Lexicalising functional heads in the ‘AgrS-field’: evidence from the ‘A-morpheme’ in Veneto dialects

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0. Introduction¹

Subject clitics in northern Italian dialects (henceforth NIDs) have been a living issue of research for years and have stimulated the interest of many linguists on different linguistic perspectives. The purpose of this paper is to show that the microvariation which is present in some north-eastern dialects (Veneto dialects) regarding the syntax of a vocalic particle traditionally known as clitic A is much wider than previously thought². This particle was analysed for the first time within the generative framework by Benincà (1983) in Paduan and was also investigated in other NIDs by Poletto (1993, 1996, 1999, 2000), Manzini & Savoia (1999) among others³. In both analyses it was treated as a ‘CP-element’ (a TOP head in Benincà’s analysis; an invariable subject clitic

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² It is worth noting that in those years, differences among Veneto dialects with respect of the A-morpheme had already been noted by Benincà & Vanelli (1982: pp.57-59) but they had not been formally investigated.

³ See also Goria (2003, 2004) for an approach based on Optimality Theory and Minimalist Syntax.
in Poletto’s typology, the highest functional projection in the clitic string\(^4\) merged immediately above \(I\) and above \(C\), in Manzini & Savoia (1999)).

Recently, a new approach developed by Cardinaletti & Repetti (2003) (henceforth C&R 2003) recast the issue with renewed force by proposing a new way of looking at this vocalic particle. The authors reject Poletto’s (2000) ‘unified analysis’ (in C&R’s (2003) terms, p.5, see (1)) and propose an ‘alternative’ one based both on phonological and syntactic factors. In C&R’s (2003) words: ‘the other analysis (= the ‘alternative analysis’) […] challenges the view that all the preverbal material in (3) and (4) (= (2), (3), notations modified) is to be considered a subject clitic; […] the schwa in (3a) is an epenthetic vowel, the schwa in (3c) is a subject-field vowel, realising a functional head of the Infl domain, and the preverbal schwa in (4) is, what we call, an ’interrogative vowel’, realising a functional head of the Comp domain’. The distribution of (1), (2) and (3) is taken from C&R (2003: 6-7)\(^5\):

(1) ‘unified’ analysis

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{subject clitic} & \text{subject clitic} \\
\text{I drink} & \text{you:sg drink} \\
\text{he drinks} & \text{we drink} \\
\text{you:pl drink} & \text{they drink}
\end{array}
\]

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\(^4\) According Manzini & Savoia (1999), the clitic string consists in a set of inflectional and aspectual categories ordered in a fixed hierarchy. As far as subject clitics are concerned, the clitic string is the following: \([D [\text{Num} [N [P ]]]]\). The D (Definitess) position is lexicalised by uninflected clitics (e.g. \(A\), \(N\) (Number) is lexicalised by the third person plural clitics, \(N\) hosts the third person singular clitics, \(P\) (Person) is the position for first and second person singular and plural clitics.

\(^5\) The dialects described by Cardinaletti & Repetti (2003) are varieties of Piacentine spoken in the towns of Donceto and Gazzoli.
(2) 'alternative' analysis

a. ə t be:v 'you:sg drink'

  ə l be:v ə 'he drinks'

  epenthetic vowel  subject clitic

b. i 'be:v ə n 'they drink'

  subject clitic

c. (ə be:v 'I drink'

  (ə) bu'veum 'we drink'

  (ə) bu'vei 'you:pl drink'

  subject-field vowel

(3) 'alternative' analysis

(ə) be:v-ə t 'do you (sg) drink?'

(ə) be:v ə l 'does he drink?'

(ə) be:v ə n-jə 'are they drinking?'

(ə) be:v-jə 'am I drinking?'

(ə) bu'veum-jə 'are we drinking?'

(ə) bu'vei-ə 'are you:pl drinking?'

  interrogative vowel

As we will see more in detail in the next sections, this new investigation is of great theoretical interest because it supports with clear evidence the hypothesis that this vocalic material may be generated not only in the left periphery of the clause (the CP-
layer, see Rizzi (1997)) as the ‘unified analysis’ predicts, but also in a lower one (more precisely immediately above I but below C, see Manzini & Savoia (1999)). C&R’s (2003) new framework shows that a dialect may have different vocalic particles (with one and the same phonological realization), with a different syntax and different positions in the clausal structure. For the sake of simplicity, from now on I will refer to that particle with the name of A-morpheme.

In the following sections I will present the microvariation of the A-morpheme in eleven dialects of the Veneto region. The data obtained will lead me to the following claims:

I. a unitary approach to the syntax of the A-morpheme like Poletto’s (2000) ‘unified analysis’ does not properly explain the range of microvariation in the Veneto region.

II. the syntactic distribution of the A-morpheme within Veneto dialects does not fit into the typology of ‘subject clitics’ proposed by Poletto (2000). It belongs neither to the class of the invariable subject clitics’ (henceforth ISCs), nor to the class of the deictic subject clitics (henceforth DSCs).

III. the new proposal put forth by C&R (2003) accounts for the data found in Veneto dialects. The complex syntactic scenario of the A-morpheme can be captured in their general view: one specialized syntactic position is not possible; multiple specialized functional projections which are lexically realized by the A-morpheme are present both in the Infl and Comp domains.

IV. In Veneto dialects there is no A-morpheme in the Comp domain. Different morphemes are spelled out in different positions in the functional projections dedicated to subject positions.

The paper is structured as follows: in section two, I present the most important previous analyses of the A-morpheme; section three deals with the basic assumptions on subject positions which I will assume during the discussion; in section four I present C&R’s (2003) new approach more in detail whereas in section five I am concerned with methodology and materials of the dialectological investigation; section six presents the results obtained and section seven brings neurolinguistic evidence in favour of a different status between the pronominal subject clitics and the A-morpheme. The new proposal which accounts for the microvariation of the A-morpheme in Veneto dialects is given in section eight, whereas section nine concludes the work.
2. Previous analyses

The A-morpheme has been long considered the overt realization of a pronominal subject clitic in the 1st, 4th and sometimes in the 5th person⁶. In her seminal work on the syntax of the A-morpheme, Benincà (1983:16-17) compares its distribution with the one of the 2nd, 3rd, and 6th person pronominal subject clitics. She claims that whereas the latter are mandatory and morphologically distinct clitics, the former are optional and have a special semantics. In Paduan, the dialect taken into consideration in Benincà (1983), the A-morpheme occurs is all persons, as in (4); pronominal subject clitics are marked in bold⁷:

⁶. The most representative work of the ‘traditional analysis’ is Rohlf's (1969), II, § 444-449.

⁷. According to the framework in (2) and (3) one might ask whether the a in the third person singular in (4) might be treated as an epenthetic vowel. Although the real subject clitic is /l/ (see C&R 2003 for discussion), as one can see in negative sentences where the epenthetic vowel e is deleted because it is not phonologically necessary (contrast (i) and (ii)),

(i)   (e) l beve   (He drinks)

(ii) a. no l beve   (He doesn’t drink)
    b. no (*e)l beve   (He doesn’t drink)

in Paduan the vocalic segment a is not an epenthetic vowel because it signalizes that the sentence is all new:

(iii) el beve   (He drinks – old information)

(iv) al beve   (He drinks – new information)

Moreover, the A-morpheme can occur before negation to mark the new information:

(v) no l beve   (He doesn’t drink – old information)

(vi) a no l beve   (He doesn’t drink – new information)
Benincà (1983) notes that the morpheme is restricted to some pragmatic conditions such as the sentence intonation (surprise or emphasis) and that the sentence is given as all new:

(5) A si sempre qua!\hspace{1cm} (Benincà 1983:18)
   (A you:pl are always here!)

