

Article

(Extreme) Polymorphism in Occitan Verb Morphology

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Abstract: Polymorphism has long been recognized as a crucial dimension of the nature of language. One of the merits of dialectology and dialectologists is emphasis on the inherently variable and polymorphic nature of linguistic systems, which are always in a state of *relative* equilibrium and stability. The most striking features of the Occitan data that will be discussed lies in the possibility of finding various forms in a given cell in certain paradigms; more strikingly, it will be shown that two or three (even four) paradigms for one and the same (tense) verb may coexist in the same variety. It will be argued that if polymorphism is the natural state of linguistic systems, it is also anti-economic from a cognitive and processing point of view. It follows that the diachronic evolution of languages tends to develop adaptive solutions to circumvent the potential drawbacks of extreme polymorphism: “natural selection” leads to the reduction or elimination of morphological proliferation. Of course, before reduction or elimination take place, a more or less extended period of time may elapse during which a preference for some paradigmatic options may arise.

Keywords: polymorphism; Occitan; verb; morphology; (free) variation; paradigms; hypercharacterization; linguistic change



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1. Introduction

The very development of linguistics thus reveals that linguists should not only try to discover regularities as general as possible but also to fight, even more intensely, against the excessive, mechanical simplification of language phenomena. (Mathesius [1911] 1964, p. 2)¹

Polymorphism—or “overabundance” in recent theoretical works on variation in morphological systems—has long been recognized as a crucial dimension of the nature of language. Within transformational grammar, variation was either ignored or assigned the status of a performance deviancy with respect to the unity and stability of abstract underlying forms². It is one of the merits of dialectology and dialectologists to have repeatedly emphasized the inherently variable and polymorphic nature of linguistic systems, which are always in a state of *relative* equilibrium and stability (cf. among others the many works of Jean Séguy, Jacques Allières, Jean-Louis Fossat, Jacques Boisgontier, Xavier Ravier etc., all members of what could be called the Toulouse School of Dialectology). Remember as well that in a work like *Pathologie et thérapeutique verbale*, Jules Gilliéron (1915) extensively investigates the way “concurrent” forms may “compete” in a given area and the way such conflicts may resolve in the long run—cf. as well his various contributions on the “mots en collision.” Additionally, the pioneering works of Mathesius emphasized as well the importance of “static oscillation,” i.e., variation in the speech properties of the individuals of a given community at a given time, variation which may be correlated or not with emphasis and expressivity (cf. Stankiewicz 1964).

The most striking features of the Occitan data that will be discussed in this contribution lie not only in the possibility of finding various forms for a given cell in certain paradigms³. Rather, it will be shown that in certain cases, two, three and sometimes even four (sub-)paradigms for one and the same verb may coexist in the same variety. The question

of the ‘raison d’être’ of such complexity will be addressed as well as its resolution. Let us add that the Occitan data presented in this paper are taken from the *Atlas Linguistique du Languedoc occidental* (Ravier 1978–1993; henceforth ALLOc), as well as from fieldwork material gathered by Xavier Ravier, Jacques Boisgontier and Ernest Nègre with a linguistic questionnaire containing 2396 questions for each locality—the questionnaire is followed by a version of the parable of the prodigal son. These data which were initially transcribed following the “Romanists” notation, have been turned into the IPA transcription⁴: they offer an exceptional picture of the dialectological situation of the Occitan varieties spoken in Languedoc in the 70s. As recalled by Esher (2015, p. 251), the ALLOc provides comparable data for 132 localities across the départements Ariège (09), Aude (11), Aveyron (12), Corrèze (19), Dordogne (24), Gironde (33), Haute-Garonne (31), Lot (46), Lot-et-Garonne (47), Tarn (81), and Tarn-et-Garonne (82). Of course, the data recorded in the various atlases are not exempt from criticism and the dialectologists are perfectly aware of the methodological limitations of this kind of data. It must be pointed out, however, that the phonetic and morphological information reported in these *enquêtes* is rigorously noted and the enquêteurs systematically provide the reader with the free variants recorded in such or such variety. They also mention the existence of variants used; for example, before a pause in the final position, as opposed to those used before a vowel or a consonant. To take just one example, in the fieldwork realized in the dialect of Auzits (Aveyron), the enquêteur clearly indicates that such or such (coexistent) verb forms are used indifferently by the informant(s). When a possible or expected variant is suggested, one of the informants may point out that it was used by the preceding generation, that it is used in the neighbouring dialect or (s)he may exclude it completely. A given variant may as well be mentioned as more frequent than another one or preferred in a slow vs. rapid rate of speech, thus providing the enquêteur with a particularly rich set of (linguistic and metalinguistic) data⁵.

2. Polymorphism and Linguistic Variation

Polymorphism and variation are the natural state of linguistic systems (cf. Lope Blanch 1977, p. 597)⁶. Accustomed with our linguistic traditions and our historical norms, this is a truism we may be led to forget, even when we are linguists. However, linguistic systems are always in a relative state of (in)stability (cf. the notion of ‘static oscillation’ in Mathesius ([1911] 1964), if not because they are the result and the outcome of a tension between historical traditions and individual innovations. Needless to say, if polymorphism and variation are a rather banal situation among dialects, they are also a consubstantial aspect of varieties endowed with a shared norm as illustrated, for example, by the competing perfective forms *apparse*, *apparve*, *appari* ‘(s)he appeared’ in Italian, which coexist without any difference from a semantic point of view (cf. Thornton 2011, 2012, etc.)—we can mention as well the pioneering work of Nencioni (1953–1954) dedicated to the coexisting third person plural Preterit forms in the history of Italian). From this point of view, it is not certain that we can follow Alvar (1966, p. 34) when he holds that polymorphism is a phenomenon typical of living speech and not of the literary standard: polymorphism is just easier to observe in living dialects than in fixed norms. Observe that Occitan itself has been and still is a literary language—cf. the *Donatz Proensal* or the *Razós de trobar* (Guessard 1858), which represents the first Romance Language grammar in Europe (cf. Bourciez 1910, p. 314, §261; Bec 1963, pp. 72–73, etc.); to quote just one example, the Occitan norm does not resort to clitic subjects; but of course subject clitics may be attested in such or such dialect.

The idea according to which multiplicity of forms should be viewed as the surface manifestation of an underlying unity was one of the credos of the transformational period of Generative grammar⁷. In his analysis of the French verb, Schane (1966, p. 747) takes French verb forms such as *je vis*, *tu vis*, *il vit*, *nous vivons*, *vous vivez*, *ils vivent* ‘I live, you live, he lives etc.’ to be the result of deletion/insertion process: “(…) throughout the plural the verb stem manifests itself phonetically as [viv] (with a stem-final consonant), whereas in the singular the stem is [vi] without the stem-final consonant. One could, of course, postulate two allomorphs for the morpheme ‘live’—namely |vi| and |viv|, these two allomorphs

being distributed in the singular and in the plural, respectively. However, this solution is of limited interest since it merely restates the already observable facts and in no way explains why the verb stem should exhibit this difference at all. Instead, we shall represent a given morpheme by a single phonological representation, so that throughout the paradigm the same morpheme will always have the same phonological shape.” As can be seen, the very notion of allomorphy has no place in such a perspective.

In addition, Mondorf (2014, p. 209) recalls that “Traditional grammatical theory had, for a long time, relegated language variation to the realm of performance, thereby declaring it out of bounds for linguistic theory-building. And even in sociolinguistics, the cradle of linguistic variability, research on morphological or syntactic variation as opposed to phonological or lexical variation, was occasionally impaired by erroneous assumptions concerning an alleged uniformity of syntax, which was regarded as “the marker of cohesion in society” by Hudson (1980, pp. 44, 47).” Of course, the search for unity behind variation cannot be said to characterize Generative Grammar only, and we should remember the motto of Jakobson (1971, p. 588) according to which “Naive attempts to deal with variations without attacking the problem of invariants are condemned to failure.” However, observe first that the legitimate search for general principles underlying variation should not lead to some kind of reductionism whereby variation itself would lose any relevance or any *raison d’être*; and second, the question of ‘invariants’ should not be equated to that of ‘universals’.

Thus, we are not claiming that when possible and justified, the identification of unity behind diversity would be an erroneous task. We are just recalling that variation is not an ‘accident’ or a disturbance that would disrupt the best of the (phonetic and morphological) worlds; unity and stability should not be taken to be something else than a platonic ideal which is only met in exceptional conditions. As Haugen (1966, p. 931) points out, “The ideal case of minimal variation in form would be a hypothetical, ‘pure’ variety of a language having only one spelling and one pronunciation for every word, one word for every meaning, and one grammatical framework for all utterances.”

From this point of view, the statement of Bonami and Stump (2016, p. 469) according to which “It is *natural* to assume that each cell in a lexeme’s paradigm has at most one realization” may only be relevant within a given theoretical framework and on the basis of assumptions concerning language in general that are at least questionable. In French, any native speaker asked to provide the Imperative form of the verb *attendre* [atɑ̃dʁ] ‘to wait’ in the second person singular will hardly give anything else than *attends!* [atɑ̃], and this is exactly what the normative grammars indicate. However, one only has to listen to any informal conversation to realize that this is not the only option, and in spontaneous speech it is not hard to find reduced forms such as [tɑ̃]. Needless to say, this kind of reduced Imperative tends to acquire specific properties and only partially covers the same functional field as the full form (cf. Floricic and Molinu 2003, 2012 and the works cited therein). However, this is, of course, not a sufficient reason to exclude it from the set of realizations of the Imperative.

