

# Chapter 11

## From macro to nano: A parametric hierarchy approach to the diatopic and diachronic variation of Italian *ben*

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In this squib we discuss the morpho-syntactic requirements affecting the distribution of the Italian discourse particle *ben* (lit. ‘well’) as employed in a selection of regional varieties of the language. We present a preliminary comparison with its attestations in earlier stages of the language and we show how the attested diatopic and diachronic variation may be modelled in terms of a parameter hierarchy of the type developed by the *ReCoS* team.

### 1 Introduction

The aims of the following squib are: (i) introducing the morpho-syntactic requirements affecting the distribution of a poorly studied discourse particle, namely Italian *ben* (lit. ‘well’), as employed in a selection of regional varieties of the language, building on the work in Cognola & Schifano (2015; 2018a,b) (§2), (ii) presenting a preliminary comparison with its attestations in earlier stages of the language (§3), and (iii) showing how the attested diatopic and diachronic variation are particularly relevant for our understanding of comparative syntax in that, far from being random, they fit the predictions of the parametric hierarchy approach, as developed by the *ReCoS* team (Roberts 2012; Biberauer & Roberts



2012; 2015; 2016; Biberauer, Holmberg, et al. 2014; Biberauer, Roberts & Sheehan 2014, a.o.; §4).

The challenge raised by the behaviour of this element is twofold. On the one hand, particles represent a “poorly understood group of elements” (Biberauer & Sheehan 2011: 387) which raise a number of both empirical and theoretical questions, including i.a. a proper understanding and adequate description of their individual syntactic functions, of their (lack of) ordering restrictions, as well as defectivity, optionality, degree and path of grammaticalization and pragmaticalization, semantic contribution, etc. (Biberauer & Sheehan 2011; Biberauer, Haegeman, et al. 2014). On the other hand, the sub-category of *discourse* particles introduces a number of even more complex issues.<sup>1</sup> According to Zimmermann’s (2011: 2012) semantic criterion, discourse particles can be defined as “expressions [which] contribute only to the expressive content of an utterance, and not to its core propositional content” (cf. also Bayer & Obenauer 2011: 450, a.o.). This means that any formalization of discourse particles must be able to capture not only their syntactic behaviour and structural status (as, for example, (deficient) adverbs, Cardinaletti 2011; 2015; Manzini 2015; TP pro-forms, Haegeman & Weir 2015; speech act functional heads, Haegeman 2014; Hill 2014; propositional anaphors, Hinterhölzl & Munaro 2015), but also their discourse properties, which involve highly heterogeneous non-syntactic categories such as speakers’ “emotional needs” (von der Gabelentz 1969 [1891]; cf. i.a. the expression of commitment, e.g. German *wohl*, Zimmermann 2011; confidence, e.g. *ben* in some varieties of Italian, Coniglio 2008; Cardinaletti 2011; surprise, e.g. Cantonese *me1*, Li 2006; surprise-disapproval, e.g. Bangla *ki*, Bayer 1996; concern, e.g. German *denn*, Bayer & Obenauer 2011; impatience, e.g. Dolomitic Ladin *po*, Hack 2014: 52) or context/common ground dependence (cf. i.a. presupposition, e.g. Italian *mica*, Cinque 1976, Zanuttini 1997; existence of mutual knowledge, e.g. German *ja*, Zimmermann 2011; evidentiality, e.g. Bellunese *lu/ti/mo/po*, Hinterhölzl & Munaro 2015), just to mention a few.

In what follows, we leave these issues aside, simply assuming that Italian *ben* is a discourse particle located in the IP area (see further discussion in Cognola & Schifano 2018a,b).<sup>2</sup> Conversely, we focus our attention on the diatopic distribution of this element, as this proves to be particularly interesting in that it is

<sup>1</sup>A wider related issue concerns the notion of “discourse” itself, which is too vast for us to be able to discuss it here. The reader is referred to Bayer et al. (2015) for an updated overview of some of the most prominent proposals about its codification and relationship with syntax.