This analysis has been adopted and revised by Poletto in several works. From now on I will use the term ‘Poletto-typology’ (Pol-Typ) in order to refer to a group of studies (Poletto 1993, 1996, 1999, 2000 are the most representatives) which defines a precise typology of clitics, their syntax and their position in the clause. Although terminology and syntactic proposals have slightly changed among her works, there is a fundamental idea underlying them:

“while the position of clitics\(^8\) is always the same in every variety, their function can change”. (Poletto 1993: 46)

From now on, examples will be taken from the Pol-Typ. This typology divides preverbal subject clitics in two classes according to their phonological realization, i.e. vocalic and consonantal clitics (the schema below is taken from C&R 2003: 7):

- vocalic subject clitics:
  a. **invariable** subject clitics \hspace{1cm} (all persons)
  b. **deictic** subject clitics \hspace{1cm} (1\(^{st}\) / 2\(^{nd}\) pers. sing/pl. vs. 3\(^{rd}\) pers. sing/pl.)
  c. **number** subject clitics \hspace{1cm} (3\(^{rd}\) pers. pl. masc.)

- consonantal subject clitics:
  a. **person** subject clitics \hspace{1cm} (2\(^{nd}\) pers. sg., 3\(^{rd}\) pers. sg. masc.)

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\(^8\) This statement refers to ‘vocalic’ clitics which is also the subject of my inquiry. However, following C&R’s (2003) proposal, in this work a different path will be maintained: since the ‘function’ of the morpheme changes not only among dialects but also inside a single dialect, different morphemes in different syntactic positions must be assumed.
b. **number** (+gender) subject clitics \(3^{rd}\) pers. sg. and pl. fem.

Let us consider the main characteristics of the vocalic clitics in a and b (namely, invariable and deictic clitics). According to the Pol-Typ:

1. they are prenegative\(^9\), whereas ‘pure consonantal’ and ‘consonant + vowel’ clitics are postnegative as it is shown in (6-8):

   (6)  A no magno / * No a magno       
        (Polesano, Poletto 1999: 587)  
        (A not eat-1\(^{st}\) sing / Not a eat-1\(^{st}\) sing)

   (7)  A no l ven / * No al ven       
        (S.Michele al T., Poletto 1999: 585)  
        (A not cl-3\(^{rd}\) comes / Not a+cl-3\(^{rd}\) not comes)

   (8)  No la vien / * La no vien       
        (Venetian, Poletto 1999:588)  
        (Not she-cl3 comes / She-cl not comes)

2. They may be omitted in coordination (in the second conjunct). The presence of the morpheme in the second conjunct raises marginality, but not ungrammaticality:

   (9)  a  A canto co ti e _ balo co lu.  
        (Basso Polesano, Poletto 2000: 24)  
        (A sing-1\(^{st}\) with you and dance-1\(^{st}\) with him)

   b.  ?A magno pomi e a bevo caffè
        (Basso Polesano, Poletto 1993: 23)  
        (A eat-1\(^{st}\) apples and drink-1\(^{st}\) coffee)

In Poletto (1996) the A-morpheme is described with additional data from a southern Veneto dialect, Basso Polesano\(^10\). Poletto (1996) proposes that the A-morpheme is also an expletive subject clitic which licences pro. According to Poletto (1996):

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\(^9\). As for the syntactic position of negation, the *Pol-Typ* adopts Zanuttini’s (1997) hypothesis in which the head of the negative projection is higher than AgrSP in languages which display one negation morpheme (as Italian or Veneto dialects).

\(^10\). ‘Basso Polesano’ (‘Eastern’ Polesano) is a comprehensive term that indicates a group of dialects in the eastern part of the Polesine area. In Poletto (1996) data are taken from the town of Loreo.
1. it is mandatory with the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th person:

(10) *(A) Magno / *(A) magnemo
    (A eat-1st sing / A eat-1st pl.)

(11) *(A) te magni / *(A) magné
    (A cl-2nd eat / A eat-2nd pl)

2. it is incompatible with the third person subject clitic but it is mandatory if the subject clitic is omitted.

(12) (*A) el vien
    (A cl-3rd comes)

(13) *(A) riva Toni
    (A comes Toni)

3. It is mandatory in contexts where no argumental theta role is assigned to the subject:

(14) *(A) piove
    (A rains)

(15) *(A) pare che Nane vegna qua.
    (A seems that Nane comes-subjunctive here)

Although the author is aware of the fact that ‘the generalizations that have been made [...] are valid only for the dialects included in the sample and are not intended to represent the last word of the topic [...]’ (Poletto 1999, p.581), she claims that ‘it is interesting to try to formalize the descriptive generalizations found’ (p. 581). The aim of the Pol-Typ is to show that in NIDs there is not a single AgrS position. The so-called Agreement Field consists of several syntactically distinct positions, “which realise distinct morphological features of the subject DP”. Moreover, subject clitics are spread in ‘two sub fields, one of which is higher than NegP and the position where the complementizer occurs’ (p.582).

Finally, Poletto (2000) reviews and synthesizes her previous analyses and describes in detail four types of subject clitics. For the proposal of the present paper, I will consider
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the first two ones (vocalic clitics). In the conclusive part of Poletto (1999: 617) the author argues that the class of pure vocalic clitics are a “sort of ‘less precise agreement’, since only a [± deictic] (for DSCs) or even no subject feature at all (for ISCs) are realized in these positions.” (brackets are mine). Let us examine the main diagnostics for the ISCs:

I. As it is shown in (16) ISCs do not encode any subject feature at all since, according to Poletto (2000), this class ‘is invariable for all persons’ (p.12)

(16) 1  2  3  4  5  6     (Luganese, Poletto 2000: 12)
  a  a  a  a  a  a

II. Following Benincà (1983), Poletto (2000) notes that they express theme/rheme distinction. Moreover, Poletto (2000: 23) argues that ‘only those clitics that have completely neutralized their agreement feature may be realized as rheme markers’.

(17) A piove!               (Paduan, Benincà 1983: 23)
     (A it rains!)

III. They are compatible with yes-no question but not compatible with a wh-item:

(18) A ve-to via?           (Paduan, Benincà 1983: 23)
     (A go-cl-2nd away?)

(19) *Dove a ze-lo ndà?
     (Where a is-he gone?)

(20) *A dove ze-lo ndà?
     (A where is-he gone?)

IV. They are not compatible with left-dislocated items:

(21) *Co ti, a no voio ndare. (Paduan, Benincà 1983: 23)
     (with you, a not want to go)
V. They are sensitive to the feature instantiated inside C°. If a declarative complementizer appears in C°, they obligatorily cliticize onto it.

(22) Vara ch’a vegno          (Polesano, Poletto 1999: 601)

(23) *Vara che a vegno
(Look that+ a come)
‘Look, I am going’

VI. They may also be optional or related to pragmatic restrictions, whereas Person and Number clitics may not:

(24) (A) mangi             (Luganese, Poletto 1999: 590)
(A eat-1st)

Consider now the main diagnostics for DSCs. According to the Pol-Typ:

I. they are found in the first and second singular and plural and they are often in opposition with another clitic in the third person singular and plural:

(25) 1  2  3  4  5  6     (S. Michele al T., Poletto 2000: 13)
    i  i  a  i  i  a

II. they are incompatible with certain wh-items and compatible with others:

(26) Se (*a) fanu?           (S. Michele al T., Poletto 2000: 25)
    what SCL do+they
    ‘What are they doing?’

(27) Quantis caramelis *(i) a-tu mangiat?   (S. Michele al T., Poletto 2000: 25)
    How many sweets SCL have you eaten?
    ‘How many sweets did you eat?’

