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(Article begins on next page)

Word-formation in linguistic islands – Abstracts in Walser German

«*VIRTUAL implies a 'mode of existence'
even further removed from realisation than POTENTIAL*»

(Rainer 2012, 179)

1. Semelfactive abstracts: A Romance revolution

In their survey of the main changes affecting word-formation in French, Rainer / Buridant (2015, 1986) observe:

The category of action nouns has witnessed important changes not only from Latin to Old French, but also from Old to Modern French.

Similar observations can be repeated for the other Romance languages as well. One of the revolutionary leaders of this upheaval is surely represented by nouns based on the feminine past participle such for as for instance It. *lavare* 'to wash' → *lavata* 'a wash' (Gaeta 2015). Despite the general misrecognition of their role – for instance it remains unmentioned in surveys on the development of word-formation from Latin to Romance (Buchi / Chauveau 2015) – the far-reaching relevance of this innovation is impressive. First, this pattern results from the reanalysis of an inflectional form, i.e. a feminine past participle, into a clearly derivational pattern to form deverbal nouns. As is well known, the origin of the reanalysis is debated. While the traditional account relying on the ellipsis of a nominal head (*res*) *defensā* > It. *difesa* / Fr. *défense* / Sp. *defensa* / Port. *defesa* 'defence' has been rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis that these abstracts come from the reanalysis of older abstracts in *-us* of the type *cursus* which happened to be confused with neuter nouns of the second class whose plural was confused in its turn with the singular feminine nouns of the first class: *cursus* > *cursum* > *cursa* > It. *corsa* / Fr. *course* 'run, race'. The second hypothesis is able to account straightforwardly for the peculiar word-formation meaning displayed by the derivatives. On the other hand, the first one is based on the mechanism of ellipsis which our Festschrifttee has recently employed to account for derivatives displaying an instrumental – besides an agent – value and traditionally explained by a process of metaphorical or metonymic extension such as Galilei's coinage *misuratore* 'indicator, measurer', on the basis of formulas containing a specific head such as *apparecchio* / *strumento misuratore* 'measuring device / instrument' subsequently deleted (cf. Rainer 2011).

Be that as it may, the emergence of this action noun is particularly notable in that it gives rise to a new derivational category, the *nomen vicis* 'noun of instance', found

in all Romance languages, especially in the South-Western branch (Spanish, Catalan, Occitan, Franco-Provençal, Italian, etc.) in which it achieves high productivity, while it remains completely foreign to the languages of the Eastern branch (Romanian). This derivational category accompanies the traditional action nouns which were fairly common in Latin, with the addition of a substantial value: the semelfactive meaning that resembles the *ismu* ‘*al-marrati*’ ‘one-time noun’ found in Arabic (cf. Simone 2003). These derivatives can be treated as a sort of packaging operators which serve to segment an activity into single chunks which are presented as single instantiations of the whole (cf. Gaeta 2000, 2004, 338-346). This is similar to the function accomplished by quantifying or classifying expression such as It. *un cucchiaino di brodo* ‘a spoonful of soup’, *un secchio di latte* ‘a bucket of milk’, etc. It is not surprising to find derivatives formed by means of this feminine suffix in combination with nominal bases which can serve as packaging operators of the activity typically accomplished by the base and/or of its result: *martellata* ‘hammer blow’, *secchiata* ‘hit with a basket or basketful’, *cucchiata* ‘spoonful’, etc. They have been called *nomina vicis* because they don’t literally refer to an (abstract or concrete) event but rather to its instantiation, which is temporally delimited forming a unit that is countable. In this contribution I will focus on an offspring of this revolutionary pattern which has given rise to an interesting case in the Walser German islands found in the Alps which were in strict contact with Romance languages for centuries.

2. Semelfactive abstracts in Germanic

As in Latin, semelfactive abstracts are not particularly salient in Germanic. They usually result from old apophonic abstract nouns such as Old High German (= OHG) *trinkan* ‘to drink’ / *trunc* ‘drink’, Old English *breccan* ‘to break’ / *brēc* ‘breaking’, or zero suffixations such as Gothic *grētan* ‘to cry’ / *grēts* ‘cry’, Old Icelandic *bíta* ‘to bite’ / *bit* ‘biting’, etc. (Lowe 1972, 225-226, Ringe 2006, 218, 292). It is not clear whether an autonomous derivational meaning ‘single instance of V’ can be extracted from a reliable set of derivatives. Semelfactive meaning is generally inherited from a punctual verb as in the Modern Standard German (= MSG) examples of conversion or ablaut derivation: *fallen* ‘to fall’ / *Fall* ‘fall’, *springen* ‘to jump’ / *Sprung* ‘jump’, etc. In contrast to this, English productively exploits conversion to form semelfactive abstracts which are bounded to the construction using as a light verb *have* and *give*: *have a walk*, *give a look*, etc. (cf. Dixon 2005, 459). Interestingly, the same pattern is largely productive with the abstracts formed with the feminine past participle in Italian and other Romance languages: It. *fare una passeggiata* ‘have a walk’, *dare un’occhiata* ‘give a look’, etc. (cf. Gaeta 2002 on Italian, and Gaeta 2015 for a survey). However, the productive use of conversion and of its semelfactive value in light verb constructions in English has been interpreted as the result of a general development towards lexical multifunctionality (cf. Vogel 2000 for a discussion). In contrast to English in MSG it is not easy to find pairs of abstracts which systematically oppose the semelfactive value to a general activity value of the verbal base: *laufen* ‘to