<sup>2</sup>As for the syntactic status of *ben*, the reader is referred to Cognola & Schifano (2015; 2018a,b), where *ben* is analysed as a weak XP (in the sense of Cardinaletti & Starke 1999), as it is subject to the series of syntactic restrictions affecting weak elements (e.g. impossibility of fronting, coordination, focusing) which do not extend to *ben(e)* when used as a manner adverb. More

subject to an increasing set of morpho-syntactic restrictions which reflect the macro > meso > micro > nano typology of parameters of the kind advocated by the *ReCoS* approach. Accordingly, we claim that the fine-grained diatopic variation which affects Italian *ben* can be modelled in terms of a parameter hierarchy, which allows us to gain insights also into the diachronic development of this element. The case of Italian *ben* thus provides evidence that the adequacy of the parametric hierarchy approach stretches to (the morpho-syntactic behaviour of) elements at the syntax-discourse interface.

## 2 Italian: Diatopic variation in morpho-syntactic requirements

Consistently with the cross-linguistic behaviour of manner adverbs, which are known to have developed homophonous forms with a discourse value both in Romance (Belletti 1990; 1994; Lonzi 1991; Cinque 1976; 1999; Vinet 1996; Waltereit & Detges 2007; Coniglio 2008; Hernanz 2010; Cardinaletti 2011; Padovan & Penello 2014, a.o.) and Germanic (Weydt 1969; Baardewyk-Resseguier 1991, a.o.), the Italian manner adverb *ben(e)* ‘well’ (1a,b) co-exists with the non-adverbial element *ben* (1c), which has been traditionally described as conveying an emphatic/assertive meaning, used to reinforce the assertion (Belletti 1990; 1994; Lonzi 1991) and to express speakers’ confidence about the propositional content of their assertion (Coniglio 2008; Cardinaletti 2011):<sup>3</sup>

- (1) Italian (Cinque 1999: 171, fn. 20)
- a. Carlo disegna *bene*.
  - C. draw.PRS.3SG well
- ‘Carlo is good at drawing.’

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specifically, we assume that when it is used as a discourse particle, *ben* is licensed in NegPresuppositionalP by a silent negative operator in ForceP and receives its presuppositional character by a Focus in PolarityP (see Hernanz 2010 for the role of PolarityP in the licensing of Spanish *bien*). Also note that, according to the above definition of discourse particles (also called *modal particles* in the literature due to their semantics and position in the clause, see Weydt 1969), these elements have to be kept distinct from so-called conversational-management elements, in that the latter have a pragmatic function similar to discourse particles, but are typically hosted in the CP layer. Interestingly, the Italian manner adverb *bene/ben* has also developed an usage as a conversational-management element (cf. *be*’).

<sup>3</sup>The translation of *ben* in (1b) is the one offered in the cited work. On the whole, *ben* does not seem to have an immediate corresponding form in English, where it could at best be rendered with an emphatic stress on the verb or as *indeed*. As such, it will not be translated in the examples below coming from our corpus of contemporary Italian, while it will be rendered with various periphrases in the early examples, according to the context.

- b. Carlo è                    una persona *ben* educata.  
    C. be.PRS.3SG a    person well educated  
    ‘Carlo is a well-educated person.’
- c. Avrai                    *ben* già          cenato.  
    have.FUT.2SG BEN already dined  
    ‘You will have indeed already eaten.’

In Cognola & Schifano (2018a,b), we have argued instead that the core property of Italian *ben* is that of denying the interlocutor’s negative presupposition (cf. also Waltereit & Detges 2007 on French and Hernanz 2010 on Spanish), i.e. *ben* can only occur in (syntactically positive) contexts in which the negative counterpart of the proposition expressed by the sentence is part of the common ground (cf. Cinque 1976 on *mica*):

(2) Italian

- a. Speaker A: (negative presupposition)  
    Nicola non l’avrebbe                    neanche toccata quella roba.  
    N.    not it=have.COND.3SG even    touched that    stuff  
    ‘Nicola wouldn’t even have touched that stuff.’
- b. Speaker B: (negative presupposition denied)  
    Nicola l’avrebbe                    *ben* mangiata la carne.  
    N.    it=have.COND.3SG BEN eaten    the meat  
    ‘Nicola would have eaten the meat.’

