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Dialect levelling and merchant writing in Renaissance Italy

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Abstract: This article aims to assess the extent to which merchant language in Renaissance Italy can be said to have undergone a process of dialect levelling. Merchant letters in the Italian context are characterised by their high degree of verb allomorphy, both verbal and nominal. Previous investigations have shown that this degree of allomorphy is much more present in merchant texts than in other text genres immediately preceding codification in the 1500s. This article continues this line of research, showing how a process of dialect levelling occurs in a corpus of merchant writing sent from Milan in the late 1300s and early 1400s. Specifically, it focuses on 1pl. verb endings and the presence of voicing in past participles to show that Tuscan linguistic items infiltrated and then spread into neighbouring dialectal areas, such as Gallo-Italian, that is typologically distinct from Tuscan. Since this process of levelling was occurring at the same time as literary Tuscan was spreading, sometimes mediated also by merchants, the article also discusses these issues. While focus is placed on the contribution of merchant language in Renaissance Italy, the article can be seen as a case-study as evidence of language evolution ‘from below’. Overall, it argues that historical sociolinguistics provide powerful tools which help to show the various processes identified during standardization.

Keywords: dialect levelling; standardization; merchants; Italian; Gallo-Italian

1 Introduction

This article aims to assess the extent to which merchant language in Renaissance Italy can be seen to have undergone a process of dialect levelling. Merchant letters in the Italian context are characterised by their high degree of allomorphy, both verbal and nominal. Previous investigations have shown that this allomorphy is much more present in merchant texts than in other text genres, such as religious or chancery writing, immediately preceding standardization of Italian in the 1500s (Brown 2023a). Histories of the Italian language often include a section, of smaller or greater

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length, on the rise of the merchant class and the subsequent development of merchant language (for example, Boschetto 2011; Cella 2015; Kinder and Scotellaro 2020; Serianni 2015; Sosnowski 2006). At the same time, specific studies of merchant language in the linguistic history of Italy in both literary and non-literary culture have long recognised the fundamental role which merchants have played in forming the standard language during Renaissance Italy (Bec 1983; Carboni 2014; Formentin 2012; Lazzarini 2015, 2016; Manni 2016; Palermo 1999; Ricci 2011; Trotter 2011). There exist, therefore, excellent descriptions of (a) the earliest practical documents which merchants wrote and the typologies of these texts (e.g. Ricci 2005; Serianni 2002); (b) profiles of individual merchants and merchant networks (Bettarini 2022; Bocchi 1991; Hsy 2013; Miner 2019; Orlandi 2014); (c) studies of the development of a specialized merchant script, known as *mercantesca* (Ceccherini 2008, 2009, 2010; Petrucci 1992); (d) the role of literacy and merchant writing (Petrucci and Miglio 1988; Stella 1994a), as well as many critical editions of merchant letters, often accompanied by a philological analysis (Tomasin 2019; Trolli 1972; and others).

Some work has also focussed on the development of a mercantile lexicon at the origins of Italian (Sosnowski 2006; Tiddeman 2022, 2023). Merchants use particular trade argots, and they have been the attention of scholarly inquiry across a range of European languages, sometimes relating to standardization, sometimes not (Wagner and Beinhoff 2017). What has received less attention has been the role of merchants in standardising language practices, especially in terms of how merchants brought different vernaculars into contact, processes of accommodation and supralocalisation in standard formation, as well as the overall contribution of merchant lexis to standard Italian. Since standards are often imposed via a ‘top down’ model, either through political or literary means (Pountain 2016), less attention has been paid to contemporaneous forms of language change ‘from below’.¹ Dialect levelling is but one example of what can occur when different vernaculars are brought into contact in a broader process of language change.

In an earlier work, I attempted to show how ‘bottom up’ and ‘top down’ approaches are not water-tight delimitations (Brown 2020). That study looked at dialect contact in non-literary writing and the points of intersection between evolving regional forms of language in northern Italy during the Renaissance, and the ongoing formation of a standard. Generally speaking, however, few studies have considered the role merchant writing played specifically in the standardization of Italian. Some previous work (Brown 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017a) has considered how merchants

¹ Following Elspaß (2021: 94), I use this term to refer to the main concern of language standardization from below as “the consideration of the contributions of non-elite writers and, in particular, informal texts by such writers to standardization processes”. This concept of language standardization “rests on the assumption that potentially all members of a language community and all of their forms of verbal interaction have contributed to the standardization processes of this language” (p. 94).

‘spread’ Tuscan throughout the Italian peninsula, which helped it to become selected during the Renaissance as a written, literary standard. The processes inherent in standardization can also be seen in historical contexts leading up to and during the early sixteenth century, that is ‘from below’, looking at corpora of merchant and religious writing. While it may be misleading to draw parallels with other traditions, these processes in an Italian context could be analogous to what Hernández-Campoy and Conde-Silvestre (2005: 101) describe as ‘incipient standardisation’ during ‘Late Middle English’. To my knowledge, few studies have looked at merchant language from the modern viewpoint of historical sociolinguistics. Studies of merchant language in a comparative framework, that is across languages and historical periods, are also rare (cf. Wagner and Beinhoff 2017). Desiderata remain for (a) the direct transfer of (mainly) lexical phenomena from specialized merchant language to the standard language in the history of Italian, and; (b) the way in which merchants facilitated (either directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously) processes of standardization in the history of Italian.²

This article shows how a process of dialect levelling occurs in a corpus of merchant writing from the late 1300s and early 1400s. Specifically, it focusses on two variables. The first is the 1pl. Tuscan verb ending *-iamo*, while the second looks at voiced versus unvoiced participle endings. The aim is to show that Tuscan features infiltrated and then spread to neighbouring dialectal areas such as north Italy, where a Gallo-Italian variety is found, and which is typologically distinct from Tuscan. Section 2 provides a brief description of the linguistic varieties in late medieval Italy, before turning to the extant material available from merchant writers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It also describes the notion of historical dialect levelling adopted in this paper. Section 3 introduces the two variables under investigation. Section 4 defines the corpus, looking at the written evidence available from two merchants used in this study, Francesco Tanso and Giovanni da Pessano. Results are presented in Section 5, and I make some comparison to the work of a contemporary religious writer, Margherita Lambertenghi (?–1454). A conclusion is offered at the end of the paper, reflecting further on the processes inherent in dialect levelling and language change.

2 Medieval Tuscany, merchant writing, and historical dialect levelling

Tuscany during the 1300s and 1400s was characterized by a high degree of social, political, and linguistic variation. From the mid thirteenth century, the city-states of

² For an account of lexical dialect levelling between contemporary Tuscan dialects and standard Italian, see Wieling et al. (2014).

