FRIULIAN DIALECT CLASSIFICATION

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the classification of Friulian dialects. Two classifications have been proposed by Francescato (1966) and Frau (1984), which are extremely similar: both of them argue that Friulian is divided in three main dialectal areas dialects (Northern or Carnian, Central-Eastern, and Western or Concordiese), each of them parted into subareas. This classification has been carried out in the framework of isoglossic dialectology, basing mostly on materials collected for linguistic atlases.

Keywords: dialect classification, isoglossic dialectology, Friulian

Name: [furˈlaŋ]   **Language-code:** ISO 639-2 fur

CLASSIFICACIÓ DIALECTAL DEL FRIÜLÀ

Resum

Aquest article ofereix una visió general de la classificació dels dialectes friülans. Francescato (1966) i Frau (1984) van proposar dues classificacions extremadament semblants: ambdós afirmaven que el friülà es divideix en tres àrees dialectals principals (friülà septentrional o càrnic, friülà centre-oriental, i friülà occidental o concordiès). Cada àrea dialectal es divideix en subàrees. Aquesta classificació es va fer en el marc de la dialectologia isoglòssica, basant-se sobretot en materials recollits per als atles lingüístics.

Paraules clau: classificació dialectal, dialectologia isoglòssica, friülà

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<div align="center">**CLASSIFICAZION DIALETÂL DAL FURLAN**</div>

Struc

Chest articul al presente une vision gjenerâl de classificazion dai dialets dal furlan. Francescato (1966) e Frau (1984) a àn proponût dôs classificazions une vore similis: ducj i doi a disin che il furlan al è dividût in trê areis dialetâls principâls (furlan setentrionâl o cjargnel, furlan centro-orientâl, e furlan ocidentâl o cuncuardiês). Ogni aree, po, e je dividude in subareis. Cheste classificazion e je stade realizade te suaze de dialetologjie isoglossiche, analizant soredut i materiâi dai atlants lenghistics.

Peraulis clâf: Classificazion dialetâl, dialetologjie isoglossiche, furlan

1. Introduction

Friulian represents the easternmost Rhaeto-Romance variety. It is spoken in Friuli, a region spanning approximately 8,250 square kilometers in area situated in the northeastern part of Italy.

Frau's (2007) brief overview of the linguistic history of Friulian highlights its unique position within Romance Europe as a peripheral language. Its geographic marginality and historical isolation from other Romance areas during the Middle Ages have contributed to the development of a language that mixes conservative features with a set of original innovations that are not shared with other Romance varieties.

Friulian is the result of the evolution of the Aquileiese vernacular Latin variety, which was spoken in the region encompassing the Roman *municipia* of Aquileia, Julia Concordia, and Julium Carnicum, and was influenced by a pre-Roman Celtic substrate. During and after the decline of the Roman Empire, the local vernacular Latin came into contact with the languages of the Germanic peoples who settled in Friuli, including the Lombards, who ruled Friuli from 568 to 774 AD. From the 9th century, while Friuli was part of the Holy German Empire and was ruled by the Patriarchs of Aquileia, part of the Friulian plain was repopulated by Slavs who were assimilated over time, leaving traces of their language in place names and vocabulary. In the early 15th century, the Republic of Venice conquered a large part of Friuli, leading to the spread of Venetian as the higher prestige dialect, especially for the local ruling classes, while Latin remained the language of the liturgy, and Italian began to take over from Latin as the

written language especially by the 16th century. Between 1866 and 1918 Friuli was incorporated into the new Italian state. The Italian government embarked on a systematic campaign to promote Italian as the common language of the state, through its use in public education and mass media (Andri 1997, De Mauro 1963).

Various estimates suggest that the number of Friulian speakers ranges between 300,000 to 600,000, as reported in the works of Eberhard, Simons and Fenning (2023), and Melchior (2017), respectively. Despite Friulian being granted legal protection as a minority language in the 1990s, the sharp decline in the number of speakers has put it at risk of extinction (Moseley 2010, Strassoldo 2001, Templin 2020).

