Synchronic and diachronic variation phenomena in inverted interrogative and related contexts in Northern Italian dialects

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Abstract:

In the spirit of Ferdinand de Saussure, the present contribution is offered as an integrated synchronic and diachronic analysis of syntactic variation phenomena across a selected number of Veneto and other Northern Italian dialects: the main focus of the study will be on (unembedded) interrogative clauses. The goal targeted is to account for the wide range of structural options allowed by contemporary dialects (VS/SV/SVS) in the light of the discrepant evolutionary stages they embody and reflect, as independently reconstructed and singled out in the history of the Venetian dialect. Seemingly idiosyncratic contemporary inter-dialectal variation phenomena are thus viewed as functions of the different parametric values dialects activate in dependence on the position they occupy in an evolutionary continuum which promotes the elimination of an anciently fully productive inverted pattern VS (along with the syntactic rule V-to-C which possibly underlies its generation).

1. Introduction[1]

The present paper aims to show through a concrete case study how dialectological research may play an essential role in the development of general syntactic theory and how it can be further exploited as a privileged standpoint for the observation and explanation of linguistic variation phenomena. My objective is to single out and comment upon the dynamics of change and variation as they surface both synchronically and diachronically in the empirical sub-domain of interrogative (and, to a certain extent, optative) clauses across a selected number of Eastern Veneto and other Northern Italian dialects: the merit of such a methodology is that the (mutually enlightening) explicative potentials of the two dimensions of enquiry are more easily accessed, to the point that seemingly idiosyncratic patterns of inter-dialectal differentiation can be ultimately viewed as functions of discrepant parametric values.

The present paper is divided in two parts: the first one focuses on a comparative survey of some closely related, geographically contiguous

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Northern Italian dialects, lingering on the wide range of variation they admit; the second part centres on the diachrony of the Venetian dialect and attempts to consistently describe and analyse the syntactic changes it was affected by in order to obtain a subtler understanding of contemporary inter-linguistic variation. As far as this second line of research is concerned, special attention will be paid to the effects of syntactic readjustments that take place in the chosen domain: particular emphasis will be placed on the drastic drop and final disappearance of inverted interrogatives (VS) which occur in the history of Venetian. The distinctive traits of the reanalysis point to three stages in the evolution of the dialect taken into account: the first is the 18th century Venetian documented by Goldoni's comedies; the second coincides with the pre-modern and conservative dialect spoken by Giulio Lepschy and by other Venetians emigrated after the Second World War; and the third is paired with Modern, contemporary Venetian.

The explanatory proposal I am going to advance claims that the history of Venetian can be parametrically characterized in terms of the loss of the syntactic rule which originally moved the inflected verb to the head position (possibly, C° or Interr°, inside the CP) of a higher functional projection located on the left of the pronominal subject (thus resulting in a high-rate percentage of VS-strings): in fact, the presence of inverted structures in ancient Venetian and its systematic absence from modern, contemporary paradigms, with a less clear-cut syntactic situation in the stage in-between, can be accounted for if the rule hypothesized is taken to have been still fully productive in Goldoni's grammar and in the Venetian spoken until 50 years ago - and significantly maintained, almost frozen, in the dialectal variety mastered by Lepschy and other post-war emigrants, while it is supposed to have been completely swept away in the last fifty years, as inferable from the ungrammaticality attributed to inverted patterns (*VS) by native speakers of Contemporary Venetian.

Given these hypotheses, the variation dynamics emerging inter-dialectally in synchrony within the interrogative domain become more easily interpretable in terms of the different stage of progression achieved by contemporary Northern Italian dialects towards a complete elimination of the V-to-C rule, which is the one we hold responsible for the derivation of inverted interrogative constructions.

2. A proposal of parametrization

What mostly strikes the researcher when attempting a comparative excursus on Modern, Northern Italian dialects is the great range of syntactic variation they unfold also within such a restricted empirical sub-domain as the one of unembedded interrogative clauses, both *Yes-/No-*

questions and *Wh*-questions. Actually, as already pointed out in previous analyses devoted to the topic (see Benincà 1995, 1996, 1997, Benincà and Poletto 2005, Munaro 2001, 2002, 2005, Parry 1997, and Poletto and Vanelli 1997), interrogative clauses are distinctively characterized with respect to declarative clauses because of their tendency to instantiate the so-called interrogative inversion pattern ($V_{infl}S_{pr}$). Yet, the structural properties displayed in interrogative domains also by geographically contiguous, genealogically related dialects are far from homogeneous, in this respect differing from the invariable codification properties recorded in declarative contexts (where SV-sequencing is systematic in all the varieties submitted to investigation). The next subsection will immediately illustrate some of the structural strategies which are most widespread in interrogative clauses in Veneto and Northern Italian dialects and which may enter into 'minimal pairs' with their declarative counterparts (VS vs. SV).

