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# Subject and impersonal clitics in northern Italian dialects<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The present contribution focuses on the interaction between the impersonal *si/se* and subject clitics in northern Italian dialects. In western dialects, *si* co-occurs with a non-agreeing clitic form (while it cannot co-occur with object clitics in the so-called passive-*si* construction); in Venetan dialects, the co-occurrence of *se* and subject clitics is degraded/ungrammatical, while in Friulian the combination is acceptable, but the subject clitic is dropped. I argue that the peculiar behaviour of northern Italian dialects results from the Multiple-Agree relation holding between T,  $s_{arb}$ , and the argument of passive-like constructions (D’Alessandro 2007), coupled with language-specific constraints on the realisation of T’s features (Calabrese & Pescarini 2014).

**Keywords:** impersonal, arbitrary, clitics, Italian dialects, Distributed Morphology.

## 1. Introduction

This paper examines the interaction between subject clitics and the clitic *si/se* triggering an arbitrary interpretation (henceforth  $s_{arb}$ ; Manzini 1986; Cinque 1988 a.o.).  $s_{arb}$  constructions feature an implicit argument denoting a set of human individuals that may contain the speaker. The null argument usually corresponds to the external argument of transitive and unergative verbs and, to a lesser extent, the internal argument of unaccusatives (Dobrovie Sorin 1998, 2006; Parry 1998). In what follows, I focus on the alternation between two  $s_{arb}$  constructions featuring transitive verbs (on terminological issues, see also D’Alessandro 2007: 39):

- i. the passive-like construction (PASS), in which the subject is the (third-person) internal argument, see (1);<sup>2</sup>
- ii. the impersonal construction *stricto sensu* (IMP)<sup>3</sup>, in which the verb takes an accusative argument, which is usually realised as a clitic pronoun or, to a lesser extent, as a DP<sup>4</sup>.

- (1) Questa sera si leggono due libri. (PASS)  
This evening  $s=^5$  read.3PL two books  
‘This evening we will read two books’

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<sup>1</sup> To Andrea, my mentor.

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<sup>2</sup> Besides the two constructions illustrated above, it is worth mentioning a third one, usually dubbed ‘the middle *si* construction’, which is a kind of passive-like construction without specific time reference (Cinque 1988). Middles differ from passive-like constructions in that the former have a property reading and occur more readily with a preverbal subject (more on this in section 3).

- (i) Quel libro si legge facilmente. (middle)  
That book  $s=$  reads easily  
‘That book is easy to read’

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars – Cennamo (1993, 1995, 1997); Parry (1998) among others – use the term *passive* to refer to  $s$ -constructions having the subject in preverbal position. However, I will argue that preverbal subjects of passive-like constructions are in A’ position (see §3 and Raposo & Uriagereka 1996).

<sup>4</sup> According to D’Alessandro (2007: 55), the agreeing variant denotes accomplishment predicates, while the nonagreeing variant denotes activity predicates. In what follows I will concentrate on the former, disregarding the latter, which is accepted by a subset of speakers.

<sup>5</sup> Following the Leipzig Glossing Rules, cliticization is signalled with the symbol “=”.

- (2) a. %Questa sera si legge due libri. (IMP)  
 This evening s= read.3SGtwo books  
 ‘This evening we will read two books’  
 b. Questa sera li si legge  
 This evening them= s= read  
 ‘This evening we will read them (two books)’

I show that, although  $s_{arb}$  does not behave as a fully-fledged subject clitic, it nonetheless exhibits a puzzling interaction with subject clitics. I argue that the peculiar behaviour of northern Italian dialects (henceforth NIDs) results from the Multiple-Agree relation holding between T,  $s_{arb}$ , and the argument of passive-like constructions (D’Alessandro 2007), coupled with language-specific constraints on the realisation of T’s features (Calabrese & Pescarini 2014).

The structure of the paper is as follows: sections 2, 3, and 4 overview the main features of  $s_{arb}$  constructions in western NIDs, Venetan, and Friulian dialects, respectively; section 5 deals with further irregularities in the placement of  $s_{arb}$  with respect to other clitic elements.

## 2. Western NIDs

In Romance languages, the IMP construction is attested in a subset of the languages allowing the PASS construction. In languages lacking the IMP construction, such as Romanian,  $s_{arb}$  cannot occur with object clitics, as shown in (3). Furthermore, since double passives are generally not allowed,  $s_{arb}$  cannot occur with passives in IMP-less dialects, as shown in (4) (Dobrovie Sorin 1998, 2006)

- (3) a. (Le materie umanistiche) le si studia in questa università (Italian)  
 b. \*(Stiințele umane) le se predă în această universitate (Romanian)  
 (the humanities) them= s= studies in this university  
 ‘You can study the humanities in this university’
- (4) a. Spesso si è traditi dai falsi amici (Italian)  
 b. \*Adesea se este trădat de prieteni falși (Romanian)  
 Frequently s= is betrayed by friends false  
 ‘One is frequently betrayed by false friends’

Similar restrictions are found in Italo-Romance dialects (Parry 1998; 2005: 216-219). Eastern NIDs such as Venetan, Lombard, and Friulian dialects allow both PASS and IMP constructions, while western NIDs such as Ligurian and Piedmontese exhibit a pattern akin to the one in Romanian, in which  $s_{arb}$  cannot occur in passives or co-occur with accusative clitics; see (5) and (6):