run' → *Lauf* 'run' / *Gelaufe* 'running', *schreien* 'to shout' → *Schrei* 'shout' / *Geschreie* 'shouting', etc. (Motsch 2004, 333). Notice that the conversion normally displays the semelfactive meaning in contrast to the other derivative that shows a collective-iterative value. Moreover, light verb constructions with abstracts show a rather different structure and value (cf. Eisenberg 2020: 332 for a survey). Interestingly, in OHG a few pairs of abstracts are found which exhibit a semelfactive abstract formed with the loan suffix *-āta* in contrast to other abstracts, and especially abstract nouns in *-unga*. The *-āta* suffix is likely to come from the Latin or Romance feminine ending of the participle *-āta* or *-ēta* (cf. Henzen 1965, 175). In Tab. 1, the list of all *-āta* derivatives attested in OHG is found as reported in Splett (1993) and Schützeichel (2012)¹:

Base	<i>-āta</i> derivative	Other abstracts
<i>bāgen</i> 'to fight'	<i>bāgāta</i> 'arousal, fury'	<i>bāg</i> , <i>bāga</i> , <i>bāgunga</i> 'fight', <i>gibāgi</i> 'quarreling', <i>bāgheit</i> 'arrogance'
<i>chlafōn</i> 'to crack'	<i>klaffāta</i> 'uproar'	<i>chlaffōt</i> 'uproar', <i>clafunga</i> 'crunch'
<i>fillen</i> 'to flagellate'	<i>fillāta</i> 'scourge blow'	<i>fillunga</i> 'scourge blow'
<i>miscelōn</i> 'to mix'	<i>miscelāta</i> 'mix'	<i>miscelunga</i> 'mix'
<i>sam(a)nōn</i> 'to assemble'	<i>samanāta</i> 'collection, assemblage'	<i>samanunga</i> 'assembly, congregation'
<i>sceltan</i> 'to scold'	<i>sceltāta</i> 'blasphemy'	<i>skeltunga</i> 'reprimand', <i>sceltāt</i> 'blasphemy'
<i>sciez(z)en</i> 'to shit'	<i>scīzāta</i> 'shit, dirt'	–
<i>scrīan</i> 'to shout'	<i>screiāta</i> 'shouting'	<i>screi</i> , <i>screiōd</i> 'shouting'
<i>snūden</i> 'to taunt'	<i>snūderāta</i> 'snot'	<i>snūda</i> 'taunt'
<i>(bi-)telban</i> 'to bury'	<i>tolbāta</i> 'precipice'	–
<i>temp(e)rōn</i> 'to mix'	<i>temparāta</i> 'mix'	<i>temparunga</i> 'temperance, mix'

Table 1: OHG *-āta* derivatives

The *-āta* derivatives in Tab. 1 are generally based on an activity verb that can also have a punctual value; furthermore, they are almost always flanked by another abstract formed in a different way.

While the few *āta* derivatives of Tab. 1 disappeared in MSG, the followers of the loan suffix are still found in the south-western varieties of Germany and in Switzerland (Swabian and Alemannic), e.g. *Schüüsete* 'a shooting' and *Verschimpfete* 'a scolding' (cf. Henzen 1965, 175-176, Russ 1990, 359, 379). Hodler (1915, 142) observes that in Bernese «[f]ast von jedem konkreten Verb eine Ableitung mit *-etē* gebildet werden [kann]». Hodler's characterization of this suffix is quite detailed. Its meaning is held to stand between the infinitive and the conversion insofar as it portrays a bounded action involving a certain duration or consisting in different acts that can

¹ In Tab. 1 *-āta* formations are excluded that are not amenable to an occurring lexical base as for instance *chemenāta* 'chamber' or *merāta* 'soup'. Moreover, I generally adopted the form reported in Schützeichel (2012).

also be repeated: *ε brüelēte* ‘a scene with roaring’, *strubel* ‘(one-time) tussle with hair’ → *strubelēte* ‘a scene where there is a scuffle’. The abstracts can give rise to semantic extensions of the usual type (cf. Rainer 1996b for a survey), in particular the result noun as in *tröchnēte* ‘the laundry hung up to dry’, *metsgetē* ‘meat, what is butchered’, and the bounded quantity resulting as a product from the activity denoted by the base: *chochēte* ‘as much as is cooked at once’, *schufletē* ‘as much as is shoveled at once’. Since the latter derivative can also be interpreted as based on the noun *schufle* ‘shovel’, a straightforward extension to nominal bases is observed when no intermediate verb is found as in *tällēretē* ‘dishful’, *chórbēte* ‘basketful’, etc., where it can also acquire a meronymic value as in *houptēte* ‘superior extremity (of a bed)’, *fußβēte* ‘inferior extremity (of a bed)’, and finally an intensifying value with nominal bases denoting quantities *tschupp(l)ēte* ‘a bit’ from *tschup* ‘bit’.