Tuscany started to enlarge and came into increasing contact with each other. This contact was driven not only by demographic changes, but patterns of trade, war with neighbouring towns (*comuni*), as well as internal migration throughout Tuscany. At the end of the eleventh century, Pisa had tripled its urban area (Balestracci 1989: 87). From the late 1200s to the early 1300s, Florence managed to quintuple in size (p. 88).³ It began a series of military conquests during which it captured many other Tuscan city-states, such as Pistoia in 1351, and Pisa in 1406. In these cases, the direct presence of Florentines in other parts of Tuscany would have also increased language contact, particularly as Florence preferred “to use local persons who were loyal to Florence but occasionally [sent] Florentines to the dependent community” (Nicholas 1997: 90). Increased trade was an important motivator in contact between city-states as well, driven particularly by the silk and wool industries, and trade in luxury products. By the end of the thirteenth century, Florence had surpassed all other towns in the region to become an international capital of commerce, banking, and industry; indeed it has been described as “one of the four or five largest cities in all of Europe” (Goldthwaite 2009: 14–15). While statistics can vary, estimates place the population growth in Florence during the late 1200s to somewhere between 90,000 and 130,000 – “a five- to sixfold increase in the course of a century” (Goldthwaite 2009: 28).⁴

Tuscan forms of language (typologically distinct from Gallo-Italian varieties, to which Milanese belongs) began to circulate throughout Italy. Gallo-Italian (spoken in the regions of Piedmont, Lombardy, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna) is the main subvariety of Romance found in north Italy (Maiden and Parry 1997: 3). Gallo-Italian varieties are separated from Tuscan by the La Spezia-Rimini isogloss as shown in Figure 1 below.⁵

The spread of Tuscan throughout the peninsula, then, is one type of language contact that brought different vernaculars together, as merchants (and others) travelled around from one town to another. This form of contact gave rise to what has been called ‘supra-regional’ languages in the literature, sometimes termed

3 Cf. Goldthwaite (2009: 28): “the best evidence for the success of [the Florentine] economy, however, is its physical manifestations at the time, and these are as dramatic as such things can be”. He lists such factors as the creation of a new currency (the Florin, in 1252), the creation of a third set of walls, as well as population growth.

4 For further details on the expansion of Florence and evidence for contact between Tuscan city-states, see the sections in Goldthwaite (2009) on “The Tuscan Towns” (pp. 12–23) and “Florence: Rise to Predominance” (pp. 23–30) respectively.

5 The La Spezia-Rimini line is, in reality, a bundle of phonetic and lexical isoglosses running from Carrara to Fano, which traditionally delineates northern dialects from those grouped together under the Rome-Ancona isogloss. Dialects to the south of the line display a measure of linguistic cohesion, such as the conservation of long consonants of Latin. Dialects to the north of the line share many structural properties, such as the shortening of Latin long consonants, with other Romance varieties such as French, Occitan, Spanish and Portuguese (Maiden and Parry 1997: 3; Savoia 1997a).

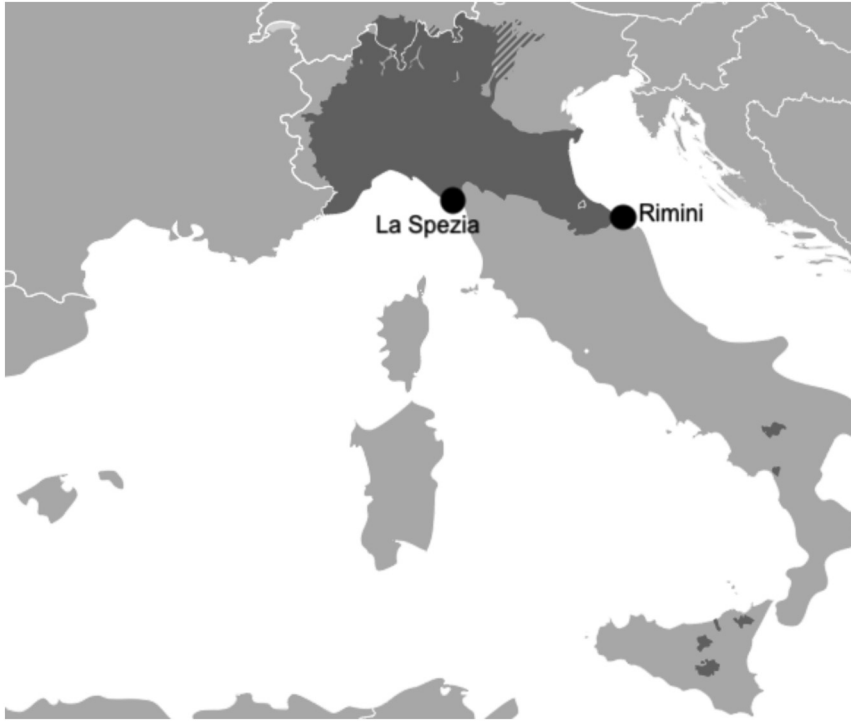


Figure 1: The distribution of Gallo-Italian in Italy. Taken and adapted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallo-Italic_languages#/media/File:Gallo-Italic_languages.svg (Wikipedia contributors 2024).

regional ‘koinés’ (Brown 2020, 2023b; Carlucci 2020; for terminology and overviews). Supraregional koinés found particular expression in courts and chanceries, where the mobility of persons was especially high (Stella 1994b; Vitale 1953). This article focuses on two linguistic variables in this broader contact between Tuscan and Gallo-Italian. The first is the spread of the 1pl. verb desinence *-iamo*, and the second is the presence of voiced versus unvoiced consonants in past participles deriving from Latin *-āru(m)*. The increased frequency of these forms in non-Tuscan vernaculars and the reduction of Milanese forms, I argue, can be seen to be one form of dialect levelling.

Dialect levelling is one element that is part of a broader process in different types of language change.⁶ According to Britain (2012: 224), levelling is one outcome of

⁶ For studies of levelling in the history of English, see Nevalainen and Tiekens-Boon van Ostade 2005: *sic passim*; Takeda 2002 (and especially pp. 141–143 on ‘dialect levelling vs. standardisation’); Wright 2001.

historical dialect contact, which he defines as “the eradication of marked linguistic features, marked in the sense of being in a minority in the ambient linguistic environment after the contact ‘event’, marked in the sense of being overtly stereotyped, or marked in the sense of being found rarely in the languages of the world and/or acquired late in first language acquisition”.