- (5) a. Quando che se vien veci, se ze desmentegà dai zovini (Vicentino, east. NID)  
 When that s= come old, s= is forgotten by.the young  
 b. \*Quand ch’ as ven vej, as ven dësmentià dai giovo (Pied., Parry 1998: 91)  
 When that s= come old, s= come forgotten by.the young  
 ‘When one becomes old, one is forgotten by the young’
- (6) a. Lose magna doman (Vicentino)  
 it=s= eats tomorrow  
 b. U s (\*lu) mângia adman (Pied.; Monregalese)  
 SCL= s= it= eats tomorrow  
 ‘We will eat it tomorrow’

Notice that, like Romanian, western NIDs do not allow  $s_{arb}$  to combine with accusative clitics, but dative, locative and partitive clitics are free to co-occur with  $s_{arb}$ , as shown in (7). This means that the above restriction does not result from a generalised ban on clitic combinations, but instead hinges on the Case-licensing mechanism.

- (7) a. a s jë disìa (Pied., Parry 1998: 87)  
 SCL= s= to.him/her/them= say.impf  
 ‘One used to say to them’  
 b. a s në contratavo minca ann quatr mila chilo  
 SCL= s= of.them exchanged.hands each year four thousand kilos  
 ‘Each year four thousand kilos of them exchanges hands’

Some western NIDs such as Genovese (Ligurian) are more liberal than the others as they allow first or second person accusative clitics to co-occur with  $s_{arb}$  (Mendikoetxea & Battye 1990). I will not discuss here the variation across western NIDs; for a principled account, see Pescarini (2017).

- (8) a. Finalmente me/te se vedde (Genovese)  
 At last me/you= s= sees  
 ‘At last, one sees me’  
 b.\*I se leza  
 them= s= reads  
 ‘one reads them’

### 3. Venetan

Eastern NIDs have been reported to allow both IMP and PASS constructions, but in this section I will show that the alternation is less clear than previously thought.

The distinction between PASS and IMP constructions is often blurred when the subject of PASS is postverbal. In many Venetan dialects, postverbal subjects of PASS cannot be distinguished from objects of IMP because postverbal subjects are not doubled by subject clitics and the verb shows no plural agreement in the third person.

To observe a contrast between IMP and PASS constructions, we must turn to preverbal subjects. Crucially, with preverbal subjects, PASS sentences are degraded. For Trentino, Zubizarreta (1982: 150ff) reports the ungrammaticality of the PASS construction in (9) (contrasted with the IMP counterpart in (9)), while for Paduan and Venetian, Cinque (1988: 573-574) concludes that they “appear not to allow for passive *si* with specific time reference (Paola Benincà (personal communication) and Lepschy (1984, 71)), but only to allow for it with generic time reference.” (more on this below):

- (9) a. \*Le castagne se magna col vin caldo. (Trentino, Cinque 1988: 573)  
 The chestnuts s= eats with.the wine hot  
 ‘Chestnuts are eaten with hot wine.’  
 b. Le castagne, se le magna col vin caldo.  
 The chestnuts s= them= eats with.the wine hot  
 ‘Chestnuts se (one) eats them with hot wine.’
- (10) a.\*Maria se ga invità na volta. (Paduan, Cinque 1988: 574)  
 Maria s= has invited one time  
 ‘Maria was invited once.’  
 b.\*Ana dovaria verse ciamà do volte.

- Ana should have=*s* called two times  
 ‘Ana should have se been called twice.’
- c.\*Mario se ga visto in strada poco fa.  
 Mario s= has seen in street a.while ago  
 ‘Mario se has (was) seen in the street a while ago.’

In what follows, I claim that the marginality of (9) and (10) is related to the position of preverbal subject in PASS constructions and, in turn, to the syntax of subject clitics. First, I will show that the preverbal subjects of PASS occupy an A’ position (for a similar conclusion, see Raposo & Uriagereka 1996); second, since topicalised subjects are expected to co-occur with subject clitics (Benincà & Poletto 2004), I will argue that the ungrammaticality of (9) and (10) results from an incompatibility between *s<sub>arb</sub>* and subject clitics.

As for preverbal subjects, notice that a sentence with the order *subject* > *s<sub>arb</sub>* > *verb* cannot be uttered in wide focus environments as (11), meaning that preverbal subjects of PASS constructions yield a topic/comment partition. Furthermore, unlike canonical subjects in A position, the preverbal subject of *s<sub>arb</sub>* constructions cannot be a controller, as shown in (12) (Belletti 1982a, 1982b), and cannot be pronominalized by the It. weak subject pronoun *egli* ‘he’, as in (13).

- (11) - Cos’è successo?  
 ‘What happened?’  
 - #Una torta si è mangiata (vs si è mangiata una torta)  
 A cake s= is eaten  
 ‘we ate a cake’
- (12) I miei genitori<sub>i</sub> si sono salutati prima di PRO\*<sub>i</sub> partire  
 The my parents s= are greeted before of leaving  
 ‘We greeted my parents before we/\*they left’
- (13) \*egli/lui si è scelto  
 He s= is chosen  
 ‘He has been chosen’

The tests in (11)-(13) confirm that the preverbal subject of PASS constructions is in fact topicalised and, as such, it is expected to be resumed by a subject clitic. Benincà and Poletto (2004) show that, with preverbal subjects, the clitic seems to be optional, see (14). However, if a dislocated object intervenes between the subject and the verb as in (14), then the clitic cannot be omitted. This means that the clitic is obligatory whenever the subject is left dislocated and that the optionality of (14)a is only apparent, as the presence of the clitic ultimately depends on the A/A’ position of the subject.