In order to shed further light on the behaviour of this element, we collected data with native speakers and we found that regional varieties of Italian can be classified into three main groups, in accordance with the morpho-syntactic requirements exhibited by *ben*, i.e. Group 1 (Trentino), Group 2 (mainly Venetan varieties) and Group 3 (Rovigo, plus localities in Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lombardy, Piedmont, Emilia Romagna, Lazio, Marche and Puglia).

Looking at the morpho-syntactic requirements in more detail, the following restrictions can be identified:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The following morpho-syntactic restrictions were identified through a questionnaire run with 28 speakers of mixed age, gender and education from 15 different localities, who were asked for grammaticality judgements on a 1–5 scale on 67 sentences testing the occurrence of *ben* across a variety of verb forms and tense, aspect, mood (TAM) contexts (see Cognola & Schifano 2018a,b for details). The reader is referred to the aforementioned works for a discussion of one additional morpho-syntactic restriction which was identified for Group 3 (cf. a preference for transitive over unaccusative verbs) and a difference in the interpretative requirements of *ben* between Group 1 and 3 (cf. negation of implicit vs explicit negative presupposition).

- (3) Morpho-syntactic requirements on the distribution of *ben*
- a. embedded non-root contexts are ruled out (Restriction 1);
  - b. TAM combinations not involving a non-finite form are ruled out (Restriction 2);
  - c. among restructuring verbs, *potere* ‘can’ is widely accepted, *volere* ‘want’ is more restricted and *smettere* ‘stop’ is largely ruled out (Restriction 3);

While all the three restrictions apply to Group 3, Group 1 is only subject to Restriction 1.<sup>5</sup> By way of illustration, consider the examples below, showing that embedded non-root contexts like the ones selected by a matrix volitional verb are ruled out in both groups (4); while both simple and compound tenses are admitted by Trentino speakers, only the latter combination is admitted by speakers of Group 3 (5); while Trentino allows *ben* to occur with *potere/volere/smettere*, only the former is completely grammatical in all the tested contexts in Group 3 (6):<sup>6</sup>

(4) Group 1/3 (Italian)

- a. \* Gianni vuole            che Marco compri            *ben* qualcosa    per  
    G.    want.PRS.3SG that M.    buy.SBJV.3SG BEN something for  
    cena.  
    dinner  
    ‘Gianni wants Marco to buy something for dinner.’
- b. \* Gianni avrebbe            voluto che Marco avesse            *ben*  
    G.    have.COND.3SG wanted that M.    have.SBJV.IPFV.3SG BEN  
    comprato qualcosa    per cena.  
    bought    something for dinner  
    ‘Gianni would have wanted Marco to buy something for dinner.’

(5) Italian

- a. Group 1/\*3  
    Gianni compra            *ben* qualcosa    per cena    quando può.  
    G.    buy.PRS.3SG BEN something for dinner when    can.PRS.3SG  
    ‘Gianni buys something for dinner when he can.’

<sup>5</sup>Note however that, for all speakers, *ben* can be used in root-like embedded clauses, like in embedded clauses introduced by a *verbum dicendi*.

<sup>6</sup>See further examples in Cognola & Schifano (2018a,b).

b. Group 1/3

Gianni avrebbe *ben* comprato qualcosa per cena, se  
 G. have.COND.3SG BEN bought something for dinner if  
 avesse potuto.  
 have.SBJV.IPFV.3SG been.able

‘Gianni would have bought something for dinner if he had been able to.’

(6) Group 3 (Italian)

a. Gianni può *ben* parlare con la povera Maria.  
 G. can.PRS.3SG BEN speak.INF with the poor M.

‘Gianni should speak with Mary, poor thing.’

b. Gianni \*vuole / vorrà *ben* incontrare Rihanna.  
 G. want.PRS.3SG want.FUT.3SG BEN meet.INF R.

‘Gianni wants / will want to meet with Rihanna.’

c. \* Gianni smette *ben* di fumare ogni volta che  
 G. stop.PRS.3SG BEN of smoke.INF every time that

gli=dicono che fa male.

3SG.DAT=say.PRS.3PL that do.PRS.3SG harm

‘Gianni quits smoking every time they tell him that it is harmful.’

