Diachronic Perspectives on a Rich Linguistic Repertoire
Translations of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Walser German Varieties

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Abstract   The translations of the Parable of the Prodigal Son are an invaluable source for documenting the Walser German varieties spoken in northwestern Italy. This article examines in detail the varieties spoken in the two islands of Aosta Valley, respectively in Gressoney and Issime, based on a number of structural features that can be easily gleaned from old and more recent translations. This significant amount of data allows us to observe significant differences between the two varieties that cannot be explained as the result of common convergence processes with the dominant varieties of the multilingual repertoire of the speakers living in these villages. While we observe clear cases of language attrition in Gressoney, the structural profile of the Issime variety is the result of a creoloidization process that can be traced back to centuries of intra-societal bilingualism.

Keywords   Language Contact. Multilingualism. Linguistic islands. Language attrition. Syntax.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Gressoney and Issime: The Same but Different. – 3 Translations of the Parable of the Prodigal Son and their Linguistic Profile. – 4 Discussion. – 5 Conclusion

1 Introduction

The special interest in the Walser varieties spoken in northwestern Italy lies in their character as polytypic languages, i.e. "linguistic varieties that are structurally so diverse that linguists would characterize them as different languages, yet their speakers perceive them as dialects of the same language" (Croft 2000, 16).[1] Accordingly, the single varieties spoken in an arguably homogeneous area are not mutually intelligible because of significantly different developments and processes of differentiation. On the other hand, speakers of these varieties clearly feel to belong to the same group and to share the same culture, language, traditions. This article presents a linguistic analysis of the two varieties spoken in Gressoney and Issime in the Aosta Valley. The analysis is based on various historical translations of the same source text, namely the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which is also the first documented record of these varieties from the early nineteenth century. In particular, the focus will be on few structural features, namely the verb-centred brackets including the particle verbs, the subject clitic and generally the subject position in the clause, and the so-called DO-periphrasis. These phenomena form a catalogue of relatively well-known case-studies, useful from a comparative perspective within the (West-)Germanic family in which these varieties have their genetic roots. The aim of this paper is to point out the possible convergence and/or divergence of the varieties given their recent process of language decay (Dal Negro 2004; Zürrer 2009). The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a short introduction into the complex situation found in the Lys-Valley relating to the Walser German islands and to the Parable of the Prodigal Son; in Section 3 the single structural features are investigated in details throughout the translations; Section 4 discusses the results and suggests a general interpretation of the evidence; Section 5 briefly draws the conclusion.

2   Gressoney and Issime: The Same but Different

The Walser German varieties, which belong to the southernmost branch of the Alemannic language family, known as Highest Alemannic (Bohnenberger 1913; Russ 1994), can be traced back to a uniform migration process that began in the thirteenth century, partly following the same routes and spreading across a large area south and east of the region of origin, Valais. In this contribution, the focus will be on two villages located in the valley crossed by the river Lys in Aosta Valley, namely Gressoney and Issime. Given their position, it is likely that they originated from an old and similar migration and settlement, but their historical developments were quite different. Although they are only fourteen kilometers away, the varieties spoken in these two villages are remarkably different up to the point that their mutual unintelligibility is taken for granted by the speakers, whether this is true or not (see Saracco et al. 2024 for a discussion). This is clearly related to their different history. In particular, the community of Issime shows a peculiar development because, before the Alemannic colonization, the place was an old settlement with an autochthonous population speaking a Francoprovençal variety (Zinsli 1991, 278; Zürrer 2009, 96). When towards the thirteenth century the Walser German immigrants settled in the area, the two linguistic groups gave rise to a linguistically mixed place, in which Walser German and Francoprovençal speakers lived side by side for centuries, although in separate communities. Later, towards the eighteenth century, the two communities split definitely, with the consequence that the Francoprovençal part merged into the German one in the three Walser Weiler ('hamlets'), and, correspondingly, the Francoprovençal community absorbed the German one in the village of Gabi. This resulted into a variety that in the nineteenth century presented peculiar features, as witnessed by the German linguist Albert Schott (1842, 13) who, during his visit of Issime, did not understand a single syllable and had to speak French with the local population:

> nur von der sprache schick' ich hier voraus, daß ich von der silvischen mundart nicht eine sylbe verstund, weil sie von der mir geläufigen alemannischen sehr entfernt, weil die schule französisch und weil der verkehr der Issimer nicht nach Deutschland und der Schweiz gerichtet ist. Ich muste also mit den leuten französisch reden.[2]

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2   "The only thing I can say about the language is that I didn't understand a single syllable of the Sylvian dialect because it is very different from the Alemannic dialect I know, because the school is French and because the traffic of the Issimer is not directed towards Germany and Switzerland. So, I had to speak French with the people". Unless otherwise stated all translations are by the Author.

This stood in stark contrast to Gressoney, where Schott (1842, 16) felt at home with the customs and habits of the local population:

> [ich] traf alles nach deutschländischer Art, wurde in ganz verständlicher sprache angeredet, fand vorstellungen, sitten, redensarten und aussprache wie sie in Süd-Deutschland gangbar sind, eine natürliche folge des großen verkehrs, in dem die meisten familien von Gressoney mit jenen gegenden stehen.[3]

This difference, which was already evident before a possible future convergence under the same Italian *Dachsprache* after national unification, also illustrates the main concern of the article, namely to show that different developments are responsible for very different outcomes, regardless of the strong (recent) processes of language mixing and language decay that can tangibly be observed in the recent decades. In this regard, while despite their proximity the two varieties are known to differ consistently in several respects, from the vocabulary (Dal Negro, Angster 2018) to the speakers' repertoire (Angster, Gaeta 2021), it will be argued that these differences were already present since their first attestations. Before discussing their peculiar development, we will introduce the source material that will be investigated, namely the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and subsequently the single phenomena that will be object of investigation.

3   Translations of the Parable of the Prodigal Son and their Linguistic Profile

The Parable of the Prodigal Son notoriously is a cornerstone of dialectological research in Europe because it was the text adopted for linguistic inquiry by Napoleon in the early years of the nineteenth century (Ködel 2014a). This tremendous effort has left behind a sketch of the linguistic varieties spoken in the French empire at the dawn of modern linguistics, as pointed out by Johann Ferdinand Schnakenburg (1840, 23), a German linguist and expert of French based in Berlin, who observed in his *Tableau synoptique et comparative des idioms populaires ou patois de la France* (1840, 23):

> Nous ne pouvons passer ici sous silence la grande entreprise commencée sous Napoléon par le bureau statistique du ministère

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3   "I encountered everything in the German way, I was addressed in completely understandable language, found ideas, customs, idioms and pronunciation as they are common in southern Germany, a natural consequence of the great traffic that most families from Gressoney have with those regions".

