement (Polinsky 2018). However, the fact that the behavior of unaccusatives might differ from that of passives is something that we could test, and in fact gave the expected results.

Specifically, one piece of evidence that our assumption is on the right track comes from comparing agreement in unaccusatives with agreement in passive constructions. Passive *v* is defective and therefore not phasal. Therefore, it should not trigger AAE, which is triggered by the presence of a phase head. If passive *v* is defective while active unaccusative *v* is non-defective and phasal, AAE will be triggered in unaccusative contexts but not in passive ones. This is in fact the case: passives and unaccusatives behave differently with respect to agreement with postverbal subjects<sup>7</sup>. Specifically, the position of the subject does not seem to affect agreement with the verb in passive constructions. The preverbal subjects in (18a) and (19a) and the postverbal subjects in (18b) and (19b) trigger full agreement on the past participle and the same auxiliary form is used.

(18) Brazilian Venetan

- a. Serte tose ze sta vedest-e.  
 some girls are.3PL been.F seen-PL.F
- b. Ze sta vedest-e sert-e tos-e.  
 are.3PL been.PL.F seen-PL.F some-PL.F girls-PL.F  
 'Some girls have been seen.'

7. Like in all non-standardized varieties, passives are rare in Venetan. These passive forms might be regional Italian rather than Venetan forms. We leave this for further investigation.

## (19) Italian Venetan

- a. Sert-e    tos-e    ze    sta    vist-e.  
 some-PL.F girls-PL.F are.3PL been.F seen-PL.F
- b. Ze    sta    vist-e    sert-e    tos-e.  
 are.3PL been.F seen-PL.F some-PL.F girls-PL.F  
 ‘Some girls have been seen.’

The reason for this different syntactic behaviour can be attributed to the fact that *v* in Italo-Romance does not encode transitivity, but Voice (see Alexiadou et al. 2015 and references therein). In this case, passives and unaccusatives are expected to pattern differently, in that passives have a (defective) passive *v*, while unaccusatives have an active *v*, which triggers AAE. AAE is found in all varieties of Venetan. Only in BV, however, it triggers further complexification of the system, as we will see in the next section.

#### 4. Resumptive elements in heritage varieties

BV auxiliaries show a distribution that is rather different from that of their Italian Venetan counterparts. This specialization is not unknown in heritage languages, where speakers prefer a one-form-one-meaning lexical organization, and tend to avoid multifunctional words. This phenomenon is described by Polinsky (2018) as the Avoid Indeterminacy Principle: when confronted with lexical items that have more than one meaning, heritage language speakers select only one of them, usually the prototypical one, and discard all others. Heritage language speakers tend to avoid synonyms, redundant information (see also Aalberse, Backus & Muysken 2019 for a thorough discussion about this). In the case of BV auxiliaries, we are in a similar situation, induced by the mixing of the different Venetan varieties present on the territory. While in Italy each auxiliary form is used in a different area, in Brazil all the varieties merged, which resulted in the creation of a large pool of items to choose from. Given the one-to-one preference, BV speakers create a syntactic rule for the distribution of auxiliaries that was not present in the original varieties. In what follows, we will present some ideas regarding simplification versus complexification in language change in contact. Then, we will propose a possible explanation for these facts.

##### 4.1. Simplification or complexification

One of the challenges of linguistic theory is to define complexity. While we all share the feeling that languages are “complex” systems, quantifying this complexity is not easy. Furthermore, as Haspelmath (2006) shows in a seminal paper on complexity and markedness, there are at least 12 different notions for markedness. First and foremost, it needs to be decided what domain we are considering: the sentence, the morphological structure, the lexicon, the phonological realization. One sentence can be more complex than the other because it requires more syntactic operations, but the same sentence might be considered less complex because

it is less ambiguous, that is to say, more transparent. Likewise, morphologically transparent words might be considered more complex in that they perhaps convey more grammatical information, but less complex than others as the information they convey is more transparent.

The vast literature on bilingual populations, including heritage speakers (see for instance Montrul 2004 and D'Alessandro 2021), shows that attested change in various domains constantly go in the direction of a simplification of the system. This simplification has been linked to a problem with the acquisition of complex grammatical rules, especially those that involve different modules of language, by bilingual speakers. In other words, bilingual speakers would always opt for the simpler choice available in their grammar. This possibility has been explored both from the perspective of language representation (Hulk & Müller 2000; Platzack 2001; Sorace & Filiaci 2006) and that of language processing (Sorace 2011). On the other hand, a growing body of research, including Heath (1978), Nichols (1992), Harris & Campbell (1995: 133), Aikhenvald (2002), and many others, has shown that contact-induced change does not necessarily imply attrition and simplification, but can also lead to enrichment through differentiation and complexification of the constraints on the interpretation and distribution of underlying categories and the relationships that hold between them.

