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**Venetian as a Heritage Language:
Exploring Aspectual Contrasts in
Bilingual Speakers**

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Venetian as a Heritage Language: Exploring Aspectual Contrasts in Bilingual Speakers

Abstract

Researchers have demonstrated that verbal morphology, in particular aspectual morphology and its semantic entailments are a difficult area to master in second language acquisition (Montrul 2002, 2009; Silva Corvalàn 1994; Dominguez y Arche 2013). However, this issue is still a unexplored area in Heritage Speakers, especially with a dialect such as Venetian. The purpose of this study is to investigate the ability to master perfective and imperfective aspect of *Passato Prossimo* and *Imperfetto* in 20 Heritage Speakers of Venetian, born and raised in Australia and in Canada. This study is also aimed to investigate if the inherent meaning of the verb (lexical aspect) guides the choice of a verbal form over the other.

The participants of the study were 20 Venetian Heritage Speakers (second generation) born and raised in Australia and in Canada aged between 54 and 68 years old. The participants have been divided into two groups according to their exposure to Venetian in their lifetime (Shorter exposure and Longer Exposure). Their performance in oral production and comprehension has been compared with a group of five native speakers age-matched to the heritage speakers, all residents in Veneto.

Aspect is a grammatical category which expresses how an event, a state, or an action extends over time and it describes whether an event is presented as bounded (or complete) or unbounded (or incomplete). In Venetian, such as in Italian, imperfective (unbounded events) aspect is morphologically expressed with *Imperfetto* past forms, and the perfective aspect (bounded events) is expressed with *Passato Prossimo* morphology. On the other hand, English lacks a different morphological tenses in the past to express these aspectual contrasts. Indeed, English Past simple can encode both *perfectivity* and *imperfectivity*, which may create difficulties in expressing aspect in Venetian and leading to over extend *Passato Prossimo* even in Imperfective situations. Moreover, Imperfective aspect could be a more complex aspect since it encodes more than one interpretation. Additionally, the intrinsic lexical aspect of the verb can also be a variable that affects the overt morphology of the verb. According to the Aspect Hypothesis, predicates whose intrinsic meaning involves an endpoint (telic

predicate) tend to be expressed with a Perfective tense, and predicates which not have an endpoint (atelic) tend to be used with Imperfective tenses.

To investigate their abilities to use and interpret these aspectual contrasts in their heritage language, a background questionnaire and three oral tasks have been provided: a Narrative retelling task with 23 contexts and 23 verbs to be conjugated, a Picture description task concerning simultaneous actions, and a Semantic Judgment task. These task have been adapted from the SPLLOC Project (2010) into Venetian for the current study.

Overall, the results showed that the Longer Exposure group have a higher accuracy rate in Imperfective Context than the Shorter Exposure group. In shot, the Longer Exposure managed to master the aspectual forms investigated, unlike the Shorter Exposure group, which showed a tendency to overproduce Passato Prossimo at the expense of Imperfetto also in imperfective contexts in all of the three tasks provided. Concerning the lexical aspects investigated in this study, it emerged that neither group made use of the lexical aspect to choose the overt morphology of the verb and instead exploited the context provided. The Shorter exposure group, in fact, has been found to overproduce Passato Prossimo form both with telic predicates and with atelic predicates.

Introduction

Since the middle of the 20th century, linguists have been studying the effects of language contact and how the potential changes are manifested intergenerationally. In recent years, second and third generation studies on heritage speakers' competences have been studied to analyze inclination of contact-induced language and semantic and morphological universals (Silva-Corvalán 1994). Despite the numerous studies on heritage speakers this is a largely unexplored area of study. In fact, not only do Heritage Speakers offer the opportunity to explore language human capacity, but they can also provide further notions in understanding first and second language acquisition. (Montrul 2002, 2009; Bennamoun 2013; Polinsky)

The goal of this thesis is to contribute to the literature of heritage languages by focusing on the *Venetian* of Venetians-Canadian/Australian. The study is aimed to investigate the linguistic ability to resolve the semantic aspectual conflict between Perfective and Imperfective aspects of 20 Venetian heritage speakers born and raised in Australia and in Canada (English context), compared with 5 Venetians native speakers who still reside in the Veneto area. Venetian, also known as Venetan or vèneto, is a Romance language used as a first language by Venetians, a population of almost four million people in northeastern Italy, primarily in the Veneto area.¹

The group of heritage speakers have been divided in two groups according to the length of exposure of the heritage language. It has been decided to name the two groups Shorter exposure (the one who have been exposed to the heritage language until the school age and then interrupted the input) and Longer Exposure (those who have been exposed to a continued input of *Venetian*).

We can define heritage speakers as the second generation of immigrants, namely: children of the first generation of immigrants who have been exposed to the minority language at home in an informal setting as opposed to having learned it at school. The language of the host country, which is the language in which they receive their formal education and that is mainly used in their life outside the family, becomes the majority one. The exposure to their heritage language therefore, becomes less and less frequent, and as a result, the heritage language becomes weaker.

¹ Venetian, should not be confused with Venetian variety of Venice. In this dissertation Venetian refers to the language actually spoken by the Veneto region population.

Many research investigated the linguistic abilities in the heritage speakers, revealing that some grammatical areas are weaker due to interference with the majority language and to the reduced input in the heritage language (Montrul 2002; Rothman 2008; Zentella 1997; Silva-Corvalán 1994; Silva-Corvalán 2006)

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the linguistic competence of these 20 heritage speakers in mastering the preterite/ imperfective aspectual conflict in Venetian. The second purpose is to analyze if the intrinsic semantics of the verb can affect or guide the production of an aspectual contrast at the expense of another.

I claim that lexical aspect determines the use of preterit vs imperfect aspect in heritage speakers, and that the use of preterit is overextended due to an interference with English (the preterit overextends because in English it has less semantic complexity than Imperfect and because in English Imperfectivity and Perfectivity aspects can be expressed with Past Simple) I also claim that for heritage speakers the context and the lexical aspect are crucial to convey the semantic information.

For this study we got in touch with 20 Venetian heritage speakers born and raised in Australia and in Canada. The Veneto Club and all the existing communities in Australia and Canada have been crucial to provide us suitable participants for the experiment. Following (SPLLOC), which is a project on the acquisition of Spanish as L2, three tasks have been provided to test their ability to discriminate between Preterito and Imperfect aspects in Venetian Dialect. The tasks have been preceded by a brief background interview, aimed to investigate the linguistic background of participants. The tasks that follow involve a storytelling task, a simultaneous actions task and a semantic Interpretation task.

This thesis is organized as follows: In Chapter one I will provide all the information about Lexical and Grammatical Aspect (Perfectivity and Imperfectivity), temporal Boundedness and Semantic Context, underlying the English-Venetian aspectual conflict. The grammatical information about Passato Prossimo and Imperfetto in Venetian are also included in this chapter.

In Chapter two I will introduce the language contact phenomena and the migration background from Veneto to Australia and Canada and I will briefly describe the situation of Venetian migrants.

Chapter three is aimed to give a more precise description of Heritage Language and Heritage Speakers, introducing what their characteristics are, the grammatical areas affected

by the influence of the majority language. I will also review the existing literature on Heritage Speakers about their grammar competence, deepening research on tense and aspect system.

In Chapter 4, I will describe the participants of the study and discuss the methodology used in the study. The results of the study and the consequent statistical analysis will be discussed in this section too.

Finally I will provide a discussion of the results that have emerged from the study.

1. Grammatical and Lexical Aspect: Perfectivity and Imperfectivity

1.1 Grammatical Aspect

Studies on tense and aspect acquisition demonstrated that the two dimensions interact in ways that affect heritage language acquisition, simplification patterns, and language attrition. (Montrul 2002; Jacobson 1986; Andersen 1991).

Despite the fact that Tense and Aspect are linked, they convey two different temporal meanings. It is crucial then, to explain what the differences between these two categories are.

Tense can be divided in past, present and future and it refers to the time in which an event takes place in relation to the moment in which the utterance is expressed.

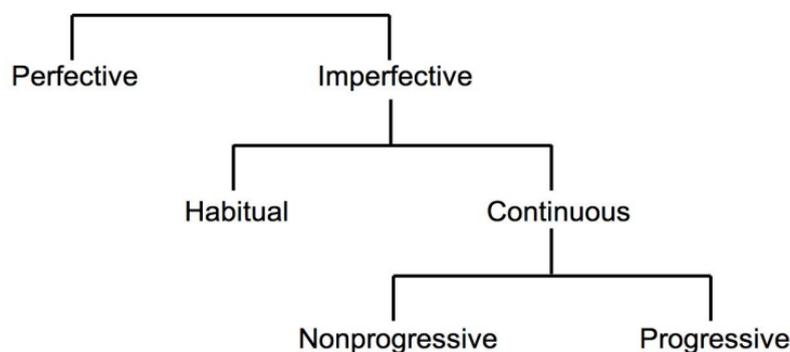
On the other hand, aspect is a grammatical category which expresses how an event, a state or an action extends over time and it describes whether an event is presented as bounded (or complete) or unbounded (or incomplete). In other words, aspect is not related to the time in which the event occurred, but it refers to “different ways of viewing the intern temporal constituency of a situation” (Comrie 1976:3). Two types of aspectual marking can be distinguished: the lexical aspect, which refers to the intrinsic meaning of the verb, and the grammatical aspect, which is indicated by imperfective and perfective morphological form in the languages that morphologically encode this contrast. I will now describe the two grammatical aspects Perfectivity and Imperfectivity.

I will start by stating that *Perfectivity* is used in referring to a finished event (bounded), while *Imperfectivity* is used to denote unfinished (unbounded) events. Imperfect

aspect can have three different meanings according to the number of occasions in which the eventuality has been instantiated. Imperfective aspect provides a viewpoint on the *internal* constituency of the event. Thus, *Imperfectivity* looks at the event from the inside and it does not provide information about the beginning or the end of the event. If a situation is encoded as imperfective it must have an internal structure (Comrie 1976) and the subcomponents that compound the event must be viewed as habitual, repeated or in progress. The imperfect gives the vision of an event from the inside. For this to be possible, the event must have a duration and therefore be made up of several phases, whether they are homogeneous or inhomogeneous. If the event does not have these semantic properties and is therefore punctual, it is not compatible - in principle - with the imperfective aspect.

On the other hand, *perfective* aspect describes the situation as a finished event (bounded) with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The perfective situation is viewed from outside, on its whole, without distinguishing any of its internal structure. Anyway, the fact that the perfective aspect considers the situation as a whole does not imply that the event lacks an internal structure, but that internal structure is not as focused as in the Imperfect aspect.

In many languages, imperfectivity is expressed by a single category; but, in certain languages, an aspectual category may only correspond to a portion of the meaning of imperfectivity, and in others, imperfectivity may be partitioned into multiple categories. The following diagrammatic illustration, provided by Comrie (1976), shows one of the most common divisions within the set of aspectual values:



Picture 1: Aspect divisions within the set of aspectual values (Comrie, 1976)

Morphological forms to express *perfectivity* and *imperfectivity* differs from language to language. English is one of the languages that does not have a general form to express *Imperfective*. As we can see in example 1, there are three interpretations associated with the Imperfective aspect: habituality, continuous and progressive.

The following sentences shows how Imperfectivity and Perfectivity are expressed in English:

- | | | |
|----|---|-------------|
| 1) | a. He graduated while he <i>was working</i> at the company. | Imp |
| | b. He <i>used to work</i> at the company when he was young. | Imp |
| | c. When he was young, he <i>worked</i> at the company. | Imp |
| | d. He <i>went</i> to the grocery store yesterday. | Perf |

The progressive interpretation, which is used to describe ongoing situations, has a morphology for itself (was+ -*ing*). The progressive morphology (-*ing*) on the verb denotes an action that is still in progress and no information about when the action started or whether the action has culminated (unbounded) has been provided. In the example (1a) the events described in the sentence occurred simultaneously and the progressive construction *was+ing* (was working) has been used to show the progression of one event, while another event was occurring too (graduated). The progressive emphasizes the progression of the event, and since the event is analyzable and open, the reader can perceive that, while the subject was working, another event could have occurred. In addition, the progressive form expresses a background context for the second event clause, while the Perfective aspect permits the action or event to go ahead in the narration. (Silva-Corvalán 1983). “Perfective events move the narrative forward because each event clause with perfective morphology produces a new reference time”. On a narrative temporal line, each reference time interval focuses on each new event (Smith 1999).

The reference time is the point of evaluation that connects a situation to event time or speech time (for example, in English, the present perfect *I have sung* has a reference point that is the instant of utterance and the past event time) (Reichenbach 1947).

The other interpretation that Imperfective meaning encodes is habituality. Habituality can be defined as an action or event that was habitually repeated in the past. In sentence 1b. and 1c., we can see how habituality in English can be expressed with two forms. In sentence 1c. is expressed by using Simple Past, while in sentence 1b. an alternative periphrastic form

has been used: *would/used to*. English lacks a morphological form that marks this imperfective meaning.

By contrast in sentence d. the situation is viewed from the outside, as a bounded whole, without necessarily distinguishing any of its internal structure. The action in this sentence is completed, it started and then it ended. No information about the length of the event or how many times this action occurred, we are simply stating that the event has occurred in the past. The event is bounded and totally completed.

Through this verification we can affirm that the verbal forms of these sentences, although both temporally place the action in the past, diverge for the immanent vision they provide of the action, that is, for the aspect. We will then say that the verbal form of sentences a., b. and c. express the imperfective aspect, while that of sentence d. perfective aspect.

1.2 Passato Prossimo and Imperfetto in Venetian

1.2.1 Imperfective form in Venetian: Imperfetto

This section will describe how perfectivity and imperfectivity aspect are encoded in Venetian with distinguished verbal forms.

Following Bertinetto's analysis (2013), even for Venetian we can distinguish imperfective aspect, which focuses on a moment of the event whose conclusion is not specified, and perfective aspect, with the event considered as concluded in its entirety. In Venetian, like in Italian the imperfective aspect is expressed with Imperfetto verbal form. On the other hand, the perfective aspect occurs with the Passato Prossimo verbal form.

The imperfective aspect encode different meanings:

-progressive imperfective, which indicates a process seen in a single instant of its development. It is often accompanied by *mentre/intanto che* (while) and *quando* (when), and it corresponds to the English Past Progressive. Again, with the example below, we notice how an imperfective situation not only expresses simultaneity of two actions that occur in the same moment, but also it views the action of *running* as an on-going event. It does not provide information about the beginning, the length and the end of the action.

2) *Intanto che corevo, ga inissia a piovere.*

While I was running, it started raining.