de l'intérieur, et continuée plus tard par la Société royale des Antiquaires de France, de faire traduire dans tous les dialectes populaires de la France et dans leurs moindres nuances la Parabole de l'Enfant prodigue. Un plan semblable pouvait, avec quelques modifications, produire des résultats fort intéressants; mais il fut malheureusement abandonné trop tôt par suite des évènements politiques. Il nous reste encore plus de cent de ces traductions, qui ne laissent pas cependant d'offrir des lacunes considérables pour quelques provinces pendant que d'autres en sout presque trop richement dotées.[4]

This effort goes well beyond the initial campaign started by Napoleon, in that it was replicated immediately thereafter in 1819 by the Swiss linguist Franz Joseph Stalder, who collected a sketch of all varieties spoken in Switzerland with the addition of the respective translations of the Parable. Moreover, a few decades later Albert Schott went on the southern slops of the Alps in order to document the Walser German varieties around the Monte Rosa.[5] Subsequently, not only was the Parable employed by Italian dialectologists to investigate varieties spoken through the Italian peninsula in the twentieth century (Campagna et al. 2007); more recently, it was translated again for the sake of witnessing the Walser German varieties by members of the two communities. This gives us an impressing amount of empirical evidence, albeit in a limited and repetitive form, covering around a period of two hundred years. It must be added that other authors have used translations of the Parable to investigate these (and other) varieties in recent times (Zürrer 1993; Dal Negro 2002).

In the next paragraphs, we will try to make a general evaluation of the data related to the varieties spoken in Aosta Valley considering the following structural features:

- the verb-centred brackets including the verbal bracket stricto sensu, the lexical bracket and the sentence bracket;

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4 "We cannot overlook the great undertaking begun under Napoleon by the statistical office of the Ministry of the Interior, and later continued by the Royal Society of Antiquaries of France, to translate the Parable of the Prodigal Son into all the popular dialects of France, with their slightest nuances. A similar plan could, with a few modifications, produce very interesting results; but unfortunately, it was abandoned too soon as a result of political events. We still have more than a hundred of these translations, which nevertheless have considerable gaps for some provinces, while others are almost too richly endowed".

5 A similar enterprise was undertaken in 1844 by the Austrian linguist Joseph Bergmann in the shade of Schott. However, in order to remark his distance from the German scholar, he chose as a text a different tale, the Tale of the Cross, of which we have a translation into all Walser German varieties spoken on the Austrian territory at that time, but also into the variety of Gressoney because the latter was felt to be a possible model for the Austrian Walser.

- the realization of the subject and its position;
- the verbal periphrasis containing *tun* 'to do'.

Our empirical basis consists of several translations of the Parable of the Prodigal Son (=PPS) starting with the first translations carried out in the early nineteenth century under the impulse of Napoleon (Keller 1975; Ködel 2014a). Moreover, we will use some recent translations published in the periodical of the local cultural association *Augusta*, and others produced in 1998 and subsequently collected in Antonietti (2010). Finally, I personally elicited translations of the Parable in recent fieldwork spent in the villages in 2022. In these stays, I collected both oral and written translations of PPS. For this contribution, I decided to use only two written translations provided by two speakers of different age living in Gressoney. This provides a longitudinal empirical base spanning over two centuries. The following abbreviations will be used for the sources: PPS_GR and PPS_IS identify respectively translations of the PPS from Gressoney and Issime, while the year refers to the year of the translation, whose author is given in the following tables respectively for Gressoney and Issime:

Table 1   Translations of PPS in Gressoney

Text	Author	Source
PPS_GR_1840	Joseph Zumstein	Schott 1840
PPS_GR_1998	Vittorio Delapierre, Gabriella Thedy	Antonietti 2010
PPS_GR_2022a	Luciana (b. 1949)	Fieldwork 2022
PPS_GR_2022b	Valeria (b. 1973)	Fieldwork 2022

Table 2   Translations of PPS in Issime

Text	Author	Source
PPS_IS_1809	Coquebert	Keller 1975
PPS_IS_1842	not indicated	Schott 1842
PPS_IS_1970	Alberto Linty	*Augusta* 1970
PPS_IS_1982	Sabino Consol, Albert Linty	*Augusta* 1982
PPS_IS_1998	Busso, Ronco	Antonietti 2010

Unfortunately, we do not have the translation carried out in Gressoney by Coquebert because there was probably an error on the part of the local official in charge of collecting the texts, who probably mistook the translation made in Gressoney for the one made in Alagna (see Ködel 2014b, 83 for the discussion). Parts of these were uploaded in the CLiMAlp platform, where they are available online (Gaeta et al. 2022

for the details), while the translations resulting from recent fieldwork still await the upload into the CLiMAlp platform.

3.1 The Verb-Centred Brackets

As is well known, West-Germanic varieties are characterized by a distinctive structural feature known as verbal bracket (see Nübling et al. 2017, 118-24, Molencki 2017, 101-4 for historical reconstructions respectively of German and English). Basically, this refers to the distance observed between the finite and the non-finite parts of the verbal complex when it consists of more than one piece, as exemplified by the following examples from the variety of Gressoney (Titsch) that are all taken from the first translation:

(1) *duę   hëd   dẹr-atto   dʃîn-ę   chnëcht-ę   gseid*
     then   has   DEF-father   his-PL   servant-PL   said.PTCP
     'Then the father said to his servants.'   PPS_GR_1840

The non-finite part of the verbal bracket can contain several pieces that are ordered in a peculiar way. Notice in particular that the order of the verbal complex – marked by a subscript number indicating the degree of embedding in the examples – matches the order also found in Modern Standard German (= MSG), namely $V_1 ... V_3 V_2$, when the auxiliary verb is *si* 'to be' (2), while it reflects a linear dependence, namely $V_1 [...] V_2 V_3$, when the auxiliary is *hä* 'to have' (3) and (4), in contrast to MSG:[6]

(2) *dîn   bruẹdẹr   iʃ$_1$-gʃtôrbẹd$_3$ gsîd$_2$*
     your   brother   is-died.PTCP   been
     'Your brother was dead.'   PPS_GR_1840

(3) *so   hëd$_1$-ẹr   khêrd$_2$ singen$_3$ on-pfîfo$_3$*
     so   has-he   heard.PTCP   sing.INF   and-whistle.INF
     'Thus he heard singing and whistling.'   PPS_GR_1840

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6   It is interesting to observe that Schott explicitly links as a clitic the finite auxiliary to the following participle although they are not structurally close to each other. In the rest of the paper the soft hyphen '-' used in the examples generally reflects what is found in the source, while the dash '–' is added to indicate morphological segmentation. This distinction is also adopted in the glosses in which, moreover, the equals sign '=' reflects the usage of an apostrophe in the text.

