

Some comparative remarks on the adverbial particle *po* and its Central Rhaeto-Romance cognates*

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Abstract

In this article I undertake a comparative survey of the distributional and interpretive properties of the adverbial particle *po/pa* across the Dolomitic region, trying to shed light on the diachronic process of grammaticalization it has undergone in some Central Rhaeto-Romance varieties; in doing so, I crucially refer to the role this particle plays in determining the epistemic state of the discourse participants. Its grammaticalization as an interrogative marker can be more precisely characterized as the loss of the capacity to quantify the degree of overlap between the speaker's and the addressee's background knowledge (or the clash between the speaker's expectation/presupposition and the real state of affairs). In this sense, as a neutral interrogative marker, the particle *pa* simply marks a default (or conventionalized) degree of matching between the common ground shared by the two interlocutors.

1 Introduction

In this article I will sketch a comparative survey of the distributional and interpretive properties of the particles *po/pa* across the Dolomitic region; by comparing the syntactic behaviour and semantic contribution of this particle in different dialectal areas, I will try to better characterize the diachronic process of grammaticalization as an interrogative marker this particle has undergone in some Central Rhaeto-Romance varieties (cf. the analogous destiny of *denn* in Bavarian).¹ In doing so, I will crucially refer to the (loss of the) role this particle plays in determining the epistemic state of the discourse participants, which relates directly to the definition of modal particle as an element that conveys in-

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¹ For a general overview of the geographical distribution and the main structural features of the Central Rhaeto-Romance dialects, the interested reader is referred to Videsott/Videsott/Casalicchio (2020).

formation about the speaker's attitude or the epistemic condition of the interlocutors, without contributing to the descriptive content of the utterance (cf. Zimmermann 2012). From the syntactic point of view, the particles under analysis display however a clearly different behaviour, because Bellunese *po* appears almost exclusively in peripheral positions, while Rhaeto-Romance *pa* occurs generally in clause internal position.

The paper is structured as follows: in section 2 I provide a detailed description of the use of *po/pa* in interrogative clauses across different Dolomitic Rhaeto-Romance dialects, presenting in section 3 previous accounts of the grammaticalization process this particle has undergone diachronically in some of these varieties; in section 4 I investigate the use of the particle *po* in the dialects of the Bellunese area, trying to characterize its semantic-pragmatic import in different contexts, which amounts to an evaluation of the epistemic state of the discourse participants, comparing the background knowledge of speaker and hearer; in section 5 I provide further empirical evidence on additional functions of *pa* and of a few etymologically related sentential particles in some Central Rhaeto-Romance dialects; section 6 concludes the article with some summarizing remarks.

2 The particle *po/pa* in Rhaeto-Romance interrogatives

Building on previous studies on this topic, in this section I explore the distributional and interpretive properties of the particles *po/pa* in interrogative contexts across the Central Rhaeto-Romance varieties.

Hack (2011: 63) reports the existence of the following minimal pair attested in two different subvarieties of Fassano, namely Fassano Cazet in (1a) and Fassano Moenat in (1b):

- (1) a. Ke temp e-l **pa**?
 what weather is-it pa
 b. Ke temp e-lo **po**?
 What weather is-it po
 ‘What’s the weather like?’

On this basis she argues that the two forms *po* and *pa* (as well as two other related particles attested in Badiotto and Gardenesse and discussed in section 5 below) are simply phonetic variants of the same lexical item, deriving etymologically from the (grammaticalization of the) Latin locative/temporal adverb *post* (cf. Pellegrini 1972). I will submit here that this assumption is essentially correct.²

2.1 Fodom and Ampezzano

In Fodom and Ampezzano, two Rhaeto-Romance varieties spoken in the Northern part of the province of Belluno, the particle *pa* can have a “connecting function” (Hack 2014: 54), where the speaker refers to a previous context shared with the addressee, which leads to the question containing the particle; consider the following contrast in Fodom:

² The subvariation between different varieties of Fassano cannot be dealt with in this article and I will simply use the macro-label Fassano to refer to the relevant examples.

