

‘Cimbrian syntax: a case study in macro- and micro-parametrization’

Cimbrian is a heritage language spoken in the North-East of Italy whose syntax is stuck between an original German(ic) and a contact-induced Romance type, with respect to several phenomena. In particular, Cimbrian represents a very special key-study for the theoretical correlation between V2 and *pro-drop* (two mutually exclusive macro-parameters).

In the recent literature devoted to Cimbrian syntax, there is general consensus on the following descriptive generalizations:

- Cimbrian does not display the canonical V2 linear restriction (allowing for YP XP V_{fin} ...) maintaining some syntactic aspects which typically correlate with V2 such as (i) pronominal subject inversion (... V_{fin}+pron...) and (ii) a residual root *versus* embedded word order asymmetry;
- Cimbrian allows free subject inversion (VP-NP) and does not show any *that*-trace effect (similar to Italian), although it maintains a fully articulated class of expletives, in coherence with the negative value of the Null Subject Parameter.

This very specific entanglement of macro- and micro-parametrization allows us to revisit the role of micro-variation with respect to both language contact and Parameter-resetting (ultimately language change).

On one side language contact seems to favor the linear convergence of word order patterns without changing the “core” structural aspect of a given phenomenon:

- i) the loss of V2 as linear restriction does not imply the loss of mandatory V to C movement;
- ii) free subject inversion and subject extraction out of the subordinate clause co-exist with the maintenance of an articulated class of lexical expletives

On the other side, from a diachronic point of view we can argue that phenomena of micro-variation play a crucial role in the process of both losing and acquiring the ‘core’ aspect of a given parametric choice. In particular:

- (i) Pronominal subject inversion with the finite verb ‘survives’ (/disappears later than) the loss of the core manifestation of the V2 parameter (i.e.: the loss of the linear V2 restriction);
- (ii) Free subject inversion precedes the core phenomenon of *pro-drop* (i.e. the potential development of a referential null subject), and crucially implies the mandatory co-occurrence with a lexical expletive (*-da*).

At this stage of evolution, the coexistence of epiphenomena correlating with two mutually exclusive parameter values (+V2, +Null Subject) determines a ‘syntactic impasse’ in the grammar of Cimbrian which will be resolved only through the resetting of one of these parameter values.

In this perspective we should discharge a Theory of contact based on the hypothesis of a gradual process of approximation to the model language (continuity approach):

$$\mathbf{A} \text{ --- } \mathbf{A}' \text{ --- } (\mathbf{A}'' = \mathbf{B}'') \text{ --- } \mathbf{B}' \text{ --- } \mathbf{B}$$

$$[-] \leftarrow \text{-----} \rightarrow [+]$$

But rather interpret contact induced phenomena as the superficial (/linear) convergence at the peripheries of two systems which may induce (but does not presuppose) a process of parameter-resetting along two distinct developmental paths:

$$\mathbf{A} \text{ ----- } \mathbf{A}' \text{ ----- } \left| \mathbf{A}'' \right| \text{ ----- } \mathbf{A}''' \rightarrow$$

$$\leftarrow \mathbf{B}''' \text{ ----- } \left| \mathbf{B}'' \right| \text{ ----- } \mathbf{B}' \text{ ----- } \mathbf{B}$$

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