The first obvious conclusion that we can draw from the observation of the BV data presented in this study is that they challenge the notion that heritage grammars are incompletely acquired, as proposed by Montrul (2008), following the cross-linguistic influence hypothesis (Hulk & Müller 2000) and the different versions of the interface hypothesis (Sorace & Filiaci 2006; Sorace 2011). Recent studies (Pascual y Cabo & Rothman 2012; Polinsky 2018; Putnam & Sánchez 2013) have shown that heritage grammars are not reduced or incomplete, but coherent and organized systems, though they may diverge from other varieties of the same language in some respect (Kupisch & Rothman 2018; D'Alessandro, Natvig & Putnam 2021). This 'divergent attainment' may lead to cases of simplification or complexification within any linguistic domain. Previous studies correctly identified processes of simplification in heritage grammars, but that is not the only possibility: the present study shows that a complexification of the system is also possible. Specifically, auxiliaries in BV display a richer system than Italian Venetan: there are three specialized forms instead of one. Because of the specialization of forms, the system is more transparent than in Italian Venetan, but at the same time more complex because of an additional grammatical rule that determines the distribution of different auxiliary forms based on the position of the subject.

Summarizing, the BV data presented in this study confirm that heritage language change can go in the direction of a simplification of the system, but that is only one of the options. A second possibility is that the system is made more complex, with the introduction of new constraints on already existing forms. The specialization of forms in BV auxiliaries represents an innovation that stems from the need to avoid indeterminacy, as also shown in Polinsky (2018).

At this point, the question remains on the choice of the auxiliary form; it is not clear why *l'* is almost exclusively used with postverbal subjects, *è* with preverbal

3rd plural subjects and *ze* with preverbal subjects. In what follows, we provide a possible explanation.

#### 4.2. *The division of labor between auxiliaries*

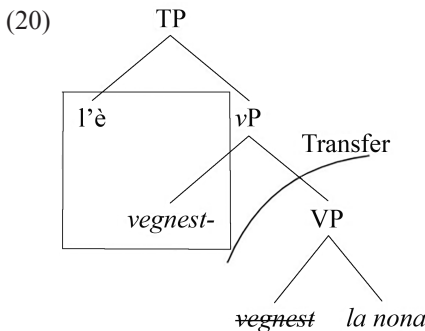
In a recent paper, D’Alessandro (2022), following Casalicchio, Ciconte & D’Alessandro (2018), argues that the structural weight of resumptive clitics depends on whether or not they crossed a phasal Transfer domain.

Specifically, when the clitic resumes an element across a phasal head, it conveys more syntactic information, it is richer. Casalicchio, Ciconte & D’Alessandro (2018) illustrate this through the asymmetry between subject and object clitics in Romance, where subject clitics are systematically weaker than object clitics. This is due to the fact that object clitics often resume a dislocated object in Romance; the structural distance (before phonological cliticization) between the object clitic and the dislocated element is such that the object clitic must convey all the syntactic information of the object; in the case of subject clitics or null subjects, this is not necessary, because the first-merge position of the subject and the dislocated position belong to the same phasal domain (headed by C), and therefore the information does not need to be repeated.

We wish to propose that something similar is at work in BV unaccusative constructions: heritage language speakers also resort to the use of doubling/resumptive features when the item they refer to is in a different domain.

On a par with cases of topicalization discussed by D’Alessandro (2022), BV speakers resort to some additional features, added on the auxiliary when the subject and the part participle it is agreeing with belong to different phases.

We have argued above that antiagreement effects in Venetan are due to the fact that unaccusative *v* is phasal. If we are on the right track, this implies that the auxiliary will be “heavier” in the presence of a postverbal subject. This prediction seems to be borne out, given that *l’è* results from the incorporation of a clitic to an auxiliary, and is therefore structurally heavier than *è*. Of course, *ze* is also morphologically more complex than *è*. We will return to a more detailed discussion of the featural setup of *l’è* and its selection in section 4.2.1. The syntax of agreement with a *l’è* auxiliary is illustrated in the tree in (20).



One of the principles guiding heritage language syntax is in fact “avoid silence”. Polinsky (2018) shows extensively that heritage language speakers prefer to spell out silent elements; this is particularly evident with null *pro* or ellipsis sites. BV speakers arguably abide by the same principle: since it is unclear what the past participle agrees with, they make it explicit by inserting an element that is already present in the system. The diachronic evolution of *l'* is debated: it is likely to have originated from a 3rd person complement clitic (Parry 1993). In this context, we wish to argue, it just gets used as a 3rd person feature, agreeing with the subject. It is, therefore, a case of exaptation. The fact that the auxiliary is already marked as 3rd person does not constitute a problem in subject-clitic systems such as the ones we are considering here. Rather, we are facing a subject doubling construction of the sort which is found in heritage languages, adopting a strategy which is very widely used in spoken and informal languages (as argued by Ciconte 2018 and D'Alessandro 2022, among others).