- (14) a. Mario (l) compra na casa  
 Mario (he=) buys a house  
 ‘Mario is going to buy a house’
- b. Mario, na casa, no \*(l) la compra  
 Mario, a house, not (he=) it= will.buy  
 ‘Mario is not going to buy a house’

To summarize, subject clitics are expected to double topicalised subjects, including the preverbal subjects of PASS. If this analysis is on the right track, we expect Venetan to allow PASS sentences in which a topicalised/null subject is resumed/doubled by a subject clitic. In fact, Lepschy (1983/1989, 1984/1989) claims that PASS constructions featuring a subject clitic (which precedes

$s_{arb}$ ) are fine and alternate freely with the IMP construction, in which the internal argument is pronominalized by an accusative clitic, which follows  $s_{arb}$ :

- (15) a. La se vede ~~Mar~~ia (PASS; Venetian, Lepschy 1986)  
 She= s= sees  
 ‘One sees her’  
 b. Se la vede ~~Mar~~ia (IMP)  
 s= her= sees  
 ‘One sees her’

However, for many Venetan speakers, the PASS structure in (15)a is less acceptable than the IMP one in (15)b. I illustrate the contrast with data from the Venetan dialect of Palmanova (Laura Vanelli, p.c.): the PASS structure in (16)a is far less acceptable than that in (16)b, in which the internal argument is left dislocated and resumed by an accusative clitic.

- (16) a.\*?(Le patate) le se magna doman (Palmanova, Ven.)  
 The potatoes they= s= eats tomorrow  
 ‘Potatoes will be eaten tomorrow’  
 b. (Le patate), se le magna doman  
 The potatoes s= them= eats tomorrow  
 ‘Potatoes will be eaten tomorrow’

Notice that the contrast becomes stronger if we turn to a masculine singular clitic (Pescarini 2015). In fact, the contrast between the PASS and IMP constructions in sentences like (15) and (16) is partly blurred as object and subject clitics are identical. One might therefore accept (15)a and (16)a as instances of the IMP construction with a deviant clitic order; we will see in section 5 that in several NIDs the order of  $s_{arb}$  with respect to other object clitics is not fixed and it is worth noting that the order accusative >  $s_{arb}$  is the one in Italian. However, if we turn to cases in which the subject form (e.g. *el*) differs from the accusative one (e.g. *lo* ‘him/it’), the contrast between PASS and IMP construction is clearer:

- (17) a.\*(El formajo) el se magna doman (Palmanova, Ven.)  
 (The cheese) it.NOM= s= eats tomorrow  
 ‘Tomorrow we will eat cheese’  
 b. (El formajo) se lo magna doman  
 (The cheese) s= it.ACC= eats tomorrow  
 ‘Tomorrow we will eat cheese’

The data in (16) and (17) show that the asymmetry between PASS and IMP constructions holds even if the subject clitic is present. Hence, given the above data, one may argue that the marginality/ungrammaticality of PASS constructions *results* from the incompatibility between  $s_{arb}$  and subject clitics; subject clitics are mandatory with dislocated subjects, but they cannot co-occur with  $s_{arb}$  in PASS.

Before exploring this hypothesis, it is worth addressing the aforementioned asymmetry between PASS constructions with and without specific time reference, namely the PASS *stricto sensu* and the so-called middle construction (fn. 2; Cinque 1988: 558-566). From a semantic point of view, PASS constructions denote an event, while middle constructions trigger a property reading. As shown in the following examples, the subject of the middle construction, unlike that of PASS, behaves as a canonical preverbal subject that can occur under wide focus and can control into an adjunct clause, cf. (19):

- (18) a. la pasta si mangia facilmente  
property reading: ‘pasta is easy to eat, anybody can eat pasta’ → middle  
\*event reading: ‘we are likely to eat pasta’ → PASS
- b. facilmente si mangia la pasta  
\*property reading: ‘pasta is easy to eat, anybody can eat pasta’ → middle  
event reading: ‘we are likely to eat pasta’ → PASS
- (19) a. la pasta<sub>i</sub> si mangia facilmente (a patto d’ PRO<sub>i</sub> essere senza sugo)  
The pasta <sub>s=</sub> eats easily (provided to be without sauce)  
‘Pasta is easy to eat (if it does not have sauce)’
- b. domani la pasta<sub>i</sub> si mangia di sicuro (a patto d’ PRO\*<sub>i</sub> essere  
Tomorrow the pasta <sub>s=</sub> eats for sure (provided to be  
senza sugo)  
without sauce)  
‘Tomorrow we will certainly eat pasta (if it does not have sauce)’

This may explain why in languages like Paduan and Venetian the PASS construction is ungrammatical with specific time reference (see Cinque’s quote above): sentences like (9) and (10) are degraded because the subject is dislocated and, as such, must be resumed by a subject clitic (Benincà and Poletto 2004). Conversely, sentences without specific time reference are fine because the subject can occupy an A position, where it can occur without being doubled by a subject clitic.