On the basis of the distributional facts summarised above, we classify Trentino as the productive isogloss for the use of *ben*. Conversely, Group 3 allows a considerably more restricted usage and Group 2 represents a transitional area between the two, where the above restrictions do not apply consistently yet. One of the most striking results of this investigation is that the localities in Group 3 behaved surprisingly homogeneously, in spite of their geographical scatteredness, suggesting that once outside the productive isogloss, any varieties conform to the same behaviour. In what follows, we shall not attempt at accounting for the above restrictions (see Cognola & Schifano 2018a,b for a proposal), but we will instead consider a representative set of examples regarding the distribution of this particle in earlier attestations of Italo-Romance in order to assess whether the more liberal pattern of Trentino instantiates an innovative or conservative stage in the distribution of *ben*.

### 3 Italian: Diachronic variation in morpho-syntactic requirements

A preliminary examination of occurrences of *ben* in earlier attestations of Italo-Romance suggests that the extensive use of Trentino reflects a conservative stage, where *ben* occurred in a wider range of TAM contexts than present-day (standard) Italian.<sup>7</sup> More specifically, we observe that (i) the particle was already employed to deny a negative presupposition, and (ii) although occurrences of *ben* in non-root embedded contexts do not seem to be attested (cf. Restriction 1),<sup>8</sup> the particle was not only allowed with compound tenses, such as the present perfect (7a) and pluperfect indicative (7b), as well as with restructuring verbs like *potere* ‘can’ (7c), but was also readily admitted with simple tenses, such as the present indicative (8), the imperfect indicative (9), the simple past (10) and the simple future (11), on a pair with modern-day Trentino and unlike the contemporary Italian varieties of Group 3 (cf. Restriction 2):<sup>9</sup>

- (7) a. (negative presupposition: the knight does not deserve to be treated in such an uncivil manner)

Così tenendo lor camino, trovaro il re Meliadus ch’andava a uno torneamento, altresì a guisa di cavaliere errante e sue arme coverte. E’ domandò questi sergenti: “Perché menate voi a ‘mperatore questo cavaliere? E chi [è] elli, che cosìe lo disonorate villanamente?” Li sergenti rispuosero: “Elli hae *bene* morte servita; e se voi il sapeste come [noi], voi il menareste assai più tosto di noi. Adomandatelo di suo misfatto!” (Novellino, LXIII, p.267, l.20–28)

‘Along the road they met King Meliadus, on his way to a tournament, also dressed as a knight errant and hiding his weapons. He asked the

<sup>7</sup>We take “standard” Italian to pattern with Group 3, as shown by the scores provided by our central-southern informants, whose judgements refer to their competence of the standard language, *ben* being absent both from their regional varieties of Italian and their local Romance dialects. The diachronic data reported below are taken from two central-northern varieties only, namely Old Tuscan (cf. *Novellino*, about end of the 13th century) and Old Venetan (cf. *Lio Mazor*, 14th century). We therefore do not exclude the possibility that other early varieties of Italo-Romance behave differently. The English translation provided for *Novellino* have been freely adapted from Consoli’s (1997) edition.

<sup>8</sup>That *ben* should be excluded from non-root embedded contexts also in the early varieties under review here is not surprising under the analysis proposed in Cognola & Schifano (2018a), where *ben* is licensed by a negative operator in ForceP, as argued elsewhere for other discourse particles (see Coniglio 2008 and Zimmermann 2004; 2011, a.o.).

<sup>9</sup>We leave it open to future research to determine whether Restrictions 3 was active or not in the early varieties under investigation here.

vassals: “Why are you carrying this knight to the emperor? And who is he, that you are dishonouring him in such an uncivil manner?” The vassals replied: “He well deserves to die; and if you knew why, you would be carrying him faster than us. Ask him yourself about his crime!”

- b. (context: there is a quarrel involving Lena’s son and Pero Stomarin. Lena’s son was supposed to give Pero Stomarin money for the fish, but according to Çanun he has kept it for himself. Negative presupposition: Lena’s son has not given the money to Pero Stomarin)

[...] la quala dis che Çanun diseua che lo fio de Lena aueua toleto li deneri del pes da Siluester Uener et lo fio dis ch’el li aueua *ben* dati a Pero Stomarin. (Lio Mazar, p.48, l.160–163)

‘[...] she said that Çanun said that Lena’s son had taken the money for the fish from Siluester Uener and the son said that he had indeed given it to Pero Stomarin.’