2.1. Semelfactive abstracts in Walser German

The Alemannic suffix *-ēte* found in Bernese notoriously results from the weakening of the unstressed vowels, which is not particularly surprising in the context of their general Middle High German weakening. Unfortunately, except for the sporadic mention of the suffix found for instance in surveys like Russ (1990), no detailed investigations have been carried on these varieties more recently. Interesting data now come from the platform CLiMAIp, which collects texts and dictionaries of the Walser German linguistic islands found in the Aosta Valley and Piedmont (Gaeta *et al.* 2022). These are particularly interesting because the speakers of these communities are multilingual, mastering a Romance variety (Piedmontese, Italian, French) in addition to the ancestral Walser German variety. We will focus on the varieties of Gressoney (Titsch) and Issime (Töitschu), which for the time being are the best documented in the platform. Under several respects, these two varieties outline quite different scenarios from a historical point of view. The former can be reconstructed as being spoken in a typical island, which for centuries has been autonomous and isolated from the neighborhood, maintaining strict contacts with its ancestral region – the Valais – as well as with the south-western parts of Germany. Given these contacts, German used to have a privileged status of H-variety serving as *Dachsprache* at least until the Italian unification (1861). In contrast to this, Issime never had significant contacts with the German-speaking world, while the H-variety used to be French. In both villages, after the Italian unification Italian has become the H-variety and Piedmontese has acquired a privileged status as L-variety within the repertoire (cf. Angster / Gaeta 2021, Gaeta 2024 for a discussion).

The OHG *-āta* suffix is continued in Titsch and Töitschu respectively by the suffixes *-etò* and *-etu*. Note the preservation of the unstressed final vowel which is a typical feature of the Walser German varieties (cf. Braune / Reiffenstein 2004, 63-64, Bohnenberger 1913 for a historical reconstruction). The final *-ò* and *-u*, respectively [o] and [u], normally continue nouns belonging to the PGmc. *-ō* and *-n-* classes as shown by Ti. *seifò* / Tö. *seifu* ‘soap’, Ti. *zòngò* / Tö. *zunhu* ‘tongue’, Ti. *hasò* / Tö.

hoasu ‘hare’, cf. respectively OHG *seifa*, *zunga* and *haso*, while in MSG a reduced vowel is found as in *Seife*, *Zunge* and *Hase*. In addition, a final *-a* found in Italian feminine loanwords is normally adapted in Titsch as *-ò*, cf. It. *gara* ‘match, competition’ > *garò* ‘match’, and in Töitschu as *-u*, cf. It. *barca* ‘boat’ > *boarku* ‘boat’. Semelfactive abstracts are normally feminine, although we also find a few masculine nouns such as Ti. *repsetò* ‘belch’, *wénketò* ‘wink’, or neuters such as Tö. *hoarnetu* ‘butt’, *tschawetu* ‘bite’.

The platform CLiMAIp consists of data coming from the two dictionaries originally collected by the communities in the 1990ies and enriched with the text corpora digitalized and acquired into the database (cf. Gaeta *et al.* 2022 for a description). In Tab. 2 the actual consistence of the platform is shown:

	Texts	Types	Tokens
Titsch (Gressoney)	659	12320	92580
Töitschu (Issime)	368	7606	111829

Table 2: The actual consistence of the platform CLiMAIp (www.climalp.org)

Note that the fewer texts collected for Töitschu than for Titsch give rise to a smaller inventory of types but to a larger number of tokens. To give an idea of the consistence of the corpus regarding the overall number of types in the platform, in Tab. 3 and 4 the figures for verbs, nouns and adjectives occurring in the platform and in the corpus are provided for the two varieties:

	Platform	Corpus	
	Types _p = 12320	Types _c = 5905	Tokens _c = 92580
Verbs	3058 / 25%	1428 / 24%	21568 / 23%
Nouns	7017 / 57%	3295 / 56%	20653 / 22%
Adjectives	1352 / 11%	655 / 11%	7265 / 8%
Rest	893 / 7%	527 / 9%	43094 / 47%

Table 3: Verbs, nouns and adjectives in the platform and in the corpus for Titsch

	Platform	Corpus	
	Types _p = 7606	Types _c = 3592	Tokens _c = 111829
Verbs	1620 / 21%	825 / 23%	28674 / 26%
Nouns	4078 / 54%	1907 / 53%	19213 / 17%
Adjectives	948 / 12%	473 / 13%	7101 / 6%
Rest	960 / 13%	387 / 11%	56841 / 51%

Table 4: Verbs, nouns and adjectives in the platform and in the corpus for Töitschu

Note that the percentage values are remarkably similar despite the consistent differences between the two varieties regarding the overall number of types and tokens. Moreover, the token number expectedly differs from the distribution observed for the type number in accordance with the Zipfian distribution of the highly frequent grammatical words compared to the frequency of the major word-classes.