III. They do not express theme/rheme relations, e.g. they are compatible with left dislocated items:
(28) A casa o soi già laat\textsuperscript{11} (Palmanova, Poletto 2000: 26)

\begin{quote}
    at home SCL am already been
    ‘I have already been at home’
\end{quote}

IV. They cannot be omitted in coordination:

\begin{itemize}
\item It is not clear how \textit{o} can be a DSC, since its distribution in Palmanova (the Friulian dialect quoted by the \textit{Pol-Typ} together with other Friulian dialects such as the ones spoken in S. Michele al Tagliamento and Cervignano) is found in the first person singular and plural and second person plural, but not in the second person singular as Laura Vanelli (p.c) drew to my attention:
\end{itemize}

\begin{verbatim}
1 2 3m 3f 4 5 6m/f
 o tu al e o o e
\end{verbatim}

The sentence in (i) is ungrammatical:

\begin{itemize}
\item (i) \textit{(*o) tu ciantis} (‘\textit{o}’ you sing)
\end{itemize}

Moreover, as far as negation is concerned, it not clear whether \textit{o} is absorbed or cancelled in the following example:

\begin{itemize}
\item (ii) \textit{no cianti}
\end{itemize}

\begin{verbatim}
  (neg+ ‘o’+ sing)
\end{verbatim}

What is worth noting here is that ‘\textit{o}’ cannot precede the negative item:

\begin{itemize}
\item (iii) \textit{(*O) no cianti}
\end{itemize}

Thus, it is not a prenegative clitic and cannot fit in the category of deictic clitics. Rather, it seems to belong to a ‘1-4-5’ system which had already been noted by Renzi & Vanelli’s (1983) ‘generalization 4’ and Vanelli (1984). Renzi & Vanelli (1983) point out in a footnote (n.11) that there are some reasons to doubt that the ‘1-4-5’ system is a system of ‘subject clitics’ and they quote the arguments put forth by Benincà (1983). However, Benincà’s (1983) is silent about the ‘1-4-5’ system since she found in Paduan a different one (a ‘1-2-3-4-5-6’ system). See also Manzini & Savoia (1999) and C&R (2003) for a very neat piece of evidence for a ‘1-4-5’ system in another northern Italian dialect.
(29) I cianti cun te e *(i) bali cun lui  
    (I sing-1st sing. with you and  i dance-1st sing. with him)

The aim of the following sections is to check whether the A-morpheme considered in my sample of Veneto dialects can or can not satisfy these diagnostics, either for ICSs or for DSCs.

3. Basic Assumptions

The first assumption which I will assume in this paper has to deal with the status of subject clitics. Following C&R (2003: 28):

(30) the only elements that can be considered subject clitics are the consonants /t/ and /l/ in the second and third person singular (see 2a), respectively, and the vocalic segment /i/ in the third person plural.

The second assumption refers to the subject position in the clause, be it a lexical DP or a strong pronoun. I will consider the lexical subjects in (31) to occupy the same structural position:

(31) a. John /He eats an apple (English)  
    b. Gianni / Lui mangia una mela (Italian)  
    c. Nane / Lu el magna un pomo (Veneto dialect)

The presence of a pronominal subject clitic co-occurring with a lexical DP in (31c) does not imply that the DP is always left-dislocated (contra Benincà & Poletto (in press)). In several Veneto dialects left-dislocation may take place without a resumptive subject clitic. Contrast (32a and 32b):

(32) a. I fioi (i) magna e paste (Venetian)  
    (The boys (sub-cl3) eat the pastries)  
    b. I fioi, e paste, (i) *(le) ga zà magnae  
    (The boys, the pastries, sub-cl3 ob-cl6 have already eaten)
In (32b) the subject is clearly left-dislocated because of the presence of a dislocated object, but the resumptive subject clitic is not mandatory whereas the object clitic is. Thus, the presence or absence of the subject clitic has nothing to do with the position of the subject.

Moreover, there are dialects in which a subject clitic must appear with a QP, which is never left dislocated:

(33) Nisun al rive (Friulian, Zanuttini 1997:27)
(Nobody sub-cl3 arrives)

Therefore, I take the subject position to occupy a specialized functional projection in the Infl domain, namely SubjP (see Cardinaletti (1994, 1997, in press)).

According to Cardinaletti (in press), SubjP is in the Infl domain. Let us briefly summarize her main arguments:

1. Following Rizzi (1997:283), which established that Infl domain is the locus of morpho-syntactic features of the verb, while Comp is an interface between the propositional content (expressed by IP) and the superordinate structure or the previous discourse, she notices that a topic analysis of the subject cannot hold for the so-called ‘out of the blue’ sentences or in answer to the question ‘What happened?’:

(34) A: Che è successo?  B: Gianni ha perso il lavoro.
(What happened?  John has lost his job)

2. In Italian, the weak pronoun egli cannot be left-dislocated (35), although it can appear preverbally (36) or in Aux-to Comp construction (37) (examples taken from Cardinaletti (in press: 40)):

(35) Gianni / *Egli la nostra causa non l’ha appoggiata.  (Left dislocation)
    (John / he the our cause [he] not it has supported )

(36) Gianni / Egli ha appoggiato la nostra causa.  (Subject position)
    (Johni / he has supported the our cause)
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(37) Avendo Gianni / egli telefonato a Maria, ...
    (having John / he phoned to Maria, .... )

3. Cardinaletti (in press: 41) also notes that in some Italian dialects, (e.g in Florentine, see Brandi & Cordin 1989: 113-114) the difference between preverbal and left-dislocated subjects is lexicalised by a subject clitic or a vocalic morpheme. For instance, in Florentine when the subject is left dislocated, a vocalic morpheme (e, which is not a subject clitic) appears to differentiate the two kinds of sentences.

(38) a. Te tu parli.
    (you you speak)

b. Te, e tu parli troppo.
    ([as for] you, TOP you speak too much)

Finally, Cardinaletti (in press) notes that the specialized position of SubjectP is the functional projection which hosts the ‘subject of predication’, e.g. in Italian dative subjects:

(39) [SubjP Ai ragazzi [EppP .......[AgrS pro piace [la musica]]]]
    (To the boys pro likes the music)
    ‘The boys like music’

We have seen above that SubjP is not a left-dislocated position. Another piece of evidence supporting this claim comes from dative subjects in Veneto dialects. When a dative subject is present the subject clitic agreeing with the verb is not mandatory whereas the dative clitic is:

(40) [SubjP A ti [EppP .....[AgrS (el)i *(te) piaze [ti]]]]
    (To you you-dat. likes)
    ‘You like that’

4. Cardinaletti & Repetti (2003): the framework

Going back to vocalic particles in NIDs, C&R’s (2003) approach develops a new framework, which has very interesting consequences for the theory of the functional
projections in the IP-layer. The empirical basis of their work is constituted by the phonology and syntax of the Piacentine A-morpheme ([ə]). As I mentioned in the introduction, the authors claim that the nature of the preverbal vocalic element cannot be properly explained by an ‘unified analysis’ (as the one proposed by the Pol-typ). The new ‘alternative analysis’ claims that in Piacentine the preverbal vocalic particle is the phonological realization of different entities. In particular, one has to distinguish inside the verbal conjugation among:

1. an epenthetic vowel for second and third person singular; this phonological material is mandatory.
2. a head of a functional projection base-generated in the IP-layer (subject-field vowel), for 1st, 4th, 5th person; this syntactic element is optional.
3. an interrogative vowel for all persons; this syntactic element is optional with yes-no question but it is mandatory with wh-phrases.

Let us consider the epenthetic vowel, first. In Piacentine, the vowel appears before the pronominal subject clitic (41a,c) if the verb begins with a CV-syllable; if the verb begins with an /s/ + stop consonant cluster the vowel must follow the clitic (41b,d) (C&R 2003: 10):

(41) a. ə t bev (ə you drink)  
   a’ * t ə bev  
   b. t ə scriv (you ə write)  
   b’ * ə t scriv  
   c. əl bevə (ə he drinks)  
   c’ * lə bevə  
   d. lə scrivə (he ə writes)  
   d’ * al scrivə

The epenthetic vowel is absent in the present perfect construction (C&R 2003: 13):

(42) l a buvid  
    (subj.clitic have drunk)
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(43)  *əl a buvid
  (ə subj.clitic have drunk)
  ‘He has drunk’

The vowel can appear before the clitic even when a complementizer is present (44a, b), but it is optional as shown in (44c, d.). The third person plural subject clitic cannot be omitted (44f) and can be present or not near a complementizer (44e, g) (C&R 2003: 15):

(44)  a. (ə) so che ət bev  ((ə) (I) know that ə you drink)
  b. (ə) so che əl bevə  ((ə) (I) know that ə he drinks)
  c. (ə) so che t bev  ((ə) (I) know that you drink)
  d. (ə) so che l bevə  ((ə) (I) know that you drink)
  e. (ə) so che i bevən  ((ə) (I) know that they drink)
  f. *(ə) so che bevən  ((ə) (I) know that drink-3rd.pl.)
  g. (ə) so ch i bevən  ((ə) (I) know that they drink)

Another fact deserving consideration in this new framework is the analysis of the ‘1-4-5 person system’. Although the existence of this system was already noted by the typological study of Renzi & Vanelli (1983), by Manzini & Savoia (1999) and by Goria (2003), it is absent in the Pol-Typ. As we will see in the next sections, a similar system is also present in some Veneto dialects. C&R (2003) points out that this syntactic element lexicalizes a functional head in the IP-layer. The detailed analysis of the Piacentine [ə] supports the claim that there are elements which do not fit into the Pol-Typ. In fact:

- it is not found with all persons in the verbal paradigm (but only in the first singular and plural and in the second plural, since in the second and third person singular there is an epenthetic vowel).
- the distribution in the 1st, 4th, 5th persons exclude the [ə] from the category of ISCs and DSCs.
- it does not necessarily cluster with the complementizer.

