VOICE IN ISTRO-ROMANIAN. A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS*

IONUȚ GEANĂ

I. ISTRO-ROMANIAN AS A HISTORICAL DIALECT OF ROMANIAN

Typologically, it is part of Eastern Romance, alongside Daco-Romanian, Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian, all four forming the historical dialects of Romanian. The name to designate the language spoken by Istro-Romanians differs according to the region; it is usually a word derived from the name of the community or village where they live, thus those of the northern group call it *Zheyanski* [ʒe'j$^{(w)}$ɑnski], whereas in the south, they call it *Vlashki* ['vlaʃki] (for current research, see Vrzić & Singler (2016: 51–55)).

The term *Istro-Romanian* (for both the language and the population) has been culturally established, mainly to show its connection to Romanian; traditionally, it has been considered a historical dialect of Romanian (see Puşcariu 1906: 117–120, Kovačec 1984: 550–551). In the sense of this article, the word *language* refers to what Istro-Romanians speak, and has no intention whatsoever of going into the language/dialect dispute.

Istro-Romanian forms two (once large) groups: the northern group – the village of Žejane, and the southern group made of several villages, most prominently Šušnjevica. Istro-Romanians live at the Croatian-Italian border, in a multi-ethnic and multilingual environment and language contact especially with Croatian is widely accepted (for details, see Puşcariu 1906: 117–120, Kovačec 1984: 550–554, Vrzić & Singler 2016: 51). Recent work on the syntax of Istro-Romanian is to be found at Zegrean (2012) and Giusti and Zegrean (2015).

II. VOICE IN ISTRO-ROMANIAN

The same with the other (Eastern) Romance languages and dialects, Istro-Romanian follows the traditional pattern distinguishing between active vs.

* This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-2523, title of the project: *Balkan Romance Convergences in South-Danubian Romanian Dialects (BALKROM)*, project director: Manuela Nevaci.

FD, XXXVI, Bucureşti, 2017, p. 36–46

BDD-A27540 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 23:04:49 UTC)

passive constructions. The use of reflexive pronouns in reciprocal and impersonal constructions is nearly as frequent as in Daco-Romanian.

The dimensions of voice in the grammatical system of Istro-Romanian do not differ from standard Romanian, in the sense that it is organized as active (default, unmarked, as in (1a)) vs. passive (marked either with tensed BE forms + participle, as in (1b), or with SE, as in (2c)) – for transitive verbs, and active/personal vs. impersonal – for intransitive verbs (for Romanian data, see Pană Dindelegan (2010: 264–268); for historical and dialectal evidence, see Timotin 2000a, Timotin 2000b and Timotin 2002):

(1) a. *Cum kemåț voi?*
how call.2.PL you
"What do you call it?"
(SF 52)

b. *Čel'i miseț zabraneno -åv fost de lovi.*
those months forbidden has been DE hunt
"Hunting was forbidden those months"
(SF 300)

c. *semința s-å pus nutru.*
clot.DEF SE=has.AUX put.PPLE inside
"The clot was put inside [the milk]"
(SF 66)

In some active constructions, it is to be noted that, in the absence of a specific intonation, some sentences may become ambiguous, as in:

(2) *Bovu ântręba åsiru.*
ox.DEF(NOM/ACC) asks donkey.DEF(NOM/ACC)
"The ox is asking the donkey" or "The donkey is asking the ox"
(Kovačec 580)

The ambiguity is given by the fact that Istro-Romanian does not have a fixed word-order. The order of the constituents by itself does not help identify the exact syntactic position. Moreover, unlike standard Romanian, Istro-Romanian does not have differential object marking, and clitic doubling is rare and optional. It is usually the context that helps identify the syntactic function of each constituent.

