

Realization and deletion of subject clitics in Friulian. Does syncretism matter?

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Syncretism (or homophony) is usually defined as a lacking one-to-one-correspondence of a word form and its morphosyntactic function, or, spelling it differently: one phonetic form is shared by at least two cells in the paradigm (cf. Spencer 1991, Trask 1997). Syncretism is neither unusual in the languages of the world, nor poses it serious problems to most of them (cf. Baerman, Brown and Corbett 2005). Nonetheless, it seems, that some languages exhibit strategies to avoid homophony, as the analysis in Baerman (2009) clearly shows, i.e. with respect to Tamashek. In Romance languages, homophony avoidance plays a marginal role. E.g. the syncretic Italian subjunctive is disambiguated by using the pronoun of 2SG although Italian represents a null-subject language (1a, b) (cf. Cordin & Calabrese 2001). Syncretism between 1SG and 3SG is tolerated, instead (1a).

- (1a) PRES.SUBJ: \emptyset possa (1SG) / tu possa (2SG) / \emptyset possa (3SG)
(1b) IMPERF.SUBJ: \emptyset potessi (1SG) / tu potessi (2SG)

However, Northern Italian dialects exhibit a double series of subject pronouns consisting of free pronouns and clitics (i.a. Renzi & Vanelli, 1983, Manzini & Savoia 2005). The subject clitics (SCL) are often interpreted as agreement morphemes and therefore as belonging to the verb (Haiman 1991). The following example is taken from Friulian (i.a. Marchetti 1952, Gregor 1975, Frau 1984, Vicario 2005), a language attributed also to Rhaeto-Romance (cf. Gartner 1883, Haiman & Benincà 1991).

- (2) (Jo) o feveli (Marchetti 1952: 222)
PRO.1SG SCL.1SG speak-1SG PRES.IND
'I speak'

It is well-known with respect to Friulian, that preverbal SCL beside 2SG are deleted in certain environments, e.g. with the negation particle *no* (3a, 3b) and before object clitics (4a, 4b) (i.a. Marchetti 1952, Gregor 1975, Haiman & Benincà 1992).

- (3a) (tu) no tu sâs (Marchetti 1952: 222)
you NEG SCL.2SG know-2SG PRES.IND
'You don't know'
- (3b) Ane no \emptyset lè su (Bibie, 1 Samuel 1, 22)
Hannah NEG SCL.3F.SG went up
'Hannah did not go up'
- (4a) (tu) tu mi disis (Marchetti 1952: 214)
you SCL.2SG OCL.DAT tell-2SG PRES.IND
'You tell me'
- (4b) il signor \emptyset j veve sierât il grim (Bibie, 1 Samuel 1, 5)
the lord SCL 3M.SG OCL.DAT had closed the womb
'The Lord had closed her womb'

The conditions for preverbal SCL-deletion in the main varieties of Friulian (Carnic, Western Friulian, Central-Southern Friulian) have not been studied in detail until now. I will show, that syncretism avoidance plays a crucial role with respect to SCL-deletion. On the one hand,

syncretism occurs with respect to all moods and tenses beside the first conjugational class of the present tense (the overview in (5) shows the occurrence of syncretism in Central-Southern Friulian).

- (5) 1SG/3SG: PRES.IND (2nd, 3rd, 4th class), COND, PRES.SUBJ, IMPERF.SUBJ
 2SG/2PL: IMPERF.IND, PERF.IND, COND, IMPERF.SUBJ
 1PL/3PL: IMPERF.IND, PERF.IND, COND, IMPERF.SUBJ, FUTURE (4th class)

On the other hand, the SCL of 1SG, 1PL and 2PL are also syncretic (Carnic: *i*; Western and Central-Southern Friulian: *o*). The neutralization of whole SCL-v-sequences is not observable. I therefore assume, that SCL in Friulian display the function of disambiguating syncretic verb forms. Against this backdrop, the deletion of preverbal SCL mentioned above, represents a paradox at first glance. It will be shown, that the following conflicting constraints determine subject clitic deletion. The framework I will use is that of optimality theory (McCarthy & Prince 1993):

- (6) *VV >> IDENT-IO(NEG) >> ANTI-IDENT(SCL=V) >> LINEARITY-IO(SCL=V) >> MAX(SCL)

Additionally, my findings will be compared to other Romance languages as Swiss Romansh and Dolomitic Ladin.

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