Let us now observe the distribution of deverbal abstracts in the two varieties, respectively Titsch (= Ti) and Töitschu (= Tö). Basically, we observe the same patterns typically found in MSG as well as in its varieties (see for instance Fuhrhop / Werner 2016 for a recent discussion), with the remarkable addition of the peculiar semelfactive suffix. In Tab. 5 besides (a) the abstracts corresponding to the feminine suffix *-ung* like *Führung* ‘guidance, direction’, namely Ti. *-òng* and Tö. *-unh*, we observe (b) several distinct Root-Vowel Alternations (= RVA) due to ablaut, e.g. Ti. *bisse* / *bés*, or umlaut, e.g. Ti. *hälfe* / *hélf* (traditionally also labeled *implizite Derivate*, ‘implicit derivatives’, cf. Fleischer & Barz 2012, 89), (c) conversions based on two different verb types, e.g. Ti. *loufe* / *louf* and *redò* / *red*, (d) several distinct minor patterns, e.g. Tö. *taufen* / *taufi* and *gschwellen* / *gschwulscht* and finally (e) the semelfactive suffix, e.g. Ti. *ròtschò* / *ròtschetò* and *lachen* / *lachetu*:

	German correspondent		Walser German examples
a.	<i>-ung</i> e.g. <i>führen</i> ‘to guide’ → <i>Führung</i> ‘guidance’, <i>ausstellen</i> ‘to exhibit’ → <i>Ausstellung</i> ‘exhibition’	Ti	<i>fiere</i> ‘to lead’ → <i>fieròng</i> ‘direction’, <i>usstelle</i> ‘to exhibit’ → <i>usstellòng</i> ‘exhibition’
		Tö	<i>housun</i> ‘to edify’ → <i>housunh</i> ‘apartment’, <i>rechtnun</i> ‘to count’ → <i>rechtnunh</i> ‘count’
b.	RVA e.g. <i>beißen</i> ‘to bite’ → <i>Biss</i> ‘bite’, <i>springen</i> ‘to spring’ → <i>Sprung</i> ‘spring’	Ti	<i>bisse</i> ‘to bite’ → <i>bés</i> ‘bite’, <i>hälfe</i> ‘to help’ → <i>hélf</i> ‘help’
		Tö	<i>helfun</i> ‘to help’ → <i>hilf</i> ‘help’, <i>sprinnhen</i> ‘to jump’ → <i>sprunh</i> ‘jump’
c.	conversion e.g. <i>fallen</i> ‘to fall’ → <i>Fall</i> ‘fall’, <i>schlafen</i> ‘to sleep’ → <i>Schlaf</i> ‘sleep’	Ti	<i>loufe</i> ‘to run’ → <i>louf</i> ‘run’, <i>redò</i> ‘to talk’ → <i>red</i> ‘talk’
		Tö	<i>chrigen</i> ‘to fight’ → <i>chrig</i> ‘fight’, <i>trommun</i> ‘to cut’ → <i>trom</i> ‘cut’
d.	other suffixes e.g. <i>taufen</i> ‘to baptize’ → <i>Taufe</i> ‘baptism’, <i>dienen</i> ‘to serve’ → <i>Dienst</i> ‘service’	Ti	<i>toufe</i> ‘to baptize’ → <i>toufé</i> ‘baptism’, <i>dienò</i> ‘to serve’ → <i>dientscht</i> ‘service’
		Tö	<i>taufen</i> ‘to baptize’ → <i>taufi</i> ‘baptism’, <i>gschwellen</i> ‘to blow’ → <i>gschwulscht</i> ‘bulge’
e.	semelfactive suffix e.g. <i>kochen</i> ‘to cook’ → <i>Kochete</i> ‘meal’	Ti	<i>ròtschò</i> ‘to slip’ → <i>ròtschetò</i> ‘slip’, <i>oug</i> ‘eye’ → <i>ougetò</i> ‘glance’
		Tö	<i>lachen</i> ‘to laugh’ → <i>lachetu</i> ‘laugh’, <i>reche</i> ‘rake’ → <i>rechetu</i> ‘raking’

Table 5: Deverbal abstracts in Walser German

If we consider the types found in the corpus we obtain the following results:

		Titsch	Töitschu
a.	<i>-ung</i>	146 / 34%	6 / 3%
b.	RVA	93 / 21%	11 / 5%
c.	Conversion	72 / 17%	28 / 12%
d.	Semelfactive	85 / 20%	160 / 68%
e.	Others	36 / 8%	29 / 12%
Total		432 / 100%	234 / 100%

Table 6: Walser German deverbal abstract types in the CLiMAIp platform

Titsch closely reflects the typical pattern of a continental West-Germanic language in which the most productive device is the suffix *-òng* followed by RVA alternations, conversions and additionally the Alemannic semelfactive derivatives in *-etò* displaying a similar size. In neat contrast, in Töitschu the deverbal suffix *-unh* has surprisingly almost disappeared, as well as the RVA alternations. Conversions are also neatly reduced, while semelfactive abstracts in *-etu* clearly qualify as the only expanding pattern in Töitschu².

