

Zeitschrift: Revue de linguistique romane
Herausgeber: Société de Linguistique Romane
Band: 31 (1967)
Heft: 121-122

Artikel: Piedmontese influence on Valdôtain syntax
Autor: Harris, Roy
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-399405>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 23.02.2026

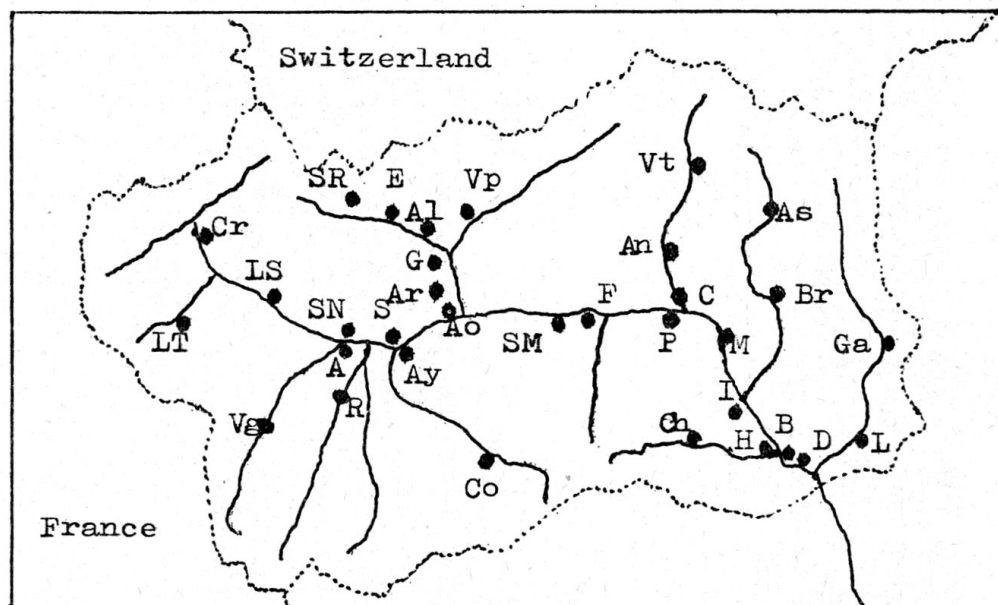
ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

PIEDMONTESE INFLUENCE ON VALDÔTAIN SYNTAX

In the Valdôtain dialects, the tendency in the compound tenses to substitute for the normal Franco-Provençal construction (type 'je l'ai dit', 'je l'avais dit', etc.) the Piedmontese construction with object pronoun postposed after the past participle has been in evidence for more than a hundred years, but the history of this infiltration and the reasons for it have not been fully elucidated. It is of some interest, therefore, to compare the information about this piece of syntax collected by Biondelli in 1841 for his *Saggio sui dialetti gallo-italici* with that collected by Edmont for the *Atlas linguistique de la France* in 1900 and also with that collected recently by Professor Keller. In this way it is possible to obtain a very incomplete but nonetheless informative picture of three stages in the history of this development, at intervals of approximately half a century.

In the following analysis, 'B' refers to the texts collected by Biondelli and published by Salvioni in *Romania*, vol. 42 (1913) p. 430-437; 'E' to the material published in the *Atlas linguistique de la France*; and 'K' to that published in H-E. Keller, *Études linguistiques sur les parlers valdôtains* (*Romanica Helvetica*, vol. 66), Berne, 1958, p. 140-141 and Tableau XXX. The following abbreviations for other sources are also used: 'BG' for B. Biondelli, *Saggio sui dialetti gallo-italici*, Milano, 1853; 'PV' for Pierre Vietti, *Batezar fê 'ncò la guida*, published in *Théâtre populaire valdôtain en patois*, t. 1, Aoste, 1958; 'CG' for J-B. Cerlogne, *Petite grammaire du dialecte valdotain*, 1893 (cited from the 1958 edition); 'CIP' for J-B. Cerlogne, *L'Infan Prodeggo*, 1855 (cited from the 1957 edition of the *Poésies en dialecte valdotain*); and 'CM' for J-B. Cerlogne, *Marenda a Tsesalet*, 1855 (cited from the 1957 edition of the *Poésies en dialecte valdotain*).