2.1 Yes-/No-*Questions versus declarative clauses in some Veneto dialects*

(1)   a.   varde-***lo/la***?
            watches-he/she.3SG.M/F.CL
            'Does he/she watch?'

        b.   ***el/la***   varda.   Bellunese (Bl) **VS? ≠ SV**
            he/she.3SG.M/F.CL watches
            'He/she watches.'

(1')   a.   varde-***li/le***?
            watch-they.3PL.M/F.CL
            'Do they watch?'

        b.   ***i/le***   magna.   Bellunese (Bl) **VS? ≠ SV**
            they.3PL.M/F.CL eat
            'They eat.'

(2)   a.   magne-***lo/la***?
            eats-he/she.3SG.M/F.CL
            'Does he/she eat?'

        b.   ***el/la***   magna.   Paduan (Pd) **VS? ≠ SV**
            he/she.3SG.M/F.CL eats
            'He/she eats.'

(2')   a.   magne-***li/le***?
             eat-they.3PL.M/F.CL
            'Do they eat?'

b. ***i/le***   magna.   Paduan (Pd) **VS? ≠ SV**[2]
they.3PL.M/F.CL eat
'They eat.'   (examples from Munaro 2002)

(3)   a.   ***el/ea***   vien?
he/she.3SG.M/F.CL comes
'Does he/she come?'

       b.   ***el/ea***   vien.   Mod. Venetian (Ve) **SV? = SV**
he/she.3SG.M/F.CL comes
'He/she comes.'

(3')   a.   ***i/e***   vien?
they.3PL.M/F.CL come
'Do they come?'

       b.   ***i/e***   vien.   Mod. Venetian (Ve) **SV? = SV**
they.3PL.M/F.CL come
'They come.'

As far as *Yes-/No*-questions are concerned, the examples listed above suggest that Paduan and Bellunese pattern alike in obligatorily resorting to the enclisis of the (third person singular and plural) subject pronoun to the

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[2] Modern Paduan syntactically patterns with the dialect of Aldeno, another Northern Italian dialect spoken in the district of Trento, which shows the same alternation VS? / SV, respectively in the interrogative (both *Yes-/No*-questions and *Wh*-questions) and declarative domain:

(2'')   a.   magne-***lo/la***?   Aldeno (Tn) **VS? ≠ SV**
eats-he/she.3SG.M/F.CL
'Does he/she eat?'

       b.   ***el/la***   magna.
he/she.3SG.M/F.CL eats
'He/she eats.'

(2''')   a.   magne-***i/le***?   Aldeno (Tn) **VS? ≠ SV**
eat-they.3PL.M/F.CL
'Do they eat?'

       b.   ***i/le***   magna.
they.3PL.M/F.CL eat
'They eat.'

(3)   a.   *Cosa* ha-***i***   vist?   *Wh*-Q Aldeno (Tn) **VS?**
what have-they.3PL.M.CL seen
'What have they seen?'

inflected verb (VS)[3], while Modern Venetian stands apart by having the same proclitic subject-inflected verb string in both interrogative and declarative contexts.

2.2 Wh-questions

(4) *cossa* varde-***lo***? Bellunese (Bl) **VS**
what looks-at-he.3SG.M.CL
'What does he look at?'

(5) a. cossa fa-***lo***? Paduan (Pd) **VS**
what does-he.3SG.M.CL
'What does he do?'

b. *cossa (***el***) fa? Paduan (Pd) ≠ *SV**
what (he.3SG.M.CL) does
'What does he do?'

(6) *cossa* xe *che **el*** fa? Mod. Venetian (Ve) **+ C°; SV?**
what is that he.3SG.M.CL does
'What does he do?'

The examples in (4)-(6) suggest that the descriptive generalizations just sketched for *Yes-/No*-questions apparently hold true also for *Wh*-questions. It seems furthermore worth pointing out that, as illustrated by example (6), Modern Venetian uses the cleft-construction '*cossa* xe *che* … SV?,' which evidences the co-occurrence of a phonologically realized complementizer 'che' and an un-inverted sequencing SV '*el* fa': as far as this construction type is concerned, there seems to be a match between the complementizer-insertion and the inhibition of the inverted structure (as we will see in the next subsections), as if the dynamics underlying the derivation of such (clefted, non-inverted) interrogatives were one and the same reconstructed for embedded interrogatives across all the dialects analysed. In embedded interrogatives as the ones exemplified below, in fact, the presence of a lexical complementizer placed in C° would according to standard analyses explain the impossibility of having the verb in front of the subject, due to the unavailability of C° as a possible target for V-to-C raising across the subject pronoun. This also holds in varieties like Paduan where root interrogatives obligatorily instantiate the inverted pattern VS with the pronominal subject in enclisis:

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[3] Third singular and plural have been chosen since all the dialects explored have distinctive (enclitic and proclitic) pronoun forms for these person/number combinations, in interrogative and declarative contexts respectively.