That one lexical item is reanalyzed and exapted to serve a different function is also no surprise. As argued by Lass (1988, 1990), and more recently by Biberauer (2019), in fact, this is a very common strategy in language change.

The whole auxiliary system in BV is, therefore, reorganized, following the principles of “avoid ambiguity” and “avoid silence”. One last question regards the way different features are reorganized on the three auxiliary forms. A possible description of this redistribution comes from Adger's (2006) Combinatorial variability model.

#### 4.2.1. *The Combinatorial Variability model*

Adger (2006) proposes that intra-speaker morphosyntactic variation is captured by the notions of feature interpretability and feature checking. Variation is intended as the case in which a morpheme has different allomorphs that result from the featural specification of the morpheme and from the context. This factor is defined as Combinatorial Variability, and allows us to capture cases of stable variability, as opposed to cases of variability that are resolved diachronically as a process of language change.

In Combinatorial Variability, variation in the use of the two auxiliary forms left in BV is assumed to derive from the ways the feature bundles underlying the forms combine. This is implemented by means of an algorithm of maximal generalization, which considers the way features are combined to form lexical items. Maximal generalizations are those made by lexical items having the fewest features. In other words, the algorithm generates one-feature lexical items, evaluates the outcome and, if this is not satisfactory, generates two feature lexical items and so on.

#### (21) Combinatorial Variability Algorithm (Adger 2006)

Seek Maximal Generalization by:

- Generating all lexical items encoding only one feature.
- Matching the one-feature lexical items with morphological forms.
- Rejecting optionality = all lexical items whose feature bundle can be mapped to multiple form are rejected.

- Rejecting synonymy = lexical items are rejected if their feature bundle can always be mapped to a single form but this creates synonymy.
- Minimising lexicon = if and only if some forms have not been successfully analysed as one-feature lexical items, generate two-feature lexical items.

We have seen that *l'è* is probably selected because of its complexity. Let us see how it works specifically for the case of third person BE in BV in the remaining forms. The algorithm will first create lexical items using just a single feature. For the third person, these will be: [ $\pm$ singular], [-participant].

Then it will try to associate these features with morphological forms, assuming that a single lexical item correlates with a single form; we are looking for matches where a feature or a feature bundle can always be mapped to a single form. If two forms are found, then a lexical item with this feature specification is rejected.

In the case of [-participant], the algorithm finds three forms matching the feature: *ze*, *è* and *l'è*. The feature is however matched with *l'è*; according to Adger, this matching may depend on extra-linguistic reasons, such as social or psychological factors or the frequency of occurrence. We believe that the reason for its selection is instead syntactic, as explained in section 4.2.

Moving to the second step, the algorithm generates the list of two-feature lexical items and applies the same procedure to the two remaining available auxiliary forms: specifically, the feature bundle [-participant, -singular] matches *è*, while the bundle [-participant, +singular] matches both *ze* and *è*. It is not possible to eliminate one of the forms of the doublet *ze/è* for the feature bundle [-participant, +singular]; removing the association of the feature [+singular] with the form *è* would predict that *è* is not a possible form for third person singular, contrary to fact. Adger proposes that cases such as the one of *ze/è* is diachronically unstable and should lead to a change. This doublet arose through dialect contact and currently competes in use in the singular form; however, two forms can coexist only if they specialize, that is to say, if they cease to be doublets. Over time, as dialects level out, doublets tend to disappear. This seem to be the case, as shown by the fact that *è* is preferred as a plural form already at this stage, while *ze* is preferred as singular.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper we presented an analysis of variational auxiliary selectional patterns in unaccusative constructions in Brazilian Venetan. This heritage variety uses three different forms of the third person auxiliary BE in presence of preverbal or postverbal subjects. This specialization follows the AAE found in most Venetan varieties for unaccusative constructions: while preverbal subjects display a fully agreeing past participle form, postverbal subjects trigger default agreement on the past participle. Aside from Brazilian Venetan, however, no Venetan varieties have developed a specialized auxiliary form to be used in the default agreement pattern.



As far as the general AAE in Venetan is concerned, we argue that the default masculine singular agreement ending is inserted at PF because the subject and the participle belong to different Transfer domains.

With respect to the specialization of auxiliary forms, we argue that the change depends on the fact that heritage speakers generally tend to avoid multifunctional words, as also shown in Polinsky (2018). At a syntactic level, this specialization is explained by the presence of additional features on the auxiliary. Such features have a resumptive function, in that unaccusative *v* is phasal in Venetan. So, the 'heavier' auxiliary form, incorporating a *l'* clitic, is reanalyzed as a marker of default agreement.

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