

# Brazilian Venetan is going *leísta*: Clitic doubling and resumption in a heritage Romance variety

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## Abstract

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This paper discusses language variation in heritage languages, focussing on a peculiar use of the dative clitic *ghe* in Brazilian Venetan, a heritage northern Italo-Romance variety. Corpus data and grammaticality judgments by native speakers showed that, unlike homeland varieties of Venetan, the clitic is used in doubling constructions with both indirect and direct objects. Conversely, accusative clitics do not appear in doubling constructions in Brazilian Venetan, but are limited to cases of resumption of dislocated constituents. This phenomenon is compared to a parallel use of dative clitics with direct objects in some previously described *leísta* varieties of Spanish. I will show that the type of variation attested in Brazilian Venetan accusative and dative clitics depends on different conditions on cliticisation of the two elements. Specifically, while accusative clitics are pronouns that undergo a morphological process of incorporation, dative clitics are merged as agreement markers on the finite verb. The analysis also captures a diachronic change in the distribution of dative clitics in the diachrony of Venetan.

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**Keywords:** clitics, doubling, resumption, heritage, syntax

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## 1. Introduction

Numerous experimental and theoretical studies have focused on investigating changes in the nominal domain among bilingual and heritage speakers. Over the past two decades, researchers have formulated hypotheses and principles, such as the Interface Hypothesis (Sorace and Filiaci 2006), cross-linguistic influence (Hulk and Muller 2000), incomplete acquisition (Montrul 2008), and competence divergence (Pires and Rothman 2007), and have tested them on a variety of heritage varieties. This has led to the detection of predictable patterns of change in various phenomena: the overt realisation of subjects and objects, case, gender, and number. However, the study of pronominal clitics in heritage varieties has received less attention, and it is uncertain whether similar change patterns exist in clitic systems.

This paper aims at exploring the structural and distributional properties of heritage language clitics and formulate generalisations on their behaviour, highlighting their contribution to the broader discussion on the structure of heritage grammars. Specifically, this work focusses on the structure and properties of accusative and dative clitics in a heritage Venetan variety.

Venetan is an Italo-Romance language spoken in north-eastern Italy, in its native settings, as well as southern Brazil, where a variety of the language is used by a wide community of descendants of Venetan immigrants since the 19th century. Brazilian Venetan has been the focus of various recent studies (Frasson 2021, 2022; Guzzo and Garcia 2020; Costantini and Sidraschi 2022), which showed that, while its structural properties are stable, this variety exhibits divergent behaviours with respect to homeland Venetan, especially at the interfaces with PF and LF. These changes are not taken to signal a weakening or a reduction of complexity in the system, but rather the autonomous development of the variety with respect to the homeland variety of Venetan, as well as the dominant language of Brazilian Venetan speakers (Brazilian Portuguese). This paper provides further evidence in such direction and contributes to the discussion on featural change in heritage and bilingual speakers.

The phenomenon analysed in the paper is a peculiar use of the dative clitic *ghe* in Brazilian Venetan; this clitic is used in doubling constructions with both indirect and direct objects. Conversely, accusative clitics do not appear in doubling constructions in Brazilian Venetan, but are limited to cases of resumption of dislocated constituents. This phenomenon is compared to a parallel use of dative clitics with direct objects in some previously described *leísta* varieties of Spanish. I will show that the type of variation attested in Brazilian Venetan accusative and dative clitics depends on different conditions on cliticisation of the two elements. Specifically, while accusative clitics are pronouns that undergo a morphological process of incorporation (Matushansky 2006), dative clitics are merged as agreement markers on the finite verb. The peculiar distribution of dative clitics in Brazilian Venetan is analysed as part of a change process that privileges representational economy.

The paper is organised as follows. In section 2, I will discuss the properties of Romance accusative and dative clitics, focussing in particular on the Venetan paradigms: I present different types of Venetan clitics, introducing their structural and distributional properties. In section 3, I reflect on previous approaches to Romance clitics, presenting some relevant challenges in the establishment of generalisations that

could be applied to accusative and dative clitics alike; I discuss some previously analysed data from *leísta* Spanish, which displays a comparable distribution of dative clitics to that of Brazilian Venetan. In section 4, I present my analysis of Brazilian Venetan clitics; this approach builds on the difference between resumptive and doubling clitics, proposing distinct structural properties and cliticisation paths for accusative and dative clitics: while the former are analysed as regular pronouns that undergo a morphological process of incorporation, the latter are agreement heads merged on a v-head. I connect the type of variation displayed by Brazilian Venetan with respect to homeland varieties of the language to a tendency to favour representational economy (Scontras et al. 2018). Finally, section 5 attempts to capture a change in the distribution of dative clitics in the diachrony of Venetan, building on the analysis presented in the paper; the role of language contact is also briefly discussed in this section. Section 6 concludes the paper.

## 2. Accusative and dative clitics in Venetan: evidence for different clitic classes

### 2.1. Venetan accusative and dative clitics

The set of pronominal clitics in the homeland (Italian) variety of Venetan is particularly rich. In this paper, I will use the system attested in Trevigiano, a Central Venetan variety, to illustrate the paradigm of Venetan clitics. The language displays nominative, reflexive, accusative, dative, locative and partitive clitics. Among them, nominative clitics (‘subject clitics’) are attested only in a few Romance varieties (French, northern Italo-Romance and Rhaeto-Romance languages), while the remaining paradigms closely resemble clitic systems in other Romance languages such as Italian or Catalan. This paper will focus on third person accusative and dative clitics. The full set of Venetan clitics is summarised in table 1.

**Table 1.** Clitic paradigms in Venetan.

	Nominative	Reflexive	Accusative	Dative	Locative	Partitive
1sg	-	<i>me</i>			<i>ghe</i>	<i>ghe-ne</i>
1pl	-	<i>se</i>	<i>ne</i>			
2sg	<i>te</i>	<i>te</i>				
2pl	-	<i>se</i>	<i>ve</i>			
3sgm	<i>el</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>lo</i>	<i>ghe</i>		
3sgf	<i>la</i>		<i>la</i>			
3plm	<i>i</i>		<i>li</i>			
3plf	<i>le</i>		<i>le</i>			

At the morphological level, Venetan displays partially distinct paradigms of accusative and dative clitics. First and second person accusative and dative clitics are formally identical; third person is special, in that accusative clitics have dedicated forms for the two genders and numbers, while dative uses a single clitic form *ghe*.

