Marko Simonović[*]

STABLE VARIATION AND LANGUAGE CHANGE IN WRITTEN FIUMAN

Abstract: Fiuman is an endangered Venetian variety spoken in Rijeka/Fiume, Croatia, as well as in the Fiuman diaspora. Studies on the use of Fiuman in Croatia consistently indicate a decline in its usage, yet underscore the significance of written Fiuman, especially in online interactions (Plešković, Kraš & Drljača Margić 2019). Moreover, the self-perceived engagement with Fiuman and positive attitudes towards its maintenance correlate positively with higher educational levels (Plešković, Drljača Margić & Kraš 2021), indicating that Fiuman is predominantly used by speakers who are also proficient writers. This study examines variation in modern written Fiuman based on two text collections: a growing collection of Fiuman texts published between 1968 and 2024 in the (bi-)monthly *La Voce di Fiume* (currently app. 114K words), produced predominantly by diaspora Fiuman speakers, and a collection of texts published between 2018 and 2023 in the Fiuman-language column *La Scartaza* (app. 27K words), produced by the writer Laura Marchig, a resident of Rijeka/Fiume. Four case studies targeting different linguistic variables are presented, and evidence for language change and the specialisation of variants is considered. The targeted variables are: the quality of the first vowel in the word for 'so' (*cu̱s(s)ì* vs. *co̱s(s)ì*), the strong 3rd person feminine pronoun (*ela* vs. *essa*), the verbal negation particle (*no* vs. *non*), theme vowel mutation in the formation of the future and the conditional (e.g. *ciam-a̱-r-à* vs. *ciam-e̱-r-à* 'call.FUT.2/3SG' from *ciam-a̱-r* 'call.INF'). The results show that while none of the explored variants is fully

---

[*] University of Graz
    Department of Slavic Studies
    marko.simonovic@uni-graz.at
    https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9651-6399

absent from modern written Fiuman and most variables exhibit a pattern of stable variation, there are clear indications that the future/conditional forms without vowel mutation (e.g. *ciam-a̱-r-à*) are becoming less frequent in the observed period. In three out of four case studies, evidence is presented for a linguistic (i.e. phonological and morphological) specialisation of the variants.

Keywords: Fiuman, Venetian, written language, variation, language change, corpus study

1. Introduction

Fiuman (endonym; *fiumano* in Italian, *fijumanski* in Croatian) is an endangered variety of Colonial Venetian spoken in Rijeka/Fiume, Croatia, and within the Fiuman diaspora, mainly in Italy. The term Colonial Venetian (introduced by Bidwell 1967) refers to Venetian varieties that emerged in different locations, primarily along the eastern Adriatic coast, where Venetian was overlaid on a non-Venetian (Romance or Slavic) linguistic substratum. This linguistic overlay has led to a unique set of features shared among these varieties but uncommon in other Venetian dialects (see Zamboni (1979) for a general overview of the features of Venetian, and Zamboni (1974) for an overview of the Venetian dialects spoken in the Italian region of Veneto). The area along the eastern Adriatic coast where Colonial Venetian is spoken has shrunk considerably in the course of the 20th century. While Colonial Venetian was the dominant urban vernacular in many cities along the coast at the century's start, Trieste is now the only city where this remains the case. In several cities, such as Split/Spalato and Kotor/Cattaro, Colonial Venetian has become entirely extinct and is minoritised in others. Rijeka/Fiume is nowadays the easternmost location where a Colonial Venetian variety remains vital, meaning that it forms the eastern endpoint of a continuum of Colonial Venetian varieties extending from Trieste along the Istrian coast. Colonial Venetian in the Eastern Adriatic is spoken across three countries (Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia). It is present in locations where Italian is the sole official language (e.g. Trieste, Muggia), in areas with some level of bilingualism between the dominant Slovenian/Croatian and the minoritised Italian (most locations in Istria), as well as in areas where Croatian is the only official language (Rijeka/Fiume, and the islands of Cres/Cherso and Lošinj/Lussino).

While Italian and Fiuman have no official status in the city of Rijeka/ Fiume and are not dominant in any particular area of the city, both are used extensively within the numerous institutions of the Italian community. These include four primary schools, one secondary school, the publishing house EDIT, the daily newspaper *La Voce del Popolo*, the Italian theatre troupe, and others.

The number of Fiuman speakers in Rijeka/Fiume cannot be directly gauged from census data, as the Croatian census includes just one question concerning the mother tongue, permitting only one answer per respondent (Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2022). Speakers of Fiuman residing in Rijeka/ Fiume all have an advanced command of Croatian, and many use Croatian in more domains than they use Italian or Fiuman. This means that most, if not all, inhabitants of Rijeka/Fiume who declared Italian as their native language (1,347 persons, or 1.25% of the city's population in 2021) are likely Fiuman speakers, but there are arguably many others who also speak Fiuman but have not declared Italian as their mother tongue.

For the Fiuman diaspora, no comparable figures are available. The Fiuman diaspora emerged after the Second World War, when more than 95% of the population left Rijeka/Fiume, predominantly relocating to Italy. The exodus is often viewed, especially by authors from the Fiuman community, as the point at which Fiuman split into two dialects: that of the exiled Fiumani (esuli), more strongly influenced by standard Italian, and that of those who remained (rimasti), more heavily influenced by Croatian (Gottardi 2007, Blagoni 2020). Like the rimasti, who are not concentrated in specific neighbourhoods of Rijeka/Fiume, the esuli mainly use Fiuman within their families and in the context of numerous organisations, some shared with Istrian and Dalmatian esuli and some exclusively for Fiumani. The two most significant organisations for exiled Fiumani are the Associazione Fiumani Italiani nel Mondo, headquartered in Padua, and the Società di Studi Fiumani in Rome, though many active esuli organisations operate outside Italy.

1.1. Vitality of Fiuman

Studies on the use of Fiuman in Rijeka/Fiume consistently highlight a perceived steady decline in its everyday spoken usage. This is also consistent with the fact that the reported frequency of Fiuman usage is significantly lower among younger speakers compared to older generations. However, studies also

emphasise that "written use of Fiuman, primarily in social networks, in text messaging and via e-mail, seems to be on the rise" (Plešković, Kraš & Drljača Margić 2019). Additionally, self-reported engagement with Fiuman, along with positive attitudes towards its preservation, has been found to correlate with higher levels of education (Plešković, Drljača Margić & Kraš 2021). This suggests that Fiuman is primarily maintained by speakers who possess strong literacy skills (presumably both in Croatian and standard Italian).