In this model, levelling is the first of a four-step process in a broader type of language change described as koineization. The other three processes (simplification, interdialect formation, and reallocation), are not discussed here. Dialect levelling is taken as a focus in this paper since it is one process in the broader framework of language change – and also of standardization – with which this article (and this special issue) is concerned. Previous studies have pointed to other processes that relate to standardization of other languages, such as Lodge’s work on processes of codification and reallocation in French (Grübl 2014; also Lodge 2010, 2013). In the development of supraregional varieties (discussed above) such as the case was for north Italy, levelling is often invoked to explain language change or related processes. Ferguson (1996) writes that koineization, or the reduction of dialect differences by levelling and simplification, is one of at least three tendencies involved in the spread of a favoured variety. Tuten (2001: 3) also looked at levelling as the reduction or attrition of marked variants (following Trudgill 1986: 97) in his modelling of koineization. Importantly for our purposes here, he makes an explicit link between levelling and standardization. The early disappearance of variants, he says, is one of the most “dramatic results of koineization” and “one can only conclude that this is so because these reductions are seen as the “normal” development from the perspective of the modern standard” (see also Kerswill 2003 for other terms and definitions, including ‘geographical diffusion’ and the incorporation of accommodation into the model; Tuten 2003: 114).

The notion of ‘marked’ in the definition above (and adopted in this paper) entails several further elaborations that characterise the data described below. Specifically, we will see that certain linguistic forms are marked as being in the minority, and that they are also overtly stereotyped following the introduction of these new variants. The question of ‘overtness’ is also picked up later in the paper. I discuss the potential ambiguity surrounding this term in the literature also in the conclusion.

A brief foray into the previous studies on the *-iamo* ending, and earlier attempts at explaining its historical development and diffusion, is needed before discussing its distribution among the data. I also consider another contrastive feature between Tuscan and Milanese, that is, the presence of voiced versus unvoiced consonants in past participles deriving from Latin *-ātū(M)*. The voiced variant is only characteristic of Milanese, and shows a wide levelling in the data below.

3 The problem

A traditional date for the codification of Italian is 1525, the year of publication of Pietro Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua*.⁷ This work defined grammar of Florentine, based on the language of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch, that was eventually accepted throughout Italy, although not without some resistance (Maraschio and Matarrese 2021). Nevertheless, selecting a vernacular to become a national standard was not straightforward; in the first instance, debates arose about whether a national standard should be based on Latin or a vernacular – and, if it were a vernacular, which one it should be. In any case, “the rise of literary and national standards had already begun in the later Middle Ages” (Sansón 2013: 237).

The 1pl. present indicative desinence for verbs of the first conjugation in contemporary standard Italian is *-iamo* < Latin *-(i)ĀMUS*. While the phonomorphological continuant of this ending has received some attention in the past, less obvious is the degree of variation and subsequent diffusion of this form at the origins of Italian up until codification in the early 16th century.⁸ So far, no study has considered the diffusion of the *-iamo* morpheme from a historical sociolinguistic perspective.⁹ In short, the expected outcomes of 1pl. verbs *-amo*, *-emo*, *-imo* corresponding to the three conjugations in Italian have, somewhat unexpectedly, all been replaced by *-iamo*.¹⁰ Sometime after the thirteenth century, *-iamo* became generalized to all verb classes.¹¹ Meszler and Samu (2007) looked at the generalization of *-iamo* to verbs of the present

7 See also Section 3 in Serra (2019) on ‘The background: Codification of the standard and “Questione della lingua” debates in early modern Italy’.

8 A certain degree of allomorphy still remains in the contemporary standard, however, particularly in regard to orthography and the difficulties around certain “rifts with respect to writing and pronunciation that even our current system presents”, including variation between forms such as *accompagniamo*, *guadagniamo* which can alternate with *accompagnamo*, *guadagnamo*. See Serianni (1988: 346) and references listed at: <https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/desinenze-iamo-amo-nella-prima-persona-plurale-dellindicativo-presente/17>.

9 Previous research into the diffusion of this ending has been somewhat sporadic. In the main, most studies have focused on formal explanations, either as a continuant from Latin *-i/EAMUS*, or with a focus on semantic criteria (Maiden 1995; Meszler and Samu 2007; Škerlj 1971; Spina and Dressler 2011; Vincent 1980; Wanner 1975).

10 Savoia (1997b: 78) also comments that, in contemporary varieties, “many central dialects (and some rural Tuscan varieties, in the imperative) have 1pl. in ThV + [mo]: Jesi [por'tamo] ‘we carry’, [be'emo] ‘we drink’, [ve'nimo] ‘we come’”. For further details on the evolution of this ending, see the studies by Wanner (1975), Vincent (1980: 388–89), Maiden (1995: 128) and Giannelli (1997). For an excellent account of the first-person plural in Milan that distinguishes between moods of the indicative, subjunctive, and the imperative, see Ziano (2024).

11 This goes for 1pl. verbs in both the indicative and the subjunctive. See Maiden (2012) on the morphological history of the Romance present subjunctive.

indicative in Old Tuscan.¹² They ascertain a series of semantic criteria (setting aside auxiliary *siamo*, and then look at action verbs, stative verbs etc.) to focus on the spread of this particular desinence, using the main corpus for research in historical Italian, the *Opera del Vocabolario Italiano* (OVI).¹³

There are several reasons why *-iamo* is an excellent candidate for a case-study of historical dialect levelling in merchant letters. For one thing, “it is a peculiarity of Tuscan, firmly established in Florentine by the fifteenth century (and one of the hallmarks of the Tuscan origin of Italian), that the first person plural present indicative and subjunctive are characterized by the ending *-iamo*” (Maiden 1995: 127).¹⁴ The “distinctiveness” of this ending as being a Florentine form therefore makes it a good test-case as the ‘unmarked’ variant in processes where dialect levelling is occurring in historical perspective. The generalization of *-iamo* can be seen as a widely observable tendency in Italo-Romance for conjugational distinctions to be neutralized in the first-person plural present.¹⁵

For verbs in the first conjugation ending in *-are*, Domokos (2007: 274) has identified three past participle endings in the writing of the early fourteenth-century Milanese poet Bonvesin dra Riva: *-ado*, *-adho*, *-ao*. Rohlfs (1966: §203) notes that, in an early stage, Latin *-ātum* > *-ado* and then > *-aδo* (where *δ* has the phonetic value of a voiced interdental fricative). From this latter development, *-aδ* > *-a* “in grandi zone del territorio settentrionale”. In eastern Lombardy, there was a return to a preceding form *-ado*. For other areas of Lombardy, *δ* “fell away before the disappearance of the final vowel: the result of this development was that *aδo* > *au* (*ao*)” (Rohlfs 1966: §203) which then turned into both *ou* and *o*.¹⁶ A document from nearby Mantua from 1374 still keeps the *-uto* desinence in *perduto* (Bongrani and Morgana 1994: 119, n.18) but lenition is present in a translation (*volgarizzamento*) by Vivaldo Belcalzer from the late 13th/early 14th century, as seen in the past participle *metuda* (Bongrani and

12 Where relevant, I have made some comparison with the previous research in Meszler and Samu (2007) in the analysis below, building on their descriptive framework (taking into account, for example, mood as well as stative vs. active verbs). The layout of the data below provides the broader context in which the linguistic forms occur, to aid for verification of results and to show context for expressions of formulae, discussed towards the end of the paper.