(4) *abęr èęr iſ fęrdrißig–ę   g'chièmmęd   o-hën$_1$-ni   welli$_2$*
     but   he is   querulous–M.SG come.PST.PTCP and-has-not want.INF
     ingjęr-khjëmę$_3$
     inside-come.INF
     'But he became querulous and did not want to enter.'   PPS_GR_1840

This order is however commonly found in Swiss German (Reese 2007, 66):

(5) *Si   hät$_1$ sich wele$_2$ chönen$_3$ aamälde$_4$.*
     she   has   REFL want.INF   can.INF   register.INF
     'She wanted to be able to register.'

Note that both in (3) and in (4) the verbal complex is interrupted by a clitic constituent, respectively the subject pronoun and the negation, clearly pointing to the occurrence of the bracket as in Swiss German.

A peculiar type of verb-centred bracket is given by the so-called lexical bracket in which the non-finite part of the verb consists of a verb particle (Dehé 2015). When the verbal complex contains a non-finite piece, the particle is normally prefixed to this latter in the right bracket, as shown in (4) above. Otherwise, the particle appears alone in the right bracket, as shown by the particles corresponding to primary prepositions as in (6) or to adverbs as in (7):

(6) *bring–ęd vir-ſich d'shen–ſto   chleid–ęr o-leckęmo-ſe   a*
     bring–2PL for-REFL DEF=beautiful–SUP dress–PL and-put.him.DAT-them.ACC on
     'Bring here the most beautiful dresses and put them on him.'   PPS_GR_1840

(7) *têdęd-s   un   ëßen-s   vrêlich   zjëmę*
     kill.2PL-it and eat.1PL-it cheerfully together
     'Kill it und let's eat it cheerfully together!'   PPS_GR_1840

The parts of the theoretically unique constituent that form verbal and lexical brackets are separated by the so-called *Mittelfeld* (= MF) 'middle field', which may contain full or clitic constituents as shown in all the previous examples. The verbal (or lexical) bracket can be further expanded by means of a dependent infinitive, that is usually placed after the right bracket as shown in (8), possibly connected by the complementizer *ze* 'to' (9), and forming in its turn a further MF closed by the verb:

(8) *dëʃę   pùr   hënne   gshiccht   d-ʃwî   hiętę.*
    DEM   farmer   has.him.ACC   sent.PTCP   DEF-pig   graze.INF
    'This farmer sent him to graze the pig.'   PPS_GR_1840

(9) *on   du-hëʃ-męr   no   kheis   gizzi   kae,   mëmmîn–ę*
    and   you-have.2SG-me.DAT   still   NEG   goat.DIM   given   with.my–PL
    khamęrad–ę   mëch   z-vęreinigo.
    friend–PL   me.ACC   to-rejoin.INF
    'And you still haven't given any goats to reunite me with my   PPS_GR_1840
    friends.'

The occurrence of MF also characterizes the so-called sentence
bracket that is found in subordinate clauses. In this case MF is
delimited by the initial subordinating conjunction (or relative
pronoun) and the final verb:

(10) *on-bën   nëmmę   wirdig   daß-ęr-męr   «mîs-chënn»   sjëgęd.*
     and-am   no.more   worthy   that-he-me.DAT   my-kid   says
     'And I am no longer worthy for him to call me son.'   PPS_GR_1840

(11) *was   mîs   iʃt,   iʃ-dîs*
     what   mine   is   is-yours
     'What is mine is yours.'   PPS_GR_1840

In the following example, a verb-final order reflecting the sentence
bracket is found in two relative clauses:

(12) *abęr   wo   dëʃę   zuę–chind,   wo-d'r   dîn   sach   all–ę*
     but   where   dem   to–comes   where-DEM   your   thing   all–PL
     vęrpuzt$_2$ hëd$_1$
     squandered.PTCP   has
     'But when this comes up, who squandered all your things'   PPS_GR_1840

Notice the occurrence of the verb particle prefixed to the finite verb
and the right-to-left linearization of the verbal complex. When the
verbal complex consists of more than one piece, there are various
possibilities for the order. When the finite auxiliary is *hä* 'to have', we
can find a right-to-left linearization as in (12), or a left-to-right order:

(13) *well-i   mî-so   tôd   hën$_1$ gmeind$_2$*
     because-I   my-son   dead   have.1SG   meant.PTCP
     'Because I thought my son had died.'   PPS_GR_1840

On the other hand, when the auxiliary in the verbal complex is *si* 'to be', the right-to-left order is consistently found:

(14) *abẹr*   *wiẹ*   *dʃîn*   *eltʃt*   *buẹb*   *zum*   *hûs*   *khjëmẹd*$_2$ *iʃ*$_1$
but   how   your   eldest   son   to.DEF   house   come.PST.PTCP   is
'But when your eldest son came home'   PPS_GR_1840

Note finally that with verbal complexes consisting of more than two elements, a peculiar order is found, namely $V_3\ V_1\ V_2$, that contrasts with MSG in which a consistent right-to-left order $V_3\ V_2\ V_1$ is found:

(15) *wiẹ-ẹr*   *all–s*   *vẹrpuzt*$_3$ *hëd*$_1$ *khëbẹ*$_2$
how-he   all–N   squandered.PTCP   has   had.PTCP
'When he squandered everything'   PPS_GR_1840

This possibility is also found in other varieties, for instance in Upper Bavarian (Füssen, Lötscher 1978, 21):

(16) *die's*   *isch*   *halt*   *nimma*   *so*   *guat*   *ganga*   *wie's*   *ganga*$_3$
DEM.F.SG=it   is   just   no.more   so   good   gone   how=it   gone
het$_1$ *solla*$_2$.
has   should.INF
'This didn't go as well as it should have gone.'

Finally, in contrast to the placement of constituents within MF, the phenomenon of the so-called *Ausklammerung* (= AK) 'exclusion' must be observed whereby one or more constituents are extraposed outside the bracket and postposed in the so-called *Nachfeld* (= NF) 'posterior field'. Notice that in some cases AK is obligatory, as in the following two examples in which the dependent infinitive, the genitive heading a relative clause (17) and the clause containing the standard of comparison (18) are respectively found after the corresponding right bracket (RB):

(17) [[*wemmo-mo*   *hette*   *kaed*]$_{RB1}$ [[*gnuẹg*   *z,ëßẹ*]$_{NF\_RB1}$ [*van*   *dëm*
when.IMP-him.DAT   had   given   enough   to=eat.INF   of   dem
[*wuâ-ʃ*   *dẹ*   *ʃwîn–ẹ*   *gaem*]$_{RB2}$]$_{NF\_RB2}$]
REL-they   DEF   pig–PL   give.3PL
'If they had fed him enough of what they fed the pigs.'   PPS_GR_1840

(18) [*wê*   *fil*   *hëd*   *min-atto*   *chnëcht–ę*,   [[*di*   *mê*   *z'ëßę*
     how   much   has   my-father   servant–PL   REL   more   to=eat.INF
     hein]$_{RB}$ *als-nę*   *khêrd*]$_{NF}$]]
     have.3PL   as-them.DAT   belong.3SG
     'How many servants my father has who have more to eat   PPS_GR_1840
     than they are entitled to.'