1.1 Historic and geographic factors relevant for dialectal division

Before illustrating the characteristics of the different varieties of Friulian, it is appropriate to briefly introduce the factors that have determined the current dialectal configuration of the language. The lines that separate its dialects largely coincide with natural (orographic or hydrographic) boundaries, ancient administrative and ecclesiastical divisions, or with the areas of influence of certain urban centers. Roseano (2015), based on the proposals of Francescato (1966), Frau (1984), and the introductory tables of the first volume of ASLEF (Pellegrini 1972-1986), presents the historical, geographical, and anthropic elements that are more important to understand the dialectal subdivision of Friulian (Map 1).

From an orographic point of view, the Friulian linguistic area (delimited by a dashed-dotted line on the map), includes a large mountainous area to the north. This area can be divided into two sections, separated by the Tagliamento-Meduna watershed: in the province of Udine there is the area corresponding to the upper course of the Tagliamento river with its main Alpine tributaries (Degano, But, and Fella), while in the province of Pordenone we find the mountainous area that includes the upper part of the Cellina, Meduna, and Arzino river basins. In the Pordenone mountains, the alpine valley of Vajont, which includes the villages of Erto and Casso,

should be considered separately since, unlike the rest of the villages on the Friulian mountains, it does not open onto the Friulian plain but onto the Piave valley.

Regarding hydrography, the most notable element is undoubtedly the Tagliamento river, whose middle and lower course divides the Friulian plain in half, in a north-south direction. To the east, the course of the Isonzo river south of Gorizia marks the rapid transition from the proper Friulian area to the area of Bisiacaria (on its disputed belonging to the Friulian-speaking area, see Frau 1984: 197-203, Zamboni 1986; Heinemann & Melchior 2015). To the west, on the contrary, the transition from Friulian to Venetian does not correspond to any concrete geographical element and is more gradual in nature.
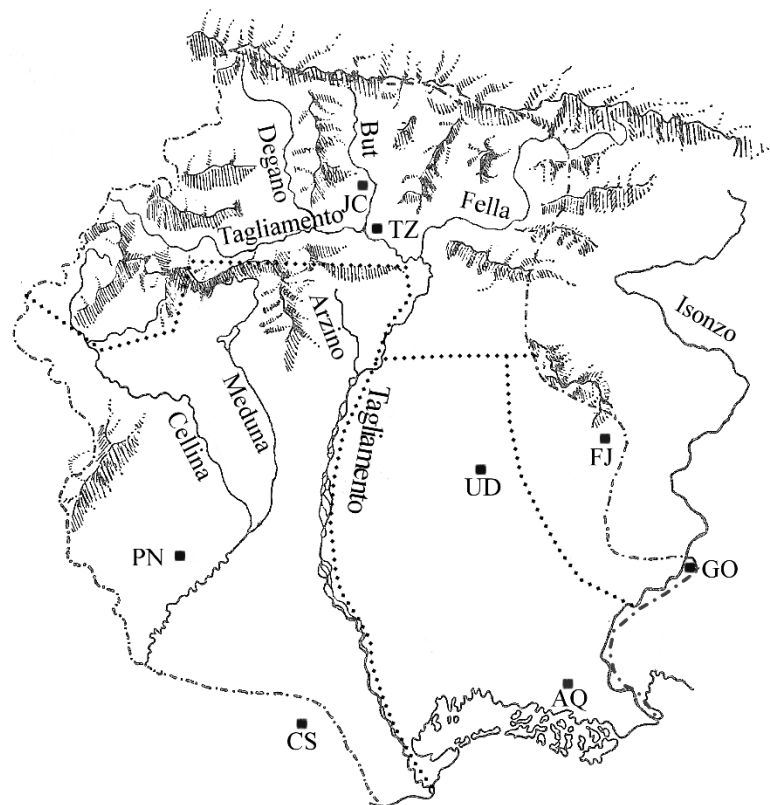
Map 1. Friulian linguistic area (source: adapted from Roseano 2015)

From an anthropic point of view, the most important cities in present-day Friuli are Pordenone (abbreviated as PN in Figure 1), Gorizia (GO), and Udine (UD), while the town of Tolmezzo (TZ), although smaller in size, is *de facto* the capital of the

mountainous area of the province of Udine. Starting from the last centuries of the Middle Ages, Udine gradually emerged as the main urban center of the area and played a leading role in the diffusion of some linguistic changes.