We shall show in the following lines that polymorphism and variation should not be viewed as a “fait de parole” (performance) as opposed to a “fait de langue” (competence), as argued by Alvar (1966, pp. 34–35)—we are of course aware of the fact that “fait de langue” and “competence” are not exactly the same thing. They should not be viewed either as a manifestation of the existence of ‘multiple grammars’ (cf. Guy 1997, 125sq., who argues against the existence of ‘multiple grammars’ and against the relevance of the competence–performance distinction). Polymorphism and variation should be viewed as a systemic property of language, thus as a “fait de langue” (cf. Lope Blanch 1977; Kristol 2018, etc.). Once again, it is a commonplace experience that in many cases, several options may be equally offered to the speaker without any difference and without any particular connotation between them. However, it is also true—and this point will be illustrated in the following lines—that at some point in the historical development of a language, the “old” may coexist with the “new,” some preferences may manifest in favour of such or such option, for such or such configuration, and this state of oscillating and coexisting options

may lead to the reduction or elimination of fragmentation and plurality (on variation, its nature and its fake, cf. [Moravcsik 2019](#)). As a matter of fact, we should not forget that the amount of complexity is at least limited by our cognitive and perceptive abilities, let alone our memory limitations, even though the polymorphic nature of linguistic systems shows that the human brain may accommodate with a certain amount of complexity.

Needless to say, it is not possible to discuss in this paper the general question of morphological complexity (for an overview, cf. [Baerman et al. 2017](#)). Of course, complexity may take very different forms, but it is hard to deny that multiplicity of coexistent options for one and same property or set of properties offers a major amount of complexity than the existence of a unique one. In the same way, it is hard to deny that the existence of various allomorphs for a given verb lexeme is an instance of complexity as compared to a situation in which such allomorphy is absent. Here again, we should not rely on the picture offered by the linguistic norm of standard languages to evaluate or describe the degree of complexity of its patterns. As pointed out by Paul Passy (1890, p. 56) quoting the French Celticist Henri Gaidoz (1883–1885, pp. 87–88), if French were analyzed or studied like an American or Oceanic language, we would identify conjugation forms like *jlèm* ‘I love him’, *tulèm* ‘you love him’, *imèm* ‘he loves me’ and we would thus conclude that French is a polysynthetic language.

2.1. Multiple Coexisting Paradigms

Recent works on “overabundance” have mainly concentrated on the existence of ‘doublets’ for the same slot or cell of a given (sub-)paradigm—and this is the (main) sense given to the term “overabundance” in recent morphological research. In other words, it has been held to be a typical example of (morphological) non-canonicity that the same cell of an inflectional paradigm may be filled by more than one form (cf. [Thornton 2012](#), p. 183). For sure, in a (morphologically) ideal world, perfection would be achieved if, as brilliantly formulated by Meillet (1904, p. 462), “Tout le développement des formes grammaticales est dominé par un principe, qu’on ne formule pas le plus souvent dans toute sa rigueur et dans toute sa généralité, mais qui est le fondement essentiel de toutes les recherches faites dans ce domaine: *Chaque fonction tend à être remplie par une forme unique, bien définie et toujours la même en toutes conditions dans une langue donnée*” [“The whole development of grammatical forms is dominated by one principle, which is not usually formulated in all its rigour and generality, but which is the essential foundation of all research in this field: Each function tends to be fulfilled by a form that is unique, well-defined, and always the same under all conditions in a given language”]. Such a one-to-one correspondence between form and content is far from being achieved in natural languages. What is more, formal variation and proliferation may be said to be the norm rather than the exception. If the kind of polymorphism such as that referred to earlier is widely attested among dialects and official languages, it seems that multiple coexisting (sub-)paradigms for the same verb are less easy to observe and much less work has been devoted to this kind of complexity offered by morphological systems. Of course, if linguists take as a base for their investigations the paradigms found in school grammars, they will hardly find the kind of variation that will be presented in the following lines (cf. [Kristol 2018](#) for a criticism of the standpoint of those linguists who limit their investigations to data and phenomena of a given linguistic ‘norm’).

An example of such extreme polymorphism is given in (1a–c): in the dialect of Auzits (Aveyron) the Present Indicative and the Imperative of the verb *dyr’bi* ‘to open’ in (1a) show that the speakers have at their disposal a double inflectional paradigm. The point to be stressed is that we are faced with pure variation: it is clear from the data gathered by Xavier Ravier that no semantic criterion may be put forward to account for the choice or preference of one paradigm over another:

(1a)					
dyr'bi 'to open' Auzits (12)					
Present Indicative			Imperative		
dyr'bise	/	'dɣerbe			
dyr'bises	/	'dɣerbes	dyr'bis	/	'dɣer ^P
dyr'bis	/	'dɣer ^P		/	
dyrbi'sɛn	/	dyr'bɛn		/	
dyrbi'ses	/	dyr'bɛs	dyrbi'ses	/	dyr'bɛs
dyr'bisu	/	'dɣerbu		/	

(1b)				(1c)			
dur'mi 'to sleep' Auzits				pɔr'ti 'to go away' Auzits			
Present Indicative		Imperative.		Present Indicative		Imperative	
dur'mise	/	'dwɔrme		'parte	/	pɔr'tise	
dur'mises	/	'dwɔrmes	'dwɔn	'partes	/	pɔr'tises	'par
dur'mis	/	'dwɔn		'par	/	pɔr'tis	
durmi'sɛn	/	dur'mɛn		pɔr'tɛn	/	pɔr'ti'sɛn	
durmi'ses	/	dur'mɛs	dur'mɛs	pɔr'tɛs	/	pɔr'ti'ses	pɔr'tɛs
dur'misu	/	'dwɔrmu		'partu	/	pɔr'tisu	

On the other hand, in the case of the verbs *dur'mi* 'to sleep' and *pɔr'ti* 'to go away' in (1b–c), competing (sub-)paradigms are restricted to the Present Indicative. The historical “raison d’être” of such a situation may be very difficult to identify. In the dialect of Auzits spoken in the Aveyron department (12)⁸, it can be argued that the emergence of competing paradigms has a purely morphological ‘raison d’être’: the propagation and success of the inchoative infix -ISC- has given rise to the configuration illustrated in (1), where the same verb appears with or without its infixed variant (on the role and extension of this infix, cf. [Ravier 1971](#)). Of course, we are using here the expressions “inchoative infix” or “inchoative inflection” as does [Ravier \(1971\)](#), i.e., as a practical label (cf. as well [Dalbera 1990](#); [Casagrande 2012](#), etc.). However, it must be clear that (a) synchronically there is no aspectual value in the formations where this affix appears—should such a value have been available, it would have been mentioned by the enquêteurs, who regularly provide many metalinguistic information in their *carnets d’enquêtes*⁹; (b) it is far from being clear that we should talk about infixation. The same type of morphological object sometimes is referred to as ‘augment’ or as ‘interfix’ (cf. [Floricić 2018](#), from which some of these data are borrowed, even though ([Floricić 2018](#)) is mainly concerned with Imperatives)¹⁰.

Let us add that the 2nd sg. Imperative has the same shape as the 3rd person sg., a feature which is common to Occitan and Ibero-Romance. Thus the 2nd sg. Imperative of the verb *dyr'bi* 'to open' is either *dyr'bis* or *'dɣer^P* 'open!'—the unvoiced bilabial in final position is due to devoicing in that position. The (sub-)paradigms of the verb *dur'mi* 'to sleep' and *pɔr'ti* 'to go away' in (1b–c) show only one variant in the Imperative—the shortest one (cf. [Companys 1964](#), p. 55). And such a property is in keeping with what we know about the Imperative: Imperatives are commonly expressed by the bare root or stem of a verb (cf. [Maiden 2007](#); [Aikhenvald 2010](#); [Floricić 2011, 2021b](#), etc.). By the way the poor or reduced inflectional marking of the Imperative may be correlated with another fundamental property of the Imperatives: their (pragmatic) efficiency is linked with tone and they tend to maximize the beginning of the word (cf. [Jespersen 1949](#), pp. 26–27), who rightly stresses the importance of the beginning of the word in word recognition, and the opposite value of the end of the word, hence the various deletion or reduction phenomena found in this position). In languages with rather developed focus systems, the Imperative may suspend any (focus) marking onto the other elements of the sentence, hence the conclusion that the Imperative is itself on focus (cf. [Floricić 2000, 2009, 2020](#) and the references reported therein). No wonder, then, that this category may privilege short forms over longer ones. This is exactly what is illustrated in (1b–c), where the forms *'dwɔn* 'sleep!' and *'par* 'go away!' are preferred over *dur'mis* and *pɔr'tis*.

2.2. Inchoative Inflexion and Polymorphism

A particularly complex situation holds in the dialect of Dun (Ariège) in (2), where in the Present Indicative the verb 'dərβe/dur'βi 'to open' shows up to three coexistent paradigms:

(2)									
Dun (09)									
'dərβe/dur'βi 'to open'				par'ti 'to go away'			'kurre 'to run'		
Present Indicative			Imper.	Present Indicative		Imper.	Present Indicative		Imper.
'dərβi	dur'βisi	der'βisi		'parti	par'tisi		'kurri	kur'risi	
'dərβes	dur'βises	der'βises	'dər 'dərɸ	'partes	par'tises	'part	'kures	kur'ries	'kurr
'dərɸ	dur'βis	der'βis		'part	par'tis		'kur kurr	kur'ris	
der'βēn	durβi'sēn	derβi'sēn		par'tēn	parti'sēn		kur'rēn	kuri'sēn	
der'βets	durβi'sets	derβi'sets	derβi'sets	par'tets	parti'sets	par'tets	kur'rets	kuri'sets	kur'rets
'dərβen	dur'βisēn	der'βisēn		'partēn	par'tisēn		'kurrēn	ku'risēn	

The particular case of the verb 'dərβe/dur'βi 'to open' could be due to both a morphological and a phonetic impulse. The quality of the pretonic vowel may reflect either the outcome of the preposition *de* of the complex form *deoperire*, or the initial vowel of the (simple) verb form, which surfaces as [u] when reduced. As pointed out by one of the reviewers, however, the stem 'dərβ- may as well be the outcome of 'dɸerβ-, with monophthongization of [ɸɛ]. And here too, the inchoative infix -ISC- has given rise to the variants in -is- which extended as well to the verbs par'ti 'to go away' and 'kurre 'to run'. The data of this dialect seem to confirm what has been said about the Imperative: the short form is preferred over the longer.