The map below shows the situation of all the localities in question.



| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Al Allain | Co Cogne | L Lillianes |
| An Anthey-St-André | Cr Courmayeur | M Montjovet |
| Ao Aosta | D Donnas | P Pontey |
| Ar Arpuilles | E Etroubles | R Rhêmes-St-Georges |
| A Arvier | F Fénis | SM St-Marcel |
| As Ayas | Ga Gaby | SN St-Nicolas |
| Ay Aymavilles | G Gignod | S St-Pierre |
| B Bard | H Hône | SR St-Rhémy-Bosses |
| Br Brusson | I Issogne | Vg Valgrisenche |
| Ch Champorcher | LS La Salle | Vp Valpelline |
| C Châtillon | LT La Thuile | Vt Valtournenche. |

The available data may be considered under two heads :

1. Geographical distribution. 2. Syntactic aspects.

1. Of the six Valdôtaine texts in B, from Aosta, Cogne, Bard/Donnas, Ayas, the Val di Gignod and Valtournenche, the first three only show examples of past participles with postposed object pronouns. E confirms the usage of the Piedmontese construction at Aosta, but shows that it has not penetrated as far north-west as Courmayeur. In the central valley, E gives examples of the Piedmontese construction for Châtillon, but again confirms B in registering no examples for the lateral northern

valley of Ayas. The Piedmontese construction also appears further south at the fifth locality in E, Champorcher. K provides data for twenty-eight localities, confirming E in registering no examples of the Piedmontese construction for Courmayeur (nor for two other localities in the same area, la Thuile and la Salle). K also confirms B in showing the apparent failure of the Piedmontese construction to penetrate up the lateral valley from Châtillon to Anthey-St-André and Valtournenche. The remaining locality in K for which no example of the Piedmontese construction is registered is Rhêmes-St-Georges, but the information given is from the *A. I. S.* inquiry of 1928. On the other hand, the Piedmontese construction appears to have made progress up the Vallée du Grand St. Bernard, for whereas B fails to register it for the Val di Gignod, K gives examples for Allain, Etroubles and St-Rhémy. K unfortunately gives no data for Ayas, but the appearance of the Piedmontese construction at Brusson is recorded in the *A. I. S.* K also gives examples of this construction for Valpelline, Valgrisenche, Arvier, St-Nicolas, St-Pierre, Aymavilles, Arpuilles, St-Marcel, Fénis, Pontey, Montjovet, Issogne, Champorcher, Hône, Bard, Donnas, Lillianes and Gaby.

(Although it is of only marginal importance for the question of geographical distribution, it is worth discussing at this point the situation at Champorcher, since the question of the validity of Edmont's data arises in this connexion. Professor Keller describes Champorcher (*loc. cit.*, p. 140) as 'sur le point d'être gagné par la construction piémontaise' (since it has *l an mandálo vyá* but *l i savôy*). However, E shows the Piedmontese construction already established here in 1900: *l ěy... lŕ* 'je l'ai (déjà entendu)' *A. L. F.* 83b; *nŕ l ěm pámě vyŕ lŕ* 'nous ne le revîmes plus' *A. L. F.* 1154; *l ā sěŕā lā* '(le médecin) l'a saigné' *A. L. F.* 1181. The comparison is an interesting one, showing that over a period of fifty years the Piedmontaise construction has not succeeded in eliminating the indigenous construction entirely in the patois of Champorcher — given that the replies of Edmont's informant are representative. Does it seem likely that they are? It is possible that living in Châtillon had affected the syntax of Edmont's informant, and Professor Keller evidently has doubts about him (*op. cit.*, p. 35, '...Edmont, qui a choisi ses sujets d'Ayas (P. 987) et de Champorcher (P. 985) parmi les habitants de la banlieue de Châtillon (P. 986)!'). But whatever doubts there may be on the score of pronunciation, on the point of syntax in question there seems no reason to suspect the validity of the *A. L. F.* replies for Cham-