Let us summarise the overall scenario:

- 1) the PASS construction is forbidden in the context in which subject clitics are mandatory, i.e. when the subject of the PASS construction is left-dislocated.
- 2) the PASS construction is grammatical when the preverbal subject is in an A position as in the middle construction with generic time reference. Recall that, with preverbal subjects in A position, subject clitics are not mandatory (Benincà & Poletto 2004).
- 3) The PASS construction is fine when the subject occurs postverbally. In this case, subject clitics do not occur, but the PASS construction (often) becomes identical to the IMP one as the verb does not show number agreement.

Given the above data, I ultimately advance the hypothesis that the marginality of the PASS construction in Venetan follows from a restriction on the co-occurrence of subject clitics and  $s_{arb}$ .

This hypothesis allows us to account for the Venetan pattern without discarding the sound parametric analysis of arbitrary constructions put forth in works such as Cinque 1988, Roberts 2010. These works build on the generalisation that the IMP construction is allowed iff the PASS construction is allowed, which is at odds with the Venetan data. As Cinque 1988: 577 observes, “I see no simple way to reconcile the Venetian/Paduan case with that of the remaining Romance languages.” However, if we account for the Venetan pattern as an orthogonal agreement restriction ruling out subject clitics in the context of  $s_{arb}$ , then we may keep the overall parametric analysis unchanged.

The remainder of this section shows that the hypothesized restriction results from the specific agreement pattern holding in  $s_{arb}$  constructions. To do so, some remarks on the representation of clitics are in order. Unlike (non-colloquial) French subject clitics, NIDs subject clitics are usually analysed as agr-like elements licensing a *pro* or doubling an overt DP subject. For the sake of clarity, in what follows I adopt a split representation in which T’s features are scattered across several positions. I remain agnostic as to whether the template below results from fission (*à la* Roberts 2010, 2012, 2014) or exists *a priori* (*à la* Poletto 2000, Manzini & Savoia 2005). Following Roberts (2010), clitics are represented as bundles of agreement features resulting from the Agree relation holding between a T probe and a (defective) argument:

- (20) [T<sub>1</sub> iφ<sub>T</sub> ... [T<sub>2</sub> v ...

↓  
SCL

Given the above analysis of subject clitics, let us introduce object clitics in the representation. Object clitics, like subject clitics, will be represented as bundles of  $\phi$  features. Object clitics, including  $s_{arb}$ , are always lower than subject clitics and, unlike subject clitics, move along with the inflected verb under T-to-C movement. I therefore assume that object clitics (and  $s_{arb}$ , cf. Manzini & Savoia 2001: 251) are merged with the verb in a previous stage of the derivation (Roberts 2010; Calabrese & Pescarini 2011) and then moved to T. Whether the [... v] constituent is a complex head (Roberts 2010) or a remnant phrase (Poletto & Pollock 2009) is orthogonal to the present analysis.

(21) [T<sub>1</sub> i $\phi$ <sub>T</sub> ... [T<sub>2</sub> [i $\phi$  v] ...  
           ↓                  ↓  
       SCL                  OCL

Under this representation, no interaction is supposed to hold between subject and object clitics and, *mutatis mutandis*, between subject clitics/agreement and  $s_{arb}$ .

However, this is not the case (more on this below). What is of interest here is that  $s_{arb}$ , even if placed in [... v], triggers a clear agreement restriction on T, banning first or second person subjects, cf. (22) vs (22):

(22) a. Lui      si      vede spesso   in televisione  
       b.\*Tu     si      vedi spesso   in televisione  
           he/\*you s=   see often   on TV  
           ‘One can often see him/\*you on TV’

D’Alessandro (2007) argues that the ungrammaticality of (22) is due to a condition on Multiple-Agree (Anagnostopoulou 2003) in which T probes  $s_{arb}$  and the subject at the same time. This disallows the occurrence of subjects whose Person features are incompatible with the {arb} specification of  $s_{arb}$ . Rephrasing D’Alessandro’s claim, let us assume that when  $s_{arb}$  occurs, the {arb} specification spreads across T projections, thus restricting the range of T’s possible goals to third person, i.e. non-person, arguments (for an alternative account, see Stegovec 2017):

(23)           ←-----  
           [T<sub>1</sub> {arb} ... [T<sub>2</sub> [{arb} v]  
                                   ↓  
                                   *si*

Under (23), the restriction on Venetan subject clitics begins to receive a principled, though tentative explanation: besides preventing T from agreeing with a first or second person subject, as in (22), the configuration in (23) prevents the occurrence of further agreement markers such as eastern NIDs subject clitics. I will resume this point later, dealing with Friulian data.

Before turning to another group of dialects, however, one may wonder why the restriction in PASS constructions is not attested in western NIDs, which exhibit subject clitics as well. As a tentative answer, I would point to the fact that in Piedmontese and Ligurian the subject of PASS constructions – but the same holds for any type of impersonal construction *lato sensu* – is doubled by a non-agreeing nominative clitic, e.g. *a*:

(24) A      se sciairs  nen  bin  (ël cel / la montagna)  (Parry 1998: 86)  
       SCL= s= sees     not  well  (the sky / the mountain)  
       ‘the sky/the mountain cannot be seen well’



Hence, while Venetan subject clitics are agreement markers, which undergo agreement restrictions when combined with *s<sub>arb</sub>*, in Piedmontese and Liguarian the subject clitic is an invariable particle, acting as an expletive element (for a sound typology of subject clitic pronouns, see Poletto 2000).