-habitual imperfective, which expresses an action or event that was habitually repeated in the past: these are felt as "vague" in time, in the sense that the beginning, the end and the duration of the event are not specified. Also in this case, the action is not viewed as a whole and the Imperfetto focuses on the internal structure information, it focuses on the repetitiveness of the past action.

3) *Luca cantava sempre prima de 'ndare scoea.*

Luca used to sing before he goes to school.

-Descriptive imperfective: The Imperfect is used to describe an object or a person, or a state of things, a feeling, a situation, etc in the past. It is particularly common at the beginning of stories, news reports, fairy tales, etc. to describe the situation of "background", for example:

4) *Fabio iera alto, magro e el gaveva a barba longa.*

Fabio was tall, thin and he had a long beard.

1.2.2 Imperfetto's Formation:

Before delving into the section that describes how the Imperfetto is formed in Venetian, it is crucial to point out that Venetian dialect is characterized by an undifferentiated homogeneity, therefore there are no standard rules but there are alternative regularities, equally grammatically effective, linked to the locality that has preserved them. Venetian is therefore identified not in an absolute homogeneity, but in an articulated variation of typical features of particular dialectal areas and subareas. It is crucial to underline that there are no differences in the way in which aspect is encoded in the past in the following varieties. The differences rely on the forms in which Imperfetto is formed.

Currently, the dialects of Veneto have been divided by researchers in five subgroups²:

- Central (Padua, Vicenza, Polesine), with about 1,500,000 speakers
- Eastern/Coastal (Trieste, Grado, Istria, Fiume)

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venetian_language#Regional_variants

- Western (Verona, Trentino)
- Northern Sinistra Piave of the Province of Treviso, most of the Province of Pordenone)
- North-Central Destra Piave of the Province of Treviso, (Belluno, comprising Feltre, Agordo, Cadore, and Zoldo Alto)

For the current study we will consider only the variety from the Treviso province, since participant’s parents were mostly born in that area.

Like Italian, the Venetian dialect has three verbal conjugations (I -are, II -ere, III -ire), marked by the grammatical categories of mood (finite: indicative, subjunctive, conditional, imperative; indefinite: infinitive, participle, gerund), tense (simple: present, imperfect, future; compound: past, past, future) and person (with number and gender).

Table (1) below shows the Venetian verb paradigm for the three verb conjugations *-are*, *-ere*, *-ire*. The verb's inflectional morphemes indicate person and number, as well as tense and aspect. Regular past participles in Venetian are formed by dropping the infinitive endings *-are*, *-ere*, or *-ire* and adding the suffixes displayed in the following table:

Imperfetto						
	1 sg - MI	2sg - TI	3 sg LU/EA	1pl NOIALTRI	2pl VOIALTRI	3pl LORI
<i>Parlare</i>	<i>parl-avo</i>	<i>parl-avi</i>	<i>parl-ava</i>	<i>parla-vimo</i>	<i>parl-avi</i>	<i>parl-ava</i>
<i>Credere</i>	<i>cred-evo</i>	<i>cred-evi</i>	<i>cred-eva</i>	<i>crede-vimo</i>	<i>cred-evi</i>	<i>cred-eva</i>
<i>Finire</i>	<i>fin-ivo</i>	<i>fin-ivi</i>	<i>fin-iva</i>	<i>fini-vimo</i>	<i>fin-ivi</i>	<i>fin-iva</i>

Table 1. Indicative imperfect paradigm for verbs *parlare* ‘to speak’, *credere* ‘to believe’, and *finire* ‘to finish’

It is important to mention that lots of varieties of the dialect of Treviso and also of Feltre and Belluno are characterized not only by the omission of the consonant *-v-* (*viveva* → *vivéa*, *finiva* → *finìa*, *credévimo* → *credeìmo*), but also by the fact that the ending *-eva* (suffix of the II conjugation *-ere*) is also extended to verbs ending with *-are* (I conjugation): *mi parléa*, *mi cantéa*, *mi magnéa*.

Among the irregular verbs we find the verb “essere” (to be), “fare” (to do/make), “dire” (to say) that are conjugating in the following way:

Imperfetto	1 sg - MI	2sg- TI	3 sg- LU/EA	1pl- NOIALTRI	2pl VOIALTRI	3pl LORI
<i>Essere</i>	<i>jero</i>	<i>jeri</i>	<i>jera</i>	<i>jerimo</i>	<i>jeri</i>	<i>jera</i>
<i>Fare</i>	<i>fazevo</i>	<i>fazevi</i>	<i>fazeva</i>	<i>fazevimo</i>	<i>fazevi</i>	<i>fazeva</i>
<i>Dire</i>	<i>dizevo</i>	<i>dizevi</i>	<i>dizeva</i>	<i>dizevimo</i>	<i>dizevi</i>	<i>dizeva</i>

Table 2. Indicative imperfect paradigm for irregular verbs *essere* ‘to be’, *fare* ‘to do/make’, and *dire* ‘to say’.

Also with the irregular forms of Imperfetto, the consonant *-v-* is often omitted (*faseva* → *faséa*, *disevimo* → *diseìmo*).

In addition, another expression commonly used to express **an** action that is happening is “*essar drio*” (literally “be behind”) followed by the base form of the verb:

5) *So drio cantare na cansòn.*

I’m singing a song.

1.2.3 The Perfective form in Venetia: Passato Prossimo

Passato Prossimo and Passato Remoto

Similar to other Romance languages, in Italian the perfective aspect can be expressed with two past tenses: a compound past, which is called Passato Prossimo (auxiliary + past participle) and a simple past called Passato Remoto. Both tenses refer to situations that occurred in the past with respect to the speech point (the moment in which the utterance is pronounced) and they both convey the perfective aspect since the situation they describe is viewed “in its entirety, without regard to internal temporal constituency” (Comrie 1976).

Although the two tenses are similar, they present some differences in their aspectual and temporal characteristics. The terms Passato Prossimo and Passato Remoto suggest that the differences between the two forms refers to the length of time interval between the moment in which the utterance is pronounced (Speech Time) and the moment in which the

event has actually occurred (Event Time). Passato Prossimo is used to refer to past events that occurred recently, while Passato Remoto refers to remote past events.

Other linguists, such as Weinrich (1964) claimed that the difference between Passato Prossimo and Passato Remoto lies in the psychological involvement, instead of temporal distance. While Passato Remoto describes events that have no psychological relevance in the moment of speech, Passato Prossimo concerns events that still have a psychological impact in the moment of speech. However, these two definitions are linked: if a situation is located in the recent past it is likely to have more relevance and more consequences in the present.

However, this difference cannot account for phenomena observable in language use: nowadays, in Northern Italy varieties there is a tendency to generalise the Passato Prossimo and to extend its use also to Passato Remoto situations. In fact, Passato Prossimo's use displays a high degree of flexibility, in opposition to Passato Remoto, which can only refer to situations that occurred in the Past, whose consequences do not affect the Present. The extensive use of Passato Prossimo in some varieties appears to have neutralised the differences between these two verbal forms.

As we mentioned before: Passato Prossimo belongs to the domain of perfective aspect which can be divided in two other subdomains: the aoristic aspect, which denotes an event that happened in the past and that has no present relevance in the moment of speech, and the perfect aspect referring to a "past situation which has present relevance" (Comrie 1976).

6) *Luca cadde dall'albero.* (Passato Remoto- aoristic aspect)

Luca fell from the tree.

7) *Luca è caduto dall'albero.* (Passato Prossimo- perfect aspect)

Luca has fallen from the tree.

In example 6), the event is considered as a whole in its entirety and the event described has no consequence on the moment of the utterance's enunciation: the aoristic aspect is expressed in Italian with Passato Remoto. By contrast on example 7) the event is concluded too, but its consequences persist and affect the moment of speech (perfect aspect, expressed with Passato Prossimo)

As pointed out in the previous part Passato Prossimo presents a high degree of flexibility and in various parts of Italy Passato Remoto has been substituted by Passato Prossimo.

The existence of two types of perfect, one synthetic (in Italian *Io mangiai* “I ate”) and one analytical (*Ho mangiato* “I have eaten”), have been compromised by the tendency, common to all languages, to simplification, which leads to prefer analytical forms and regular paradigms: Passato Remoto disappears in favour of Passato Prossimo.

In Venetian, as in many other dialects of Northern Italy the Passato Remoto is no longer known as a verbal paradigm, nor in the dialectal spoken, nor in regional Italian, nor in written dialect.

Since Venetian lacks the verbal form of Passato Remoto, Passato Prossimo encodes both the aoristic aspect and the perfect one, therefore recognizable only by the context.

8) a. *L'Italia **ga vinto** i Mondiai del 1982.* (concluded event, without present
(**PP**) relevance) → aoristic aspect

Italy won the World Cup in 1982.

b. *Fabio **gà fato** un incidente, l'è all'ospedae.* (the event has repercussions on the
(**PP**) present: he's still suffering the
Fabio had an accident, he's at the hospital. consequences of the accident.) → perfect aspect

From the sentences in example 8), it can be seen how Passato Prossimo is used both to express an event concluded several years before the moment of speech and that does not have a continuing effect on the present (aoristic aspect) and an past situation occurred in a recent past that has still present relevance (Perfect aspect). In Venetian, the simple form of Passato Remoto, which can be compared to Spanish Preterito, does not exist. All the interpretations of the Perfective aspect are expressed with Passato Prossimo.

1.2.4 Passato Prossimo Formation

In Venetian Passato Prossimo is formed by combining the forms of the present indicative of auxiliaries *essere* “to have” or *avere* “to be” + the past participle of the verb that follows. The auxiliary *avere* (to have) is used with unergative and transitive verbs, whereas auxiliary *essere* (to be) is used with unaccusative verbs, in passive voice, with the compound form of the impersonal and prepositional form.

Moreover, the auxiliary concords with the subject, whereas the past participle concords with the object. In the following sentences, three examples have been provided to show how Passato Prossimo is formed.

ex Fabio g`a parl`a pa un'ora. (Unergative)

Fabio talked/have talked for an hour.

ex Fabio ga magn`a na torta. (Transitive)

Fabio have eaten/ate a cake.

ex Fabio ze part`io. (Unaccusative)

Fabio has left/left.

The present auxiliaries of the verb *essere* “to be” and *avere*, “to have” are irregular:

1 sg - MI	2sg- TI - te	3 sg- LU/EA	1pl- NOIALTRI	2pl VOIALTRI	3pl LORI
g`o	gh`e	g`a	gh`emo	gav`i	g`a

Table 3 Present indicative of auxiliaries *avere* “to have”

Auxiliaries “to be” :

1 sg - MI	2sg- TI	3 sg- LU/EA	1pl- NOIALTRI	2pl VOIAL TRI	3pl LORI
s`o/son	s`i	z`e	s`emo	s`i	z`e

Table 4 Present indicative of auxiliaries *essare* ‘to be’

The participles of regular conjugations turn out to be slightly different depending on the Veneto area considered. Again, our description will focus on the Trevigiana variety. Regular past participles in Venetian are formed by dropping the infinitive endings *-are*, *-ere*, or *-ire* and adding, respectively, the suffixes shown in table 5. Table (5) is representative of the Past Participle formation of the I, II and III conjugation.

		Singular		Plural	
		Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine
<i>I Conj.</i>	<i>Cant-are</i>	<i>Cant-à</i>	<i>Cant-à</i>	<i>Cant-ài</i>	<i>Cant-àe</i>
<i>II Con.</i>	<i>Cred-ere</i>	<i>Cred-ùo/ Cred-ésto</i>	<i>Cred -ùa/ Cred-ésta</i>	<i>Cred-ùì/ Cred-ésti</i>	<i>Cred-ùè/ Cred-èste</i>
<i>II Conj.</i>	<i>Part-ire</i>	<i>Part-ìo</i>	<i>Part-ìa</i>	<i>Part-ìi</i>	<i>Part-ìe</i>

Table 5 Past Participle paradigm for verbs *cantare* ‘to sing’, *credere* ‘to believe’, and *partire* ‘to leave’

As in English and in Italian, there are lots of irregular forms of past participles. These are some of the most important ones:

<i>Veneto base form</i>	<i>Veneto Past Participle</i>
<i>verzare (to open)</i>	<i>verto</i>
<i>coprire (to cover)</i>	<i>coerto</i>
<i>decidere (to decide)</i>	<i>deciso</i>
<i>dire (to say)</i>	<i>dito</i>
<i>fare (to do/make)</i>	<i>fato</i>
<i>lezare (to read)</i>	<i>leto</i>
<i>metare (to put)</i>	<i>meso</i>
<i>tore (to take)</i>	<i>tolto</i>
<i>rompere (to break)</i>	<i>roto</i>

<i>scrivere (to write)</i>	<i>scrito</i>
<i>vincere (to win)</i>	<i>vinto</i>
<i>ridare (to laugh)</i>	<i>riso</i>

Table 6. List of some irregular Veneto Past forms

1.3 Lexical Aspect: Predicate Classification

While grammatical aspect has to do with unbound and bound events, lexical aspect or situation aspect depends on inherent meaning of the verb and semantic properties of its arguments. Predicates have been classified into four categories by Vendler (1967) based on their inherent semantic properties. Verbs tend to convey inherent aspectual meaning because the event they describe has inherent temporal properties. The temporal properties by which verbs can be classified are: static vs. dynamic, durative vs. instantaneous, and telic vs. atelic distinguish the four types (Smith 1995). Achievements (e.g. recognize, reach), accomplishments (e.g. melt, intransitive freeze), states (e.g. know, love, hate) and activities are the four types of predicates (e.g. walk, write), depending on the temporal properties.

Telic predicates are characterized by the fact that they have an endpoint and by the fact that the verb undergoes a change of state through reaching that endpoint: the internal structure they describe consists of a process which leads up to a terminal point. On the other hand, atelic predicates have no inherent terminal point.

In 1976, Comrie claimed that telic situations can be tested in the following way “if a sentence referring to this situation with an imperfective meaning (such as English Progressive) implies the sentence referring to the same situation in a form with perfective meaning (English Perfect), then the situation is atelic; otherwise is telic.

If one says: *Robb is walking* it can be also deduced that *Robb has walked* but if one says *Robb is building a sandcastle* it cannot be deduced that *Robb has built a sandcastle*: a telic situation involves processes that conduct to a definite endpoint, beyond which the process cannot continue.

The other distinction involves punctual and durative verbs. Punctual verbs lack any duration and the events they describe occur at a single point in time (*knock, ring ecc*). By contrast durative verbs are conceived of lasting over a period (*hate, walk to school*). Punctual

verbs can also be considered semelfactive (occurring only once) or iterative (occurring in a repeating time).