Benincà (1996) reports for Fassano the following examples, where *pa* either follows the cluster formed by inflected verb and inverted subject pronoun (6a), or precedes the pronominal subject and the inflected verb (6b), in which case it is in complementary distribution with the complementizer *che* (6c):

- (6) a. Olà as-to **pa** magnat
 where have-you pa eaten
 b. Olà **pa** tu as magnat?
 where pa you have eaten
 c. Olà che tu as magnat?
 where that you have eaten
 ‘Where have you eaten?’

Interestingly, as pointed out by Benincà (1996), *pa* cannot precede the cluster formed by inflected verb and inverted subject pronoun:³

- (7) *Olà **pa** as-to magnat?
 Where pa have-you eaten

For Fassano main *wh*-questions, Poletto (2000) identifies the four alternative syntactic structures reported in (8), pointing out that *pa* is incompatible with the complementizer *che*, as witnessed by the ungrammaticality of (9):

- (8) a. Olà vas-to?
 where go-you
 b. Olà vas-to **pa**?
 where go-you pa
 c. Olà **pa** tu vas?
 where pa you go
 d. Olà che tu vas?
 where that you go
 ‘Where are you going?’
 (9) a. *Olà che **pa** tu vas?
 where that pa you go
 b. *Olà **pa** che tu vas?
 where pa that you go

As discussed by Dohi (2020), in Fassano the particle *pa* can also optionally appear in polar questions, and the presence of the particle in (10a) seems to convey a slight emphasis on the question:

³ Moreover, the verbal cluster is incompatible with the complementizer *che* irrespectively of their linear order:

- (i) a. *Olà che as-to magnat?
 where that have-you eaten
 b. *Olà as-to che magnat?
 where have-you that eaten

For insightful remarks on the categorial status of the particle *pa* in Fassano, the reader is referred to Benincà (1996).

- (10) a. Rùes-te **pa** doman?
 arrive-you pa tomorrow
 b. Rùes-te doman?
 arrive-you tomorrow
 ‘Do you arrive tomorrow?’

According to the native speakers, the inflected verb *rues-te* preceding *pa* is emphasized by the presence of the particle.

So, in Fassano *pa* can be optionally added to an interrogative clause, apparently without contributing a significant interpretive import to the utterance.⁴

2.3 Badiotto

Poletto (2000) reports that Badiotto displays an interesting asymmetry between constituent questions and polar questions with respect to the presence of *pa*, which is obligatory in standard *wh*-questions and in non-standard polar questions. So, *pa* appears obligatorily in the standard *wh*-question in (11a), while its absence triggers a non-standard interpretation, like in (11b), where the speaker expresses his/her surprise/disapproval/disagreement about the fact that the addressee is leaving or about the place where he/she is going to:⁵

- (11) a. Ulà vas-t **pa**?
 where go-you pa
 ‘Where are you going?’
 b. Ulà vas-t?!
 where go-you
 ‘Where (the hell) are you going?!’

The same point is made in Poletto/Zanutini (2003), who observe that (12a) is a standard *wh*-question, while in (12b) it is the *wh*-phrase which is prosodically focalized:

- (12) a. Can vas-te **pa** a Venezia?
 when go-you pa to Venice
 ‘When are you going to Venice?’
 b. CAN vas-te a Venezia?!
 WHEN go-you to Venice
 ‘When (the hell) are you going to Venice?!’

⁴ However, according to Poletto (2000) in Fassano the presence of *pa* always turns the question into a rhetorical one, although there is considerable variation among speakers and (sub)varieties:

- (i) a. Vasto **pa**?
 go-you pa
 ‘Are you going (or not)?’
 b. Che asto **pa** fat?
 what have-you pa done
 ‘What (on earth) have you done?’

⁵ An anonymous reviewer points out to me that in examples like (11b) and (12b) the absence of *pa* entails that the speaker already knows the answer and expresses his/her strong surprise or disagreement, underlining the relevance of the ‘shared knowledge’ between the two discourse participants.