Observe that in some dialects, the success of the inchoative infix -ISC-/-ESC- has been such as to impose “double” inchoative marking in the same verb. This is the case for example in the dialect of Meljac (12) with verbs like 'kreiise 'to grow up' (cf. (3a)), where of course this “double” marking corresponds to two different strata: the second stratum applies to a form where the inchoative is no longer transparent. The paradigm of the verb 'ese 'to be' in the same dialect shows that this infix extends to the Present Subjunctive, hence a triple paradigm for the same verb¹¹:

(3a)		(3b)		
'kreiise 'to grow up' Meljac (12)		'ese 'to be' Meljac (12)		
Present Indicative		Subjunctive		
'kreiisi	krei'sisi	ke 'sao	ke 'sjao	ke 'sjasko
'kreises	krei'sises	ke 'saos	ke 'sjaos	ke 'sjaskos
'kreis	krei'sis	ke 'sao	ke 'sjao	ke 'sjasko
krei'sēn	krei'si'sēn	ke 'sjēn	ke sja'ēn	ke sjas'kēn
krei'ses	krei'si'ses	ke 'sjes	ke sja'es	ke sjas'kes
'kreisu	krei'sisu	ke 'sau	ke 'sjau	ke 'sjasku

From (sub-)paradigms like those in (1)–(2) and (3a), one may want to infer that the present indicative is particularly subject to polymorphism. However, as shown by the paradigm of the verb 'ese 'to be' in the present subjunctive in (3b), such a conclusion would be mistaken. Nor could we hold that such a proliferation is limited to auxiliaries (cf. the case of the verb 'dərβe/dur'βi 'to open' in the dialect of Dun in (2)).

Interestingly, the Imperfect Subjunctive and the Preterit of the verb 'faide 'to do' may show the same kind of paradigmatic complexity, as illustrated in (4) with data from the dialect of Onet-l'Eglise (12): here too the inchoative infix -ISC-/-ESC- has extended to the Present and Imperfect Subjunctive and in the Preterit, hence the coexisting paradigms found in the last two “tiroirs” (cf. Buckenmaier 1934, pp. 84–85, §§292–294; Ronjat 1937, p. 282, §635, etc.):

(4)						
'faide 'to do' (Onet-l'Eglise (12))						
Pres. Ind.	Imper.	Pres. Subj.	Imperf. Subj.		Preterit	
'fa _u		ke 'faske	ke fəs'kese	'fese	'fere	fəs'kere
'fas	'fai	ke 'faskos	ke fəs'kesos	'fesos	'feros	fəs'keros
'fō		ke 'fasko	ke fəs'keso	'feso	'fet	fəs'ket
fō'zēn		ke fəs'kēn	ke fəs'kesēn	'fesēn	'ferēn	fəs'kerēn
fō'zes	fō'zes	ke fəs'kes	ke fəs'keses	'feses	'feres	fəs'keres
fō _u		ke 'fasku	ke fəs'kesu	'fesu	'feru	fəs'keru

Let's add that the Imperfect Subjunctive and Preterit stem fəs'k- is found as well in the Gerund (cf. ē fəs'kēn 'doing') and that the same stem occurs with verbs like 'puire 'to be able to' (cf. in the Preterit 1. pus'kere/pu'ere, etc. and in the Imperfect Subjunctive 3. ke pus'keso/pu'eso, 3. ke pus'ket/pu'et, etc.). Needless to say, the -er- Preterit forms are the outcome of the -ērun/ -ērunt Latin Perfects¹², while the -es- Imperfect Subjunctive forms are the outcome of Latin Pluperfect Subjunctive (cf. fēcissēm, fēcissēs, fēcisset, etc.).

It is very difficult to predict which verbs and which paradigms may be affected by the extension of the inchoative infix. Buckenmaier (1934, p. 84) points out that a verb like be'ni 'to come' does not show any inchoative variant, and the same observation holds for many other dialects: this verb resists any contamination of the inchoative inflexion. It could be argued that (token or/and type) frequency is a crucial property of this kind of verb. Highly frequent verbs often are irregular from a phonetic point of view, and their cognitive salience sets them apart in many respects: they are learned rather than reproduced by rules, they escape phonetic laws, and they resist analogical change (cf. on frequency the many works of Witold Mańczak and his rehabilitation in the works of Joan Bybee, particularly (Bybee 2007)). On the other hand, the same principle should prevent other frequent verbs from falling under the attraction of the inchoative type: the verbs 'fa 'to do' and 'ese 'to be' are such verbs. Nonetheless, the data illustrated in (3) and (4) show that the inchoative infix may extend to these verbs too.

In the dialect of Les Lèves-et-Thoumayragues (33) for example, the inchoative inflexion has penetrated into the verb 'estrə'to be' (Preterit, Present and Imperfect Subjunctive), the Present Subjunctive of the verb ou'yer 'to have' (1. 'k aski), the Preterit (1. fas'keri/fa'yeri), the Present (1. ke 'faski) and Imperfect Subjunctive (1. ke fas'kesi/fa'yesi) of the verb 'fa/'fairə'to do', and even the Present Subjunctive of the verb 'di 'to say' (cf. the variants ke i 'diski/'di'vi 'that I say'):

(5)						
'estrə'to be' Les Lèves-et-Thoumayragues (33)						
Preterit				Pres. Subj.		Imperf. Subj.
si'Yeri	fy'Yeri	sis'keri	fys'keri	ke 'sjeski		ke sis'kesi
ty si'Yerə	ty fy'Yerə	ty sis'kerə	ty fys'kerə	ke ty 'sjeskə		ke ty sis'kesə
si'Ye	fy'Ye	sis'ke	fys'ke	ke 'sjeskə		ke sis'ke
si'Yerə	fy'Yerə	sis'kerə	fys'kerə	ke si'Yjēŋ	ke sis'kēŋ	ke sis'kesə
vuzau	vuzau	vuzau sis'kerə	vuzau fys'kerə	ke vuzau sis'kje		ke vuzau
si'Yerə	fy'Yerə					sis'kesə
si'Yerə	fy'Yerə	sis'kerə	fys'kerə	ke 'sjeskə		ke sis'kesə

In the dialect of Les Lèves-et-Thoumayragues (Aquitaine), the connections between the Present Perfect and the Present/Imperfect Subjunctive of the verb 'estrə'to be' can be seen in the selection of the stem used in the various tenses/moods: in the Present Perfect, the stem si-/sj- (Allières 1971, p. 142) and the stem fy-, to which the Perfect exponent -er- (<ērun/ -ērunt) can be attached and may be lengthened with the infix -ISC-/-ESC- (cf. 1st sg. forms si-s'k-er-i, fy-s'k-er-i). Interestingly, however, in the Imperative only one of the two variants is reported: 'di'və'say! (sg.)/'di'vej 'say! (pl.): no corresponding inchoative

stem has been mentioned. Notice that the Imperative is known for showing (phonetically) aberrant patterns and for its resistance to analogical change.

Another striking case of extreme polymorphism can be observed in the paradigms of the verb *a'na* 'to go' again in the dialect of Dun in the Ariège department:

(6)								
<i>a'na</i> 'to go' (Dun (09))								
Pres. Ind.	Imper.	Pres. Subj.	Imperf. Subj.				Preterit	
'baʊ		'ãŋge	ãŋ'geſe	ãŋ'geſo	a'neſo		ãŋ'gegi	ãŋ'geri
'bas	'bas	'ãŋges	ãŋ'geſos	ãŋ'geſes	a'neſes	a'neſos	ãŋ'geges	ãŋ'geres
'ba		'ãŋge	ãŋ'geſo	ãŋ'geſe	a'neſe	a'neſo	ãŋ'gek	
a'nân		ãŋ'gẽn	ãŋ'geſẽn	ãŋ'geſõn	a'neſõn	a'neſẽn	ãŋ'geVẽn	ãŋ'gerẽn
a'nats	a'nats	ãŋ'gets	ãŋ'geſots	ãŋ'geſets	a'neſots	a'neſets	ãŋ'geVets	ãŋ'gerets
'bân		'ãŋgẽn	ãŋ'geſõn	ãŋ'geſẽn	a'neſõn	a'neſẽn	ãŋ'geVẽn	ãŋ'gerẽn

The extreme polymorphism found in the verb morphology of this dialect (up to 4 coexistent (sub-)paradigms in the Imperfect Subjunctive) is not easy to explain.

As far as the Present Indicative is concerned, no particular variation can be mentioned. The unique aspect to be pointed out is the correlation between the 2nd sg. of the Present Indicative and the same cell of the Imperative: as we already observed, the general pattern in Occitan is to have the 2nd sg. (Imperative) alongside the 3rd sg. (Present Indicative) (cf. Floricic 2018). From this point of view, the relation between Imperative and Present Indicative in this dialect is reminiscent of that of Italian, where the Imperative of monosyllabic verbs is taken from the 2nd sg. Present Indicative and does not continue the corresponding Latin Imperative (cf. (7)):

(7)								
'dare 'to give'		'fare 'to do'		'stare 'to stay'		'andare 'to go'		
Pres. Ind.	Imper.	Pres. Ind.	Imper.	Pres. Ind.	Imper.	Pres. Ind.	Imper.	
'dɔ		'fatʃo	'fɔ	s'tɔ		'vado	'vɔ	
'daj	'daj	'faj	'faj	s'taj	s'taj	'vaj	'vaj	
'da	'da	'fa	'fa	s'ta	s'ta	'va	'va	
'djamo	'djamo	fat'tʃamo	fat'tʃamo	s'tjamo	s'tjamo	an'djamo	an'djamo	
'date	'date	'fate	'fate	s'tate	s'tate	an'date	an'date	
'danno		'fanno		s'tanno		'vanno		

In other words, while in Italian the Imperative 2nd singular of the 1st conjugation in *-are* coincide with the 3rd person singular of the Present Indicative, the monosyllabic verbs in *-are* have their Imperative identical to the 2nd person singular of the Present Indicative (cf. Floricic and Molinu 2003, 2012; Floricic 2007, 2018, etc.)¹³.