- c. (negative presupposition: the infant girl cannot be the doctor’s daughter)

Uno medico di Tolosa tolse per mogliera una gentile donna di Tolosa, nepote dell’arcivescovo. Menolla. In due mesi fece una fanciulla. Il medico non ne mostrò nullo cruccio, anzi consolava la donna e mostravale ragioni secondo fisica, che *ben* poteva esser sua di ragione [...]. (Novellino, XLIX, p.234, l.3–7)

‘A doctor from Toulouse took for his wife a gentle woman of Toulouse, the niece of the Archbishop. He brought her home. Two months later she gave birth to an infant girl. The doctor showed no signs of anger, instead he consoled his lady and presented many reasons, according to the law of physics, which logically proved the child could be his.’

- (8) (negative presupposition: your god is not better)

E tornando al signore per iscommiatarsi da lui, il signore disse: – Or sei tu ancor qui? Non avestu la torta? – Messer sì, ebbi. – Or che ne facesti? – Messere, io avea allora mangiato: diedila a un povero giullare che mi diceva male perch’io vi chiamava mio Iddio. – Allora disse il signore: – Va’ con la mala ventura: ché *bene* è miglior il suo Iddio che ‘l tuo! – E disseli il fatto della torta. (Novellino, LXXIX, p.309, l.30–39)

‘[the minstrel] returned to his lord to formally take his leave, and his lord said: – You’re still here? Didn’t you receive a tart? – Sire, I had it – What



did you do with it? – Sire, I had already eaten: I gave it to that poor minstrel who chided me for calling you my god. – Then the lord said: May misfortune follow you, for it is true that his god is better than yours! – And then he told him all about the tart.’

- (9) (context: a watchman sees a boat in the sea which looks like Nasel’s one. The watchman orders the man on the boat to dock, but the person refuses and gets a fine. The judge asks the watchman whether he knows the man on the boat and the watchman replies no. Negative presupposition: the boat was not Nasel’s)

Domandà s’el lo cogno[se]se, li dis, no; mo lo burclo era *ben* del Nasel.

(*Lio Mazor*, p.43, l.11)

‘[the judge] asks whether he knows [the man on the boat], he says “no”; but the boat was indeed Nasel’s.’

- (10) (negative presupposition: you didn’t see them passing)

Quell’altro cavalcò poi più volte, tanto che udì il padre e la madre fare romore nell’agio, e intese dalla fante com’ella n’era andata in cotal modo. Questi sbigotti: tornò a’ compagni e disselo loro. E que’ rispuosero: – *Ben* lo vedemmo passar con llei, ma nol conoscemmo: et è tanto, che puote bene essere allungato; et andarne per cotale strada.

(*Novellino*, XCIX, p.350, l.47–53)

‘The other man rode past her house many times, until he heard her mother and father making a ruckus inside, and he learned from the maidservant what had taken place. He was mortified: he returned to his companions and told them all [*i.e. that the lady had left with another man, without being seen*]. They replied: – We did see him pass with her, but we didn’t recognise him: and it was so long ago, they must be far away by now; this is the road they took.’

- (11) (context: there is a quarrel involving Maria, Magdalena and Francesca. Maria wants to buy some bread from Magdalena. She takes a piece of bread, but another woman, Francesca, grabs it from her hands. There is a fight between the two women. Magdalena understands that Maria wants to steal the bread and Maria answers as below. Negative presupposition: you will not pay for the bread)

[...] no me-lo tor, ch’e’ tel pagarò *ben*. (*Lio Mazor*, p.27, l.12)

‘don’t take it away from me, that I will indeed pay you for that’