Finally, the stative - dynamic distinction. Static property refers to situations or conditions which do not change or are likely to change, even if something occurs to change that state (*know, love ecc*). By contrast dynamic predicates (also called actions verbs) describe actions (*run, talk ecc*).

The table below illustrates the situation type and the properties of each class of verbs:

	Static	Dynamic	Durative	Telic	Atelic
State	x		x		x
Activity		x	x		x
Accomplishment		x	x	x	
Achievement		x		x	

Table: Situation types classified by features (Smith 1991)

It is crucial to point out that the sole verb is not sufficient to classify a predicate, the entire verb phrase has to be considered. The verb *dance* for example can be considered as atelic, durative and dynamic, but *dance a cha-cha* is an accomplishment since it is durative, telic and dynamic.

Eg. (6) a. Emily sang for one hour.

b. Emily sang a lullaby.

In example 6a. a temporal boundary is present and the activity of singing ended after one hour (that is an independent temporal bound) but technically, the act of singing could have continued if not for an external cause that stopped the event. For this reason, *sing* is atelic. In sentence 6b. we can notice that the difference relies on telicity and natural terminal point. The verb within its object “a lullaby” is completed when the endpoint is reached.

Languages may have lexical classes and grammatical aspects that are similar to the telic/atelic or stative/eventive (or non-stative) distinctions. One of the goals of this research is to see if Venetian Heritage speakers are making use of one division over the other.

Furthermore, a distinction between grammatical and lexical aspects has to be clarified. Boundedness and unboundedness refers to the grammatical aspect, whereas inherent terminal point and telicity are properties of lexical aspect. As it has been explained above, telicity concerns whether the event has a definite endpoint or not. On the other hand, boundness and unboundedness refers to temporal boundaries and can be encoded by morphology. Boundedness is conveyed by a Perfectivity and unboundedness is denoted by Imperfectivity.

Anyway, the two dimensions are linked, in the sense that verbs with a certain type of actionality tend to be associated with a certain type of aspect. Stative and activities, for example, tend to be expressed with imperfect tense because they have no inherent endpoint, whereas telic predicates (accomplishments and achievements) are more likely to be expressed with perfective forms.

As noted by Giorgi e Pianesi (1997) achievement predicates are rarely expressed with imperfect: they have a culmination point, consequently they are not compatible with the imperfect, which denotes unbounded situations. Achievements verbs can only be associated with imperfect meaning only if there is a context that emphasizes the process that leads to the endpoint. (*Tom was reaching the top, when it started snowing*).

Conversely, the verbs of activity can appear with equal frequency in perfective or imperfective form, expressing different ways of conceptualizing the event: if I say *Yesterday, I walked for two hours*, I represent the event as concluded, with precise limits; if I say *Yesterday while I was walking I met Gianni* I represent the event as it unfolds as an activity, against the background of which a punctual event such as the meeting takes place.

The theory according to which intrinsic meaning of the verb can be a determinant variable to determine the choice of a tense over the other, is tested in this dissertation. In the tasks that participants underwent, all the types of lexical predicates are included. Some of them were inserted in a non-prototypical context (such as achievements in Imperfective context, and stative and activities in Perfective context) in order to investigate if they make use of the lexical classes of the verb to resolve the aspectual conflict.

Perfectivity and Imperfectivity: English - Venetian contrast

For the current dissertation, I will exploit other studies and theoretical accounts that have been conducted on the Spanish - English aspectual contrast. The study of Montrul and Slabakova (1999, 2002), Arche and Dominguez (2010) and Giorgi and Pianesi (1997) are crucial to make assumptions also with the Venetian - English aspectual conflict, since the use and the aspectual properties of the Spanish Preterit are comparable with Passato Prossimo. In Venetian, bounded and finished intervals (perfective context) are expressed with the morphology of the perfective Passato Prossimo, while the unbounded and unfinished intervals are expressed with imperfect.

The main cause of this conflict lies in the fact that English *Past Simple* can express both Imperfective and Perfective Semantics. The perfective/imperfective distinction in the past is realized in Venetian through inflectional morphology, whereas in English it can be expressed with Past simple. So features that provide the same interpretation in the two languages, can have two different morphological forms to express them. The table below shows how two sentences with the same meaning can be expressed with two different forms in English and in Venetian:

Meaning	Status of the event	Dialetto Veneto form	English form
Perfective	Bounded	<u>Passato Prossimo:</u> <i>Fabio ga magnà sareze al so compleanno</i>	<u>Past Simple:</u> <i>Fabio ate cherries on his birthday.</i>
Continuous	Unbounded	<u>Imperfetto:</u> <i>Fabio stava mae.</i>	<u>Past Simple:</u> <i>Fabio was ill.</i>
Habitual	Unbounded	<u>Imperfetto:</u> <i>Fabio magnava sareze in primavera</i>	<u>Past Simple:</u>

			<i>Fabio used to eat Cherries./ Fabio ate cherries in Spring.</i>
Progressive	Unbounded	<u>Imperfetto</u> : <i>Fabio iera imbriago co ze rivà so nona.</i>	<u>Past Simple</u> : <i>Fabio was drunk when his granny arrived</i>

Table 7: Characteristics of Perfective and Imperfective in Venetian and in English.

There are also other differences between the two languages in expressing and interpreting perfectivity and imperfectivity. The following example shows how in English, Past tense encodes both Perfective and Imperfective semantics:

9) a. *Did you meet David and Ivan at the wedding?*

Venetian: No, i ze stati mae tutto el fine settimana e no i ze vegnui. Perfective,PP

*English: No, they were sick the whole weekend and they didn't come. Perfective,
Past Simple*

9) b. *Did you visit your grandma?*

Venetian: Si, so 'ndata a trovarla ma no me so fermada perchè a stava mae.

English: Yes, I went to see her but I didn't stay because she was sick.

According to Arche (2010), Past English not only can encode continuous events as we have noticed in the example 9, but it is also compatible with habituality, so simple past can convey habitual meaning in case the verb is atelic. This can be seen in the following example: (Montrul and Slabakova)

6. *My grandad smoked three cigarettes every day.* (Imperfective Context, habitual)

Another difference between Venetian Preterite and English consists in the fact that in Spanish all lexical classes (states, activities, accomplishment and achievement) can be expressed both with Passato Prossimo and Imperfetto. On the other hand in English, the Past

Simple goes with all classes, while the progressive is generally infelicitous with states (Slabakova and Montrul 1999)

This phenomena happens with Venetian too.

STATE

7 a. *El cellulare me ze costà 200 euro.*

The mobile cost me 200 euro.

IMPERFECT

b. *El cellulare me costava 200 euro.*

*The mobile phone used to/would cost/*is costing me 200 €.*

ACTIVITY

8. a. *Tom ga cantà in doccia.*

Tom sang in the shower

b. *Tom cantava in doccia.*

Tom was singing/ would sing in the shower.

ACCOMPLISHMENT

9 *Tom ga corso na maratona*

Tom run a marathon

Tom correva na maratona

Tom used to run/ was running a marathon

ACHIEVEMENTS

10 *El giasso se ga sciolto*

The ice melted

El giasso se scioglieva

The Ice was melting/ would melt

Moreover English verbs do not always convey whether the endpoint is reached or not:

a. *The movie lasted two hours, that's why we came home earlier.*

b. *The movie lasted two hours and we saw it all.*

In Spanish and in Venetian too, this such of ambiguity does not exist, since the morphology disambiguates the meaning with Preterito/Passato Prossimo and Imperfect tenses:

c. *La película duraba dos horas y por eso me fui a casa antes de que terminara.*

d. *El film durava do ore e par questo so vegnùo/vegnesto casa prima che el finisse.*

e. *La película duró dos horas y la vi toda.*

f. *El film ze durà do ore e o go visto tutto.*

To summarize, when English Speakers have to acquire Spanish or Venetian morphology they have to learn that meaning and forms are not the same and differ from language to language. More particularly, they have to learn that Past Simple cannot be used both with unfinished and finished predicates, as in English. In fact, English language uses alternative lexical construction to lexicalizes *used to/would*. As a result, mastering *Imperfect* aspect could be problematic for English speakers, since they would have to dissociate the Past, which in English is used to express both imperfective and Perfective, from this meaning and form (Dominguez, Arche, Myles 2010). The mismatch in the morphology appears to be the cause of the difficulties that English speakers encounter when they have to learn how to master Imperfetto and Preterito/ Passato Prossimo semantic conflict. (Montrul 1999)

English speakers appear to be influenced by how imperfective and perfective are expressed in their L1 (Dominguez and Arche 2010). Salaberry (2008), also claimed that English Speakers associate the Past tense with the Preterite in Spanish and consequently the use of Preterite is widespread also in Imperfective contexts even in speakers with advanced levels of proficiency.

Previous research on this topic, following Montrul and Slabakova (2002) provided a parametric-type analysis of aspectual distinction. They stated English learners have to learn which morphological form is associated with the semantic interpretation, since in Spanish the aspectual distinction is morphologically marked. They also proposed that when English Speakers have to learn the aspectual distinction, they undergo four stages:

- recognise the syntactic characteristic of the verb in Spanish, which is different from English.
- learn the correct morphological form in Spanish.
- acquiring the perfective features.
- associated the feature to the correct form.

Given the fact that the aspectual distinction is morphologically marked in Venetian too, it could be proposed that English speakers undergo the same stages also in Venetian (they have to recognise the different syntactic characteristics in Venetian verbs and then associate the features to the correct form).

To account for the morphosyntactic differences between the two languages described before, we follow Giorgi and Pianesi's (1997) assumptions on aspect. After having underlined the strong connection between morphology and semantics in the aspectual

domain, they stated that one of the main differences between English and Romance languages is that English verbs can be bare roots without any lexical marking, moreover their lexical category can be ambiguous: verbs like dance, smile can be both verbs and nouns. Conversely, in Romance languages, verbal roots cannot function as free forms (cantar, cannot be cant). Giorgi and Pianesi sustained that “English verbs acquire categorial features by being associated with the aspectual feature [+perfective] in the lexicon (otherwise they can be ambiguous as to lexical category”. The imperfect continuous reading, with eventive verbs (accomplishments, achievements and activities) in English is not available with present tense. By contrast, in Spanish and also in Venetian, present tense can describe an ongoing action, because Spanish and Venetian do not relate the feature [+perfective] with the present tense (Giorgi and Pianesi 1997). This can be demonstrated with the following sentences:

Tom drinks a coffee right now.

Tom bebe un café en este momento

Tom beve un caffè in sto momento.

Under the presuppositions that aspect and tense head their own functional projections, formulated by Chomsky in 1995, Giorgi and Pianesi in 1997, proposed that the functional category AspP, together with its feature [+perfective] are instantiated in Germanic and Romance languages. The main difference between Romance and English is the feature composition and values of the AspP category, as shown in the following Table. (F-features refers to formal features and M-paradigm concerns morphological paradigm).

<i>English AspP</i>		<i>Venetian AspP</i>	
<i>F-features</i>	<i>M-paradigm</i>	<i>F-features</i>	<i>M-paradigm</i>
+perfective	simple past	+perfective	preterite
		-perfective	imperfect

Table 8. Feature composition and values of the AspP category (Giorgi and Pianesi, 1997)

Giorgi and Pianesi also argued that English intrinsically associates the [+perfective] feature value, which is referred to bounded events, with all the eventive predicates

(accomplishments, achievements and activities). It can be assumed that the feature [-perfective] is not relevant in English.

2. Venetians Heritage Speakers in Canada and Australia

Language Contact and Multilingualism

Nowadays, *multilingualism* is a growing and ongoing phenomenon in many societies: the migratory flows and international mobility, together with technological evolution, are radically transforming world social and cultural paradigms. The term multilingualism is usually used to define a person's ability to express herself in a variety of languages, but to give a more precise definition *multilingualism*, we can state that it is the coexistence, in a given geographical area, of more than one language³.

Mass migrations result in social interaction between speakers of different languages, which lead to a phenomenon called *language contact*. This phenomenon occurs when speakers of various languages communicate frequently and their languages are likely to influence one another⁴.

Of course, *language contact* is not a uniform phenomena. Contact can occur across genetically related or unrelated languages and between speakers of different languages that have comparable or significantly distinct social systems. Linguistic studies, that show how grammar evolves over time in an immigrant population, demonstrated that these changes are predictable and follow predictable patterns.

With *heritage languages*, change occurs as a result of a language's separation from its source variety across place and time, as well as being influenced by the input language's reduced frequency: if speakers of a language separate from their community, their language is likely to diverge from the source one.

Thus, the aim of Contact linguistics, which is the science of language contacts, is to analyze the main contact phenomena, such as codeswitching, attrition, convergence and then deduce general principles of language evolution from these changes. In situations of bilingualism and language contact, cross-linguistic features of change emerge in one or more of the languages spoken, but the language most affected by contact is frequently the secondary language or the one with fewer domains (Rosenhouse & Goral, 2004).

³ <https://www.pensieroplurale.it/multilinguismo-e-plurilinguismo/>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_contact

2.1 The Venetians Exodus

Italy has always been a land of migrants, since 1861 about 30 million departures⁵ have been recorded, so the Italian exodus can be considered one of the greatest exodus in modern history.

In the decade following the end of the II World war, around 1,200,000 Italians moved to the Americas and other parts of the world. The great emigration, which saw entire families leave Veneto and led to the depopulation of villages and rural areas, began in 1876: peasants and laborers embarked for the countries of Latin America to escape from poverty and from the effects of the great agrarian crisis, also encouraged by emigration agencies and by governments of destination countries. The exodus affected all Italian regions, but in particular Northern Italy: three regions alone provided 47% of the entire migratory contingent, Veneto (17.9%), Friuli Venezia Giulia (16.1%) and Piemonte (13.5%)⁶.

Another great wave of emigration occurred in Italy after World War II: almost four million Italians left the country to head mainly to the closest European countries. Not only had Italy lost the war, but it had also lost a significant amount of infrastructure, its productive system had been destroyed, and its agriculture had seen a significant drop in productivity. The government, which found itself facing the dramatic post-war situation, saw emigration as a solution to the demographic and employment problem and it strongly encouraged the departure of thousands of Italian workers to France, Switzerland, Belgium and, later, Germany. Over half of the Veneto departures (57% per cent) took place after the Great War II.

In the years following the Second World War, the countries chosen as destinations by the Italians, and in particular by Venetians were: the United States, South America, Australia and, of course, the countries of Northern Europe.