The ‘alternative analysis’ shows that there are vocalic elements which are base-generated in the IP-layer. Although this possibility has also been noted by Manzini & Savoia (1999) (see footnote 3), it is excluded by the Pol-Typ.
5. Methodology and materials

I begin my discussion by presenting the dialects which I examined. The reason why I studied eleven dialects belonging to the same region is to best capture the syntactic microvariation.12 I asked several informants grammaticality judgments on the syntax of the A-morpheme with an oral interview. I presented a questionnaire of about ninety sentences and I asked informants to read the sentences and then judge them or provide another version13. I also asked them to judge the sentence with and without the A-morpheme to test its optionality.

The dialectological investigation considers the following dialects: Paduan (Paduan #1, Salzano #9); Eastern Vicentino (Carmignano di Brenta #2, see Penello (2003)); Central Vicentino (Creazzo #3, Vicenza #4); Northern Vicentino (Cereda di Cornedo Vicentino #5, Isola Vicentina #6, Giavenale #7, Schio #8). I also considered two dialects which belong to two different parts of the Polesine area which is traditionally divided in ‘Alto Polesano’ (western area), ‘Medio Polesano’ (central area) and ‘Basso Polesano’ (eastern area): Basso Polesano (Adria #10) and Medio Polesano (Borsea #11).

5.1. The Questionnaire

The interview consisted of items which have been created by taking some representative occurrences described in early reports: for example, following Benincà (1983), I asked informants to give judgments on the compatibility of the A-morpheme with left dislocation (henceforth, LD, as it is shown in (45), with Subject Focus (46), with Wh-phrases and yes-no questions (47-48). The judgments below (45-48) are taken from

---

12. The core of this analysis is also present in Chinellato (2002b, 2003b, 2004, in press).

13. The procedure is slightly different from other ways of eliciting data. For example, differently form the ASIS project (CNR/University of Padua) the questionnaire has not been written in Italian but in dialect (since the author is also a native speaker of a Veneto Dialect). So I did not ask for a written translation from Standard Italian into dialect but for a simple grammaticality judgment. Moreover, I preferred an elicitation task in a form of interview instead of sending the questionnaire by mail because of the very delicate nature of the issue (a vocalic particle) and because written translations into dialect hardly show contexts of optionality.
Paduan, described in Benincà (1983). A further test was to look at the distribution of
the A-morpheme with an Object Focus (49).

(45) *Co ti, a no voio ndare  (Benincà 1983: 25)
    (with you, a not want to go)

(46) *GIORGIO, a parte doman!  (Benincà 1983: 20)
    (GIORGIO, a leaves tomorrow)

(47) *Dove a ze-lo ndâ?  (Benincà 1983: 26)
    (Where a is-he gone?)

(48) A ve-to via?  (Benincà 1983: 26)
    (A go-you away?)

(49) EL GATO, a go visto!  (questionnaire)
    (THE CAT, a have-1st seen!)

6. The results

6.1. A preliminary overview

In this section I discuss the results obtained by the dialectological investigation. What is
to be noted here is that there are varieties which admit a strong subject before the A-
morpheme and others that do not. In table 1 the distribution with a strong subject is
presented. For the sake of simplicity, a [-s] dialect is a dialect which can admit a context
like (50), a null subject context, and a [+s] dialect allows a construction like (51):

(50) a magno
    (a eat-1st )

(51) Mi a magno
    (I ‘a’ eat -1st )
This is what I found w.r.t. the presence or absence of the pronominal strong subject:

- **Paduan I** excludes the presence of the A-morpheme with a strong subject. This is consistent with Benincà’s data.

- **Eastern Vicentino** allows the A-morpheme with a strong subject, although the sentence is slightly marginal.

- Dialect #3 of **Central Vicentino** has an A-morpheme which is compatible only with the 1st and 4th persons in declarative sentences, but is also compatible with the 5th person in exclamative sentences, whether the strong subject is present or not.

- Dialect #4 of **Central Vicentino** patterns like C&R’s (2003) [ə] of Piacentine.

- **Northern Vicentino** patterns like Piacentine with a strong subject, but have a ‘1-2-4-5’ distribution without it.

- **Paduan II** has an A-morpheme which is compatible only with the 2nd person in an exclamative context.

- **Basso Polesano** patterns like #2 without a tonic subject but has a distribution 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th with the strong subject.

- **Medio Polesano** have a ‘1-2-4-5’ with and without the strong subject.

From this preliminary distribution we can see that the picture is an intriguing set of differences among persons. The aim of this work is to provide a synchronic analysis that accounts for this distribution.
6.2. The syntactic contexts

In tables 2 and 3 the syntactic distribution of the A-morpheme among the sample of dialects is presented: the invariable clitics class is compared with dialects which have a distribution with all persons (*Paduan, Eastern Vicentino* and *Basso Polesano*).

**TABLE2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LD</th>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>WH</th>
<th>OPTIONAL</th>
<th>YES-NO</th>
<th>STRONG SUBJECTS</th>
<th>QP-SUBJECTS</th>
<th>NEG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IN_VARIABLE</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paduan</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>!</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East. Vicentino</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medio Polesano</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see, there is no single dialect which satisfies the diagnostics of the *invariable clitics* class. According to the Pol-Typ, *Paduan* seems the perfect candidate for this class of subject clitics but as we will see in the following sections, the distribution of this morpheme is restricted to exclamative contexts.

In table 3, the comparison between the deictic class and the dialects with the same distribution among persons is given:

**TABLE3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LD</th>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>WH</th>
<th>OPTIONAL</th>
<th>YES-NO</th>
<th>STRONG SUBJECT</th>
<th>NEG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deictic</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*/√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Vicentino #5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>!/*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Vicentino #6</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√!/√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Vicentino #7</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td><em>!/</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Vicentino #8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td><em>!/</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medio Polesano</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√!/√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see, the A-morpheme in the dialects considered does not fit into Poletto’s (2000) class of deictic clitics.

To sum up:
1. if an A-morpheme is not compatible with LD, it is not necessarily incompatible with a Focus (see Northern Vicentino), namely there can be dialects in which the A-morpheme is compatible with both (Medio Polesano, Basso Polesano), or incompatible with both (Paduan, Central Vicentino) or with the former, but not with the latter (but not viceversa).

2. if an A-morpheme is not compatible with yes-no questions, it is not necessarily incompatible with Focus (see Northern Vicentino)

But:

- if an A-morpheme is incompatible with a tonic subject or with a QP subject, then it is incompatible with all the syntactic constructions in the CP-layer (LD, Focus, WH).