However, the most interesting aspect of the verb (sub-)paradigms in (6) is the extension/generalization of the velar segment, which has again as its starting point the Latin Perfect forms (cf. Bourciez 1927). From the Preterit, it extends to the Subjunctive, as shown by forms such as the Present Subjunctive *ãŋge* and the Imperfect Subjunctive *ãŋ'geſe/ãŋ'geſo*. As a matter of fact, the velar stop of the stem *ãŋ'g-* can be said to go back to the Latin Perfectum: it is a well-known fact that the Preterit of various verbs played a crucial role in Occitan verb morphology and that it spread in many sectors of the verbal system (cf. Chabaneau 1876, p. 261). However synchronically, is it not clear to which extent we can hold that we are dealing with a 'Preterit stem' obtained adding the augment *-g-* to the stem *an-*.

The phonetic process at stake had already been explained by Millardet (1910, pp. 185–86). And if the forms with a velar consonant have had such a success in Occitan morphology, it is also due to the frequency and saliency of the Preterit of such verbs as *ac* <habuit (cf. Camproux 1962, p. 436), as has been repeatedly noticed (cf. infra)¹⁴.

From this point of view, the stem $\tilde{a}^{\eta}g-$ is not stranger than the stem $be^{\eta}g-$ of the verb $be^{\eta}ge$ ‘to come’ (cf. Ronjat 1937, pp. 295–96, §645), and Allières (1971, pp. 146–47) points out the close link between the two verbs (for a discussion, cf. Floricic 2019, 2021a). The point to be stressed is that in the dialect of Dun, the spread of the velar segment in the verb paradigms of $a'na$ ‘to go’ has not yet eliminated the non-velar stems, hence the coexistence of both in the Imperfect Subjunctive. As for the polymorphism found in the Preterit (cf. the 1st person singular forms $\tilde{a}^{\eta}g\epsilon gi/\tilde{a}^{\eta}g\epsilon ri$ ‘I went’), it is due—as has been already observed—to the evolution of the Latin Perfect forms in $-ui$: the velar stop arises as a strengthening process of the velar glide which devoices in final position in the zero 3rd person singular form (cf. Schulz-Gora 1906, pp. 96–97). And this form acts as a pivot on which the whole paradigm may be reshaped (cf. Bybee and Brewer 1980; Floricic 2021a and especially Bourciez 1927, pp. 116, 122–23): the form 3. $\tilde{a}^{\eta}g\epsilon k$ ‘(s)he went’, modelled on 3. $b\tilde{e}^{\eta}g\epsilon k$ ‘(s)he came’ and reanalyzed as a zero stem, takes on the various personal endings¹⁵. In other words, the basicness of the Preterit 3rd person singular can be seen in the fact that it has served as a base on which the first person singular has been reshaped; hence 1. $\tilde{a}^{\eta}g\epsilon gi$, 2. $\tilde{a}^{\eta}g\epsilon ges$, etc., where the second velar segment is of course secondary (cf. Sicre (1907–1908, p. 394) for similar data in the dialect of Foix in the Ariège area).

Interestingly, the variants of the $\tilde{a}^{\eta}g\epsilon ri$ type are derived as well from the Perfect forms. However, in this case the starting point of the process is not the 3rd person singular form but the 3rd person plural one. As a matter of fact, the stem found in 1. $\tilde{a}^{\eta}g\epsilon ri$, 2. $\tilde{a}^{\eta}g\epsilon res$, etc. can only be explained taking as base the forms in $-\tilde{e}runt/-\tilde{e}runt$, and this feature further illustrates the crucial role of the 3rd person forms (cf. Bourciez 1927, p. 114). As for the stem $\tilde{a}^{\eta}g-$ itself, it may be due to the analogy of the stem $b\tilde{e}^{\eta}g-$ of the verb $be'ni$ ‘to come’, as pointed out earlier (cf. Floricic 2021a, 2022).

As for the origin of the stem $\tilde{a}^{\eta}ges-$, it can be said to continue the Latin Subjunctive Pluperfect of the *ambulāvissēm* type. And the vowel following the velar segment (cf. $\tilde{a}^{\eta}g-\epsilon$ -so) can be held to come from the Preterit forms (cf. $\tilde{a}^{\eta}g-\epsilon$ -k, etc.). The final vowel of the $\tilde{a}^{\eta}geso$ variant may be said to have spread from the Present Indicative where it is the regular outcome of $-a$ in unstressed syllable (it is attested as well thorough the paradigm of the Imperfect Indicative: $a'na\beta o$, $a'na\beta os$, $a'na\beta o$, $a'na\beta \tilde{o}n$, $ana'\beta ots$, $a'na\beta \tilde{o}n$). It must be emphasized that the Latin singular endings of the Pluperfect Subjunctive are only maintained in the second person: the 1st and 3rd person endings $-m$ and $-t$ are lost, hence the syncretism found in these cells (cf. $\tilde{a}^{\eta}geso/\tilde{a}^{\eta}gese/a'neso$). Of course, this particular vocalism has spread from the singular to the plural, hence forms like $\tilde{a}^{\eta}gesots/a'nesots$.

Another syncretism can be found, i.e., that between the cell 4 (1st plural) and the cell 6 (3rd plural). A syncretism which is probably due—in this case too—to the fate of the final nasal consonant of the Pluperfect Subjunctive forms (cf. *ambulā-v-is-sē-mus*, *ambulā-v-is-se-nt*): once the final consonant of the *ambulā-v-is-se-nt* type is lost, we are left with a final nasal which nasalizes the preceding vowel, hence $\tilde{a}^{\eta}ges\tilde{e}n/a'nes\tilde{e}n$. In the same way, the shape of the 1st person plural can be accounted for holding that the $-us$ final sequence has been lost (cf. in Romanian *dormim* from *dormīmūs*), hence the nasalization of the post-tonic vowel.

2.3. Phonetic and Lexical Conditioning behind Extreme Polymorphism

Phonetic polymorphism probably is the easiest kind of polymorphism to observe in everyday speech, and this is probably the type of polymorphism that linguists have most readily recognized in earlier linguistic research (cf. Sturtevant 1917, p. 121; the question of free variants was discussed among others by Troubetzkoy). By the way, Allières takes phonetic polymorphism to be the ‘purest’ kind of polymorphism and the most palpable one, as widely illustrated by the fate of the plural definite article derived from *illos/illas* (cf. Straka 1979, 443sq. on the phonetic scenario underlying such a polymorphism).

As a further example of pure variation within coexistent paradigms, we shall mention the case of the Conditional forms in the dialect of Clermont-le-Fort (31) in (8):

(8)								
Clermont-le-Fort (31)								
'estre 'to be'			bas'ti 'to build'			'fa 'to do'		
Conditional	Future		Conditional	Future		Conditional	Future	
si'ɔ̃i	si'rɔ̃i	si'rei	basti'jɔ̃i	basti'rɔ̃i	basti're	fa'jɔ̃i	fa'rɔ̃i	fa're
si'ɔs	si'rɔs	si'ras	basti'jɔs	basti'rɔs	basti'ras	fa'jɔs	fa'rɔs	fa'ras
si'o	si'ro	si'ra	basti'jɔ	basti'rɔ	basti'ra	fa'jɔ	fa'rɔ	fa'ra
si'ɔ̃n	si'rɔ̃n	si'rɛ̃n	basti'jɔ̃n	basti'rɔ̃n	basti'rɛ̃n	fa'jɔ̃n	fa'rɔ̃n	fa'rɛ̃n
si'ɔts	si'rɔts	si'rets	basti'jɔts	basti'rɔts	basti'rets	fa'jɔts	fa'rɔts	fa'rets
si'ɔ̃n	si'rɔ̃n	si'rɛ̃n	basti'jɔ̃n	basti'rɔ̃n	basti'rɛ̃n	fa'jɔ̃n	fa'rɔ̃n	fa'rɛ̃n

The coexistent paradigms in (8) illustrate the idea put forth by Jacques Allières (1954) that, in many cases, polymorphism has a phonetic grounding. As is well known, the Romance Conditional continues a periphrastic construction made of the Infinitive of the lexical verb plus the Imperfect Indicative *habēbam* of the auxiliary *habēre* (cf. *cantāre habēbam* > *cantarea* > *cantaría* '(s)he would sing' (Sp.))¹⁶. In the formation of Conditional in modern Italian, the auxiliary *habēre* is not used in the Imperfect Indicative but in the Preterit, hence *cantāre habuī* > *cantarei*—the *cantāre habēbam* type is widely attested in Old Italian and in various dialects and dialectal areas in Italy (cf. Rohlfs 1968, pp. 339–42, §§593–594). The point to be stressed is that the same ending as that used in (7) appears in the Imperfect Indicative (cf. *basti'sjɔ̃i* 'I built', *basti'sjɔs*, *basti'sjɔ*, etc.; *fa'jɔ̃i* 'I did', *fa'jɔs*, *fa'jɔ*, etc.)¹⁷. From this point of view, it can be said that the Conditional and the Future are built upon the same stem, except that the -r- exponent of the Future may simply be in complementary distribution with zero or a glide in the Conditional. It follows that a simple analysis would be to assume that one of the variants of the Conditional (co-existent) forms is obtained deleting the -r- morph of the Future/Conditional. In intervocalic contexts, this situation leads to a hiatus which would be solved inserting an anti-hiatic glide, hence forms like *basti'jɔ̃i*, *fa'jɔ̃i*, etc. However, this analysis does not hold in other dialects, where the glide cannot be said to have an anti-hiatic function. In the dialect of Meljac (12) for example, the 1st person singular Conditional form *durmi'rjɔ* 'I would sleep' (as opposed to the Future form *durmi'rɔ* 'I will sleep') cannot be said to owe its glide to any anti-hiatic constraint. What the dialect of Meljac shows is that -rjɔ must be taken to be the primitive outcome of the Conditional: from there, a simplification process must have taken place, which reduces the -rjɔ sequence to -jɔ, hence the variants *basti'rɔ̃i* and *basti'jɔ̃i* from **basti'rjɔ̃i* (cf. as well Esher 2015, p. 253)—see as well the case of *arĕa* > *arja* > *aja* in Tuscan. Mutatis mutandis, the same kind of analysis can account for the Conditional form *fa'rɔ̃i* and the Imperfect Indicative form *fa'jɔ̃i* 'I did': *fa'jɔ̃i* can be taken to presuppose a form like *fa'jɔ̃i* whose -jɔ̃- may have secondarily simplified in -jɔ- (cf. in Tuscan the evolution of *gĕlu* > *ġjelo* > *ġelo*). The data of the *aveyronnais* dialect of Sonnac in (9) confirm our analysis: as can be seen, Conditional forms in -rjɔ and -rɔ coexist within the same (sub-)paradigms:

(9)								
Sonnac (12)								
kān'ta 'to sing'			'bēndre 'to sell'			'fa 'to do'		
Conditional	Future		Conditional	Future		Conditional	Future	
kānta'rɔ	kānta'rjɔ	kānta're	bēn'drɔ	bēn'drjɔ	bēn'dre	fa'rjɔ	fa'rɔ	fa're
kānta'rɔs	kānta'rjɔs	kānta'ras	bēn'drɔs	bēn'drjɔs	bēn'dras	fa'rjɔs	fa'rɔs	fa'ras
kānta'rɔ	kānta'rjɔ	kānta'ra	bēn'drɔ	bēn'drjɔ	bēn'dra	fa'rjɔ	fa'rɔ	fa'ra
kānta'rɔ̃n	kānta'rjɔ̃n	kānta'rɛ̃n	bēn'drjɔ̃n	bēn'drɔ̃n	bēn'drɛ̃n	fa'rjɔ̃n	fa'rɔ̃n	fa'rɛ̃n
kānta'rɔts	kānta'rjɔtʃ	kānta'rets	bēn'drjɔtʃ	bēn'drɔts	bēn'drets	fa'rjɔtʃ	fa'rɔtʃ	fa'rets
kānta'rɔ̃n	kānta'rjɔ̃n	kānta'rɛ̃n	bēn'drjɔ̃n	bēn'drɔ̃n	bēn'drɛ̃n	fa'rjɔ̃n	fa'rɔ̃n	fa'rɛ̃n

Interestingly, in some dialects like that of Gaillac (81), within the same (sub-)paradigm variants in -rjɔ and in -jɔ can be found, as illustrated in (10), thus confirming our analysis:

(10)							
Gaillac (81)							
bas'ti 'to build'		a'na 'to go'		'fa 'to do'			
Conditional		Future	Conditional	Future	Conditional		Future
basti'jɔ	basti'rjo	basti'rej̃	ani'rjɔ	ani'rej̃	fa'rjɔ		fa'rej̃
basti'jos		basti'ras	ani'rjos	ani'ras	fa'rjos	fa'jos	fa'ras
basti'jɔ		basti'ra	ani'jɔ	ani'ra	fa'rjɔ		fa'ra
basti'jān		basti'rēn	ani'rjān	ani'rēn	fa'rjān	fa'jān	fa'rēn
basti'jas		basti'res	ani'rjas	ani'res	fa'rjas		fa'res
basti'jɔ̃		basti'rɔ̃	ani'jɔ̃	ani'rɔ̃	fa'rjɔ̃	fa'jɔ̃	fa'rɔ̃

To sum up: the sequence -'rjɔ can be simplified by either eliminating the glide (hence -'rɔ), or by eliminating the vibrant (hence -'jɔ). In some cases, the reduction of the phonetic string of the Conditional may lead to a situation that could be said to be in some sense anti-iconic: in the dialect of Saint-Martin Lalande (11), for example, the verb dur'mi 'to sleep' has as Future form durmi'ra (cf. the Present Indicative forms dur'misi, dur'mises, dur'mis, durmi'sēn, durmi'sets, dur'misūn). On the other hand, the Conditional form is durmi'o 'I would sleep': the amount of morphological complexity thus is less high in the Conditional than in the Present Indicative, where the verb forms are augmented via the aforementioned element -ISC-. In any case, the pattern that shows up in the dialect of Saint-Martin Lalande offers an illustration of the formal asymmetry between the Future and the Conditional (cf. [Esher 2015](#) for an indepth analysis).

Another instance of (phonetic) polymorphism may be illustrated in the paradigms of the Future of the verb a'na 'to go' in several dialects. This verb has given rise to a large amount of discussions and hypotheses concerning its etymology and its evolution from Latin. It is of course not the place to re-open this old debate. As exemplified in (11) with data from the dialects of Sonnac and Saint-Matré, the nasal consonant of this form may delete intervocalically, hence the double paradigm found in the dialect of Sonnac. Notice that in the dialect of Saint-Matré, the reduced allomorph is limited to certain cells of the paradigm (1, 4, 5), thus showing that in this dialect the phenomenon at stake is just incipient:

(11)					
Saint-Matre (46)		Sonnac (11)			
Future		Future		Conditional	
ani're	ai're	ani're	ai're	ani'rɔ	ai'ro
ani'ras		ani'ras	ai'ras	ani'rɔs	ai'rɔs
ani'ra		ani'ra	ai'ra	ani'ro	ai'ro
ani'rēn	ai'rēn	ani'rēn	ai'rēn	ani'rɔ̃n	ai'rɔ̃n
ani'res	ai'res	ani'rets	ai'rets	ani'rɔts	ai'rɔts
ani'rān		ani'rān	ai'rān	ani'rɔ̃n	ai'rɔ̃n

It is probable that such kind of variation arises in contexts of *tempo allegro*, with effects that are all the more important that this verb belongs to the most frequent ones. However, once the two kinds of variants—a short one and a long one—have come to existence, they may extend to the whole paradigm and leave their 'own life'.

A slightly different case to be mentioned in this respect is the case of the verb a'na 'to go' in the dialect of Caychax (09).

(12)					
a'na 'to go' (Caychax (09))					
Pres. Ind.	Pres. Subj.	Future		Conditional	
'ba _u	'ba _ŋ go	ani're	bi're	ani'rō	bi'rō
'bas	'ba _ŋ gos	ani'ras	bi'ras	ani'rōs	bi'rōs
'ba	'ba _ŋ go	ani'ra	bi'ra	ani'rō	bi'rō
a'nān	a'nēn	ani'rēn	bi'rēn	ani'rōn	bi'rōn
a'nats	a'nets	ani'rets	bi'rets	ani'rōts	bi'rōts
'bān	'ba _ŋ gūn	ani'rān	bi'rān	ani'rōn	bi'rōn

As shown in (12), the paradigms of the Present Indicative and of the Present Subjunctive show suppletive stems: *ba-* in the cells 1, 2, 3, 6 and *ana-* in the cells 4 and 5: the first one is the outcome of Lat. *vadēre*, while the second could derive from *ambulāre*¹⁸. As recalled by Mańczak (2001, p. 23), since the XVIth Century at least 60 etymologies have been proposed to account for the particular shape of this verb in the Romance Languages. The idea according to which the unexpected phonetic evolution of this verb would be due to its high frequency, is taken to go back at least to Friedrich August Pott (1852, p. 315). As for the stem of the Present Subjunctive 'ba_ŋgo, its analysis is more complex but it can be argued to be modelled on the (Present and Imperfect) Subjunctive of the verbs *be'ni* 'to come'/'te'ni 'to hold' (cf. Massouré 2005, p. 266; 2012, p. 251): 'bē_ŋgu and bē_ŋ'ges/'tē_ŋgo and tē_ŋ'ges, the Subjunctive stem being borrowed from the Preterit (cf. bē_ŋ'gēgi 'I came', tē_ŋ'gēi/tē_ŋ'gēgi 'I held', etc.).

A rather similar situation holds in the Italo-Romance dialect of Sonnino (LT, point 682), where according to the AIS data, the 1st person singular of the Present Indicative 'va_ŋgo 'I go' is clearly built upon 've_ŋgo 'I come' (cf. Jaberg and Jud 1928, 1928–1940). Crocioni (1907, p. 63) mentions the same type of extension in the dialect of Sezze (LT): 'va_ŋgo 'I go', s'tō_ŋgo 'I stay', 'tō_ŋgo 'I give', 'sō_ŋgo 'I am' (cf. as well Markun 1932, p. 330; Rohlf 1968, p. 260, §535; Floricic 2019 etc.). The morphological shape of the Future and Conditional forms is still more difficult to account for. A possible analysis is to assume that forms like ani're/ani'rō and bi're/bi'rō are the result of a blending process: the pretonic vowel of the ani're/ani'rō can only be explained assuming some kind of lexical blend between *ambulāre* and *ire* (cf. Anglade 1921, p. 278; Bourciez 1927, p. 345, §297, 2° b), etc.), and the same observation holds for the forms bi're/bi'rō, which can be explained assuming some kind of lexical blend between *vādēre* and *ire*. Our interpretation seems to be confirmed by the data of the dialect of Les Lèves-et-Thoumayragues (33), as illustrated in (13):

(13)				
'na 'to go' Les Lèves-et-Thoumayragues (33)				
Present Indicative	Imperfect Indicative	Preterit	Future Indicative	
'vō _u	'navi	nā _ŋ 'geri	i'rei	ni'rei
ty 'va	ty 'navə	ty nā _ŋ 'gerə	ty i'ra	ty ni'ra
'vai	'navə	nā _ŋ 'ge	i'ra	ni'ra
a'nē _ŋ	'navə	nā _ŋ 'gerə	i'rē _ŋ	ni'rē _ŋ
vuzau a'na	vuzau 'navə	vuzau nā _ŋ 'gerə	vuzau i're	vuzau 'nire
'vā _ŋ	'navə	nā _ŋ 'gerə	i'rā _ŋ	ni'rā _ŋ

As can be seen, the stem *na-* is obtained by aphaeresis of the verb *a'na* and appears in the whole (sub-)paradigm of the Imperfect Indicative. The same stem occurs in the Preterit, where the nasal consonant preceding the velar stop is due to the analogical effect of the forms *ve_ŋ'geri* 'I went' and *te_ŋ'geri* 'I held', on which *nā_ŋ'geri* has been modelled on account of the semantic/formal link between them. The main point is that the future indicative is polymorphic, and the coexisting (sub-)paradigms only differ in the presence of the initial nasal consonant due to the fusion of (a)*na* and *ire*.