porcher and Ayas. For a comparison shows them to be quite well differentiated both from each other and from the replies for Châtillon, and, moreover, differentiated in the way we would expect in the light of what else we know of the distribution of the constructions concerned. Thus Edmont's informant for Ayas never uses the past participle with postposed pronoun (cf. the absence of this construction in the B text for Ayas), the informant for Châtillon uses it on some occasions but not others, while the informant for Champorcher uses it most consistently of the three. This, when we consider the fact that Champorcher is only a few kilometres distant from Bard and Donnas, where the B text shows the Piedmontese construction already flourishing in 1841, is hardly surprising. The explanation of *l an mandâlo vyâ* but *l i savôÿ* at Champorcher seems more likely to be that a prolonged period of coexistence of the two constructions has resulted in variations in the idiolects of individual speakers. This would also account for another fact which Professor Keller admits difficulty in explaining, namely that his informant at Champorcher replies (a) *l i savôÿ* but (b) *y a triâmê or bêryo*. A similar state of affairs obtains also at Gaby. Professor Keller seeks an explanation in 'la volonté des sujets de donner à l'enquêteur des formes indigènes : inconsciemment, par contre, ils ont donné la forme piémontaise. Il faut donc croire que dans le cas *a*, ils avaient encore mieux conscience de l'influence piémontaise que dans le cas *b*' (*loc. cit.*, p. 141). In view of the likelihood that postposition with the third person pronoun as direct object was the earliest type of Piedmontese construction to become naturalized in the Valdôtain dialects (see Section 2 below), it seems preferable to regard this as another possible example of idiolect variation.)

An examination of B, E and K shows that in general the Piedmontese construction is never attested in a lateral valley unless at the same time or previously attested in that area of the main valley where the lateral valley in question debouches. This suggests a constant geographical pattern of extension : advance northwards and westwards up the main valley, followed by infiltration up those lateral valleys communicating directly with localities already affected. A possible exception to this pattern is Cogne, where the presence of the Piedmontese construction is already attested in the earliest recorded phase represented by B. This exception would be explicable by reference to the geography of the Cogne valley, of which Professor Keller (*op. cit.*, p. 26) writes as follows : « Cette vallée a une histoire particulière par le fait qu'elle est presque fermée vers la vallée

principale par l'étroite gorge rocheuse près du pont d'El. Cet obstacle a été probablement insurmontable pendant très longtemps, et cela explique que cette vallée fut pendant si longtemps orientée vers le Canavese. » Needless to say, without the support of demographic and economic data, any conclusions drawn must be very tentative.

2. The past participle with postposed object pronoun occurs in constructions of various syntactic types, which have not found equal favour in the Valdôtain dialects. Professor Keller points out (*loc. cit.*, p. 140-141) that at the present day the construction with postposed object pronoun is found more widely with the third person singular pronoun than with others, and sees in this fact an indication of the origin of the Piedmontese infiltration. 'Nous croyons que cela est dû à une particularité du dialecte piémontais; car celui-ci fait précéder le verbe « avoir » analogiquement, c'est-à-dire dans toutes les personnes, du pron. pers. *l'*: *ti i't l'às* 'tu as', *ti i't l'aviëstu* (ou *l' l'aviëstu*?) 'as-tu' (Aly-Belfâdel 150). C'est ainsi que les parlers valdôtains ont commencé à ajouter, à côté de leur pronom protonique *l'*, le *lo* « piémontais ». ' However, a comparison of B with E and K enables one to go considerably further than Professor Keller's suggestion in attempting to reconstruct the mechanism of the Piedmontese infiltration. The facts appear to be as follows.

There is no doubt from the evidence of B that the Piedmontese syntax was first adopted in constructions where the pronoun was third person singular, but it is important also to note that in all cases where it occurs in B the pronoun is the direct object of the verb in question. Thus in the Aosta text in B we have *che la mandalo* (l. 8) but *vos e tojer obéi* (l. 33). Similarly in the Bard/Donnas text in B *l'at embrashsialo* (l. 13) but *gliat bêta un anné alla man* (ll. 16-17), and in the Cogne text *son pare la vu-lo* (ll. 14-15) but *son fils llia dit* (l. 16). In no case where the pronoun is an indirect object do we find it suffixed to the past participle, whether it is a third singular or not. However, in Piedmontese the pronoun is postposed after the past participle both when it is a direct and when it is an indirect object, as in the following examples from Biondelli's Piedmontese text for Turin (BG, p. 505): *j'è corüje ancontra* (v. 20); *E'l fiöl j'à dije* (v. 21); *chial-si j'à dije* (v. 27); *a j'à dije* (v. 29); *Ma'l padre a j'à dije* (v. 31). Thus the problem is to explain why Valdôtain imitation of the Piedmontese syntax did not embrace the third person singular pronoun both as direct and as indirect object. The fact that, at least

in the earliest recorded phase, this is not the case suggests that the two Piedmontese constructions were originally interpreted differently by Valdôtain speakers. This may have come about in the following way.