As in most Romance languages, third person accusative clitics evolved from Latin demonstratives. Their determiner-like nature is evidenced in modern Venetan by the fact that accusative clitics are generally morphologically not distinguished from

other reduced elements that evolved from demonstrative forms, such as definite articles and nominative clitics<sup>1</sup>.

- (1) La go vedesta.  
she.ACC= have.1SG see.PRT-FEM-SG  
'I have seen her.'
- (2) La nona.  
the.FEM-SG grandmother  
'The grandmother.'
- (3) La canta.  
she.NOM= sing.3SG  
'She is singing.'

The three forms in (1-3) are morphologically, prosodically and phonologically undistinguishable, but they have dedicated syntactic properties and distribution. In this paper I will focus on accusative clitic forms such as the one in (1).

Unlike accusative clitics, the third person dative clitic takes the form of the "multifunctional" *ghe* clitic (4). This clitic originates from a Latin locative form; it retains its locative meaning in modern Venetan existential constructions (5), on a par with English *there* and Italian *ci*. The same clitic is obligatorily realised together with the partitive clitic *ne*, giving rise to the clitic cluster *ghe-ne* (6). Finite forms of the verb "to have" in most Venetan varieties have a lexicalised prefix that originates from *ghe* (7); this prefix does not have any semantic or grammatical import to the meaning of the verb. In this paper I will focus on the use of *ghe* as a dative clitic. I will come back to this special prefix in section 5, where I will build on the analysis put forward in section 4, in order to capture its distribution with forms of the verb 'to have' in the diachrony of Venetan.

- (4) Ghe go dà el libro.  
DAT= have.1SG give.PRT-SG the book  
'I gave her the book.'
- (5) Ghe ze tanta zente.  
LOC= be.3SG many people  
'There is a lot of people.'
- (6) Ghe=ne compro do.  
LOC=PART buy.1SG two  
'I am buying two of them.'

<sup>1</sup> Venetan is mainly a spoken variety, displaying a high degree of dialectal variation and currently lacking unified standard spelling rules. The spelling used in this work is a simplified transcription based on the one used in previous studies (Benincà 1994, Poletto 1993, 2000, Frasson 2022) and aims at representing a neutral pronunciation without accounting for local phonological variation.

- (7) Ghe-vimo / Volevimo ver razon.  
 have.IMP-1PL want.IMP-1PL have.INF reason  
 ‘We were right / wanted to be right.’

This paper will focus on the dative use of *ghe*, presented in (4), comparing its distribution to that of third person accusative clitics. Beside their morphological difference, accusative and dative third person clitics behave quite differently when it comes to doubling.

Doubling of a direct object in a thematic position with accusative clitics is normally impossible in Venetan (8), while doubling of right- (9) and left- (10) dislocated objects is possible (though not representing the preferred choice in spoken language).

- (8) \*La go vedesta ela.  
 she.ACC= have.1SG see.PRT-FEM-SG she.ACC  
 ‘I have seen her.’
- (9) La go vedesta, ela.  
 she.ACC= have.1SG see.PRT-FEM-SG she.ACC  
 ‘I have seen her.’
- (10) Ela, la go vedesta.  
 she.ACC she.ACC= have.1SG see.PRT-FEM-SG  
 ‘I have seen her.’

While the doubling of in-situ direct objects with an accusative clitic is impossible in Venetan, the same is not true for the doubling of an in-situ indirect object with a dative clitic. Dative *ghe* is always obligatorily realised together with lexical or pronominal indirect objects; therefore, indirect object doubling with a dative clitic is generalised, regardless of the position of the doubled indirect object: in-situ (11), right-dislocated (12) or left-dislocated (13).

- (11) Ghe go dà el libro a ela.  
 DAT= have.1SG give.PRT-SG the book to her  
 ‘I gave her the book.’
- (12) Ghe go dà el libro, a ela.  
 DAT= have.1SG give.PRT-SG the book to her  
 ‘I gave her the book.’
- (13) A ela, ghe go dà el libro.  
 to her DAT= have.1SG give.PRT-SG the book  
 ‘I gave her the book.’

In examples (11-13), *ghe* cannot be dropped<sup>2</sup>: it obligatorily doubles third person indirect objects, regardless of whether they appear in a thematic or dislocated position. Notice also that doubling of third person indirect objects is obligatory for animate and inanimate referents alike:

- (14) Ghe go dà un colpo ala porta.  
 DAT= have.1SG give.PRT-SG a hit to=the door  
 ‘I hit the door.’

Just as the animate referent of *ela* in (11), the inanimate *porta* in (14) requires an obligatory doubling dative clitic.

For the sake of clarity, it should be noticed that Venetan varieties lack prepositional objects for third person<sup>3</sup>, generally understood in Romance literature as a form of differential object marking (Bossong 1985, Brugé and Brugger 1996, Torrego 1999). While this phenomenon is common in other Italo-Romance varieties, direct objects are never preceded by a preposition in Venetan (15), regardless of their A- or A’- position, as well as their semantic and interpretive properties. In this respect, it should be also noticed that Venetan allows for preposition drop in a wide number of cases, including locative constructions<sup>4</sup> (16) (see Penello 2003) and some types of datives (17) (in particular psych verbs experiencers).

- (15) (\*A) ela, la go vedesta.  
 to she.ACC she.ACC= have.1SG see.PRT-FEM-SG  
 ‘I have seen her.’

- (16) Unquò ndemo (a) Venesia.  
 today go.1PL to Venice  
 ‘Today we are going to Venice.’

- (17) (A) lu ghe piaze sta canson.  
 to he.DAT DAT= like.3SG this.FEM-SG song  
 ‘He likes this song.’

While I am in no way claiming a correlation between the lack of prepositional objects (15) and the availability of non-prepositional locatives (16) and experiencers (17), I assume a general resistance in the use of the preposition *a* in Venetan. In the present work, I am not focusing on such alternations but I report these facts in view of the configuration of the doubling phenomenon in Brazilian Venetan, discussed in section 2.2.

