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Bilingual competence, complementizer selection and mood in Cimbrian*

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Abstract: The system of Cimbrian embedded declarative clauses unfolds a puzzle w.r.t. the correlation between mood and complementizer selection. As a matter of fact, two different complementizers, i.e. *az* and *ke*, can select subjunctive or indicative in predictable contexts: *az* co-occurs with subjunctive in modal sentences whereas *ke* introduces indicative in purely declarative clauses, thus a perfectly binary pattern emerges. However, the data we collected in translation tasks from Italian into Cimbrian show the existence of an unexpected symmetry-breaking structure, namely *ke* + subjunctive. The scenario is even more complex, though, since another unexpected pattern shows up which concerns the 1st person plural. In this very specific context only one complementizer is possible. The aim of our contribution is twofold: (i) accounting for the nature of the two Cimbrian complementizer *az* and *ke* and mood selection; (ii) explaining to what extent the two aforementioned unexpected phenomena are connected with contact-induced grammatical change.

1 Introduction: language contact, grammatical change and bilingual competence

In the last decades the traditional topic of language contact (cf. Haugen 1950 and Weinreich 1953) has been increasingly attracting the attention of several scholars, above all, in order to investigate the correlation of language contact and grammatical change (cf., among others, Breu 1996, Thomason 2001a and 2001b, Johanson 2002, Riehl 2009, Heine 2005, Aikhenvald 2007). In this sense, minority languages have been playing a paradigmatic role (cf. Rosenberg 2003, Riehl 2009, Breu 2005 and 2011, Kolmer 2012).

In many of these studies the main assumption is that every property or feature of a given language can be transferred from one language to another under language contact (cf. for instance Thomason's "anything goes"-approach [Thomason 2001a:60], cf. also

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Johanson [1999: 60] and Kolmer [2012: 23–24]). Moreover, according to Sasse (1992), the long-term collective bilingualism, induced by language contact, leads the replica (i.e. the minority language for our purposes) and the model (i.e. the stronger standard) language to converge over time until “a total isomorphism” is reached (Sasse 1992: 61), since the grammat-

[*Linguistische Berichte, Sonderheft 19, 48*]

ical differences between the languages gradually weaken to the disadvantage of the replica language.

On the contrary, Abraham (2012) proposes a totally different view on the correlation of grammatical change and language contact claiming a radical separation of the two phenomena. On the basis of the evolution of Cimbrian’s syntax (cf. Bidese 2008 and 2011) he maintains that in order to analyze grammatical change language contact should be considered as a last resort, both in terms of work methodology and as justification strategy. From the logic of explanation, the contact argument somehow corresponds to a demonstration that turns out to be “paradigm external”, i.e. beyond the expected causality chain of the single language evolution steps. Against this, a “paradigm internal” or “endogenous” explanation should always be preferred. The main consequence of such an approach is not only of epistemological character, but it also affects the understanding of the structure of grammatical change under language contact, leading to the following radical hypothesis (Abraham 2012: 177–178)¹:

Wandel unter Sprachkontakt [gibt es] bloß dort, wo solcher Wandel auch autonom stattfinden hätte können – wo also, salopp gesprochen, eine Tür zum Wandel bereits sprachautonom (= paradigm intern) halboffen steht.

In our contribution we present and discuss data from Cimbrian, a German minority language, historically spoken in the northeastern Italian provinces of Verona, Vicenza and Trento, but surviving nowadays in the small village Lusérn only (Italian denomination: Luserna) in the Southern Province of Trento. The aim is to explore how mood selection works (subjunctive vs indicative) with regard to the type of complementizer (*az* vs *ke*) and the class of matrix verbs in translation tasks from Italian

¹ For similar explanations with regard to the orders OV/VO in another German minority language in Italy, Mòcheno, cf. Cognola (2011) and Cognola’s contribution in this volume.

into Cimbrian, in which contact-induced phenomena w.r.t. linguistic competence in minority languages are supposed to be strongly represented. Our data, surprisingly, disconfirms both Thomason’s (2001a) “anything goes”-idea and Sasse’s (1992) “isomorphism hypothesis” and suggests a clear diversification of lexical vs syntactic borrowings. On the level of the latter, only single abstract features can pass – in particular circumstances and through the bilingual mind – from the model into the replica language supporting Abraham’s “last resort thesis” about language contact and grammatical change. In doing so, we take up Karl Brugmann’s early insight (1917: 55) that the role of bilingual speakers is crucial to account for syntactic borrowing:

Vielmehr ist in der Regel für etwas, was zunächst nur in dem einen Gebiet in weiterem Umfang üblich war, in dem Nachbargebiet zwar Analoges, aber nur in ganz geringer Anwendung, vielleicht nur bei einem ganz kleinen Teil der Sprachgenossen, in Gebrauch, *und nun wird dieses erst durch die Zweisprachigen – denn im Syntaktischen werden Lehnbeziehungen folgenreicher Art erst möglich, wenn Leute da sind, die zu ihrer Muttersprache die fremde Sprache hinzugelernt haben und diese nun wenigsten bis zu einem gewissen Grad schon beherrschen – zu reichem Leben entwickelt, wenn oft auch nur zu einem Leben in gewissen einzelnen Kreisen* (italic ours).

[*Linguistische Berichte, Sonderheft 19, 49*]

2 The puzzle

2.1 A binary complementizer system and mood selection: *az* + *SUB* vs *ke* + *IND*

According to grammatical descriptions of the Cimbrian variety spoken in Lusérn non-factive verbs as, for instance, the verb for ‘to think/believe’, *gloam*, which expresses a possibility that may be true or not, are supposed to trigger the presence of subjunctive in the embedded clause (cf. Tyroller 2003: 108, cf. also Schweizer 1953/2008: 858), as is the case in Italian. Subjunctive mood, in turn, co-occurs with the modal complementizer, *az* ‘that’ (cf. Tyroller 2003: 182). However, examples under (1–3) show the possibility (cf. 1b–3b) that *gloam* too might select the declarative complementizer *ke* with indicative mood (cf. also Tyroller 2003: 238):

- (1) a. Sa gloam **azzar** *sai* gerift spet
 They think **that**._{CLIT} *be*_{SUB} arrived late
 ‘They think that he arrived late’
- b. Sa gloam **ke** dar *iz* gerift spet
 They think **that** he *is* arrived late
 ‘They think that he arrived late’

- (2) a. I gloabe **azta** *sai* gerift dar Gianni
 I believe **that**.*da* *be*_{SUB} arrived Gianni
 ‘I believe that Gianni arrived’
- b. I gloabe **ke** *z’izta* gerift dar Gianni
 I believe **that**.*da* *is* arrived Gianni
 ‘I believe that Gianni arrived’
- (3) a. I gloabe **azta** di none *boroatn* di tschoi
 I think **that**.*da* the grandmas *prepare*_{SUB} the supper
 ‘I think that the grandmas are preparing the supper’
- b. I gloabe **ke** di none *boroatn* di tschoi²
 I think **that** the grandmas *prepare*_{IND} the supper
 ‘I think that the grandmas are preparing the supper’

Why does the same verb select either the modal complementizer *az* with subjunctive mood and the declarative complementizer *ke* with indicative mood? Recall that in the model language the correct standard structure is only “che + subjunctive”. Cf. the Italian version of the sentence above: 1. Credono **che** *sia* arrivato tardi (‘They think that he arrived late’); 2. Credo **che** Gianni *sia* arrivato (‘I believe that Gianni arrived’); 3. Credo **che** le nonne *preparino* la cena (‘I think that the grandmas are preparing the dinner’).

[*Linguistische Berichte, Sonderheft 19, 50*]

Such a binary choice is also typical of other phenomena in the Cimbrian grammar. In the description of Cimbrian’s declarative clauses, for instance, both traditional grammars (Panieri et al 2006) and formal approaches (Kolmer 2005, Grewendorf & Poletto 2011, Padovan 2011) have pointed out that the declarative complementizer system of Cimbrian is made of two elements, namely *az* and *ke*, with the following different characterization:

² In the paradigm there are no differences between the indicative and the subjunctive forms with regard to the 3th Pers. Plur. (cf. Bacher 1905: 193 and Panieri et al 2006: 70). Nevertheless, the absence of the expletive “da” (cf. Kolmer 2005 and Bidese; Padovan & Tomaselli 2012) in 3b clearly shows that the sentence has a root structure with the indicative mood.

Az → “autochthonous” complementizer of Cimbrian. It triggers a word order typical of embedded sentences which somehow resembles the behavior of Scandinavian embedded clauses: i.e. V_{fin} follows Neg and sentential adverbials. Moreover, it hosts morpho-phonologically reduced pronominal forms and the expletive subject form “da” (cf. Kolmer 2005 and Bidese; Padovan & Tomaselli 2012). Meaning: *that* and *whether*.