In the Valdôtain dialects the reduction of the third person subject pronoun *il* to *l'* before verbs beginning with a vowel has been long established, and this weak form of the subject pronoun tended to become agglutinated with the third singular forms of the verb 'to have' through pleonastic usage, as the following examples show: *Un pere layait dō mainà* (B. I, l. 1); *Un hommo l'avé do fils* (B. IV, l. 1); *L'est lo Bondzeu que l'at creà lo mondo* (CG, p. 23). The same is true of the third person plural subject pronoun, which is similarly reduced before a vowel to *l'*: e. g. *l'an* 'ils ont' (CG, p. 26); *l'ayan* 'ils avaient' (CG, p. 26); *l'amon* (CG, p. 31). The result of these reductions is a dual grammatical status for initial *l'*: third person subject pronoun (singular or plural) and third person direct object pronoun (singular). E. g. in the line *Lo solei l'ayet fét le trei quar de son tor* (CM, l. 72) *l'* is a subject pronoun, while in *Cella qui l'ayet fét contenta l'aveitsàve* (CM, l. 67) it is in both instances an object pronoun. Consequently, in a case such as *L'at mindza, din vouet dzor, tot cen que possedàve* (CIP, l. 16) the status of *l'* is somewhat ambiguous, being equally well interpreted as the subject pronoun corresponding to French *il*, or as the object pronoun corresponding to French *le*, anticipating the phrase *tot cen que possedàve*. It may have been originally to clarify this type of ambiguity that the Valdôtain dialects had recourse to the Piedmontese construction, which offers the advantage of marking out the object pronoun conspicuously by its postposition. It would have been possible for a Valdôtain speaker to interpret the Piedmontese construction *l'ha vdülo* by analogy with Valdôtain syntax as 'subject pronoun + verb + past participle + object pronoun'. In the case where the pronoun object is an indirect object, on the other hand, no such ambiguity arises in Valdôtain syntax. It is worthy of note also that in the examples from BG quoted above where the pronoun object is indirect the Piedmontese form of the auxiliary verb 'to have' is in no case prefixed by *l'*, in contrast with cases where the pronoun is a direct object, as in the following examples taken from the same text: *ch'a l'à mandàlo* (v. 15); *chial-sì l'ha vdülo* (v. 20); *l'à ambrassàlo et basàlo* (v. 20); *l'à ricüperàlo* (v. 27). Accordingly it would be unlikely that a Valdôtain speaker would interpret Piedmontese *j'à dije* as anything other than a reduplication of the indirect object pronoun. These facts might explain what is already appa-

rent in B, namely the greater facility with which the Piedmontese syntax infiltrates in the case of the direct object construction than in the case of the indirect object construction.

Even in the case of the third person pronoun as direct object, the early evidence shows a certain hesitation about acceptance of the Piedmontese construction. Thus B. III (Bard/Donnas) has *l'at mandalo* (l. 7) but *l'at veito* (l. 12). Similarly B. IV (Cogne) has *la vu-lo* (l. 15) but *la pré* (l. 15). These inconsistencies seem to indicate that in 1841 the infiltration of the Piedmontese construction is still in its initial stages.