Unfortunately, no comparable research exists on the use of Fiuman among the exile community. Based on anecdotal evidence, however, I would argue that the trends observed in Rijeka/Fiume are even more pronounced within the diaspora. Despite the likely higher number of individuals identifying as Fiumani and more speakers of Fiuman within the diaspora, Gottardi's (2007: 17) assertion that "before long, [the Fiuman of the rimasti] will be the only Fiuman dialect still in use" reflects a widely held perception that Fiuman has not been transmitted to younger generations in the diaspora for quite some time. Additionally, the importance of written Fiuman for maintaining the language has been crucial within the diaspora since the exodus, as many Fiumani relied on diaspora publications as one of the few avenues for community connection. This trend has become even more pronounced in recent years, with numerous testimonies on social media from Fiumani who can now only communicate in Fiuman through these platforms.

1.2. Written Fiuman

Although Fiuman was never in official use, evidence indicates that it was widely written in the city from at least the second half of the 19th century. This is exemplified by works such as Schittar's *Rime de Fiume* (1888/2018), a Fiuman-only book featuring drama and poetry, which marks an early contribution to the literary landscape. During this period, newspapers like *La Voce del Popolo* (1889–1921) and *Il Popolo* (1902–1920) regularly published poems, columns, and letters to the editor in Fiuman, further establishing its presence in print.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, literary production in Fiuman continued, particularly within the rimasti community, as documented in recent overviews by community members (Mestrovich et al. 2020, Mazzieri Sanković & Đurđulov 2021). This period also saw an increased

focus on language description, eventually resulting in the publication of two significant dictionaries in Italy: the *Dizionario del dialetto fiumano con cenni storici, culturali, politici e sociali sulla città di Fiume* [Dictionary of the Fiuman Dialect with Historical, Cultural, Political, and Social Notes on the City of Fiume] (Ballarini 2010), published in Rome as an extended edition of Samani (1978), and the *Dizionario fiumano-italiano, italiano-fiumano* [Fiuman-Italian, Italian-Fiuman Dictionary] (Pafundi 2011), published in Padua.

Most importantly for our purposes, Fiuman has featured in various regular publications by Fiumani organisations, both in Rijeka/Fiume and throughout the diaspora. The two most significant publications are *La Voce di Fiume*, from the diaspora community, and *La Tore*, from the rimasti community. *La Voce di Fiume* has included articles in Fiuman since 1968 (with its first edition dating back to 1966), showcasing over 30 authors, many of whom contributed regular columns. In the rimasti community, *La Tore*, the annual bulletin of the Italian Community of Rijeka/Fiume, has been published since 1971, providing another platform for Fiuman texts and currently offering the widest variety of Fiuman content, with several active, recurring authors.

Finally, in recent years, this landscape has been complemented by an online column: *La Scartaza*, launched in 2018 by writer Laura Marchig, residing in Rijeka/Fiume.

1.3. Variation within (written) Fiuman

As mentioned above, Fiuman is part of the Colonial Venetian continuum, which also includes the dialect of Trieste and the Venetian dialects of Istria. In the context of these dialects, Fiuman is commonly perceived as highly "Tuscanised", as it displays certain features that can be interpreted as influences of standard Italian. Table 1 shows four examples of such forms.

Gloss	Istrian+Triestin	Fiuman	Standard Italian
'soap'	savon	sapon/savon	sapone
'Christmas'	nadal	natal/nadal	natale
'to close'	serar	ciuder/serar	chiudere
'sleeps'	dormi	dorme	dorme

Table 1: Four (partial) differences where the Fiuman-specific form can be interpreted as an Italian influence.

The first three examples in Table 1 illustrate the most common pattern of variation in Fiuman, with one variant aligning with the neighbouring Venetian dialects and the other with standard Italian. Variation within Fiuman is well documented in existing descriptions (e.g. Ballarini 2010 contains all six variants mentioned above, even though *Natal* only appears in examples), but the way speakers approach this variation has not been systematically studied so far. Based on anecdotal evidence and discussions from the Facebook page *Solo robe in fiuman*, I would tentatively assert that there is no clear indexicality of the variants (i.e. there is no clear perception of certain variants correlating with specific areas of the city, social classes, genders, etc.). Therefore, when confronted with variants they do not personally use but find plausibly Fiuman, speakers often reference observations from older community members, who recall that pre-exodus Fiuman varied across different city areas, social classes, and other factors. When a variant not used by the speaker is not accepted as Fiuman, similarity to other varieties is often cited to justify its exclusion. To use a simplified example, if a speaker who uses *savon* for 'soap' wants to exclude *sapon* as bona fide Fiuman, they might argue that *sapon* cannot be Fiuman because it is influenced by standard Italian (from *sapone*) and *savon* has to be the original Fiuman form. Conversely, if a *sapon*-sayer wants to exclude *savon*, they might argue that *savon* is Istrian/Triestin, while *sapon* is the true Fiuman form.

Examples of such argumentation can also be found in publications in Fiuman. The following excerpt contains an author's reaction to a metalinguistic comment from a reader who argues that the author's forms *così* 'so' and *loganighe* 'sausages' should be corrected to *cusì* and *luganighe*.

(1) From *La Voce di Fiume*, July/August 2020
"Per cominciar a Fiume parlando patocio se dise "loganighe" e "così", co la "u" ti la trovi nei vari dialeti istriani. […] Ti calcola anche con l'esodo in più de cento campi profughi se semo tuti misiadi e inevitabilmente se ga misià anche le parole."

["To begin with, in Fiume, in real Fiuman, one says *loganighe* and *così*; you can find the version with the 'u' in various Istrian dialects. […] Consider also that after the exodus, in more than

a hundred refugee camps, we were all mixed together, and inevitably, the words intermingled as well."]