Ke → (borrowed from Italian/Trentino dialect). It behaves more like a “subordinator” rather than a full-fledged clause-typer as is the case of *az*. Differently from *az*, *ke* does not affect word order: *ke*-introduced clauses typically display root phenomena such as post-verbal negation and subject-verb inversion. It cannot host morphological reduced pronouns; the expletive “da” never appears with *ke* (cf. Kolmer 2005 and Bidese; Padovan & Tomaselli 2012).

- (4) a. I bill **azzar** *nèt* gea ka Roma (az Pron._{Clit} Neg V_{fin})
 I want that.he_{Clit} not go_{SUB} to Rome
 Stimulus sentence: “Voglio che lu i non *vada* a Roma” (Italian: subj.)
- b. I boaz **ke** *er* geat *nèt* ka Roma (ke Pron. V_{fin} Neg)
 I know that he goes not to Rome
 Stimulus sentence: “So che lui non va a Roma” (Italian: indic.)

Examples under (4) display the specialization of *az* and *ke* w.r.t. **mood selection** too, helping us disentangle the initial puzzle.

Even if descriptive grammars of Cimbrian generalize about subjunctive mood (SUB) always implying the presence of *az* (cf. Bacher 1905: 193 and Panieri et al 2006: 70f), the contexts where SUB turns up still deserve more investigation. In particular, two questions arise:

- (i) As for complementizer selection, to what extent is the class of matrix verbs relevant for the selection of *az* (cf. 1–3 and 4)?
- (ii) As for mood selection, are other reasons at stake which have potentially to do with the pressure of Italian, i.e. with language contact (cf. in 4 the Cimbrian mood selection and the same in the Italian stimulus sentences, but also 1–3)? It

is worth mentioning that mood selection in Cimbrian is not reminiscent of the “German system” (cf. Schweizer 1953/2008: 858) where selection of present subjunctive strictly depends on reported speech; in modern Cimbrian mood selection is of the Romance type. Typically, verbs of thinking require a subjunctive complement clause.

[*Linguistische Berichte, Sonderheft 19*, 51]

Nevertheless, Cimbrian does not reproduce the syntax of the model language because of the binary complementizer system (*az* vs *ke*) which is not present in Italian.

2.2 An unexpected phenomenon: *ke* + *SUB*

Even if the factive/non-factive status of the matrix verb proves to be relevant in Italian and e.g. English (cf. Manzini 2000 and Hooper & Thompson 1973) it seems not to affect complementizer selection in Cimbrian. In fact, as we have seen, a non-factive verb such as *gloam* (It. ‘credere’, ‘to think/believe’) may co-occur with both *az* and *ke* whereas other non-factive verbs like *khün* (It. ‘dire’, ‘to say’) require only *ke* (cf. 5):

- (5) a. Sa gloam **azzar** *sai* gerift spet
 They think that.he_{Clit} be_{SUB} arrived late
 ‘They think that he arrived late’
- b. Sa gloam **ke** dar *iz* gerift spet
 They think that he is arrived late
 ‘They think that he arrived late’
- (6) a. Dar Mario khütt **ke** dar Bèppe *iz* gânt kan(n) birt³
 The M. says that the B. is gone to the pub
 ‘M. says that B. went to the pub’
- b. *Dar Mario khütt **azta** dar Beppe *sai* gânt kan(n) birt
 The M. says that.da the B. is_{SUB} gone to the pub

³ Grapheme <â> stands for /ɔ/.

‘M. says that B. went to the pub’

Data suggest that complementizer selection is not connected with the class of the matrix verb but, on the contrary, is intertwined with embedded mood (cf. 7 vs 8), exhibiting the afore-mentioned systematic correlation, namely: *az* + SUB vs *ke* + IND:

- (7) ‘Z iz schümma **azta** Lusérn *sai* asó gekhennt (az + SUB)
It is nice that.da L. be_{SUB} so renowned
Stimulus sentence: “È bello che Luserna *sia* così famosa” (Italian: subj.)
- (8) I hån darvert **ke** se *soinse* boratet (ke + IND)
I have known that they are.self_{Clit} married
Stimulus sentence: “Ho saputo che loro si *sono* sposati” (Italian: indic.)