Note that AK is commonly found in MSG (and other varieties) in connection with specific information-structure profiles, i.e. when constituents are focused or backgrounded (see Zifonun et al. 1997, 1668 for a survey). In the next section, we will consider the data coming from the different translations of PPS with respect to the verb-centred brackets surveyed above, especially focusing on the phenomenon of AK.

3.2   PPS and the Verb-Centred Brackets

Let us first discuss the verbal and the lexical bracket as they appear in main clauses. In this case, MF separates the finite from the non-finite parts of the verbal complex. Given the several possibilities of occupying MF by means of different (full, clitic or even zero) constituents, we must be careful about this. We will assume that no MF is found when we have no empirical evidence in support of the possible appearance of MF. This is evidently the case when no constituents intervene between the verbal complex; however, there must be evidence saying that in fact MF is not simply empty, but that the verbal complex is a unitary constituent, i.e. MF is absent. Consider the two following cases drawn from the first translation in Titsch:

(19) *ę*   *ma*   *hëckhëbęd*   *zwei*   *bueb–ę.*
     INDEF   man   has.had   two   son–PL
     'A man had two sons.'   PPS_GR_1840

(20) *ęr-iʃ*$_{1}$ *vęrlôrn–ę*$_{3}$ *gsî*$_{2}$
     he-is   lost.PTCP–M.SG   been
     'He was lost.'   PPS_GR_1840

In (19) the verbal complex appears fully cohesive inasmuch as the past participle is even cliticized to the finite verb, the direct object has clearly undergone AK and is postposed in NF. In (20) even if no MF shows concretely up, we can argue that MF is activated by the consistent word order of the verbal complex that reflects what we

observed respectively in (4) and in (14) above, when MF was active and when then the whole verbal complex occupied the right sentence bracket, namely $V_1 \ldots V_3 V_2/V_3 V_2 V_1$. On the other hand, notice that the order in (19) reflects at least one possible order shown by the verbal complex in the right sentence bracket when it contains *hä* 'to have', namely $V_1 V_2$, as seen in (13) above. Moreover, the cliticization of the past participle to the finite verb is also found with a verbal complex containing the auxiliary *si* 'to be' as shown in (2) above, for which we assume the occurrence of MF. Thus, the cliticization of a past participle to the finite verb and the absence of MF must be considered two independent phenomena. In sum, the only piece of evidence in support of the absence of MF in (19) is given by AK of the direct object, accompanied by the lack of any other constituent in MF. Notice that AK of the direct object is generally considered as unacceptable or substantially marginal in MSG and in its varieties (Zifonun et al. 1997, 1660).

A further argument in support of the absence of MF in the case of the verbal complex in (19) comes from the following example also containing a cliticized past participle:

(21)

ëtlich–ẹ	*tag–ẹ*	*dẹrnâẹ*	*dr-jung–ẹr–ô*		*van*	*diʃẹ*
several–PL	day–PL	thereafter	DEF-young–COMP–M.SG		of	DEM
chinn–ẹ	*hëckêcht*	*all–s*	*was-ẹr*	*khèbẹ*	*hëd*,	
kid–PL	has.had	all–N.SG	what-he	had.PTCP	has	

'After a few days the youngest of these children received all that he had.'   PPS_GR_1840

Two aspects are remarkable in this example: first, the direct object consisting of the quantifier *alls* heading a relative clause is found in NF, which contrasts again with what is normally observed in MSG and its varieties. Second, the subject *dr-jungẹrô van diʃẹ chinnẹ* occurs before the finite verb in spite of the occurrence of another constituent in first sentence position, violating the so-called V2-constraint that typically characterizes MSG and its varieties and requires the finite verb to occupy the second sentence position in main declarative clauses. We will come back to this aspect below. In sum, in both cases a number of factors speak in favor of assuming the absence of MF, with a verbal complex that accordingly forms a unitary constituent.

Let us now have a look at the data relating to the different verb-centred brackets, respectively the Verbal Bracket (= VB), the Sentence-Bracket (= SB) and the Lexical Bracket (= LB) in the several translations of PPS constituting our corpus as illustrated above in Tab. 1 for Gressoney and in Tab. 2 for Issime:

Table 3 Verb-centred brackets in Gressoney

	VB			SB			LB			Tot	
	Y	N	Tot	Y	N	Tot	Y	N	Tot	Y	N
1840	49	2	51	20	–	20	9	–	9	78	2
	96%	4%	100%	100%		100%	100%		100%	98%	3%
1998	47	15	62	1	18	19	9	–	9	57	33
	76%	24%	100%	5%	95%	100%	100%		100%	63%	7%
2022a	57	14	71	–	19	19	10	–	10	67	33
	80%	20%	100%		100%	100%	100%		100%	67%	33%
2022b	57	14	71	3	15	18	11	–	11	71	28
	80%	20%	100%	17%	83%	100%	100%		100%	72%	28%

Table 4 Verb-centred brackets in Issime

	VB			SB			LB			Tot.	
	Y	N	Tot	Y	N	Tot	Y	N	Tot	Y	N
1809	30	19	49	6	16	22	10	4	14	46	39
	61%	39%	100%	27%	73%	100%	71%	29%	100%	54%	46%
1842	18	22	40	1	12	13	3	2	5	22	36
	45%	55%	100%	8%	92%	100%	60%	40%	100%	38%	62%
1970	15	8	23	1	8	9	2	2	4	18	18
	65%	35%	100%	11%	89%	100%	50%	50%	100%	50%	50%
1982	33	24	57	3	15	18	2	5	7	38	44
	58%	42%	100%	17%	83%	100%	29%	71%	100%	46%	54%
1998	26	24	50	6	16	22	2	4	6	34	44
	52%	48%	100%	26%	73%	100%	33%	67%	100%	44%	56%

Notice that in Tab. 3 and 4 the sheer occurrence of the respective bracket is recorded without considering its consistence. Accordingly, the occurrence of a verbal bracket can be accompanied by the shift of one or more constituents into NF as in the following examples drawn from the variety of Issime (Töitschu):

(22) *unn* *dẹr* *atto* *hèmmo* *tèild* *dʃîs* *gûd.*
     and DEF father has.him divided.PTCP his good
     'And the father divided his property to him.'   PPS_IS_1842

(23) *du* *hèʃ* *mir* *niẹmer* *g'gä* *en* *bocch*
     you have.2SG me.DAT never given INDEF beak
     'You have never given me anything.'   PPS_IS_1842

In (22), the direct object is placed in NF, but at the same time the clitic pronoun expressing the indirect object separates the two pieces of the verbal complex. A similar distribution is found in (23), where the two

pieces of the verbal complex are separated by the (possibly cliticized) pronoun and the negative adverb while the direct object is placed in NF. This means that the tables report the minimal activation of MF, independently of the type of (full or cliticized) constituent occurring in MF. A more detailed analysis of MF and NF will be provided below.