A last kind of pure polymorphism leading to the (co)existence of multiple paradigms may be identified and may be taken to be purely lexical: this type of polymorphism can be

illustrated with data from the dialect of Sainte-Alauzie (46) in (14): the variants *s asje'ta/s ase'ta* ‘to sit down’ have been taken to derive from *seditare/asseditare* < *sēditus/assēdita* (cf. Meunier 1927, p. 317), while the form *se 'seĩre* is derived from *sēdēre* (>ser ‘to be’ in Spanish) (cf. Rohlf 1970, p. 129, §442).

(14)			
s asje'ta, s ase'ta/se 'seĩre ‘to sit down’ (Sainte-Alauzie (46))			
Pres. Ind.		Imper.	
m a'seti	me 'sezi		
t a'setos	te 'sezēs	a'sjeto 'te	'seĩte
s a'seto	se 'seĩ		
nuz ase'tān	nui se'zēn		
buz ase'tas	βui se'zēs	asjeta 'βus	seze'βus
s a'setu	se 'sezu		

As can be seen in table (14), the shorter variant has an initial CV syllable (vs. the onsetless variants *a'seti*, *a'setos*, etc.) which makes it more optimal from a phonological point of view. Interestingly, it can be observed that in various dialects, the verb *s asje'ta*, *s ase'ta* ‘to sit down’ may show two coexisting paradigms, one with an initial vowel and one with an initial consonant:

(15)			
se sje'ta, s asje'ta ‘to sit down’ (Labastide de Lordat (09))			
Present Indicative		Imperative	
m a'sjeti	me 'sjeti		
t a'sjetos	te 'sjetos	'sjeto te	a'sjeto te
s a'sjeto	se 'sjeto		
nuz asje'tān	nui sje'tān		
buz asje'tats	bui sje'tats	sje'tabbus	assje'tabbus
s a'sjetōn	se 'sjetōn		

Systematic aphaeresis of the initial vowel of the verb *s asje'ta* ‘to sit down’ has thus given rise to two competing paradigms. The point to be stressed is that this example could be very well analyzed as another type of polymorphism; for sure, the basis for this kind of alternation is phonetically driven. However, it can be hypothesized that it is the result of a process of *reanalysis* (or *metanalysis*, or *rebracketing*), whereby a reinterpretation of the boundaries of an expression has taken place.

Needless to say, lexical polymorphism is less easy to observe because a given lexical unit covers a functional/semantic niche which can hardly overlap in all its contours with another one (cf. the case of French *patate/cartoufle/pomme de terre* ‘potato’ discussed by Bertoldi 1939, pp. 121–23: among the concurrent designations, the one coming from the seas and the markets of ports cities (*patata*) and the one coming from the inland markets (*cartoufle*) were superseded by the victorious designation *pomme de terre*: from the agricultural milieu the later has passed into the common language (for a discussion of the geolinguistic diffusion of these terms, cf. Kawaguchi 2017 and the references therein)¹⁹.

Crucially in some cases, the speakers seem to have a preference for one form among the coexistent ones for reasons that have to do not only with phonetic optimization, but also with ‘prestige’ or fashion (cf. Gauchat 1902). In such situations of imbalance, in the long run the preferred form will probably eliminate its “rival” or a (lexical/functional) specialization will take place.

3. Why Polymorphism?

The question of the motivation behind the extreme proliferation of forms and paradigms just mentioned is a real challenge for morphology and morphological theories²⁰. We already said that variation and variability are the natural state of languages and that their stability

is something very relative: only the prism of a shared norm can give the (false) impression of unity, homogeneity and stability. As [Makaev \(1965, p. 35\)](#) puts it “(...) variation is a necessary characteristic not only of a certain level of language, but also of the language system itself.” In addition, we already observed that if the coexistence of interchangeable variants is easily observable in dialects, it is also a property of official norms. As a matter of fact, there is nothing strange in the fact that at some point, official languages show the same internal tensions and the same proliferation of forms that in the long run consecrate the selection of a given option²¹.

The question then arises as to the genesis, the maintenance and resolution of this kind of situation. Recall that according to [Allières \(1953–1954, p. 1\)](#) phonetic polymorphism is the “coexistence, dans le langage d’un sujet parlant, de deux ou plusieurs variantes phonétiques d’un même mot, utilisées concurremment pour exprimer le même concept, le choix de l’une ou de l’autre apparaissant comme absolument indépendant du conditionnement articulatoire—nous pensons par exemple au “tempo” d’élocution, ou d’une recherche quelconque d’expressivité” [Polymorphism is the coexistence, in the language of a speaking subject, of two or more phonetic variants of the same word, used concurrently to express the same concept, the choice of one or the other appearing to be absolutely independent of articulatory conditioning—we are thinking, for example, of the ‘tempo’ of elocution—or of any search for expressivity”] (cf. as well [Allières 1981](#)). And the master of Allières, [Séguy \(1973, p. 88\)](#), pointed out that “Le polymorphisme est un aspect du langage tout à fait réel, qu’il faut observer et étudier, qui devra livrer ses secrets, car il est en contradiction avec la loi d’économie. Tout ce qu’on en sait, c’est qu’il fonctionne comme prélude d’un changement à terme plus ou moins long: la coexistence de signes équivalents se réduit par élimination, et par une élimination aléatoire” [“Polymorphism is a real aspect of language, which must be observed and studied, and which will have to reveal its secrets, because it is in contradiction with the law of economy. All that is known about it is that it functions as a prelude to a more or less long-term change: the coexistence of equivalent signs is reduced by elimination, and by random elimination”]. In other words, polymorphism refers to free variation of forms which are equally available in the system of language, without any semantic or stylistic motivation behind the variation. Needless to say, although linguists have been reluctant to acknowledge the very possibility of free variation (cf. [Goldberg 2019, 25sqq.](#)), although polymorphism contradicts any principle of economy, it can be observed at any moment in the life of language, and it may be considered as a cue of transitional stages in language development and evolution. This is understandable on the grounds that polymorphism often is the manifestation of ongoing (phonetic, lexical, etc.) mutations (cf. [Lope Blanch 1977, p. 599](#)). By the way, Allières (op. cit., p. 2) rightly points out that in transition areas, polymorphism is more expected and frequent than in other areas, thus reflecting the multiple attraction some dialects may be subject to in these particular situations (cf. the case of the coexisting forms *pēt* and *pēl* (<PELLE) in the dialect of Seilh, where the typically Gascon evolution -LL- > -t- is facing the pressure of Languedocian, where -LL- > -l-). If we add that old forms or features may coexist with innovative ones, we will see that the proliferation illustrated above is not something exceptional: rather, what should be viewed as exceptional and unrealistic is the erroneous picture offered by traditional grammars (and even by some linguists) that present forms and paradigms as something fixed, stable, unique and carved in stone for eternity. As [Allières \(1992, p. 181\)](#) points out, «L’exercice qui consiste à décliner des paradigmes nominaux ou verbaux hors contexte n’est évidemment qu’un dévoiement des fonctions langagières, propre à ces êtres aberrants que sont les grammairiens, professeur ou élèves...» [«The exercise of declining nominal or verbal paradigms out of context is obviously only a deviation of language functions, specific to these aberrant beings that are grammarians, teachers or students...»].

From this point of view and as pointed out by [Francescato \(1961\)](#), the opposition between a diachronic plane and a synchronic one should at best be viewed as an oversimplification: every linguistic system bears the traces of old patterns (cf. [Darmesteter 1890, p. 29](#)) and every linguistic system pre-announces—*de facto* or *in potentia*—future developments

and evolutions. Of course, when concurrent items or paradigms are synchronically available, their equivalence or interchangeability is doomed to be lost due to the asymmetric nature of linguistic signs. For whatever reason a given item or a given (sub-)paradigm may be felt as more adapted to the context—to not say ‘to its environment’ –, more expressive than another one, more optimal from a phonological point of view (cf. the preference for CV syllables over CCVCC ones for example), etc., hence, its promotion and the progressive loss of the ‘concurrent’ one(s)²². From this point of view, polymorphism can be seen as the reflex of diachrony in the very synchrony (cf. Kristol 2018, p. 344). These considerations are not without echoing the analysis of Darmesteter (1890, p. 32), according to whom “Dans le langage comme dans la matière organisée, nous assistons à cette *lutte pour l’existence*, à cette *concurrence vitale* qui sacrifie des espèces à des espèces voisines, mieux armées pour le combat de la vie.” [“In language as in organized matter, we are witnessing this struggle for existence, this vital competition that sacrifices species to neighbouring species that are better armed for the struggle of life.”]

Needless to say, the biological metaphor—due among others to Schleicher, Bopp (1836),²³ etc. and endowed by Darmesteter (1887) and (1890)—cannot be pushed too far. It gave rise to many criticisms, as illustrated, for example, by the important review of the work of Darmesteter *La vie des mots* (1887) written by the French Romanist Gaston Paris in 1906 (Paris 1906) after the publication of Schleicher’s *Essay on Language and Darwinism*.

By the way, the very notion of polymorphism can also be found in the works of biologists and was used, among others, by the English naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace to refer to “the co-existence in the same locality of two or more distinct forms, not connected by intermediate gradations, and all of which are occasionally produced from common parents” (cf. Wallace [1871] 2009, p. 145).