The availability of *ben* across a wide selection of TAM contexts (vs. Restriction 2) exemplified in (8–11) points to a high degree of grammaticalization of this

particle in earlier stages of Italo-Romance, a situation which today persists in Trentino, i.e. the productive isogloss, but not elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, we suggest that the distribution of *ben* in Trentino reflects a conservative pattern. The reason why Trentino has preserved an earlier stage of the language, unlike all the other varieties of the Italian peninsula under investigation here, may be linked to the contact with German (in terms of reinforcement of a shared property, see Benincà 1994; Cordin 2011; Cognola 2014), which makes a very productive use of discourse particles (see Cognola & Schifano 2018b for a parallel between Italian *ben* and German *doch* and Weydt 1969, among many others, on German discourse particles). As for the other varieties, these show a reduced distribution of *ben* which, from a diachronic perspective, may be interpreted as an example of retraction (Norde 2011), i.e. it also reflects the steps of a diachronic process whereby *ben* was originally allowed in all the contexts admitted in early Italo-Romance and still retained by Trentino. Our fine-grained diatopic investigation has shown that, despite their geographical scatteredness, all the speakers outside the productive isogloss are remarkably consistent in their judgements. We take this to indicate that the retraction of *ben* from early Italo-Romance to the present-day varieties outside the productive isogloss has followed the same path. This diatopic and diachronic path can be informally represented as in (12):<sup>11</sup>

- (12) Morpho-syntactic distribution of *ben*
- a. lexical verbs: simple tenses → compound tenses
  - b. functional verbs (cf. restructuring): *smettere* ‘stop’ → *volere* ‘want’  
→ *potere* ‘can’

The path in (12) reads as follows: among lexical verbs, *ben* is first lost with simple tenses; among restructuring verbs, it is first lost with *smettere* ‘stop’ and, partially, with *volere* ‘want’. (12) can also be read as a synchronic implicational

<sup>10</sup>Here we are also glossing over the (apparently) distinct placements of *ben* in the examples (8–11), including its preverbal placement (cf. 7c, 8, 10, which have to be interpreted in the light of the distinct word order restrictions which were active in earlier varieties of Italo-Romance (see Ledgeway 2012 for an overview and references) and which are not immediately relevant for the purposes of the present discussion. We leave it open to further research to determine the exact position of *ben* in early Italo-Romance varieties and to establish whether the analysis offered by Cognola & Schifano (2018a,b) can capture this variation. We also note, in passim, that the full form *bene* too was allowed in its discourse particle meaning (7a), (8), unlike in present-day regional Italian.

<sup>11</sup>Note that the geographical factor is not totally irrelevant here, as localities closer located to Trentino (see varieties in the transitional Group 2 like Cortina D’Ampezzo) allow *ben* in a wider selection of contexts than other localities of the same group.

scale, i.e. if a variety admits *ben* with simple tenses, it will also admit it in all the other contexts, as shown by Trentino (and partly by the early varieties under investigation here, pending further research on a wider corpus).

#### 4 Italian: Towards a parameter hierarchy

In the remainder of this work, we would like to capture the implicational relationships described in (12) in terms of a parameter hierarchy. Following the latest advancements by the *ReCoS* group (Roberts 2012; Biberauer & Roberts 2012; 2015; 2016; Biberauer, Holmberg, et al. 2014; Biberauer, Roberts & Sheehan 2014, a.o.), we adopt the taxonomy of parameter-types outlined in (13) and schematized in Figure 11.1 (taken from Biberauer & Roberts 2012 and Biberauer & Roberts 2016):

- (13) For a given value  $v_i$  of a parametrically variant feature F:
- a. *Macroparameters*: all functional heads of the relevant type share  $v_i$ ;
  - b. *Mesoparameters*: all functional heads of a given naturally definable class, e.g. [+V], share  $v_i$ ;
  - c. *Microparameters*: a small subclass of functional heads (e.g. modal auxiliaries) shows  $v_i$ ;
  - d. *Nanoparameters*: one or more individual lexical items is/are specified for  $v_i$ ;

The central idea summarised in (13) and Figure 11.1 is that a macroparametric effect obtains when a given property holds for all relevant heads, and is therefore easily set by the learner and likely to be stable over millennia. As one moves downward the hierarchy, the subset of heads characterised by the relevant property increasingly reduces, moving from a natural-class subset of heads (cf. mesoparameter), through a further restricted natural-class subset of heads (cf. microparameter), to a reduced set of lexically specified items (cf. nanoparameter), all increasingly less salient in the primary linguistic data (PLD) and consequently less resistant to reanalysis (Biberauer & Roberts 2016: 261).