Several observations can be made on these tables. First, with respect to SB, Titsch has undergone a clear change from the early attestation, in which it is fully represented, to the more recent cases in which it has basically disappeared. On the other hand, in Töitschu SB was already absent in the early attestations. This does not necessarily imply the lack of any bracket. In many cases VB is found where SB is theoretically expected as shown in these two examples respectively drawn from Titsch and Töitschu:

(24) | *trotzdem* | *z* | *hus* | *vòn* | *dschim* | *pappa* | *éscht* | *fascht* | *witt* | *gsid*
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| although | DEF | house | of | his.DAT | father | is | very | far | been

'Although his father's house was very far'   PPS_GR_ 2022b

(25) | *Ischt* | *nöit* | *mangal* | *das* | *dar* | *mer* | *gejit* | *anner*
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| is | not | need | that | DEM | me.DAT | gives | other

'He doesn't need to give me anything else.'   PPS_IS_1998

A second observation concerns LB that is perfectly preserved in Titsch while it is already strongly reduced in Töitschu since its early attestations and can nowadays be considered residual (we will come back to this issue below). Finally, VB is basically preserved in the early attestations of Titsch while its occurrence is significantly reduced but still robust in the more recent translations. In sharp contrast to this, the occurrence of VB already covered less than one third of the cases in Töitschu and has remained stable in the recent translations. In this regard, let us try to understand more about the properties of MF with the help of the following tables:

Table 5   Constituents occurring in MF in Gressoney

	Clit	I/DObj/Pred	PP	Adv	Pron	Subj	Tot
1840	27	19	11	17	7	6	87
	31%	22%	13%	20%	8%	7%	100%
1998	29	9	3	13	3	–	57
	51%	16%	5%	23%	5%		100%
2022a	31	11	1	11	1	5	60
	52%	18%	2%	18%	2%	8%	100%
2022b	38	13	5	12	1	1	70
	54%	19%	7%	17%	1%	1%	100%

Table 6 Constituents occurring in MF in Issime

	Clit	I/DObj/Pred	PP	Adv	Pron	Tot
1809	28	5	4	7	–	44
	64%	11%	9%	16%		100%
1842	14	6	–	6	–	26
	54%	23%		23%		100%
1970	7	1	1	2	4	15
	47%	7%	7%	13%	27%	100%
1982	27	–	15	6	6	54
	50%		28%	11%	11%	100%
1998	21	–	2	5	2	30
	70%		7%	17%	7%	100%

In correspondence with what has been observed above for the verb-centred brackets, we record a significant difference between the two varieties. This is not much related to the occurrence of cliticized pronouns (Clit) on the finite verb forming the left part of VB, for which the data converge overall, except for the first period of Titsch where the occurrence of clitics only concerns one third of the cases but has significantly increased in the more recent periods. The most striking difference concerns the placement of full constituents which is strongly reduced – already in the early periods – in Töitschu and is mainly related to prepositional phrases (PP), adverbs (Adv) and unreduced pronouns (Pron), while (direct and indirect) objects and predicative elements (I/DObj/Pred) are only present in the early periods. A subject (Subj) is never placed in MF. In contrast, in Titsch we find a rich MF where I/DObj/Pred, Subj and Adv are constantly placed throughout the whole periods, with a significant decrease of PP and Pron. If we now turn to the occurrence of the constituents in NF, namely to the real consistence of AK, we will obtain the data summarised in the following tables:

Table 7 Constituents undergoing AK in Gressoney

	I/DObj/Pred	PP	Adv	Pron	Subj	Tot
1840	2	2	–	1	–	5
	40%	40%		20%		100%
1998	19	8	2	1	3	33
	58%	24%	6%	3%	9%	100%
2022a	19	16	3	2	1	41
	46%	39%	7%	5%	2%	100%
2022b	21	10	4	3	2	40
	53%	25%	10%	8%	5%	100%

Table 8 Constituents undergoing AK in Issime

	I/DObj/Pred	PP	Adv	Pron	Subj	Tot
1809	16	18	–	–	2	36
	44%	50%			6%	100%
1842	21	18	6	–	1	46
	46%	39%	13%		2%	100%
1970	8	8	–	–	2	18
	44%	44%			11%	100%
1982	22	15	3	–	4	44
	50%	34%	7%		9%	100%
1998	27	16	4	1	3	51
	53%	31%	8%	2%	6%	100%

While the first period of Titsch generally shows very few cases of constituent placement in NF, the data for Titsch and Töitschu generally converge throughout the other periods. This also means that we record in Titsch a significant change with respect to early attestations, while in this regard Töitschu has remained stable. This difference is also confirmed if we contrast the distribution of the single constituents in MF or in NF, as in the following tables:

Table 9 Constituents in MF and in NF in Gressoney

	I/DObj/Pred		PP		Adv		Pron		Subj	
	MF	NF	MF	NF	MF	NF	MF	NF	MF	NF
1840	19	2	11	2	17	–	7	1	6	–
	90%	10%	85%	15%	100%		88%	12%	100%	
1998	9	19	3	8	13	2	3	1	–	3
	32%	68%	27%	73%	87%	13%	75%	25%		100%
2002a	11	19	1	16	11	3	1	2	5	1
	37%	63%	6%	94%	79%	21%	33%	67%	83%	17%
2002b	13	21	5	10	12	4	1	3	1	2
	38%	62%	33%	67%	75%	25%	25%	75%	33%	67%

Table 10 Constituents in MF and in NF in Issime

	I/DObj/Pred		PP		Adv		Pron		Subj	
	MF	NF	MF	NF	MF	NF	MF	NF	MF	NF
1809	5	16	4	18	7	–	–	–	–	2
	24%	76%	18%	82%	100%					100%
1842	6	21	–	18	6	6	–	–	–	1
	22%	78%		100%	50%	50%				100%
1970	1	8	1	8	2	–	4	–	–	2
	11%	89%	11%	89%	100%		100%			100%

1982	–	22 100%	15 50%	15 50%	6 67%	3 33%	6 100%	–	–	4 100%
1998	–	27 100%	2 11%	16 89%	5 56%	4 44%	–	1 100%	–	3 100%

While in Töitschu no particular changes can be observed throughout all periods, in Gressoney there is a significant increase of the placement of I/DObj/Pred, PP and full pronouns in the recent periods compared to the old attestations. This outlines a strong tendency towards the reduction of MF in Gressoney although it is still a landing place for any sort of constituent even in the more recent period. Again, the situation is different in Töitschu, where only adverbs are still likely to be placed in MF in the more recent period. Particularly striking is the non-canonical position of Subj in NF that clearly distinguishes the two varieties in their early attestations, as shown by the following examples:

(26) *Und* *is* *hŏtte* *sich* *gerren* *g'fŭllt* *den* *Bauch*
      and   it   had.SUBJ.3SG REFL gladly filled.PTCP DEF belly
      der *Frücht* *Hŭlsche* *das* *hăn* *g'gesse* *d'Schwein*
      DEF   fruit   peels   REL   have.3PL eaten   DEF=pigs
      'And he would gladly have filled his belly with the husks that   PPS_IS_1809
      the pigs ate.'