6.3. Problems with the Poletto-Typology

6.3.1. Problem #1: The A-morpheme and Left Dislocation
With respect to Left Dislocation (LD), the Veneto dialects seem to divide into two main groups: dialects which do not admit the morpheme in the presence of LD (Paduan, Central Vicentino, Northern Vicentino) and dialects which do (Eastern Vicentino, Basso Polesano, Medio Polesano):

(52) *Co ti, a no voio ‘ndare (Paduan, Central Vicentino, Northern Vicentino)

(53) Co ti, a no voio ‘ndare (Eastern Vicentino, Basso Polesano, Medio Polesano)
(with you, a not want-1st to go)

These data seem to show that an explanation which considers A a single morpheme (like the Pol-Typ) is not sufficient. There are two different morphemes, one which is sensitive to old information and one which is not.
6.3.2. Problem #2: The A-morpheme and Focus

6.3.2.1. Focalised Object
With a focalised object the Veneto dialects divide in two other groups. Paduan and Central Vicentino do not admit the morpheme with an object focus whereas the others do (Eastern Vicentino, Northern Vicentino, Basso Polesano and Medio Polesano)

(54) *EL GATO, a go visto! (Paduan, Central Vicentino)
(55) ?EL GATO, a go visto! (Eastern Vicentino)
(56) EL GATO, a go visto! (Northern Vicentino, Basso Polesano, (THE CAT, a have-1st seen!) Medio Polesano)

Now, one might ask: do dialects which have an A as in (52) admit such a morpheme with a Focus construction? The answer is: not all of them. The A-morpheme in Northern Vicentino does not admit LD but admit Focus (contrast (52) and (56)). In this case, the A-morpheme seems not to be the same entity. Again, the Pol-Typ class of ICS does not capture these differences.

6.3.2.2. Focalised Subject
The presence of a focalized subject with the A-morpheme divides the dialects in the same groups w.r.t the focalized object. Paduan and Central Vicentino do not admit the morpheme with a subject focus15 whereas the others do (Eastern Vicentino, Northern Vicentino, Basso Polesano and Medio Polesano):

(57) GIORGIO, a parte doman! (Paduan, Central Vicentino)
(58) ?GIORGIO, a parte doman! (Eastern Vicentino)
(GIORGIO, a leaves tomorrow)
(59) MI, a so come che se parla co la gente! (Northern Vicentino- Basso, (I-foc, a know how to speak to the people) Medio Polesano)

15. The sentence was tested with other persons in the dialects which exclude the presence of the A-morpheme with a 3rd person singular subject.
6.3.3. **Problem #3: The A-morpheme and Wh-phrases**

No dialect in the sample admits the presence of the morpheme with a wh-phrase. Data are consistent with Benincà’s (1983) original analysis of the ‘A’ in *Paduan* and pattern *prima facie* with the class of ISCs of the *Pol-Typ*:

(60) a. Quante caramelle (*a) ghe-to magnâ?
   (How many candies a have-you/subj. eaten?)

As I noted above there are some dialects which display the A-morpheme only with the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> persons. Although they cannot be considered ISCs, they could be reminescent of the category of DSCs which should be compatible (according to the *Pol-Typ*) with a wh-phrase, at least the same as in (60b):

(60) b. Quantis caramelis *(i) a-tu mangiat?  (S. Michele al T., Poletto 2000: 25)
   (How many sweets SCL have you eaten?)
   ‘How many sweets did you eat?’

As we can see in (60a) this does not seem to be so. Thus, both the notions of ICSs and DSCs proposed by the *Pol-Typ* are problematic for this sample of dialects.

6.3.4. **Problem #4: The A-morpheme: optional or mandatory?**

In all Veneto varieties the A-morpheme is optional. However, in *Medio Polesano* the presence of the morpheme seems *prima facie* obligatory in declarative sentences with the first person singular. The morpheme is apparently mandatory but it becomes optional when negation is present and with second person singular and plural and with first person plural (contrast (62) with (63)):

(61) (A) vago via  
    (*Paduan, Vicentino, Basso Polesano*)

(62) *(A) vago via  
    (A go-1<sup>st</sup> away)

   *(Medio Polesano)*

(63) a. (A) no so bon de parlarghe  
    *(Medio Polesano)*

   b. (A) no te si bon de parlarghe

   c. (A) no semo boni de parlarghe
d. (A no sì boni de parlarghe)
   (A not am-1st /2nd /4th /5th good to talk-to him/clitic)
   ‘I/You-2nd /We/You-5th can’t speak to him’

As for whether an invariable subject clitic is optional or mandatory, the \textit{Pol-Typ} leaves open both the possibilities by saying that there are dialects in which it is optional (\textit{Luganese}, Poletto 1999:590) and other in which is mandatory (\textit{Basso Polesano}, Poletto 1996:281). However, the \textit{Pol-Typ} does not say anything on cases like (62) vs. (63) in which we can see a different behaviour inside the same dialect depending on different syntactic contexts (affirmative vs. negative).

\textbf{6.3.5. Problem #5: The A-morpheme and yes-no questions}

As far as yes-no questions are concerned, dialects divide into two groups; \textit{Central Vicentino}, \textit{Northern Vicentino} and \textit{Medio Polesano} do not admit the morpheme, whereas \textit{Paduan}, \textit{Eastern Vicentino} and \textit{Basso Polesano} do:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item (64) A ve-to via? \hfill (\textit{Paduan, Eastern Vicentino, Basso Polesano})
  \item (65) (*A) ve-to via? \hfill (\textit{Central and Northern Vicentino})
        (A go-you away?)
\end{enumerate}

However, in \textit{Paduan} (as suggested to me by Paola Benincà, p.c.) the sentence (64) is grammatical only with an intonation of emphasis or surprise but it cannot be used as an informative question.\footnote{The judgment has been confirmed by the informant of \textit{Paduan} of Salzano.} In fact, in \textit{Paduan} a sentence like (66a) is ungrammatical. The same is not for Eastern Vicentino and Basso Polesano (66b):

\begin{enumerate}
  \item (66) a. *A vu-to un toco del me panin? \hfill (\textit{Paduan})
  \item b. A vu-to un toco del me panin? \hfill (\textit{Eastern Vicentino, Basso Polesano})
        (A want-you a piece of my sandwich?)
\end{enumerate}

Data in (65) and (66a) cannot be explained if we postulate the presence of an ISC.
6.3.6. **Problem #6: The A-morpheme and strong subjects**

In table 1 we have seen the distribution of the $A$-morpheme w.r.t the tonic subject. If we look at (67) we see that in *Paduan* the $A$-morpheme is compatible with the subject only if a long pause follows the subject (which is probably not part of the sentence but might be discourse-related). It is compatible neither with a left dislocated subject (67b), nor with a not dislocated one (67c):

(67) a. Mi // a vegno casa \hspace{1cm} (*Paduan)
    b. Mi, (*a) vegno casa
    c. Mi (*a) vegno casa
       (I, a come-1st home)

The others dialect accept the $A$-morpheme with a dislocated and not dislocated subject:

(68) a. Mi, a vegno casa \hspace{1cm} (*Vicentino, *Polesano)
    (As for me, a come-1st home)
    b. Mi a vegno casa
       (I a come-1st home)

If we consider a context like (69), namely a dislocated object between a dislocated subject and the $A$-morpheme, we can obtain the same scenario: *Paduan* still rejects the $A$-morpheme:

(69) Mi, el cellulare, (*a) me lo so comprà sto mese \hspace{1cm} (*Paduan)
(70) Mi, el cellulare, (a) me lo so comprà sto mese \hspace{1cm} (*Vicentino, *Polesano)
    (I, the mobile phone, a to me/clitic it/clitic have bought this month)

6.3.7. **Problem #7: The A-morpheme and Quantified Subjects**

The presence of the $A$-morpheme with a quantified subject is excluded in *Paduan*, but it is allowed in *Eastern Vicentino* and *Basso Polesano*:

(71) a. Nisun (*a) magna più in chel ristorante là. \hspace{1cm} (*Paduan)
    b. Nisun (a) magna più in chel ristorante là. \hspace{1cm} (*Eastern Vicentino, Basso Polesano)
    (Nobody a eats no longer in that restaurant)
Data in (71b) clearly show that at least in *Eastern Vicentino* and *Basso Polesano* the $A$-morpheme must be in the IP-layer (and not in the CP-layer as argued by the Typ-Pol) since a QP subject cannot left dislocated.