According to Poletto/Zanuttini (2003), this contrast confirms their hypothesis that the presence of *pa* signals that the entire sentence is in focus; when *pa* is absent, then another constituent receives contrastive focus, as marked by the intonational prominence of the *wh*-item in (12b).

Conversely, in polar questions the non-standard interpretation is associated with the presence of *pa*, like in (13a), which conveys the speaker's dismay about the fact that the addressee is going to Venice, while the absence of *pa* triggers a standard interpretation, like in (13b):

- (13) a. Vas-t **pa** a Venezia?!
 go-you pa to Venice
 'Are you going to Venice?!'
 b. Vas-t a Venezia?
 go-you to Venice
 'Are you going to Venice?'

Summing up, in order to trigger a standard interpretation, in Badiotto *pa* is obligatory in *wh*-questions and not admitted in polar questions:

- (14) a. Ulà vas-te * (**pa**)?
 where go-you pa
 'Where are you going?'
 b. Vâ-les (***pa**) a Roma?
 go-they pa to Rome
 'Are they going to Rome?'

2.4 Gardenese

Gardenese is the Rhaeto-Romance variety where the particle displays the most functional use; in *wh*-questions *pa* works like in Badiotto, as it is used obligatorily to obtain the standard interpretation, while its absence implies an emphasis on the *wh*-operator (cf. Hack 2014):

- (15) a. Can compr-i **pa** n liber?
 when buy-they pa a book
 'When do they buy a book?'
 b. CAN compr-i n liber?
 WHEN buy-they a book
 'WHEN do they buy a book?'

The function of *pa* in *wh*-questions in Gardenese is therefore the same as in Badiotto, where it marks the focus, according to Poletto/Zanuttini (2003). Unlike in Badiotto, however, in Gardenese the presence of the particle *pa* is compulsory also in standard polar questions (cf. Hack 2011, 2014), so that its absence produces ungrammaticality, as witnessed by (16b):⁶

- (16) a. Vëni-el **pa** nce Tone?
 comes-he pa also Tone
 'Is Tone also coming?'

⁶ The same behaviour is reported by Trotzke/Monforte (2019) for the particle *al* in Basque, which marks neutral polar questions; leaving out *al* results in a biased interpretation of the polar question.

- b. *Vëni-el nce Tone?
comes-he also Tone

Hence, in Gardenese *pa* marks obligatorily all standard interrogative clauses, namely both polar and *wh*-questions:

- (17) a. Ciant-el **pa**?
sings-he *pa*
'Is he singing?'
b. Ciuldi ciant-el **pa**?
why sings-he *pa*
'Why is he singing?'

According to Poletto (2000), if the particle is absent, the interrogative sentence is interpreted as a rethorical question, that is, as a non-standard question.

I will suggest that in a variety like Gardenese, as a neutral interrogative marker *pa* simply marks a default (or conventionalized) degree of matching between the shared common ground of the two discourse participants; in particular, we can analyze *pa* as a canonical question marker, adopting Farkas' (2020) notion of canonical question as characterized by the default assumptions of speaker ignorance and addressee competence about the propositional content of the question.⁷

Summing up, in this section we have seen that in Fodom/Ampezzano *pa* displays a connecting function with previous discourse or shared knowledge, in Fassano it can optionally appear in interrogative contexts without relevant interpretive effects, in Badiotto it marks canonical *wh*-questions and non-canonical polar questions, and finally in Gardenese it appears obligatorily in all canonical interrogatives.

3 The grammaticalization path across Central Rhaeto-Romance

Hack (2011, 2014) shows that the dialectal varieties of Dolomitic Rhaeto-Romance can be subdivided into four groups depending on the use of *pa* in interrogative clauses; she claims that the different functions performed by *pa* in the different varieties suggest the existence of a grammaticalization process with different intermediate stages and that every variety of Dolomitic Rhaeto-Romance instantiates a stage of this diachronic process.