The paradigms and distribution of third person accusative and dative clitics described in the present section represent a broad generalization on their syntactic

<sup>2</sup> The data on ASIt – Atlante Sintattico d’Italia (Syntactic Atlas of Italy, <http://asit.maldura.unipd.it/>; accessed on 13 June 2023) reveal that there is variation with respect to the doubling of indirect objects with dative clitics. While doubling is generally obligatory, there may be an ongoing change in the distribution of doubling dative clitics.

<sup>3</sup> Different conditions on preposition drop hold for first and second persons.

<sup>4</sup> The possibility of dropping the preposition in locative constructions is generalised and is not affected by the verbal form preceding it.

distribution in Venetan varieties spoken in Italy. Across single varieties of the language, it is possible to encounter smaller morpho-phonological differences that do not constitute the primary interest of the present work. The doubling pattern presented here holds across homeland Venetan varieties spoken in Italy but, crucially, variation emerges in Brazilian Venetan, as discussed in section 2.2.

## 2.2 The Brazilian Venetan data

The data presented in this section show that Brazilian Venetan displays a different distribution of accusative and dative clitics with respect to the patterns described for accusative and dative clitics in section 2.1. for homeland Venetan. The data discussed in the present section are examples extracted from the spoken corpus of Brazilian Venetan, available on the website of the Microcontact Atlas<sup>5</sup> and already discussed in Frasson (2022b). The Brazilian Venetan data present in the Atlas were collected in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and include recordings of spontaneous speech by 21 speakers of the variety. Single occurrences of the target structures were extracted and transcribed. The acceptability of the extracted examples was checked with two native speakers of Brazilian Venetan from Rio Grande do Sul. The selected examples parallel the constructions with third person accusative and dative clitics presented in section 2.1. While the distribution of accusative clitics can be directly compared to the homeland Venetan examples, the use of dative clitics displays some intriguing doubling properties.

With respect to direct object doubling and accusative clitics, the data immediately suggest that Brazilian Venetan applies the same restrictions that were discussed in section 2.1 for homeland Venetan. The corpus contains examples of sentences in which the object is dislocated in the left or in the right periphery. Such examples were checked with native speakers of Brazilian Venetan, who confirmed the possibility of doubling a left- (18) or right- (19) dislocated object with an accusative clitic<sup>6</sup>.

(18) El            senador, lo            mandavimo là.  
 the.MAS-SG senator he.ACC= send.IMP-1PL there  
 ‘We used to send the senator there.’

(19) Niantri la            vendemo, la            ua.  
 we.NOM she.ACC= sell.1PL the.FEM-SG grape  
 ‘We sell grapes.’

When presented with parallel examples with doubling of in-situ objects, speakers confirmed that such structures are not possible in Brazilian Venetan: the accusative cannot be realised in this context (20-21).

<sup>5</sup> The atlas is available online at: <https://microcontact.sites.uu.nl/atlas/> (accessed on 13 June 2023).

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noticing that, just as in homeland Venetan, prepositional objects are not attested in Brazilian Venetan.

- (20) (\*Lo) mandavimo là el senador.  
 he.ACC= send.IMP-1PL there the.MAS-SG senator  
 ‘We used to send the senator there.’
- (21) Niantri (\*la) vendemo la ua.  
 we.NOM she.ACC= sell.1PL the.FEM-SG grape  
 ‘We sell grapes.’

Given that, as shown by (20-21), there is no object doubling *sensu strictu* in Brazilian Venetan, but rather resumption of dislocated direct objects (18-19), I conclude that if a direct object can be dislocated, it can be resumed by an accusative clitic. This possibility applies also to non-specific dislocated objects resumed by an accusative clitic; this is shown in example (22) from the corpus, which is also accepted by the informants:

- (22) Uno che parla furlan, mi lo capiso.  
 one that speak.3SG Friulian I.NOM he.ACC= understand.1SG  
 ‘I understand someone speaking Friulian.’

Moving on to third person indirect object doubling by means of a dative clitic, Brazilian Venetan shows again the same generalised use of *ghe* that was discussed for homeland Venetan; both in the corpus and according to the informants, dative clitics double both in-situ (23) and dislocated (24) indirect objects:

- (23) Ghe ga dato la benedision a la fiola.  
 DAT= have.3SG give.PRT-SG the.FEM-SG blessing to the.FEM-SG girl  
 ‘He gave the blessing to the girl.’
- (24) A=e bestie, mi ghe butea un toco de pan.  
 to=the.FEM-PL animal.PL I.NOM DAT= throw.IMP-1SG a.MAS-SG piece of bread  
 ‘I used to throw a piece of bread to the animals.’

So far, it seems that the distribution of accusative and dative clitics in Brazilian Venetan does not differ much from the homeland variety of the language: examples (23) and (24) confirm the doubling pattern already discussed in section 2.1; the same doubling conditions do not apply to accusative clitics, which may appear as resumptive elements only with dislocated direct objects.

However, the data also reveal the presence of another possible doubling pattern, a different construction, which is used quite frequently and is not attested, to my knowledge, in any homeland variety of Venetan<sup>7</sup>: the doubling of in-situ direct objects by means of a dative clitic *ghe* (25-26):

<sup>7</sup> The pattern identified for Brazilian Venetan is not attested in other Venetan varieties. The verbs ‘beat’ and ‘call’ used in examples (26) and (27) is normally solely transitive and does not allow for an alternation between accusative and dative complements of the type discussed in Pineda (2020) for other Romance varieties (Catalan, Spanish, Asturian...). However, the reasons why precisely these verbs allow for a dative clitic in Brazilian Venetan, as well as their implications of the study of heritage language change, are matters of current investigation.



(25) Ghe go sentuo me pare.  
 DAT= have.1SG hear.PRT-SG my= father  
 ‘I heard my father.’

(26) Ela ghe gavea ciamà el paron.  
 she.NOM DAT= have.IMP-3SG call.PRT-SG the.MAS-SG boss  
 ‘She had called the boss.’