13 As at August 2024, this database contains 3,512 texts and over 30 million occurrences of 555,757 unique variants. It is available online at: <http://gattoweb.ovi.cnr.it/>.

14 Maiden (1995) also notes that “in most central and southern dialects, the endings are **-amo**, **-emo**, **-imo**, according to conjugation” (p. 127).

15 The attention this form has received, the variety of linguistic theories that have been applied, and the particularity of its historical development, are just some factors why “the reasons for the spread of the inflection *-iamo* are obscure” Maiden (1995: 128). Another motivator for the generalization of *-iamo*, possibly deriving from the imperative, has been argued for in Maiden (2007).

16 *è caduta prima dell'ammutilimento della vocale finale: il risultato di un tale sviluppo è stato -aδo > au (ao).*

Morgana 1994: 116, n.11). By the late fifteenth century, however, Vitale (1953) records *-ato* as the dominant ending in a corpus of Milanese chancery writing, which is only sometimes reduced to *ado* > *ao* > *à*. In a later corpus of non-literary Milanese documents, from the early sixteenth to the mid eighteenth century, Scotti Morgana (1983: 359) found only *-ato* which is “never voiced or reduced”.¹⁷ Given the distinctive nature of past participle endings between Tuscan and Milanese, this variable can also prove to be a useful test-case for a discussion of dialect levelling below.

This article attempts to trace these forms in the writing of two merchants, and to ascertain its presence within the broader context of verb allomorphy.¹⁸ Lending greater weight to the social aspect with respect to a more traditional historical linguistic perspective allows the data to be placed in its appropriate social context. A historical sociolinguistic analysis will foreground the emergence of language variants in *use* and the patterns of such variants, “even despite the preference of other variants by language authorities” (Elspaß 2021: 93), such as grammarians, linguistic academies, or authors who served as model letter writers. As we will see in Section 5 below, this is particularly the case in merchant writing, where conventionalized forms of language emerge, including some which ultimately did not standardize.¹⁹

4 Corpus and methodology

The corpus used for this study has been constructed in order to search for evidence of linguistic contact between Tuscan and Milanese. Specifically, letters of two Milanese merchants are analysed, who were in the service of the ‘merchant of Prato’, Francesco di Marco Datini. These commercial letters were sent between 1396 and 1402 and are housed in the Archivio di Stato di Prato in the Datini Archive, Prato, Tuscany.²⁰

¹⁷ mai sonorizzato o ridotto.

¹⁸ Other scholars have looked at the variation of early Italian vernaculars across a variety of phenomena. Formentin (2020), for example, considers the presence of verb allomorphy in early Tuscan vernaculars. Others, such as Brown (2023a), Cappellaro (2013, 2018) and Thornton (2011, 2012a, 2012b), describe verb allomorphy in terms of “overabundance” at both synchronic and diachronic stages of development, and from a variety of perspectives. The aim here is to complement these earlier studies by providing an overview from historical sociolinguistics.

¹⁹ See Brown 2020 for further discussion on this point.

²⁰ In total, there are over 810 letters from Milan in the Datini Archive. Of these, 526 were written by Datini’s business associates, all Tuscan, (who travelled to Milan on business errands and to meet with their Milanese correspondents) and are thus in Tuscan. Of the remaining 284 letters, 70 were written by other Tuscans or merchants from a Tuscan family or by merchants whose provenance I have been unable to establish, 9 pieces of correspondence are not letters, 4 are in Latin and one letter was sent by an anonymous merchant. Out of the remaining 200 letters, there are 72 from one of Datini’s main Milanese correspondents, Giovanni da Pessano. Studies which make use of material in the Datini

Table 1: 1pl. verb endings recorded in Tuscan and Milanese.

Variant	Shared or Unique?	Tuscan	Milanese
1	Unique to Tuscan	<i>-iamo</i>	–
2	Shared	<i>-amo</i>	<i>-amo</i>
3	Shared	<i>-emo</i>	<i>-emo</i>
4	Shared	<i>-iano</i>	<i>-(i)ano</i>
5	Unique to Milanese	–	<i>-imo</i>
6	Unique to Milanese	–	<i>-om</i>
7	Unique to Milanese	–	<i>-am</i>

Almost all material sent from Milan in this Archive has been previously published by Frangioni (1994), and the data used for this study is based on the critical edition available in Brown (2017a).²¹ The analysis which follows is based on the writers Francesco Tanso (?–1398) and Giovanni da Pessano. Francesco Tanso sent 7 letters from Milan. Giovanni da Pessano sent 72 letters, although I have excluded four items from the analysis below.²² These are two items which are *estratti conto* ‘receipts’ and two items which are not in Giovanni’s hand.²³ Although both merchants were based in Milan, their correspondence is all addressed to Tuscan merchants working for the Datini company, and who were all Tuscan.

Instances where *-iamo* is used over the merchant’s native “Milanese” ending is taken as evidence of dialect levelling, as the *-iamo* forms remain in the minority following the contact event. A clearer distinction between Tuscan and Milanese verb forms becomes apparent by contrasting the 1pl. verb endings recorded in the available studies of Tuscan and Milanese, presented in Table 1.²⁴ I have

Archive as evidence for the early diffusion of Tuscan are Bowles and Brown (2022), Brown (2011, 2012, 2015, 2017a, 2017b).

²¹ For an account of so-called ‘foreign’ languages present in this archive as recorded by the online database of the Archivio Datini, see Brown (2017b). A recent account of languages and cross-cultural exchanges in Renaissance Italy more generally is Petrocchi and Brown (2023). A similar process of tuscanisation is found to be present also in religious writing from Milan in the fifteenth century (Brown 2018, 2020).

²² Out of the 5 merchants included in Brown (2017a), these are the only two writers whose letters include 1pl. verb forms.

²³ The two items not in Giovanni’s hand but which appear in Frangioni’s corpus are letter 697 (pp. 500–501) and letter 758 (p. 531). Letter 697 is written by one of Giovanni’s cousins. Letter 758 is a “lettera non firmata di mano di Giovanni da Pessano” ‘not a letter signed in the hand of Giovanni da Pessano’.

