

‘Do’-support in the northern Italian Camuno dialect

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Abstract. The Camuno dialect uses a support verb *fa* ‘do’ in an interrogative construction that strongly resembles English *do*-support. Stages of its grammaticalization remain within the different valley dialects. When optional, *fa*-support (FS) coexists with verb-subject clitic inversion (SCI), e.g., *fa-la mangià* (does she eat) / *mangia-la* (eats-she) *‘l peh da hena?* (the fish for supper?). There are semantic restrictions on the type of supported verb: manner > result > state. Questions are pragmatically marked with speaker answer expectations, and are opinion-seeking. A *wh*-item (normally ‘*in situ*’) has specific reference. Impersonal questions are agrammatical with optional FS but not obligatory FS. A biclausal model with a lexically rich *fa* ‘do’ is suggested for optional FS.

Keywords. ‘do’-support; specificity; embedded questions; indirect questions

1. Introduction. Although ‘do’-support is relatively common in Germanic languages (Jäger 2006), it is very rare in Romance. One of the few such examples comes from an interrogative construction in the Camuno dialect of northern Italy, originally described by Benincà and Poletto (2004) (B&P) from Monno in Upper Val Camonica.

Recent research 2017-20 has shown *fa*-support (FS) to be present over a 45 km length of the valley from Esine (Middle Valley) in the south to Monno (Upper Valley) in the north (Fig. 1).

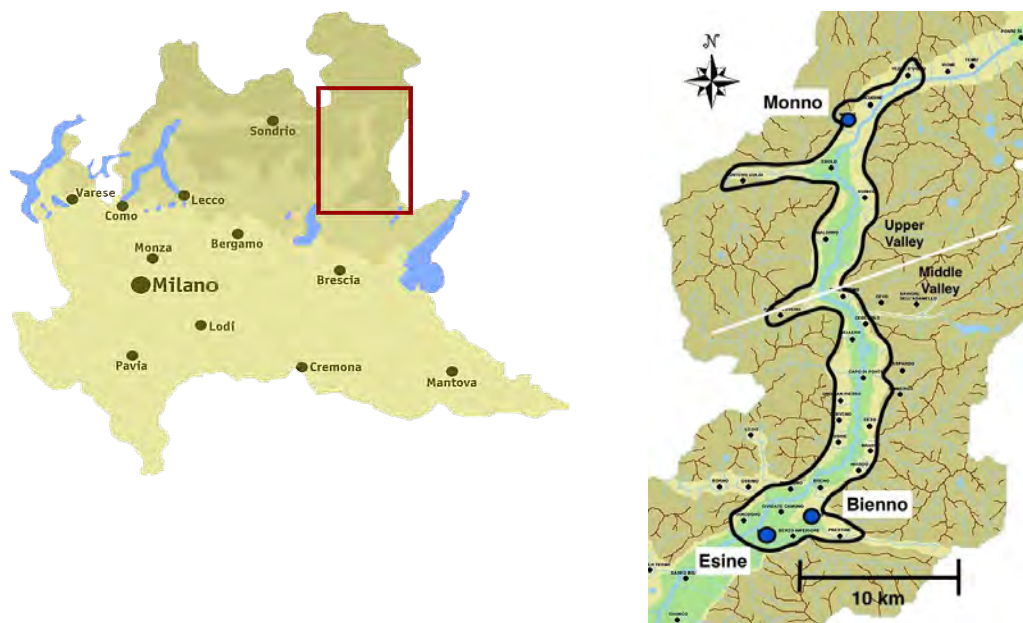


Figure 1. Location of Val Camonica in Lombardy and of FS in Val Camonica

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Significantly, while in most of the Upper Valley dialects use of FS is obligatory, in most of the Middle Valley dialects it is optional and determined by semantic and pragmatic factors. Using synchronic data from extant dialects, Swinburne (2021) (Sw21) reconstructed a grammaticalization sequence charting the transition from optional FS to obligatory FS.