#### 4. Friulian

Friulian dialects allow the IMP construction, as *s<sub>arb</sub>* occurs in passives and sentences with accusative clitics, see (25) and (26). Vanelli (1998: 126) notices that, in certain varieties the object clitic is exceptionally placed in enclisis to the finite verb (on related phenomena, see section 5):

- (25) a. Si è pajas masa pouc (Camponè)  
 b. Si è pajas masa puc (S. Michele al Tagliamento)  
*s*= is paid too little  
 ‘people are paid too little’
- (26) a. si lu vjo:t  
*s*= it/him= sees  
 ‘One sees it/him’  
 b. %si vjodi-lu  
*s*= sees=it/him  
 ‘One sees it/him’

The PASS construction is allowed as well, but subject clitics must be omitted<sup>6</sup>:

- (27) a. Patatas a(\*l) si mangjan spess (Camponè)<sup>7</sup>  
 b. Li patatis (\*al) si mangin spess (S. Michele al Tagliamento)  
 c. Lis patatis (\*al) si mangjn simpri (Palmanova, Friulian)  
 The potatoes SCL= *s*= eat often/always

The pattern above may follow from an orthogonal phenomenon as Friulian dialects are subject to a generalized restriction on the co-occurrence of subject and object clitics (what Roberts 1993 dubs ‘object clitic for subject clitic’). As shown in (28), subject clitics tend to be dropped in the presence of object clitics. Analogous phenomena are reported for Valdôtain (Roberts 1993) and Romagnol dialects (Manzini & Savoia 2004; Pescarini 2012)

- (28) a. O vin cantá:t (Friul., Benincà & Vanelli 2005: 67)  
 we= have sung  
 ‘We sang’  
 b. (\*O) lu vin cantá:t  
 we= it=have sung

<sup>6</sup> The subject clitic is allowed when occurring in enclisis as a consequence of V-to-C movement in interrogative clauses:

- (i) a. Si vjo:t la lune  
*s*= see the moon  
 ‘One sees the moon’  
 b. Si vjodi-al?  
*s*= sees=SCL  
 ‘Can you see it (the moon)?’

<sup>7</sup> According to orthographic conventions, in Friulian <gj> stands for /j/.

‘We sang it’

Hence, Friulian differs from western NIDs in allowing the IMP construction and differs from Venetan in allowing the PASS construction. In the latter, however, subject clitics are dropped because of an orthogonal process that deletes subject clitics when co-occurring with object clitics or  $s_{arb}$ .

To clarify the mechanism, I focus on the analysis of a single dialect, the one spoken in Campone (Masutti & Casalicchio 2015). I chose the dialect of Campone because it has a richer array of subject clitics than other Friulian dialects and, by virtue of its complexity, the Camponese system can clarify the behaviour of other eastern NIDs.

First, Camponese has a double subject clitic system, i.e. subject clitics are expressed by two formatives: one – usually a vowel – occurring above negation and the other occurring after negation<sup>8</sup>. The latter realises gender and number agreement features (Poletto 2000; Manzini & Savoia 2009; Calabrese & Pescarini 2014 a.o.).

- (29) a. A no l' ha studia:t (Camponese, Masutti & Casalicchio 2015)  
SCL= not M.SG= has studied  
‘He did not study’  
b. A no i vi:f uchì  
SCL= not M.PL= live here  
‘They do not live here’

We can therefore assume for Camponese the following template, in which two kinds of T’s features (D and  $\phi$  features, respectively) are checked by two probes separated by the position of the negative (clitic?) marker:

- (30)  $iD_T \dots i\Sigma \dots i\phi_T \dots$

Camponese third-person subject clitics can be therefore decomposed as follows (see also Calabrese & Pescarini 2011 on the nearby dialect of Forni di Sotto):

- (31) a. *al* ‘he’  
*a* ‘she’  
*ai* ‘they.M’  
*as* ‘they.F’  
b. *a-* ↔ [D]  
*-l* ↔ [Person: \_\_; Gender: m; Number: sg]  
*-i* ↔ [Person: \_\_; Gender: m; Number: pl]  
*-s* ↔ [Person: \_\_; Gender: f; Number: pl]

Although the verb always agrees with postverbal subjects, the clitic formatives *l/i/s* do not occur with indefinite postverbal subjects (Masutti & Casalicchio 2015).

- (32) a. A \_ son rivaz trei canais  
SCL= are arrived three boys  
‘There arrived three boys’  
b. A \_ son rivaz duciu tarc  
SCL= are arrived all late  
‘They all arrived late/ Everybody arrived late’

<sup>8</sup> The latter is often dropped whenever an object clitic is present, while the vowel *a* is never affected by the presence of other clitic material.

However, in the PASS construction the clitic formatives *l/i/s* are dropped not only with indefinite subjects, but also with definite ones, see (33).