In spite of the clear differences between Titsch and Töitschu with regard to the status of the semelfactive suffix within the domain of abstracts, their profile is basically the same to the extent that they predominantly select verbal bases and a consistent number of abstracts can be analyzed as deverbal or denominal:

		Bases	Titsch	Töitschu
a.	V		50 / 59%	89 / 56%
b.	N		13 / 15%	37 / 23%
c.	N/V		18 / 21%	26 / 16%
d.	Adj		1 / 1%	3 / 2%
e.	Base-less		3 / 4%	5 / 3%
Total			85 / 100%	160 / 100%

Table 7: Base-driven selectional properties of *-etò/-etu*

To these derivatives one might also add a few lexemes which are totally opaque because they do not display any relation with the possible base like Ti. *schisse* ‘to shit’ / *schissetò* ‘snowfall’, *anke* ‘butter’ / *anketò* ‘traditional skirt’, Tö. *hannun* ‘to prepare for’ / *hannetu* ‘mush’, *wèlljen* ‘to want’ / *wèlljetu* ‘rye flour soup’, *stipfen* ‘to

² Note that both in Titsch and in Töitschu the abstract suffix is homonymous with the endings *-òng* and *-unh* systematically found with loanwords from Romance reflecting the Latin ending *-ōNE(M)*: Ti. *galòng* ‘seal’, *pòvròng* ‘pepper’, Tö. *reisunh* ‘reason’, *tirbuschunh* ‘corkscrew’, cf. respectively It. *gallone* / Piedm. *galun* / Fr. *galon*, Piedm. *puvrun* / Fr. *poivron*, Piedm. *rasun* / Fr. *raison*, Piedm. *tirabussun* / Fr. *tire-bouchon*. This case emphasizes the richness of the multilingual repertoire.

goad' / *stipfetu* 'signature'. However, they were not included in Tab. 6 and 7 because their morphological status is unclear. On the other hand, we included the few baseless derivatives like Ti. *gòuvletò* 'handful', *schnälzetò* 'dog bite', Tö. *fiambetu* 'blaze', *schiddschutu* 'bucketful', because they can be treated on a par with the other derivatives although no extant base is recoverable.

With respect to the selection of the input base these derivatives resemble the Romance (and specifically Italian) derivatives formed with the feminine past participles insofar as the latter also take as input verbs (1a) and nouns (1b):

- (1) (a) Ti. *foare* 'to go, travel' → *foaretò* 'travel'
schwétze 'to sweat' → *schwétzetò* 'sweat'
 Tö. *lachen* 'to laugh' → *lachetu* 'laugh'
petziun 'to pinch' → *petzietu* 'pinch'
- (b) Ti. *gabelò* 'fork' → *gabetò* 'forkful, hit with a fork'
oug 'eye' → *ougetò* 'glance'
 Tö. *fannu* 'pan' → *fannetu* 'panful, hit with a pan'
matzu 'club' → *matzetu* 'hit'

Similarly to what can be observed in Italian (Gaeta 2002, 2004), the dominant pattern is clearly deverbal, as can be gathered from the figures in Tab. 7. In a significant number of cases, however, the derivatives can be based on the verb or on the noun, basically displaying a similar semelfactive meaning:

- (2) Ti. *fuess* 'foot' / *fuessò* 'to kick' → *fuessetò* 'kick'
hòre 'horn' / *hòrnò* 'to ram' → *hòrnetò* 'butt'
 Tö. *luft* 'air' / *luftun* 'to air out' / *luftetu* 'puff, gust of wind'
seifu 'soap' / *seifun* 'to soap' / *seifetu* 'soaping'

Again, the same can be repeated for Italian examples involving the feminine past participle (or possibly the suffix *-ata*).

2.2. *The place of semelfactives within the domain of abstract nouns*

Let us now discuss the general profile of semelfactives within the system of deverbal abstracts occurring in the two varieties. In Gaeta / Angster (2020), the attempt was made to extend to the Walser German case the analysis worked out for Italian semelfactives. This is elaborated in (3) below:

- (3) [... <+dyn, -b>]_{vi} -etò ~ etu]_{Nj} ↔ [the SitTyp <+b>_j combined with SEM_i ...]_j

The formula is couched within the framework of Booij's (2016) Construction Morphology and outlines a Situation Type (= SitTyp) characterized by a bounded (= <+b>), i.e. delimited, value that is related to the semantic (= SEM) value of the entity denoted by the base. This consists of dynamic (= <+dyn>) verbs that depict a SitTyp as unbounded. Boundedness refers to the general actional value of the activity denoted by the verb that must be atelic, i.e. such that it does not profile a resultant

state. The main value of the semelfactive suffix consists in changing the value of the property of boundedness. In concrete terms, *foaretò* represents an instantiation of the general activity of *foare*, delimited to a single portion of it. While this captures exactly the value of deverbal nouns, for denominal nouns one must generalize over the SitTyp in which the noun typically appears. Thus, *gabletò* can refer either to the SitTyp in which the fork is conceptualized as a container, and accordingly refers to the quantity contained in it, or to the SitTyp in which it is used as an instrument to punch.