II. 1. The *fi* 'be' passive constructions

Given the exclusive oral use of Istro-Romanian and the pragmatic value of the passive voice, the corpus shows only a few, though very diverse, examples of passive constructions with tensed BE + participle. Thus, the example provided above in (1b) is particular to peculiar, to the extent that the form of the adjective does not resemble a typical (Istro-)Romanian participle, and it is included more for semantic and analogic reasons under BE passive constructions. Clearer examples are in what follows:

BDD-A27540 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 23:04:49 UTC)

(3) a. *se* *conoşte* *cum* *ie* *a* *fost* *lucråta.*
SE know.3.SG how she has been worked.F
"It is known how it [the church] was worked upon"
(SF 54)

b. *De* *când* *ie* *cåşu* *facut* *remâre* *zeru*
of when is cheese.DEF.NOM make.PPLE
rest.3.SG.PRES whey.DEF
"After the cheese is made, whey is what is left"
(SF 66)

c. *pârla* *doi,* *trei* *åń* *a* *fost* *zruşita.*
until.at two three years has.AUX been
destroy.PPLE
"It [the church] was destroyed two or three years ago"
(SF 92)

d. *Şi* *fost-a* *restegnit* *za* *noi ...*
and be.PPLE-has.AUX crucified for us
şi ... *fost-a* *zecopeit ...* *cum* *fost-a*
and be.PPLE-has.AUX earthed as
be.PPLE-has.AUX
piseit *ăn* *Sveta* *Pisma*
write.PPLE in holy.DEF book
"And he was crucified, and he was buried for us, as it was written in the Bible"
(LM 6)

II.2. The *veri* 'come' passive constructions

There is no synthetic passive in tensed forms, and the particularity of the southern varieties of Istro-Romanian is the use of the auxiliary *veri* 'come', under the influence of Italian:

(4) a. *Vaca* *virit-a* *uţisę.*
cow.DEF come.PPLE-has. AUX killed.F
"The cow was killed"
(Kovačec577)

b. *ţesći* *feţor* *pena* *can-a* *fost* *nascuţ*
these boys.NOM till when-have.AUX be.PPLE born.PPLE
iel' *a* *virit* *hitiţ* *ăn* *apę.*
they have.AUX come thrown.PPLE.M.PL in waters
"These sons, soon after they were borne, they were thrown in the water"
(SP129)

(5) *Neca* *se* *strica* *låptele,*
so.that SE break.PRES.3.SG milk.DEF

BDD-A27540 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 23:04:49 UTC)

neca *vire* *cåşu* *?ɣust*
so.that comes cheese.DEF.NOM clotted
"So that milk ferments and cheese gets clotted"

(SF 66)

However, all these examples show something particular. Although it is claimed that this is an influence from Italian (see, among others, Kovačec (1984: 577)),with which it shares the 'change of state' feature, the distribution of the periphrastic passives with *venire* 'come' in Italian is different from the examples identified for Istro-Romanian. Thus, according to Giacalone Ramat & Sansò (2014: 21–44), at least for standard contemporary Italian, both passive constructions with *essere* 'be' and *venire* 'come' passives can appear with simple tenses, whereas for compound tenses only the *essere* 'be' possibility is available.

The *venire* 'come' passive constructions in Italian are "highly favoured with telic predicates in imperfective contexts" (Giacalone Ramat & Sansò (2014: 21)). From this perspective, examples (4a, b) – where the verb *veri* 'come' is in the compound past – are an innovation in the use of the verb *veri* 'come' for passive periphrases.

Moreover, Dragomirescu & Nicolae 2014 (following Iordan 1950: 278) admit to the fact that, for Romanian, the *veni* 'come' passive constructions are the equivalent of the reflexive passive (added by a weak deontic meaning). This is again not the case for the examples (4a, b) in Istro-Romanian, which cannot be rephrased using SE passives; this can be done, however, in example (5). The values identified by Dragomirescu & Nicolae 2014 for Romanian do not hold in total for Istro-Romanian – not for the examples (4a, b) identified above, but they do hold in (5).

Unfortunately, the Romanian examples do not show instances of *veni* 'come' passive constructions in compound tenses, like Istro-Romanian. Following Dragomirescu & Nicolae 2014 and references therein, in this present paper I believe it not to be an influence from Italian, rather it is similar to dialectal Romanian.