²⁴ The data for this table are taken from the endings recorded in the following studies of Tuscan and Milanese: Castellani (1952); Colombo (2016); Degli Innocenti (1984); Domokos (2007); Ghinassi (2006); Manni (2003); Mengaldo (1963); Morgana (1987); Rohlfs (1966); Scotti Morgana (1983); Trolli (1972); Vitale (1953); Ziano (2024).

highlighted the *-iamo* ending in bold to show that it is not recorded as a ‘native’ ending in studies of early Milanese vernacular and that it is indeed distinctive of Tuscan, specifically Florentine. In some cases, the endings are shared between both Tuscan and Milanese. These are also highlighted in the table.

As can be seen from Table 1 above, some verb endings are common to both varieties (as with *-amo* and *-emo*), while *-iamo* is unique to Tuscan. Milanese is distinguished by its lack of word-final vowels, such as *-am*, *-om*, discussed later. I present the results below, first highlighting all cases of 1pl. verb endings in the letters of Francesco Tanso and then for Giovanni da Pessano, before turning to voiced versus unvoiced consonants in past participles. I highlight instances of copular, modal, and auxiliary *siamo* ‘we are’ and *abiamo* ‘we have’, and make some comparison to the previous work by Meszler and Samu (2007), building on the work there.

5 Results²⁵

5.1 1pl. Ending *-iamo* in Milanese

The Tuscan *-iamo* ending is dominant in the letters of Francesco Tanso in both regular and irregular verbs. The first occurrences of *-iamo* in the corpus are in the very first letter from Francesco Tanso of 1397, where he writes:

- (1) *Di poi che **siamo** partito da Genoa sono mandate balle VI mercerie (...)* [1]
‘Since we left Genova, 6 bales of merchandise have been sent (...)’
- (2) ***abiamo** scritto che le faza legare in ball(e)...* [1]
‘we have written that he should tie them into bales...’
- (3) *Sapiati che **abiamo** parlato a uno di li deti patroni... [1]*
‘Know that we have spoken to one of the aforementioned owners...’
- (4) ***Abiamo** scritto II lettere le qualli ve dè dare Stefano Lechavo* [3]
‘We have written two letters which Stefano Lechavo must give to you’

What these instances show is that the *-iamo* ending has not just entered present verb forms but it is also grammaticalized as auxiliaries in perfects as well. In this sense, the *-iamo* ending has displaced the early Milanese forms present, for example, in the writing of the thirteenth-century poet Bonvesin dra Riva who only has the northern desinenes *-am(o)*, *-em(o)*, *-im* (Domokos 2007: 263). Their use in irregular verbs provides evidence for extension also within paradigms of the present indicative

²⁵ Numbers in square brackets at the end of citations refer to the letter number in Brown (2017a).

in early Italian (Meszler and Samu 2007: 167).²⁶ In other cases still, *abiamo* is introduced before a dependent infinitive as a modal, as in (5) (6) below, and there also exist instances of the *-iamo* ending extending to 1pl. of *dire* ‘to say’ as in *diciamo* (7), oftentimes as part of *formulae* in the *conclusio* of the letter:

- (5) *Altro no abiamo a dire.* [1]
‘We do not have anything else to say.’
- (6) *Altro no abiamo a dire.* [2]
‘We do not have anything else to say.’
- (7) *Altro no ve diciamo.* [6]
‘We do not say anything else to you.’

In these cases, *formulae* in merchant letter writing may help to explain the repeated use of particular verbs and verb endings, which allow for a higher incidence of the form to occur and a greater diffusion of the variant. The high instances of *-iamo* and the necessity to end medieval letters by stating that there is nothing else to write or to say, may also lend weight to the idea that *-iamo* was either becoming a fixed desinence for certain types of verbs with particular semantic value. In addition, it allows greater visibility to the ending in these parts of the letter given that other verb endings from Milanese are not selected.

Other verbs with the *-iamo* ending are also present in Francesco’s writing, albeit in a reduced number. In the main, these verbs relate to aspects of information exchange, sending and receiving letters, or the *petitio* in the letter itself:

- (8) *Se p(er) voy posiamo fare alchuna cossa di q(ua), scrivytello.* [1]
‘If we can do anything for you from here, write it.’
- (9) *Ve mandiamo con questa II lettere di Tomaxo....* [3]
‘We send to you, with this letter, two letters from Tomaxo...’
- (10) *...pensiamo meglo avere che de poy lui iscrisse sono meliorate....* [6]
‘we think it best to have (them) because, since he last wrote, they have improved...’

²⁶ Meszler and Samu (2007: 182, n.3) make the point, however, that there is the possibility of interpreting *-ia-* as being part of the root, and *-mo* as the desinence. See also Vincent (1980: 387) who comments on the morphological segmentation of *-iamo*. He notes that */-mo/* “presents no difficulty as it recurs without exception in every 1st pers. pl. verb form of the language” but that */-ja-/* “seems to occupy the TV slot, standing as it does between stem and ending”. In morphology of northern forms, the matter is made more difficult still in recorded cases such as 1pl. *voliàn* (Mengaldo 1963: 119), where multiple segments can be discerned, particularly with regard to *-ia-* insertion, use of *-n-* as 1pl. marker, and zero word-final vowel, thus complicating the question of borrowed morphology. For further details and an excellent overview, see the section on ‘verb roots’ in Ledgeway (2016). On the question of borrowed morphology more generally, see Gardani et al. (2015).

In total, there are 44 occurrences of the *-iamo* desinence (out of a total of 47 1pl. verbs used by Francesco Tanso, or 94 %) across a number of different verbs and in different contexts, even if many of these instances are represented in *formulae*. All verbs presented in this subsection of the corpus are in the indicative. In most cases, the *-iamo* ending appears as 1pl. of auxiliaries *avere* ‘to have’ or *essere* ‘to be’ but it is also used here as a modal before a dependent infinite, as in (5) and (6) above. In line with Meszler and Samu (2007: 166), generalization of *siamo* appears mainly in present indicatives as well as an auxiliary (also from the earliest texts), and mainly in compound verbs in particular forms of perfects, notably the *passato prossimo*.²⁷ Absent are instances of *semo* – an early form of the present indicative of *essere* ‘to be’ which became replaced by *siamo* ‘we are’ during the thirteenth century (by way of analogy with *avemo* ‘we have’ and *volemo* ‘we want’).²⁸ Levelling in the sense described above by Britain (2012: 224; also Britain 2010), can be seen by the reduction of Milanese verb endings shown below in Table 2, and discussed further in the conclusion. Table 2 below records the frequencies of all verbs with the *-iamo* ending in the letters of Francesco Tanso.²⁹ These occurrences appear throughout the letters of Francesco Tanso, written 1397–1398, and are not restricted to any one particular year or time frame. This process can be seen as a dual outcome of the levelling process which must have taken place earlier, but also as a result of language contact in the merchant writing studied here between Tuscan and Gallo-Italian.