This possibility seems particularly interesting since, as shown in (20-21), Brazilian Venetan disallows the doubling of in-situ direct objects with accusative clitics. However, the possibility of doubling direct objects with dative clitics is attested in the corpus and was confirmed by the consulted informants. On par with what was shown for accusative clitics resuming dislocated direct objects, dative clitics do not impose any restrictions on the semantic properties of the doubled constituent, allowing for the doubling of non-specific direct objects too (27):

(27) I ghe gavea bastonà qualchedun.  
 they.NOM= DAT= have.IMP-3PL beat.PRT-SG someone  
 ‘They had beaten someone.’

Example (27) shows that semantic properties of the doubled object do not seem to be relevant in the realisation of the doubling clitic; however, their position (in-situ or dislocated) does. While examples (25) and (26), with an in-situ post-verbal object, are accepted by the informants, parallel sentences with a left-dislocated object (28-29) were not attested in the corpus and they are judged as acceptable only with an accusative clitic.

(28) Me pare, lo / \*ghe go sentuo.  
 my= father he.ACC= DAT= have.1SG hear.PRT-SG  
 ‘I heard my father.’

(29) El paron, ela lo / \*ghe gavea ciamà.  
 the.MAS-SG boss she.NOM he.ACC= DAT= have.IMP-3SG call.PRT-SG  
 ‘She had called the boss.’

The resumption of a dislocated object with an accusative clitic *lo* is accepted, while the same is not true for the dative clitic *ghe*, which can only double direct objects in a thematic position.

In sum, this section has shown that accusative and dative clitics display conditions on resumption and doubling that are similar to those discussed for homeland Venetan. However, one main difference is attested in the corpus and confirmed by native speakers of the variety: the possibility of doubling third person direct objects in a thematic position with the dative clitic *ghe*. This pattern, which is not allowed in other varieties of Venetan, requires a separate analysis. Before moving to that, section 3 will introduce some previous relevant approaches to Romance clitics that will constitute a starting point for the analysis I will propose in section 4.

### 3. Preliminary theoretical considerations

Section 2.2 described a peculiar doubling pattern in Brazilian Venetan, involving in-situ direct objects doubled by the dative clitic *ghe*. This pattern is not unknown to Romance languages and closely resembles the distribution of dative and accusative clitics in the *leísta* varieties of Spanish that have been the focus of several studies on the properties of Romance clitics (Bleam 1999, focusing on varieties spoken in Northern Spain). Before moving to the proposed analysis of Brazilian Venetan data, it is therefore necessary to introduce such accounts of Romance clitics, in order to compare the pattern displayed by Brazilian Venetan with other related Romance clitic systems, focusing in particular on the *leísta* Spanish data presented in Bleam (1999). Previous analyses of such varieties of Spanish constitute a necessary background, allowing to fully understand the pattern displayed by Brazilian Venetan.

As already discussed in section 2, Venetan accusative clitics resemble very closely those of other closely-related Romance languages, such as Italian, French and Catalan. The first generalisations on such Romance clitics in the generative framework date back to Kayne (1975). In Kayne's analysis, based mainly on French data, cliticisation of pronouns is accounted for as the result of a movement operation. Clitics of the type presented in examples (18) and (19) are assumed to be merged in the object position of the verb, where pronominal or lexical objects would otherwise be merged, and subsequently moved to their cliticisation site. This approach captures quite straightforwardly the system of homeland and Brazilian Venetan accusative clitics: they are merged in a thematic position, corresponding to the complement of V, and represent arguments of the verb; given their argumental nature, they appear in complementary distribution with pronominal and lexical direct objects and disallow doubling; the only cases in which accusative clitics may co-occur with pronominal or lexical objects are constructions with left- and right- dislocated objects, which accusative clitics resume, rather than double.

However, the literature on American Spanish varieties shows that the picture is more complex (Suñer 1988). Rioplatense Spanish, for example, allows for direct object doubling; in particular, Rioplatense Spanish accusative clitics can double in-situ pronominal and lexical objects; therefore, in such varieties, accusative clitics do not represent real arguments of the verb; they rather double object arguments found in-situ. Not all direct objects can be doubled by an accusative clitic: there is a constraint that restricts the type of objects that can be doubled by a clitic: only specific direct objects can be doubled by an accusative clitic (30-31). Conversely, direct objects receiving a non-specific interpretation are generally not doubled (32)<sup>8</sup>. The specificity constraint on clitic doubling is exemplified by the following Rioplatense Spanish examples (adapted from Bleam 1999).

- (30) (La) oían a la niña.  
 she.ACC= hear.IMP-3PL to the.FEM-SG girl  
 'They heard the girl.'

<sup>8</sup> Recall that it is not possible to check for such specificity restrictions in Venetan as there is no direct object doubling; Venetan uses clitics do resume left- or right- dislocated objects regardless of their specificity.

- (31) (La) escuchaba a una mujer que cantaba tangos.  
 she.ACC= listen.IMP-1SG to a.FEM-SG woman that sing.IMP-3SG tango.PL  
 ‘I listened to a woman who sang tangos.’
- (32) (\*Lo) buscaban a alguien que los ayudara.  
 he.ACC= search.IMP-3PL to someone that they.ACC= help.SUBJ-PST-3SG  
 ‘They were looking for someone who would help them.’

Examples (30-32) represent a challenge for Kayne’s analysis of Romance clitics. Apparently, there is no possible merging site for the clitic, as the thematic (post-verbal) position of the object is filled by a phrasal object, blocking the merge (and the subsequent movement) of the clitic. An alternative analysis, presented in Jaeggli (1986), assumes base-generation of the clitic in its surface position. According to Kayne (1989), clitics that are compatible with this analysis, like Rioplatense Spanish accusative clitics, cannot be defined as arguments of the verb, but rather as inflection-like elements that are merged in a higher dedicated agreement projection. Building on this analysis, Uriagereka (1995) proposed that the behaviour of Spanish accusative clitics represents an instance of head movement<sup>9</sup>: clitics head a DP (defined as ‘big-DP’), which has its specifier occupied by the doubled nominal object; such DP is merged in VP, in the thematic post-verbal object position; the clitic alone moves out of the D head, to the dedicated agreement projection proposed in Kayne (1989), while the phrasal object remains in-situ. In the Minimalist Programme (Chomsky 1995), the controversial nature of clitics, involving the fact that they are realised in a phrase but move as heads, is taken as the representation of their ambiguous XP/X<sup>0</sup> status.