All the examples considered hitherto have been cases in which not only is the object pronoun third person singular but the subject of the verb is third person singular also. In cases where the subject is other than third person singular, the B texts are divided over acceptance of the Piedmontese construction. The Bard/Donnas text has not only *l'at mandalo* (l. 7) but also *vo l'avude tratalo* (ll. 36-37). The Cogne text, however, has *la vu-lo* (l. 15) but *l'avou perdu* (l. 21) and *l'ai retrouvà* (l. 21). This confirms the impression that B shows us the initial stages of the Piedmontese infiltration, but also indicates in the case of Bard/Donnas that before the type 'l'a fait-le' had itself been entirely accepted an extension to other syntactic types had begun. This is of interest inasmuch as with subjects other than the third person the construction is patently a reduplication (e. g. in *vo l'avude tratalo* there is no doubt that the pronoun object is expressed twice) whereas with third person subjects there is the ambiguity about the status of *l'* already mentioned. E shows that the reduplicated construction with subjects other than third person has by 1900 gained ground: Aosta *dʒɛ l ɛ... lɔ* 'je l'ai (entendu)' *A. L. F.* 83 b; Champorcher *l ɛy... lɔ* 'je l'ai (entendu)' *A. L. F.* 83 b; Champorcher *nɔ l ɛm pãmɛ vyɥ lɔ* 'nous ne le revîmes plus' *A. L. F.* 1154; Châtillon *nɔ l ɛm pãmɛ vɥ lɔ* 'nous ne le revîmes plus' *A. L. F.* 1154; Châtillon *dʒɛ l ɛ sãvɥ lɔ* 'j'ai su ça' *A. L. F.* 1203. What is remarkable is that K shows a virtual elimination of the reduplication in this type of construction and the acceptance of a simple postposition of the object pronoun (type 'j'ai su-le'). Of the seventeen localities in K for which the past participle with postposed object pronoun is recorded, only two (St-Marcel and Brusson) retain the reduplicated construction, and it is significant that in both these instances the data given comes from the *A. I. S.* inquiry of 1928. It seems beyond doubt, therefore, that in relatively recent times the Valdôtain dialects, while accepting an extension of the

Piedmontese syntax in phrases of this type, have rejected the original (i. e. reduplicated) form which this construction took. A possible reason for this development, which hitherto remains unexplained, is discussed below.

In cases where the pronoun object, direct or indirect, is other than third person postposition with the past participle is found in Piedmontese, e. g. *voi m'avì mai dâme* (BG, p. 505, v. 29). But in all such cases the B texts adhere still to pre-position, e. g. *vos e tojor obéi* (B. I, l. 33), *vos èi jamais dèsobèi* (B. II, l. 37), *mahè jamais donna* (B. II, l. 37), *vo mavuda mai donna* (B. III, ll. 24-25), *vous ai jamay desoubèi* (B. IV, l. 28), *vou m'âde jamay bàilla* (B. IV, l. 29), *vos é geami dèsobèi* (B. V, l. 31), *mei geami bailla* (B. V, l. 31), *dze no vo s'ei jamé dèsobèi* (B. VI, ll. 26-27), *jamé vo no n'é doro* (B. VI, l. 27). E shows that in one locality the Piedmontese construction is gaining acceptance with pronoun objects other than third person: Champorcher *è ã... mē* 'et m'a (fait saigner du nez)' A. L. F. But in E Aosta, Courmayeur, Châtillon and Ayas all show pre-position still. K gives data for the phrase 'il me serra la gorge' showing the past participle with postposed pronoun at six localities: Brusson *l à sarrâm^{mē}* (A. I. S.), Issogne *y at sarrômā*, Hône *y at sarō^wmē*, Bard *ya serâmē*, Donnas *ya sarrâmē*, and Lillianes *a strissâmē*. Two points are worthy of note here. First, that none of these localities is likely, by reason of its geographical situation, to owe the presence of this construction to the influence of Aosta. We seem, therefore, to be dealing with a linguistic infiltration directly from the Piedmontese plain. Second, in no case does the construction adopted show reduplication of the object pronoun. This throws some light on the problem raised at the conclusion of the preceding paragraph, and suggests that the Valdôtain dialects have absorbed two successive waves of Piedmontese infiltration, the earlier characterized by past participles with a reduplicated pronoun object postposed, the later by past participles with simple postposition of the pronoun object. The later infiltration made rapid progress where the reduplicated construction had already been accepted and merely replaced it, but much slower progress where the reduplicated construction had never found acceptance at all. In support of this suggestion one may point to the fact that there is some evidence of a tendency in the Piedmontese dialects themselves to reject the earlier reduplicated constructions in favour of simple postposition. Thus Biondelli's text for Turin (BG, p. 505) shows twenty-one examples of past participles with postposed object pronouns,

without exception of the reduplicated type. But the data for Turin given in the *A. I. S.* nearly a hundred years later shows examples of simple postposition: *al ë kaskâme sla fáča* 'mi è caduto sul viso' (*A. I. S.* 1617), *l à strēnzîme la gûla* 'mi strinse la gola' (*A. I. S.* 1671).