Notably, the author invokes pre-exodus Fiuman as the model but does not consider the possibility that this pre-exodus Fiuman had multiple variants or that there might have been a (legitimate) linguistic development after the exodus that brought Fiuman closer to Istrian. Rather, the assumption is that true Fiuman had and has only one variant, which is not the one found in Istrian dialects.

1.4. Aims of the present study

Against the background sketched in this section, the present study aims to describe and analyse cases of variation in written Fiuman based on text samples covering different periods of post-exodus Fiuman. The main question will be whether there is evidence of diachronic change in the specific cases examined. In instances where variation is stable, the key question will be whether evidence can be found for the specialisation of the variants.

As the first systematic corpus-based study of variation in written Fiuman, this study is exploratory in nature, and its conclusions will be used to formulate hypotheses for future work on a larger sample.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the materials and methods of the study; Section 3 presents the results, the analysis, and a preliminary discussion; and Section 4 provides conclusions and outlines pathways for further research.

2. Materials and methods

This study investigates variation in written Fiuman using two samples: a growing collection of texts from *La Voce di Fiume* (currently approximately 114K words) and all texts from *La Scartaza* published up to the submission date of this chapter (approximately 27K words).

The *La Voce di Fiume* sample spans from 1968 to 2024 and includes all texts from the years 1968, 1972, 1974, 1979, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020, 2023, and 2024 (the last year until the July/August

number, the last one available at the moment of submission). As texts from the 1960s and 1970s were relatively sparse, all available Fiuman texts from this period are included. Starting in 1980, texts from years ending in 0 or 5 were selected, capturing data at 5-year intervals through 2020. Additionally, texts from 2023 and 2024 were included, as 2025 data is not yet available. These texts were primarily authored by Fiuman speakers outside Rijeka/Fiume, with contributions from approximately 30 individuals; however, the exact number is challenging to determine due to frequent pseudonym use.

The second sample comprises texts from the online column *La Scartaza*, authored by Laura Marchig, a writer based in Rijeka/Fiume, covering entries from 2017 to 2023.

The inclusion of these two samples and the exclusion of texts from *La Tore* and other publications were based not on methodological criteria but on text availability and resource limitations. Thus, it is essential to note that results from the two samples are not directly comparable—not only because they cover vastly different periods but also due to differing production circumstances. The *La Scartaza* texts were produced using a word processor, enabling the author to standardise linguistic features, whereas a vast majority of the *La Voce di Fiume* texts were submitted by post to the editorial team, sometimes accompanied by explicit instructions to preserve the original language.

Texts from both publications were extracted and stored in separate documents for each year. This structure allowed for efficient year-by-year examination. The texts were then imported into #LancsBox (Brezina & Platt 2024), a software that allows searching texts using regular expressions. For the sake of illustration, the search results for the variable *luganiga/loganiga* 'sausage' in the *La Voce di Fiume* sample are shown in Image 1.

File ▲	Left	Node	Right
1979VDF.txt	ga risposto: « Capuzi garbi cole	loganighe	e, se non te dispiase,
1980VDF.txt	e, ancora dela Letizia, le	luganighe	cragnoline col cren. Molto aprezado
1980VDF.txt	man panini col butiro, polpete,	luganighe,	slepe de carne, tochi de
1985VDF.txt	mercato in Braida) le jera	loganighe	fate de sangue fresco con
1985VDF.txt	ga la panza piena (de	loganighe	e de bira) quando che
1985VDF.txt	pasta e fasoi con le	loganighe,	e, per farghe una sorpresa
1985VDF.txt	de tost, ovi cola panzeta,	oganighete	color grigio-rosa roste, aringhe scaldade
1990VDF.txt	i zigari CAVOUR, grossi come	luganighe,	che costava la belezza de
2005VDF.txt	butiro, orzo e fasoi con	luganighe	cragnoline fate venir aposta de
2005VDF.txt	ben, tocchi de persuto e	loganighe	col cren". El cren mi
2005VDF.txt	mi non so, ma le	luganighe	e persuto...? Però, dai un
2010VDF.txt	la polenta e senza la	luganiga,	perché era la Vigilia, se
2010VDF.txt	e capuzi garbi con le	luganighe,	che tuti va anche in
2020VDF.txt	Fiume parlando patocio se dise "	loganighe"	e "così", co la "u"
2020VDF.txt	e così persuti, panzeta e	loganighe,	non ghe digo quanti zvirchi,
2020VDF.txt	fio del beker che vendeva	loganighe.	El zigava, loganighe bone, loganighe
2020VDF.txt	che vendeva loganighe. El zigava,	loganighe	bone, loganighe bone pien de
2020VDF.txt	loganighe. El zigava, loganighe bone,	loganighe	bone pien de entusiasmo. Ma
2020VDF.txt	alora con vose più alta,	loganighe	bonee, loganighe bonee. Niente de
2020VDF.txt	vose più alta, loganighe bonee,	loganighe	bonee. Niente de far, de
2020VDF.txt	ogi son andada dal beker,	loganighe	de porco e una struza

Image 1: Search results for the forms of *luganiga/loganiga* 'sausage' in #LancsBox.

The image shows the exact query used for the search: [word="l(o|u)ganig.*"]. This query returns all strings that begin with the character *l*, followed by either *o* or *u*, then the sequence *ganig*, and ending with any subsequent characters. The final wildcard was included to capture both the singular and plural forms (ending in *-a* and *-e*, respectively) as well as any further derivations, such as the diminutive plural form *loganighete* found

among the search results. The results shown in Image 1 are arranged by the name of the source file. Since the files are named after the year the texts were published, this arrangement provides an initial impression of the distribution of variants over the observed period.