Yet, the scenario is even more complex. On one hand, *az* always selects SUB (cf. 9) unless it means ‘whether’ (cf. 10). On the other hand, *ke*, surprisingly, co-occurs both with IND and SUB (11–12); nevertheless, w.r.t. the latter case (*ke* + SUB) translations into Cimbrian seem to be crucially dependent on the Italian stimulus sentences:

[*Linguistische Berichte, Sonderheft 19, 52*]

- (9) I sperar **azta** dar turt *gevall-en* (az + SUB)
I hope that.da the cake like_{SUB}.to him_{Clit}
Stimulus sentence: “Spero che il dolce gli *piaccia*” (Italian: subj.)
- (10) I hån gevorst dar Maria **azta** dar Gianni *hatt* gest genua (az + IND)
I have asked to the M. whether.da the G. has eaten enough
Stimulus sentence: “Ho chiesto alla Maria se il Gianni abbia/ha mangiato abbastanza” (Italian: subj./indic.)
- (11) ‘Z iz nèt khött **ke** dar Gianni *khemm* pit üs (ke + SUB)
It is not said that the G. come_{SUB} with us
Stimulus sentence: “Non è detto che il Gianni *venga* con noi” (Italian: subj.)

- (12) a. I gloabe **ke** dar Gianni **iz** sa gerift ka Tria (ke + IND)
 I think that the G. is already arrived in T.
 Stimulus sentence: “Credo che Gianni *sia* già arrivato (a Trento)”
- b. I gloabe **ke** dar Gianni **sai** sa gerift ka Tria (ke + SUB)⁴⁵
 I think that the G. be_{SUB} already arrived in T.
 Stimulus sentence: “Credo che Gianni *sia* già arrivato (a Trento)”
 (Italian: subj.)

3 Tackling the puzzle

The data presented above are iconically summarized in Table 1.

	<i>embedded interrogative</i>	<i>embedded declarative sentence</i>			
<i>Italian</i>	se + SUB/IND	che + IND	che + SUB		
<i>Cimbrian</i>	az	ke	az	ke	ke
	IND	IND	SUB	SUB	IND

In the case of embedded interrogative (Italian: *se* + SUB or + IND in spoken register), Cimbrian, interestingly, only displays *az* + IND (cf. 10, above); moreover, embedded declarative sentences introduced by bridge verbs exhibit the same pattern both in Italian and in Cimbrian, i.e. *che/ke* + IND (cf. 6a and 8, above). On the contrary, embedded declarative sentences introduced by *che* + SUB in Italian yield a binary system in Cimbrian: *az* + SUB and *ke* + IND.⁵⁶ This specialized system that manifests itself in the grammar of the most speakers of

[*Linguistische Berichte, Sonderheft 19, 53*]

⁴ (12a) and (12b) were produced by the same speaker during the same task. The presence of *ke* + SUB was further confirmed in follow-up questionnaires proving itself not to be a random result.

⁵ A similar model can be found in other varieties, such as in Salentino, a romance variety spoken in the southernmost part of the region Apulia in Southern Italy, that also displays two different complementizers, either of which is specialized in selecting mood: *ca* + IND in declarative contexts and *cu* + SUB in modal contexts (cf. Damonte 2010 and 2013). Therefore, the relation between specialized complementizers and mood selection also shows up in varieties outside the Germanic-Romance interface.

Cimbrian is broken by the emergence of a third possibility, namely [*ke* + SUB] (grey column) allowed by the grammar of a subgroup of speakers.⁶ Why is this result so unexpected?

3.1 *ke* + IND vs *ke* + SUB

In recent work (Grewendorf & Poletto 2011; Padovan 2011), it has been proposed that *ke*, originally borrowed from Italian at least as far back as a century ago (cf. Bacher 1905) and fully integrated in the Cimbrian grammar, be inserted into the syntactic spine in a high C projection. Building on these assumptions, Bidese; Padovan & Tomaselli 2012 further investigated the feature characterization of complementizers w.r.t. the syntax of relative sentences. As a matter of fact, Cimbrian relative clauses also display an binary system of specialized complementizers: restrictive relatives can only be introduced by the autochthonous complementizer *bo*, whereas appositive relatives can be introduced both by *bo* and *ke*. In Bidese, Padovan, Tomaselli’s analysis, relative *ke* occupies a higher C position and cannot act as a probe in a probe-goal relation which, on the contrary, is taken to occur with the lower complementizer *bo*.