According to this analysis *pa*, deriving from Latin *pos(t)*, had initially only local, temporal, and logical functions; at a certain point it has taken up a modal/discourse-functional value through which the speaker could express its attitude towards the described event. While Fodom and Ampezzano remain by now in this stage, Fassano has developed the conventionalized use where the particle lost its semantic-pragmatic contribution, but it is not obligatory yet. Eventually *pa* becomes obligatory in *wh*-questions in Badiotto and in all interrogative contexts in Gardenese.

Hack (2014), building on Abraham (1991), proposes for the particle *pa/po* the following grammaticalization path:

⁷ For an interesting implementation of Farkas' (2020) framework on the basis of empirical data from different Central and Southern Italian dialects, the reader is referred to Bianchi/Cruschina (2022).

- (18) Localistic > temporal > logical >
 illocutive/discourse functional > wh-question marker > general question marker

A very similar diachronic grammaticalization process has been proposed by Bayer (2012) for the German particle *denn*, which has developed into a pure *wh*-interrogative marker in Bavarian, where it appears as the clitic element *-n*.⁸

Dohi (2020) checks the validity of (18) against a more detailed diachronic survey of the different Rhaeto-Romance varieties, and gets to the following conclusions.

In Gardnese the validity of this scheme is confirmed, since both in *wh*-questions and in polar questions *pa* changes its status from modal particle to obligatory interrogative marker. It is extremely plausible that speakers of Gardnese have “copied” onto polar questions the function performed by the particle in *wh*-questions, reanalyzing it as a general interrogative marker.

In Badiotto *pa* follows Hack’s scheme in *wh*-questions with a certain delay with respect to Gardnese; the concurring presence of other modal particles suggests that grammaticalization is not the only factor determining the distribution of the particle. In polar questions the diachronic evolution of *pa* shows an unpredicted tendency leading to the disappearance of the particle. In this variety the reanalysis of *pa* as interrogative marker has not taken place, unlike in Gardnese.

In Fassano the loss of interpretive value does not entail the obligatory use in *wh*-questions. Beside this, the sinking frequency of *pa* in the 20th century suggests that it will not become an interrogative marker (unlike in Gardnese or Badiotto). In polar questions, like in Badiotto, the particle seems to be progressively disappearing.

Summing up, the loss of modal value in *wh*-questions takes place in all the three investigated varieties, while the extension of obligatory *pa* to polar questions does not take place in all dialects. The following scheme represents more adequately the grammaticalization of the particle *pa* in the Dolomitic Rhaeto-Romance varieties according to Dohi (2020: 176):

(19)

	Loss of modal value	Obligatoriness in <i>wh</i> -questions	Extension to polar questions
<i>Fodom/Ampezzano</i>	-	-	-
<i>Fassano</i>	+	-	-
<i>Badiotto</i>	+	+	-
<i>Gardnese</i>	+	+	+

⁸ According to Bayer (2012), in Bavarian the clitic element *-n* appearing in *wh*-clauses is deprived of its special modal particle semantics and operates more or less like a pure *wh*-interrogative marker; the grammaticalization path identified by Abraham (1991) is prolonged due to further reduction of *denn* toward a pure marker of root *wh*-questions. The concomitant cline from the categorial status as maximal projection XP to a lexical head X^o, to a functional head X^o and finally to a clitic element is fully consistent with a well-attested diachronic process of reanalysis. For a more recent assessment of the role and the syntactic status of the particle *'n* in Bavarian the reader is referred to Bayer (2025).

The survey of the diachronic data confirms that the particle *pa* tends to be used more and more frequently and to lose its pragmatic value. Nonetheless, according to Dohi (2020), in Fassano and Badiotto it is not the case that the particle is going to become obligatory in all interrogatives; hence, it is not possible to assume that every dialect represents an intermediate stage of a single grammaticalization process; on the contrary, we must hypothesize different evolutionary trends for each variety.