The migratory phenomenon of the last century brought Venetians to the most distant regions. From a linguistic point of view, describing Venetian emigrants' language all over the world is really challenging, given the infinite range of variables to which the language was related. We then realize that speaking of the Venetians language abroad does not refer to a

⁵ <https://www.focus.it/cultura/storia/migranti-storia-emigrazione-italiana>

⁶ Associazione Emigranti Castello di Godego, *Godigesi nel mondo*, 1990.

unitary phenomenon, but about different social, cultural and linguistic situations linked to geographical and economic productive contexts in which the emigrants were inserted in and from their starting conditions (in groups, isolated ...). Other factors that contributed in shaping the Venetian migrant language situation were: their age, their ties with their mother country, their inclination to accept the new environment.

When emigrants would arrive in the host country they had to face lots of problems like the climatic conditions in which they worked, (in Canada temperature often reached - 30 degrees); homesickness, and most importantly, they did not know the language of the new country. The cultural choice of the host country to assimilate the various ethnic groups as soon as possible and to create a homogeneous society with typically Anglo-Saxon characteristics, made learning English immediately necessary: emigrants, in order to avoid marginalization, had to lay aside their culture and their language. Moreover, the absence of structures in the destination country (such as language courses) definitely did not contribute to a proficient acquisition of English as L2. Furthermore, the host countries as Australia or Canada required generic manpower (railway constructions, transportations etc), thus, the insertion in the new nation took place generally in conditions of social inferiority.

Like the other Italians that migrated in that period, Venetian migrants in Australia and in Canada mainly came from small rural areas of the poorest regions so they used their regional dialect as their first language. Those who emigrated from Italy between the 1950s and 1960s, in the period of the peak of Italian departures for Australia and Canada, came from small rural centers of the poorest areas of Italy under the pressure of economic need. These Italians were mainly illiterate, dialectophones and with a low knowledge of Italian in its regional and popular variety, despite the fact that at home they have already come into contact with the Italian language through the school, newborn radio and television broadcasts (Rubino 2006). Thus, in these first decades of the century, dialects became the main means of communication between emigrants who often spoke dialects that were incomprehensible to each other since they came from different Italian regions.

The difficulty in communicating was particularly consistent for Italians: it was linked to the individuality of their language and the difficulty of relating to the English language. This difficulty determined, as for other situations of emigration, a prerequisite for isolation and at the same time a necessity to create communities to reunite families and individuals

with the same culture. In fact, Clubs and centers of aggregation have been created, where Venetians could try to recreate the environment of their original motherland. In these centers, which were mostly found within the main cities, they often used to meet and talk Venetian or dialects and to revive the customs, traditions and culinary art of the various Venetian areas. In these clubs and within the family, the mixture of all venetian dialect varieties remained the principal means of communication, so they had the opportunity to preserve their language and culture.

The linguistic situation of the children of emigrants was different: having learned English at a young age, they have a good competence of L1 that allowed them to fully integrate in the society. But the process of integration of young people often constitutes, as some testimonies have shown, a delicate moment which can create a rift between the two generations that have different behavioral models.

Nowadays, more than one hundred Venetian organizations all over the world are still active. It is crucial for this study to mention "Trevisani nel mondo," "Veneti nel mondo," and "Veneto Club," which are all settled in Toronto, in which all Venetian immigrants are kept in contact with one another and organize events and meetings aimed to preserve Venetian language and culture. Although about one hundred Venetian communities are still active and organize lots of events and meetings to preserve the language, the heritage language may not be transmitted to the third generations.

Second generation's dialect, often very impoverished and anglicized, is preserved by young people in their relations with their parents in familiar contexts. For this reason, Venetian is often replaced even in the family context by English.

The Italian community in Canada today is the product of almost 700,000 migrants entering Canada in the last century. According to census data, the majority of the first Italian migrants arrived in Canada between 1951 and 1961, when the number of Italians in Canada nearly tripled, from 150,000 to just under 450,000. As in Canada, the immigration flow to Australia took place between 1950 and 1960s and according to census data, over 18,000 new arrivals were recorded each year during that decade⁷.

⁷ Vita, G. *I Veneti in Canada e il loro Dialetto*. Retrieved from Cortellazzo, M. Guida ai Dialetti Veneti parte IX. 1987. Padova, Cleup

2.2 Heritage Speaker's Characteristics

The aim of this study is to investigate the competence of twenty Canadian and Australian-Venetian Heritage speakers in mastering Imperfetto and Passato Prossimo aspects in Venetian. Heritage speakers are an interesting group of bilinguals since they offer useful data to understand human language capacity. I will begin by clarifying basic terms and concepts concerning heritage speakers and by explaining what their characteristics are.

From a sociolinguistic point of view heritage speakers are the children of the first generation of immigrants, namely: they are people who are born in a host country or immigrant children who emigrated during childhood and have some knowledge of the family language that crucially is not spoken in the larger community. Linguistically speaking heritage speakers are a group of bilinguals who speak a minority language at home, which is called *heritage language*. To define a heritage language Jason Rothman (2009) states: "A language qualifies as a heritage language if it is a language spoken at home or otherwise readily available to young children, and crucially this language is not a dominant language of the larger (national) society."

Heritage speakers are a particular type of early bilinguals, since they are exposed both to the majority language and to the heritage language from birth. They can be *sequential bilinguals* if they have lived in a monolingual context and then, after the emigration, became bilingual in consequence to their contact with the majority language, or *simultaneous bilinguals*, that means that they acquired both languages at the same time. Even though heritage language is a form of childhood bilingualism, not all bilingual children are heritage speakers. In fact, what distinguishes heritage speakers is the social context in which they live: they are exposed both to the language spoken at home since birth and also to the language of the host country (Rothman 2007).

In order to give a more precise explanation of heritage speakers' characteristics, it is crucial to point out three linguistic dimensions: in terms of order of acquisition we distinguish *first* language from *second* language, whereas the terms *primary* and *secondary* language refers to the functional dimension of the languages. Finally, from a sociopolitical point of view we separate *minority* vs *majority* language, which refer to the language spoken by the majority of the population in a country (Bennamoun 2013).

Generally, when a child learns a second language after having learned the majority language at school the first language remains stronger, whereas the second language, which is used less frequently, becomes weaker. In the case of Heritage speakers, the first language they master is the minority language. This provokes “a shift in the functional dimension of the languages as the child grows up, with the first and primary language eventually becoming secondary in language use” (Montrul 2012). This shift in the functional dimension implicates a lower proficiency in heritage language and it demonstrates that functional dimension and the order of acquisition may not always go together (Montrul 2012). This shift can be described with the participants of the current study: *Venetian* is acquired as heritage language and consequently the linguistic dimensions are shifted: *Venetian* is their first language but is also the minority language. English is their second language, but also the primary and the majority language. By contrast, in a L2 situation, if a language is acquired later as an L2, that language would be the second, secondary and the minority language, too.

Since in early childhood the heritage language is spoken in fewer contexts (at home only) than the majority language, it lags behind in morphosyntactic and lexical development in comparison to the speaker's stronger language, and even monolingual development norms, and thus becomes the weaker language. (Schlyter, 1993)

Moreover, being a sociopolitical minority language in its context as a heritage language is not commonly supported outside the family, and the emigrated families are put under pressure to assimilate the destination country culture and language and, consequently, the majority language becomes the predominant one also at home (Montrul 2009). As a result, the exposure of language spoken at home and outside changes, and the amount of heritage language spoken at home decreases as the speaker gets older. As a consequence heritage speakers' competence of their heritage language becomes weaker than their competence of the majority language.

Since the heritage language is spoken in a reduced context, the speaker's competence in this language risks not reaching its full potential. In addition, if the heritage language does not receive proper academic support during school age it will never have the opportunity to develop later on. Consequently, heritage language in adulthood usually does not reach monolingual standards (Bennamoun 2013).

2.3 Heritage Speakers and Second Language Acquisition

In light of the above, it can be said that the heritage language of these children shares many aspects with a second language acquired in adulthood. Thus, it is important to underline the main differences and similarities of these two linguistic situations.

Two important factors that are relevant to observe the linguistic proficiency of L2 speakers are age acquisition and the quantity and quality of input.

The main point that unites L2 and heritage languages is the scarcity and the quantity of input. In fact, both languages are used in restricted environments. Another crucial aspect they share is the fact that they both have another majority or dominant language, which is different from the second/heritage language.

On the other hand, the main difference is the age of exposure: heritage speakers are exposed to their heritage language from birth, whereas L2 learners are exposed to the second language at school or via instruction generally during adolescence.

In addition, heritage language lacks a written instruction: the modality of the input in heritage languages is mainly oral and the register is colloquial (since it is spoken in a familiar and natural context). In contrast, L2 is mainly acquired in an instructional setting, and consequently it has a written and aural baseline. (Montrul 2009)

Generally, many heritage speakers possess good proficiency in the heritage language, which obviously varies from speaker to speaker. It is interesting then to investigate which grammatical areas are fully mastered, what fields remain undeveloped and what the causes of the underdevelopment are.

In the study of Silva-Corvalán (1994) it is claimed that the two forms of language loss of heritage speakers can be caused from incomplete acquisition or/and attrition, namely: loss of linguistic abilities. According to Seliger (1996) attrition is “the temporary or permanent loss of language ability as reflected in a speaker’s performance or in his or her inability to make grammatical judgments that would be consistent with native speaker monolinguals of the same age and stage of language development.” In other words, a given grammatical

structure fully developed, remains stable for a while and then, due to the reduced input, becomes weaker or is lost for several years (Bennamoun 2013).

On the other hand, Polinsky (2006) defines the term incomplete acquisition largely as an outcome to describe adult early bilinguals' (heritage speakers') non-target-like ultimate attainment, which can be the result of a variety of factors leading to input decrease in childhood.

Anyway, it is difficult to determine empirically if the heritage speaker's grammar differences from the monolingual variety are caused by attrition or incomplete acquisition. A diachronic study comparing a bilingual's tense and aspect system in childhood and then as an adult, for example, could reveal whether the grammar never obtained certain morphology (i.e. incomplete acquisition) or if the bilingual had the morphology at one point and then lost it (i.e. attrition).

Montrul (2009) indicates that adult Spanish heritage speakers have several characteristics in common with native Spanish speakers, including: strong speaking and listening abilities), native-like pronunciation, a vast vocabulary relevant to familiar domains, and good mastering of sociolinguistic norms. Despite these abilities, many heritage speakers suffer morphosyntax and lexical gaps in their grammars.

Existing research proves that both attrition and incomplete acquisition of a language can affect different grammatical abilities, but it has been proved that attrition affects mostly in lexical retrieval, phonetic values and referential discourse related aspects, whereas syntax and morphology remains largely intact. (Montrul 2009) Incomplete acquisition (as well as child attrition) has far more serious repercussions. It impacts both core and non-core parts of grammatical competence, including inflectional morphology and complex syntax, in addition to lexical retrieval, phonetic values, and discourse-related aspects of language (Montrul, 2008).

Another important phenomena that could occur in Heritage Speakers' linguistic loss is linguistic transfer, namely: the application of linguistic features from one language to another by a bilingual or multilingual speaker. To what extent does first language grammar influence the development of second language grammar?

In phonology (Barlow, 2002; Paradis, 2001), morphology (Nicoladis, 2003), and syntax (Hulk & Müller, 2000; Nicoladis, 2006), bilingual children who are exposed to two languages

from birth or sequentially have been found to display transfer from one of the languages. Seliger (1996), who proposed five phases of potential connections between the L1 and the L2 in bilingualism, claims that attrition begins at stage 4, when the L2 becomes dominant from a functional point of view, and transfer from the L2 to the L1 (Montrul, 2010). At the same time, it's unclear if the transfer effects of adult L2 acquisition and heritage language development can be compared, especially because the target language is learned in early childhood in heritage language speakers, but around and after puberty in adult L2 learners.

Another grammatical area which has been found to be vulnerable in heritage speakers is the area of aspect. A considerable amount of studies with Spanish Language has been carried out to test if heritage speakers manage to resolve Perfective and Imperfective aspectual conflict in the proper way, and it emerged that the imperfect form is the most affected verbal form. In the following chapter I will highlight some of the studies that tested the aspect system of heritage speakers.

2.4 Previous Studies on Heritage Speakers' Aspect

In the following chapter I will describe previous studies on heritage language tense and aspect systems that point out that viewpoint aspect morphology is a vulnerable area in heritage speakers' grammar. In the paragraphs that follows I will describe some studies focused on examining preterit and imperfect conflict in Heritage speakers of Spanish, both adults and children.

The choice to describe works carried out on Spanish Heritage Speakers is not casual. In fact, the usage of preterite and imperfect in Spanish is the same as that in Venetian dialect. Thus, the previous findings that have emerged on Spanish as a heritage language will constitute the baseline for the current study and to examine Venetian heritage speakers' aspect system.

2.4.1 Silva - Corvalàn (1994)

In the study of Silva Corvalàn (1994), 50 adult Mexican-American Bilinguals have been recorded spanning three generational groups. The participants were composed of three

groups: the first group was composed of first generation Mexican immigrants who arrived in the United States after the age of 11. In the second group, there were second generation Mexican-Americans, including those who had immigrated before the age of six. The third group involved third generation Mexican Americans with at least one parent born in the United States. English was the predominant language for each group of participants.

Silva-Corvalán (1994) explains the simplification she observed in her speakers' morphosyntax by referring to compensatory techniques that help lessen the cognitive burden of juggling two language systems. This has been carried out through two major strategies: overextension of particular tense morphology inside the secondary language and the usage and/or development of periphrastic structures for encoding tense and aspect (for example, employing the progressive instead of the imperfect).

In English the preterite and imperfect are both employed with the Past Simple, thus they might be seen as two forms with comparable meanings in Spanish and therefore subject to loss in one and semantic overextension in the other.

Her observations and analysis of the evolving preterit and defective morphology in the second and third generation participants are important for the goals of the current dissertation.

The author analyzed the aspectual distinction within three different contexts: obligatory context, discourse pragmatic and optional (Silva-Corvalán 1994). In obligatory context, the choice of a verbal form over another is conditioned by the syntactic position of the predicate and its arguments in the clause; if the speaker produces an unexpected verbal form it demonstrates that their verbal paradigm has changed or simplified. In this context, she mostly found that imperfect substitutes the pluperfect subjunctive, pluperfect indicative, or the conditional.

In the case of discourse-pragmatics context the arguments in the clause, adverbial expression and the semantic interpretation of the verbs largely condition the choice of a verbal form over another; in this context participants generally use the proper form with the context. In the part of the study in which that investigated the preterit and imperfect distinction, it emerged that the context is crucial to the choice of the verb.