(7)   a.   no so   cossa *che **el**   ga fato.   Paduan **SV**
            not know what that he.3SG.M.CL has done
            'I don't know what he has done.'

    b.   *no so   cossa *che* ga-**lo**   fato.   ***VS**
            not know what that has-he.3SG.M.CL done
            'I don't know what he has done.'
                     (examples quoted from Munaro 2002)

2.3 Yes-/No-*questions and* Wh-*questions in Piedmontese*

When the inventory of the dialects taken into account is enlarged, the syntactic variables involved rise proportionally in number: consequently, while the Piedmontese variety of Rueglio (To) turns out to be consistent with the syntactic behavior already observed for Bellunese and Paduan (*i.e.* it uniformly exhibits a VS order both in *Yes-/No-* and *Wh-*questions), things change and get more complicated when we turn to the variety of Oglianico, where a proclitic subject co-occurs with an enclitic one, to the effect that the surface string conforms to SVS sequencing;

(8)   a.   È **-l**   partì Mario?   *Yes-/No-*Q Rueglio (To) **VS**
            has he.3SG.M.CL left Mario
            'Has Mario left?'

    b.   *Co* pòs-**ni**   far?   *Wh-*Q Rueglio (To) **VS**
            what can-I.1SG.CL. do
            'What can I do?'

(9)   a.   **A**   ven-**lò**.   *Yes-/No-*Q Oglianico (To) **SVS**
            she.3SG.F.CL comes-she.3SG.F.CL

            Lucia doman?
            Lucia tomorrow
            'Will Lucia come tomorrow?'

    b.   *Còs* **i**   fas-**ne**?   *Wh-*Q Oglianico (To) **SVS**
            what I.1SG.CL do-I.1SG.CL
            'What am I doing?'

Similarly, in the variety of Agliano, a discrepancy begins to emerge between *Yes-/No-*questions, which are still modelled upon the standard inversion pattern VS (10a), and *Wh-*questions, which show a yet different structure, where the absence of the enclisis of the subject on the verb can be seen in relation to the presence of a lexically realized complementizer 'che', which presumably blocks V-to-C movement (10b).

(10)   a.   Ò   -*te*   vist to   barba? *Yes-/No*-Q Agliano (At) **VS**
have-you.2SG.CL seen your uncle
'Have you seen your uncle?'

   b.   Lo *che'**t***   fâi?   *Wh*-Q Agliano (At) **+ C°; SV**
what that you.2SG.CL do
'What are you doing?'   (examples quoted from Parry 1997)

To conclude this first part of the paper, I tentatively set forth the following descriptive generalization holding for unembedded contexts: interrogative constructions stand out for the great number of syntactic options they allow across contiguous dialects; to a first approximation, however, the structural variables they seem to entail can be drawn back to the presence versus absence of the inversion clitic subject / inflected verb (posited as a sort of macro-difference, liable of being parametrically worked out, under which other, minor variants can be comprised). The following table summarizes the inter-dialectal differences:

Table 1			
Dialect	*Yes-/No*-**questions**	*Wh*-**questions**	
Bellunese (Bl)	+ VS	- C	+ VS
Paduan (Pd)	+ VS	- C	+ VS
Modern Venetian (Ve)	**- VS**	± C-cleft	- VS
Rueglio (To)	+ VS	- C	+ VS
Oglianico (To)	**SVS**	**- C**	**SVS**
Agliano (At)	+ VS	+ C	- VS

3. A case study of variation in diachrony: the Venetian dialect

In the spirit of Ferdinand de Saussure, diachrony is appealed to and explored side by side with synchrony in view of the insights it can help us gaining as a complementary field of research. As a matter of fact, on the assumption that the two dimensions of inquiry stand in a dialectic and strictly intertwined relationship to one another, synchrony is here taken to be a flattened projection of diachrony, a sort of record and mirror of previous evolutionary stages which followed each other throughout the axis of time: in modern dialects (or languages), traces of anciently productive processes may be co-existing, thus contributing to feeding the general impression we often get of idiosyncratic variation. Under these premises, diachrony is here revalued and exploited as a powerful heuristic tool, capable of accounting for phenomena which generally impress us as structurally non-systematic when considered by themselves: on the contrary, viewing them under a historically grounded perspective crucially has the effect of unmasking their regular and even systematic nature. In the light of these considerations, what I want to do is to draw from the

diachrony of the Venetian dialect the evidence needed to project inter-dialectal variation across Modern Veneto dialects into discrepant evolutionary steps, which happen to be still accessible to reconstruction in Venetian: the final goal I pursue is to demonstrate that areal variation is but a function of the different parametric value every single dialect selects in dependence on its higher or lower degree of conservativeness.