4 The particle *po* in the Bellunese area

As discussed extensively by Munaro/Poletto (2005, 2008), in the dialects of the Bellunese area, in particular Pagotto, the particle *po* can be used in a variety of contexts with different interpretive shades.⁹ In polar interrogatives it can have the “connecting function” identified by Hack (2011, 2014) if it appears in clause final position, as in (20a); exactly like in (2b) above, the connecting function of *pa* may bear on a prior discourse, shared knowledge or expectations/presuppositions that form part of the common ground of the conversation participants. In clause initial position, like in (20b), it has a counter-expectational flavour in the sense of Giorgi (2018), and expresses a remarkable degree of surprise of the speaker on the given state of affairs:

- (20) a. E-la partida **po**?
 is-she left po
 ‘Has she left then?’
 b. **Po**, é-la partida?!
 po is-she left
 ‘Has she really left?!’

As pointed out by Hinterhölzl/Munaro (2015), in *wh*-interrogatives *po* can express different degrees of surprise, depending on the position it occupies in the sentence, which corresponds to different degrees of shared knowledge between speaker and hearer; in particular, the higher the position occupied by the particle, the greater the degree of the speaker’s surprise, so that (21a) has a strongly counter-expectational flavour, while (21c) is only slightly counter-expectational and rather conveys a prosecutive entailment:

- (21) a. **Po**, quando é-la partida?
 po when is-she left
 b. Quando **po** é-la partida?
 when po is-she left
 c. Quando é-la partida **po**?
 when is-she left po
 ‘When has she left?!’

According to Hinterhölzl/Munaro (2015), there is a sort of scale based on the degree of shared knowledge between the interlocutors. In this sense, we can say that in this dialect group *po* can still work as a modal particle providing information about the epistemic state of discourse

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, the Bellunese data reported in this section are due to the native competence of the author.

participants, more precisely, about the degree of shared knowledge between speaker and hearer (or about the relationship between the speaker's expectations and the real situation).

The same function is performed by *po* in answers, where the speaker underlines the obviousness of the answer and consequently the uselessness of the question, signalling the complete overlapping between the speaker's and the hearer's epistemic state; this is exemplified in (22)–(23) with Pagotto and in (24) with Ampezzano:

- (22) A: A-tu comprà che? B: Al pan **po!**
 have-you bought what the bread po
 'What have you bought?' 'Obviously the bread!'
- (23) A: E Maria? B: *Po*, la è partida!/ La è partida **po!**
 and Maria po, she-is left/ she-is left po
 'And Mary?' 'She has left, of course!'
- (24) A: Ce fès-to? B: Son dàos magnà **po!**
 what do-you am behind eat po
 'What are you doing?' 'I'm having lunch, of course!'

However, in the dialects of the Bellunese area *po* can also add simply a connecting shade of meaning in the final position of standard *wh*-questions, where the *wh*-item appears in sentence internal position, like in (25a):

- (25) E-la partida quando **po?**
 is-she left when po
 ?? **Po**, é-la partida quando?
 po, is-she left when
 'When has she left then?'

Po can also have the function of neutral interrogative marker in non-propositional interrogative contexts, namely with *wh*-items in isolation, like in (26):

- (26) a. Quando **po**
 when po
 'And when?'
- b. Che **po**
 what po
 'And what?'

As witnessed by (27) and (28), in this function the presence of *po* is particularly frequent with the *wh*-item *parché* (cf. also Hack 2011), possibly due to the close semantic relation between the interpretive properties of 'why' and the pragmatic import of surprise/disapproval questions (cf. Munaro/Obenauer 2002); the examples in (27) are from Pagotto and Falcadino respectively, while the ones in (28) are from Ampezzano:

- (27) a. Parché **po** (é-la partida)?
 why po (is-she left)
 'Why (has she left)?'
- b. Parché **po** magné-o 'n pom?
 why po eat-you an apple
 'Why are you eating an apple?'

- (28) a. **Parcé po,** no aaràe abù da 'l fei?!
 why po not would-have had to it do
 b. **Parcé no aaràe abù da 'l fei, po?!**
 why not would-have had to it do po
 ‘Why on earth shouldn’t I have done it?’

Essentially, the difference between the standard interrogative reading and the interpretive import of these utterances amounts to the distinction between a speech act which is interpreted as a genuine request for an informative answer from the addressee, as opposed to a speech act whose aim is the expression of an emotionally salient attitude of the speaker with respect to the event described by the propositional content.