The preterit and imperfect have distinct impacts in Spanish when it comes to organizing events inside a narrative framework. For assertions that are foregrounded or occurrences that are assessed as a whole, the preterit must be employed (Silva-Corvalán

1994:24). However Silva-Corvalán discovered that monolingual Spanish speakers follow this norm, but second generation speakers commonly replace the predicted preterit forms with imperfect ones. Since the second generation used an unexpected verbal form, is an indication that the aspect system in heritage speakers does not encode the same semantic meaning as the monolingual norm.

In the tense and aspect systems of second generation speakers, Silva-Corvalán (1994) finds overextension of the preterit and subsequent simplification of the imperfect. However, the imperfect aspect has not been totally forgotten: in a limited set of stative verbs, preterite has generally stopped being generated, leaving mainly imperfect forms. The stative verbs were “was” “had” “knew”, respectively in Spanish “era” “tenía” and “sabía”.

Nevertheless, the majority of her speakers increased their usage of the preterit with non-stative and stative verbs that were not on the aforementioned list.

Though Silva-Corvalán finds this to be the case in the grammars of the majority of her second-generation speakers, high-proficiency second and third-generation speakers nevertheless maintain the preterit forms of these verbs and employ them when the situation requires the aspectual interpretation of perfectivity. Overall, the preterit form is more likely than the imperfect form to be preserved by her speakers.

2.4.2 Montrul (1994), Montrul and Perpiñán (2011)

Montrul (2002) examines the morphological and semantic acquisition and mastering of preterit and imperfect in three groups of adult Spanish-English bilinguals: 16 English-Spanish simultaneously bilinguals from the ages of 0 to 3, 15 US-born sequential bilinguals who learned English from the ages of 4 to 7 and 20 children who moved from a Spanish-speaking country between the ages of 8 and 15 but did not acquire English until then. The results have been compared with the responses of a group of 20 monolingually raised Spanish Speakers. Montrul, in her research utilized a set of oral and written production tasks such as narrative retelling task, written morphology recognition task and a sentence conjunction judgment task.

In Montrul (2002) it has been found a correlation between aspectual use and telicity: 95% of the atelic predicates (activities and states) have been used with the imperfect, while preterit occurs mainly with telic predicates. It also emerged that late L2 learners managed to resolve aspectual conflicts, more than the other two groups. The group of simultaneous bilinguals demonstrates to have difficulties with atypical pairings: this suggests that in the Spanish aspectual distinction, they lack discourse-pragmatic expertise. States with perfective morphology were the most challenging aspectual conflict for simultaneous bilinguals to resolve. That is, the majority of errors occurred in instances when the preterit was required due to context.

Montrul claims that these findings reflect early bilinguals' "incomplete acquisition" of the preterite-imperfect contrast, as well as child L2 learners' "early L1 attrition" of the contrast, both of which are attributed to a lack of exposure to Spanish.

In the later study, Montrul (2009) provided both a production task and the sentence conjunction task. Participants were 65 heritage speakers born in the United States. The group has been divided according to their proficiency (advanced, intermediate and low). From these tasks it emerged that 55% of all predicates were in the preterit form, while some participants never produced the imperfect at all.

Although not all speakers generated unexpected forms, there were instances of the imperfect being used in place of the preterit and the preterit being used in place of the imperfect, as found by Silva-Corvalán (1994). The ANOVA test revealed that each group was more accurate with the preterite than the imperfect.

According to the author, heritage speakers can master the preterit- imperfect conflict but the errors occur more in using the imperfect form than in preterite form. Montrul argues that the difficulty that heritage speakers have with the imperfect is caused by the semantic complexity of the morphology, which encodes several meanings.

Montrul and Perpiñán (2011), utilized written morphology recognition task and a shortened version of the sentence conjunction judgment tasks used in Montrul's previous studies to test 60 heritage speakers of Spanish' accuracy, alongside 60 L2 learners. The Heritage Speakers have been divided into three groups (advanced, intermediate, low). From the results it emerged that, in the first task, all the groups performed better in using the preterit form than the imperfect form. Generally, in the sentence conjunction task the heritage

speakers managed to distinguish preterit and imperfect verb forms, however they accepted the imperfect and rejected the preterit at lower rates than the control group.

2.4.3 Cuza (2013)

Another research that analyses the aspect system of heritage speakers is the study of Cuza (2013). The participants of his study were 7 children aged between 5 and 7 years old, 6 children aged 8 to 9 and 11 adult heritage speakers. The monolingual child and the control group were taken from the CHILDES database. Comparing production rates and chi squared tests, the researcher found that bilingual children produced more preterite and fewer imperfect and present forms than the monolingual children. The adult bilingual, compared with the group of monolingual adults, produced more preterite and present form than imperfect.

Cuza et al claims that the findings suggest that heritage speakers' ability in mastering the preterit form might be attrited, considering the increased usage of this form the older children group and the consequent reduction in adult heritage speakers. By contrast, the fact that the low percentage of imperfect production employed in the narrative task does not increase with age across the groups indicates that their ability to deal with the imperfect could not improve at all.

All these studies demonstrated that in heritage speakers the aspect system is vulnerable. Aside from a tendency to overuse the imperfect with stative predicates in perfective contexts, the imperfect appears to be more vulnerable than the preterit. The preterit in fact, is utilized in a number of habitual and continuous contexts instead of the imperfect. However, the source of this vulnerability remained unresolved.

3.The study:

3.1 Predictions

The study is aimed to investigate whether Veneto Heritage Speakers experience difficulties in mastering the semantic Perfective/Imperfective aspects conflict by determining the frequency in production of Passato Prossimo and Imperfetto in Veneto Heritage Speakers and analysing how it differs from the the Control group.

I hypothesize that the aspectual system of the Heritage Speakers changed from the Native Speakers, and that these changes are systematic especially for SE groups because of the reduced Veneto input in a language Contact situation.

When acquiring the Veneto Imperfect, English speakers find challenging detecting that two different morphological forms (PP and IMP) exist and they have difficulties in realising that those forms are used to mark respectively Perfectivity and Imperfectivity in Venetian, since in English the same form (past simple) can encode both. Furthermore, according to Montrul (2002), the imperfect is more semantically complex than the preterit because it encodes a wider range of meanings that differ depending on context. To summarize, following Salaberry's assumptions (1999), I claim that for English speakers, who are not trained to observe aspectual distinction, using the correct form in the Imperfective could be problematic.

Following this assumption I predict that:

- Imperfective will be a more problematic aspect than the perfective for Heritage Speakers and in particular for the group which Veneto input reduced in school age (SE group).
- The use of Passato Prossimo by the Heritage Exposure group will be overextended in imperfective situations, leading to the reduction of Imperfetto production. Heritage Speakers will not reject the use of Passato Prossimo in Imperfective situation.
- The Lexical aspect of the predicates will determine the use of a Passato Prossimo vs Imperfetto in Heritage Speakers.

These predictions are tested in the following study which examines data obtained from 20 English Veneto Heritage Speakers through 3 oral tasks (a picture-based story retelling, a picture description task "Simultaneous actions" and a Semantic Interpretation judgment task).

3.2 Methodology:

3.2.1 Participants:

A total of 20 Dialecto Veneto heritage speakers and 10 fluent native speakers of Dialecto Veneto participated in the study. The bilinguals' mean age was 63 years old, ranging from 50 to 72 years old. The five native speakers were aged between 50 to 61 years old. Five

participants were born and currently live in Canada and 15 of them originated in Australia. All participant's parents are Veneto (both the parents were first generation immigrants and emigrated from 1950 to 1968. They all emigrated from the Treviso province); Every participant was exposed to Dialecto Veneto from birth, but eight of them reported that when they began to attend school (6 years old) their Dialecto Veneto input was restricted only to familiar interactions. This group of participants has been called the *Shorter Exposure* group (4 Canadians and 4 Australians). The rest of the Heritage Speakers participants declared that they continued to talk Dialecto Veneto after school age, given their parents' low English proficiency or because they attended and still attend large Veneto communities which allows to preserve the language, especially in Australia (*Veneto Club*). This Group has been called the *Longer Exposure Group*. (3 Canadians and 9 Australians)

3.2.2 Tasks:

1. Background Questionnaire

The first part of the tasks consists of a background questionnaire in Venetian focused on discovering language background, in order to know about how much Venetian was part of their past and current life. The questionnaire included questions such as: *Do you still speak in Venetian? In which contexts? And with whom? What language did your family speak when you were a child? When did you stop speaking Venetian?*

The answers to these questions permitted us to divide our participants into two groups according to the quantity of their Veneto exposure. Some participants reported that Venetian is mainly spoken with parents, whereas with siblings they spoke English. Other participants stated that they are part of Venetian Communities (especially participants from Melbourne and Toronto), so their Venetian input has never been interrupted or drastically reduced.

The questionnaire was carried out not only to investigate participant's Venetian competence and use, but also to be aware of the educational levels of our participants. From this questionnaire it emerged that 75 % of the participants have received formal instruction and attended University, whereas 25% of them only attended high school.

Every task has been taken from *SPLLOC*⁸ 2 (*Spanish Learner Language Oral Corpora*) projects and then readapted in Veneto. The tasks consisted of: a Retelling story task, a Simultaneous Events task and a Semantic Interpretation task. Both tasks and questionnaire took place by video call, two members and author of the project were present.

2. Retelling Story Task

For the retelling story task, all participants were shown a series of illustrations concerning two sisters taking a journey from Madrid to Barcelona. During the journey they talk about their childhood: they start to recall their routine when they were children and about their experiences, until they are interrupted by an unexpected event.

The aim of this task was for learners to retell the story in Venetian using the pictures and the verbs (in the bare form) and stimuli in venetian present under each picture. In other words, the story involved both situations that required to be expressed with a perfective form (Passato Prossimo) and situations that needed to be expressed with an Imperfective (Imperfetto) form, such as their reminiscing of their childhood and past experiences.

Moreover, the verbs provided in the task conveyed verbs with all lexical aspects (activities, accomplishments..) in order to investigate if the inherent meaning of the verb guided the choice of a certain tense. In other words, there were telic and atelic preterites inserted in a non prototypical context in order to see if the choice of the tense was determined by the context or by the lexical class of the predicate.

Participants firstly were asked to study the entire story, and were instructed to use the phrases given under each picture. Discourse prompts such as “*Da piccola Lucia, ogni mattina..*” (*When Lucia was young, every morning..*) were given too. They then were asked to retold the story in Veneto to the two members of the research team.

The task consists of 23 stimuli (23 verbs to conjugate during the retelling) 13 items were in perfective context and thus elicited Passato Prossimo and 10 in imperfective context and elicited Imperfetto.

In the following illustrations, the background context and an example has been shown.

⁸ <http://www.splloc.soton.ac.uk/splloc2/sit.html>

TASK 1: E do soree

The aim of this task is to **retell** a relatively controlled picture narrative. The narrative was specially written and concerns the experiences of two sisters taking a rail journey from Madrid to Barcelona. During the trip they recall their different childhood characters and experiences... until they are interrupted by an unexpected event.

The stimulus consists of a picture booklet containing a series of illustrations, accompanied by keywords and expressions **to be used** in the retelling.

A Madrid

(Magnare) panini / (Bere) vin

(Visitar) a città

Fig 1. Background story of the Narrative retelling task **Fig 2.** Sample Item for Narrative retelling task

3. “Simultaneous Actions” task

In this task participants were asked to describe various simultaneous actions that occurred in the previous day. A context was provided: two friends have to go to Mexico, the goal was to describe the day life before the departure. Participants were requested to review the pictures and describe in Venetian the simultaneous actions of each picture. The illustrations depicted what the friends were doing at the same time at different times of the day; under each picture verb prompts were present. The verbs present in the task involved different kinds of lexical classes (activities, accomplishments, achievements) combined in various ways and several of the sentences were designed to contain aspectual conflicts.

The task consisted of 10 pictures (5 pairs of verbs to be described - the form elicited was Imperfetto for all the items).

The instructions for the tasks have been provided in English, whereas the words under the pictures were in Veneto

The context given in the task and an example of stimuli are depicted in the following pictures:

Carla and Mario are cousins who travelled together to Mexico for holiday.

They just arrived today and have already done a couple of things

But...all day yesterday they were very busy getting ready for their trip.

What were they doing?

Mentre Mario**(bere)** acqua...Carla **(lavare)** piatti

Figure 3. Background story provided for the task. **Fig 4.** Example of simultaneous activities depicted in task 2.

4. Semantic Interpretation task

The purpose of the third task was to explore how participants interpreted the various possible meanings of the Venetian Imperfetto and Passato Prossimo.

In each item, two Venetian sentences were shown to the participants, one using Imperfetto, the other Passato Prossimo. A context of use was also provided (in English): Learners were asked to give an acceptability judgement on a scale from -2 to 2. The items were designed to explore learners' acceptability judgements for varying combinations of: different types of context (habitual, progressive, perfective). The task consisted of a total of 10 sentences to be judged. (Also in this case the context elicited Imperfetto form in each item). In the following pictures, the background story for the third task and a pair of sentences to be judged are displayed in the following pictures.

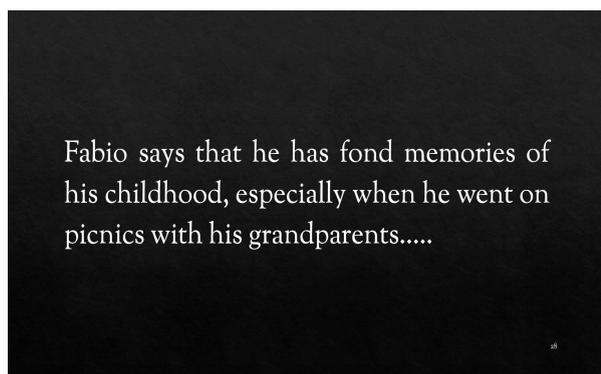


Fig 5 Background story for the third task

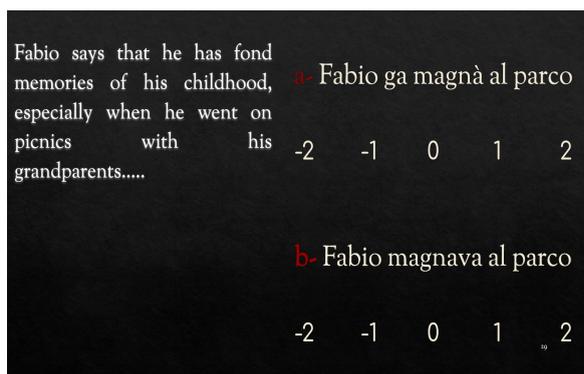


Fig 6 Example of sentence to be grammatically judged.

3.3 Results and Analysis:

Retelling Story Task: E Do Soree (The Two Sisters)

A specific research question we want to answer is whether the Imperfetto is a more problematic aspect to express than Passato Prossimo and to test the ability to master the two aspects.