II. 3. The SE passive and impersonal constructions

Far more productive are the passive and impersonal constructions with SE:, for which the corpus provides such examples as coordinated structures with the auxiliary inversion of the second element of the coordination (and never the first one, at least not according to the data found in the corpus), thus not falling under the Wackernagel law (for details, see Giusti and Zegrean 2015); this is not a feature of the passive-reflexives, rather it regards all coordinated compound tenses[1]:

(6) a. *Månt"e* *s-åu* *iåco* *fino* *jivit* *şi* *zaslujit s-a*.
before SE-has very fine lived and won SE-has

[1] For a detailed analysis on the use of the compound past in Istro-Romanian, see Geană (2017).

BDD-A27540 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 23:04:49 UTC)

"Before, people used to live very well and earn money"

(SF 119)

b. *Țesåru* *l-a* *scutåt* *si*
emperor.DEF him.CL.3.PL.F-has.AUX listen.PPLE and
avzit-av *tot* *ț-av* *iale* *ganęit.*
hear.PPLE-have.AUX all what-have.AUX.3.PL. they.F spoken
"The emperor listened to them and heard all they had to say"

(SP 125)

Other examples include repeated structures, with the reflexive dislocation in the second part; since the editor did not use correction/intonation markers, we cannot tell for sure whether this construction with verb-reflexive inversion is a correction or just another option of expressing the same syntactic function:

(7) *Atunče* *se* *spredę,* *spredę* *se*.
then SE weave.3.SG weave.3.SG SE
"Then, it [the wool] is woven"

(SF 65)

A lot of instances of SE passives regard verbs denoting activities; this is the most frequent pattern, especially since most of the available texts deal with the general activities of the Istro-Romanian community, which receive explanations in the form of impersonal passives:

(8) a. *Lâra* *se* *fače* *de* *oi.*
wool.DEF SE make.3.SG of sheep.PL
"Wool is made from sheep"

(SF 65)

b. *La* *voi* *se* *cum* *ziče?*
at you.PL se how says
"What do you call it?"

(SF 72)

c. *Za* *atâta* *åń* *s-å* *lucråt* *carbur.*
for so.many years SE-have.AUX worked coal.PL
"For so many years, people have worked in the coal industry"

(SF 71)

d. *Iuva-s,* *che* *nu* *se* *vedu?*
where-be.3.PL that not SE see.3.PL
"Where are they [the children], because they cannot be seen"

(TC 5)

e. *Nu* *se* *va* *şti* *ŭatu* *iuva* *ăi*.
not SE will know.INF another.DEF where is
"No one will know where another one is"

(TC 13)

A subclass of activity verbs are those used in cooking terminology (specific to recipes), as in:

BDD-A27540 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 23:04:49 UTC)

(9) a. *Farina se friję.*
flour.DEF SE fry.3.SG
"The flour is fried"
(SF 274)

b. *I-o cadåre speţialna iuva se cuhę rakiia.*
is-a bucket special.FEM where SE boil.3.SG brandy.DEF.NOM
"It's a special bucket to boil the brandy"
(SF 195)

Just like in standard Romanian, the SE constructions can take a plural subject:

(10) a. *Učide se rę, ama nu låsu ca şi lovacco druştvo.*
kill.INF SE COND but not let.3.SG like and hunting association
"They [the boars] would be killed, but the hunters' association does not allow it"
(SF 63)

b. *Oile se striję, pac vire lâra.*
sheep.PL.NOM SE clip.3.PL.IMPF then comes wool.DEF.NOM
"Sheep were clipped, then wool is obtained"
(SF 65)

c. *Lęmne uvâc se vindu.*
wood.PL always SE sell.3.PL
"Wood always sells good"
(SF 98)

Moving on to impersonal constructions, they can appear with modals; in (11), the pattern is similar to Daco-Romanian (the same impersonal construction with SE + *poate* 'can'), whereas in (12), the structure possibly follows a presumably Croatian pattern:

(11) a. *Nu se pote zaučide porcu div'iu.*
not SE can.3.SG kill.INF pig.DEF wild
"It is forbidden to kill boars"
(SF 303)

b. *ali mâre nu se pote de månt'e ziče.*
but tomorrow not SE can.PS.3.SG of the.day.before.yesterday say
"But tomorrow one cannot say/utter the day before yesterday"
(SF 51)

(12) *ke' se morę totile cu strehul'a penuntu žos omacni.*
as SE must.3.SG all.DEF with shovel.DEF eart.DEF down give.INF
"Since all the earth must be taken down with the shovel"
(Kovačec580)

BDD-A27540 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 23:04:49 UTC)

Just like in Daco-Romanian, the se impersonal constructions are allowed with intransitive verbs, as in:

(13) *Iårna (...)* *se męję* *cu* *tractoru,* *pac* *se* *tråje.*
winter.DEF SE walks with tractor.DEF then SE pulls.
"In winter, one takes the tractor, and then it is pulled.
(SF 68)

– or with raised clitics (with the verb *can*):

(14) *ånța* *nu* *se* *pote* *stå* *de* *frikę.*
here not SE can.3.SG stay of fear
"One cannot stay here for fear"
(SP 122)

Another kind of impersonal use in Istro-Romanian is with verbs that have an empty subject position:

– either default impersonal verbs:

(15) a. *mai* *apoi* *mi-se* *va* *zgodi* *ke*
more then I.DAT.SG-SE will happen that
va *si* *åt* *mire*
will also another I.ACC
"Later on, what will happen is me also being killed by another person"
(SP 121)

b. *Țe* *s-a* *țiie* *ănmişat?*
what SE-has.AUX you.SG.DAT dream.PPLE
"What did you dream?"
(TC 66)

– or contextual impersonals:

c. *Ți-se* *va* *vedę* *ke-s* *tel'* *fråț*
you.DAT.SG-SE will see that-are.3.PL your brothers
"It will seem to you that they are your brothers"
(SP 130)

d. *Samoć* *nemislę* *pre* *țela* *pul',* *țiie*
only think of that chicken you.SG.DAT
se *va* *scåndu* *fåțe*
SE will table make
"Just think of that chicken, and it will become your meal"
(SP 134)

Of course, the reflexives can be used in typical reflexive verbs (i.e., without a passive reading), just like in other Romance (particularly Eastern Romance), with human subject:

(17) a. *Şi-omiri* *s-åu* *cu* *čå* *bavit.*
and-people SE-have.AUX.3.PL with that.F dealt.PPLE
"And people dealt with it"
(SF 45)

BDD-A27540 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 23:04:49 UTC)

b. *Şi cum li s-åv muiåra kemåt?*
and how his.DAT.POS SE-has.AUX woman.DEF called
"What was his wife's name?"
(SF 48)

c. ?*Ura se vire de jos, din Hârvaţca.*
one.F SE comes of down from Croatia
"A woman comes from down, from Croatia"
(SF 49)

The example (17b) shows that the verb *se cl(')ema* 'to be named/called' has an inherent reflexive use, like Italian and unlike standard Romanian. The example in (17c) shows a particular reflexive use of the verb *veri* 'come', unattested for standard Romanian.

Some constructions are similar with sub-standard examples from Romanian:

(18) a. *Hlapăţu tåţe si se ărde.*
hired.man.DEF shuts.up and SE laughs
"The hired man keeps his mouth shut and is laughing"
(SP 136)

b. *Căn se ărde, schipune din gure.*
when SE laughs flowers from mouth
"When she laughs, flowers [get out] of her mouth"
(TC 6)

Compare with:

(18') *Argatul tace şi se râde.*

It can also be used with the so-called weather verbs:

(19) *de rent'e de nopte se ziče se nopta.*
of before of night se say.3.SG se get.dark.INF
"Before night, it is said that is is getting dark"
(SF 49)

Impersonal constructions with raised clitics are also attested:

(19) *Ma nu se vręse sculå.*
but not se wanted wake.up.INF
"But he wouldn't wake up"
(SP 142)

II. 4. Expressing *Agent* in passive and impersonal constructions

Due to its mostly oral use, Istro-Romanian shows little to no examples with *de* 'by' phrases to express the agent of a passive construction; also, there are no attested examples as of yet with regard to the use of the passive in non-finite verb forms.