The contemporary Friulian urban network is markedly different from the ancient one. In Roman times, in fact, the current Friulian-speaking territory was divided into four municipia: Aquileia (abbreviated as AQ in the map), Forum Julii (FJ), Julium Carnicum (JC), and Julia Concordia (today Concordia Sagittaria, CS). In the map 1, the probable boundaries between the four *municipia* are indicated by a dotted line. To the north, the *municipium* of Julium Carnicum included the mountainous part of the present Friulian linguistic area and also extended into the hilly area immediately south of the confluence of the Tagliamento and Fella rivers. To the east, the territory of Forum Julii included the current Friulian-speaking territories of the pre-Alpine and eastern hilly areas. To the west, the *municipium* of Concordia extended over almost all the Friulian-speaking territories south and west of the Tagliamento. Finally, to the south, the city of Aquileia was the capital of much of the plain east of the same river. The Roman division into four *municipia* found an almost perfect continuity in the division of the territory among the three paleochristian dioceses of the area: while the bishops of Julium Carnicum and Concordia controlled the territories of the homonymous *municipia*, that of Aquileia extended its authority over the *municipium* of the same city and that of Forum Julii. Each diocese was divided in smaller functional units called *plebes* (in Friulian *plêfs*), which arose in the Middle Ages and whose territorial demarcations often coincide with sub-dialectal areas (Francescato 1963, Marchetti 1963).

The tripartition between a Concordian, a Carnian, and an Aquileian/Forojulian area is a constant that surfaces, with some variations and transformations, throughout the entire history of Friuli.

More recent, instead, is the separation of the Friulian-speaking part of Eastern Friuli, which includes the lands between the Isonzo and the Cormons-Cervignano line. This happened in the year 1500, when the Habsburgs established their rule on the

County of Gorizia, while the rest of the Friulian speaking area belonged to the Republic of Venice.

It should be emphasized that the different types of borders mentioned in the preceding paragraphs often coincide. The course of the middle and lower Tagliamento, for example, besides being a hydrographic element of primary importance, also marks the border between Roman *municipia* and early Christian dioceses. Similarly, the upper basin of the Tagliamento, with its Alpine tributaries, corresponds to the *municipium* and diocese of Julium Carnicum.

1.2 Overview of the literature

The panorama of general dialectological descriptions of Friulian includes a limited number of monographs and a not particularly large series of shorter writings that reproduce the contents of the monographs, summarizing them (with few minor integrations). The two reference works are Francescato's *Dialettologia Friulana* [Friulian dialectology] (1966) and Frau's *I dialetti del Friuli* [The dialects of Friuli] (1984), which present a substantially concurring description of the dialects of Friulian.

Minor works by the same authors (Frau 1989, Francescato 1965, 1982), as well as the dialectal descriptions published by others (such as Iliescu 1964, 1972, Marcato 2001, Vicario 2005, 2007, Heinemann 2007, Roseano 2015, Roseano & Finco 2021) are in line with the conclusions of the two above-mentioned works by Francescato and Frau.

2. Dialect classifications

As mentioned above, there are two main proposals for the classification of Friulian dialects, namely Francescato's (1966) and Frau's (1984), which share many similarities. The two propositions diverge only in terms of their conceptualization of the relationships among the varieties. While Francescato puts forward a laxer classification (insofar as he does not always define strictly the set of subvarieties of a

dialect), Frau proposes a more structured classification. In addition, while Francescato refrains from assigning the transitional varieties to any specific dialectal areas, Frau does.

Leaving aside these differences, both authors share the most important methodological features. For this reason, in the following section, where we summarize Francescato's classification (2.1), we will also point out the features that the two authors have in common and we will not repeat them in the section devoted to Frau's classification (2.2).