In the following section, I will compare what we may regard as three stages in the recent evolution of the Venetian dialect: (i) Goldoni's 18th century Venetian (*Sior Todero brontolon – STB*: 1762), (ii) Giulio Lepschy's conservative Venetian, and (iii) Contemporary Venetian. At first, the investigation lingers on the different typologies of contexts which notoriously pair with inverted orders (VS) and on the main structural differences between the varieties (*i.e. Yes-/No*-questions, section 3.1; *Wh*-questions, section 3.2; to end with optative clauses, section 3.3). Finally, I will turn to an overall discussion of the data (section 4, 5), purported to set forth an explanation both in diachrony and in synchrony.

3.1 Yes-/No-*questions*

The following examples photograph the divergent stages the VS → SV reanalysis progressed through, from 18th century to present day Venetian:

(11) a. *Fort.:* **Vor-*la***   che ghe   (*STB*: I.3.50) **VS**
         wants-she.3SG.F.CL that her.3SG.DAT.CL

         parla   da amiga?
         speak.1SG as friend

   b. **Vol-*la***   che ghe   Giulio Lepschy **VS**
         wants-she.3SG.F.CL that her.3SG.DAT.CL

         parla   da amiga?
         speak.1SG as friend

   b'. ***La***   **vol**   che ghe   Giulio Lepschy **SV**
         she.3SG.F.CL wants that her.3SG.DAT.CL

         parla   da amiga?
         speak.1SG as friend

   c. ***Ea***   **vol**   che ghe   Mod. Venetian **SV**
         she.3SG.F.CL wants that her.3SG.DAT.CL

         parla   da amiga?
         speak.1SG as friend
         'Do you want that I speak to you as a friend?'

(12) a. *Marc.:* M ˈ**ha-*i***   trovà   (*STB*: I.2.1) **VS**
         me have-they.3PL.M.CL found

in t'un gàttolo?
in a   dust-bin

b. Me **ga-*li***   trovà   Giulio Lepschy **VS**
me have-they.3PL.M.CL found

nee   scoasse?
in a   dust-bin

b'. ***I***   me **ga**   trovà   Giulio Lepschy **SV**
they.PL.M me have.3PL found

nele scoasse?
in a dust-bin

c. ***I***   me **ga**   trovà   Mod. Venetian **SV**
they.3PL.M.CL me have.3PL found

nee scoasse?
in a dust-bin
'Did they find me in a dust-bin?'

3.2. Wh-*Questions*

The same evolutionary stages just surveyed for *Yes-/No*-questions are
illustrated below for *Wh*-questions:

(13) a. *Fort.*: *Cossa* gh'   **ha-*la***   (*STB*: I.3.36) **VS**
         what   there.LOC.CL has-she.3SG.F.CL

paura?
fear

b. (De) Cossa **ga-*la***   paura?   Giulio Lepschy **VS**
(of) what   has-she.3SG.F.CL fear

b'. [?](De cossa *la*   ga paura?)   Giulio Lepschy ([?]**SV**)
    of what she.3SG.F.CL has fear

c. De cossa *ea*   ga paura?   Mod. Venetian **SV**
of what she.3SG.F.CL has fear
'What are you afraid of?'

(14) a. *Marc.*: La diga ela: cossa **pretenderàve-*lo***? (*STB*: I.3.63) **VS**
         she says she what would-want-he.3SG.M.CL

b. … cossa **pretendaresse-*lo***?   Giulio Lepschy **VS**
what would-want-he.3SG.M.CL

b'. … cossa ***el***   **pretendaria**?   Giulio Lepschy **SV**
what he.3SG.M.CL would-want

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c.   Ea diga ea
she says she

cossa **el**   **pretendaria**?   Mod. Venetian **SV**
what he.3SG.M.CL would-want
'Tell me: what would he want?'