In the dialects of the Bellunese area *po* can also be used in imperatives, where it conveys a substantial reinforcement of the order; this exhortative shade derives presumably from the fact that speaker and hearer share common knowledge of a situation which leads to unavoidable performing of the relevant action:¹⁰

- (29) a. **Po,** vèrdi la finestra!
 po open the window
 b. **Vèrdi la finestra po!**
 open the window po
 ‘Come on, open the window!’

Furthermore, in total exclamatives *po* can convey a slightly adversative nuance, deriving from the disconfirmation of the speaker’s expectation, as witnessed by the following example from Ampezzano:¹¹

¹⁰ Hack (2011) reports the following example from Fodom, where *pa* is used in an exclamative context with a similar exhortative entailment:

- (i) Fè **pa** polito
 do pa well
 ‘Behave well!’ (2nd sing.)

¹¹ Interestingly, the particle *po* in Bellunese can not appear in *wh*-exclamative clauses, either sentence finally or sentence internally/initially:

- (i) ***[Po]** Che bela machina **[po]** che te à comprà **[po]**!
 [po] what beautiful car [po] that you-have bought [po]

According to Hinterhölzl/Munaro (2015), this incompatibility might be due to the fact that the semantics of the *wh*-exclamative and the contribution of the particle are the same, namely to signal that there is a gap between the speaker’s expectation (or between a standard expectation) and the actual state of affairs. Related to this, Hinterhölzl/Munaro (2021) argue that non-canonical *wh*-questions and *wh*-exclamatives involve the expression of surprise about an unexpected state of affairs; however, they exhibit a difference in illocutionary force: while non-canonical questions constitute directive speech acts which request the hearer to provide an explanation for the unexpected state of affairs, *wh*-exclamatives are more akin to assertions, since they are used to indicate the speaker’s surprise about the difference between the expected state of affairs and the actual one. These interpretive differences are syntactically codified by the presence and absence of Verb Second in German and by a difference in the final landing site of the *wh*-element in standard questions, non-canonical questions and *wh*-exclamatives in Italian.

- (30) **Po**, s'i lo sa d'ùte!
 po if they-it-know all
 'But if everybody knows about it!'

Summing up, in the Bellunese area *po* appears only in directive speech acts, i. e. questions/answers and imperatives, the clause types which involve the presence of an addressee and his/her reaction to the utterance, a reaction which can be verbal (in interrogatives) or non-verbal (in imperatives).

Its function seems to be the one of evaluating the epistemic state of the discourse participants, signalling that there is a complete overlapping of the background knowledge of speaker and hearer; the background knowledge of the two discourse participants is then related to the speech situation, which may be in contrast with such shared knowledge, giving rise to the surprise effect described above. In this sense, *po* displays a degree of grammaticalization which is far weaker than the one of Rhaeto-Romance *pa*, in particular of Gardenese *pa*; as suggested in the previous section, *pa* marks the interrogative speech act in which it appears as a canonical one, where the background knowledge of speaker and hearer crucially do not coincide.

5 Additional evidence from Central Rhaeto-Romance

In Badiotto the particle under investigation appears in two different forms, *pa* and *pö*, which are likely to be etymologically related (cf. Dohi 2020), and have different distributional properties.

Poletto/Zanuttini (2003) claim that the function of *pö* is the disconfirmation of a presupposition, as it signals that the propositional content denoted by the sentence in which it occurs contradicts some proposition which is already in the discourse; they observe that *pö* can appear in this counter-expectational function both in imperatives, like (31), and in emphatic statements, like in (32):

- (31) a. Fàl **pö** ch'al é na buna idea!
 do-it pö that it is a good idea
 'Do it, it's a good idea!'
- b. Va **pö** tres adërta fora!
 go pö always straight ahead?
 'Keep going straight ahead!'
- c. Tèt **pö** n dé de vacanza!
 Take pö a day of vacation
 'Take a day off for vacation!'
- (32) Al é **pö** bun!
 It is pö good
 'Sure it's good!'