The search results were subsequently cleaned and manually annotated in Google Sheets, where data visualisation and initial analyses were conducted. When applicable, further statistical analysis was performed using VassarStats. Again, for illustration purposes, Figure 1 shows the data from Image 1 visualised per year using Google Sheets.
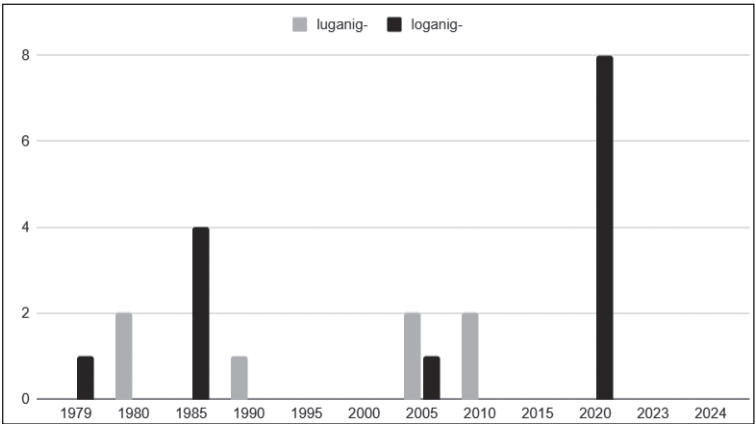

Figure 1: The distribution of *loganig-* and *luganig-* in
La Voce di Fiume visualised using Google Sheets.

3. Results, analysis and discussion

This section presents the findings from the four case studies, each targeting a different domain. Table 2 provides an overview of the targeted variables, the variants, and the matches (partial or full) with Triestin[1], Istrian[2] (i.e. Istro-Venetian), and standard Italian.

---

[1] This representation of Triestin aligns with Zeper (2015).
[2] Although Istro-Venetian shows considerable internal variation, I am not aware of any varieties that deviate from what is outlined in the table. This is also consistent with recent representations of the dialects of Pula/Pola (Buršić Giudici & Orbanich 2009) and Buje/Buie (Dussich 2019).

Variable	Variant 1	Variant 2	Match with Triestin	Match with Istrian	Match with standard Italian
First vowel in the word for 'so'	*c<u>o</u>s(s)ì*	*c<u>u</u>s(s)ì*	V2	V2	V1
Strong 3rd person feminine pronoun	*es(s)a*	*ela*	V2	V2	(V1/V2)
Verbal negation particle	*non*	*no*	V2	V2	V1
Mutation of the theme vowel *a* in the FUT/COND	*ciam-<u>e</u>-r-à* 'call. FUT.2/3SG'	*ciam-<u>a</u>-r-à* 'call. FUT.2/3SG'	V1	V2	V1

Table 2: The four case studies: variables, variants and matches with Triestin, Istrian and standard Italian.

Several remarks are in order regarding the overview in Table 2. First, the bracketed characters in *cos(s)ì*, *cus(s)ì*, and *es(s)a* indicate that searches included hits both with and without the bracketed character, as the voiceless fricative [s] is represented as either <ss> or <s>. The brackets for the match with standard Italian in both *ela* and *es(s)a* signify that while both *ella* and *essa* are attested, they are marked forms in modern Standard Italian.[3] The dominant Standard Italian form *lei* is used in Fiuman, but exclusively as the second-person polite form. Finally, the variants for the fourth variable exemplify a specific future-tense form of the verb *ciam-a-r* ('to call'). In practice, any verb from this conjugation in the future or conditional could illustrate the forms with and without mutation.

3.1. Case study 1: Saying 'so'

This variable was already mentioned in example (1) in 1.3, where a *La Voce di Fiume* author commented on the form *cu(s)sì* being Istrian rather

---

3   A further difference between Fiuman and standard Italian lies in the fact that in standard Italian *essa* coexists with other pronouns derived from the stem *ess-* (the masculine singular *esso*, the masculine plural *essi*, and the feminine plural *esse*), whereas in Fiuman, only *essa* is attested. Similarly, *ela* is the only strong pronoun with this stem in Fiuman, mirroring *ella* in standard Italian. However, some Venetian dialects do exhibit multiple strong pronouns derived from the stem *el-*. For instance, Zamboni (1974: 20) describes a contrast between *elo* 'he' and *ela* 'she' in the dialect of Venice.

than Fiuman. The two big dictionaries disagree in the treatment of these variants: whereas Ballarini (2010) includes both variants, Pafundi (2011) records only the form *cussì*.

To identify all tokens of the two variants in the samples, a search was performed using the query [word="c(o|u)(s|ss)(i|i'|ì)"]. The results indicate that both samples showed a preference for *cus(s)ì*. However, the distribution of the two variants differed significantly between the samples, as shown in Table 3: while *cos(s)ì* appears in over a third of the tokens in the *La Voce di Fiume* sample, *cus(s)ì* is the sole form found in the *La Scartaza* sample.

Sample	cos(s)ì	cus(s)ì
La Scartaza	0	54 (100%)
La Voce di Fiume	121 (37%)	204 (63%)

Table 3: *cos(s)ì* vs. *cus(s)ì* in the two samples.

Given that *La Voce di Fiume* spans over five decades and exhibits variation, the question arises as to whether it shows evidence of language change towards the pattern observed in *La Scartaza*, i.e. a shift to *cus(s)ì* as the only form. As shown in Figure 2, this does not appear to be the case. If anything, the opposite trend is observed: *cus(s)ì* remains the dominant form until 2020, after which *cos(s)ì* becomes virtually the only form.
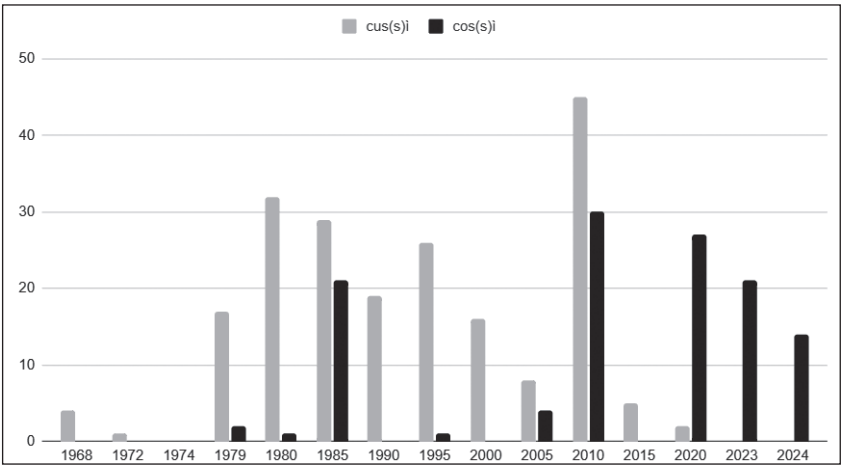

Figure 2: The distribution of *cos(s)ì* vs. *cus(s)ì* by year in *La Voce di Fiume*.