(15) a.   *Fort.*: La diga, cara ela, cossa ghe
        she says dear she what her.3SG.DAT.CL

    dara-*li*   de dota?   (*STB*: I.3.63) **VS**
    will-give-they.3PL.M.CL as dowry

b.   … cossa ghe   **dara**-*li*   Lepschy **VS**
      what her.3SG.DAT.CL will-give-they.3PL.M.CL

de dote?
as dowry

b'.   … cossa ***i***   ghe   **darà**   Lepschy **SV**
      what they.3PL.M.CL her.3SG.DAT.CL will-give

de dote?
as dowry

c.   Ea diga, cara ea, cossa ***i***   ghe   Mod. Ven. **SV**
    she says dear she what they.3PL.M.CL her.3SG.DAT.CL

darà   de dote?
will-give as dowry
'Tell me, my dear, what will they give her as a dowry?'

(16) a.   *Tod.*: Da   quando in qua le donne **hà-*le*** (*STB*: I.7.28) **VS**
      since when   the women have-they.3PL.F.CL

da tòrse sta libertà*?*
to take this liberty

b.   Da   quando in qua le done **ga-*le***   Lepschy **VS**
    since when   the women have-they.3PL.F.CL

da torse sta libertà?
to take this liberty

b'.   Da   quando in qua le done ***le***   Lepschy **SV**
    since when   the women they.3PL.F.CL

ga   da torse sta libertà?
have.3PL to take this liberty

    c.   Da   quando en qua e   done   **e**   Mod.Ven. **SV**
         since when   the women they.3PL.F.CL

         ga   da torse sta libertà?
         have.3PL to take this liberty
         'Since when do women have to take (all) this liberty?'

3.3 Optative clauses

As already anticipated, the interrogative structures listed above are to be compared with other structurally contiguous domains, including what Benincà (1989) defines as 'optative sentences which express a desire by the speaker, through which he wishes that a counterfactual propositional content may come true,' given that they share significant properties of structural codification with interrogative clauses:

(17) a.   *Fort.*: Eh via,   cara ela: **fússe-*le***   (*STB*: I.3.60) **VS**
               eh come on dear she were-they.3PL.F.CL

           cussì   tutte le putte dal dì d'ancuo;
           like-this all   the girls of nowadays

           e   **fússe-*li***   cusì   i   putti...
           and were-they.3PL.M.CL like-this the boys

    b.   … **fusse-*le***   cussì ...   Lepschy **VS**
           were-they.3PL.F.CL like-this

           e   **fusse-*li***   cussì ...
           and were-they.3PL.M.CL like this

    b'.   … ***le***   **fusse** cussì...   Lepschy **SV**
            they.3PL.F.CL were like-this

           e   *i*   **fusse** cussì ...
           and they. 3PL.M.CL were like-this

    c.   Eh via,   (magari) ***e***   **fusse**   Mod. Ven. **SV**
           eh come on dear she they.3PL.F.CL were

           cussì   tutte e fie de ancuo;   e   *i*   **fusse**
           like-this all   the girls of nowadays and they.3PL.M.CL were

           cussì   i   fioi…
           like-this the boys
           'Eh, come on, dear you: may all the girls of nowadays be like this, and all the boys be like that…'

4. Some generalizations and explanatory proposals

The corpus of data presented in sections 3.1-3.3 seems to enable us to sketch some provisional descriptive generalizations that apply

diachronically. First of all, the situation attested in the interrogative (and optative) clauses of Goldoni's Venetian (*Sior Todero Brontolon* 1762) crucially contrasts with what holds true for Contemporary Venetian, given the opposition that systematically shows up between enclisis of the pronominal subject to the verb and its absence (VS vs. SV). On the other hand, the picture becomes less clear-cut and still unskewed in favor of the one or the other grammatical system when we turn to the conservative and archaic Venetian still spoken by Giulio Lepschy and by the other Venetian emigrants who left the city after the Second World War: both options - VS and SV – appear to be possible in their grammar, even if a slight preference tends to emerge for the pre-modern construction featuring the inverted order VS (both in *Yes-/No*-questions: 'Vus-*tu*?' - want-you.2SG.CL – favored by Lepschy – p.c. – over: '*Ti* vol?' – you.2SG.CL want; and in *Wh*-questions: '(De) Cossa **ga**-*la* paura?' - (of) what has-she.3SG.F.CL fear – preferred to: 'De cossa *la* **ga** paura?'' - of what she.3SG.F.CL has fear, judged marginally acceptable). At a still superficial level of analysis, this fact might lead to conclude that, as far as interrogative (and some strictly related) contexts are concerned, Venetian displays a consistent system at its two chronological extremes: namely, ancient 18th century Venetian (VS) and Contemporary Venetian (SV). At the same time, it seems to bear testimony of a sociolinguistically marked condition of two grammars in competition (VS and SV), using Kroch's (1989) terminology, in a stage in-between, dating back to approximately 50 years ago, and still embodied by Lepschy's competence.