Of the 44 tokens with *-iamo*, eight appear in *formulae*. These include: *altro no(n) abiamo a dire* (3); *non altro (ve ne) diciamo* (3); *se per voy posiamo fare alchuna cossa* (2).³⁰ Let us now turn to the letters of Giovanni da Pessano.

The letters of Giovanni da Pessano are more numerous than those of Francesco Tanso (68 letters versus 7 letters). Despite the greater number of letters with respect to Francesco Tanso, there are in fact fewer cases of 1pl. verb forms. Almost all forms for the first person are Milanese, and there are no recorded forms of *-iamo* at all in

27 They quote the *Lettera di Consiglio de' Cerchi* from 1291, published in Castellani (1952: 600), which contains occurrences of *siamo* ‘we are’ and *siamo stati* ‘we have been’. Other early occurrences listed in the Corpus OVI, in Tuscan writing, can be found from Brunetto Latini’s *Rettorica* (c.1260–1261), from the *Lettera senese* (1262), and in the *Trattati morali* by Andrea da Grosseto (1268).

28 By way of quick comparison, the Corpus OVI shows there to be 5,044 occurrences of *siamo* and 1,046 for *semo*. See Meszler and Samu (2007: 166) for some brief description.

29 I use the term auxiliary here only in reference to cases where *abiamo* and *siamo* are used for compound tenses in the *passato prossimo*.

30 I am grateful to a reviewer for pointing out the possibility that the restriction of certain forms to *formulae* might be considered ‘specialization’, i.e., the “differentiation of variants” in the sense of Denis and Tagliamonte (2018: 407). In this case, “the consequence is that particular forms will take on differentiating semantic or grammatical nuances and in so doing develop a different distributional footprint”.

Table 2: All occurrences of 1pl. verb endings in the letters of Francesco Tanso (listed in alphabetical order).

Verb ending	Verb	Number of occurrences
Tuscan (-iamo)	<i>abiamo</i> (auxiliary) ^a	21
	<i>abiamo</i> (modal)	2
	<i>abiamo</i> ‘we have’	5
	<i>diciamo</i> ‘we say’	2
	<i>mandiamo</i> ‘we send’	5
	<i>pensiamo</i> ‘we think’	2
	<i>posiamo</i> ‘we can’	2
	<i>prechiamo</i> ‘we beg, implore’	1
	<i>rispondiamo</i> ‘we respond’	1
	<i>siamo</i> (auxiliary)	1
	<i>siamo</i> (copular)	1
	<i>voliamo</i> ‘we want’	1
Total number of occurrences of -iamo		44
Milanese and Tuscan	<i>abiano</i>	2
Milanese	<i>Mandano</i> ^b	1
Total number of occurrences of -(i)ano		3
Grand total of 1pl. verb forms		47

^aIn one case spelled as *habiamo* with so-called ‘etymological *h*’, in Letter 7. ^bThis form occurs in a series of formulae at the end of Letter 5 in Brown (2017a: 237): *Con questa mandano* [mandiamo] *una lettera di Iohani di Pasano. Altro non ve dicho. Deu sia con voy* ‘With this [letter], we are sending a letter from Iohani di Pasano. I say nothing else to you. May god be with you’.

his letters.³¹ Table 3 below presents all occurrences of 1pl. verbs in the letters of Giovanni da Pessano.

Examples of the 1sg. used consistently throughout his writing can be seen in the *salutatio* and *conclusio* of any letter, oftentimes mirroring *formulae* in Francesco Tanso’s letters. For example:

- (11) *Per la mane di Luchino Billia ve scrisse mia lettera....* [27]
 ‘In the hand of Luchino Billia, I wrote to you my letter...’
- (12) *Altro per questa no dicho.* [27]
 ‘I do not say anything else in this (letter)’

The forms of the 1pl. show there to be two instances of the regular, northern outcomes. Regular verbs for 1pl. in Giovanni’s letters include the following:

31 There is one case of *perdiamo* ‘we lose’ in letter 63 in Brown (2017a), at the end of the letter but it is not in Giovanni da Pessano’s handwriting.

Table 3: Occurrences of 1pl. verb in the letters of Giovanni da Pessano (listed in alphabetical order).

Verb	Number of occurrences
<i>abiano</i> ‘we have’	1
<i>credemo</i> ‘we believe’	1
<i>faciano</i> ‘we do/make’	1
<i>pomo</i> ‘we can’	1
<i>preghano</i> ‘we ask’	1
<i>semo</i> ‘we are’	1
<i>staghamo</i> ‘we stay’	1
Total number of occurrences of 1pl. verb forms	7

(13) *preghàno che al termine facisti bon pagamento.* [27]

‘we ask that at the end you make good payment.’

(14) *Qui se rechunta che lo Zamberlano è tornato indietro, no di meno no ne credemo* [59]

‘Here it is said that Zamberlano has returned, nevertheless we do not believe it’

In the cases of *-ano* and *-emo*, one sees forms common to Tuscan and Milanese. A similar process can be seen also with forms of the verb *essere* ‘to be’. There is one case of 1pl. copular verb in Giovanni’s letters in the indicative. Although there are no cases of *siamo* ‘we are’, we find one case of *semo* – a form that is common to both Tuscan and Milanese:³²

(15) *...e anchora semo in li feste, ma in questi dì farò de venderlo....* [65]

‘and we are still having celebrations, but in these days I will try to sell it...’

One could see this occurrence as a late survival of this form given that most historical grammars of Italian (Tuscan) attribute the replacement of *semo* by *siamo* to a process that begins in the thirteenth century. Of the 1,046 occurrences of *semo* in the Corpus OVI, approximately half are from the fourteenth century, in a wide variety of text genres. By this time, it is clear that *siamo* is becoming the preferred

³² In Tuscan, recorded cases of *semo* can be found in Rohlfs (1966: §540) and Castellani (2000: 332). Castellani also records *siemo* in ‘western Tuscan’, that is, the early vernaculars of Pisa, Lucca, and Pistoia (p. 332), while Trolli (1972: 90) records *siano* in the writing of the Florentine merchant Giovanni Morelli (1371–1444). In Milanese, the form is recorded in the earliest texts. See Colombo (2016: 192); Degli Innocenti (1984: 79); Domokos (2007: 264); Rohlfs (1966: §540); Stella (1994b: 197); Vitale (1953: 93).

variant. Given the consensus that the *-iamo* ending in paradigms of the indicative is somehow transferred from the subjunctive, and given the ‘clear prevalence’ of *siamo* in the corpora, “it is difficult to see how this form can act as a ‘bridge’ on a functional level between the present indicative and the subjunctive” (Meszler and Samu 2007: 167).³³ Meszler and Samu make a distinction between stative verbs and active verbs. They suggest that, differently from active verbs, the diffusion of *-iamo* mainly occurs not just due to the formal influence of the subjunctive, but also at a functional level too.

