

## Accidental Identities and Analogical Innovation.

### A hypothesis about the evolution of the present subjunctive inflection in some Venetan dialects

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One of the hallmarks of the Romance verbal systems is the presence of paradigmatic patterns usually known as morphemes (Maiden 2016a, 2018). These can be defined as distributional regularities within verbal paradigms, such that a given unit of morphological analysis (typically a root allomorph) is found to be systematically associated with a specific, though arbitrary, set of paradigm cells.

The fact that the set of paradigm cells of a morpheme does not, as a rule, constitute a ‘natural class’ in morphosyntactic or phonological terms qualifies such structures as purely morphological entities, suggesting that, especially in languages with complex inflectional systems, the mapping of meaning onto form would be mediated by an autonomous (‘morphomic’) level of organization (Aronoff 1994).

Interestingly enough, the diachronic scenario behind the rise and development of morphemes typically presupposes a change in interpretation: the formal identity between the inflectional units in a morpheme is initially morphologically fortuitous, being due mostly, though not exclusively, to phonological factors. Yet this identity is for some reason reinterpreted as morphologically fundamental, as shown by the fact that the distributional pattern that it creates is subsequently analogically reinforced in various ways (Maiden 2016b).

Most of the current research on morphemes deals with the morphology of ‘roots’ (or ‘stems’). This contribution, by contrast, is concerned with affixal morphology: its aim is to suggest that the evolution of the inflectional endings marking the present subjunctive (PS) in the Venetan dialects of the Venice-Padua-Verona area is best interpreted as a morphomic phenomenon.

In the dialects at issue, the PS forms are currently characterized by a uniform inflectional pattern such that verbs of all conjugations display the same affix set (Table 1):

Table 1: Present Subjunctive, Venetian pattern (Genovese 2011)

	I C	II C	III C	Inflectional pattern (uniformity)
1sg	parl-a ‘may I speak’	ved-a ‘may I see’	sént-a ‘may I feel’	-a
2sg	parl-i	ved-i	sént-i	-i
3sg (=3pl)	parl-a	ved-a	sént-a	-a

This inflectional uniformity presupposes neutralization of conjugational allomorphy in diachrony: the present subjunctive forms in Latin displayed an affixal pattern in which first conjugation verbs were characterised by the vowel –e- in the position immediately following the verbal root, whereas verbs of the other classes shared the vowel –a- (Table 2):

Table 2: Present Subjunctive, Latin pattern

	I C	II C	III C	IV C	Inflectional pattern (allomorphy)		
1sg.	laud-e-m	mon-ě-a-m	leg-a-m	aud-i-a-m	-e-	-a-	-m

The etymological pattern of conjugational allomorphy survived, *modulo* sound change, at least until the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century: in texts of this chronological stage, most first conjugation verbs are still found to display the allomorph –e, whereas verbs of the other classes regularly display the ending –a. On the other hand, some of the texts at issue also show that the innovative inflectional pattern was gaining ground. For instance, Stussi (1965) reports PS forms with both final –e and –a for first conjugation verbs, sometimes even for the same lexeme: *conte* ‘may he count’, *marida* ‘may she get married’, *prege / prega* ‘may they pray’.

How can we account for the inflectional innovation whereby first conjugation verbs acquired the ending –a in the present subjunctive?

*Prima facie*, the phenomenon could be regarded as an instance of morphological simplification, since the presence of conjugational allomorphy notoriously contributes to the ‘morphological complexity’ of an inflectional system (Baerman et al. 2017). Looking at our data, one might suppose that the original inflectional pattern might have been simplified by analogically extending non-first conjugation endings into first conjugation verbs (Ferguson 2007: 157), in such a way as to establish a one-to-one mapping between morphosyntactic meaning (‘present subjunctive’) and morphological form.

However, this interpretation of the change leaves a significant detail unexplained, concerning the direction of the alleged analogical extension: why should inflectional uniformity be obtained by extending the allomorph –a and not its ‘rival’, –e?

A different interpretation of the analogical change at issue, which can easily account for the quality of the vowel that is introduced in first conjugation verbs, appeals to an abstract paradigmatic pattern that we might regard as ‘morphomic’. In this particular case, the present subjunctive pattern, as a whole, would have been analogically reshaped on the model of the affixal pattern originally observed in the imperfect indicative forms. The basis of the analogy would be an accidental identity, originally limited to non-first conjugation verbs, between the present subjunctive affixes and the imperfect indicative affixes (Diagram 1):

Diagram 1: Mechanism of the analogical innovation

	Present Subjunctive			Imperfect Indicative		
	I C	II C	III C	I C	II C	III C
1sg	-e	-a	-a	-a	-a	-a
2sg	-i / -e	-i / -e	-i / -e	-i / -e	-i / -e	-i / -e
3sg	-e	-a	-a	-a	-a	-a
	≠	=	=	≠	=	=

Before the innovation: partial identity

	Present Subjunctive			Imperfect Indicative		
	I C	II C	III C	I C	II C	III C
	-a	-a	-a	-a	-a	-a
	-i / -e	-i / -e	-i / -e	-i / -e	-i / -e	-i / -e
	-a	-a	-a	-a	-a	-a
	=	=	=	=	=	=

After the innovation: complete identity

Under this new interpretation, the inflectional change at issue can be described as a generalization of an affixal pattern based on a formal identity that simply cannot be motivated in morphosyntactic terms, qualifying therefore as a ‘morphomic’ phenomenon.

The ontological difference between stems and affixes cannot be dismissed as irrelevant in the study of morphology (cf. Carstairs-McCarthy 2010). Despite this, the interpretation of the inflectional change affecting the PS of our Venetan dialects suggests that there are interesting parallels between the paradigmatic organization of stems and affixal resources in complex inflectional systems. In both cases, analogical innovations seem to be triggered by the fact that morphologically accidental formal identities may be reinterpreted as morphologically significant, being subsequently generalized in such a way that they can cover a broader range of analogous cases.

## References

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