(27) *abẹr* *doẹ* *waeri* *dër* *vrô* *gsî,* *wemmo-mo* *hette* *kaed*
      but   there were   DEM   happy been   if.IMP-him had.SUBJ.3SG given
      gnuẹg *zëßẹ* *van* *dëm* *wuâ-ʃ* *dẹ* *ʃwîn–ẹ* *gaem*
      enough   to=eat.INF of dem REL-they DEF pigs–PL.DAT give.3PL
      'But there he would have been happy if they had given him   PPS_GR_1840
      enough to eat of what they gave to the pigs.'

In the recent attestations the two varieties clearly converge, as shown by the following examples:

(28) *woa* *hein* *gwónt* *dŝchin* *liebó* *eltre.*
      REL   have.3PL lived.PTCP his   dear   parents
      'where his dear parents lived'   PPS_GR_1998

(29) *woa* *hen* *dŝchi* *pheabe* *dŝchein* *ljib* *attu* *un* *eju*
      REL   have.3PL REFL held.PTCP his   dear   father and   mother
      'where his dear father and mother lived'   PPS_IS_1998

On the other hand, even the youngest speaker still employs the canonical construction with Subj in MF:

(30) | woa | hein | dschin | liebò | eltre | gwont |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| REL | have.3PL | his | dear | parents | lived.PTCP |

'where his dear parents lived'   PPS_GR_2022b

Considering the lasting stability observed in Issime and the variation recorded in Gressoney, where the verbal parenthesis has been retained unlike other translations that follow the Italian text literally, it seems to me that the role of Italian as a language of contact should be considered in completely different terms – at least for these varieties – than those proposed by Dal Negro (2002, 42):

> Trotzdem scheint mir die althochdeutsche Vielfältigkeit […] einem anderen System nachgegeben zu haben, das teilweise den pragmatischen Regeln des Italienischen nahesteht, teilweise von der Syntax der Pronomina abhängig ist […] Ein Verzicht auf die Inversion scheint also typisch für intensive Kontaktsituationen zu sein.[7]

Especially for Issime, it is not clear what role Italian may have played given that even in Coquebert's time non-canonical Subj positions were fairly common.

Before closing this section we will consider again the neat distinction between the two varieties with respect to LB, namely the occurrence of the so-called particle verbs. We already observed above that LB is virtually not existent in Issime since its early attestations, while it is robustly represented in Gressoney throughout all periods. In practice, this has led to a full change of particle verbs that in Issime follow two different routes, compared to the stable picture observed in Gressoney, as can be gathered from the following examples:

(31) | de | jonge | ma… | éscht | fort | kanget |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DEF | young | man | is | away | gone |

'the young man went away'   PPS_GR_2022b

(32) | Und | is | ischt | g'gan'e | eweg |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| and | it | is | gone | away |

'and he went away'   PPS_IS_1809

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7 "Nevertheless, it seems to me that Old High German diversity […] has given way to a different system, which is partly based on the pragmatic rules of Italian and partly dependent on the syntax of pronouns […] The omission of inversion therefore seems to be typical of situations involving intensive contact

(33) *und*   *an-leget–s*   *ihm*   *mit*   *dem*   *Fingerring*   *an*   *d'Hand*
    and   on-put.2PL–it   him   with   DEF   finger.ring   on   DEF=hand
    'And put the ring on his hand.'   PPS_IS_1809

While Gressoney basically continues the model also attested in MSG in the recent periods – in spite of the different orthography of *fort kanget* in (31) with respect to its MSG correspondent *fortgegangen* – in Issime only phrasal verbs are attested in which the particle follows the non-finite verb form as shown in (32). As an alternative, we observe a full-fledged verb prefix that does not undergo LB as shown in (33), in sharp contrast to what is observed for Gressoney in (6) above. To illustrate the stability of the two varieties, although in two different constructional shapes, let us have a look at Tab. 11, which lists the occurrences of particles across all time periods in relation to their pre- or post-verbal position respectively in finite and non-finite verb forms:

Table 11   Particle verbs and LB in the two varieties

Gressoney	Part V$_{+fin}$	V$_{+fin}$ Part	V$_{-fin}$ Part	Part V$_{-fin}$
1840	2	2	–	5
1998	–	2	–	7
2022a	–	1	–	9
2022b	–	–	–	11
Issime				
1809	1	–	3	8
1842	–	1	2	2
1970	–	–	2	2
1982	–	–	5	2
1998	–	1	4	1

Note that, while for Gressoney the pre- or post-verbal position of the particle in finite verb forms complies with LB as sketched above, as shown in (6) and (12) above, for Issime only the following case shows LB while the other examples do not, as shown in (33) above:

(34) *un*   *lekit*   *mus*   *a*
    and   put.2PL   him.it   on
    'and put them on him'   PPS_IS_1809

If we neglect these sporadic cases and concentrate on the non-finite verb forms, the figures clearly show the stability of the two varieties displaying an opposite linearization.

3.3 Subject Realization in PPS

Let us turn now to the expression of Subj, also in connection with the so-called V2-property, according to which the first sentence position before the finite verb – that occupies the second one – is generally occupied by one constituent (or more constituents of a similar subordination type and degree, see Zifonun et al. 1997, 1591 for a discussion). Correspondingly, Subj cannot occur before the finite verb and must shift into MF. Possible violations of V2 – generally due to the occurrence of another constituent before Subj in preverbal position as can be observed in (21) above – are reported in Tables 12 and 13:

Table 12 V2-violations and Subj realization in Gressoney

	No V2	Subj					Tot
		Clit	Full	Double	ESD	SD	
1840	1	23	24	–	11	–	58
		40%	41%		19%		100%
1998	10	28	31	4	–	9	72
		39%	43%	6%		13%	100%
2022a	7	29	26	2	3	5	65
		45%	40%	3%	5%	8%	100%
2022b	6	36	9	1	2	13	61
		59%	15%	2%	3%	21%	100%

Table 13 V2-violations and Subj realization in Issime

	No V2	Subj					Tot
		Clit	Full	Double	ESD	SD	
1809	6	6	42	–	9	2	59
		10%	71%		15%	3%	100%
1842	5	9	53	1	12	–	75
		12%	71%	1%	16%		100%
1970	2	3	13	–	–	2	18
		17%	72%			11%	100%
1982	5	14	33	–	5	9	61
		23%	54%		8%	15%	100%
1998	8	14	27	–	2	12	55
		25%	49%		24%	22%	100%

Tables 12 and 13 also report the data regarding the concrete realization of Subj in its various shapes, as a clitic (Clit) – attached to the finite verb – or as a full constituent (Full), possibly also appearing twice as a clitic and in full form in the clause (Double) as shown in (35):

(35) *Der   oalt–ò   woa   hät   kät   déchtég géere (grä*
      DEF   old–M.SG   REL   has   had.PTCP   very   gladly perhaps
      zvéll)   dschin chénn, hätt–er–mò   kät   was   mò   kért.
      too.much his   child   has–he–him.DAT given what ihm.DAT belongs
      'The old man who liked his son very much (perhaps too   PPS_GR_2022b
      much) gave him what belonged to him.'