2. Syntax of obligatory and optional FS.

2.1. OBLIGATORY FS (MONNO). In most Lombard dialects, subject clitic and finite verb invert in the interrogative (SCI), compared with the equivalent declarative. However in the Monno dialect this synthetic interrogative, SCI, is not permitted, and the analytic interrogative, FS, is the only possible construction.

- Declarative¹
- (1) Maria **la** **màngia** 'l pes per sena.
 Maria SCL.3F.SG eats the fish for supper.
 'Maria [is eating] / [(usually) eats] fish for supper.'
- Interrogative
- (2) a. ***Màngia=la** 'l pes per sena, Maria? *SCI
 eats=SCL.3F.SG the fish for supper, Maria
 Lit: 'Eats she the fish for supper, Maria?'
- b. **Fa=la** mangià 'l pes per sena, Maria? ✓FS
 does=SCL.3F.SG eat.INFIN the fish for supper, Maria?
 '[Is Maria eating] / [Does Maria (usually) eat] fish for supper?'

2.2. OPTIONAL FS (ESINE). The syntax of the Esine variety is almost identical. However, both SCI and FS are possible for the interrogative.²

- (3) a. **Màngia=la** 'l peh da hena, Maria? ✓SCI
 eats=SCL.3F.SG the fish for supper Maria?
- b. **Fa=la** mangià 'l peh da hena, Maria? ✓FS
 does=SCL.3F.SG eat.INFIN the fish for supper Maria?
 '[Is Maria eating] / [Does Maria (usually) eat] fish for supper?'

Note that interrogative *fa* 'do' and the homophonous *fa* 'cause' can be distinguished in all dialects by the position of object clitics. With 'do' they are embedded as enclitics on the following infinitival verb, with 'cause' they climb to the causative verb (see examples in Appendix).

3. Characteristics of obligatory FS and comparisons to English DS. Camuno FS, at least in the Monno dialect where it is essentially obligatory, is then very similar to English *do*-support. This is largely as originally noted by B&P, with a few qualifications by Sw21 as follows.

¹My examples. Orthography is as commonly used by Camunans and is based on Italian with the addition of two German letters for rounded vowels ö = /œ/; ü = /y/. A word-initial vowel is commonly omitted when preceded by another vowel. To follow standard glossing procedures, enclitics are here separated from the word to which they are otherwise attached, with '='; in Camuno the word is written undivided.

² Most Middle Valley dialects aspirate an underlying /s/ to /h/ and that is the way Camunans usually write it.

Similarities to English DS

- Obligatory with all verbs except ‘be’ and ‘have’ (main and auxiliary) with which it is ungrammatical. (Although note that English usually supports main verb ‘have’).
- Used in all tenses otherwise lacking an auxiliary (Camuno: present, future, conditional, imperfect; English: present, preterite)

Differences from English DS

- Does not exist in the declarative. Declarative *fa* is causative (clitics climb and a causee is expected)
- Can be used with modal ‘can, could’ (B&P) (as well as - rarely ‘want’: Sw21). Note these are fully inflecting verbs in Camuno.
- It is usually not used with ‘know’ (Sw21).

4. Additional characteristics of optional FS. Three important new characteristics of optional FS are described briefly here:

The probability that a question is made with FS depends on semantics of supported verb (§5)

- non-stative > stative
- (Among non-statives) manner > result

The FS question has a special meaning (§6)

- pragmatically, it is like an indirect question
- semantically, it resembles an embedded question

Differences in permissibility of an impersonal subject with FS (§7).

- in optional FS arbitrary reference is NOT allowed
- in obligatory FS arbitrary reference is allowed.

5. Supported verb semantics.

5.1. ACCEPTABILITY JUDGMENTS. A question with a verb that lexicalizes the **manner** of an activity, e.g. ‘**eat**’ (4), is highly likely to use FS; with a verb that lexicalizes **result**, e.g. ‘**give**’ (5), FS is much less likely; and with a **stative** verb, e.g. ‘**think**’ (6), FS is very unlikely (see category definitions below). (For comparative purposes these examples all use transitive verbs, but whether the verb has or doesn’t have a complement appears to make no difference.) (Examples (4) to (6) from Esine.)