How do these results compare to other types of contemporary writing in Milan? If we consider all 1pl. verbs in the epistolary correspondence written in the early fifteenth century by the Milanese beguine Margherita Lambertenghi (?–1454), we find northern forms to still be dominant (Brown 2019). Nevertheless, Tuscan forms are beginning to appear also in her writing. Out of the 26 1pl. present indicative verbs present in that earlier study, 23 (88.5 %) show a northern ending (e.g., *famo*, *avemo*), while only three are Tuscan (11.5 %): *abiamo* ‘we have’ (2 tokens) and *vegliamo* ‘we want’ (1 token).³⁴ Religious writers such as Margherita Lambertenghi were less exposed to language from outside their immediate geographical region when compared to merchants, who often travelled and corresponded with interlocutors from further afield. Merchants can be said, in this sense, to be ‘early adopters’ following Rogers (2010 [1962]) five-stage process of innovation diffusion; in other terms, they are forerunners of broader changes at play as ‘merchants of innovation’ (Wagner and Beinhoff 2017). The results here can also be seen to mirror Alcalado Carcinero’s findings (2017) on English, where different changes appear at different times according to record type.

Further evidence for the adoption of Tuscan forms can be seen at the phonological level, such as unvoiced consonants in past participles, discussed next.

5.2 Voiced versus unvoiced past participle endings in Milanese

In Tuscan, the unmarked outcome for past participle endings of 1st conjugation verbs deriving from Latin $-\text{ATU(M)}$ is *-ato* (e.g., *parlare* [to speak] > *parlato* [spoken]). For Milanese, in contrast, Domokos (2007) identified three past participle endings from the late 1200s for *-are* verbs: *-ado*, *-adho*, *-ao*. As mentioned above, at an early stage, Latin $-\text{āTU(M)}$ > *-ado* and then > *-aδo* (Rohlf 1966: §203). Giovanni da Pessano’s

³³ Proprio per la netta prevalenza di *siamo* nella funzione indicativa nei testi del corpus, è difficile vedere come potesse fungere da ‘ponte’ a livello funzionale tra il presente dell’indicativo e del congiuntivo.

³⁴ In commenting on *amo*, *famo*, Ziano (2024: 62) notes they are “high-frequency verbs that generally prove to be resistant to the spread of innovations, be it phonological change or analogical leveling”.

Table 4: Past participle endings of 1st conjugation verbs < -ĀTU(M).

Variant in the corpus	Variety	Tokens (Giovanni da Pessano)	Tokens (Francesco Tanso)
-ato, -ata, -ati	Tuscan	127 (66.5 %)	31 (96.86 %)
-atto	Hyper-correct (Tuscan)	57 (29.8 %)	0 (0 %)
-ado / -adi / -agho	Milanese	7 (3.7 %)	1 (3.14 %)
Total		191 (100 %)	32 (100 %)

uncertainty whether the Tuscan ending is pronounced as a single or double consonant also results in a number of hyper-correct endings, for example, **parlato* instead of Tuscan *parlato*. Table 4 below presents the different variants of past participle endings in the corpus, the variety to which the variant belongs, and the number of tokens.

Giovanni's writing is incorporating Tuscan elements (that is, becoming tuscanized) though it still retains distinct northern forms. However, he adopts overwhelmingly Tuscan variants by selecting the unvoiced *-t-* variant over voiced variants (66.5 % vs. 3.7 %). In addition, the notable frequency of hyper-correct forms (29.8 %) can be seen as evidence of his attempt to accommodate to his Tuscan interlocutor by adopting a variant about whose phonological value he is uncertain. Tanso is more categorical in his use of the Tuscan variants, with 96.86 % past participle forms featuring an unvoiced *-t-* over his native Milanese *-d-*, *-g(h)-* endings. Although presenting fewer tokens than Giovanni overall, Tanso's high incidence of Tuscan forms shows how the spread of Tuscan features (and the displacement of the Milanese ending) was entering Milan in a heterogeneous way. Tanso's tendency to use just the Tuscan form almost exclusively can also be seen as evidence for merchants' capacity to accommodate fully to Tuscan forms, at least for this one variable. Over the course of the following centuries, Milanese will become further tuscanized (as shown in the language of non-literary writing from Milan during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries studied by Morgana 1985, 1987), taking on forever more Tuscan forms in a process of supralocalisation.

Again, making comparison to the writing of Margherita Lambertenghi, we find greater evidence of levelling when we consider the presence of Tuscan versus Milanese past participle reflexes, as shown below in Table 5.³⁵

³⁵ In this table, I list past participle endings from all conjugations here for completeness and to provide a more comprehensive picture of the presence of Tuscan forms in Milan.

Table 5: Tuscan versus Milanese Past Participles in the writing of Margherita Lambertenghi.

Tuscan versus Milanese	Past participle	Tokens
Tuscan (unvoiced -t- reflex)	<i>areçeuto</i> 'received'	1
	<i>azonto</i> 'added'	2
	<i>comenzato</i> 'began'	1
	<i>deputate</i> 'assigned'	1
	<i>dito</i> 'said'	1
	<i>laudato</i> 'praised'	1
	<i>lecta</i> 'read'	1
	<i>mantenuta</i> 'maintained'	1
	<i>nominato</i> 'named'	1
	<i>obligate</i> 'forced'	5
	<i>odito</i> 'heard'	1
	<i>ordenate</i> 'ordered'	1
	<i>passato</i> 'passed'	1
	<i>scripti / scripto</i> 'written'	3
Total number of Tuscan reflexes		21
Milanese (voiced -d- reflex; -g- in an irregular verb)	<i>despensado</i> 'dispensed'	1
	<i>tolegio</i> 'took'	1
Total number of Milanese reflexes		2
Grand total of all past participle reflexes		23

Here, a clearer distinction between Tuscan and Milanese past participle endings can be seen. The unvoiced Tuscan *-t-* reflex is clearly dominant over the voiced Milanese *-d-* reflex (91 % vs. 9 %), pointing to evidence for a process of levelling that is underway, but not yet complete. Given the religious nature of her writing, one cannot also discount the possibility of a closer adherence to a Latin unvoiced form; however, the presence of word-final vowels, and the non-literary nature of her writing removed from literary culture, would all suggest an ongoing process of dialect levelling induced by Tuscan as accounting for the lesser Milanese variants.