The peculiar value of these abstracts will be considered within the general context of nominalization as ‘typification of predicates’. The latter intends predicates and the finite clauses in which they are contained as a manner to reduce their referential potential that is manifested by the finiteness features anchoring the predicates to the utterance context (Lehmann 1982, Gaeta 2002, 30-33). A nominalization typifies a predicate to the extent that its referential potential is generalized beyond the concrete utterance level. This is typically manifested by the pluralizability of abstract nouns that can accordingly be conceived as «names for sentence content» (Porzig 1930-31). In spite of the similar lexical substance of semelfactives in the two varieties, there is a basic distinction between them. While in Titsch semelfactives compete with *-òng* abstracts (similarly to what is observed in MSG), in Töitschu they represent the only productive way to form deverbal abstracts and are shown in Tab. 6 to be significantly more numerous than in Titsch. Let us have a look at the corpus data. With respect to Tab. 6 (and Tab. 7), in Tab. 8 only abstracts are considered that concretely occur in the corpus, not merely in the dictionaries. First, let us consider the question of plurality. In Tab. 8 the results for the two varieties are shown with respect to the semelfactive varieties:

		types	tokens	plural
Titsch	<i>-etò</i>	28	117	32 / 27%
	<i>-òng</i>	79	355	47 / 13%
Töitschu	<i>-etu</i>	54	144	42 / 29%
	<i>-unh</i>	5	55	11 / 20%

Table 8: Walser German deverbal abstracts in the CLiMA1p corpus

We record a significant difference in terms of plural uses between the semelfactive suffix and the general nominalizer that shows a far lower number of plurals despite its higher type and token frequency. This holds true at least for Titsch, while for Töitschu the scarce number of *-unh* derivatives does not permit any significant comparison, even though the plural uses of semelfactives is aligned with the result obtained for Titsch³. These results cope well with the semantics of the derivative depicted in (9) above because the suffix *-etò* introduces a feature [+ bounded] that qualifies *-etò*

³ It can further be observed that the few *-unh* derivatives are largely employed in concrete meanings such as for instance *housunh* ‘habitation, house’, which motivates their increased plural uses compared to the corresponding Titsch suffix *-òng*.

as a convenient procedure to express pluractionality, i.e. a multiplicity of events (cf. Cabredo *et al.* 2012, and Gaeta 2015 for a discussion). Clearly, this does not exclude that other denominal abstracts can be used for the same purposes, but the data on frequency signal the privileged role of semelfactives to do so.

A peculiar consequence of the bounded nature of semelfactives is their occurrence in combination with light verbs that carry the finiteness features and re-elaborate the general semantic profile of the predication, as in the following examples drawn respectively from Titsch (4) and from Töitschu (5):

- (4) (a) *òn déewe en familiò noa der andra hät dschin*
 and while a family after the other has his
ofnetò brôt gmacht
 batch bread made
 ‘and while a family after the other made its batch of bread’
- (b) *Vòm leifer en grösse eihöre ...*
 from.the slider a big squirrel
hätt en ougòtò kät
 has a glance given
 ‘From the sliding window a big squirrel cast a glance’
- (5) (a) *Ich bin kanhen machun a spazirutu mit Lueisi*
 I am gone make.INF a walk with L.
 ‘I went for a walk with Lueisi.’
- (b) *Dar oaltu het wol keen an rawutu wa déi*
 the old-M.SG has well given a scream but they
hen sicher nöit khüart
 have.3PL sure not heard
 ‘The old man let out a cry, but they did not hear it.’

In strict correspondence with the Italian pattern – but in contrast to the Piedmontese variety in which the construction is absent – the semelfactive derivatives are combined with light verbs, respectively Tö. *machun* / Ti *machò* and Tö. *geen* ‘to give’ / Ti. *gä* ‘to give’. It is clearly beyond the scope of this contribution to described thoroughly the properties of this construction, especially when it represents an alternative to the simple verb. Some examples however, point towards a distribution similar to that observed in the Italian (and partially French) corresponding derivatives. Namely, the construction apparently serves to represent an activity as delimited with respect to the general activity denoted by the full verb as shown in the following examples drawn from Titsch (6a) and Töitschu (6b):

- (6) (a) *nid vergässe hienòntoa en stéretò z’gä*
 not forget.INF sometimes a stir to=give.INF
 ‘Don’t forget to give a stir sometimes.’
- (b) *hets gwettrut un hets dondurut hets*
 has.3N.SG rained and has.3N.SG thundered has.3N.SG
keen an dondurutu
 given a thunder
 ‘and it rained and thundered and there was a rumble.’