(4) a. Fe=t **mangià**=la, la carne? FS ✓ **manner**
do.2SG=SCL.2SG eat.INFIN=ACC.3F the meat

b. La mànge=t, la carne?
ACC.3F eat.2SG=SCL.2SG the meat
‘Do you eat meat?’

(De hòlit, per nedàl)

(5) a. ?Fe=t **dà**=ga an regàl a la zia? FS ? **result**
do.2SG=SCL.2SG give.INFIN=DAT.3 a present to the aunt

b. Ghe dé=t an regàl a la zia?
DAT.3 give.2SG=SCL.2SG a present to the aunt
‘Usually, for Christmas, do you give your aunt a present?’

- (6) a. ??#Fe=t **penhà** che 'l hàeh FS ??#**stative**
do.2SG=SCL.2SG think.INFIN that it seems.SUBJ
anna bùna idéa (o no)?
a good idea (or not)
- b. Pènhe=t che 'l hàeh anna bùna idéa (o no)?
think.2SG=SCL.2G that it seems.SUBJ a good idea (or not)
‘Do you think it seems like a good idea, or not?’

5.2. CATEGORY DEFINITIONS

Manner verb, e.g. ‘eat’

- For some otherwise transitive verbs, a direct object is optional (unergative use).
- Use with a manner adverb is possible. (This qualifies how the activity proceeds rather than how a result is achieved)
- Verb describes complex change measurable along multiple axes.
(Manner and result characteristics essentially as per Rappaport Hovav & Levin 1998)

Result verb, e.g. ‘give’

- With a transitive verb, the direct object is obligatory as it represents the result so the verb cannot be used intransitively/unergatively. Use of the result as a subject argument is possible with an unaccusative verb.
- Verb describes simple change measurable along one axis. At its simplest the change is binary from (– property X) to (+ property X).

Stative verb, e.g. ‘think’

- Verb cannot be used with adverbs of manner, time, or place (except when these are framesetters or degree modifiers)
- Verb cannot be the complement to a verb of perception (as a state is not located in time or place, so cannot be perceived).
- Unlike non-stative verbs, a stative verb is used the simple present tense with non-habitual meaning. It is not usually used with continuous aspect.
- A sentence containing the verb in the simple present tense would be an inappropriate response to the question ‘what’s happening?’.
(First three points generally following Rothmayr 2009)

5.3. ELICITATION EXPERIMENT. Questions were elicited from informants by playing them a series of dialect recordings as in the example below. Each consisted of a context that ended with a request for the speaker to make a question to an imagined interlocutor, thus reformulating the declarative as an interrogative.

*Enrica has told you that she didn’t want to work on Saturday anymore, but today is Saturday and you see her in the office in front of the coffee machine.
Ask Enrica if she works on a Saturday.*

The question to be elicited would then be the dialect equivalent of:

Enrica, do you work on a Saturday?

In the experiment, each verb was represented by several contexts with question requests. All elicited questions were y/n-Qs to prevent potential complications from clefting of wh-items and variation due to different types of wh-words. All questions relevant to the evaluation of FS by

verb were in the present tense. Results were obtained from several informants for whom FS use is optional. Figure 2 shows results from the third experimental phase (P3).^{3,4}

P3: 8 MV informants

Verb	%	FS	Tot
sembrare 'seem'	0%	0	23
volere bene 'love'	0%	0	16
volere DP 'want X'	0%	0	14
sapere 'know'	3%	1	39
potere (abil) 'can'	4%	1.5	39
piacere a 'please, like'	8%	2.5	31
pensare 'think'	10%	3	29
mancare 'miss'	13%	3	24
credere in 'believe in'	25%	4	16
durare 'last'	35%	7	20
dare 'give'	35%	11	31
finire di 'finish'	37%	5.5	15
cominciare a 'begin'	43%	6	14
costare 'cost'	43%	10	23
fare - anim 'make, let'	46%	12	26
provare a 'try'	50%	11	22
maturare 'ripen'	56%	9	16
mangiare 'eat'	61%	19	31
leggere 'read' (intrans)	68%	15	22
nuotare 'swim'	74%	23	31
lavorare 'work'	76%	23.5	31
aggiustare 'fix, repair'	77%	17	22
lavare 'wash'	78%	18	23