7. Neurolinguistic Evidence

We have just seen in sections 1-3 that, whereas the 2$^{nd}$, 3$^{rd}$ and 6$^{th}$ persons are obligatorily realised by a pronominal subject clitic, the distribution of the $A$-morpheme is much more complex and with a great variation among varieties. Interesting data supporting this hypothesis come from spontaneous speech and structured tasks of bilingual aphasic patients (Fabbro (2001), Fabbro & Frau (2001), Chinellato (2002a-b, 2003b, 2004, in press)). Whereas Fabbro (2001) and Fabbro & Frau (2001) note that non fluent aphasics omit the $A$-morpheme together with the subject clitic in productions like (72):

(72) aphasic speech: El frut bev
    target: El frut al bev *Friulian* (Fabbro (2001:207))
    (the boy cl3 drinks)

Chinellato (2002a-b, 2003b, 2004, in press) shows that bilingual non fluent aphasics (Italian/Vicentino) omit subject clitics but they have the $A$-morpheme completely spared:

    target: Ti a te bevi (You, a cl2 drink)

These findings are not incompatible if we interpret them with a linguistic theory that considers the $A$-morpheme as a different entity in the two dialects above: in Friulian the morpheme may be part of the monomorphemic unit of the subject clitic (see Vanelli (1998)) or an epenthetic vowel (see. C&R (2003)). The two different aphasic productions are explained: friulian patients omit the subject clitic, whereas the other
group (Vicentino) of patients has the $A$-morpheme preserved simply because it does not belong to the pronominal system\textsuperscript{17}.

8. The Proposal

8.1. Extending the ‘syntactic epenthesis’ approach (C&R 2003)

As I mentioned in the previous sections, the core of my proposal follows C&R’s (2003) approach of Piacentine [ə] (see section 4). According to this framework, the vowels in (74) “cannot be analyzed as subject clitics. The preverbal vowel in (75) (notation modified) is an ‘interrogative vowel’ which (optionally) realizes a functional head of the Comp layer, namely the head Focus that contains interrogative features” (C&R 2003:46):

(74) Declarative Sentence

\[
\begin{align*}
(\alpha) \text{ bev} & \quad \text{‘I drink’} \\
(\alpha) \text{ buvùm} & \quad \text{‘we drink’} \\
(\alpha) \text{ buvi} & \quad \text{‘you:pl drink’}
\end{align*}
\]

(75) Interrogative sentences

\[
\begin{align*}
(\alpha) \text{ bev-} \, \alpha \, t & \quad \text{‘are you:sg drinking?’} \\
(\alpha) \text{ bev} \, \alpha l & \quad \text{‘is he drinking?’} \\
(\alpha) \text{ bev} \, \alpha n-j \, \alpha & \quad \text{‘are they drinking?’} \\
(\alpha) \text{ bev-j} \, \alpha & \quad \text{‘am I drinking?’} \\
(\alpha) \text{ buvùm-j} \, \alpha & \quad \text{‘are we drinking?’} \\
(\alpha) \text{ buvi-v} & \quad \text{‘are you:pl drinking?’}
\end{align*}
\]

The authors call the phenomenon in (74) ‘syntactic epenthesis’, “to express a similarity with phonological epenthesis” (C&R 2003: 48). The basic argument for such a

\textsuperscript{17} Patients of the vicentino group also omit subject clitics (see Chinellato 2003a, 2004).
definition is that there is no meaning difference with or without the vocalic segment. Data from Veneto varieties support this claim\(^\text{18}\). Since in C&R (2003) the authors “leave open the question as to how to establish which heads are optionally realized by syntactic epenthesis [...]” (p.48), I will try to map the precise functional heads realized by the A-morpheme. Moreover, my data support C&R’s (2003) claim that “the phenomenon, which, to our knowledge, has never been discussed in the literature, is probably more wide-spread across languages than it looks like.” (p.48)

Thus, I propose that in Veneto dialects, the A-morpheme lexicalizes (optionally or obligatorily) functional heads of specialized functional projections in the IP layer.

### 8.2. The position of the A-morpheme in the clause

Consider the syntactic epenthesis, first. So far, I have considered four systems of distribution of the A-morpheme w.r.t. persons:

1. A ‘1-2-3-4-5-6’ system, in which the A-morpheme is optional. This system corresponds to Benincà’s (1983) traditional analysis of ‘clitic A’. This system is present in three dialects (Paduan, Eastern Vicentino, Basso Polesano) and I will propose that it spells out at least two different morphemes in two different syntactic positions.

2. A ‘1-4-5’ system (Northern Vicentino), whose optionality was already noted by Renzi & Vanelli’s (1983) generalization 4 and developed by C&R (2003). In this system, which was also noted by the ‘traditional analysis’ (see footnote 5), the A-morpheme is not the ‘subject clitic’ of the first and second persons singular and first person plural as it has been shown by C&R (2003) for Piacentine\(^\text{19}\).

3. A ‘1-4’ system (Central Vicentino), where the A-morpheme is optional without any difference in meaning.

Consider now the fourth system noted in the sample of dialects, namely the ‘1-2-4-5’ system (or deictic class in the Pol-Typ). As I showed in table 1, there are dialects (i.e.

\(^\text{18}\) Dialects #2-6,#10 also show no difference meaning whether the A-morpheme is present or not.

\(^\text{19}\) I refer the reader to the article for the detailed analysis.
the *Northern Vicentino* group) which exhibit a double system: if the sentence is an exclamative, the system extends from ‘1-4-5’ to ‘1-2-4-5’. We also have seen that there is a dialect (*Paduan of Salzano*) which exhibits an *A*-morpheme only in the second person singular and only in exclamative contexts.

I propose that the ‘1-2-4-5’ system does not exist by itself (see also C&R (2003), Goria (2003, 2004) for a critique of this system with independent evidence), but is a ‘surface’ system which realises two underlying ones: a ‘1-4-5’ and a ‘2-exclamative’ system. When an *A*-morpheme co-occurs with a second person singular, the sentence has always an ‘exclamative flavour’.

In order to isolate this property I will try to test the morpheme with specialized *yes-no* exclamatives particles in order to determine whether this claim is empirically supported.

In a report on the pattern of exclamative formation in *Paduan*, Zanuttini & Portner (2000) identify a a type of *yes/no* exclamative introduced by *ecome se* (literally ‘and how if’; example taken by Zanuttini & Portner (2000)):

\[(76) \text{Ecome se el ga pianto!} \quad (Paduan, Zanuttini & Portner (2000))\]

(And how if he has cried) And how he cried so!

---

20. In other words, when an *A*-morpheme appears with a second person clitic two options are possible: it is an epenthetic vowel as it is shown in (i) (but see also Piacentine in C&R (2003)):

\[(i) \text{At bevi} \quad \text{You-2\textsuperscript{nd} drink} \quad \text{Basso Polesano of Porto Viro}\]

\[\text{it is an exclamative marker}\]

Another piece of evidence supporting the claim that *a* in (i) has to be considered an epenthetic vowel comes from dative subjects. In Veneto dialects the *A*-morpheme is incompatible with a dative subjects, whereas in *Basso Polesano of Portoviro* the same sentence is grammatical. Contrast (ii) and (iii):

\[(ii) \text{A ti \ (*a) t(e) pia[z]e} \quad \text{Vicentino}\]

\[(iii) \text{A ti \ (*a) t pia[z]} \quad \text{Basso Polesano of Porto Viro}\]

(To you – *a*- te/dative clitic likes)

The fact that in (iii) the sentence is grammatical is due to the fact the *a* is an epenthetic vowel.
According to the authors “‘ecome’ is considered obligatory [...] and is not merely an introductory particle along the lines of Wow!, since there is no intonational break between it and the rest of the clause”. Let us use the same exclamative type with the A-morpheme: if the morpheme with the second person singular has not to be considered a syntactic epenthesis, but a sort of ‘exclamative marker’ the sentence should be ungrammatical because both particles compete for the same job. This is what happens in (77). When the sentence is in the second person singular the A-morpheme is impossible. Contrast (77) and (78):

(77) Ecome se (*a) te ghe pianto! (Northern Vicentino)

(78) a. Ecome se a go pianto!
   b. Ecome se a ghemo pianto!
   c. Ecome se a gavi pianto!
   (And how if a you 2nd /i/we/you 5th has cried)
   And how you 2nd /i/we/you 5th cried so!