- (33) a. A (\*-s) si manghian patatas  
 SCL= F.PL= s= eats potatoes  
 ‘people eat potatoes’  
 b. A (\*-s) si manghian las patatas ...  
 SCL= F.PL= s= eats the potatoes that I bought yesterday  
 ‘people eat the potatoes that bought yesterday’

With intransitive verbs, the clitic *a* does not occur. This confirms the hypothesis that *a* expresses a D feature, thus occurring if T probes a DP.

- (34) a. (\*a) si è pajas masa pouc  
 s= is paid too little  
 ‘people are paid too little’  
 b. (\*a) si durmis benon uchì  
 s= sleep well here  
 ‘people sleep well here’  
 c. (\*a) si partis doma:n  
 s= leaves tomorrow  
 ‘we will leave tomorrow’

Let us focus on the incompatibility in (33) between  $s_{arb}$  and the subject clitics expressing T’s  $\varphi$ -features. The deletion of the subject clitic formative is not exceptional since Camponese is one of the many Friulian dialects that exhibit the ‘object clitic for subject clitic’ pattern (Roberts 1993, 2015). In Camponese, the subject clitics *l/i/s* are omitted whenever a third-person object clitic is present, while the D clitic *a* is never dropped (Masutti & Casalicchio 2015: fn. 30):

- (35) A no (\*I) l' ha chiatat  
 SCL= not =M.SG =it has found  
 'He has not found it'

Roberts (2015) argues that object clitic for subject clitic effects are due to operations of fission and fusion. Similar operations have been assumed in the analysis of the nearby dialect of Forni di Sotto by Calabrese & Pescarini (2011). In Roberts’s terms, T’s and v’s  $\varphi$ -features, i.e. subject and object agreement markers, are fused under adjacency into a single feature bundle:

- (36)  $[T_1 \text{ i}\varphi_T \dots [T_2 \text{ i}\varphi_V] \dots \rightarrow [T_{1/2} \text{ i}\varphi_T \text{ i}\varphi_V] \dots$

Then, feature specifications are deleted/simplified, giving rise to the object clitic for subject clitic effect (recall that the clitic *a* can be spelled out because it realizes a D feature, which is located in a higher position):

- (37)  $[\text{i}\varphi_T \text{ i}\varphi_V] \rightarrow [\text{i}\varphi_V]$

The same holds for clitic combinations featuring  $s_{arb}$ : after T’s and v’s features are fused,  $s_{arb}$ ’s features obliterate T’s features, thus impeding the insertion of the subject clitic. In my opinion, the ‘object clitic for subject clitic’ acts as a *repair strategy* (Calabrese 2005; 1994, 2011 on clitics) avoiding the presence of subject clitics in the PASS construction.

In conclusion, I argued that the marginality of PASS in Venetan results from an agreement restriction banning the co-occurrence of subject clitics and  $s_{arb}$ . Western NIDs do not exhibit any restriction as the subject clitic occurring in PASS construction is a non-agreeing, expletive clitic, while in Friulian, PASS constructions are grammatical because the restriction is overridden by an orthogonal process, namely the ‘object clitic for subject clitic’ repair.

## 5. An aside on placement phenomena

Given the above interactions between  $s_{arb}$  and T’s features, one might wonder whether in NIDs  $s_{arb}$  can be eventually treated as a subject clitic itself. Since  $s_{arb}$  pronominalizes the grammatical subject of IMP constructions and the logical subject of PASS constructions, the hypothesis has already been advanced in the literature. However, the only convincing clue in favour of this hypothesis comes from the dialect of Borgomanero (Tortora 2015), where complement clitics, including the reflexive *si*, stand enclitic to the inflected verb, while subject clitics and – crucially – the arbitrary *as* occur in preverbal position:

- (38) a. Al vônga =si. (Borgomanerese, Tortora 2015)  
 He= sees =himself  
 ‘He sees himself’  
 b. As môngia bej chilonsé.  
 s= eat well here  
 ‘You eat well here’

This led Tortora to conclude that “[b]ecause there are no OCLs in Borgomanerese which otherwise appear proclitically, the pre-verbal position of impersonal *s* in (115) [= (38)b] suggests that this is in fact a subject clitic.” (Tortora 2015: 115). The conclusion, however, cannot be extended straightforwardly to all the northern dialects as, under many respects,  $s_{arb}$  does not exhibit the peculiar behaviour of fully-fledged subject clitics (see also Manzini & Savoia 2001: 251). For instance,  $s_{arb}$  never undergoes inversion in the dialects exhibiting subject-clitic inversion in interrogative clauses, cf. (39) vs (39):

- (39) a. magne-li mia ancò? (Vicentino, Venetan)  
 eat=they not today  
 ‘Don’t they eat today?’  
 b. se magna / \*magne=se mia ancò?  
 s= eat not today  
 ‘Don’t we/they eat today?’