So far I have discussed only accusative clitics; in the remainder of this section, I will show that dative clitics in varieties of Spanish spoken in the north of the country present a further complication. While the behaviour of accusative clitics is captured by Uriagereka’s approach, the distribution of dative clitics complicates the analysis. Suñer (1988) focussed specifically on the difference between the behaviour of accusative and dative clitics in Rioplatense Spanish, which depends on a difference in their structure and featural composition; such difference also reflects on the possibility for Rioplatense Spanish clitics to participate in doubling constructions. Suñer showed that, while object doubling in Rioplatense Spanish is subject to specificity restrictions, such restrictions do not apply to indirect object doubling: all types of indirect objects allow for doubling with a dative clitic. She captures this distinction by establishing different featural compositions of the two clitic types: more precisely, accusative clitics are marked in the lexicon with the feature [+specific], while the dative clitics are not, allowing for the doubling of non-specific indirect objects.

- (33) Le entregó el libro a alguien.  
 DAT= give.PST-3SG the.MAS-SG book to someone  
 ‘He gave the book to someone.’

<sup>9</sup> A reviewer pointed out that the analysis proposed by Uriagereka holds mainly in American varieties of Spanish, but not in European varieties.

Building on the different behaviour of clitics in (30-32) and (33), Bleam (1999) reconsiders the movement approach (Kayne 1975), comparing it with the base-generation (Jaeggli 1986) and head-movement (Uriagereka 1995) approaches; she attempts at reconciling them by proposing that accusative and dative clitics follow different derivations and, crucially, the former allows for a head-movement analysis, while the latter is captured as an instance of base-generation. To put it differently, dative clitics are defined as functional heads externally merged in the inflectional field, while accusative clitics are defined as determiners that move from the argument position. This distinction is diachronically motivated by the fact that accusative clitics are determiners (Torrego 1988, Uriagereka 1995), while dative clitics are not determiners and require a dedicated syntactic analysis.

One final complication is presented by the peculiar distribution of dative clitics in other varieties of Spanish. Bleam (1999) discusses data from *leísta* varieties from Northern Spain, where the use of dative clitics is extended to contexts in which accusative clitics are expected, such as the doubling of direct objects; notice that this behaviour parallels the one described for Brazilian Venetan in section 2.2. Just as Brazilian Venetan, the *leísta* Spanish data discussed by Bleam (1999) pose a problem for the analysis sketched in the present section because, in the context of direct object doubling, accusative clitics take the form of dative clitics (34).

- (34) Le / \*lo vi al profesor ayer.  
 DAT= he.ACC= see.PRT-1SG to=the.MAS-SG professor yesterday  
 ‘Yesterday I saw the professor.’

One question that may emerge at this point is whether the similarities with Brazilian Venetan extend to the availability of doubling dative clitics with all types of direct objects, or whether the specificity restrictions on object doubling with accusative clitics, previously identified for Rioplatense Spanish by Suñer (1988) also apply to object doubling with dative clitics in the *leísta* varieties from Northern Spain. According to Suñer’s analysis, specificity restrictions on direct object doubling are strictly related to the morphology of the accusative clitic and to its determiner nature. Such restrictions do not depend on the grammatical function played by the clitic. Given the different morphology and the fact that they are not determiners, the prediction is that the accusative clitic, when it takes the form of a dative clitic, should not impose specificity restrictions on the type of elements it doubles. However, when the direct object is doubled by the dative clitic, only a specific interpretation is possible. Doubling of non-specific direct objects is not possible in the *leísta* varieties from Northern Spain (35).

- (35) Ana (\*les) ha visto a muchas chicas.  
 Ana DAT-PL= have.3SG see.PRT-SG to many.FEM-PL girl.PL  
 ‘Ana has seen many girls.’

Doubling of non-specific objects by a dative clitic such as the one in (35) constitutes the main difference between the pattern displayed by Brazilian Venetan and the *leísta* Spanish varieties discussed in Bleam (1999); only the former allows for it, while the latter bans it.

This section had the goal of introducing previous analyses of different types of Romance clitics. In sum, there is reason to believe that the generalisations on clitic use proposed by Kayne (1975) correctly capture the use of accusative and dative clitics in homeland Venetan, but not in Brazilian Venetan. Recall that this variety does not allow for accusative clitics in the context of direct-object doubling, but it does allow for dative clitics in the same constructions. In this sense, Brazilian Venetan resembles the *leísta* Spanish data in Blear (1999), with one difference: unlike such Spanish varieties, Brazilian Venetan does not impose any semantic restriction on the type of direct objects that can be doubled by a dative clitic.

While building on such studies, in section 4 I will propose a new analysis for Brazilian Venetan clitics, capturing their peculiar behaviour with respect to the homeland variety of the language, as well as the parallel distribution of dative clitics in *leísta* Spanish and Brazilian Venetan.

#### 4. Capturing the distribution of Brazilian Venetan clitics

In this section, I will build on the approaches to Romance clitics discussed in section 3, but I will propose a different account of the specific properties of accusative and dative clitics in Brazilian Venetan. I will maintain that the two forms have different structural properties, but this difference is analysed at different linguistic levels: while the placement of accusative clitic (phrases) is captured as a morphological process of incorporation, dative clitics can be analysed as heads, whose distributional properties are ruled by syntax. The analysis proposed in this section builds on various accounts to Romance clitics (Roberts 2010, Pescarini 2021) and it allows me to capture the different doubling properties of accusative and dative clitics attested in Brazilian Venetan.

##### 4.1 Brazilian Venetan accusative clitics as pronouns

The first fundamental ingredient of the analysis I present in this section is the distinction between resumptive and doubling clitics, already introduced in sections 2 and 3. I assume a clear-cut distinction between doubling (a relationship between in-situ constituents and clitics that double them) and resumption (a relationship between a left- or right- dislocated constituent and a clitic resuming them) on the other hand. More precisely, the resumption relationship holding between dislocated constituents and resumptive clitics within the sentence can be described as co-reference: resumptive clitics are pronominal arguments that co-refer with a dislocated nominal; conversely, clitic doubling is limited to those cases in which both the phrasal constituent and the clitic, analysed as an agreement head, are within the sentence.