In the following sections I will assign a specific syntactic position to the A-morphemes spelled out by these five systems.

8.3. Toward a hierarchy of person features

The A-morpheme in the second person singular gives to the sentence an exclamative interpretation. Extending the proposal to the other systems we obtain the following scenario:

(79) a. 1-[2]-3-4-5-6 > 1-3-4-5-6 (Paduan, Eastern Vicentino, Basso Polesano)
   b. 1-[2]-4-5 > 1-4-5 (Central and Northern Vicentino, Medio Polesano)

exclamative marker syntactic epenthesis

The typological studies on preverbal pronominal clitics (see Renzi & Vanelli 1983, among others) noted that the second, third and sixth person clitics (/u/, /i/, /i/) are not always present in NIDs although there is not a huge microvariation and some generalizations have been proposed. Let us consider Renzi & Vanelli’s (1983) generalizations 1, 2 and 3 (translation is taken from C&R (2003:77))
- if a variety has at least one subject clitic, it is the second person singular (1)

- if a variety has two subject clitics, they are the second and third person singular (2)

- if there are three subject clitics, they are second person singular, third person singular, third person plural (3)

In C&R’s (2003:77) framework these generalizations have been recast in syntactic terms, by proposing that the second person singular verb must move higher than the verb conjugated in the other persons, making the clitic pronoun possible instead of the weak counterpart pro.

The functional projections labelled as ZP²¹, YP²² and XP belong to a Person Field (Subject Field in their own terms), namely to a set of functional projections which encode subject features:

(80)  

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
1^{st} & 4^{th} & 5^{th} & [\text{wh}] & 6^{th} & 3^{rd} & 2^{nd} \\
[\text{ZP}] & [\,] & [\text{YP}] & [\text{X3P}] & [\text{X2P}] & [\text{X1P}] & [\text{AgrSP pro tj'}]
\end{array}
\]

The hierarchy in (80) account for the generalizations above. The microvariation of these vocalic particles (in this case, the A-morpheme) can thus be explained in terms of verb movement: if a subject clitic has to check the [+ person] feature (the marked value), the

²¹. In C&R (2003) framework a special feature characterizes the Z° head of the ZP projection. Following Kayne (1989), they propose that the ‘1-4-5’ is marked for an underspecified number feature ‘α’, the only feature they have in common.

²². As for the syntax of Yes/No questions (without any rhetorical or exclamative interpretation), I follow the ‘lack of V-to-C hypothesis’ for Romance Languages (see Cardinaletti (2001), C&R 2003, p.19 footnote 13). According to C&R (2003), in subject-clitic inversion the verb moves to a YP inside the IP-layer (C&R 2003:78):

(i)  

\[
[\text{Subj} \ a \ [\text{ZP} \ [\text{VP vcl-toj} \ [\text{XP t--- tj'} \ [\text{AgrSP pro tj'}]]]]]
\]

The IP-layer

In the footnote (64) (C&R 2003: 78) the authors motivate the location of the YP in the IP-layer by observing that “questions always imply the involvement of the addressee by the speaker. The Inflectional [wh] feature can thus be naturally taken to be related in the subject field”.

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$A$-morpheme lexicalises the empty functional head with a syntactic epenthesis. Let us look at each single subject clitic:

A. If the /t/ subject clitic has to check the [+person] feature in the specialized functional projection for the second person (the X1° head), then the syntactic epenthesis can be spelled out in the other persons of the paradigm. This system can be optionally realised in Paduan, Eastern Vicentino, Basso Polesano by the $A$-morpheme (see (79a)). According to Renzi & Vanelli (1983: 34) and Goria (2004) this system is also present respectively in other dialects, namely Pontremolese (Massa Carrara, Tuscany) and in Astigiano (Piedmont).

B. If the /l/ subject clitic has to check the [+person] feature in the functional projection dedicated to the third person (the X2° head), then the syntactic epenthesis can apply to the the first, fourth, fifth and sixth person. According to Renzi & Vanelli (1983: 34) this system (‘1-4-5-6’) is realised in Istrioto di Rovigno (the present Rovinij, Croatia).

C. If the /i/ subject clitic has to check the [+person] feature in the X3° head, then the syntactic epenthesis apply to the first, fourth and fifth persons; this system can be optionally realised in Vicentino by the $A$-morpheme and in Piacentine by the optional [ə].

D. If a [+person] feature has to be checked by a subject clitic for the fifth person in a X4° head (e.g. in Fiorentino),

\begin{align*}
(81) & \text{Vu venite!} \quad \text{(Poletto 2000)} \\
& \text{(Cl}^{15}\text{th come)} \\
& \text{You come}
\end{align*}

then the remaining syntactic epenthesis applies to the first and fourth persons. This system is optionally realised in Central Vicentino, but it has also been noted in another Veneto dialect, Feltrino. (see Corrà 2004).

Let us summarize the refinement of C&R’s (2003) proposal: as we compare (80) with (82) we can see that a ZP projection is no longer necessary: when the ‘interrogative vowel’ is optionally present in yes-no question (see (3)), the activated functional head is the Focus° head in the CP-layer, whereas when it is mandatory in the first, fourth and fifth person with a wh-clitic (see (83)) the activated functional head is the X3P:
I proposed that the A-morpheme with the 1st, 4th and 5th person corresponds to the ‘subject field vowel’ proposed by C&R (2003). If so, it is necessary to explain why the A-morpheme is incompatible with wh-elements (84), whereas the Piacentine vowel is mandatory (85):

(84) do (*a) nde-o? (Vicentino)
(85) dō:d *(*a) naːː-v (Piacentine)
   (where are you-2nd pl. going?)

My proposal is that in Piacentine the morpheme has to move to the Y° head realizing the [wh] feature, whereas in Vicentino the A-morpheme remains in X3° because it is not used in questions.

(84′) * [YP [ Y° wh [ XP5 [ X°5 ndeː-o […[XP3 [ X°3 a [TP [ T° ti]]]]]]]]]

(85′) [YP [ Y° a [ XP3 [ X°3 naːːː-ːv …… [TP [ T° ti]]]]]]
8.4. Northern Vicentino (# 7 and # 8): one more position

So far, I have considered the optional realization of the A-morpheme (Paduan, Polesano, Vicentino). In two dialects of Northern Vicentino (Giavenale, Schio), the optionality of the A-morpheme is only apparent, namely the morpheme is not a syntactic epenthesis. Consider sentences (86-87)

(86) Me sento male parché [a go magnà massa].
   (I feel sick because [a have:1sg eaten too much])

(87) Me sento male parché [go magnà massa].
   (I feel sick because [have:1sg eaten too much])

In sentence (87) the hearer knows the information in the square brackets whereas in (86) the speaker presumes that the hearer does not know the information in square brackets. This can happen without any change of intonation. Consider the sentences in the minidialogue in (87’):

(87’) A: Come ste-to? (How are you?)
   B: Male, seto! (Bad, you know!)
   A: Cossa ghe-to? (What’s wrong?)
   B1: A go magnà massa. (A have:1sg have eaten too much)
   B2: Go magnà massa. (have:1sg have eaten too much)
   A1: Poareto! Me despiaze! (Poor thing! I’m sorry!)
   A2: Te lo gavevo mia dito, mi! (I’d told you (not to eat so much))

The appropriate reply to B1 is A1 because the speaker A does not know that the speaker B has eaten too much. It would be very unusual to reply to B1 with A2, because A2 is the typical reply of someone who already knows the cause of B’s sickness. A further example is taken by a fragment of real everyday conversation:

(88) Two physicians at the Schio General Hospital
   A1: Ghe-to ricevuo mia l’ordine de servizio? (Have you received the summons?)
   B1: [A go trovà] na letera del primario. (A I found a letter from the chief)
A2: Zé mia quela! Ghe-to trovà altra posta?
   (It's not that one! Have you found any other mail?)
   (I only found that one)