The hypothesis we derived from the syntax of relative sentences is now further validated by the distribution of *az* and *ke* w.r.t. the embedded declarative clauses. Crucially, relative *ke* and declarative *ke* share the same structure since they cannot host clitics, nor do they block finite verb movement, so that embedded word order ends up being the same as root word order (cf. 13 and 14):

- (13) a. [SubordP [ForceP [... [FinP **bo**-CL [TP ... V_{fin}]]]]] (relative **bo**)
 b. [SubordP **ke** [ForceP [... [FinP V_{fin} [TP ... V_{fin}]]]]] (relative **ke**)
- (14) a. [SubordP [ForceP [... [FinP **az**-CL [TP ... mood/V_{fin}]]]]] (decl. **az** + SUB)
 b. [SubordP **ke** [ForceP [... [FinP V_{fin} [TP ... V_{fin}]]]]] (decl. **ke** + IND)

Consequently, observing the distribution under (13) and (14) we assume the following: (i) in both case (relative and declarative embedded clauses) *ke* occupies a high C position or “subordinator” (*à la* Bhatt & Yoon 1992) and does not admit feature characteri-

⁶ Cf. also Tyroller (2003: 238) for the context of modal sentences: “[N]ach der Konjunktion *ke* wird manchmal auch der Konjunktiv verwendet”. Yet, he does not provide any example sentences.

zation, hence it cannot enter a probe-goal relation; (ii) declarative *ke* is unable to license a mood feature which consequently is compatible with *az* only.

Therefore, in our perspective the emergence of *ke* + SUB as documented in (11 and 12b) is totally unexpected.

As a matter of fact, recall first that [*ke* + SUB] is (implicitly) excluded by descriptive grammars of Cimbrian. Furthermore, [*ke* + SUB] never triggers the embedded syntax typical of [*az* + SUB] (cf. 15) but, crucially displays the same root syntax of [*ke* + IND] confirming the assumption that *ke* is always inserted in a high C position:

[*Linguistische Berichte, Sonderheft 19, 54*]

- (15) a. *Sa gloam **ke** er *nèt* sai gerift spet (*Neg V)
 They think **that** he *not* be_{SUB} arrived late
 b. Sa gloam **ke** er sai *nèt* gerift spet (V Neg)

To sum up, [*ke* + SUB] cannot be explained for reasons internal to the Cimbrian complementation system and its compatibility with a mood feature ought to be sought in external factors, reconsidering the pressure of the model language i.e. Italian in the grammar of (some) bilingual speakers.

3.2 *ke* + IND: the role of the 1st pers. plur.

A strong argument in favor of the pressure exerted by the model language could be found by looking into the whole paradigm of verbal morphology, focusing on the role played by the 1st person plural.

Firstly, it is worth specifying that the Cimbrian threefold system represented in Tab. 1 presents just one exception in the paradigm: 1st pers. plur. is the only slot where **az** + SUB is excluded (cf. 16b):

- (16) a. Sa gloam **ke** bar *soin* gerift spet
 They think **that**.he_{Clit} be_{SUB} arrived late
 Stimulus sentence: “Credono che (noi) siamo arrivati tardi”
 b. *Sa gloam **az**par *soin* gerift spet

The relevance of this conundrum is better understood when we consider the whole paradigm w.r.t. the Italian stimulus sentence. See Table 2:

<i>Stimulus</i> 'che + SUB'			Extension of ke + IND
<i>Credo che io ... =</i> <i>credo di ...</i>	I gloabe zo ...	I gloabe zo ...	
<i>Credo che tu ...</i>	I gloabe az to + SUB	I gloabe ke du + IND	
<i>Credo che lui ...</i>	I gloabe azz ar + SUB	I gloabe ke er + IND	
<i>Credo che noi ...</i>	*I gloabe az par + SUB	I gloabe ke biar + IND	
<i>Credo che voi ...</i>	I gloabe azz ar + SUB	I gloabe ke dar + IND	
<i>Credo che loro ...</i>	I gloabe az ze + SUB	I gloabe ke sa + IND	

Interestingly enough, it is exactly the 1st pers. plur. the context where Italian SUB and IND morphology display homophonous forms in all conjugations (e.g. *siamo*, *abbiamo*, *arriviamo*, *leggiamo*, *finiamo*): in this very same context the Cimbrian complementizer system exhibit a “hole”, i.e. the choice of *az* is ruled out.

We assume that the exclusion of *az* in the 1st pers. plur depends on the choice of IND induced by homophony. In other words, the lack of SUB is contact-induced in the grammar of (some) bilingual speakers who take these homophonous verbal forms to be a “default IND”.

[*Linguistische Berichte, Sonderheft 19*, 55]

To sum up, both the emergence of *ke* + SUB (cf. chapter 3.1) and the ungrammaticality of [*gloam* + **az* + 1st pers. plur.] (cf. chapter 3.2) deserve an explanation which forces us to face the “big question” concerning the modality of (morpho)syntactic interference in linguistic contact.