Moving on to a deeper level of analysis, we might claim that the diachrony of Venetian is characterized by the loss of the syntactic movement rule which, in earlier times, promoted the displacement of the V to a higher functional head on the left of the (pronominal) subject, and accordingly triggered the derivation of inverted orders VS[4]. Something similar might be expected to underlie the parametric differences of syntactic behavior singled out between 18th century and Modern Venetian (VS vs. SV) within the empirical sub-domain of optative clauses: in the spirit of Munaro (2002), the presence or absence of an inverted pattern VS might be drawn back to the application or not of a movement rule shifting

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[4] We might tentatively characterize such a rule as V-to-C°: this hypothesis is made plausible by the fact that V-to-C° is ineffective in embedded interrogative contexts (which are all consistently SV, while VS is felt as ungrammatical), precisely because C° is thought of as already filled by the complementizer and, hence, unsuitable a landing site for the raised verb – as already illustrated for Paduan in (7b). Alternatively, in Munaro's (2002) more precise terms, such a rule might be conceived as V-to-*Interrogative*°.

the verb to a higher, *Counterfactual°* head (inside the CP-layer), which could be thought of as codifying the speaker's subjective attitude towards the propositional content expressed, in this case coinciding with his hope for the realization of a counterfactual propositional content. In tune with Benincà (1989) and Munaro (2002), we might push our line of reasoning even further and hypothesize that the structural match holding between inverted and uninverted structures (VS/SV) are not confined to the interrogative and optative contexts, but rather spread to other, contiguous domains – namely, those referred to as *pseudo*-questions, presuppositional exclamatives, *if*-clauses, and disjunctives: for each of the former it seems similarly reasonable to assume the existence of a number of corresponding functional heads (encoding the distinctive interpretative features that mirror the speaker's mental and emotional attitude towards the propositional content delivered, such as *Interrogative°, Presuppositional°, Counterfactual°, Disjunctive°*). In turn, these heads would be managed in a strict hierarchical order and would function as possible landing sites for the movement of the verb, taking place in a head-to-head fashion in compliance with the *Head Movement Constraint*:

(18)   *Disjunctive > Counterfactual > Presuppositional > Interrogative*

A further prediction that follows from such a restrictive syntactic theory – and already borne out by Contemporary Venetian data, while still waiting to be tested against Goldonian Venetian - is that the inversion pattern should be barred from the remaining structural contexts it associates with in many dialects (consisting of pseudo-interrogatives, presuppositional exclamatives, hypothetical and optative clauses, etc)[5] whenever, as is the

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[5] In Benincà's (1989) analysis, the contexts which allow for inverted structures are the following (here illustrated with central Friulian data): each of them matches with an emotionally or mentally salient attitude of the speaker toward the propositional content expressed, which makes it plausible to postulate as many functional heads as the distinctive interpretative features identified from time to time turn out to be (except for the possibility of encoding two readings under the same functional head, when relevant structural solidarities come to the surface, as it seems to be the case for the *hypothetical* and o*ptative* interpretations, summarized under the *Counterfactual°* head, and for the *pseudo-interrogative* and *presuppositional exclamative readings* – subsumed under the *Presuppositional°* head):

Hypotetical-disjunctive construction: the subject's financial condition is dismissed as irrelevant by the speaker:

(i)   sedi-***al*** pùar o sedi-***al*** sior, no m'   impuarte.
         be-Scl poor or be-Scl rich not to-me matters
         'I don't care whether he's rich or poor.'

case in Modern Venetian, it is not found in prototypical interrogative clauses: this expectation follows from the fact that, if the verb is not allowed to reach the first functional head of the hierarchy – namely, *Interrogative°* - the other steps of the scale (namely, *Presuppositional°, Counterfactual°*, etc.) remain out of its reach, owing to the principle of successive cyclicity imposed by the *Head Movement Constraint* to its movement (as straightforwardly confirmed by the un-inverted articulation of optative clauses in contemporary Venetian).

Finally, the fact that the same paradigm of diachronic variation is to be found in other grammatical systems of a number of Northern Italian dialects (as illustrated below for two generations of speakers of the dialect of Aldeno – in the district of Trento) suggests that the dynamics involved by the syntactic change at stake are overlapping and similarly consist in the

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If-clauses of conditional sentences*:* defining the condition under which the event of going could take place:

(ii)   vinisi-***al*** tjo pari, o   podaresin là
       came-Scl your father Scl could   go
       'if your father came, we could go'

Optative clause: the speaker expresses the wish he had told the truth, in contrast with what the facts bear testimony to:

(iii)   ti   vess-***jo*** dit la veretàt!
        you had-Scl told the truth
        'if only I had told you the truth!'