What all these instances may point to in the letters of both authors is evidence of a process of dialect levelling that began earlier and which is not yet complete. It is a process whereby Tuscan forms are becoming more and more adopted, however, infiltrating into the northern, supraregional language that was evolving, but where northern forms are still evident. Many of the forms occur in particular *formulae* used in the letters, i.e., conventionalised expressions, specific to the letter genre, which perform a pragmatic function within this text type. This suggests that the very structure of merchant letters lends itself to selecting particular verb forms over others. The *formulae* may represent direct borrowings from Tuscan, and it is possible that the Tuscan endings discussed here first entered into Milanese by means of

formulae. The motivation for the adoption of the *formulae* by these writers might be framed as a form of accommodation to their (more powerful) Tuscan interlocutors. Similarly, to other studies of *formulae*, the forms studied here are possibly “associated with group membership or social positioning” (Laitinen and Nordlund 2012: 85) in a ‘community of practice’ of merchant letter writers (see also Rutten and van der Wal 2012).

6 Conclusions

This article has looked at dialect levelling in merchant letters sent from Milan during the late 1300s and early 1400s. By focussing on one verb ending that is characteristic of Tuscan, and the presence of unvoiced dentals in participial endings, the aim has been to see how the successive displacement of earlier northern verb endings, such as *-am*, *-om*, shows a varied patterning in merchant language. Previous studies of Old Italian described the historical development of the *-iamo* ending from a variety of linguistic traditions. As yet, little research has taken a historical sociolinguistic view, and almost none in non-literary writing or merchant writing. Adopting this approach allows for a great emphasis to be placed on the social context of language in use, specifically the culture of literacy surrounding merchant writing and the forms of exchange with which such culture was engaged. The additional view from historical sociolinguistics also facilitates a more holistic approach to language history and standardization. Rather than focussing narrowly on the language of authorities, such as grammarians or elite writers – whose role is undeniable in the history of Italian – historical sociolinguistics lends greater emphasis to forms of writing which have traditionally been given less importance in the history of Italian. It also sheds light on forms of language that were evolving at the same time as a standard was becoming selected.

I have argued that the progressive substitution of Milanese forms by Tuscan can be taken as evidence of dialect levelling, in the sense of Britain (2012). In this definition, levelling invokes the notion of ‘markedness’ in the eradication of linguistic features. What the data above indicate is that the Milanese 1pl. forms (*-am*, *-om*) and voiced past participles (*-ado*, *-agho*, *-ao*) are indeed in a minority and therefore marked, having been ousted by their Tuscan counterparts. The lack of frequency of the Milanese variants in the data may also be due of course to the available extant record and fragmentary nature of the data that have come down, as is the case in all studies of historical sociolinguistics. Another characterisation inherent in the definition of levelling is that the marked variants are ‘overtly stereotyped’. In the case presented here, this question is more difficult to ascertain. To my knowledge, the Milanese forms appear almost exclusively in literary works and are only rarely present in

non-literary writing. It is in this sense that they may be considered marked and therefore evidence of dialect levelling. There is no overt marking in terms of metalinguistic or any other comments that singles them out as such.

Using evidence from merchant letters housed in the voluminous Datini Archive, I have described all endings of 1pl. reflexes in two major merchants from late medieval Italy. Merchant language, with its specific argot, had an important role in introducing dialect levelling in and around Milan. However, it must be cautioned that merchants may only represent a particular subsection of the population as a whole. They use particular jargon – often restricted to specific commercial commodities, coins, weights, measures etc. – and in this sense create a sectorial language that progresses *alongside* the parallel development of the standard. The Datini Archive still remains a rich resource for further investigations into merchant language and forms of language contact, particularly for investigations which aim to measure the linguistic outcomes between different subvarieties of Romance, such as those discussed here between Tuscan and Gallo-Italian.³⁶

While Francesco Tanso adopts Tuscan verb forms much more frequently, Giovanni da Pessano selects forms that are common to both vernaculars. Greater evidence for dialect levelling in Giovanni's writing can be seen in his wide adoption of unvoiced consonants in past participles that are a typical feature of Tuscan. In the case presented here, one can consider the contact 'event' referenced in Britain's definition not only to have been the close personal contact between these two merchants and Francesco Datini, but also the broader economic, political, and literary power which Tuscan wielded over its northern counterpart. In this sense, there is no one single event which can be seen to be the starting point of the linguistic contact between Tuscan and Milanese, but a form of interaction that takes place over several centuries and whose ties become progressively stronger as the two dialect areas came into closer contact. When Italian becomes codified in the early sixteenth century, the abundant correspondence that was being exchanged between merchants across the peninsula and beyond had already helped to spread Tuscan among non-Tuscans. Merchants can be seen as integral 'agents' in the broader process of language change leading up to standardization. They were not only responsible for the exchange of goods and services around late medieval Italy in a practical sense; they also traded vernaculars, bringing different varieties into contact and thus helping to spread incipient forms of Tuscan that would eventually form the national standard.

As with many merchants of late medieval Europe, Francesco Tanso and Giovanni da Pessano sent large numbers of letters, sometimes in rapid succession. Merchants required access to quick information. In creating such an enormous

³⁶ For a more general overview of Romance in contact with Romance, see Schulte (2018).

written correspondence, both writers made use of formulae in their letters, especially in the *salutatio* and *conclusio*. Repetition of formulae was one way in which particular forms of language spread quickly and made writing easy. Not only did these formulae aid in the writing process, they also provide evidence for language *conventionalization* – one of the salient features of *standardization from below* in Elspaß (2021: 93). The occurrences of *-iamo* discussed above also point to formulae as being one motivator behind the extensive use of forms in closing letters and possibly as evidence of a broader levelling process. Vincent (1980: 395) had already commented on the need for more detailed work on the histories of individual verbs “in order to discover exactly what mechanisms are at work”. Since then, new editions have appeared and more theoretical treatments of the problem have clarified further aspects of the historical development and subsequent spread of the verb endings discussed in this paper. As yet, little application from the tools of historical sociolinguistics has been undertaken on Italian. This paper barely scratches the surface of the work that is yet to be done. Further studies will be able to trace more verb forms in larger corpora, across different text types, and across greater chronological periods, in order to reveal the complex processes involved in processes of dialect levelling and standardization in Renaissance Italy.

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