In sum, I adopt a perspective in which Venetan accusative clitics are defined as resumptive clitics, while dative clitics are defined as doubling clitics<sup>10</sup>. This

<sup>10</sup> Dative clitics in Venetan can obviously appear also in sentences where the argumental indirect object is not realised:

Ghe go dà el libro (a ela).  
 DAT= have.1SG give.PRT-SG the book (to her)  
 ‘I gave her the book.’

distinction follows from their distributive properties (accusative clitics resume dislocated objects; dative clitics double in-situ objects) and is related to a fundamental difference between argumental and agreement-like clitics. While Venetan accusative clitics carry a thematic role and represent real arguments of the verb, dative clitics are not arguments themselves, but rather double  $\varphi$ -features of phrasal constituents realised in the sentence. I maintain that the argumental vs. agreement-like nature of clitics is closely related to the different structural properties of accusative and dative clitics. With respect to the structural properties of clitics, I adopt a tripartite model of pronouns inspired by Déchaine and Wiltschko (2002), which consists in a classification of pronouns into three different types: DP,  $\varphi$ P or NP. Each pronoun type is associated with a syntactic projection, as shown in (36).

- (36)
- |                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| a. [DP [ $\varphi$ P [NP.] | (DP-pronouns)           |
| b. [ $\varphi$ P [NP.]     | ( $\varphi$ P-pronouns) |
| c. [NP]                    | (NP-pronouns)           |

According to the model in (36) DP-pronouns are full phrases and, as such, function like regular definite referring expressions; conversely,  $\varphi$ P-pronouns have a reduced structural representation, in that they lack the D-layer.

This proposal is also compatible with Cardinaletti and Starke's (1999) model of structural deficiency for pronouns. Precisely this model may help in understanding the exact structural properties of dative and accusative clitics. Similarly to Déchaine and Wiltschko's model (36), Cardinaletti and Starke propose that personal pronouns are divided into three different classes according to their level of structural deficiency: strong pronouns, weak pronouns and clitic pronouns. Weak pronouns are structurally deficient with respect to strong pronouns, in that they lack a set of morphological, syntactic, semantic and prosodic properties that strong pronouns have; clitics are structurally deficient with respect to weak and the strong pronouns in that they lack a set of properties that both the weak and the strong pronoun have. Crucially, weak pronouns are phrasal, while clitics are analysed as heads. I propose that dative clitics can be safely identified with Cardinaletti and Starke's clitics, while accusative clitics roughly correspond to their weak pronouns. This is confirmed by the distribution of doubling in Venetan: in line with Cardinaletti and Starke's predictions, clitics allow for doubling of DPs, while weak pronouns do not.

Such considerations on the internal structure of clitics were linked to the syntactic status of accusative and dative Romance clitics in Marchis and Alexiadou (2013). In this work, accusative clitics are defined as D-clitics (corresponding to Déchaine and Wiltschko's DP-pronouns), while dative clitics are defined as  $\varphi$ -clitics (corresponding to  $\varphi$ P-pronouns). Marchis and Alexiadou propose that this structural

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While a complete account of the distribution of dative clitics in such sentences is beyond the scope of the present study, I preliminarily suggest that their realisation both in doubling and non-doubling constructions may strengthen the account proposed here: dative clitics are not arguments of the verb, so they are not in complementary distribution with argumental indirect objects. As for the possibility of dropping the indirect object *a ela*, I tentatively propose that it may depend on information-structural or pragmatic conditions and may therefore be captured in a wider account of argument drop.

difference accounts for the different properties accusative and dative clitics encode, which are also exemplified by the different behaviour of Rioplatense Spanish clitics with respect to specificity: specificity is expected to be encoded in the D-layer, so only accusative clitics are allowed to carry a [+specific] feature, while dative clitics cannot, lacking the portion of structure in which such feature should be realised. Again, this is also in line with what was proposed in Cardinaletti and Starke (1999). This approach elegantly captures the determiner-like nature of accusative clitics as opposed to dative clitics, dispensing with the competition between base-generation and head-movement analyses described in section 3. At the same time, this proposal makes the extraction from the big-DP proposed by Uriagereka (1995) an unnecessary step: accusative clitics are full DP themselves, rather than D-heads realised in a bigger structure, and they do not co-occur with another constituent carrying the same thematic role, being arguments themselves. In structural terms, accusative clitics can be analysed as regular DP-pronouns that, however, cliticise onto a verbal head.

I propose that this process of cliticisation can be captured without assuming additional theoretical primitives such as the ‘big-DP’; the account of cliticisation adopted in this paper builds on the analysis presented in Pescarini (2021). In this approach, the structure of object clitics is that of phrasal pronouns (possibly weak phrasal pronouns in Cardinaletti and Starke 1999, DP-pronouns in Déchaine and Wiltschko 2002), similarly to what was proposed in Marchis and Alexiadou (2013). Pescarini derives the special distributional properties of object clitics from a process in which an object pronoun is attracted and subsequently frozen in a dedicated topical position at the left of the verb; diachronically, this position is identified with the Wackernagel position; I will not delve into the discussion of the property of this position: I define it as a functional projection, located in the lower portion of the C-domain (Rizzi 1997). According to Pescarini (2021), object pronouns raising to this position do not receive stress, triggering a process of phonological reduction and incorporation into the verb in the inflectional field. In Matushansky (2006), incorporation is intended as a morphological process that conflates two adjacent elements into a single morphophonological unit. The structure that results from incorporation of a clitic is represented in (37):

(37) (adapted from Pescarini 2021: 177)  
[C... [T... [Z clitic + V]]]

The TP-internal position in which the clitic-verb complex is located in (37) is defined as Z (Ledgeway and Lombardi 2005) and represents an evolution of the original Wackernagel position to which clitics move as phrasal constituents, subsequently incorporating into a verb moving through it.

Object clitic placement in Brazilian Venetan allows for an analysis along the lines of Pescarini (2021), while the same type of approach cannot be maintained for dative clitics. In the remainder of this section, I will show that the distinction depends again on the argumental or agreement-like of clitics.