Especially, in the Töitschu example (6b) the contrast is particularly salient because the semelfactive construction occurs in the same sentence and contrasts with the full verb because it clearly represents a single instantiation of the general event of thundering. In this respect, semelfactives essentially contribute to shape the aspectual properties of the clause in which they occur. In the same track, it is interesting to compare the value of semelfactive abstracts to the other deverbal nouns, and especially the nouns suffixed with *-òng* in Titsch respectively in the singular (7) and in the plural (8)⁴:

- (7) (a) *Schribe chentemò noch dass em louf vòn*
 write.inf could.one still that in.the course of
de joare hät de tracht em grösse òn em
 the years gas the costume in.the large and in.the
ganze en ändertò gmacht
 whole a change made
 ‘One could write that in the course of the years the traditional costume has undergone a change far and wide.’
- (b) *En de Herbscht-Temper-Taga, ... hätt z’Wätter täll*
 in the fall-ember-days has the=weather easy
tischot, uf dejer Änderung chammo ou noch
 changed on this change can.one also still
en engie Zitte drufgoa
 in our time thereon.go.INF
 ‘In the Ember days in fall, the weather changed suddenly, by this change one can fall apart still today.’
- (8) (a) *D’absecht escht òn blibt z’beobachto d’änderte*
 the=intention is and remains to=observe the=changes
woa sin em louf von de joare en
 REL are in.the course of the years in
èndschem land vorkiemet
 our country occurred
 ‘The intention is and remains to observe the changes that have occurred in the country in the course of the years.’
- (b) *De... Universität vòn Turin ... treit tätég vorwertz*
 the university of Turin carries active forwards
dschin òndersuacha öber was anbelangt de
 his researches on what concerns the
bode, z’schnue, z’entlecke vòn de loubene
 ground the=snow.INF the=fragment.INF of the avalanche
òn d’ändrònge vòm klima,
 and the.changes of.the climate
 ‘The University of Turin carries out research on what concerns the ground, the snowing, the breaking down of an avalanche and the climate changes.’

⁴ Recall that no similar comparison is possible in Töitschu because of the scarce occurrence of the *-unh* abstracts observed in Tab. 5 above.

In the examples, the *-òng* abstract generally refers to the activity denoted by the verbal base, both in the singular and in the plural, while the semelfactive appears to refer to single instantiations of the activity that can carefully be described in the text, for instance by a relative clause in (8a). In sum, we can tentatively oppose the semelfactive value seen above in (3) to the general value of *-òng* in (9):

(9) $[[\dots]_{Vi} -òng]_{Nj} \leftrightarrow [\text{the SitTyp involved by SEM}_i \dots]_j$

The example of *ändertò* vs. *ändròng* is particularly significant because it does not rely on an explicit pattern occurring in the other languages of the repertoire, and especially Italian in which the pair *cambiamento / cambio* occurs but not **cambiata*.

2.3. The semantic spectrum of semelfactives

Besides the abstract value, a spectrum of other meanings is found with these derivatives both in Töitschu and Titsch. In Tab. 9 the possible meanings found with derivatives based on verbs and nouns are listed:

Derivational meaning	Base	Titsch	Töitschu
Activity			
Ti. <i>stére</i> ‘to stir’ → <i>stéretò</i> ‘stir’ Tö. <i>geinun</i> ‘to yawn’ → <i>geinetu</i> ‘yawn’	V	39 / 46%	72 / 46%
Ti. <i>seifò</i> ‘soap / to soap’ → <i>seifetò</i> ‘soaping’ Tö. <i>salb</i> ‘balm’ / <i>salbun</i> ‘to rub’ → <i>salbetu</i> ‘rub’	V/N	8 / 10%	19 / 12%
Ti. <i>oug</i> ‘eye’ → <i>ougetò</i> ‘glance’ Tö. <i>hopt</i> ‘head’ → <i>hoptetu</i> ‘header’	N	4 / 5%	11 / 7%
Ti. <i>schnälzetò</i> ‘dog bite’ Tö. <i>fiambetu</i> ‘blaze’	–	1 / 1%	3 / 2%
Result			
Ti. <i>seike</i> ‘to urinate’ → <i>seiketò</i> ‘urine’ Tö. <i>reschpun</i> ‘to knead’ → <i>reschpetu</i> ‘mash’	V	11 / 13%	17 / 11%
Ti. <i>seiver</i> / <i>seivrò</i> ‘drool / to drool’ → <i>seivretò</i> ‘drool’ Tö. <i>pioanu</i> / <i>pioanun</i> ‘plane / to plane’ → <i>pioanetu</i> ‘swarf’	V/N	4 / 5%	3 / 2%
Tö. <i>tschapte</i> ‘paw’ → <i>tschaptetu</i> ‘trace’	N	–	3 / 2%
Tö. <i>leipetu</i> ‘left-overs’	–	–	1 / 1%
Quantity			
Ti. <i>schuflò</i> ‘shovel / to shovel’ → <i>schufletò</i> ‘shovelful’ Tö. <i>nescht</i> / <i>neschtun</i> ‘nest / to nest’ → <i>neschtetu</i> ‘broom’	V/N	6 / 7%	4 / 3%
Ti. <i>gabelò</i> ‘fork’ → <i>gabetò</i> ‘forkful’ Tö. <i>fannu</i> ‘pan’ → <i>fannetu</i> ‘panful’	N	9 / 11%	23 / 15%
Ti. <i>gòuvletò</i> ‘two-handed handful’ Tö. <i>schiddschutu</i> ‘bucketful’	–	2 / 2%	1 / 1%
Tot.		84 100%	157 100%

