
Grammaticalization in Venetan: the case of *gaver*

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1 Introduction

Grammaticalization and TMA sequencing constitute fundamental aspects for grammatical theories. In this squib, we will investigate the grammaticalization of the Venetan verb *(g)aver* (from the latin *habere*).¹ In particular, we will discuss its modal use. Venetan is an Italo-Romance language, spoken by around 4 million people, mostly in Veneto, Northern Italy. The variety discussed here is Venetian.

After presenting the data, we will make an hypothesis on the path that led to the modal use of *gaver*, stating its link to previous studies in other languages. Then, we will show that the phenomenon fits both the Functional Discourse Grammar and Generative Grammar predictions. Last, we will present a challenge arisen by the defectiveness of *gaver*, together with our tentative explanation.

2 Data

In Venetian we find three different uses of the verb *gaver*:²

- (1) Eła la **ga** na machina nova.
She cl. has (have-PRES.3.SG) a new car.
- (2) Eła la **ga visto** el novo film de Quentin Tarantino.
She cl. has (have-PRES.3.SG) seen (see-PASTPART) the new movie by Quentin Tarantino.

¹Depending on the variety the infinitive form can be found with or without initial *g*.

²Three and ‘a half’, if we consider the generally accepted hypothesis that in most Romance languages (excluding south Italian dialects and Sardinian) the Latin *habere* has been re-analyzed as the ending affix for future and conditionals (Roberts and Rousou, 2003).

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- (3) Eła ła **ga da** ‘**ndar** tore el pan.
She cl. has (have-PRES.3.SG) to go (go-INF) get (get-INF) the bread.

We can then distinguish between a lexical use (1), an aspectual auxiliary use (2), and a modal use (3).³ We will focus on the modal use, recalling the aspectual use in the last section to highlight a peculiarity lying in the interplay between aspectual and modal *gaver*. *Gaver* as modal can be both root and epistemic, as the following examples show:

- (4) a. Vialtri gavì da scoltarme.
(You-PL have-PRES.2.PL to listen-I.ACC)
You have to listen to me.
b. Vialtri gavì da èsar drìo schersar.
(You-PL have-PRES.2.PL to be-INF behind joke-INF)
You have to be joking.

While in (4a), *gaver* expresses a deontic necessity, in (4b) it conveys an epistemic meaning, i.e. a deduction.

3 Diachronic hypothesis

From a diachronic perspective, there is no certainty on the passages that led to the re-analysis of *gaver* as modal. However, we can build an hypothesis on the observation of similar constructions. In fact, there are other necessity expressions involving the verb *gaver* (‘to have’):

- (5) Go un mucio de cose da far.
(Have-PRES.1.SG. a bunch of things to do-INF)
I have a bunch of things to do.

At this initial stage, the necessity is not conveyed by the verb *gaver* itself, but by the infinitivals. As testified by examples in which other verbs, different from *gaver*, occur:

- (6) El me dà sempre un mucio de cose da far.
(cl. I.DAT give.PRES.3.SG. always a bunch of things to do-INF)

³In the squib we always treat the auxiliary *gaver* as an aspectual marker defining relative anterior tense, however its borders are blurred and it is also possible to consider it as fully developed into an absolute tense referring to recent past, like in ‘most Spanish dialects’ and Italian (Hengeveld, 2011). For the purposes of this squib it does not make any difference.

He always gives me a bunch of things to do.

However, we do find a crystallized expression that suggests the passage through which *gaver* and the infinitive may have become closer.

- (7) Go da far.
(Have-PRES.1.SG. to do-INF)
I have [some things] to do. = I am busy.

We can argue that (7) has a similar meaning to (5), with the difference that the object has become implicit. On a surface level then, the possessive verb and the infinitive are closer. This step may have later developed in the reanalysis of *gaver da* as modal. From a biclausal expression, it may have become a monoclausal deontic modal, and subsequently an epistemic one.

This hypothesis is in lines with the studies on the grammaticalization of *have to* in English (Brinton, 1991; Van der Gaaf, 1931). Moreover, Hengeveld (2011) acknowledges this as a common path for possessives, going from attribution to primary predication, through secondary predication. Adapting Hengeveld (2011) for (5):

- Path a. Go [un mucio de cose da far]
 b. Go [un mucio de cose] [da far]
 c. [Go da far] [un mucio de cose]

4 *Gaver da* in FDG and GG

We now turn to evaluating the grammaticalization of *gaver*, through our diachronic hypothesis, in Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG) and Generative Grammar (GG).

Model.

According to FDG, grammaticalization involves an increase in the scope of semantic units, which then move from lower to higher layers (Hengeveld, 1989). In its lexical meaning, *gaver* would be analysed as the head of a property, at the Representational level. In its modal (both deontic and objective epistemic) meanings, *gaver da* would be analysed as an operator in the layer of State-of-Affairs (Keizer, 2015). As the theory predicts, we detect a movement from a lower layer to a higher layer.