One peculiar use of the reflexive with a possible passive interpretation can be in such examples as:

BDD-A27540 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 23:04:49 UTC)

(20) a. *??io* *m-am* *ănmeţåt* *de* *iel'*
I myself.CL-have.AUX.1.SG teach.PPLE? by him
"I was taught by him"
(HS 96)

b. ?? *ănmeţåt-s-a* *şi* *ie, ma* *ne* *de* *ţåţe*
teach.PPLE=himself.CL=has.AUXand he but not ?by dad
"He was also taught, but not by dad"
(HS 96)

The question marks are there because the source and the agent are expressed in Istro-Romanian with the preposition *de* (as opposed to *de la* 'from' for source and *de* 'by' for agent in Daco-Romanian). However, especially with this verb (*learn*//*teach*), similar cases with 1st and 2nd person reflexive passives are attested for southern Italian dialects as well.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of Istro-Romanian syntactic particularities is important because it shows interesting parallels with standard and regional Daco-Romanian, on the one hand, or with the history of Romanian, on the other. The particular structure of Istro-Romanian passives is, expectedly, similar to Daco-Romanian in many concerns. The *fi* 'be' and SE passives are widely attested in both historical dialects, whereas the *veri* 'come' passive periphrastic constructionshave a limited distribution both in Istro-Romanian, and in standard/regional Daco-Romanian.

The contact with Slavic languages (Croatian, in particular), which is – as already stated – widely accepted, and the contact with Italian dialects can be indeed seen in syntax as well (more obvious though in the Istro-Romanian vocabulary), but this is yet to be revisited. For example, as seen in subsection *II.2.* above, the *veri* 'come' passives, although stated by most literature to be an influence from Italian (Kovačec (1984: 577), a.o.), have a different distribution both from Italian (with clear examples in (4a, b) – cases in which Italian would not allow for compound tenses), and from Daco-Romanian (the impossibility of impersonal SE rephrasing), the intuition however being that this kind of construction is closer to Western varieties of Daco-Romanian, for which similar periphrases have been attested.

For the contact with Croatian, I have identified verbs that are used reflexively (either inherent, or contextual reflexives, some of them in the so-called SE passive constructions) in different way than Daco-Romanian uses them. For the time being, I have not taken into account the comparison with Aromanian or Megleno-Romanian.

Although the corpus used for the purposes of this article cover more than one hundred years, and in spite of some empirical observations, I did not make any claimson the historical evolution of voice in Istro-Romanian (or any other types of evolution, for that matter). This could however be the subject of future research.

BDD-A27540 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 23:04:49 UTC)

SOURCES

HS M. Marin, M. Tiugan (eds.), 2014, „*Harta sonoră*" *a graiurilor şi a dialectelor limbii române*, Editura Academiei Române.

LM L. Morariu, *Lu Fraţi Noştri. Libru lu Rumeri din Istrie*, Suceava, Editura Revistei „Făt-Frumos", 1928.

SF Sârbu, R., V. Frăţilă, 1998, *Dialectul istroromân*, Timişoara, Armacord.

SP S. Puşcariu, 1906, *Studii istroromâne*, I. *Texte*, and II, 1926, *Introducere. Gramatică. Caracterizarea dialectului istroromân*, Bucureşti, Cultura Națională, Institutul de Arte Grafice „Carol Göbl".

TC Cantemir, T., *Texte istroromâne*, 1959, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Populare Române.

Kovačec A. Kovačec, „Istroromâna", in V. Rusu (ed.), 1984, *Tratat de dialectologie românească*, Craiova, Editura Scrisul Românesc, 550–591.