However, the dominance of *cos(s)ì* may be related to the specific intervention cited in example (1) in 1.3, when the claim was made that *cus(s)ì* is Istrian. Notably, the same individual authored the majority of texts produced after this assertion.

In summary, the analysis of the variation between *cos(s)ì* and *cus(s)ì* reveals stable variation, with both forms being well-attested over at least the last four decades. However, in recent years, we may be observing a trend among writers toward unifying their own usage, a process facilitated by modern text processors. To determine whether the *La Voce di Fiume* sample includes texts by authors who use both forms in free variation, we would need author annotations—an aspect of annotation not currently available.

3.2. Case study 2: Strong 3rd person feminine pronoun

The variation between *essa* and *ela* is well-attested. Already Depoli (1913) mentions both, even though he says that *ela* is rare. Ballarini (2010)'s dictionary also includes both variants, as does Pafundi (2011).

An important feature of the Fiuman pronominal system, which is also Venetian in general, is the distinction between strong and clitic pronouns. Strong pronouns do not differentiate between subject and object forms (Table 4), whereas clitics have specialised forms for subjects[4], direct objects, and datives (Table 5).

	Singular		Plural	
	Subject	Object	Subject	Object
1	mi		noi	
2	ti		voi	
2P	lei		voi	
3M	lui		lori	
3F	essa/ela		lore	

Table 4: Strong personal pronouns in Fiuman.

---

4   Fiuman subject clitics are always proclitics. None of the consulted descriptions mentions the enclitic interrogative forms attested in other Venetian dialects, and I have not encountered any remnants of these forms in the samples. For example, while Zamboni (1974: 25) describes the contrast *ti ga* 'you have' vs. *gastu* 'do you have?' in the dialect of Venice, in Fiuman, *ti ga* is the only attested form.

	Singular			Plural		
	Subject	Direct Object	Dative	Subject	Direct Object	Dative
1	/	me		/	ne	
2	ti	te		/	ve	
2P	la		ghe			
3M	el	lo		i	li	ghe
3F	la			le		

Table 5: Clitic personal pronouns in Fiuman.

Returning to the variation between *essa* and *ela*, the query [word="e(s|ss|l)a"] was used to identify all tokens of the target pronoun. The results reveal significant differences between the two samples, as shown in Table 6. As in the previous study, the *La Scartaza* sample exhibits total unification: only *ela* appears in it. In contrast, the *La Voce di Fiume* sample shows dominance of *es(s)a*.

Sample	es(s)a	ela
La Scartaza	0	12 (100%)
La Voce di Fiume	33 (60%)	22 (40%)

Table 6: *essa* vs. *ela* in the two samples.

Considering that Depoli (1913) marks *ela* as rare and that it is not rare in any of our samples, it is pertinent to test the hypothesis that *es(s)a* might be losing ground to *ela* over time in *La Voce di Fiume* as well. However, as shown in Figure 3, our results do not support this assumption. In summary, we observe another case of stable variation, with both forms having fairly recent attestations.
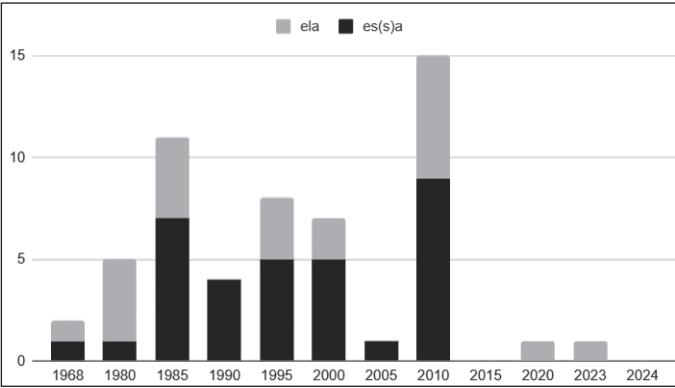
Figure 3: The distribution of *e(s)sa* vs. *ela* by year in *La Voce di Fiume*.

Considering the generalisations presented above regarding the lack of a subject/object distinction in strong pronouns in Venetian, it is quite unexpected that *es(s)a* and *ela* would specialise in this respect. However, our results suggest otherwise. Specifically, *es(s)a* is used significantly more often in the subject function, while *ela* appears more frequently in the object function (Figure 4). Despite the small sample size, the difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.5$, $p < 0.05$). It is also noticeable that neither is attested in the direct object function.
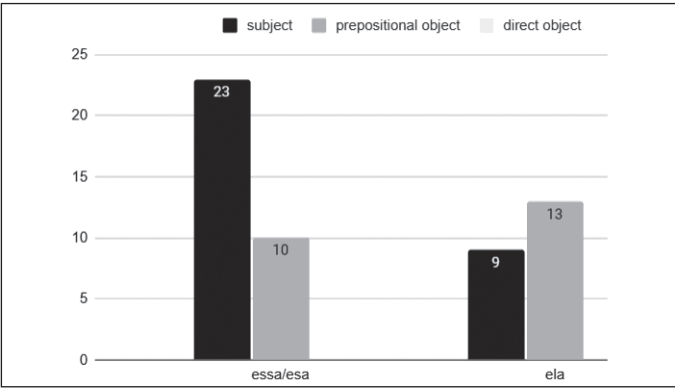

Figure 4: The distribution of *e(s)sa* vs. *ela* according to syntactic function in *La Voce di Fiume*.

3.3. Case study 3: Verbal negation

The variation between *non* and *no* as particles used for verbal negation preceding the verb (and any verbal clitics) was already described by Depoli

(1913). To identify all instances of *non* and *no* in this position, a search was conducted with the query [word="no('|n|)"]. Manual data cleaning in this case led to the exclusion of a substantial portion of the initial sample, as *non* and *no* are also used with other parts of speech. Additionally, *no* serves as a negative response particle, question tag, and so on. To keep the sample uniform, only the cases where *non* and *no* negate a finite form of the verb were included. The results reveal significant differences between the two samples, as shown in Table 7. *La Scartaza* displays almost complete unification in favour of *no*. In contrast, the *La Voce di Fiume* sample presents a more balanced picture, with a slight dominance of *non*.

