

Intense language contact and collapse of lexical strata:

verbs ending with *-urun* in Issime

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In Töitschu, a variety of Walser German spoken in the linguistic island of Issime in Aosta Valley, a verbalizing suffix *-urun* is found with a significant number of verbs (cf. Zürner 2009: 136). Note incidentally that the suffix has the form *-ur-*, while the ending *-un* has to be further segmented into a thematic vowel *-u-*, responsible for the inflectional class, and the infinitive suffix *-n*. For brevity, I will refer to *-urun* as a unit which serves at least three different functions. The first function consists in forming denominal verbs from Germanic (1a) and Romance (1b) bases, possibly selecting complex bases (1c), as in the following examples in which *-urun* is also shown to compete with conversion (1d):

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| (1) | a. <i>chalb-urun</i> ‘to calve’ | <i>ei-urun</i> ‘to whey-bubble’ | <i>joag-urun</i> ‘to hunt’ |
| | b. <i>giatz-urun</i> ‘to cobblestone’ | <i>kubbi-urun</i> ‘to pair’ | <i>pump-urun</i> ‘to pump’ |
| | c. <i>biss-ut-urun</i> ‘to nibble’ | <i>siebn-ut-urun</i> ‘to lump’ | <i>weerh-ut-urun</i> ‘to work idly’ |
| | d. <i>spigl-un</i> ‘to mirror’ | <i>viesch-un</i> ‘to bandage’ | <i>vröin-un</i> ‘to befriend’ |

Second, *-urun* is used for making deadjectival causatives mostly in combination with different prefixes – *ar-*, *var-*, etc. – from Germanic (2a) and Romance (2b) bases:

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| (2) | a. <i>ar-gruass-urun</i> ‘to enlarge’ | <i>ar-vrüj-urun</i> ‘to anticipate’ | <i>var-spiet-urun</i> ‘to postpone’ |
| | b. <i>a-reer-urun</i> ‘to thin’ | <i>ar-fresk-urun</i> ‘to refresh’ | <i>dis-libb-urun</i> ‘to free’ |

Third, *-urun* is commonly found as verbalizer (cf. Wohlgemuth 2009: 95) for accommodating Romance verbs: *asardurun* ‘to risk’ (Fr. *hasarder* / It. *azzardare*), *askappurun* ‘to escape’ (Fr. *échapper* / It. *scappare*), *goddurun* ‘to enjoy’ (It. *godere*), *offurun* ‘to offer’ (Fr. *offrir* / It. *offrire*), *parturun* ‘to leave’ (Fr. *partir* / It. *partire*), *regreturun* (Fr. *regretter*), and many others. Note that a Romance verb does not always take *-urun* as marker as in *kurrun* ‘to run’ (Fr. *courir* / It. *correre*), but in most cases it does.

In the talk, it will be shown that this complex picture – which also represents a hard challenge for the issue of affixal homophony or polysemy – results from the merger of two different patterns as a consequence of the leveling of the non-native and of the native lexical stratum. The latter are well preserved in the close variety of Gressoney, where the native suffix *-(e)r-* and the loan suffix *-iere* (found respectively in *chalbrò* ‘to calve’ and *datiere* ‘to date’, see the Standard German correspondents *kalbern* and *datieren*) are neatly distinct. The leveling observed in Issime will be argued to be due to the combined effect of two distinct phonological changes forcing on the one hand initial stress and on the other regressive vowel harmony. These massive sound changes can be explained as the result of intense contact with Romance varieties, and especially Franco-Provençal, which might also have led to a partial creolization (cf. McWhorter 2005). This caused the collapse of the stratal distinction whereby the two etymologically distinct

suffixes *-er(n)* and *-ier(en)* found in German merged and gave rise to the suffix *-urun* constituting a unitary pattern. This pattern stands in competition with the less productive technique of conversion which suffers from not being immediately compatible with Romance bases while the productivity of *-urun* is enhanced by its function as verbalizer. Thus, language contact plays a crucial role insofar as speakers rely on a well-established correspondence pattern which in Töitschu is further expanded through the ancestral Germanic lexical domain (cf. Gaeta & Angster 2020).

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