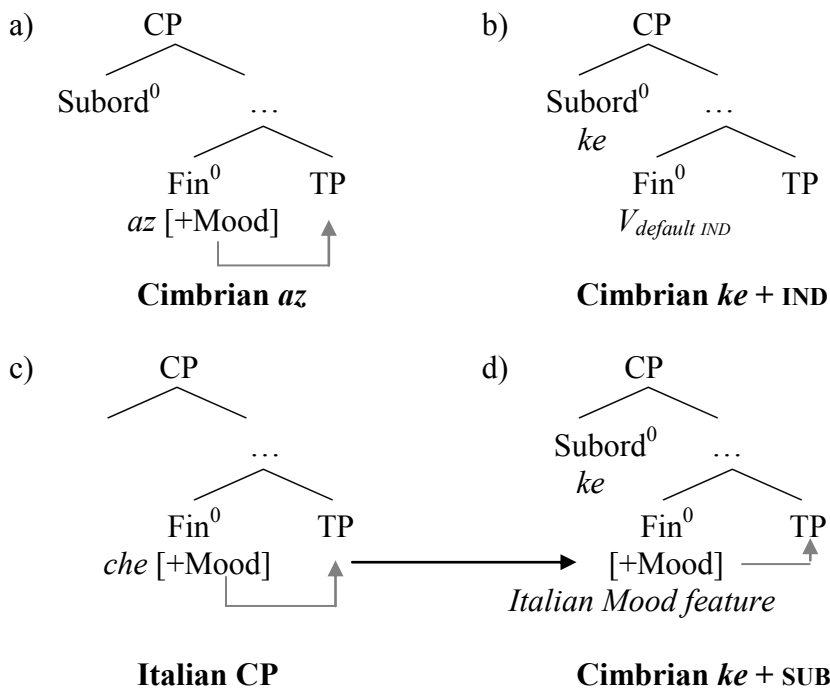
4 Conclusion

Data clearly show that SI does not consist in mere transfer of syntactic structures from the strong standard language to the minority language. Embedded subjunctive mood is

not simply transferred from Italian into Cimbrian but infiltrates the Cimbrian complementation system in a sophisticated way through what could be dubbed “weak points”.

Complementizer *ke* introduces a sentence characterized by Cimbrian root word order (V-to-C) which should be incompatible *per se* with subjunctive mood. The fact that *ke* unexpectedly co-occurs with SUB must be parasitic on the Italian pressure: this allows mood selection from an empty lower C position (cf. scheme 17d).

(17)

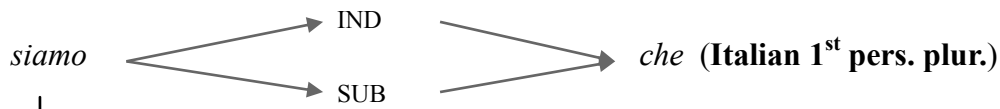


Complementizer *az* is incompatible with 1st pers. plur. due to default indicative interpretation of Italian verbal morphology (cf. 18a). Given the morphological overlapping of IND and SUB endings in the 1st pers. plur., the default indicative prevails, forcing the choice of *ke* and IND in Cimbrian and preventing the co-occurrence with *az* (cf. 18b):

[*Linguistische Berichte, Sonderheft 19, 56*]

(18)

a.



b.



As a consequence, a novel theory of linguistic contact should find its theoretical foundation on a theory of markedness (cf. Bidese & Tomaselli 2007) which formally defines the concept of default value.

5 Towards a theory of contact

As our data strongly confirm, syntactic interference in language contact is very hard to obtain contrary to general theories of isomorphism and in favour of Abraham (2012). Nevertheless, we are still far from developing a general theory of how contact phenomena actually work. In this perspective, our investigation represents a first step towards a radical diversification of lexical vs syntactic borrowings:

– On the lexical level “bare” words are inserted into the morphological system of the target language (*odiar-n* ‘to hate’, *ge-rif-t* ‘arrived’, *narânz/narenze* ‘orange/-s’). Even functional words like *ke* are inserted into the replica language in their “bare” form, discarding their original feature array; differently from lexical words they do not assume – at least initially – the abstract morphosyntactic feature characterization of the target language.

– On the syntactic level just single abstract features – and not chunks of syntactic structure – enter the target language ([+SUB]/[+IND]).

If we are on the right track the target structure is not only respected but, paradoxically, even confirmed.

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