#### 4.2 Brazilian Venetan dative clitics as heads: the role of featural economy

Dative clitics are analysed as agreement elements ( $\phi$ -clitics in Marchis and Alexiadou 2013); I maintain that this analysis implies that they are agreement heads realised on T, building on previous analyses (Sportiche 1993, Bleam 1999, Roberts 2010). As already mentioned, this crucial structural difference between dative and accusative clitics implies that the latter, but not the former, encode a D-layer where the [+specific] feature, responsible for the restriction on doubling discussed in Suñer (1988), is found.

In order to capture the use of Brazilian Venetan dative clitic in doubling constructions with both direct and indirect objects, as well as the lack of specificity effects, it is necessary to consider that Brazilian Venetan is a heritage variety and its speakers are unbalanced bilinguals: while their native language is Venetan, their dominant language (the one that they use more often in daily activities and communication with people that do not belong to their family) is Brazilian Portuguese. These peculiar conditions, which are typical for the development of heritage grammars, may lead to a divergence in competence between heritage and homeland speakers (Pires and Rothman 2007); Scontras et al. (2018) showed that such divergence is symptomatic of deeper structural differences in heritage grammar: heritage speakers prioritise representational economy, restructuring their grammar in favour of lighter linguistic representations and more parsimonious structures. Scontras et al. (2018), discussing feature distribution in homeland and heritage Spanish, show that agreement features that are projected and valued independently of each other in the homeland variety, tend to bundle together in heritage varieties, becoming dependent on each other: more precisely, the valuation of one feature presupposes the valuation of the other, resulting in a single process whereby one head probes for more features at the same time. This pattern contrasts with homeland Spanish, in which features such as number and gender may be projected and valued independently<sup>11</sup>.

Following this analysis, I propose that a similar difference in the process of feature valuation exists between homeland and heritage varieties of Brazilian Venetan too. Specifically, dative clitic *ghe* in homeland Venetan checks case and agreement features independently of the verb. I propose that the dative clitic is a  $\phi$ -head that is merged in v. The v head is transparent for syntactic operations (similarly to what was proposed in Vicente 2007 for complex heads): it functions as a probe, where the clitic carries Case and  $\phi$  features to be checked independently of the features on v.

<sup>11</sup> I refer to Scontras et al. (2018) for the complete discussion of the change in heritage Spanish. Here, I limit the discussion to their general conclusions on feature valuation in heritage languages, which are shown to hold in the case of Brazilian Venetan too. For the sake of clarity, Scontras et al. (2018) tested the distribution of agreement features in heritage Spanish by accounting for agreement mismatches of the following type:

(Scontras et al. 2018: 11)

El niño considera **la noticia** en la revista terriblemente {**aburrida / aburrido**} (...)  
 the boy consider.3SG **the news.FEM-SG** in the newspaper terribly **boring.{FEM-SG / MAS-SG}**  
 ‘The boy considers the article in the paper to be terribly boring (...)’

The type of agreement in the sentence is taken by the authors to indicate whether the agreement features are valued independently (yielding full agreement on the adjective *aburrida*) or as a bundle (yielding the mismatched form *aburrido*).



Conversely, Brazilian Venetan data show that the *ghe* clitic in this variety is not sensitive to the type of object (direct or indirect) that is doubled. I propose that the features carried by the dative clitic in Brazilian Venetan are bundled together with the features of the verb, being projected and valued together. When features are bundled together, their content becomes more opaque, as predicted by Scontras et al. (2018). This structure requires more processing effort to disentangle the individual features, giving rise to an interpretive instability of the feature bundle, whose complexity is finally reduced: only the agreement features of the verb are preserved, while the case and agreement features of *ghe* are lost, giving to a less strict selection of doubled constituents.

In this section I have argued that the derivation of accusative and dative clitics result in very similar structures, but the two elements require separate analyses. While accusative clitics are analysed as pronouns that undergo a morphological process of incorporation, dative clitics are analysed as heads merged in a v-head in syntax. Crucially, the divergent doubling pattern attested in Brazilian Venetan does not affect the morphological process displayed by accusative clitics, but only the featural composition of dative clitics, giving rise to the generalised pattern of object and indirect object doubling discussed in section 2. This type of change seems to be at odds with most general descriptions of heritage language change, where syntax is claimed to be resistant and not prone to change. Following Scontras et al. (2018), I propose that representational economy influenced the grammar of Brazilian Venetan, which converges on a lighter feature representation where the minimally necessary number of feature values are specified. In section 5, I will show that the reasons for this specific pattern of change can be directly compared to a diachronic change in the distribution of *ghe* in Venetan varieties, suggesting that the two types of change may follow parallel paths.

## 5. Heritage language change

### 5.1. Zooming in into diachronic change

In light of the analysis proposed for Brazilian Venetan in section 4, I will now briefly reflect on the data introduced in section 2. I showed that finite forms of the verb “to have” in most homeland Venetan varieties have a lexicalised prefix that originates from the clitic *ghe*; this prefix does not have any semantic or grammatical import to the meaning of the verb, being totally lexicalised in the finite forms of the verb, as already noticed by Benincà (2007). Consider the contrast in (7), repeated here as (38):

- (38) Ghe-vimo / Volevimo ver razon.  
 have.IMP-1PL want.IMP-1PL have.INF reason  
 ‘We were right / wanted to be right.’

While the presence of *ghe* is generalised to all finite forms of the verb in most Venetan varieties, some archaic varieties display a more nuanced distribution. Benincà (2007) suggests that in archaic Venetan varieties such prefix is dropped when a partitive clitic cluster is realised (39); for a comparison, note that in more innovative varieties, the clitic is always realised also with partitive clusters (40):

- (39) *Ghe=n'è*                      *cantà*                      *do*.  
 LOC=PART=have.1SG sing.PRT-SG two  
 'I sang two of them.'
- (40) *Ghe=ne*    *gh-o*                      *cantà*                      *do*.  
 LOC=PART have.1SG sing.PRT-SG two  
 'I sang two of them.'

Benincà proposes that the prefix *ghe* in (39), despite lacking its original locative or dative value, has a deictic function, in that it locates the verbal form in space or time with respect to speaker and hearer. In other words, the prefix *ghe* in (39) adds a deictic value to the third person singular verb in the present tense. The third person has been traditionally classified as 'non-person', following the classic work of Benveniste (1966). The additional deictic value provided by the prefix establishes the reference of the verbal form with respect to the speaker. Conversely, *ghe* in (40) does not contribute in any significant way to the meaning of the verb.