From this point of view the revival of the “survival for the fittest”²⁴ alluded to by Aronoff (2016) and Lindsay and Aronoff (2013) among others—and this holds as well for the notion of “competition” itself—should be considered with great caution. By the way, in his review of Darmesteter *La vie des mots* (1887), Michel Bréal (1887, pp. 187–88) pointed out that the expressions “life,” “organisms,” “struggle,” “competitors,” etc. should be used with the awareness that they are merely metaphors. In the case of the coexistent Conditional forms mentioned in (8)–(10), the complexity of the string '(d)rjɔ is rooted in production constraints: it is understandable that sequences requiring great articulatory energy may be disfavoured over sequences requiring less or minimal articulatory energy (cf. Straka 1979). From this point of view, it must be borne in mind that phonetic optimization is a leading parameter in morphological as well as in syntactic innovations²⁵.

We should not forget either what was one of the main ideas put forward by Antoine Meillet and his school but also by Otto Jespersen (op. cit., p. 12): “Language is activity, chiefly social activity undertaken in order to get into touch with other individuals and communicate to them one’s thoughts, feelings and will.” Of course, getting in touch with other individuals presupposes adaptation, (real time) optimization, distinctiveness, relevance and informativeness or, a contrario, (informational) worthlessness²⁶, all constraints that may conflict with one another. Getting in touch with other individuals may also lead one to differentiate, to distinguish from others in one way or another, and such a differentiation process may manifest in particular (lexical, phonetic, etc.) options made available by the linguistic system. From this point of view, it is clear that hypercharacterization, overmarking, expressivity, etc. may lead to more complex patterns than expected by the economy principle²⁷. Observe as well that even though the Occitan dialects presented in this contribution may offer up to four coexisting paradigms for one and the same verb, it is also true that in the individual speech acts and discourse events, the speaker generally selects one option among several choices at their disposal. Moreover, the selection of such or such a variant will depend on as many parameters as the *tempo*, the degree of formality, focus marking, the discourse situation and the phonetic environment of the selected item, etc.

4. Conclusions

It has been argued that if polymorphism is the natural state of linguistic systems, it is also anti-economic from a cognitive point of view: learning and memorizing full coexistent paradigms presupposes a high processing cost²⁸. It follows that the diachronic evolution of languages may develop adaptive solutions to circumvent the potential drawbacks of extreme polymorphism: ‘(un)natural (?) selection’ leads to the reduction or elimination of morphological proliferation. Of course, before reduction or elimination take place, a more or less extended period of time may elapse during which a preference for some (coexisting) paradigmatic options may manifest. Such a preference can be illustrated in the Imperative forms in (1b–c), where the forms of only one paradigm are selected. In other dialects however, co-occurring Imperative forms are attested as well. However, where a given form has been preferred over another/other one(s), it may be taken to rely on phonetic maximization and pragmatic efficiency amenable to Jespersen’s principle according to which “the best is what with a minimum of effort on the part of the speaker produces a maximum of effect in the hearer.” Of course, we cannot exclude as well that morphological proliferation may be the result of some kind of linguistic insecurity: Occitan speakers faced with the pressure to speak and write in French since their childhood have lost, year after year, the mastering of Occitan. As recalled by Salminen (2007, p. 256) “There may well be over a million people able to speak Languedocian, but very few children learn the language, which makes the language severely endangered despite the large number of speakers and the continuing cultivation of the Occitan literary language which is essentially based on Languedocian.” However, the situation of the endangerment of the Occitan languages cannot be put forward, to account for polymorphism in (fully) living languages and dialects, nor can it be put forward to account for polymorphism in times when the Occitan dialects were the first languages of the speakers. By the way, we saw that polymorphism cannot be said to characterize exclusively living dialects: literary varieties may also show coexisting forms for the same cell of a given (sub-)paradigm. Of course, polymorphism is not limited to phonetics or phonology. In Italian, it is hard to find any stylistic/semantic difference between, say, *Non aiutarlo/Non lo aiutare* ‘Don’t help him’ (cf. also variants such as Spanish *Se lo voy a decir cuando lo vea/Voy a decírselo cuando lo vea* mentioned by Lope Blanch 1993, p. 104). But if both options are available synchronically in Italian, the first one was excluded in Old Italian and the coexistence of both patterns can be seen as the reflection of a diachronic scenario in which the second position clitic constraint has been relaxed (cf. Mussafia 1886, p. 261). From this point of view, polymorphism cannot be reduced to a lack of stability, to performance error, to linguistic attrition or to interference. It ought to be fully recognized as a fundamental aspect of language and language change.

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Notes

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² Cf. and the question of the place assigned to morphology in earlier versions of Generative Grammar. In his *Generative Morphology*, Scalise (1986, p. ix) points out that “Morphology was a very central field in the structuralist period, both in the European and in the American tradition. Unfortunately, the pendulum swung back with early generative grammar, mainly because of the priority assigned to syntax. A sign of this lack of interest in morphology during the sixties is the fact that morphology was not supposed to account for a specific set of problems; sometimes it was attached to the syntactic component (morphosyntax) and sometimes to the phonological component (morphophonology).”

- Of course, we do not take ‘paradigms’ to be the sole morphological objects identifiable by the analyst. It is clear that smaller morphological pieces can and should be recognized, even though their contours may not always be evident to delimit. Observe that the very notion of morpheme is far from being coherently used by morphologists (for a discussion and a typological/historical overview, cf. [Haspelmath 2020](#)).
- The Romanists’ notation is itself the same, on the whole, as the Rousselot’s notation, as observed by one of the reviewers (cf. on this point the website of the Symila project: http://symila.univ-tlse2.fr/alf/notation_phonetique, accessed on 3 January 2020).
- In a locality such as that of Montayral (Lot-et-Garonne), the fieldwork has been realized with one and the same informant. However, this is rather exceptional and in other places, the questionnaire may have been realized with more informants. In the locality of Saint-Pierre-La-Feuille (Lot) for example, up to 11 informants are mentioned in the fieldwork notes (many thanks to my colleague Guylaine Brun-Trigaud for having provided me with these data).
- As a linguistic notion, *polymorphism* was used since [Canello \(1878\)](#) to refer to ‘doublets’, i.e., (divergent) forms diachronically derived from the same etymon (cf. It. *vecchio/veglio* ‘old’ from *vetŭlus* ‘little old’ or *selvaggio/selvatico* ‘wild’ from *sĭlvātĭcus* ‘from the wood’. However, whereas doublets usually show some kind of semantic differentiation, in the following lines we shall interpret *polymorphism* as the (synchronic) coexistence of forms which are interchangeable from a semantic or stylistic point of view. Needless to say, polymorphism may be seen as one of the many forms variation may take, but it is clear that variation is not reducible to polymorphism as investigated in this contribution.
- As is clear from the data and references mentioned in this paper, the importance of polymorphism has long been recognized, in particular among dialectologists and Romanists, as a central aspect of morphological systems and morphological development.
- In the following lines, the points of inquiry will be indicated with the corresponding number of the department in which it is situated.
- As pointed out at the beginning of this contribution, they regularly mention the non-existence of forms that on the other hand are used in other varieties; they mention the optionality (or obligatoriness) of such or such element. Of course, besides socio-cultural or historical information, they provide the variants attested in such or such variety, sometimes indicating that a given pattern is not as frequent as another one.
- In his paper dedicated to morpho-phonological aspects of Occidental Gascon, [Allières \(1976\)](#) alternatively describes the variants -iʃ-, -eʃ-, or -öʃ- as “inchoative” suffixes and infixes. It is hard to imagine that Allières had no idea about the difference between the two kinds of elements.
- The Subjunctive forms 1. ke ‘sjao, 2. ke ‘sjaos, 3. ke ‘sjao, etc. probably presuppose a preceding stage in which the intervocalic velar [ʏ] was present. Such a stage is attested for example in the dialect of Auzits (12), where the Present Subjunctive forms are 1. ke ‘sjao/’sjaʏo, 2. ke ‘sjaes, 3. ke ‘sjaʏo, etc. It is possible that the velar segment of this form be due to the subjunctive forms in -ca (> -go) (cf. [Camproux \(1962, p. 498\)](#)).
- The Old Provençal Preterit forms of this verb are 1. *fi, fis, fezi*, 2. *fezist, fezis*, 3. *fe, fetz, fes*, 4. *fem, fezem*, 5. *fes, fezetz, fezes*, 6. *fezeron, feron, feiron, feiro* (cf. [Grandgent 1905](#), pp. 139–41; [Anglade 1921](#), p. 303, etc.). Observe that the *fer-* forms in (4) do not constitute the direct outcome of the Old Provençal paradigm just mentioned. Rather, they probably are the result of forms like those found in the dialect of Cordes (81), where the intervocalic velar consonant has weakened to zero in some cells of the paradigm (cf. 1. *fa’Yeri*, 2. *fa’Yeros*, 3. *fa’Yet*, 4. *fa’erën*, 5. *fa’eres*, 6. *fa’Yeru*). By the way, in the dialect of Savignac-sur-Leyze (47), the verb ‘fa’ to do’ shows coexisting short and long forms in the Preterit: 1. *’feri/fa’gëri*, 2. *’feres/fa’gëres*, 3. *’fet/fa’get*, 4. *fage’jân*, 5. *fage’jas*, 6. *’ferün/fa’gërün*.
- Observe that the coexisting forms in the 2nd person singular cell of the Imperative are not free variants, as can be *passato remoto* forms such as *apparve/apparse* ‘(s)he appeared’. When reduplicated, for example, the full form is more natural than the reduced one (cf. *vai vai* or *dai dai*). Moreover, in a sequence like *Dai, andiamo !* ‘OK, lets’go !’, the reduced form could hardly be used (cf. ?? *Da’, andiamo !*). Let us add that the coexistence—for one and the same cell—of reduced and full forms is not limited to these “monosyllabic verbs.” From this point of view, it cannot be claimed that in Italian “(...) only verbs which have an asyllabic stem have overabundance in the 2SG.IMP cell,” as assumed by [Thornton \(2019, p. 249, footnote 27\)](#): any informal conversation contains expressions such as *aspè !* [as’pe] (< *aspetta !* ‘wait’), *gua’ !* [’gwa] (< *guarda !* ‘look’), *viè !* [’vje] (< *vieni !* ‘come’), *asco’ !* [as’ko] (< *ascolta !* ‘listen’), etc. (for a discussion, cf. [Florici 2021b](#)).
- In his review of Koschwitz’ *Grammaire historique de la langue des Félîtres*, [Rambeau \(1904, p. 31\)](#) points out that “HABUI, HABUISTI, etc., became *ag* or *ac* (*g = c*, voiceless, at the end of the word), *aguest, ag* or *ac, aguem, aguets, agron*; and HABUISSEM, HABUISSES, etc., became *agues, aguesses, agues, aguessem, aguessets, aguesson*. The *gu, g* of the perfect and pluperfect (=imperfect) subjunctive was introduced, by analogy, already in the Middle Ages, into the past participle of the same class of verbs: *tengut, agut, valgut, tolgut*. This grammatical contrivance, very popular already in Old Provençal, has had an immense success in the modern language. It has taken possession of the perfect and pluperfect (= imperfect) subjunctive of the large majority of verbs of all conjugations, except the first: *puniguère—puniguèsse, serviguère—serviguèsse, rendeguère—rendeguèsse, couneiguère—couneiguèsse, faguère—faguèsse, diguère—diguèsse, fuguère and siguère—fuguèsse and siguèsse*, etc.”
- “La 3e p. sg. n’a point joué un rôle aussi considérable que celle du pl. dans l’évolution historique du parfait gascon. Mais, prise en elle-même, elle est cependant d’une grande importance, ne fût-ce que parce qu’elle est probablement la plus usuelle de toutes les formes du paradigme; elle a son originalité, son individualité, car là même où les autres flexions s’allongeaient, elle est

