Diphthongisation patterns in Venetian and Friulian

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In this paper two main diachronic processes involving diphthongs in Venetian and Friulian varieties will be analysed. It will be shown that the diphthong *wɔ* (from a Latin Ŏ sitting in an open syllable) undergoes two main diachronic changes, both in Venetian and Friulian varieties: i) it evolves into *vɔ* or *vwɔ* when in word initial position ii) it evolves into *jɔ* after a coronal consonant. It will be argued that the first change is an instance of a *strengthening* process involving *w* in word initial position, and that the second process is an instance of *assimilation* of the labial-velar approximant to the preceding coronal C. Both processes have received different interpretations in the literature; it will be shown that an approach couched within Element Theory (Backley 2011) is better suited to account for these phenomena (with particular respect to the second process).

wɔ > vɔ, vwɔ

When in word initial position, the diphthong *wɔ* has two possible evolutions: *vɔ* or *vwɔ*, as the following examples serve to show (as can be seen, the quality of the stressed vowel "shifts" between [ɔ] and [o]. This alternation has no trivial explanation and will be disregarded hereafter since it has no relevance for the processes under discussion):

(1)

*ŎVU(M)	> ven. *ˈvovo*, *ˈvwɔvo* 'egg'
ŎP(E)RA(M)	> frl. *ˈvore* 'work'
	(with P > ∅ as in e.g. SŬPRA > *ˈsɔre*)
ŎLEU(M)	> frl. *ˈvweli* 'oil'
	(with *wo* > *we* due to a dissimilation process in frl. e.g. SCHŎLA(M) > *ˈskwɛle* 'school')

The *w* > *v* change in word initial position is a classic instance of a fortition process (Bybee / Easterday 2017, Brandão de Carvalho / Scheer / Ségéral 2008). We propose that also the second output, *viz*. *ˈvwɔ* (*ˈvwe* in frl.), be interpreted as an instance of a fortition process, this time involving feature spreading: the melodical make-up of the labial-velar approximant (and in particular the element |U|, responsible for roundness / backness and labiality) spreads to a preceding temporal position (an *x-slot* in classical Autosegmental terms), and gets reinterpreted as [v] (the sequence *wwɔ or *wːɔ being disallowed in the varieties under investigation; for the relationship between strength and length see Luo / Enguehard 2019 a.m.o. and references therein).

wɔ > jɔ

When following a coronal C, the diphthong *wɔ* changes into *jɔ*, as shown by the following examples (taken from Baglioni 2016, Ferguson 2007):

(2)

13th-15th century ven.	>	16th-18th century ven.	
duol(o)	>	*diol*	'pain'
luogo	>	*liogo*	'place'
but			
fuogo	>	*fuogo*	'fire'

The same can be said for Friulian, with an added caveat: Friulian displays a palatalisation process that targets the coronal C preceding the diphthong. Such palatalisation process can only be accounted for by assuming an intermediate stage in which *jo* was present – the palatal approximant *j* is then responsible for the palatalisation of the preceding coronal C – (as already proposed by Ascoli 1873):

(3)

TŎLLERE > *twoli > *tjoli > *ˈcoli* 'to take'

(note that diphthongisation in frl. characterises also an ŏ sitting in a closed syllable)

NŎVA(M) > *nwove > *njove > *ˈɲove* 'new, f.'

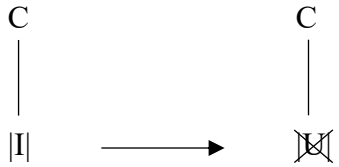
but

CŎCTU(M) > *ˈkwet* not *ˈkjet

This process has been variously explained (for a review of the relevant literature see Baglioni 2016). Following Baglioni (2016) (but also see Stussi 2005, Benincà 1989, Gartner 1882), we propose that the change *wɔ > jɔ* be interpreted as an instance of an assimilation process driven by the preceding coronal C (note that any other explanation misses the crucial point of this process being phonologically conditioned, in that it only happens after a coronal C).

This process does not have a straightforward explanation in an account that uses Chomsky / Halle (1968) binary features, since there is no feature that a coronal C could spread to a labial-velar approximant to make it palatal (also, in an Autosegmental model, coronal Cs and labial-velars activate different articulatory nodes and should not, in principle, be able to assimilate one another). If one considers Elements, though, the solution follows through quite easily: we take these cases to be instances of languages in which coronal Cs are characterised by the |I| element (for languages with |A|-coronals and languages with |I|-coronals see Backley 2011). It is this element, then, that gets spread from the coronal C to the following labial-velar, resulting in the palatal approximant *j* (the following representation builds on the formalisation presented in Backley 2011):

(4)



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