While I do not make predictions with respect to the featural import of the prefix in homeland Venetan varieties, I propose that the process described in Benincà (2007) can be compared to the feature loss displayed by Brazilian Venetan *ghe*; in particular, I hypothesise that *ghe* underwent a similar change in the diachrony of Venetan. The generalised realisation of *ghe* as a lexicalised element in finite forms of the verb 'have' started out as a process of bundling between the features of the clitic and those of the verb. Features of the clitic, possibly related to indirect object or locative doubling, became more opaque and finally got amalgamated with those of the verb, becoming inseparable from it.

The comparison suggested in this section allows me to formulate a hypothesis which, however, I will not be able to test in this study. It is possible that processes of change attested in heritage languages are not unlike the endogenous processes of change attested in the diachrony of languages. Heritage language change, however, allows us to zoom into specific paths of change, capturing the whole process in a shorter span, corresponding to just some generations of speakers.

## 5.2 What is the role of contact

In the course of this paper, I did not focus on the fact that all Brazilian Venetan speakers are bilingual with, and possibly dominant in, Brazilian Portuguese. I am not excluding the possibility that certain properties can be transferred from one grammar to the other, in bilingual contexts. However, I propose that contact-induced change is most likely to happen when the two languages have comparable structures, that minimally differ in that, for instance, the dominant language allows only for one possible realisation, while the heritage language allows for more possible realisations (Andriani et al. 2021). This type of process is labelled cross-linguistic influence in the literature on bilingual acquisition (see Hulk and Muller 2000).

One of the most widely discussed cases in which language contact may play a fundamental role is the availability and distribution of null subjects. Montrul (2008) studied this phenomenon in English-Spanish heritage speakers and showed that heritage Spanish extends the use of overt subjects to contexts in which a null subject

would be pragmatically acceptable under the influence of English, a language that does not allow for null subjects and, therefore, provides a non-ambiguous input given the lack of multiple possibilities for subject realisation. The possible role of contact with Brazilian Portuguese was discussed for Brazilian Venetan in Frasson (2021): the distribution of null subjects in Brazilian Venetan may have been affected by the more restricted use of null subjects in Brazilian Portuguese, because of cross-linguistic influence. Another possibility, discussed in Platzack (2001), regards V2 structures in bilingual English-Swedish speakers: bilingual Swedish speakers display a more fixed SVO order, resulting from a reduced use of V2, possibly under the influence of English, a language which lacks V2 altogether. Frasson (2022) discussed the lack of subject-clitic inversion in Brazilian Venetan, another possible effect of contact with Brazilian Portuguese.

In the case of clitic doubling discussed in the present paper, there is no comparable structure in Brazilian Portuguese that could have affected the change attested in Brazilian Venetan. A well-known feature of Brazilian Portuguese pronominal system is the absence of third person accusative and dative clitics (see Galves 2020), only first and second person clitics remain (particularly in the singular). This configuration implies that direct and indirect objects will not be doubled by clitics comparable to the ones described for Brazilian Venetan<sup>12</sup>.

The possibility of analysing such process as an effect of contact-induced change remains therefore entirely speculative, as it is not possible to show whether the feature-bundling mechanism that led to the extended use of *ghe* in Brazilian Venetan depends on a parallel configuration available in Brazilian Portuguese: this language has very limited possibilities of object doubling and it shows that third person clitics are replaced by full pronouns (Kato 1993), suggesting a change that goes in an opposite direction than what is found in Brazilian Venetan. It is possible that contact with Brazilian Portuguese has the effect of triggering the change, regardless its direction. However, the grammar of heritage languages such as Brazilian Venetan requires many generations to stabilise and it is not possible to conclusively define the role of the contact language in shaping the change.

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<sup>12</sup> A reviewer pointed out a possible parallel between Brazilian Venetan *ghe* and the dative clitic *lhe*, used to address the second person in some varieties of Brazilian Portuguese, particularly in relation to DPs such as *você*. As a second person, the clitic *lhe* is not morphologically marked as dative or accusative, hence it may occur as an anaphor for both direct and indirect animate objects. There are some crucial differences between this phenomenon and the one discussed for Brazilian Venetan *ghe* in the present study. The first one concerns the obligatory realisation of *ghe* in Brazilian Venetan: it cannot be dropped, regardless of the (in)animacy of the third person referent. Secondly, first and second person clitics in Venetan are not morphologically marked as dative or accusative, on a par with Brazilian Portuguese, and are not affected by the process described for third person. Therefore, I tend to believe that a direct influence of Brazilian Portuguese *lhe* on Brazilian Venetan *ghe* is unlikely.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper explored the distributional and structural properties of accusative and dative clitics in Brazilian Venetan, a heritage Italo-Romance variety spoken in Southern Brazil. The goal of this paper was twofold.

Firstly, it aimed at discussing new data, extracted from the Microcontact Atlas and compared with judgments by two native speakers of this variety.

Secondly, it analysed the detected changes in view of the wider perspective of representational economy in heritage languages, building on syntactic approaches to Romance clitics.

Finally, the paper briefly discussed the diachronic development of Venetan, focussing on the of incorporation of dative clitics into finite forms of verbs as a reflex of the same change process that was described for Brazilian Venetan.

In conclusion, the picture that emerges sees Brazilian Venetan clitics following two different change paths: accusative clitics have stable syntactic and distributional properties, while dative clitics display an innovation: they are allowed in double constructions with both direct and indirect objects. This pattern closely resembles what was previously observed in some Northern Spanish *leísta* varieties by Bleam (1999). The question remains of what causes change to target only dative clitics, specifically for the heritage context, as well as for the diachrony of Venetan more generally.

## List of abbreviations

ACC	Accusative
DAT	Dative
FEM	Feminine
IMP	Imperfect
INF	Infinitive
LOC	Locative
MAS	Masculine
NOM	Nominative
PL	Plural
PART	Partitive
PRT	Participle
PST	Past
SG	Singular
1	First person
2	Second person
3	Third person

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