Turning our attention again to the morpho-syntactic distribution of *ben* described above, which gradually decreases as one moves outside the productive isogloss of Trentino (cf. Group 3 and 1, respectively), passing through a grey area of variation (cf. Group 2), we immediately realise that this kind of diatopic variation remarkably reflects the path of specialization predicted by the above taxonomy. If we label the discourse function carried out by *ben* as “negative marking

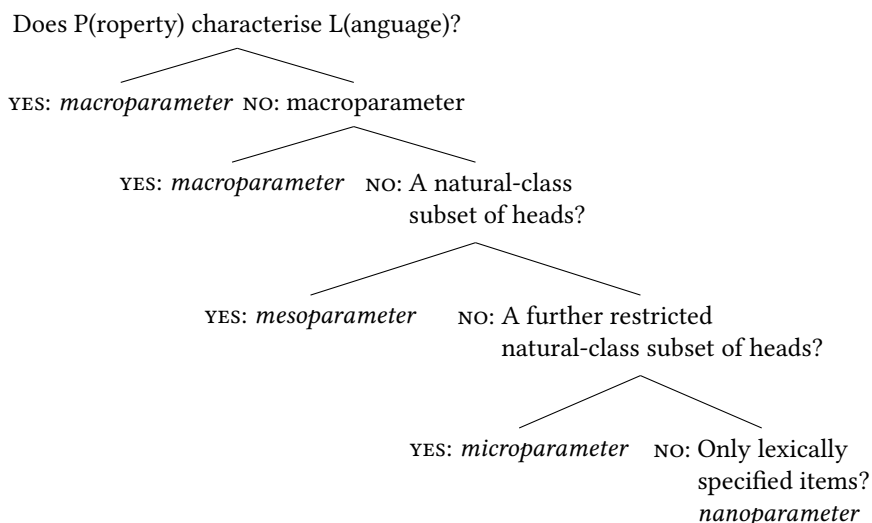
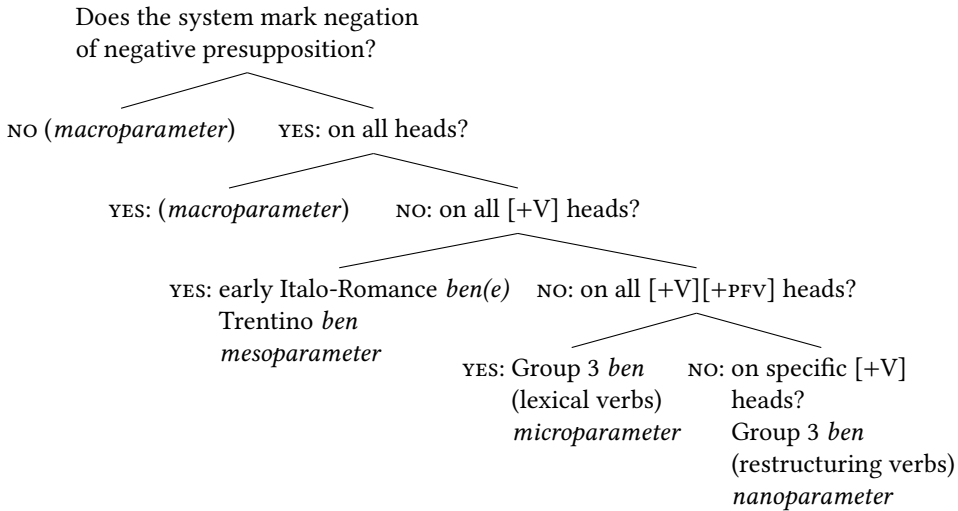


Figure 11.1: General format of parameter hierarchies

of negative presupposition”, as argued in Cognola & Schifano (2018a), we observe that in the early varieties discussed above (here cumulatively referred to as “early Italo-Romance”) and in Trentino, such marking is allowed on all [+V] heads, that is a natural-class subset of heads, corresponding to a mesoparametric option. Conversely, Group 3 seems to split its behaviour. As far as its lexical verbs are concerned, these clearly instantiate a microparametric option, with *ben* being attested in a further restricted natural-class subset of heads, namely [+V] perfective heads (cf. Restriction 2). Conversely, its functional (viz. restructuring) verbs represent a nanoparametric choice, in that *ben* seems to be allowed only on lexically specified items (cf. *potere* vs. *smettere*).<sup>12</sup> The relevant portion of this hierarchy is sketched in Figure 11.2.