Pseudo-interrogatives: the speaker expresses his dismay for what he's forced to see:

(iv)   ce   mi toci-***al***   di vjodi!
       what me must-Scl of see
       'what I'm forced to see!'

Presuppositional exclamative: the negation expresses the speaker's negative presupposition with respect to the fact of having to pay the fine, which, however, is contradicted by the facts:

(v)   no mi toci-***al***   di pajà la multe!
      not me must-Scl of pay the fine
      'I even have to pay the fine!'

Direct interrogative clauses: *Yes-/No-*Questions (vi) and *Wh-*Questions (vi'):

(vi)   vegni-***al***   Toni?   (vi')   cui vegni-***al***?
       comes-Scl Toni   *who comes-Scl*
       'is Toni coming?'   'who's coming?'

elimination of the verb displacement rule, in compliance with Economy Principles internal to the organization of the language[6].

(19) a. *Endo* **Ø se-*t***   nà?
         where Ø are-you.2SG.CL gone

                          (Aldeno: Lucianer: 1957) - C°; + **VS**

      b. *Nd(o)* è **che *te***   **sei** na?
         where is that you.2SG.CL are gone
         'Where have you gone?'

                          (Aldeno: Faes: 1982) + C°; - **VS**

      c. *Perché* **Ø *te***   **cori** cosita?
         why   Ø you.2SG.CL run like-this?
         'Why do you run like this?'

                          (Aldeno: Faes: 1982) - C°; - **VS**

In the case of Aldeno, the transition from an inverted to an un-inverted organization of the interrogative clause (VS → SV) seems to have passed through a third, intermediate stage (the one exemplified under 19b) in which the absence of the inversion VS is somehow imputable to the cleft construction, entailing the insertion of a lexically realized complementizer '*che*' in C°, which would hinder the verb from moving to the left of the Subject. In Modern Venetian, this stage seems to be documented by *Wh-*

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[6] Parry (1997) singles out three evolutionary steps in the transformations which affected interrogative constructions starting from the first texts of the Northern Romance area: a more archaic one, in which the order was always VS and the presence of the enclitic pronoun excluded the proclitic one (at least up to 400, when free and clitic forms started to be distinguished):

(i) **Creis tu** zo que dit lo Vangeli?   **VS**
    believe you what that says the Gospel

    (*Sermoni subalpini* 12th and 13th century: Clivio and Danesi 1974 – xiv-xv: I: 117)

A second stage, which dates back to the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, in which a proclitic pronoun co-occurs with an enclitic one:

(ii) Quant   pì   **a** s'podrà**lo** fè?   **SVS**
    how-much more he might-he do

    (Pipino, 1783: 138)

And a third one still *in fieri*, in which the interrogative constructions with inversion tend to go out of use:

(iii) Cosa **it   veule** dì?   **SV**
    what you want say

    ('*L Cotel* 1869 of Luigi Pietracqua – Scaglione 1982)

(cleft)-questions like (6) quoted above: *Cossa* xe **che *el* fa**?, what is *that* he.3SG.M.CL does, as an alternative to: *Cossa **el** fa*?, what he.3SG.M.CL does. Schematically, the steps the reanalysis moves through are the following, as reflected by the variation phenomenology observed inter-dialectally in synchrony (where example (20) corresponds to 18th century, Goldonian Venetian, in addition to Lucianer's dialect of Aldeno; the structure illustrated in (20') is found in a few dialects, such as the Piedmont dialect of Oglianico and in Western Friulian; (21) mirrors a stage in-between, with a cleft construction, attested in Faes' (Aldeno) grammar, and, to a certain extent, in Modern Venetian; example (21'), on the other hand, points to a further possibility spread across Northern Italian dialects, as the dialect of Agliano quoted in (10b); finally, example (22) refers to Modern Venetian and to Faes' (Aldeno) grammar).

(20)   Cosa **dice-*CL***?
       what says-CL

(20') [Cosa ***CL* dice-*CL***?]
       what CL says-CL

(21)   Cosa è ***che CL* dice**?
       what is that CL says

(21') Cosa ***che CL* dice**?
       what that CL says

(22)   Cosa ***CL* dice**?
       what CL says
       'What does he/she say?'