Sample	non	no
La Scartaza	5 (2%)	325 (98%)
La Voce di Fiume	602 (60%)	409 (40%)

Table 7: *non* vs. *no* in the two samples.

As in previous studies, a year-by-year overview of the results for *La Voce di Fiume* (Figure 5) does not indicate a diachronic shift towards the pattern observed in *La Scartaza*. Instead, it appears that *no* is losing ground in *La Voce di Fiume*.
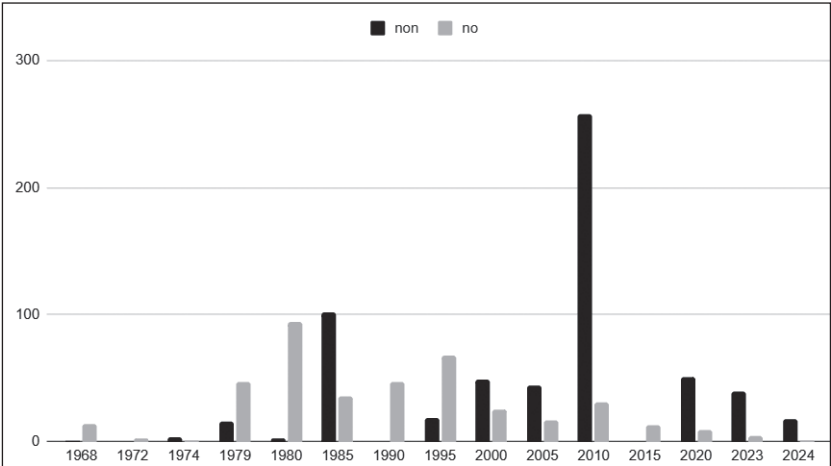

Figure 5: The distribution of *non* vs. *no* by year in *La Voce di Fiume*.

Given the substantial variation between *non* and *no* in the *La Voce di Fiume* sample, additional annotation and analysis were conducted to determine whether the distribution of the two variants is phonologically optimising—that is, whether *no* occurs more often before consonants and *non* before vowels[5]. For this purpose, all tokens were annotated according to the following segment. Cases where the negation particle phonologically incorporates the subject clitic were excluded from this part of the analysis. Such cases include two third-person masculine clitics, where the singular clitic *el* may fuse with the negation particle, resulting in [nol], and the plural clitic *i* may similarly merge, yielding [noj]. Since the spelling does not indicate syllabification in *no+i*, all cases involving the plural clitic were excluded, while for the singular subject clitic, only cases plausibly pronounced as [nol] (e.g. *nol*, *no l*, *no' l*, *no'l*) were excluded.

The results shown in Figure 6 indicate a clear tendency towards a phonologically optimising distribution of the two variants. This difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.6$, $p < 0.05$).
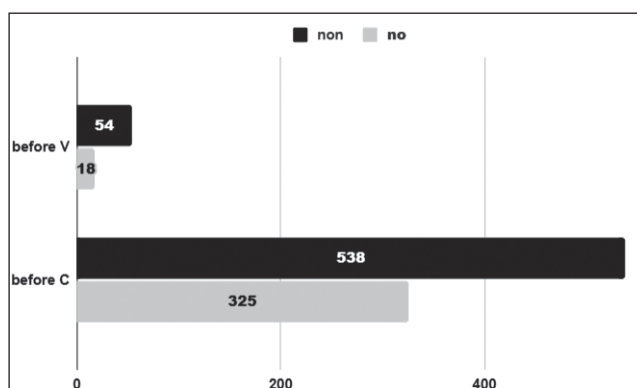

Figure 6: The distribution of *non* vs. *no* by the following segment in *La Voce di Fiume*.

In summary, the results indicate overall stable variation between the two variants, with strong evidence that an emergent, phonologically conditioned specialisation of the variants may exist in some speakers.

---

[5] Unlike the situation in standard Italian and some Venetian varieties, where *no* and *non* feature different vowels, in Fiuman, the vowel is the same, as Fiuman does not distinguish between close-mid and open-mid vowels. In fact, having a five-vowel system is one of the most prominent features of Colonial Venetian varieties, as discussed by Bidwell (1967).

3.4. Case study 4: Theme vowel mutation in the future and conditional

The final case study focuses on theme vowel mutation in the future and conditional forms. As shown in Table 8, verbs with infinitive forms ending in *-ar* (e.g. *ciamar* 'to call') either retain the unmodified infinitive as the base for future/conditional forms or the theme vowel shifts from *a* to *e*.

	No mutation system		Mutation system	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1	ciam-a-r-ò	ciam-a-r-emo	ciam-e-r-ò	ciam-e-r-emo
2	ciam-a-r-à	ciam-a-r-è	ciam-e-r-à	ciam-e-r-è
3	ciam-a-r-à	ciam-a-r-à	ciam-e-r-à	ciam-e-r-à

Table 8: The future tense forms of the verb *ciamar* 'to call'.

Unlike previous cases of variation, all descriptions (e.g. Berghoffer 1894/1992, Depoli 1913, Pafundi 2011) only mention the version without theme vowel mutation, which is also the inherited Venetian form. Although Ballarini (2010) does not include a grammar section, both mutated and unmutated forms in the future or conditional can be found in the examples (e.g. *parl-a-r-i-imo* 'we would speak' from *parlar* 'to speak' on page 205, but *merit-e-r-i-i* 'you would merit' from *meritar* 'to merit' on page 270).

To capture all future and conditional forms of the a-conjugation, the query [word=".*(a|e)r(o|ò|o'|a|à|a'|e|è|e'|emo|io|ii|iimo|ia|imo|ìo|ìi|ìimo|ìa|ì mo)"] was used. The search results were manually cleaned and annotated for vowel mutation. In this study, both samples show considerable variation, and both show a dominance of mutated forms, though the *La Scartaza* sample remains more uniform. The results are summarised in Table 9.

Sample	Mutation	No mutation
La Scartaza	52 (82%)	11 (18%)
La Voce di Fiume	79 (52%)	72 (48%)

Table 9: Theme vowel mutation in the two samples.