SELECTED REFERENCES

Dragomirescu, A., A. Nicolae, 2014, "The Multiple Grammaticalization of Romanian veni 'come'. Focusing on the Passive Construction", in Maud Devos, Jenneke van der Wal (eds.), *'Come' and 'go' off the beaten grammaticalization path*. Berlin-New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 69–100.

Geană, I., 2017 „On the Use of Compound Past in Istro-Romanian", in A. Dragomirescu, A. Nicolae, C. Stan, R. Zafiu (eds.), *Sintaxa ca mod de a fi. Omagiu Gabrielei Pană Dindelegan, la aniversare*, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, pp. 207–212.

Giacalone Ramat, A., A. Sansò, 2014, "*Venire* ('come') as a passive auxiliary in Italian", in Maud Devos, Jenneke van der Wal (eds.), *'Come" and 'go' off the beaten grammaticalization path*. Berlin-New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 21–44.

Giusti, G., I. Zegrean, 2015, "Syntactic Protocols to Enhance Inclusive Cultural Identity. A Case Study on Istro-Romanian Clausal Structure", Quaderni di Linguistica e Studi Orientali / Working Papers in Linguistics and Orientral Studies, n. 1 (2015), pp. 117–138.

Iordan, Iorgu, 1950, *Note sintactice*, SCL, I (2), 269.

Kovačec, A., 1984, „Istroromâna", in: V. Rusu (ed.), *Tratat de dialectologie românească*, Craiova, Editura Scrisul Românesc, pp. 550–591.

Pană Dindelegan, G. (coord.), 2010, *Gramatica de bază a limbii române*, Bucureşti, Editura Univers Enciclopedic Gold.

Puşcariu, S., 1926, *Introducere. Gramatică. Caracterizarea dialectului istroromân*, Cultura Națională Bucureşti, Institutul de Arte Grafice „Carol Göbl".

Rusu, V. (ed.), 1984, *Tratat de dialectologie românească*, Craiova, Editura Scrisul Românesc.

Sârbu, R., V. Frăţilă, 1998, *Dialectul istroromân*, Timişoara, Editura Armacord.

Timotin, E., 2000a, „Pasivul românesc în textele originale din secolul al XVI-lea", in SCL, LI, nr. 1, pp. 225–231.

Timotin, E., 2000b, „Modalităţi de exprimare a pasivului în dialectele româneşti sud-dunărene", in SCL, LI, nr. 2, pp. 481–490.

Timotin, E., 2002, „Originea pasivului românesc", SCL, LIII, pp. 95–109.

Vrzić, Z., J. V. Singler, 2016, "Identity and language shift among Vlashki/Zheyanski speakers in Croatia", in Ferreira, V., P. Brouda, *Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication No. 9 (January 2016): Language Documentation and Conservation in Europe*, pp. 51–68.

Zegrean, I.-G., 2012, *Aspects on the Syntax of Istro-Romanian* (PhD Thesis, *mss*), Venezia, Università Ca'Foscari, Italy.

BDD-A27540 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 23:04:49 UTC)

VOICE IN ISTRO-ROMANIAN. A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the presentation of voice in Istro-Romanian. Voice in Istro-Romanian shows many similarities with standard (and regional) Romanian, mainly due to their Easter Romance status (comparisons with Aromanian or Megleno-Romanian are beyond the scope of this article, but they are a source for future research). Although not bringing methodological or scientific breakthroughs, my contribution based on corpus analysis brings evidence on the vitality of voice as a pragma-syntactic category in Istro-Romanian. The active/passive/impersonal system is both described and exemplified. The contact with Croatian is obvious also in the use of voice, whereas the Italian influence, as per the literature, – in the sense of a specific passive periphrastic construction with *veri*'come' – is reconsidered, as some of the examples provided by the corpus contradict the literature on the use of the 'come' passives in (dialectal) Italian.

Institutul de Lingvistică
al Academiei Române
„Iorgu Iordan – Alexandru Rosetti"
Facultatea de Litere,
Universitatea din Bucureşti

BDD-A27540 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 23:04:49 UTC)