Finally, Tables 12 and 13 also report the data on the lack of realization of Subj, i.e. as a zero form, which comprises two different phenomena, namely the case of the so-called Equi-Subject-Deletion (ESD) commonly found in cases of clause coordination as in (36) – that are also largely possible in MSG – and bona fide Subj-Deletion (SD) that is normally not expected in the standard variety as in (37):

(36) *Aber de meischter tuet–er schrie de chnächta ón seit éne*
      but DEF master   does–he call.INF DEF servants and says them.DAT
      'But the master calls the servants and says to them.'   PPS_GR_1998

(37) *Sómét chan–der   gä   nómma es   bétzié brót*
      so.with can.1SG–you.SG.DAT give.INF only   INDEF bit   bread
      'Therefore I can you only a little bit of bread.'   PPS_GR_1998

As for V2-violations, the situation has radically changed in Gressoney compared to the oldest attestation, in which it was sporadic, and currently parallels what was already widespread in Issime in the nineteenth century. As for the realization of Subj, the data of Issime are quite surprising because the clitic realization is not dominant, and in fact in most cases Subj is expressed by a full constituent. In contrast to this in Gressoney the clitic realization of Subj was already normal in the oldest attestations and it is still the most favored option nowadays (although there is a considerable variation between the two more recent translations). Notice that a double realization of Subj as full form and clitic within the sentence is constantly attested in Gressoney, but not in Issime. However, it must be considered a marginal phenomenon speaking against the full grammaticalization of clitic pronouns as inflectional markers signaling person and number, as suggested for instance by Zürrer (1999, 369). As might be expected given the low number of clitic Subj, the double occurrence does not practically occur in Issime. Finally, as for Subj-less sentences, if we limit our analysis to the case of SD, namely to non-standard-compliant Subj deletion, a significant increase can be observed in both varieties.

3.4 The DO-Periphrasis

The DO-periphrasis is known for being a widespread feature in MSG and non-standard varieties and more generally in the West-Germanic family (Langer 2001, Schwarz 2004). For brevity I only report the data contrasting MSG in (38) and High Alemannic in (39):

(38)	a.	Context-related proverbal value:	*So etwas tut er nicht.*
			'He doesn't do things like that.'
	b.	Cotext-related proverbal value:	*Er tut so, als ob er angle.*
			'He pretends to fish.'
	c.	Support verb:	*Er hat ihr einen Gefallen getan.*
			'He did her a favor.'
	d.	Verb contrastive focus:	*Essen tue ich schon immer am liebsten.*
			'I have always preferred eating.'
	e.	Sentence focus:	*Ich tue bloß noch schnell die Blumen gießen.*
			'I'll just quickly water the flowers.'
	f.	Subjunctive auxiliary:	*Für das Geld täte ich nach Amerika schwimmen.*
			'For that money, I'd swim to America.'

Besides the role of support verb (38c), that is related to specific lexical patterns of a certain phraseological nature, the proverbal value – taking a larger (38a) or stricter (38b) scope – as well as the verb contrastive focus (38d) are particularly widespread, especially in speakers' concrete interactions. In addition, the last two values are considered sub-standard, the subjunctive auxiliary (38f) being typical of Swabian and the sentence focus (38e) more generally colloquial. In High Alemannic the spectrum of the DO-periphrasis is apparently broader and generalized to more complex contexts, including the imperative (39a), the contrastive comparative construction (39b), the progressive construction (39c), the direct and indirect interrogative construction (39d-e), and the habitual construction (39f) (see Schwarz 2004 for the examples):

(39)	a.	Imperative:	*Tue Di z'eerscht na chli b'sinne.*
			'First, take a moment to reflect.'
	b.	Contrastive comparative construction:	*Mir tüe lieber ässe als schwätze.*
			'We prefer eating to talking.'
	c.	Progressive construction:	*Si tüend em Kevin grad d Haar wäsche.*
			'They're washing Kevin's hair right now.'
	d.	Direct interrogative construction:	*Tuescht iez bald melche?*
			'Are you going to milk?'
	e.	Indirect interrogative construction:	*Är wollt wissen, öb dü Fleisch döscht ässen.*
			'He wanted to know, if you eat meat.'

    f.   Habitual construction: *Das isch dä Maa, woni immer mit em tue rede.*
                                               'This is the man I always talk to.'

This flourishing picture is also reflected in Walser German. For instance, in Gressoney we find the contrastive comparative construction (40a), the imperative (40b), the interrogative construction (40c), the progressive construction (40d) and the subjunctive auxiliary (40e):[8]

(40) a. *Z'metag tuemò em metzktag nid schwinenz ässe aber*   DOK_0101
         meischtenz geissmues
         'On slaughter day, people don't eat pork for lunch, but usually goat broth.'

      b. *tue jede Òabe fer d'liebò Séle bettò*   DOK_0011
         'Pray every evening for deceased relatives!'

      c. *As Joahr escht vergannet, as anders tue chieme; was tuetz*   BEL_0091
         ach bringe?
         'One year has passed, another is coming; what will it bring?'

      d. *Als was hännentsch én déŝhem joahr, woa tuet eister stéerbe,*   DOK_0423
         erfreit
         'Everything that has delighted us this year, which is now coming to an end.'

      e. *wenn allé tetté géere greschòneyera òn eischemra blibe*,   DOK_0006
         'if every Gressoneyer and Issimer stayed willingly'

In the Parable, the DO-periphrasis is attested in both varieties as shown by the following examples:

(41) *òn*   *ti*   *tétè*   *z'schén–tschtòsch*   *chalb*
     and do.2PL kill.INF DEF=beautiful-SUP calf
     'and kill the most beautiful calf!'   PPS_GR_2022b

(42) *sein*   *vil*   *ioari*   *das*   *ich*   *tun*   *di*   *dinun,*
     are.3PL much yeas that I   do.1SG you.ACC serve.INF
     'I have been serving you for many years.'   PPS_IS_1982

However, the data are somewhat surprising, as can be gathered from Tab. 14:

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8   The examples in (40) come from the CLiMAlp corpus to which the reader is referred for the exact reference.