- FDG Lexical *gaver*: RL: $p \leftarrow ep \leftarrow e \leftarrow f$
 Modal *gaver*: RL: $p \leftarrow ep \leftarrow e \leftarrow f$

According to GG, grammaticalization implies a re-analysis: either lexical

items become functional, or one functional category becomes another one higher in the tree (Heine, 1993; Roberts and Roussou, 2003). Our hypothesis again conforms with the predictions. As possessive lexical item, *gaver* is first merged in the head of a VP, as deontic modal it is merged in head of a $\text{ModP}_{\text{Root}}$, and as epistemic modal it is merged even higher, in the head of a $\text{ModP}_{\text{Epistemic}}$ (Cinque, 1999; Gelderen, 2017).

GG Lexical *gaver*: $\text{ModP}_E > \text{TP} > \text{AspP} > \text{ModP}_R > \mathbf{VP}$
 Deontic *gaver*: $\text{ModP}_E > \text{TP} > \text{AspP} > \mathbf{\text{ModP}_R} > \text{VP}$
 Epistemic *gaver*: $\mathbf{\text{ModP}_E} > \text{TP} > \text{AspP} > \text{ModP}_R > \text{VP}$

Importantly, this representation shows another phenomenon related to *gaver*.⁴ The deontic *gaver* can occur in the scope of the perfective auxiliaries but not vice versa, and perfective auxiliaries can occur in the scope of epistemic *gaver* but not vice versa.

In the light of the above, we can affirm that our diachronic hypothesis perfectly fits FDG and GG predictions. Furthermore, we can safely state that *gaver* did not experience a unique multi-steps evolution (from lexical, to deontic, to perfective, to epistemic), but rather two different evolutions departing from a unique core (the modal one: from lexical, to deontic, to epistemic, and the auxiliary one: from lexical to perfective).⁵

5 The defectiveness of *Gaver da* and the Differential Selection Hypothesis

As mentioned before, *gaver da* is similar to the English *have to*. Beyond the link between possessives and necessity, it has also to be noted that both *gaver* and *have* developed as auxiliaries to express perfectivity in compound tenses.⁶ However, an important difference has to be highlighted. In opposition to *have*, *gaver* cannot occur both as modal and as perfective marker applied to the modal in compound tenses, even though *gaver* presents a past participle (*avùo*).

(8) a. She **has had to go**.

⁴We decided to put both TP and AspP to cover both analyses mentioned in footnote 2.

⁵Indeed, from an historical and across-languages perspective, we do observe that the perfective auxiliary in some sense ‘preceeds’ the modal one. In Italian for instance, we do find the aspect/tense auxiliary *avere*, but not the modal one.

⁶Moreover, they also simply maintain their possessive lexical use.

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- b. ***Ła ga avùo da ndar via.**
(cl. have-PRES.3.SG. have-PASTPART to go away.)

This defectiveness relies precisely in the combination of the aspectual auxiliary applied to the deontic *gaver*, in fact other combinations are perfectly fine.⁷

AUX + LEX: **Ła ga avùo** a freve.
(cl. has had a fever.)

EPI + LEX: **Ła ga da aver** a freve.
(cl. has to have a fever.)

EPI + AUX + LEX: **Ła ga da aver avùo** a freve.
(cl. has to have had a fever.)

If a speaker wishes to express the notion of necessity in a compound perfect tense, they must apply to *dover*, another verb, which has the only meaning of modal necessity. *Dover*, as *must*, combine directly with a bare infinitive, but, in contrast to *must*, can be inflected in any tense and mood, including the past participle.⁸

- (9) a. **Ła ga dovùo ndar via.**
(cl. have-PRES.3.SG. ‘must’-PASTPART go-INF away.)
She has had to go away.

Dover, less used than *gaver* in present, imperfect, or future inflections, becomes the only available alternative for compound tenses.

We then formulate, in the language of GG, the following Differential Selection Hypothesis regulating competition:

DSH If two occurrences of the same lexeme would be merged as heads of TP and ModP_{Root}, or AspP and ModP_{Root}, and a substitute term is available for one of them, the substitute will prevail.

Naturally this hypothesis comes with several repercussions that have to be checked by empirical studies, as we mention in the last section.

⁷With the limitations mentioned in §4.

⁸Interestingly, *dover* comes from the Latin *debere*, which underlines once again the link between possessives and necessity, being formed by *de* and *habere*.

6 Future Work

In this squib, we briefly discussed the grammaticalization of the Venetan *gaver*, showing its relation to FDG and GG, and presenting a challenge it rises. Possible future works on the topic should be driven by empirical analysis of the predictions made here, namely:

1. Checking whether the historical development in corpora over the centuries confirms our diachronic predictions.

Additionally, as theoretical issue: Italian presents up to stage (b) of the path mentioned in §3, do the more deterministic approaches towards grammaticalization paths (Newmeyer, 2000; Roberts and Rous-sou, 2003) predict that the Italian *avere* will eventually become modal as well?

2. Checking whether languages with alternatives for modals similar to the Venetian ones conform to the DSH hypothesis, and on the other hand, whether in opposite cases, like English, the hypothesis is still confirmed, for example: did the modal use of *have to* arose after the fall of the use of *must* in the past form, such that they never were contemporary available alternatives?

We are confident that further studies may shed light not only on this Venetian phenomenon, but also on the relation between possessives and modals, and even more broadly on the relations between selection of TMA elements and grammaticalization paths.

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