Introduction

The present volume is made up of a collection of papers expounding on some of the most significant contributions that have been recently worked out under the ASIS project (Atlante Sintattico Italia Settentrionale, 'Syntactic Atlas for Northern Italy') to offer a descriptive and explicative account of (syntactic) variation phenomena across Northern Italian dialects. Relying on first-hand linguistic data collected through written and oral questionnaires, the four contributors propose a through analysis of syntactic, morphological and semantic processes singled out within specific dialectal (sub-)areas, to ultimately push forward the development of general syntactic theory.

Unlike its three predecessors, which were conceived as monothematic volumes focused on a unique empirical domain (e.g. *Wh*-constructions, negation, and exclamatives), the present, fourth issue of the *Quaderni di lavoro dell'ASIS* (QDL) deals with different topics: in greater detail, some of them – treated, respectively, in Garzonio's, and Patruno's & Sgarioto's papers – hold a tighter relationship with the linguistic problems already addressed respectively in volume one and two, as shown by the fact that they concern interrogative- and negation-related phenomena; the others – discussed by Maschi & Penello and Penello – refer to new lines of linguistic investigation, consistently with the ASIS goal to look for different research fields to gain insight into the theory of syntax.

In this respect, the four studies which are being surveyed give a measure of the liveliness of the ASIS project, which has been refining its methods of inquiry in the course of time and proportionally broadening the scope of its investigations: the analyses they set forth therefore represent the natural evolution of the pioneering work carried out since the eighties, whose results were first published in the year 1997. What undercuts the four works contained in the present volume is their descriptive nature, as inspired by the belief that rigorous descriptive generalizations are the basis from which explicative solutions can be subsequently derived. Their relevance to modern linguists can be measured against the actuality of the debate which is being disputed precisely on the subjects touched by them: this applies to the *vexata questio* of clitic syntax, along with the typology of interrogative clauses, meant as a useful heuristic tool to access the fine structure of the left periphery of the clause (Benincà

1998, Beninca' and Poletto 2004, Rizzi 1998) and the internal layering of functional projections, verbal (past participle) morphology, to end with negative imperative constructions. At this point, a quick overview of each paper seems worth carrying out to give an idea of the linguistic questions discussed in the current issue.

As made evident also by the title of his paper, Jacopo Garzonio yields an interesting contribution to the analysis and understanding of Interrogative Types and Left Periphery articulation by hinging on new evidence from the Fiorentino dialect: more precisely, the author focuses his examination on a specific sub-set of questions - normally referred to as "non-canonical" questions – which stand out for the particle [*o*] they systematically match with. Under Garzonio's analysis, this particle is taken to change the sentential force of the clause by adding a semantic feature to the set of interrogative properties classified as standard. The examination of its distribution is further demonstrated to provide crucial pieces of evidence for the understanding of the CP-layer structure.

Moving on to Nicoletta Penello's contribution, it is conceived as a detailed description of the distributional properties of partitive and locative clitics across a sample of 95 Northern Italian varieties: the paper has basically descriptive goals, given that the author is primarily concerned with outlining descriptive generalizations, even if she also supplies formal analyses of the inner structure of partitive clitics, of the nature of existential locatives, and of the phenomenon of complement enclisis. The systematic study of partitive and locative clitics leads to discover meaningful implicational scales between their respective presence and absence. The analysis embraces also a case of micro-variation between the two contiguous dialectal varieties of Paduan and Carmignanese which clarifies the syntactic behaviour of the locative clitic, evidencing significant differences in its capacity to incorporate to the verb *avere* "to have" in its lexical, modal deontic, or pure auxiliary use. The final part of Penello's paper is focused on a closed group of prepositions commonly labelled 'adverbial prepositions', which turn out relevant for syntactic theory since, in some contexts, they admit the enclisis of their complement.

In Maschi's and Penello's contribution, we find a descriptive, general outline of past participle phenomena: this is firstly carried out through an overview of regular and irregular, weak and strong past participle forms as attested in synchrony in a selection of Modern Veneto dialects, and secondly through the extension of the analysis to a diachronic dimension of investigation, ranging over the forms past participles took up throughout the time and the dynamics which underlay their replacement. The focus of the examination is progressively

narrowed to a recently developed form of (second conjugation) past participle in –*ésto*: the latter is offered as a good example of how analogical forces exert a pervasive action in verbal paradigms to promote the diffusion of regular forms through irregular paradigms. The analysis further moves from a purely morphological perspective to a syntactically-oriented one when data from the Carmignano dialect are taken into account to investigate into a difference between the past participle forms of second conjugation –*esto* and –*uo*: in this respect, the compatibility of the former with any type of subject argues for its unmarked status, as opposed to the restriction of the latter to [+ animate]-subjects, which substantiates its marked nature.

Finally, Patruno's and Sgarioto's joint contribution is entirely dedicated to the study of negative imperatives across three central Ladin varieties – the Badiotto of San Leonardo of Badia, the Gardenese of Ortisei, and the Fassano of Campitello of Fassa: their analysis is developed on syntactic and semantic-pragmatic grounds to the specific aim of comparing negative imperatives expressed through a discontinuous negation in Gardenese and Badiotto with those marked by the preverbal negation *no*. On considering the movement of the verb to C in negative imperatives, its interactions with the negation type, the person of the verb, and the position occupied by object clitics, the two authoresses demonstrate that the strategies the dialectal varieties examined resort to (ranging from the discontinuous negation to the employ of specific particles) vary in compliance with the different points of view they want to mark. The last question they are concerned with has to do with the nature of the preverbal element *no* attested in all the varieties explored and the position it occupies in the clause structure.

The present volume is not meant to provide a definitive answer to all the questions raised by its contributors: each paper leaves a number of problems open, which will act as stimuli to define new lines for the research of the future and to call for new methodologies of inquiry.

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Selected References:

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