Figure 2. Results by verb semantics for P3 (red=manner verb; blue=result verb⁵; green=stative verb; verbs with vP complement in lighter colour) for 8 Middle Valley informants

Results for subgroups of informants in Figure 3 demonstrate how FS use begins with manner verbs, spreads to result verbs (including the causative verb – shown here in uses with an animate/human subject), and then generalizes to stative verbs.⁶ The lettering for verbs at the base of each sequence is greyed out if, during the experiment, FS was used with that verb all or nearly all

³ To include the maximum number of verbs, the particular results shown here are inconsistent in the number of questions on which they are based, varying from 2 to 5. However, the same general pattern of manner > result > stative was obtained in both Phase 3 using a consistent 3 questions per verb and Phase 4 with 4 questions per verb, regardless of the precise selection of verbs.

⁴ To aid the reader and because there was small local variation in the verbs, the infinitives are named here by their Italian cognates.

⁵ Verbs of measure *costare* 'cost', *durare* 'last' (and in Phase 4 also *pesare* 'weigh') are included as blue result verbs as they consistently patterned this way. This classification could not have been made *a priori*.

⁶ Use of FS with main verb *fa* 'do' is generally at a lower level than with *fa* 'cause', which is a further indication that in the optional FS dialects, interrogative *fa* means 'do', so speakers see no necessity to repeat it. This is despite the fact that *fa* 'do' is a manner verb and *fa* 'cause' a result verb.

Confirmation-seeking

‘Does Elisabetta still smoke?’

- (8) a. Fùme=la amò Elisabeta ? (Inf. 70. Cividate)
smokes=3F.SG still Elisabeta
SCI: I’m not investigating her! There were no preconceived ideas. It’s an **open question**.
- b. Ha=la fümà amò Elisabeta?
does.3SG=SCL.3F.SG smoke.INFIN still Elisabeta
FS: Presupposes that there is already an understanding that she still smokes. [So you are looking for **confirmation**.]
[Note: In Cividate *fa* is aspirated as *ha*.]

Old information

‘Does the news on RAI 1 finish at 9?’

- (9) a. **Finìhe=l** a le nöf al telegiornale ho RAI 1? (Inf. 36 Esine)
finishes=SCL.3M.SG at the 9 the news on RAI 1
SCI: Direct, blunt question in search of information.
- b. **Fa=l finì** a le nöf al telegiornale ho RAI 1?
does=SCL.3M.SG finish.INFIN at the 9 the news on RAI 1
FS: Seems to be hiding something depending on the reply. Use of *fa* implies that there are practical **consequences** for the person making the question: if it's like this then... or like that then...

(You hear a noise and wonder: Has there been a goal?)

‘What's happening?’

- (10) a. Che **hücéde=l** (Inf. 54. Aстриo di Breno)
what happens=SCL.3M.SG
SCI: You are frightened [by the **ongoing noise**]. [You don’t know if it was a goal or something else. You want to know what is happening.]
- b. Che **fa=l hücedé?** / **Fal hücedé** che?
what does=SCL.3M.SG happen.INFIN
FS: This presupposes you have **already heard the noise**. [You interpreted the noise so you know something has happened: “Is it true (what I suspect) is happening?”]
[Note: This dialect has optional wh “*in situ*” (=post-verbal)]

Opinion-seeking

(The arm is very swollen.)

‘Could it be broken?’

- (11) a. **Póde=l** eser ròt? (Inf. 39. Malonno)
could=SCL.3M.SG be.INFIN broken
SCI: Normal question. [**Anyone could be asked this**.]
- b. **Fa=l podé** eser ròt?
does=SCL.3M.SG be-possible.INFIN be.INFIN broken
FS: **Said to the doctor** [because the idea ‘that it could be broken’ has already come up in conversation and now you want an authoritative answer.]
[Paraphrase: Is it true (what I’ve heard/suspect) “that it could be broken?”]