While a year-by-year overview of *La Scartaza* cannot be used to identify indications of diachronic change, it may still be useful to determine

whether the overall variation encountered is attributable to a specific text or group of texts. As the overview in Figure 7 illustrates, this is not the case because a similar pattern of variation holds for most yearly samples.
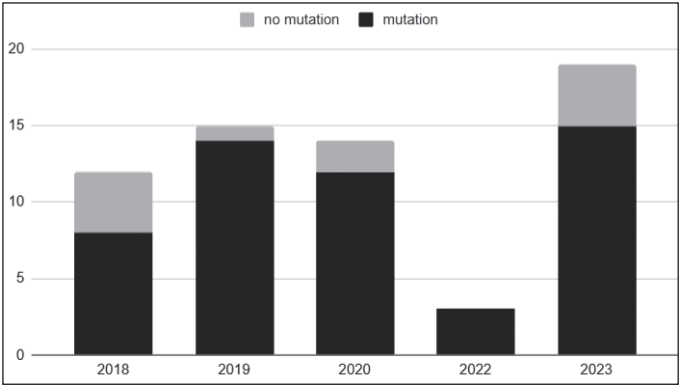

Figure 7: Theme vowel mutation in La Scartaza by year.

On the other hand, the *La Voce di Fiume* sample may indicate a diachronic change towards a system with theme vowel mutation. As shown in the overview in Figure 8, the data suggest a trend in this direction, as forms with vowel mutation are virtually the only ones found in recent years.
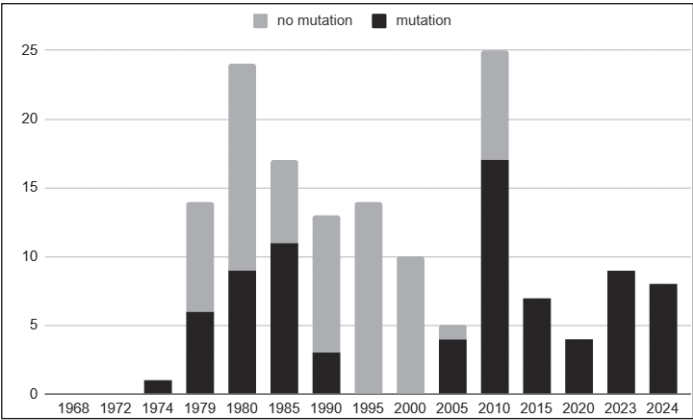

Figure 8: Theme vowel mutation in *La Voce di Fiume* by year.

Regarding the specialisation of the variants, additional annotation and analysis were conducted to establish whether the quality of the vowel

preceding the theme vowel influences the mutation of the theme vowel (e.g. *andar* 'to go' vs. *portar* 'to carry'). The results summarised in Table 10 show that in both samples, there is a difference between verbs in which the theme vowel is preceded by an *a* (as in *andar* 'to go') and all other verbs. Specifically, verbs with a preceding *a* resist vowel mutation more than other verbs. The differences are statistically significant for *La Scartaza* (χ^2 = 10.3, p < 0.05) but not for *La Voce di Fiume* (χ^2 = 2.6, p = 0.1).

Sample	Pre-TV vowel	Mutation	No mutation
La Scartaza	a	7 (44%)	9 (56%)
	e/i/o/u	4 (9%)	43 (91%)
La Voce di Fiume	a	25 (58%)	18 (42%)
	e/i/o/u	47 (44%)	61 (56%)

Table 10: Theme vowel mutation in the two samples.

The lack of statistical significance in the *La Voce di Fiume* sample may be attributed to the fact that many writers use a system allowing either only mutated or only unmutated forms. A clearer picture might emerge if analysis were limited to texts by authors who use both forms. This remains a task for future research.

In sum, this case study provides strong evidence for gradual language change toward a system with vowel mutation. However, in at least some speakers, this change appears to be inhibited in verbs where the vowel preceding the theme vowel is *a*.

4. Conclusions

The four case studies presented in the previous section illustrate a general pattern of co-existence of variants in written Fiuman, where all variants documented in older sources continue to be in use. However, a clear trend emerges in the future and conditional forms, where there is a shift toward a system that favours mutation of the theme vowel *a*. Beyond this, the data reveal several cases of specialisation of variants. Specifically, two instances of phonological specialisation emerge: in verbal negation,

a syllable-optimising distribution appears to guide the use of *non* versus *no*, and in future and conditional forms, theme vowel mutation tends to be inhibited when the theme vowel *a* is preceded by another *a*, suggesting an effect of vowel harmony. Another notable development is the emergent subject-object contrast between *es(s)a* and *ela*, hinting at the potential beginning of a new syntactic distinction in pronoun use. The patterns of specialisation identified here open promising avenues for further theoretical research, not necessarily limited to Fiuman. Similar patterns may well be present in other under-resourced and non-standardised languages.

While these results show considerable potential, additional work will be essential to derive robust generalisations. This includes both the collection of new data and a more detailed annotation of existing data, particularly for case studies focused on variant specialisation. A valuable annotation level for future studies would involve tracking usage by individual authors, enabling analyses that specifically include authors who allow for variation.

Though these findings reflect patterns observed in written Fiuman, it will be important to test these generalisations on spoken Fiuman as well, both in spontaneous production and experimental contexts. A comprehensive analysis of both written and spoken data will provide a fuller understanding of the language's variation and change.

In closing, I would like to reflect on the broader applicability of these findings to language maintenance efforts. As noted in the introduction, online interactions on social networks offer an important opportunity for language maintenance within the Fiuman-speaking community, particularly for those who do not regularly use Fiuman in daily life. However, my experience suggests that these social media interactions are occasionally marked by a strong prescriptive stance toward Fiuman, where speakers who use less common forms may sometimes be discouraged from using the language, as their usage is seen as "spoiling" Fiuman. Such prescriptive criticisms frequently target forms that, though less common, are attested among various speakers and in older sources. In this context, highlighting the historical continuity of variation in Fiuman can be both empowering and reassuring. It validates the experiences of those using less common variants and eases the concerns of prescriptivists by demonstrating that Fiuman has always encompassed considerable variation—a trait that has not undermined its vitality. This final point also emphasises the importance of resource availability to the community. Currently, all issues of *La Voce*

di Fiume are available online on the website http://www.lavocedifiume.com/ as PDF files, most of which are not searchable. While this is certainly an improvement over having no access, the availability of these and older Fiuman texts (e.g. those from the pre-exodus period) in a searchable format would greatly contribute to the accessibility and study of the language. This would enable community members and researchers alike to engage more deeply with the linguistic heritage of the Fiuman community.