Table 9: The semantic spectrum of semelfactives

The three derivational meanings attested refer to (i) the noun denoting the semelfactive activity, (ii) the result of the activity and (iii) the quantity contained in the base. In spite of the significant difference in quantitative terms between the two varieties, the semantic spectrum is very similar. In Tab. 9, the main difference between the verb- and the noun-base pattern is shown to relate to the derivational meaning. Noun-based derivatives mainly display the quantity value while the activity value is connected with verbal bases. This is clearly shown by Tab. 10 in which the figures of Tab. 9 are grouped according to the derivational bases and the percentages are calculated correspondingly:

Base	Derivational meaning	Titsch	Töitschu
V	Activity Result	39 / 78% 11 / 22%	72 / 81% 17 / 19%
V/N	Activity Result Quantity	8 / 44% 4 / 22% 6 / 33%	19 / 73% 3 / 12% 4 / 15%
N	Activity Result Quantity	4 / 31% – 9 / 69%	11 / 30% 3 / 8% 23 / 62%

Table 10: The semantic spectrum of semelfactives and the bases

It must be added that the quantity value is in principle not incompatible with the activity value, as shown by the corresponding Italian semelfactives such as *forchettata* ‘forkful’ that can also mean ‘stroke with a fork’. However, it remains to be understood to what extent the polysemy is possible in the Walser varieties. At a first sight, speakers are uncomfortable with the double meaning attributed to the corresponding derivatives Ti. *gabletò* / Tö. *furkulunutu*. But more research is needed on this subject.

A last observation concerns the lexical domain selected by the semelfactive suffixes. While in Titsch the suffix only selects the native stratum (with a couple of exceptions such as *flammetò* ‘blaze’ based on *flammò* ‘flame / to blaze’, cf. French *flamme* ‘flame’ and *reindschetò* ‘line’ based on *reindschò* ‘to line up’, cf. French *ranger* ‘to line up’, in Töitschu we find several derivatives based on non-native bases such as *fuetteretu* ‘lash’ based on *fuetturun* ‘to lash’, cf. French *fouetter* ‘to lash’, *boaschetu* ‘tacking’ based on *boaschtun* ‘to baste’, cf. Italian *imbastire* ‘to baste’), *kassurlutu* ‘saucepanful’ based on *kasserlu* ‘saucepan’, cf. French *casseroles* / Italian *casseroles* ‘saucepan’, *tasketu* ‘sackful’ based on *tasku* ‘bag’, cf. Italian *tasca* ‘pocket, bag’, etc. This difference is generally in line with the neat division between a native and a non-native lexical stratum shown by Titsch, which is largely blurred in Töitschu (cf. Gaeta 2023, 2024 for a general discussion). On the other hand, it is interesting to observe that despite its non-native origin the suffix *-etò* in Titsch is assimilated to the native stratum.

3. Conclusion

The abstract revolution has also invested the Alemannic varieties that were in strict contact with Romance languages for centuries and underwent a dramatic development with respect to the sparse occurrence of the OHG *-āta* derivatives. We have focused on the two varieties of Gressoney and Issime, but similar data can also be observed in the other villages in which a Walser German variety is spoken. For instance, in Formazza the semelfactives show the form *-ata*:

- (10) *bache* ‘to bake’ → *bachata* ‘batch’, *messer* ‘knife’ → *messrata* ‘stabbing’, *leffel* ‘spoon’ → *lefflata* ‘spoonful’, *hoor* ‘horn’ → *hoornata* ‘butt’, *ofe* ‘oven’ → *ofnata* ‘batch’, *spritze* ‘to spray’ → *spritzata* ‘spray’, *schwitze* ‘to sweat’ → *schwizata* ‘sweat’

However, this is not due to recent borrowings from Italian given that the pattern tightly corresponds to what we have seen above for Titsch to the extent that it is mainly restricted to the native lexicon. Rather, this results from a regular phonological change whereby in Formazza a final PGmc. *-ō* has become /a/, cf. *seifa* ‘soap’, *zunga* ‘tongue’, etc. (cf. Ti. *seifō*, *zōngō*). A similar situation is witnessed by the variety spoken in Alagna, where the suffix shows the form *-āta*: *bensil* ‘brush’ → *bensiāta* ‘brush stroke’, *houre* ‘horn’ → *hournäta* ‘butt’, *leffil* ‘spoon’ → *leffiāta* ‘spoonful’, *mund* ‘mouth’ → *mundāta* ‘mouthful’, etc. Finally, in Rimella the form *-etu* is found in few derivatives such as *laffelj* ‘spoon’ → *laffetu* ‘spoonful’, *wainu* ‘to cry’ → *wainetu* ‘cry’, *waschu* ‘to wash’ → *washetu* ‘wash’. Although data for these varieties are essentially scarcer, they seem to show a picture in many respects comparable to that observed for Gressoney and Issime. This speaks in favor of a robust presence of the semelfactive abstracts in the Western side of the Alps, which still persists and is in urgent need of documentation before they will definitely turn from a potential to a virtual existence.