As we mentioned above, the task required to retell a story by using verb prompts and by describing pictures concerning a story of two sisters taking a journey. The narration involved both perfective situations, that requires Passato Prossimo to be expressed and

imperfective situations, which involved the use of Imperfetto. Figure 7. shows the mean accuracy (%) and standard deviation for each context (perfective and imperfective) for the three groups investigated. The results demonstrate greater variability in the SE group in both contexts and a lower accuracy rate. LE group displays a high variability too, in contrast to Control group which variability is low both in perfective context and in imperfective situations.

Descriptives			
	groups	accuracy in perfective context	accuracy in imperfective context
N	shorter	8	8
	long	12	12
	control	5	5
Mean	shorter	0.62625	0.33750
	long	0.86583	0.83333
	control	0.95600	1.0000
Standard deviation	shorter	0.24442	0.43074
	long	0.10950	0.28391
	control	0.040988	0.0000

Fig. 7 Mean and standard deviation in accuracy in Narrative Retelling task splitted by groups.

As such, these results are only a preliminary evidence that SE groups behave differently to the other groups. In order to confirm the impressionistic difference between the groups, a deeper analysis has followed.

The overall results by groups of accuracy in perfective and imperfective context are displayed in the following table that allows comparisons of accuracy between the three groups investigated and it gives us information about what context is more problematic over the other.

Groups		PASSATO PROSSIMO			IMPERFETTO		
		Total Verbs	Correct	Accuracy Rate	Total Verbs	Correct	Accuracy Rate
Level	N						
LE	12	156	143	92%	120	92	77%
SE	8	104	66	63%	80	28	35%
Control	5	65	61	94%	50	50	100%
Overall	25	325	270	83%	250	170	68%

Table 9. Accuracy rate for Passato Prossimo and Imperfetto in Retelling Story task, split by groups

From Table 9. It emerged that imperfect is the context in which the accuracy rates are lower for both SE and LE groups. Thus, it is crucial to highlight the fact that SE group is the group which performed worse in both Imperfective and Perfective context (respectively 35% and 63%) compared to LE group, which performed better though presenting a lower accuracy in Imperfective situations (77%) than in Perfective ones (92%).

The accuracy scores on Imperfective and Perfective context were submitted to a factorial ANOVA with repeated measures, with group as the between-group factors (SE group, LE group and Control group) and context (Imperfective and Perfective) as the within-group factor. Overall results did not reveal a significant context effect, whereas it emerged a significant main effect for groups, $F(2, 22)=13.435, p<0,0002$.

To identify specific differences between groups and context we carried out a post hoc Bonferroni's procedures. The post hoc comparisons revealed significant main differences between SE group and LE group ($Pb <0.001$) and between SE and Control group ($p<0.0005$). No significant differences arose between the LE's accuracy and Control's accuracy, which can be an indication of the higher competence of the Longer Exposure group.

As regard the the interaction between context and group the results revealed significant effects between:

- SE group and Control group on perfective context ($p<0.03$).
- LE group and SE group in imperfective context ($p<0.003$)
- SE group and Control group in Imperfective context ($p<0.04$).

Another research question for the current study is to investigate the frequency in production of Passato Prossimo and Imperfetto in Veneto heritage speakers and how this differs from the standard Venetian form and to see if the use of the Passato Prossimo is overextending even in Imperfective Context.

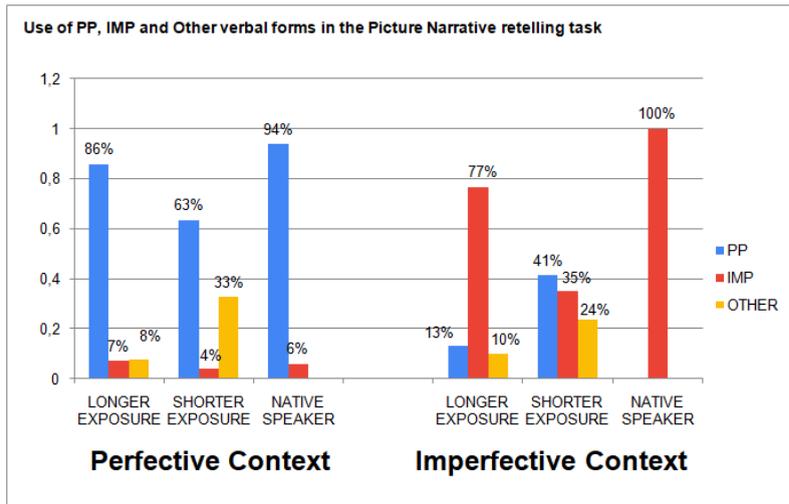


Fig 8. Use of PP, Imperfect and other forms in the two contexts (Narrative retelling task)

The percentage of the use of form (Passato Prossimo PP, Imperfetto= IMP and Other) in each of the two contexts (Imperfective and Perfective) by the groups are illustrated in Fig 8. It can be seen that in this first task SE group used mostly Passato Prossimo form both in perfective and in imperfective context (63% PP context and 41% IMP context) and a very low rate of Imperfect. Furthermore, in the SE group, the percentage of "Other", which includes non-target forms including Present tense and Infinitive form of the verb, is also high in both the contexts (33% and 24%). In addition, it can be seen from the illustration that the Shorter Group tends to overextend the use of Passato Prossimo in a context that requires an Imperfetto form: when it was required to describe habitual events in the past, therefore expressed with Imperfect, not all SE subjects produced the appropriate form (Imperfetto).

Compared to the SE group, more use of Imperfetto is observed in the LE group (77% in imperfective context). As we predicted, the imperfective context posed some difficulties.

Since one of the main research questions is to investigate if Heritage Speakers overextend the production of Passato Prossimo also in imperfective situations, the percentage of Passato Prossimo production in the Imperfective context has been submitted to the ANOVA test too. Although, there is a percentage of overproduction of Passato Prossimo even in an Imperfective Context the statistical test shows no significant context effect for groups effect. In general we can state that the accuracy in mastering Imperfetto is lower than on Passato Prossimo for both Heritage Speakers groups and that there is a tendency, even if not significant, for the Shorter Group to overextend the production of Passato Prossimo also in Imperfective context.

I will now show some examples of input for Narrative retelling task, displaying also target verbs and types of errors produced by SE group participants.

Input, Target, and Error in Perfective context:

Input Nell'istà del 2016, e do soree ga fatto un viaggio a Barcellona. Par prima cosa, al mattino (rivare) all'areoporto, dopo (visitare) a città e dopo ancora (magnare un panin).

In the summer of 2016, the two sisters took a journey to Barcelona. Firstly, in the morning they (arrive) at the airport. Then, they (visit) the city and then they (eat) a sandwich.

Target: Nell'istà del 2016, e do soree ga fatto un viaggio a Barcellona. Par prima cosa, al mattino e **ze riavae** all'areoporto, e **gà visità** a città e e **gà magnà** un panin.

In the summer of 2016, the two sisters took a journey to Barcelona. Firstly, in the morning they arrived at the airport. Then, they visited the city and then they ate a sandwich.

Error: Nell'istà del 2016, e do soree ga fatto un viaggio a Barcellona. Par prima cosa, al mattino **rivare** all'areoporto, **visitare** a città **magnare** un panin. (**use of Infinitive Error**).

In the summer of 2016, the two sisters took a journey to Barcelona. Firstly, in the morning they arrive at the airport. Then, they visit the city and then they eat a sandwich

Input, Target, and Error in Imperfective context:

Input: Da piccoe (essere) tanto diverse. Lucia, da cea, durante a settimana (fare) i compiti presto e nel weekend (zogare) a football.

When they were young they (are) very different. During the week, Lucia (do) her homework early and on the weekend she (play) football.

Target: Da piccoe e **iera** tanto diverse. Lucia, da cea, durante a settimana a **fazeva** i compiti presto e nel weekend a **zogava** a football.

When they were young they were very different. During the week, Lucia used to do her homework early and on the weekend she used to play football.

Error: Da piccoe e iera tanto diverse. Lucia, da cea, durante a settimana **gà fatto** i compiti compiti presto e nel weekend a **ga zogà** a football.

When they were young they were very different. During the week, Lucia did her homework early and on the weekend she played football.

Given that these speakers do not completely grasp the aspectual meanings provided by the contexts, we wanted to test whether the form choice was driven by the inherent lexical aspect of each verb. It is important to recall that achievements and accomplishments are telic

verbs (they have an endpoint) which are prototypical with Passato Prossimo morphology because they share the boundedness features. On the other hand, there is a central tendency for atelic predicates (states and activities) to occur with the imperfect tense. In this task, when the protagonists of the story recall different experiences and habitual events in the past, the use of Imperfetto forces an unbounded interpretation.

The following illustrations show the use of Passato Prossimo, Imperfetto in Achievements and Accomplishments lexical class of verbs.

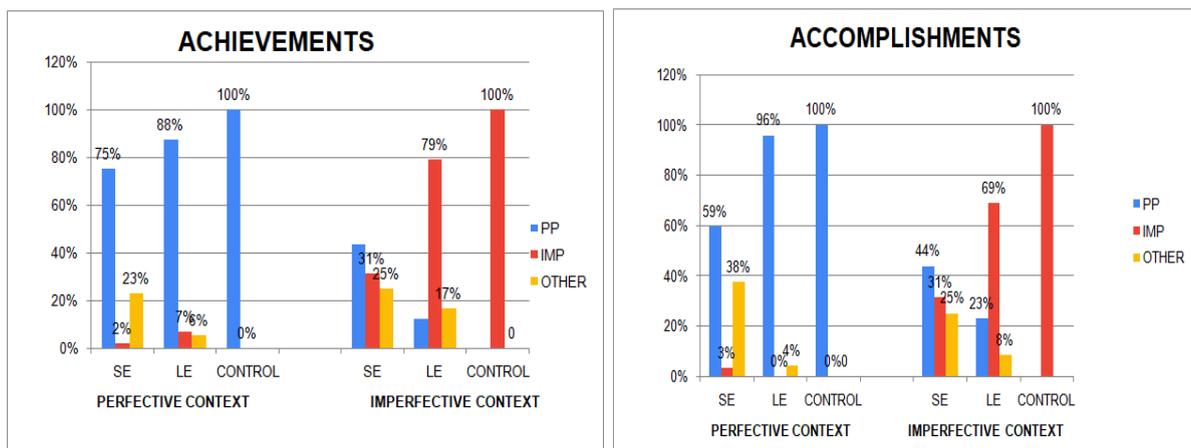


Fig 10 and 11. Use of PP, IMP an other verbal forms with telic predicates (Achievements and Accomplishments)

Analysing the graphs 10. and 11. it can be noticed that for LE group and Control group the lexical class of verbs does not determine the choice of verbs over another: although the central tendency for achievements and accomplishments is to be express with a perfective tense, in this task the context is a sufficient factor to determine the production of a tense. In imperfective context, both for achievements and for accomplishments we can notice a high percentage of Imperfect production.

By contrast, SE groups, despite the imperfective context, tend to produce Passato Prossimo instead, both with achievements and accomplishments predicates.

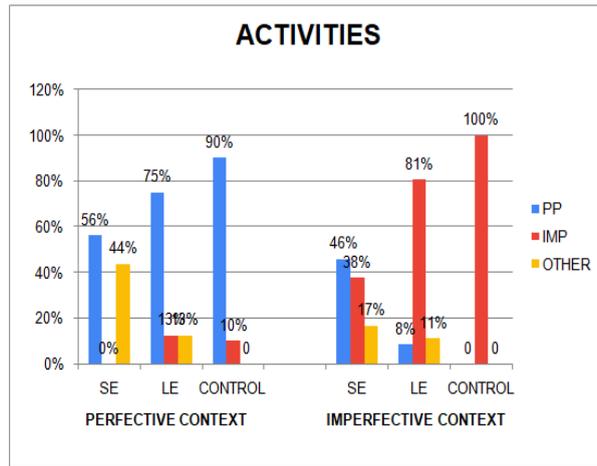


Fig 12. Use of PP, IMP an other verbal forms with atelic predicates (Activities)

Figure 12. illustrates the percentage of Passato Prossimo, Imperfetto and other verbal forms in Activities and States. With activities LE group and Control group behave similarly to achievements and accomplishments: despite activities tend to be expressed with an Imperfective, the imperfective context given by the exercise guided participants to express it with Passato Prossimo. By contrast, SE groups, despite the imperfective context, produced 46% of Passato Prossimo and 44% of other verbal forms.

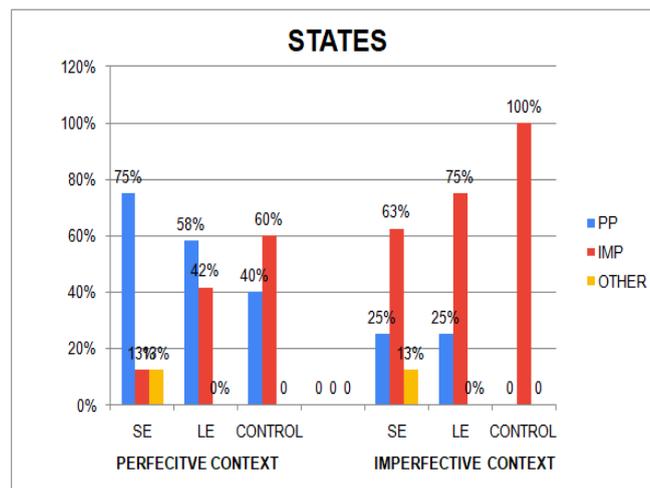


Fig 13.Use of PP, IMP an other verbal forms with atelic predicates (States)

With state predicates the scenario is different. In the imperfect context all the groups behave in the same fashion, and also the SE group managed to produce the correct form (Imperfect). On the contrary in the perfective context, SE group produced the right form

requested (Passato Prossimo). LE, despite correctly expressing a higher percentage of Passato Prossimo (58%), also produced a considerable number of Imperfetto forms (42%).

In case of control groups the trend seems to invert, the verbal form mainly used to express a state predicates in a perfective context is Imperfetto (60% against 40% of PP production).

States predicates refers to durative, atelic and non-dynamic situations. Due to their properties and to the lack of an endpoint, they are normally expressed with Imperfective form and they are often incompatible with Perfective and bounded situations. Predicates such as *know*, *love*, *think* belong to this category. The state predicates present in this task were two: the verb *iera* (were) and the verb *pensare* (think). From the graph in figure 14, it can be noticed that, only with this type of predicate SE group stopped producing Passato Prossimo and correctly produced Imperfetto instead. The other verb “pensava” (think) was inserted in a Perfective context (an unexpected event interrupted the flashback about the protagonist’s childhood). It seems that in this case, the Control group is driven by the inherent semantic meaning of the verb, and produced an Imperfetto verb instead.