toujours restée strictement monosyllabique” (Bourciez 1927, p. 32). [“The 3rd p. sg. did not play as considerable a role as that of the pl. in the historical evolution of the Gascon Perfect. Taken in itself, however, it is of great importance, if only because it is probably the most common of all the forms of the paradigm; it has its originality, its individuality, because even where the other flexions were lengthened, it always remained strictly monosyllabic”].

- 16 On Future and Conditional in Occitan, cf. Esher (2015). Forms like 1. kânta’ria ‘I would sing’, 1. bën’dria ‘I would sell’, 1. bi’ria ‘I would go’ etc. are still attested in many places, for example in the dialect of Merens-les-Vals (09).
- 17 From a phonetic point of view, the -jɔ̃ ending of the 1st person singular can be explained in the following way: taking a form like *cantaria* as a starting point, the post-tonic vowel reduces in post-tonic position, hence kanta’riɔ̃. Then stress shifts onto the final vowel, hence kanta’rjɔ̃. In some varieties, an analogical -i may have spread from the model provided by other 1st person singular forms in -i, hence the hyper-characterized form kanta’rjɔ̃i.
- 18 In other varieties, the same stem is used within the whole paradigm. For example in the dialect of Saint-Martin-d’Oydes (09), the Present Indicative of the verb a’na ‘to go’ is derived exclusively from Lat. vadere (cf. 1. ‘baɹ, 2. ‘bas, 3. ‘ba, 4. ‘bân, 5. ‘bats, 6. ‘bân).
- 19 The same observation holds for (truncated) variants of the same lexical unit. If French *auto/automobile* ‘car’ or *labo/laboratoire* ‘lab’ can be said to be equivalent, this is not the case of, say, *manif/manifestation* (cf. la **manif/manifestation de la vérité* ‘the manifestation of truth’) (cf. among others Kerleroux 1997).
- 20 MacWhinney (2014, p. 364) points out that “The three basic principles underlying evolution are proliferation, competition, and selection. Proliferation generates organismic variation through mutation and sexual recombination. Organisms then compete for resources or rewards such as food, shelter, and the opportunity to reproduce. Finally, selection involves the ways in which strong and successful organisms produce offspring that also survive and reproduce.”
- 21 Even though he does not use the expression “overabundance.” Gauchat said exactly the same thing 120 years ago: “Mais n’avons-nous pas en français pour le futur du verbe *asseoir* les trois formes sanctionnées par l’Académie *je m’assiérai*, *je m’asseyerai* et *je m’assoirai*? Et une foule de points de la grammaire française qui nous apparaissent aujourd’hui bien arrêtés et définis, se trouvaient autrefois dans le cas du futur du verbe *asseoir* et ont coûté un grand travail de choix et de préférences, où la mode entraînait pour beaucoup et la logique pour peu!” [“But don’t we have in French for the future tense of the verb *asseoir* the three forms sanctioned by the Académie *je m’assiérai*, *je m’asseyerai* and *je m’assoirai*? And a host of points in French grammar which appear to us today to be well settled and defined, were once found in the case of the future tense of the verb *asseoir* and cost a great deal of work in terms of choice and preference, where fashion was for many and logic for a few!”]. (Gauchat 1902, p. 21).
- 22 Cf. Jespersen (1949, p. 7): “(...) those particular traits of a language which are best adapted to their purpose tend to be preserved at the cost of others which do not answer the linguistic purpose so well.” A similar view was expressed by Pușcariu (1937, p. 177): “Parmi les millions d’innovations individuelles, tout ce qui n’est pas capable de vivre périra: ne vivront que celles qui offrent à la langue le maximum de traits propices: ainsi, parmi les innombrables espèces animales, n’ont pu se maintenir que celles qui réunissaient les conditions les plus avantageuses pour la lutte avec le milieu ambiant” [“Among the millions of individual innovations, all that is not capable of living will perish: only those that offer the maximum number of favourable features to the language will live on: thus, among the innumerable animal species, only those that meet the most advantageous conditions for the struggle with the surrounding environment have been able to maintain themselves”].
- 23 “Languages must be regarded as organic bodies [organische Naturkörper], formed in accordance with definite laws; having a life-giving principle within, they develop and then gradually die out, after losing consciousness of their true nature, and throwing aside, or mutilating, or misusing (i.e., applying to uses to which they were not primarily adapted) their members or forms, which were originally significant, but have gradually become a more external mass” (quoted by Delbrück 1882, pp. 18–19).
- 24 The expression “survival of the fittest” comes from Herbert Spencer and was introduced five years after the publication of Darwin’s ‘Origin of Species’ as an equivalent of “natural selection.”
- 25 Cf. Millardet (1923, p. 146): “(...) comme il existe une sélection morphologique (voir *Revue dial. rom.*, II, 87; cf. chap. xiii), qui retient, élimine ou crée les formes verbales conformément aux besoins de la flexion, il y a aussi une sélection entre les tours de syntaxe, et le principe qui préside à cette sélection est souvent de nature phonologique” [as there is a morphological selection (see *Revue dial. rom.*, II, 87; cf. chap. xiii), which retains, eliminates or creates verbal forms according to the needs of inflection, there is also a selection between turns of syntax, and the principle which presides over this selection is often of a phonological nature”]. According to Millardet, morphological selection results in (a) the elimination of forms which are homophonous with others whose meaning is different and more widespread, especially if such homophony creates ambiguous patterns; (b) the promotion of new forms which replace those forms eliminated according to the scenario presented in (a) (cf. as well Millardet 1918a, p. 74; 1918b, p. 458).
- 26 Cf. Jespersen (1949, pp. 24–25): “Anyone will tend to slur over what to him, and presumably to his hearer, is of no real importance. I explained in this way the violent abbreviations found in insignificant greetings like (good) morning, German [na’mt] for *guten abend*, in French [splɛ] for *s’il vous plaît*, and in titles like Spanish *Usted* from *uuestra merced*; Russian *gosudar’* ‘master’, ‘sir’ even sinks down to a mere [s], which in polite speech may be attached to nearly any word. Such irregular changes cannot, I said, be understood merely from the very frequent use of these words, but from the ease of understanding and from their worthlessness to speaker and hearer alike.”

- ²⁷ Cf. [Martinet \(1955, p. 94\)](#): “Sur le plan des mots et des signes, chaque communauté linguistique trouve à chaque instant un équilibre entre les besoins d’expression qui demandent des unités plus nombreuses, plus spécifiques et proportionnellement moins fréquentes, et l’inertie naturelle qui pousse vers un nombre plus restreint d’unités plus générales et d’emploi plus fréquent. L’inertie est un élément permanent qu’on peut supposer immuable, mais les besoins communicatifs et expressifs sont, d’un âge à un autre, soumis à variations, et la nature de l’équilibre se modifiera au cours du temps” [“In terms of words and signs, each linguistic community finds at any given moment a balance between the need for expression which requires more numerous, more specific and proportionally less frequent units, and the natural inertia which pushes towards a smaller number of more general and more frequently used units. Inertia is a permanent element that can be assumed to be immutable, but communicative and expressive needs are, from one age to another, subject to variations, and the nature of the balance will change over time.”]
- ²⁸ The difference between Rosa, rosa, rosam, etc. and the concurrent paradigms found in Occitan is that in some cases, no (inferential) procedure can be activated in order to retrieve the existence of the coexisting paradigms. How can the speaker infer the existence of the three coexisting (1sg) Present Subjunctives *ane*, *anu*, *anungo* ‘that I go’ in the dialect of Bethmale (cf. [Floriciu 2022](#)). The speaker has to learn that the first person singular *anungo* is available with the verb *a’na* ‘to go’, while **kantungo* is not possible with the verb *kan’ta*. In a dialect such as that of Gaillac (cf. table (10)), the coexisting Conditional (1sg) forms *basti’jo* and *basti’rjo* ‘I would build’ are available with the verb *bas’ti* ‘to build’ but not with, say, the verbs *a’na* ‘to go’ or *fa* ‘to do’.

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