- (40) a. I me vol ben  
 they= me= wish.3PL well  
 ‘They love me’  
 b. me vol-i ben?  
 me.F= wish.3PL=they well  
 ‘Do they love me’

If we analyse inversion as movement of the [iφ v] constituent above the position hosting subject clitics, the data above show that  $s_{arb}$  moves along with the finite verb, as illustrated below:

- (41) [C            [T1 iφT ... [T2 [iφ v] ...  
 ↑                    ↓                    ↓

However, even if  $s_{arb}$  does not behave as a fully-fledged subject clitic, it is fair to conclude that it does not behave as a proper object clitic, either. Outside of Borgomanerese, the exceptionality of the impersonal  $s_{arb}$  is confirmed by further data from other dialects of Piedmont, where enclisis of object pronouns is allowed only in compound tenses and restructuring environments. Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these contexts allowed a pattern of clitic copying (Parry 1998: 107-110) in which two instances of the object clitic occur, one in enclisis and the other in proclisis (see also Tortora 2014a, 2014b). In present-day dialects, by contrast, the proclitic copy cannot occur anymore, as shown in (42). However, as shown in (43), the impersonal  $s$ - differs from *plain* complement clitics like *lo* as it is still allowed to occur twice and, in contexts where it occurs once, as in (43), it is allowed to stand proclitic to the modal verb:

- (42) a. a l peul di-lo (18th century Piedm., Parry 1998: 108)  
 (S)he= it=can say=it  
 b. a \*(l) peul di-lo (present day Piedm.)  
 (S)he= it=can say=it  
 ‘(S)he can say’

- (43) a. a s peul di-sse  
 EXPL= s= can say=s  
 b. a s peul di  
 EXPL= s= can say  
 c. a peul di-sse  
 EXPL= can say=s  
 ‘One can say’

Another clue of the peculiar status of  $s_{arb}$  comes from Venetan dialects like Venetian (Lepschy 1984/1989). In Venetian, the partitive clitic is *ghene*, which can be analysed as a compound formed by two clitic items (*ghe+ne*). The former element (*ghe*) is dropped if another complement clitic precedes the partitive, see (44)a (Benincà & Vanelli 1982, 14). However, after a subject clitic or  $s_{arb}$ , *ghe* cannot be dropped, see (44)b and (44)c respectively:

- (44) a. el me (\*ghe)ne parla  
 he= to.me= of.it= speaks  
 ‘He speaks to me about it’  
 b. el \*(ghe)ne parla  
 he= of.it= speaks  
 ‘He speaks about it’  
 c. se \*(ghe)ne parla  
 s= of.it= speaks  
 ‘One speaks about it’

Given (44)a and (44)b, one might argue that *ghe* is dropped when another clitic occurs in the same local domain, i.e. in [... v], while *ghe* is not dropped if a clitic occurs in T, cf. (45) vs (45). Under this analysis, the pattern in (44) means that, when  $s_{arb}$  is placed in [... v], something happens, preventing *ghe* from being dropped (more on this below).

- (45) a. [T<sub>1</sub> el ... [T<sub>2</sub> [**me** (**\*ghe**)ne v] ...

- b. [T<sub>1</sub> el ... [T<sub>2</sub> [\*(*ghe*)ne v] ...

Further evidence of the exceptionality of *s<sub>arb</sub>* comes from the placement of *s<sub>arb</sub>* with respect to other complement clitics (Manzini & Savoia 2001) as it turns out that the order in many NIDs is not rigid. Lepschy 1983/1989; 1984/1989) notices that in modern Venetian, the impersonal *se* precedes the accusative clitic, as shown in (46). However, besides the order in (46), several authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also allow the opposite order (*viz*, accusative > impersonal), which is in fact attested in other Venetan vernaculars. According to Lepschy, similar alternations are found in combinations with first and second person dative clitics as well.

- (46) a. *se lo tol* (Venetian, 20<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> c.)  
*s= it=take*  
 ‘one takes it’  
 b. *no la se ga da mandar via* (Venetian, 19<sup>th</sup> c.)  
*not it/her= s= has of send away*  
 ‘one should not turn her away’

Vicentino, another Venetan dialect, exhibits a similar alternation, but in combination with the third person dative clitic *ghe*:

- (47) a. *Ghe se porta un libro.* (Vicentino)  
*to.him= s= bring a book*  
 ‘One brings him a book’  
 b. *Se ghe porta un libro.*  
*s= to.him= bring a book*  
 ‘One brings him a book’

Mendrisiotto, a dialect spoken in Ticino (Lurà 1987: 162), exhibits the same pattern of alternation with either dative or accusative clitics. The latter alternation is attested in other dialects of Ticino such as Bellinzonese (Cattaneo 2009):

- (48) a. *a la mam granda, sa ga / ga sa dava dal vö* (Mendrisiotto, Tic.)  
*to the mum great s= to.her= / to.her= s= give the vö*  
 ‘We were used to addressing the grandmother with the *vö* form’  
 b. *a sa l / al sa tö migna*  
*PART s= it=/ it=s= takes NEG*  
 ‘One does not take it’  
 (49) a. *Sa la ved tüt i matin in piazza* (Bellinzonese, Tic.)  
*s= it/her= sees all the morning in square*  
 ‘One sees her/it in the square every morning’  
 b. *La sa ved tüt i matin in piazza*  
*it/her= s= sees all the morning in square*  
 ‘One sees her/it in the square every morning’

An account of these alternations is provided by Cattaneo (2009), who argues that third-person object clitics like *la* can ‘rebel’ and exceptionally climb to the positions dedicated to the homophonous third person subject clitics. The analysis builds on Lepschy’s intuition that these alternations result from the identity of third person subject and object clitics. If we assume the hypothesis that subject and object clitics are merged in different positions of the functional spine of the clause, then Cattaneo’s analysis can be reformulated as follows:

(50) a. [T<sub>1</sub> *la* ... [T<sub>2</sub> [*sa la v*] ...