Wh-specificity

(They tell me that you've got a lovely collection of ties.)

'Which one are you wearing to the wedding?'

- (12) a. **Mète=t** chela a hpude? (Inf. 33. Berzo Inf.)
 put.on.2SG=SCL.2SG which.one at wedding

SCI: You're asking **which one**.

- b. **He=t** **meté** chela (a hpude)?
 do.2SG=SCL.2SG put.on.INFIN which/that.one (at wedding)

FS: It's **already decided**. [Are you wearing the one we talked about?] [Speaker has a referent for the wh-item in mind: it is specific.]

[Note: Berzo speakers also aspirate *fa* to *ha*]

6.2. RESEMBLANCE TO PROPERTIES OF EMBEDDED QUESTIONS

Speaker answer expectation/old information/opinion seeking

While speaker answer expectation could be explained by *fa* having an intensifying function similar to emphatic English DO, the presence of old information of which the speaker is already aware, suggests an alternative syntactic structure – that of an embedded question. The speaker is requesting an opinion from the addressee about a preexisting embedded proposition, X: 'Is it true that X?'

Wh-specificity

Taking the definition that a pronoun is specific if it **refers to an entity that already exists (in the mind of the speaker)**, it can be argued that:

- An interrogative pronoun with argumental position in a matrix clause is non-specific, but
- A relative pronoun (Karttunen 1977) or interrogative pronoun with argumental position in an embedded clause (Cinque 1991; Rizzi 1991) has specific reference.

7. Permissibility of a question with impersonal subject

7.1. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OPTIONAL FS AND OBLIGATORY FS. Question (13) with subject of (English) *one*, Italian *si* / Camuno *se/he* has arbitrary reference: it refers to anyone, no one in particular, and excludes no one. It is hypothetical. In an optional FS dialect the impersonal question with *fa-h* or *fa-s* cannot be made using FS, and SCI or QDec (declarative form with question intonation) must be used instead. (Note the question is possible with the 3rd person (masc. pl.) form to make *fa-i*.) In an obligatory FS dialect there is no such problem and *fa-s* is allowed.

'What does one give a lady for her 100th birthday?'

(Ital: Cosa si dà a una signora per il suo centesimo compleanno?)

- (13) a. **H' ghe dà** chè QDec (Inf. 36. Esine)
 one DAT.3 gives what

a 'nna fónna che fà i hènto agn?
 to a lady that does the 100 years

- b. ***Fa=h / √Fa=i dà=ga** chè *FS-imp (Inf. 36. Esine)

does=one / do=they give.INFIN=DAT.3 what
 a 'nna fónna che fà i hènto agn?
 to a lady that does the 100 years

c. $\sqrt{Fa=s}$ $d\grave{a}=i$ que FS-imp (Inf. 67. Monno)
 does=one give.INFIN=DAT.3 what
 a ina fomna quan- che la fa i cent' agn?
 to a lady when- that she does the 100 years

- Optional FS **disallows** (FS) impersonal questions.
- Obligatory FS **permits** impersonal questions.

The same pattern of agrammaticality of the impersonal question with FS in a dialect with optional FS, but grammaticality in a dialect with obligatory FS, was repeated valley-wide.

7.2. PROPERTIES OF QUESTIONS WITH ARBITRARY REFERENCE. Compare the English non-embedded (14) with embedded (15). In (15), the subject with arbitrary reference *one* is compatible only with embedding verbs that emphasize the *irrealis* nature of the embedded event and allow the object, 'a lady', to remain nonspecific.

(14) What does one give a lady for her 100th birthday?
 This is hypothetical: you may know no such lady.