All the predicates present in the first task were divided according to their lexical class according to the following table:

<p>rivare all’areoporto (arrive at the airport), ciapare el treno (take the train), sveiarse preso (wake up early), finire i compiti presto (finish the homework early), sentire un rumore forte (hear a noise), cadere gocce de acqua (water drop fall), domandare aiuto al controllore (ask the conductor for help), aiutare a cambiare de posto (help changing seat)</p>	<p>achievements</p>
<p>Visitare a città (visit the city), magnare panini (eat sandwiches), bere vin (drink wine), lezare un libro (read a book), scrivere na storietta (write a novel), fare un disegno (make a drawing), vardare un film (watch a movie), magnare na pizza (eat a pizza).</p>	<p>accomplishments</p>
<p>Parlare de a so gioventù (talk about their childhood), zogare a football (play football), Corare in bici (ride a bike), fare i compiti de notte (do homework by night), ridere ripensando al viaggio (laughing thinking</p>	<p>activities</p>

about the journey).	
da piccole e iera tanto diverse (when they were young they were very different), pensare che ghe sia un problema (thinking that there is a problem)	states

Table 14. Predicates of the first task divided for lexical classes

A repeated measures ANOVA procedure has been used to test the results with group as the between-group factor, aspectual contrast (Imperfective and Perfective) and Lexical class of Verbs (Accomplishments, Achievements, States and Activities) as the within group factor. From the results it emerged a significant interaction between aspectual contrast and group $F(2)=4.992, p<0.03$) and between lexical aspects and groups $F(3)= 2.880, p<0.02$. The results also revealed that “group” is a significant Between Subject Effect $F(2,20)=7.643, p<0.00342$.

A post hoc procedure followed the ANOVA test. The results of the post hoc comparisons between the factors showed a significant effect between the lexical class aspect of accomplishment verbs between SE group and control group ($p<0.03$). No other significant effects emerged from the interactions between aspectual contrast, group and lexical aspect.

Task 2: Simultaneous Actions task: Carla and Mario.

As we have already described in the methodology chapter, in this task participants were asked to describe two pictures showing activities that had taken place the day before simultaneously, so Imperfetto was an obligatory choice in completing the task. The Veneto construction “ Carla iera drio lavare i piatti” (Carla was washing the dishes) has also been included in the Imperfect category as well.

Figure 8. displays mean accuracy (%) and standard deviation for the Imperfective context provided by the task (imperfective) for the three groups investigated. The results demonstrate considerable variability in the LE, in contrast with SE group and Control’s low rate of variability. As regards the accuracy rate, it can be seen that the mean accuracy for the SE group is considerably lower than the other two groups.

Descriptives		
	groups	accuracy imp
N	SHORTER	8
	LONGER	12
	CONTROL	5
Mean	SHORTER	0.025000
	LONGER	0.74167
	CONTROL	1.0000
Standard deviation	SHORTER	0.046291
	LONGER	0.37040
	CONTROL	0.0000

Fig. 8. Mean and Standard deviation of Imperfect accuracy use in Imperfective Context

Again, the differences emerged from the descriptive results have been deepened and further analysis has been made to compare accuracies, in order to recognise significant disparities between groups. The graph in figure 9. illustrates the percentage of accuracy in the imperfective context provided by the exercise, that corresponds to the percentage of Imperfetto forms produced.

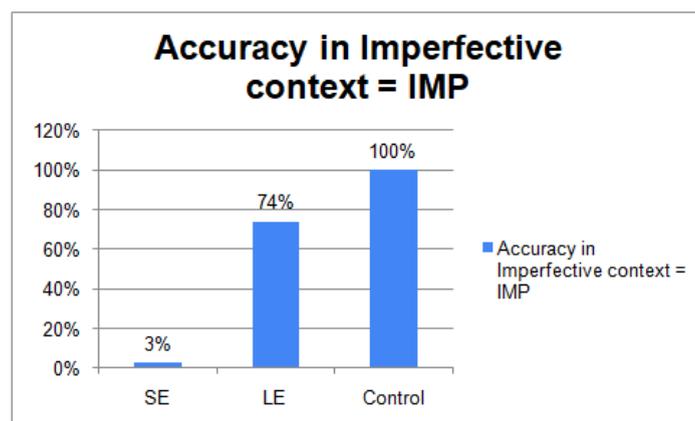


Fig 9. Mean accuracy in Imperfective context of the Simultaneous Action task

It can be seen that the rate of accuracy performed by the SE group is nearly 0 (3%): only 3 SE participants produced the proper form. Conversely, LE group performed a high level of Imperfetto's production.

The percentages of accuracy in the second task were submitted to an ANOVA test with group as the fixed independent factor and accuracy as the dependent variable. The results revealed strong main effects for groups $F(2,22) = 26.367$, $p < 0.00001$. A post hoc test with Bonferroni's procedures allowed us to identify specific differences among groups. The post hoc tests indicated differences between the SE group and LE group ($p < 0.00002$) and between

SE group and Control ($p < 0.00001$). There were no differences between the Control group and LE group.

Once again, the percentage of use of the three verbal forms in the task and in the context have been deepened:

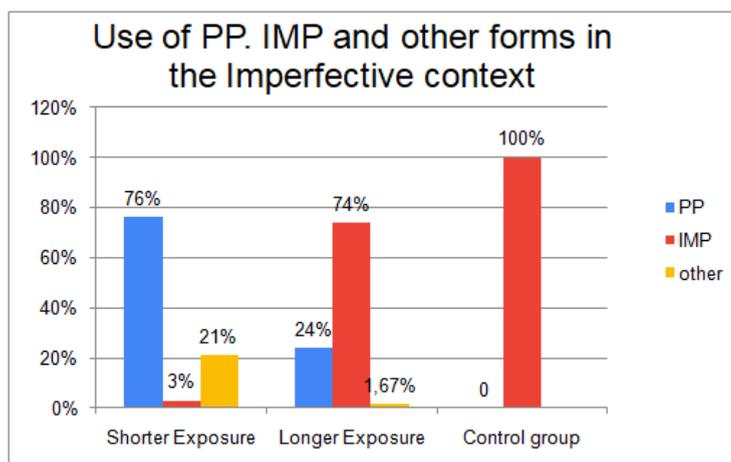


Figure 10. Use of PP, IMP and other forms in the Imperfective context: Simultaneous action task

The graph in figure 10 shows the percentage of use of Passato Prossimo, Imperfetto and other forms in the Imperfective context provided by this task. It displays how the percentage of Imperfetto production differs from group to group. The more evident difference is that in the Shorter Exposure Group the percentage of Imperfetto is near 0% (3%), whereas Passato Prossimo (76%) and other forms of verbs like present tense and Infinitive verbs (21%) are used to complete the task instead. On the other hand, the LE group performed a high grade of Imperfect production, although there is a 24% of Passato Prossimo incorrectly produced also in this context. The Control group, correctly produced a 100% of Imperfetto form.

Since one of the main research questions is to investigate if Heritage Speakers overextend the production of Passato Prossimo also in imperfective situations, the percentage of Passato Prossimo production has been submitted to the Anova test too and from the statistical test it emerged a significant main effect for groups $F(2,22)=11.235$, $p < 0.0005$. In addition, the post hoc test allowed us to identify other significant differences between groups, in particular between SE group and LE group ($p < 0.004$) and between SE group and Control group ($p < 0.0008$). Again, no significant mean differences emerged between Control group and LE group.

The following examples shows how the task was designed and what the target verb were, and an example of Passato Prossimo overextension in Imperfective context (Progressive interpretation)

Input: Mentre Mario (pareciare) da magnare..Carla (corare) in moto.

While Mario (prepare) something to eat, Carla (run) the the motorcycle.

Target: Mentre Mario **pareciava** da magnare..Carla **coreva** in moto. ✓

While Mario was preparing something to eat, Carla was riding the motorcycle.

Error: Mentre Mario ga parecià da magnare, Carla ga corso in moto. ✗ (PP overextension)

While Mario prepared something to eat, Carla rode the motorcycle.

Error: Mentre Mario parecia da magnare, Carla corre in moto. ✗ (Present tense use)

While Mario prepares something to eat, Carla rides the motorcycle.

The secondary task differs in the previous task not only in considering only one context but also in providing accomplishments and achievements in an only imperfective context. As a reminder, the task involved a series of habitual actions, all requiring Imperfetto to be expressed, anyway several actions and respective pictures depicted telic events (painting a picture, reading a book etc).

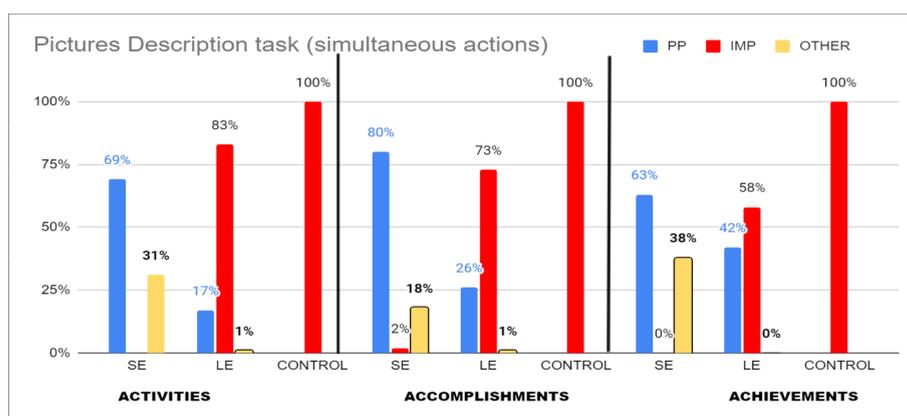


Fig 11. Use of PP, IMP and other verbal forms with activities, accomplishments and achievements predicates.

Figure 11. displays the percentage of use of Passato Prossimo, Imperfetto and other verbal forms with activities, accomplishments and achievements predicates.

As we have already anticipated in the previous analysis, SE group almost did not produce any Imperfetto form, overextending the use of Passato Prossimo and other verbal forms in the imperfective context. Consequently, the repeated measures ANOVA computed to analyse the significant effects with group as the between-group factor and aspectual contrast (imperfective vs imperfective) and lexical aspect (achievements, accomplishments and activities) as the within-group factor. A significant main effect for groups emerged from the analysis $F(2,22)=3.5045$, $p<0.05$. The post hoc procedure which analysed the interaction between the factors, revealed significant differences between SE and LE and between SE and Control group for all the imperfect form produced of all the lexical class of verbs present in the task. No significant effects have been revealed between aspectual contrast, lexical aspect between LE group and Control group.

The following examples show an example of stimulus provided in the Simultaneous action task. The examples, not only give an insight of an item, the target verbal form and a type of error. but it also displays how achievement predicates were inserted in the Imperfective situation and gives an insight of the aspectual conflict that participants had to deal with.

Input: Mentre Mario (impisare) a luce..Carla (pareciare) na spremuta.

While Mario (switch on) the light.. Carla (prepare) an orange juice.

Target: Mentre Mario **impisava/iera drio impisare** a luce, Carla **pareciava/iera drio preparare** na spremuta. ✓

While Mario was switching on the light.. Carla was preparing an orange juice.

Error: Mentre Mario **gà impisà** a luce, Carla **gà parecià** na spremuta. ✗ (PP overextension)

While Mario switched on the light.. Carla prepared an orange juice.

The following table illustrates how predicates in the Simultaneous action task have been categorized according to their lexical class.

Impisare a luce (switch on the light), comprare braghe (buy pants)	<u>achievements</u>
scoltare musica (listen to the music), corare in moto (ride a bicycle)	<u>activities</u>
pareciare na spremuta (prepare an orange juice), lezare na storiotta (read a story), pareciare da magnare (prepare something to	<u>accomplishments</u>

eat), cantare na canson (sing a song), bere acqua (drink a glass of water), lavare i piatti (wash the dishes)	
---	--

Table 15. Predicates of the Simultaneous Action task divided for lexical classes

Task 3: Semantic Judgment task

The third and last task was a Semantic judgement task which was used to test acceptability judgment' s abilities of participants. 5 pairs of sentences were shown to participants, who had to give an acceptability score on a 5 point scale (-2 to 2). It is important to point out that the context concerns a man who recalls different activities that he used to do with his grandparents. Thus the context is Imperfective and it requires Imperfetto.

In Figure 12. the means of judgment points given to the sentences and the standard deviation for the three groups are displayed. It can be observed that the means of the score on Imperfetto sentences are higher for the Control group (M 1.76) and also for the Longer Exposure group (M 1.29). As regards variability, the group with the higher Standard Deviation rate is SE with 0.70.

Descriptive			
	group	Mean score for IMP sentences	Mean score for PP sentences
Mean	SHORTER	0.98	1.28
	LONGER	1.29	0.38
	CONTROL	1.76	-1.28
ST. DEVIATION	SHORTER	0.45	0.70
	LONGER	1.22	0.46
	CONTROL	0.83	0.43

Fig 12. Mean and standard deviation of judgement scores given in the Semantic judgment task

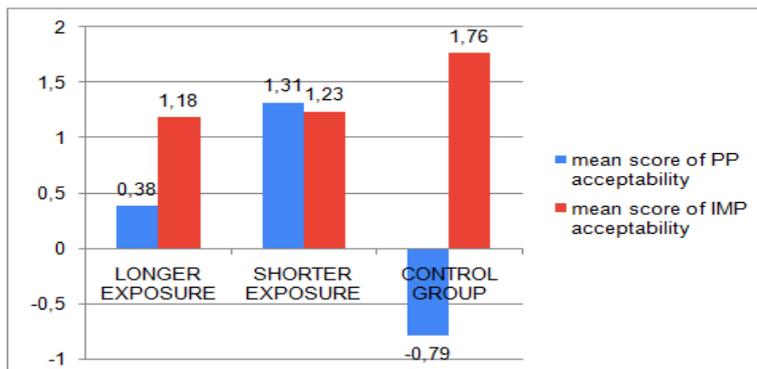


Fig 13. Mean responses on Semantic Interpretation task.

The histogram in figure 13. analysing the mean of judgment score for sentences in the semantic judgment task displays that both LE and Control group correctly gave higher scores of acceptability to sentences expressed in the Imperfetto and lower score to sentences in Passato Prossimo form.

Conversely, the SE group seems to express difficulties in rejecting Passato Prossimo sentences given the higher mean of scores given to Passato Prossimo sentences.