The fact that Group 3 simultaneously instantiates both a micro and nanoparametric option or, more precisely, that lexical vs. functional verbs are split in their behaviour, may be unexpected under the taxonomy in (13) and Figure 11.1, but finds a plausible explanation if we consider the diachrony. As discussed in §3, the

<sup>12</sup>The restrictions on the occurrence of *ben* with restructuring verbs do not seem to be amenable to an alternative explanation to their nanoparametric classification proposed here. Indeed, the position of the tested restructuring verbs in Cinque’s (2006) hierarchy, which could plausibly play a role, does not seem to be relevant here, as *volere*, which is the highest, is less accepted than *potere*, which is the lowest, but *smettere*, which lexicalises a position between the two, is largely ruled out (see also Cognola & Schifano 2018b).

Figure 11.2: The distribution of *ben*

distribution of *ben* in Group 3 is likely to represent a reduction of a previously much more extended usage, i.e. it is an instance of diatopic variation which reflects a diachronic path. A closer look at the data presented in Cognola & Schifano (2018a,b) suggests that such a retraction may still be on-going.<sup>13</sup> Under this hypothesis, the behaviour of Group 3 and the representation in Figure 11.2 are no longer surprising. That the lower branches represent unstable options is indeed consistent with current assumptions on diachronic change within the parametric hierarchy approach, where micro- and nanoparametric options are taken to be highly unstable (Biberauer & Roberts 2016: 261).

<sup>13</sup>For example, our investigation with native speakers has shown that there is a tendency for modally-marked compound tenses (e.g. conditional perfect) to score better than the temporally-related ones (e.g. present perfect). Similarly, if a compound form allows both a temporal and a modal reading (e.g. future perfect with temporal vs. epistemic interpretation), the latter is usually preferred.

This further and rather subtle specialization with compound tenses (i.e. the only morpho-syntactic combination allowed with lexical verbs), not necessarily shared by all speakers yet, may indicate that the retraction of *ben* in Group 3 is still on its way. See Cognola & Schifano (2015) for data showing a similar tendency with *smettere* (i.e. largely ruled out, but modally-marked interpretations receive higher scores).

## 5 Conclusions

In the present squib we have discussed the distribution of the discourse particle *ben* in a selection of regional varieties of Italian, as described in Cognola & Schifano (2015; 2018a,b). On the basis of the judgements expressed by native speakers, we have identified three main morpho-syntactic restrictions which affect the distribution of *ben* in Group 3 but not in Group 1, which we take to be the productive isogloss. A preliminary examination of diachronic evidence has also suggested that the more liberal use of Trentino reflects an earlier stage of Italo-Romance, where *ben* was also allowed in wide array of TAM-contexts. In conclusion, we have suggested that the attested diatopic variation can be successfully formalised in terms of a parameter hierarchy, in that the gradual retraction of the admitted contexts we described finds a remarkable parallel with the macro > meso > micro > nano path independently argued for by the parametric hierarchy approach on the basis of extensive diachronic and typological evidence. This also allows us to provide new insights into the diachronic development of *ben* from early Italo-Romance to present-day varieties. The advantage of modelling the (shrinking) diatopic and diachronic distribution of *ben* via a parameter hierarchy is that it allows us to formally capture a type of variation which would otherwise look like random change (see for example the *potere* vs. *volere* restriction, here captured as a nanoparametric option). The case of Italian *ben* also opens the way to future research on the possibility that the (morpho-syntactic) behaviour of elements at the syntax-discourse interface is also subject to the predictions of parametric hierarchy approach.

## Abbreviations

2	second person	PFV	perfective
3	third person	PL	plural
COND	conditional	PLD	primary linguistic data
DAT	dative	PRS	present
FUT	future	SBJV	subjunctive
INF	infinitive	SG	singular
IPFV	imperfective	TAM	tense, aspect, mood

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successful in showing how his research, including the one conducted with the ReCoS team, is opening the way to new thrilling lines of investigation.

Although this entire work stems from joint research, for the administrative purposes of the Italian academia Norma Schifano takes responsibility for §1, §2 and §4 and Federica Cognola for §3 and §5.

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