2.1 Francescato (1966)

2.1.1 Framework: Isoglottic dialectology

The similarity of the conclusions reached by Frau's and Francescato's works stems from the fact that they share fundamental methodological choices: both are based on materials from linguistic atlases – integrated on the basis of their own surveys – which they analyze in order to trace isoglosses.

The two authors had few dialectal databases at their disposal. The first of them was the *Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz* or AIS (Jaberg & Jud 1928-1940), which included fifteen localities in Friuli, although not all were Friulian-speaking (in fact, in Friuli also German, Slovene and Veneto are spoken). The second database is largely due to the Friulian linguist Ugo Pellis, who in 1925 began collecting data for the *Atlante Linguistico Italiano* or ALI (Bartoli et al. 1995-). Thanks to Pellis' work, the ALI includes 53 survey points in Friuli (again, not all of them are Friulian-speaking). Later, in the 1960s, researchers began to collect materials for the most important atlas for the study of Friulian, the *Atlante storico-linguistico-etnografico friulano* or ASLEF (Pellegrini 1972-1986). The 129 survey points of ASLEF are in part the same as those of AIS and ALI (whose materials were reviewed and checked with new field surveys), but in most cases they were localities where linguistic data had not yet been collected.

Francescato's and Frau's classifications were motivated on a set of phonological, morphological, and lexical features. The most relevant features for their classifications, as pointed out by Roseano and Finco (2022), were those of a phonological nature, which sometimes have an effect on morphology. The lexical features they considered, on the other hand, are very few. Tables 1 and 2 contain some (though not all) of the features considered by Francescato and Frau. In the tables, the description of each feature and of its diatopic variation is extremely simplified and readers should refer to Francescato (1966) and Frau (1984) for a complete analysis (Table 1 and Table 2).

| Feature	Distribution
Presence of long stressed vowels	Most Friulian varieties display a phonological contrast between short and long stressed vowels (found in words like [ˈnaːs] 'nose', [ˈniːt] 'nest', [ˈkruːt] 'row (s.m.)'). Only the westernmost dialects and the southeasternmost dialects do not have stressed long vowels (and, therefore, we find forms like [ˈnas] 'nose', [ˈnit] 'nest', [ˈkrut] 'row (s.m.)') (Map 2).
Stressed long vowels vs. diphthongs	While Central-Eastern varieties have long stressed /iː/, /eː/, /oː/ and /uː/, the other varieties display complex systems of diphthongs (that differ notably among the subdialects). For example, while Central Friulian has [ˈpeːl] 'hair', [ˈpiːt] 'foot', [ˈfuːk] 'fire', [ˈvoːs] 'voice', Common Western Friulian has [ˈpei̯l] 'hair', [ˈpei̯t] 'foot', [ˈfou̯k] 'fire', [ˈvou̯s] 'voice' (Map 3).
Evolution of Vulgar Latin *$/\varepsilon/$ and *$/ɔ/$	Vulgar Latin stressed *$/\varepsilon/$, in most contexts, evolved to [jɛ] in most Central and Northern varieties (e.g. [ˈtjɛre] 'earth'), while it further evolved to [ja] before a rhotic in Southern varieties (e.g. [ˈtjare] 'earth') (Map 4). Vulgar Latin stressed *$/ɔ/$, in most contexts, evolved to [wɛ] in most varieties (e.g. [ˈkwɛt] 'cooked (s.m.)'), while it gave way to [wɔ] or [ua] in the westernmost dialects (e.g. [ˈkwɔt], [ˈkuat] 'cooked (s.m.)'). When followed by a cluster formed by /n/ and another consonant, *$/ɔ/$ evolved to /wi/ in most Central and Northern varieties (e.g. [ˈpwint] 'bridge'), while Southwestern and Southeastern varieties have /u/ (e.g. [ˈpunt] 'bridge') and the westernmost varieties have either /wɔ/ or /ɔ/ (e.g. [ˈpwɔnt] or [ˈpɔnt] 'bridge') (Map 5).
Presence of postalveolar fricatives	While conservative Central and Northern varieties preserve postalveolar fricatives distinct form alveolar fricatives (e.g. [ˈmuʃ] 'donkey', [ˈʒave] 'toad'), in innovative Southern and Western varieties postalveolar fricatives have merged with their alveolar counterparts (e.g. [ˈmus] 'donkey', [ˈzave] 'toad') (Map 6).
Presence of palatal stops	While conservative Central and Northern varieties preserve palatal stops (e.g. [ˈcaŋ] 'dog, [ˈɟat] 'cat'), in innovative Southern and Western varieties palatal stops have evolved in postalveolar affricates (e.g. [ˈt͡ʃaŋ] 'dog, [ˈd͡ʒat] 'cat') (Map 7).