Cattaneo’s analysis is supported by the behaviour of the particle *a* (Lurà 1987: 157; Cattaneo 2009: 27-49), which can combine with the object *la*, but is ungrammatical in combination with the homophonous subject clitic:

(51) a. (A) *la legi, la riviscta*  
 SCL her= read the magazine  
 ‘I read it, the magazine’  
 b. (\*A) *la va a Padova*  
 SCL she= goes to Padova  
 ‘She goes to Padova’

Crucially, when the rebelling object clitic *la* precedes the impersonal *sa*, *a* is ruled out, see (52). This led Cattaneo to conclude that the rebelled *la* is not in its canonical position in [... v], but occupies a higher T position, as illustrated in (53).

(52) a. (A) *sa la ved tüt i matin in piazza*  
 SCL s= her= see.3sg all the morning in square  
 ‘One sees her/it in the square every morning’  
 b. (\*A) *la sa ved tüt i matin in piazza*  
 SCL her= s= see.3sg all the morning in square  
 ‘One sees her/it in the square every morning’

(53) a. [T<sub>1</sub> (\**a*) *la* ... [T<sub>2</sub> [*sa la v*] ...

This analysis, however, cannot hold for the cases in which *s<sub>arb</sub>* can either precede or follow another complement clitic such as the dative *ga/ghe*, cf. (47) and (48). In fact, no probing head is expected to trigger the rebellion of dative clitics. However, I think that Cattaneo’s analysis can be maintained once it is assumed that the rebelling clitic is *s<sub>arb</sub>*, which in certain dialects and under certain conditions can realise a higher bundle of T features, thus giving rise to the above alternations.

It is worth recalling the D’Alessandro-style analysis of agreement provided in the previous sections (repeated below for the sake of clarity): I argued that *s*’s {arb} feature spreads across T projections, thus giving rise to agreement restrictions and ruling out agreeing subject clitics in eastern NIDs.

(54)

[T<sub>1</sub> {arb} ... [T<sub>2</sub> [{arb} v]

↓

*si*

Given (54) and assuming a late insertion model (Halle & Marantz 1993; Calabrese 2003), one might therefore expect that, in languages with subject clitics, the formative *s* may eventually realise the higher feature bundle in T rather than the lower one in v:

(55)

[T<sub>1</sub> {arb} ... [T<sub>2</sub> [{arb} v]

↓                      ↓

Arguably, the environment triggering/allowing (55) is subject to further sub-conditions, which give rise to the kaleidoscopic variation introduced so far. Due to space limitations, I cannot go into details, but it seems to me that the mechanism in (55) provides a promising explanation of all the puzzles introduced in the present section.

Lastly, this hypothesis may shed light on the behaviour of sequences formed by an impersonal and a reflexive clitic, which are a major source of variation across Italian vernaculars. Three main patterns are attested: Italian-type languages, in which the combination is morphologically opaque as one of the two clitics is replaced by another clitic item (e.g. *ci* in (56)a); Venetan/Lombard-type languages, in which the combination is grammatical and transparent as two *s*-s elements can co-occur; Piedmontese-type languages, in which the combination is impossible and speakers must retreat to an indefinite pronoun meaning ‘one’/‘man’.

- (56) a. *ci/\*si si lava* (Italian)  
 b. *se se lava* (Venetan)  
 c. *un/\*s as lava* (Piedmontese, Parry 1998:91)  
 ‘One washes him/herself’

As suggested by Grimshaw (1997, 2000), Maiden (2000), Pescarini (2010) among others, the opacity of clusters displayed by Italian-type languages is probably triggered by an identity-avoidance principle preventing two occurrences of the same exponent within the same cluster. In the light of the previous analysis, one might argue that Venetan-type dialects allow *se se* sequences as  $s_{arb}$  can ‘rebel’, i.e. realise T’s highest head. If so, a sequence of two *se*’s becomes grammatical since the two *se*’s realise feature bundles that are not in the same local domain.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have summarised data concerning the distribution of PASS and IMP constructions in NIDs. Western NIDs seem to lack the IMP construction, thus banning (clitic) objects in arbitrary constructions. Conversely, in Venetan dialects, the most marginal construction is the PASS one, even if the distinction between the two is often blurred because subject clitics do not occur with postverbal subjects, third person subject and object clitics are often identical, and verbs do not exhibit plural agreement in the third person. Lastly, Friulian allow both PASS and IMP constructions, but in the former subject clitics are always dropped, arguably because of an ‘object clitic for subject clitic’ effect.

The type of restriction exhibited by western NIDs has already been accounted for in works such as Cinque (1988), Dobrovie Sorin (1998, 2006), Roberts (2010) on the basis of data from Romanian. On the contrary, the restrictions exhibited by Venetan and Friulian dialects, which challenge previous parametric analyses, have remained almost unnoticed.

I argued that the above restrictions follow from the agreement relation holding between T, the argument of the PASS clause, and  $s_{arb}$ . Besides giving rise to the ban against first or second person subjects in PASS (D’Alessandro 2007), I have entertained the hypothesis that the same mechanism may account for the syntax of subject clitics in PASS constructions and for other puzzling phenomena regarding the placement of  $s_{arb}$  exponents.



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