(15) What does one expect/hope/*plan/*promise/*remember to give a lady for her 100th birthday?
 Embedded clause: \checkmark *irrealis* (nonspecific lady), * *realis* (specific lady)

If optional FS has an embedded structure, the impermissibility of the subject with arbitrary reference is not then due to the embedding *per se* but to the nature of the embedding verb: as *fa* describes actual existence, it may not embed an *irrealis* clause.

8. Conclusions

8.1. SUMMARY OF PROPERTIES OF OPTIONAL FS

- Semantic restrictions on the type of supported verb in the order manner > result > stative are taken as an indication of the presence of lexical content in the support verb *fa* 'do'.
- The special semantics/pragmatics of the optional FS question resembles that of an embedded question, suggesting that *fa* 'do' is located in a separate clause.
- An arbitrary subject is not allowed in optional FS as this is incompatible with an embedding verb of lexical *fa* 'do'.

8.2. STRUCTURES OF *FA* 'DO' SUPPORT

The lexical verb *fa* embeds a CP and the structure of optional FS is biclausal.

(16) [_{CP} *fa*(*lex*)-SCL [_{CP} \emptyset [_{IP} V_{lex} (DP)]]

The structure of obligatory FS is monoclausal.

(17) [_{CP} *fa*(*func*)-SCL [_{IP} V_{lex} (DP)]]

The biclausal structure is possible due to the lexical content of the embedding verb. With generalization of FS to stative verbs, there are no more semantic restrictions on the possible type of supported verb or on the subject. So by meaning 'everything', *fa* 'do' effectively means 'nothing' and so is semantically bleached. Without lexical content in the support verb, the structure simplifies to a monoclausal.

9. Appendix. With interrogative *fa*, if there is an object clitic (dark blue), this encliticizes to the following infinitival verb (18). In contrast, with the homophonous verb causative *fa*, object clitics climb to the preceding causative verb, as shown in (19), a declarative. Hence with an interrogative causative, in a dialect where the causative verb is itself supported such as the Monno dialect (20), there are two *fa*, the first interrogative, and the second causative, with the clitics borne on the causative verb.

Interrogative *fa* (Monno)
 (18) **Fa**=la semper mangià=**l** per sena, Maria?
 does=SCL.3F.SG always eat.INFIN=ACC.3 for supper, Maria?
 (Re: the fish) ‘Does Maria always eat **it** for supper?’

Causative *fa* (in declarative)
 (19) Maria la ’**l** **fa** semper mangià ai gnarei.
 Maria SCL.3F.SG ACC.3 causes always eat.INFIN to-the children.
 (Re: the fish) ‘Maria always makes the children eat it.’

Interrogative *fa* and causative *fa* (in interrogative)
 (20) **Fa**=la semper fa=i=**el** mangià, (la mare)?
 does=SCL.3F.sg always cause.INFIN=3.DAT=3.ACC eat.INFIN (their mother)
 (Re: the fish): ‘Does she [their mother] always make them [the children] eat it?’

Therefore in a dialect where the causative verb is not usually supported, such as the Esine dialect, the identity of *fa* as interrogative ‘do’ or causative ‘cause’ would be clear by the position of an object clitic even if there was no named causee, i.e. in a *faire-par* type of causative (following Kayne 1975) shown in (21). Note that this particular example would be slightly odd as FP causatives are rare in this region. More likely is that a dative clitic (as this is a transitive verb) representing the causee would also be present, as in the *faire-infinitif* causative (22) similar to the Monno example (20) given above.

Causative *fa* with SCI (in interrogative) (*faire-par*: no named causee) (Esine)
 (21) ? ’**l** **fa**=la hemper mangià, (la mare)?
 ACC.3 does=SCL.3F.sg always eat.INFIN (their mother)
 ?(Re: the fish): ‘Does she (their mother) always get it eaten (up)?’

Causative *fa* with SCI (in interrogative) (*faire-infinitif*: named causee)
 (22) **Ghe**=**l** **fa**=la hemper mangià, (la mare)?
 DAT.3=ACC.3 does=SCL.3F.sg always eat.INFIN (their mother)
 (Re: the fish): ‘Does she (their mother) always get them to eat it?’

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