

Divergent change in inflectional paradigms: Alpes-Maritimes Occitan

While grammaticalization and replacement of inflection by analytic constructions have received considerable attention, divergent change in inflectional paradigms needs further investigation. Dialect surveys of verb inflection show marked divergence, even within a relatively small geographical area; see, for example, the data in Allières (1971), Camproux (1962), Dalbera (1994), and Perea (2001). For our purposes, an ideal survey would be exhaustive by communes and would record variation in each locality for a sample of verbs representative of inflectional diversity. Realistically we must work with data with gaps which we must assume are representative on a larger scale of the patterns of divergence to be found on the smallest scale.

In this paper I examine some of the data assembled and discussed by Dalbera (1994). Verb paradigm data was collected from 23 locations in Alpes-Maritimes. While full paradigms, for regular verbs and a few others, are presented for only seven locations, the main features of difference are assigned to all 23. To investigate divergence, the first step, using the methods of comparative reconstruction, is to reconstruct the proto-dialect from which the attested varieties have diverged. In this case, where earlier stages, of Occitan and Romance in general, are well attested it is relatively simple to distinguish retentions from innovations. Still, some indeterminacy results, which may, of course, reflect proto-variation. For example, was the *i*-Conjugation future *partirai* or *parterai* in the proto-system? With this proto-system in view, I seek to answer, what motivated, or allowed, change in it, and in particular, divergent change? In the Alpes-Maritimes case, diffusion of variants from a prestige centre seems not to have been significant. Nor does sound change seem to be a major factor in this case, though, in principle, sound change can give rise to syncretism by merger of phonemes, or to allomorphy by conditioned change differentially affecting various morphological contexts. (For example, in both Western Gascon and Eastern Catalan the merger of post-tonic /e/ and /a/ gives scope for the extension of -i- as a ‘subjunctive’ affix.) Rather, here the motivation for change is a number of ‘cognitive’ weaknesses in the proto-system, to which many equally adequate solutions are available, which surface in different localities when standardization pressure is not an issue.

Some points of cognitive weakness in the proto-system are:

- Ambiguity of mood markers in the present tense, especially the ‘flip-flop’ pattern in which *-a-* denotes ‘indicative’ in the *a*-Conjugation but ‘subjunctive’ in the *e-* and *i*-Conjugations, and vice versa for *-e-*.
- Stem allomorphy, including prosodic variation of stress templates, often oxytone in 1-2PL, paroxytone in SG and 3PL.
- Relative indistinctness of the conjugation classes, with the *e-* and *i*-Conjugations similar in the present system and the imperfect, and with the *a-* and *e*-Conjugations similar in the past subjunctive and probably the past perfective.
- Typological markedness, e.g. marked person syncretism 1SG=3SG in present and past subjunctive, imperfect and conditional, while 1PL and 3PL are distinct in these screeves (*tiroirs*). Also SBJV.PRES.3SG /kant/ is counter-iconic, bearing zero-inflection while the ‘unmarked’ IND.PRES.3SG /kanta/ is suffixed.

Investigation shows that, leaving aside some local details, there are some 22 loci of innovation in the modern paradigms, most of which have from two to four variants. For example, the past subjunctive morpheme (*-ès-*, *-és-* or *-ís-* in the original system) is subject to reduction of allomorphy, to a two-way contrast *-és-* vs *-ís-* (Breil), or to a unique morph

either *-és-* or *-ès-*, at each of the other localities. As is typical in dialect geography, the variants of the 22 variables are not distributed arbitrarily, but the isoglosses do not overlap either, for the most part. The paper explores some of the implicational relationships between innovations (or between innovations and particular retentions). While the scope of innovations within paradigms is largely semantically based, there is evidence for ‘morphomes’ —purely formal clusters of categories, such as the set {SBJV + PST.PFV + PTCP (+GER)} characterized by *-g-* in many *e*-Conjugation verbs, at Mouans-Sartoux, for example (as also, independently, in most Catalan varieties).

Drawing on some of my earlier work, I sketch an optimality approach to inflection, identifying violable markedness and ‘faithfulness’ (or ‘contrast’) constraints.

References

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