Pö seems therefore to perform the function of contradicting a presupposition, but, unlike *po*, it appears only in imperatives and (total) exclamatives, the clause types which do not entail a verbal interaction with the addressee.¹²

According to Dohi (2020), the particle *pu*, which is equally argued to derive from Latin *post*, is more frequently attested in Gardenese, where it can appear in imperatives and optatives (and apparently also interrogatives):

- (33) a. Va **pu** sce te posses jì!
 go pu if you-can go
 ‘Go if you can!’
- b. **Pu** (Maria) scot sën!
 pu (Mary) listen now
 ‘(Mary), listen now!’
- c. Fossel **pu** vëira!
 were-it pu true
 ‘I wish it was true!’

Its function seems to be to disconfirm an expectation or a presupposition, hence its semantic-pragmatic contribution is similar to the one of *pö* in Badiotto.

As for Badiotto *pa*, Poletto/Zanuttini (2003) propose that its function is to signal that the entire sentence is focused. Differently from *pö*, *pa* can appear in every basic clause type, namely it appears obligatorily in standard *wh*-interrogatives, but can also appear in polar interrogatives, as we have seen above; moreover, it can appear in imperatives, triggering a ‘stronger order’:

- (34) a. Fàl **pa** ch’al é na buna idea!
 do-it pa that it is a good idea
 ‘Do it, it’s a good idea!’
- b. Va **pa** tres adërta fora!
 go pa always straight ahead
 ‘Always go straight ahead!’

As noted by Poletto (2000), *pa* can appear also in exclamative contexts:

¹² According to an anonymous reviewer, *pö* can also be used in other contexts, like the following statements, where it still disconfirms a presupposition:

- (i) a. Al à **pö** dit ch’an dess ti scrì.
 ‘He has said that we have to write to him.’
- b. I à **pö** scialdé la stüda, porchël podunse sté chilò.
 ‘I have warmed up the living room, hence we can stay here.’

The same holds for Badiotto *pa*, as witnessed by the following examples:

- (ii) a. Marta è **pa** jüda t’America.
 ‘Marta has gone to America.’
- b. I n’ à **pa** nia ciamò cialfé tüa lëtra.
 ‘I haven’t received your letter yet.’

6 Conclusion

In this article I have carried out a comparative survey of the distributional and interpretive properties of the particles *po/pa* across the Dolomitic region; by investigating the syntactic and semantic behaviour of this particle in different dialectal areas, I have tried to better characterize the diachronic process of grammaticalization as an interrogative marker this particle has undergone in some Central Rhaeto-Romance varieties. A comparative survey of the distributional and interpretive properties of the particle *po/pa* across the Dolomitic area reveals that its grammaticalization as an interrogative marker in some varieties can be more precisely characterized as the loss of the capacity to codify the epistemic state of the discourse participants, more precisely, to measure the degree of overlapping between the speaker's and the addressee's background knowledge (or the clash between the speaker's expectation/presupposition and the real state of affairs). We can conclude that, as a neutral interrogative marker, *pa* simply marks a default (or conventionalized) degree of matching between the shared common ground of the two interlocutors, which amounts to the canonical question reading as defined by Farkas (2020).¹⁴ On the contrary, Bellunese *po* evaluates the epistemic state of the discourse participants, signalling in some cases that there is a complete overlapping of the background knowledge of speaker and hearer; hence, it displays a degree of grammaticalization which is far weaker than the one of Central Rhaeto-Romance *pa*, in particular of Gardenese *pa*; as suggested above, Gardenese *pa* marks the interrogative speech act in which it appears as a canonical one, where the background knowledge of speaker and hearer crucially do not coincide.

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mon ground and whose function is to signal the communicative goals of the interlocutors; more precisely, they propose that *poi* is associated with a verum focus, namely a focus on the truth value of the whole sentence.

¹⁴ Farkas (2020) argues that the commonly assumed felicity conditions on canonical questions follow from the semantics and the basic conventional discourse effects of unmarked interrogatives; she further argues that special interrogative forms can be used to signal special conventional discourse effects that bring about the weakening or overriding of these default assumptions.

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