Table 2				
Generations	***Wh-word***	*Compl.*	**V-to-Inter°**	**Inversion:VS**
I stage: Goldoni ~ Lepschy	*+ cosa, ndo…*	- C°: ∅	+	+
II stage: Modern Ven.	*+ cosa, ndo…*	+ C°	-	-
III stage: Modern Ven.	*+ cosa, ndo...*	- C°: ∅	-	-

4.1 An hypothesis on the point the change moved from

Upon a closer examination, the data-base investigated seems to let further evolutionary details come to the surface, so much so that new tesserae can be added to the mosaic of the parametric change hypothesized: more precisely, there appears to be sound corroborative evidence indicating that the parametric change first affected a specific typology of interrogative

structures – normally referred to as *echo* or *rhetorical questions* – to subsequently spread to the totality of un-embedded interrogatives. As far as this class of interrogatives is concerned, in fact, the three varieties of Venetian investigated converge on a uniform SV-articulation:

(23) *Marc.:* Ho   maridà   vostra fia.
          have.1SG married your   daughter
          'I have married your daughter.'

    a.   *Pell.:* **La**   **xè** *maridada*?   (*STB*: I.4.10) **SV**

    b.   *Pell.:* **La**   **xe** maridada?   Giulio Lepschy **SV**

    c.   *Pell.:* **Ea**   **xe** sposada?   Modern Venetian **SV**
          she.3SG.F.CL is married
          'Is she married?'
          (The question gives voice to all the surprise Pellegrino[7] experiences at the shock news he has just been given that his daughter has been married)

Marc.: M'intendo: la xe promessa.
      'I mean: she is engaged'

Pell.: Chi l'ha promessa?
      'Who did this?'

(24) *Tod.:* Cossa diavolo feu?   In cossa ve perdeu? *No fè   gnente.*
       what hell   do.2SG in what you lose   not do.2PL nothing
       'What the hell are you doing? What are you wasting your time in? You do nothing!'

    a.   *Des.*: **La**   **dise** che no fazzo gnente? (STB: I.6.5) **SV**

    b.   *Des.*: **La**   **dixe** che no fasso gnente? Lepschy   **SV**

    c.   *Des.*: **Ea**   **dixe** che no fasso   gnente? Mod Ven. **SV**
          he.3SG.M.CL says that not do.1SG nothing?
          'Do you say that I do nothing?'

          (Irritated question: 'And you dare to say..?')

Me   par   de far qualcossa e   più   de   qualcossa.
to-me seems to   do   something and more than something
it   seems to me that I do something and even more than something

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Mi a Rialto, mi in Piazza,   mi a Palazzo,   mi a pagar..
me at Rialto me at St. Marco Square, me at Palace,…, me to pay..
'It seems to me that I do something and even more than something.
Me at Rialto, me at St. Marco Square, me at Palace, …. me around to
pay,…'

5. Summary and provisional conclusions

The analysis of the empirical sub-domain of (unembedded) interrogative
clauses has brought to the surface great structural variation across Veneto
dialects and, more in general, across contemporary Northern Italian dialects
(VS of Bellunese (Bl), Paduan (Pd) and Rueglio (To) - *versus* SV of
Modern Venetian and Agliano (At) – limitedly to *Wh*-Questions, with all
the syntactic solidarities matching with the VS/SV alternation in the
domain of optative clauses). However, what might at first impose itself as a
case of idiosyncratic and random synchronic variation turns out amenable
to an underlying principle of regularity if, sticking to Ferdinand de
Saussure's teachings, our research follows a further, diachronic line of
inquiry: as a matter of fact, the analysis of the evolution of the Venetian
dialect (along with the dialect of Aldeno – Trento) makes possible to
identify intermediate stages in the diachronic process which promotes the
elimination of the syntactic movement of the verb to the position of
complementizer (VS → SV). Modern Veneto dialects happen to embody
and mirror these discrepant evolutionary moments: inter-dialectal variation
thus becomes a by-product of the different parametric values languages
activate in dependence on the position they occupy in the evolutionary
continuum reconstructed (as allowed for under the *Principles and
Parameters Theory*: Chomsky 1981a, b; 1986).

To conclude, we might say with Gaston Paris that 'Synchrony
summarizes diachrony' (1888: *Revue des Patois Gallo-Romans*) and an
integrated – synchronic and diachronic – approach confirms itself as the
most suitable instrument to provide an explanation for syntactic variation
phenomena, in tune with the objectives of the *ASIS* Project under which the
present research has been carried out: on these premises, the macroscopic
differences of syntactic codification singled out on the surface between
interrogative clauses – both synchronically and diachronically - can be
reduced to a *unique, discrepant parametric value* that has to be worked out
at an abstract level of analysis.

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