Table 14   The DO-periphrasis in the two varieties

Gressoney	1840	1998	2022a	2022b	Issime	1809	1842	1970	1982	1998
DO-periphrasis	–	29	14	15		–	–	–	2	2

While in Gressoney we record a rampant increase of the occurrence of the DO-periphrasis after the first period in which it is not attested, in Issime it is marginal overall, indicating a different status of the construction in the two varieties. Regardless of the current status of the DO-construction in Issime, which must be verified with a more in-depth investigation, the two varieties differ significantly in its potential usage, also considering the growing popularity clearly recorded in Gressoney.

4   Discussion

To summarize the empirical results of the detailed investigation conducted above, let us have look at the following table:

Table 15   Summary of the structural features in the two varieties

	GR		IS	
	19th	today	19th	today
verb-centred bracket	+	–/+	–	–
DO-periphrasis	–	+	–	–
particle verbs +; phrasal verbs –	+	+	–	–
occurrence of subject clitic	+/–	+	–/+	–/+
non-canonical subject position	–	+	+	+

Considering all structural features, the overall picture emerging from the analysis carried out above is striking. Töitschu is surprisingly stable while Titsch shows in fact structural changes that doubtlessly hint at an overall shift from a consistent West-Germanic variety to a new profile that is likely to be influenced by the Romance languages forming the speakers' repertoire. This can be considered a case of language attrition insofar as the phenomenon is likely to be recent – presumably expanded in the post-war generation – and rapid. Language attrition has a clear impact on sentence structure to the extent that the (partial) dismissal of the verb-centred bracket and the non-canonical Subj position in NF clearly point to a convergence with the structural organization – also in terms of remodelling the general sentence information structure – of the Romance languages of the repertoire which have a dominant role nowadays. It is

fairly well-known that sentence structure in terms of constituent linearization is remolded in cases of intense language contact and attrition (Thomason, Kaufman 1988, 75; Schmid 2011, 65). On the other hand, older structural features such as the particle verbs are not dismissed, while others such as the DO-periphrases clearly come from the Alemannic area and must be considered an expansion not immediately linked to the speakers' rich repertoire, but rather to the generalization of a typical southern feature of the West-Germanic area (Langer 2001). The generalization of a characteristic typical of a southern West-Germanic could also be the basis for the rich inventory of clitic pronouns, especially in the Subj function, which also largely characterizes Alemannic varieties. In this regard, the contact with Romance varieties that are similar in this respect is a factor that favors the expansion and not the decisive motivation for it.

In contrast to Gressoney where a clear process of language attrition is observed, Issime is strikingly different in several regards. First, despite the consistent immersion into the Romance world, no expansion of clitic pronouns is observed. In this regard, Töitschu is different from the Alemannic and from the Romance varieties of the repertoire. Second, since the first attestations it displays a clear re-organization of the syntactic profile, which only apparently resembles the re-structuring process observed in Gressoney because of language attrition. As a matter of fact, the latter cannot be invoked as an explanation for this simply because in the nineteenth century the local population was not immersed in a scenario of language shift similar to those observed in modern societies, where a standard language – supported by school, administration, ecc. – takes in and replaces the local variety. In this regard, the stability of the structural features investigated in the variety is even more striking because it presupposes a process of language change that took place much earlier in history. This language change had peculiar characters: for instance, it affected particle verbs that were changed into phrasal verbs in contrast to the language attrition observed in Gressoney, which did not affect them. Third and finally, Töitschu is essentially unaffected by the spread of linguistic traits originating in the Alemannic area, as demonstrated by the scarce use of the DO-periphrasis.

To account for the diversity observed between the two varieties with respect to other structural features, in Gaeta (2024) the hypothesis was suggested that Issime underwent a process of so-called creoloidization, similar to what Trudgill (2011, 67) assumes for English for the transition from Old to Middle English. This term refers in particular to a process of simplification and mixing – both at the lexical level, which is most easily affected by linguistic contact, and at the morphological level, which is less easily affected – that is influenced by the presence within a community of a large number of

adult immigrants who acquire and use the local variety as a lingua franca in the context of trans-regional communication. This is in fact true for Issime, where the original Walser settlers shared the same territory for centuries with the Francoprovençal population that was present before their arrival. However, starting in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the Germanic and Romance communities gradually separated, leading to the creation of a stable Germanic language type with its own distinctive characteristics that cannot be equated with the formation of a creole or creolized variety, in which Francoprovençal contributes to a simplified base grammar of a Germanic type as lexical enrichment (the so-called lexifier). Rather, after such a long period of intense contact and exchange, we can assume the stabilization of the variety that is observed in our early sources and basically holds until modern times. The unique history of what has been called in Gaeta (2024) a 'perturbed' linguistic island in contrast to the canonical island of Gressoney also accounts for the limited appeal of Alemannic features such as the DO-periphrasis. On such a canonical island, far from being precluded, the contact must be conceived in terms of a diglossic distribution of the languages in the repertoire whereby within the island, Titsch was currently acquired and spoken, while the other varieties were used outside the community for transregional communication (Braunmüller 2016). It is likely that this situation – perfectly illustrated by the first translation of PPS in the nineteenth century – remained unchanged at least until the dissolution of the community after the Second World War, leading to the phenomena of language attrition observed in recent translations.

5   Conclusion

The picture that emerges from translations of PPS is highly diverse. Language contact and/or decay only partially explain the observable evolution. While in Gressoney it is straightforward to assume a process of language attrition combined with the presence of typical structural features of the Alemannic area, the situation is radically different in Issime, where the situation is already stable in the first sources and remained stable until today. This can be accounted in terms of a Trudgillian creoloidization process due to intense contact in a mixed community, while in the canonical island of Gressoney the contact can be portrayed in terms of a diglossic distribution of the languages in the repertoire. The structural features observed in the two varieties only partially overlap, which points to essential differences between changes due to language attrition and those due to intense contact in mixed communities. It is interesting to observe that Töitschu shows several structural developments similar to those found in English, such as the development of phrasal verbs

(see Gaeta 2024 for a detailed discussion), while Gressoney clearly shows a profile linked to the rest of the Alemannic area, such as the DO-periphrasis. It is not clear, however, how far this latter contributes to the maintenance of verb-centred brackets, as suggested by some scholars (Giacalone Ramat 1989, 45). On the basis of the data coming from the translations of the Parable, they seem to be independent phenomena, but more research is needed to settle the issue. Moreover, structural features such as particle verbs are quite robust and resistant, contributing to the persistence of a distinction between native and non-native strata within the lexicon.[9]

In summary, it can be said that the Germanic language islands offer a rich heritage of original developments within the Germanic language family, particularly with regard to simplification and language attrition. Digital archives such as CLiMAlp are an important step toward preserving and safeguarding the extraordinary linguistic and cultural heritage of the Walser people, as required by UNESCO. This allows us to compare the invaluable sources from nineteenth century field research with the new findings that communities have gained in recent decades. This is a desideratum for future research, especially with respect to the structural features investigated in this contribution.

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9 See Gaeta, Angster 2020; Angster, Gaeta 2021; Gaeta 2024; 2025.

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