Sources

La Scartaza. 2018–present. Author: Laura Marchig. Online column published on: https://www.rijekadanas.com/tag/scartaza and https://www.fiumemondo.it/la-scartazza/. Accessed December 9, 2024.

La Voce di Fiume. 1966–present. Published as monthly or bi-monthly periodical by the organisation L'associazione dei fiumani italiani nel mondo All numbers are available online at http://www.lavocedifiume.com/. Accessed December 9, 2024.

References

Ballarini, A., ed. 2010. *Dizionario del dialetto fiumano con cenni storici, culturali, politici e sociali sulla città di Fiume* [Dictionary of the Fiuman Dialect with Historical, Cultural, Political, and Social Notes on the City of Rijeka/Fiume]. Rome: Società di Studi Fiumani.

Berghoffer, J. 1992. "Prinosi proučavanju fijumanskog dijalekta" [Contributions to the Study of the Fiuman Dialect]. *FLUMINENSIA: časopis za filološka istraživanja* 4 (1), 1–22. This is a translation and reprint of the original Berghoffer, G. 1894. *Contributi allo studio del dialetto fiumano (Saggio grammaticale)*. Fiume: Stabilimento Tipo-Litografico di Emidio Mohovich. (Original not accessed)

Bidwell, C. E. 1967. "Colonial Venetian and Serbo-Croatian in the Eastern Adriatic: A case study of languages in contact". *General Linguistics* 7 (1), 13–30.

Blagoni, K. 2020. "Il dialetto fiumano: evoluzione e situazione attuale di un'isola linguistica urbana" [The Fiuman Dialect: Evolution and

Current Situation of an Urban Linguistic Island]. In *Il dialetto fiumano: parole e realtà* [The Fiuman Dialect: Words and Reality], eds. I. Mestrovich, M. Sanković Ivančić, G. Mazzieri Sanković and C. Gherbaz Giuliano. Rijeka/Fiume: University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Italian Studies.

Brezina, V. and W. Platt. 2024. *#LancsBox X* [software]. Retrieved from http://lancsbox.lancs.ac.uk.

Buršić Giudici, B. and G. Orbanich. 2009. *Dizionario del dialetto di Pola* [Dictionary of the Dialect of Pula/Pola]. Collana degli Atti del Centro di Ricerche Storiche di Rovigno 31. Fiume: Unione Italiana, Trieste: Università Popolare, Pola: Società di Studi e Ricerche "Mediteran".

Croatian Bureau of Statistics. 2022. *Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in 2021. Zagreb: Croatian Bureau of Statistics.* Available at: *https://podaci.dzs.hr/media/td3jvrbu/popis_2021-stanovnistvo_po_ gradovima_opcinama.xlsx.* Accessed December 9, 2024.

Depoli, A. 1913. "Il dialetto fiumano" [The Fiuman Dialect]. *Bullettino della Deputazione fiumana di storia patria* 3, 258–315.

Dussich, M. 2019. *Dizionario Italiano-Buiese* [Italian-Buiese Dictionary]. Collana degli Atti del Centro di Ricerche Storiche di Rovigno 46. Buje: Unione Italiana, Trieste: Università Popolare.

Gottardi, F. 2007. *Come parlavamo* [How We Spoke]. Rome: Società di Studi Fiumani.

Mazzieri Sanković, G. and M. Đurđulov, eds. 2021. *Fiume nell'identità dialettale: il fiumano tra lingua e letteratura* [Fiume in Dialectal Identity: Fiuman Between Language and Literature]. Rijeka/Fiume: Council of the Italian National Minority for the City of Rijeka/Fiume.

Mestrovich, I., M. Sanković Ivančić, G. Mazzieri Sanković and C. Gherbaz Giuliano, eds. 2020. *Il dialetto fiumano: parole e realtà* [The Fiuman Dialect: Words and Reality]. Rijeka/Fiume: University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Italian Studies.

Pafundi, N. 2011. *Dizionario fiumano-italiano, italiano-fiumano* [Fiuman-Italian, Italian-Fiuman Dictionary]. Padua: Associazione Libero Comune di Fiume in Esilio.

Plešković, M., T. Kraš and B. Drljača Margić. 2019. "Changes in the self-reported frequency of use of the Fiuman dialect: Implications for language maintenance". *Govor* 36 (2), 195–218.

Plešković, M., B. Drljača Margić and T. Kraš. 2021. "Speakers' attitudes and perceptions in relation to the maintenance of the Fiuman dialect". *Suvremena lingvistika* 47 (91), 69–92. https://doi.org/10.22210/suvlin.2021.091.04

Samani, S. 1978. *Dizionario del dialetto fiumano* [Dictionary of the Fiuman Dialect]. Venezia: Associazione studi sul dialetto di Fiume.

Schittar, M. 1888/2018. *Rime de Fiume. El trionfo de San Micciel – I sfoghi del cor* [Rhymes of Fiume. The Triumph of Saint Michael – The Outpourings of the Heart]. Fiume: EDIT. (The 2018 republication edited by M. Sanković Ivančić).

Zamboni, A. 1974. "Veneto". In *Profilo dei dialetti italiani* [Profile of Italian Dialects], vol. 5, ed. M. Cortelazzo, 1–95. Pisa: Pacini.

Zamboni, A. 1979. "Le caratteristiche essenziali dei dialetti veneti" [The Essential Characteristics of Venetian Dialects]. In *Guida ai dialetti veneti* [Guide to Venetian Dialects], vol. 1, ed. M. Cortelazzo, 9–43. Padova: Cleup.

Zeper, N. 2015. *Grammatica del dialetto triestino* [Grammar of the Triestine Dialect]. Trieste: Biancaevolta edizioni.

Acknowledgement