

Contact-induced phenomena in the Alps: The European Project AThEME

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This paper aims at contributing to the debate on the effects of language contact in regional languages taking morphological and syntactic phenomena into account. In fact, while language contact clearly affects the lexical and partly the morphological level, its effects on the other levels (in particular morpho-phonology and syntax) are still object of debate. These grammatical levels are the main focus of the ‘Work Package nr. 2’ of the European project **AThEME (Advancing the European Multilingual Experience** - see the project’s URL for details, <https://vre.leidenuniv.nl/vre/atheme/public/default.aspx>). In particular, the Italian branch of the project has the Trentino-Alto Adige (South Tyrol) Region as its geographical focus: in this area three minority languages (Rhaeto-romance, henceforth 'RR', and the Germanic dialects Mòcheno and Cimbrian) and two groups of dialects (the Romance-Trentino group and the German-Tyrolean group) are spoken besides the official languages Italian and German. Although research on single contact situations has already been carried out (e.g. the influence of the surrounding Romance varieties on Cimbrian, cf. Bidese et al. 2014; Kolmer 2005; Grewendorf/Poletto 2011 a.o.; the influence of German varieties on RR and Trentino dialects, Gsell 1982, Benincà 1984, Kaiser 2002-2003, a.m.o.), the novel aspect of the AThEME project consists in describing the big scenario of variation in the area, considering all the dialects involved and offering systematic descriptions of the effects of multilingualism on grammatical changes. Work Package 2 is collecting data from different areas of the region through elicitation tasks and grammatical judgements. At the moment, the investigation of six different varieties has been completed: three of them are Romance (two RR varieties and one Trentino dialect) and three are Germanic (Mòcheno, Cimbrian and one of the Tyrolean dialects).

In our questionnaires we consider several phonological, morphological and syntactic phenomena which might have been affected (or are commonly taken to be affected) by contact situations. In this paper, we deal with two phenomena that are meant to give a first overview on the results of the project: (i) clitic climbing in RR and (ii) the complementizer system in Cimbrian.

Clitic climbing is a well-known phenomenon in Romance languages which is connected to Restructuring (Rizzi 1976, 1978, Cinque 2006, a.o.): in some varieties, when a lexical verb is embedded under a functional one (Aux, Mod or Asp), the clitic pronoun(s) representing its arguments can climb, attaching to the functional verb. This is optionally possible e.g. in Italian (1a), while in Northern Italian dialects (especially in the Veneto region) the non-restructured version is usually the only option (1b):

- (1) a. Li devo fare/ Devo farli (It.) b. *I go da lavar / Go da lavarli (Brentonico, TN)
 them.CL I.must do/ I.must do=them.CL them.CL I.have to wash / I.have to wash=them.CL

In RR both orders are possible like in Italian. The non-restructured order (2a) is more frequent and is usually claimed to be the "original" one, while the restructured order (2b) is often

discarded by speakers and normative grammars since it is perceived as "incorrect" or "due to Italian influence" (cf. Lardschneider 1909:162 and Anderlan-Obletter 1991: 146, a.o.):

- (2) a. *Ie muesse i lavé* b. *Ie i muesse lavé* (Gardenese, BZ)
I must them.CL wash I them.CL must wash

Note that RR clitics attach to the left of infinitives, thus (2a) is the typical non-restructured order.

In our view, claiming that contact be responsible for the existence of clitic climbing in RR is not supported by the data: as we have seen, the neighbouring Trentino/Veneto dialects do not display clitic climbing. On the other hand, the contact with Standard and Southern regional varieties of Italian (via the mass media or immigrants from Central and Southern Italy) might play a role if restructuring were a recent phenomenon. However, in our research we have found examples of both orders in a Gardenese grammar published in 1864, several decades before Trentino-Alto Adige became part of Italy (orthography adapted to the current norms):

- (3) a. *Èl no uel ve l di* (Vian 1864: 100) b. *..., ch'ël la ulëss spieghé* (*ibid.* 124)
he not wants you.CL it.CL say ..., that he it.CL wants explain

The fact that (3b) is fully part of the system is also proved by Lardschneider's (1909: 162) observation, according to which the clitic is mandatorily attached to the functional verb when the infinitive is fronted. This contradicts the predictions of the normative view:

- (4) a. *Auzé ne l dauses* b. **L auzé ne dauses*
lift not it.CL you.may it.CL lift not you.may
'you may not lift/raise it'

As a consequence, clitic climbing appears to be an internal evolution of RR not depending on the contact with Italian varieties; but the frequency with which it shows up in the most recent data may be a consequence of the more intense contact situation of the last decades (especially in Fassan RR varieties, where the Italian influence is heavier).

Another remarkable phenomenon found in this area is the Cimbrian *double system of complementizers* (cf. Grewendorf/Poletto 2011). In declarative sentences the complementizers *az* and *ke* can show up, being selected by either desiderative verbs or verbs of saying and thinking:

(i) *az* ('that' or 'whether') is the native complementizer of this minority language. It requires subjunctive mood and triggers a special word order comparable to the one found in Scandinavian embedded clauses: in fact, V_{fin} follows Neg and sentential adverbials, whereas it has to precede them both in matrix clauses (V-to-C movement). Moreover, *az* can host clitic pronouns and the expletive subject *-da*, see 5a-b (cf. Kolmer 2005 and Bidese/Padovan/Tomaselli 2012).

(ii) *ke* ('that', borrowed from Romance) behaves more like a "subordinator" rather than a full-fledged clause-typer as is the case of *az*. Differently from *az*, *ke* does not affect word order as it introduces clauses typically displaying root phenomena, such as postverbal negation and subject-verb inversion (arguably, V moves to C in *ke*-introduced clauses); in other words, *ke* breaks the asymmetry between matrix and embedded clause. Not surprisingly, it cannot host either weak pronouns or the expletive *-da* (cf. Kolmer 2005 and Bidese/Padovan/Tomaselli 2012) but it must be followed by strong pronouns.

- (5) a. I bill **azzar nèt** gea ka Roma (az-Pron_{Clit} Neg V_{fin})
 I want that.he_{Clit} not go_{sub} to Rome
 ‘I want him not to go to Rome’
- b. I boaz **ke er** geat nèt ka Roma (ke Pron V_{fin} Neg)
 *I boaz **kear** geat nèt ka Roma
 I know that he goes not to Rome
 ‘I know he does not go to Rome’

Although native (i.e. not borrowed) double COMP systems exist in a number of languages, the contact issue seems to be at stake here, not only for the borrowing of the functional word *per se* but also for the reorganization of the whole complementation system. *Ke* enters the system introducing a novel pattern in embedded clauses: at first sight, it might be tempting to assume that *ke* simply behaves like its Romance counterpart *che*, in not triggering a word order typical of embedded contexts. However, things turn out to be more complicated as Cimbrian root phenomena are different from Romance anyway (see Bidese et al. 2014 and Bidese-Tomaselli, in press).

To sum up, the two examples discussed will contribute to a better understanding of how and to what extent grammatical change can be ascribed to contact.

Selected references:

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