Two types of case not included in the above analysis also require comment. The first concerns usage in respect of reflexive pronouns. These are also found postposed in Piedmontese: e. g. BG, p. 505, *s'era perdüsse* (v. 24), *s'son büttasse* (v. 24), *s'è fasse* (v. 28). This is not found in the B texts: *s'ël retrova* (B. III, l. 19), *s'est betó* (B. V. l. 29), *s'est tornó* (B. V, l. 35), *s'est trovó* (B. V, l. 36). It occurs in one instance in E: Champorcher *džè sĭ... mè* 'je me suis (assis)' *A. L. F.* 500. But the data for 'elle s'est couchée' (*A. L. F.* B. 1519) and 'elle s'est pendue' (*A. L. F.* B. 1662) shows the indigenous Valdôtain pre-position everywhere maintained. K gives no data for reflexives. The second type of case concerns usage in respect of the pronoun *en* and its dialectal equivalents. Here also postposition is found in Piedmontese: e. g. BG, p. 505, *l'à fàine doe part* (v. 12), *a n'è stane vsin* (v. 25). There are no relevant examples in B, E or K, but this construction is not unknown in Valdôtain. The earliest attestation I have been able to find occurs in an example cited in quite a different connexion in CG: *Et dei adon n'est passa n'en d'ève en Džouëre* (p. 5).

Finally, since K gives no data for the town of Aosta itself, it is not without interest to examine the usage found in PV, which may be considered as giving some indication of contemporary urban usage. In PV occur examples of past participles with postposed pronouns for most of the types considered above and some others: (a) third person singular pronoun as direct object *dž'i maque preilo* (l. 83), (b) third person singular pronoun as indirect object *l'atra l'a gnēnca balhia-lei fei* (l. 38), (c) third person plural pronoun as indirect object *dž'i eidža-lei* (l. 7), *dž'i dilei* (l. 9, l. 17), *n'i repondu-lei* (l. 26), (d) first person singular pronoun as indirect object *l'an demandame* (l. 8, ll. 13-14, l. 25), *l'an deme* (l. 11), (e) first person singular reflexive *dže si trovàme* (l. 20), (f) first person singular reflexive and construction with *en*; *dže si tornamenen a meizon* (ll. 78-9). The last case is interesting as an example of double postposition. It is to be noted that in PV there are no examples of a reduplicated construction: simple postposition occurs in every instance. The only examples in the text which show an avoidance of postposition are two third person plural reflexives: *se son bettaye* (l. 59) and *se son étaoulaye* (ll. 70-71).

In conclusion, it must be stressed that the data analysed here doubtless give only a fragmentary picture of the history of this particular example of Piedmontese influence on Valdôtain. It seems to be clear, however, that the available facts are not explicable simply by reference to the linguistic prestige of Piedmontese, and the ultimate reasons for the borrowing in question are to be found in the syntactic structure of Valdôtain. The hypothesis which has been argued for above may be summarized as follows. The point of departure of the Piedmontese infiltration was a specific weakness in Valdôtain syntax. Indigenous morphological development had rendered the constructions corresponding to French 'il a fait' and 'il l'a fait', and also those corresponding to 'ils ont fait' and 'ils l'ont fait' indistinguishable. This ambiguity favoured borrowing from Piedmontese, which would resolve the ambiguity by postposition of the object pronoun. Originally confined to cases in which a third person verb took a third person singular pronoun as direct object, this borrowing led to analogous imitation of the Piedmontese construction in cases where the verb was other than third person, where the third person pronoun was indirect object, and where the pronoun object was other than third person. Hence the introduction of reduplicated constructions in Valdôtain. These were at a later stage eliminated in favour of simple postposition, under the influence of syntactic developments in the Piedmontese dialects.

Roy HARRIS.