Mean responses of the Semantic Judgment task were submitted to a repeated measures ANOVA with group as the within-group factor and sentence type (Imperfetto and Passato Prossimo) as the within-group factor. The results of the ANOVA showed a main effect for both groups $F(2,22)=6.6820$, $p<0.006$, and sentence type $F(1,22)=12.6667$, $p<0.002$. A post hoc test has been computed too, revealing a significant effect difference between mean judgement points for Imperfetto sentences of SE group and Control group ($p<0.03$), between judgement scores for Imperfetto and Passato Prossimo sentences between LE group and Control group ($p<0.01$) and between the score for Imperfetto sentences between Control group and SE ($p<0.02$). Figure 13. can also give information about the lexical aspect, since the predicates present in this task all belong to the Activities lexical class. Again for SE group, the atelicity of the predicate seems not to have determined the judgment on the verbal form. Despite the lexical class considered and the unboundedness features of the context they still accept the Passato Prossimo as a correct form to express the situations.

In the following example, I will show how the third task was structured. It illustrates a sample test item where the introductory context represents a habitual action.

Fabio ga magnà al parco. -2 -1 0 1 2

Fabio ate at the park.

Fabio magnava al parco. -2 -1 0 1 2

Fabio used to eat at the park.

Preterit sentences using a 5 point Likert scale (-2, -1, 0, +1, +2), where (-2) means completely inappropriate and (+2) completely appropriate. The task involved only activities predicates: *magnare al parco* (eat at the park), *correre col nonno* (run with his granddad), *cantare co a nonna* (sing with his grandma), *ciappare el soe col nonno* (sunbathing with his granddad), *taiava el pan* (slice the bread).

Discussion

Exploring what grammar constructions are affected in Heritage Language provides us lots of new information about properties of language acquisition and change. Furthermore, studies on this particular category of bilinguals, could also offer new insights on cross linguistic tendencies (lexical and grammatical aspect). Despite the small number of participants that took place in this experiment and the academic approach, the results revealed in this study, can have implications for tense and aspect theory. The input that Heritage Speakers are exposed to, seems to have been crucial in explaining the consequences of these studies, given the significant differences between Shorter Group and Longer group. Moreover, despite the considerable number of research on Heritage Speakers, no other studies have been conducted on Venetian dialect. This study made a humble contribution to the literature of Heritage speakers by presenting the first study on Venetian as Heritage language.

This research attempts to answer three main questions: first, are Imperfective aspects a more problematic aspect to master than Perfective? Is there a tendency for Heritage speakers to produce more Passato Prossimo form than Imperfetto, even in Imperfective context? Third, is there a correlation between the use of Passato Prossimo and Imperfetto with the lexical class of the predicates?

To address these questions, the discussion has to be divided for groups, since the results do not lead to a general confirmation or rejection of the predictions.

The LE group has not confirmed the prediction according to which Imperfetto would be a more problematic aspect. The accuracy rate performed in the Imperfective context is considerably high both in the first and in the second task (respectively 77% and 74%). The third and final task was a Semantic judgment task. The background context provided by this task was imperfective, which concerned a child's memories with his grandparents. The LE group, also in this context demonstrated to manage imperfective situations and thus to give higher scores of acceptability to Imperfetto sentences, realising that is the right form to express the Imperfective context given by the tasks. The results showed that they managed to

identify differences between that Venetian morphologically marked Perfective and Imperfective aspect. These findings show evidence that the Longer Exposure group can go beyond the knowledge structure provided by their L1 and have made the appropriate parametric choice.

Regarding the overextension of *passato prossimo* in an imperfective context, there are no significant rates of overproduction in the tasks, though a small part of Longer Exposure participants overextend the use of *Passato Prossimo* also in Imperfective context (13% in the first task 24% in the second). The prediction was based on the fact that, while in Venetian the Perfective/Imperfective distinction is obligatorily marked with morphology, English does not make use of overt morphology to mark aspectual distinction and it uses Past Simple to encode both Perfective and Imperfective interpretation. English speakers are not trained to observe the aspectual distinction (Salaberry 1999). From the results emerged from the analysis, we can state that the Longer Exposure group does not confirm the predictions: they correctly produced Imperfetto form in imperfective context and *Passato Prossimo* in perfective situation. The low rate of *Passato Prossimo* produced in Imperfective context cannot confirm this prediction.

I now turn the discussion into analysing the Shorter Exposure group's results. In fact, significant differences both on accuracy and on *Passato Prossimo* overextension have been found between Shorter Exposure group and Longer Exposure group and between Shorter Exposure group. From the results it emerged that the Shorter Exposure group found Imperfective a more problematic aspect. Effectively the accuracy rate (35% in the first task and 3% in the second task) in Imperfective situations was much lower than the Control group and the Longer Exposure group. The tendency for this group was in fact, to use *Passato Prossimo* also in Imperfective context. For example, in the Picture narrative retelling task, when the protagonists of the story start recalling their past routine, 46% of the Shorter Exposure group expressed the habitual actions using *Passato Prossimo*. The same scenario has been found also in the Simultaneous action task. Despite the discourse prompt given in the task such as *Intanto che Mario, (While Mario..)* provide an progressive situation, participants belonging to this group Produced only 3% of Imperfetto. Also in the third task (Semantic Judgment), the predictions aforementioned have been confirmed. SE group, despite the context given at the beginning of the task being imperfective, they accept *Passato Prossimo* sentences and reject the Imperfective. It appeared that for SE group the Imperfective aspect is more challenging than Perfective.

The results concerning the overextension of *Passato Prossimo* and subsequent simplification of are similar to those that Silvia-Conrvalàn found in 1994 (overextension of the preterit and subsequent simplification of the imperfect in the tense and aspect systems of second generation speakers). More than one reason can be given to explain the overextension of *Passato Prossimo* at the expense of the Imperfect. It is difficult to identify how tense and aspect are affected by contact language. One important factor to consider, is that for Venetian Heritage Speakers in Australia and Canada, Venetian is more incline to change than English due to the fact that English is the dominant language and the increase input of English and the decrease input of Venetian could, make Venetian a more vulnerable language (Rothman 2009). Therefore, if the use of Imperfect form is reduced from standard context in Venetian Heritage Speakers, this may not be caused by English influence, which uses the same verbal form (Past Simple) to encode also different imperfective meanings. There could also be other factors that contribute to the *Passato Prossimo* overextension, but investigating on which is the specific cause of this overextension is beyond the purpose of this thesis.

The other prediction for this study was that the lexical class of verbs (achievements, accomplishments, states and activities) would guide the choice of a verbal form over the other. My prediction is that accomplishment and achievements predicate, due to their telicity, and to the presence of an endpoint, would likely to be expressed with a perfective verbal (*Passato Prossimo*) and that states and activities predicate would be rather expressed with Imperfetto. The first exercise involved both perfective and imperfective situations, and some lexical classes of predicate were inserted in a non-prototypical context to create a conflict and to analyse if the inherent meaning of the verb affected the choice of the verb. These aspectual conflicts can provide information about how Heritage Speakers are using grammatical aspect; if they produced an unexpected verbal form when the context required another, are they encoding lexical aspect by using grammatical aspect? Thus, heritage speakers have two different ways to resolve the aspectual conflict: use the inherent aspectual properties (lexical aspect) or use the sentential aspect to determine which morphology to use to express the verb. Sentential aspect refers to how the context uses adverbial, subordinate clauses to denote aspectual interpretation (Walker 2010). In analysing the frequency of use of *Passato Prossimo* and Imperfetto in combination with lexical classes we can notice no correlation between lexical classes and grammatical classes. The results, in fact, revealed that, although the general tendency for achievements and accomplishment to occur with a Perfective tense and

for states and activities to occur with Imperfetto, the context is the variable that guided the choice of the verbal form: in imperfective situations they produced Imperfetto and in perfective contexts they produced more Passato Prossimo in all of the three tasks they underwent.

The findings emerged from the Longer Exposure group of Heritage speakers suggest that they manage to resolve the aspectual conflicts (achievements and accomplishment with imperfective morphology and states and activity with perfective morphology). In other words, context and speaker intention above all drives the use of the preterit and imperfect for Longer Exposure group.

The finding that the the Heritage Speakers do not use the intrinsic meaning to the verb is not compatible with the predictions of the central claim of the Aspect Hypothesis refers to that “first and second language learners will initially be influenced by the inherent semantic aspect of verbs or predicates in the acquisition of tense and aspect markers associated with or affixed to these verbs” (Andersen & Shirai, 1994). The results of this task are consistent with the literature of Silva-Corvalàn (1994) which found that in the case of discourse-pragmatic contexts, the choice of in verbal form over another is largely conditioned by discourse expression and adverbs, provided by the context. In this case, the context provided by the task is stronger than the lexical class of the predicate for motivating the use of Imperfetto and Passato Prossimo.

As regards, the third research question regarding the lexical classes of predicates, SE behaved differently from the other two groups. From the analysis it emerged in fact, that Passato Prossimo mostly occurred with Accomplishment and Achievements both in Perfective and Imperfective situations. Conversely to the LE group, the SE group appeared to be sensitive to the inherent meaning of the predicate and not considering the context provided by the task. Anyway, the fact that the SE group produced more Passato Prossimo form with accomplishment and achievement predicated does not totally confirm the prediction that they use the lexical class of verbs to determine what tense to use. In fact, the atelic and durative features of activities predicates seemed not to be taken into account, since they were mostly expressed with Passato Prossimo as well. The same trend can be observed with the Simultaneous Action task, which entails a progressive structure. Also in this case SE group produced a high percentage of Passato Prossimo with accomplishments and achievements, but also with activities predicates. Also in the Semantic judgement task, the predicates were

all activities, but SE groups mostly give higher scores of acceptability to Passato Prossimo sentences.

The only class verbs that are worth mentioning and which demonstrate a high rate of variability among groups are Stative verbs.

In fact, despite the low percentage of Imperfetto produced by the groups, Imperfetto's forms have not been completely omitted. In the small group of states predicates provided by the task, five participants out of eight stopped producing Passato Prossimo form and correctly produced imperfetto form. It is worth underlining that the stative verb considered was "era" (was).

The analysis emerged from the statistical analysis demonstrating that in states verbs are the only lexical class that seemed to have guided the choice of the form. The analysis on stative verbs is referred only to the first task, since in task 2 and 3 no state predicates were present. As we have already mentioned in the results chapter, the Longer exposure group, with stative verbs, correctly used Passato Prossimo in Perfective situations and Imperfetto with Imperfective situations, though an higher percentage of Imperfetto form has been produced too (42%) even in the Perfective context. It is important to mention that the Control group correctly produced all the expected verbs in all the three tasks and excellently managed to resolve the lexical aspectual conflict provided by the context. But with state predicate the scenario is different both for the Control group and also for the Shorter group, which for the first time, does not overextend the use of Passato Prossimo even in Imperfective context. In the retelling story task, two stative verbs were present. The first was inserted in order to describe the two protagonist in their childhood:

item: e do soree da piccole (essere) tanto diverse → "*The sisters, when they were young, (be) very different*"

target: e do soree da piccole **iera** tanto diverse → "*The sisters, when they were young, were very different*"

The second stative verbs was "pensare" (think) and it was inserted when an unexpected event interrupted their flashback about their childhood and the narration go back in the reality:

Item: All'improvviso (sentire) dee gocce de acqua cadere e (**Pensare**) che ghe fosse un problema → *"They suddenly (hear) water drop falling and they (think) there was a problem"*

Target: All'improvviso ga sentio dee gocce de acqua cadere e e **ga pensà** che ghe fosse un problema → *"They suddenly heard water drop falling and they thought there was a problem"*

With the first state predicate "era" (was), Five Shorter group participants stopped producing Passato Prossimo and correctly produced Imperfetto, two participants used the Infinite verbal form (essere) and the other participant used Passato Prossimo (e ze state). In the Longer exposure group only three participants produced passato prossimo, the other nine participants correctly used Imperfetto. It seems that the unbounded variable "da piccole" (*when they were young*), which elicits an Imperfective context, together with the lexical class of the predicate (states), guided the choice between Passato Prossimo and Imperfetto, leading to prefer Imperfetto.

With the other state predicated "pensare" (think), both SE group and LE group produced more Passato Prossimo. In this case, the lexical class of the verbs appeared not to be considered by the groups of heritage speakers, which used the variable given by the context (all'improvviso, "suddenly") to determine morphology. By contrast, the Control group, which despite the Perfective context, preferred to express "Pensare" with Imperfetto. Only in this situation, the intrinsic meaning of the predicate has been used to determine the morphology by the Control group. The context given by the task may suggest that this would only be said in reference to a closed and thus perfective event, by considering the lexical class one would predict more Imperfetto.

The fact that Longer Exposure group and Shorter exposure group expressed the states predicate "pensare" with Passato Prossimo, may suggest that, not only they have been guided by the context, but also that they might have accepted Passato Prossimo as the default form. In fact, in English that sentence "E pensava che ghe fosse un problema" can only be expressed with a Perfective form (Simple Past): *They thought there was a problem*. While habitual events, such as the reminiscing of past routines, can be expressed in English both using the construction *would to/used to* and the Past Simple, "pensava" can only be expressed in English with the Past Simple. This suggests that Heritage Speakers may have transferred English features to Venetian dialect.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that our predictions were partly confirmed. The main differences that have been found is between the Shorter group and Longer group. Shorter groups are found to find the Imperfective aspect more challenging than Longer Exposure Group, which instead managed to master the aspect with a great performance. As regards the Passato Prossimo overextension prediction we can again confirm it for the Shorter group, which used the Passato Prossimo even in Imperfective situations. For the Longer exposure group, no relevant Passato Prossimo overextensions emerged.

Concerning the lexical class predictions, we can confirm that is rejected from the Longer Exposure group, which did not make use of the inherent meaning of the predicate to determine the overt morphology and, mostly use context to choose what verbal form to use. In the Shorter Exposure group it has been found a high number of Passato Prossimo production with accomplishments and achievements predicates even in Imperfective context and also with activities predicate. The only aspectual class which displays a high grade of variability is state predicates. It appeared that with state predicates, Control group, which correctly produced the right verbal form in the right context, has been guided by the lexical class of the verb.

The data emerged from the tasks revealed a significant difference between the two groups of Heritage Speakers that has been created to divide participants according to their quantity of Venetian Exposure. As the name of the group recalls, this study can be taken into account to prove how a reduced exposure input of a language can lead to loss or affect grammatical areas and, by contrast, a longer exposure to a language can lead to a higher proficiency.

It is important to underline that all the findings that have been found from this analysis are still preliminary due to the small number of participants and the small number of items provided in the tasks. Despite this, this study provides new data from the unexplored population that is Venetian Heritage Speakers.

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