In B2 the A-morpheme is no longer necessary because there is no more new information to convey. B1 and B2 are pronounced with the same flat intonation.
I claim that this morpheme is not a syntactic epenthesis but the overt lexicalization of a functional head in the preverbal subject field, namely the head of the functional projection proposed for the thetic sences by Cardinaletti (in press). The A-morpheme has to be in a spec-head agreement with the subject in order to give the ‘thetic’ interpretation of the clause. I call this projection RhemeP (which corresponds to Cardinaletti’s EppP)

(89) [SubjP [Rheme P [Rheme° a [YP]]]

8.5. The A-morpheme in the Subject field (Paduan, Eastern Vicentino, Basso Polesano)

According to Benincà (1983), the A-morpheme in Paduan binds a Top head when the lexical subject is not expressed. If we recast this proposal in minimalist terms (Chomsky 1995 and subsequent work) we can propose that the A-morpheme lexicalises the functional head Subject° (see section 3) The morpheme is in a spec-head relation with an empty operator which checks the ‘subject of predication’ feature (see Cardinaletti (in press)). This spec-head relation blocks the movement of the DP subject to SpecSubjectP:

(90) [SubjP [Subj° a [YP [XP ]]]]

However, Subject° is not the syntactic position in which the A-morpheme is merged. Benincà (1983) claims that the morpheme expresses that the clause is new information. Thus, the morpheme has to land in Subj° via Rheme°, the functional head in which it can check the [+ rheme] feature (see 8.4).
I propose that the morpheme is base-generated in X1° (see 82) and then moves to the ‘subject field’ in order to check the [+ rheme] feature and then it is spelled out in Subj°:
Consider now the other two dialects which display the same ‘1-3-4-5-6’ system, namely Eastern Vicentino and Basso Polesano. These dialects display a very similar distribution and optionally realize a head of a functional projection activated in the preverbal subject-field (which is in the IP-layer as shown by Cardinaletti (in press)):

\[
\text{(92) } \left[\text{FinP} \left[\text{Fin}^\circ \right] \left[\text{SubjP} \left[\text{Subj}^\circ \right. \ldots \left. \text{[X1P} \left[\text{X1}^\circ \right. \ldots \text{]]]]]\right]\right]
\]

The CP-layer
The IP-layer

This morpheme is compatible with all persons (since it has neutralized its agreement features), but whereas in Polesano it is fully compatible with a strong subject, in Eastern Vicentino it is not:

\[
\text{(93) a. } \text{Mi } a \text{ bevo } \quad \text{(Polesano)} \\
\text{b. } ?\text{Mi } a \text{ bevo } \quad \text{(Eastern Vicentino)}
\]

(I a drink)

Both dialects admit the A-morpheme with a quantified subject:

\[
\text{(94) Nissun a me voe ben te sta casa} \\
\text{(Nobody a loves me in this house)}
\]

\[
\text{(95) Qualchedun a ga da dirme cossa che si drio fare} \\
\text{(Someone a has to tell me what you are doing)}
\]

As it is claimed in Cardinaletti (in press: 29-30), Tortora (1997: 67) brings evidence from Borgomanerese that in NIDs negative quantifiers occupy a different subject position with respect to subject DPs. Quoting Cardinaletti (in press: 29) “whereas nzüiₚ (nobody) can cooccur with the locative clitic ngh (there), the subject DP la Maria (the Maria) cannot:
The locative clitic ngh in AgrS requires a locative pro in specAgrSP. This prevents the nominative DP la Maria from checking $\phi$-features. The negative quantifier can be taken to occur in a position higher than specAgrSP, i.e. a position devoted to quantified subjects’.

Since the $A$-morpheme is not mandatory with strong subjects, I propose that in Eastern Vicentino it optionally realises the Quantified Subject° head:

(96) $[\text{QSubjP Nisun }[\text{QSubjP }[\text{QSubj° a }[\text{XP me voe ben te sta casa}]]]]$

Compare now Piacentine and Paduan: whereas in former the morpheme is compatible with a yes-no question, in the latter the equivalent of (97) is not ungrammatical, but the $A$-morpheme gives the sentence an exlamative reading. Note that in order to get such a reading, the morpheme has to be spelled-out:

(97) (a) bev at?
    (Are you drinking?)

(98) (a) bevi-to?!!
    (A are you drinking?!!)

The fact that in Piacentine the vowel is optional in yes-no questions is explained by assuming “that a null operator is merged higher than SpecFocusP and not moved from a lower position, which implies that no Spec-Head Agreement with the Focus head takes place.” (C&R 2003, p.35). Following Rizzi (2001) the authors “take the empty operator merged in the specifier of Int(errogative)P that hosts the complementizer se ‘whether’ in embedded yes-no questions”.(C&R 2003, p.35):

(99) Force (Top) Int (Top) Foc Fin IP-layer
Extending C&R’s (2003) proposal to Veneto dialects, I have proposed that whenever a A-morpheme conveys a special semantics to the clause, it has to be in a Spec-Head relation with the XP element in the specialized functional projection. In Paduan the optionality of A-morpheme is only apparent, because it provides new information and an exclamative interpretation to the clause. Thus, I propose that the A-morpheme spelled out in (101) is merged in X1P, raises Y° to check the [wh] feature in Y°, check the ‘thetic’ feature in Rheme° in order to give the sentence new information and finally lands to Subj°:

\[
(101) [\text{SubjP} \mathcal{O} [\text{Subj° a [ RhemeP [ Rheme° --- [YP [Y° [wh] [,][X1P [X1° ---]]]]]]]]]]
\]

The same holds for Eastern Vicentino and Basso Polesano.

9. Conclusions

In this work I studied the microvariation of the A-morpheme in Veneto dialects. The evidence brought by eleven dialects which have this vocalic particle has lead to the following claims:

1. There are dialects which admit an A-morpheme after a strong subject (see table 1 in section 6.1). This fact brings evidence that the morpheme is base-generated in the IP-layer.
2. In some Veneto dialects there is an A-morpheme which does not change the meaning of the sentence (see table 2 and table 3 in section 6.2). This is consistent with C&R’s (2003) description of [ù] in Piacentine.
3. The A-morpheme is not a subject clitic. In some dialects it is a syntactic epenthesis which optionally realizes a functional head in the IP-layer (see sections 8.1-8.3), in other dialects it is a vowel with a special semantics (an ‘exclamative marker, see 8.3, a thetic vowel in the subject-field, see 8.4-8.5). This is consistent

4. The A-morpheme is neither an invariable subject clitic nor a deictic subject clitic in the Pol-Typ sense (see 6.2). Poletto’s (2000) diagnostics does not account for the syntax of the morpheme in Veneto dialects (see 6.3).

5. There are systems of A-morphemes across the person paradigm which are not present in the Pol-Typ (see 8.2). If we isolate the second person singular as a separate system (a ‘2-exclamative’ system, see 8.2 examples (74)-(76)) we can account for others different systems which are not present in the Pol-Typ (see 8.3). Thus, in order to account to a proper treatment of the vocalic particles in Veneto dialects the notions of invariable and deictic clitics should be abandoned.

6. In Veneto dialects there are no A-morphemes in the CP-layer. The data presented in sections 6 and 8 support the claim that these morphemes are base generated (8.3) and sometimes moved (8.5) within the IP-layer, as predicted by C&R’s (2003) framework.

7. There is a precise hierarchy of person features in the Person Field (in the IP-layer, see (82)).

The different syntax of the A-morpheme as a syntactic epenthesis in the IP-layer is consistent with C&R’s (2003) correlation between the hierarchy of subject clitics (proposed by Renzi & Vanelli (1983)) and verb movement. The refinement of C&R’s (2003) hierarchy proposed in (82) also accounts for a precise syntactic position of the fifth person clitic, the highest of the X°’s heads. Moreover this proposal eliminates the ZP projection proposed by C&R (2003) (see 8.3, example (80)).

This investigation does not intend to say the last word on this topic. Several NIDs has to be investigated under this new perspective. The aim of this work was to extend C&R’s (2003) new framework to other dialects and I showed how the result obtained support this proposal and opens new ways of looking at microvariation among northern Italian dialects.
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