Table 1. Some phonological features used by Francescato and Frau for the classification of Friulian dialects
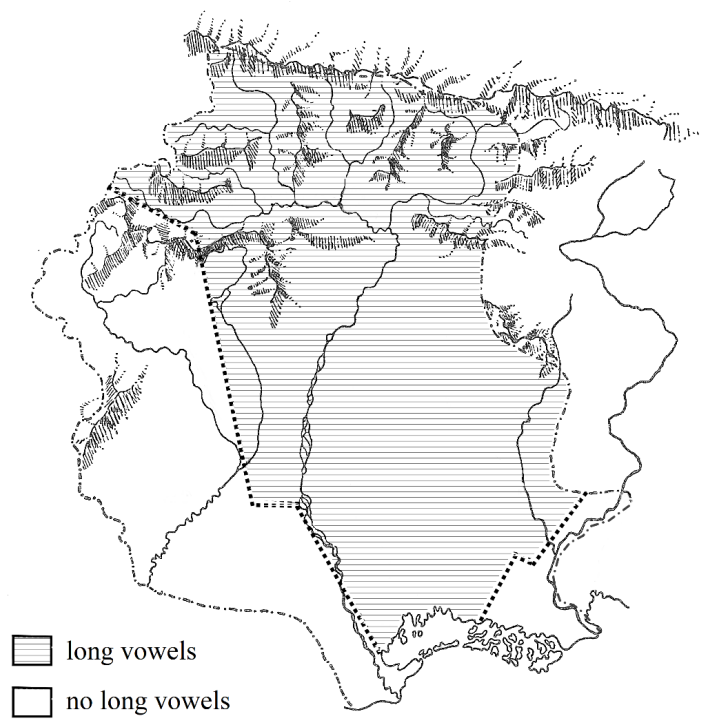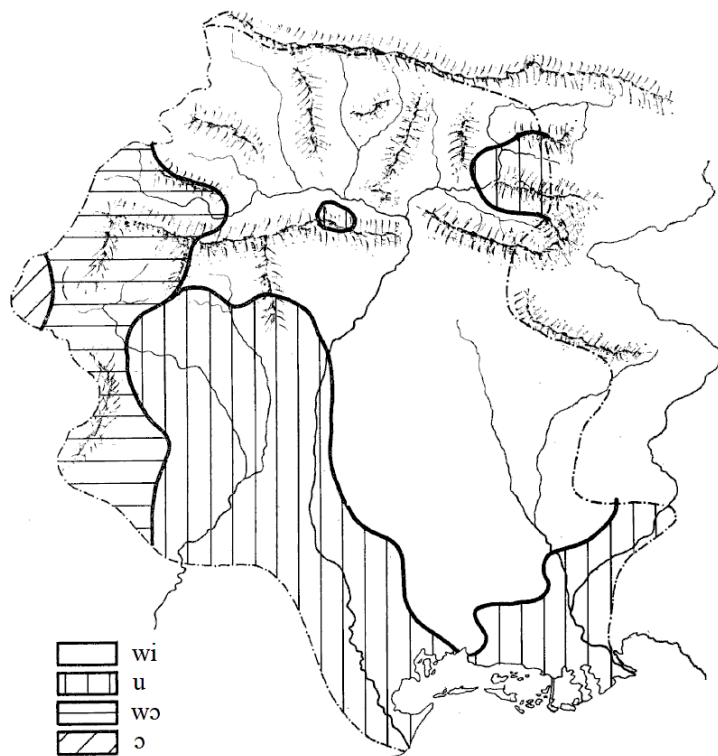
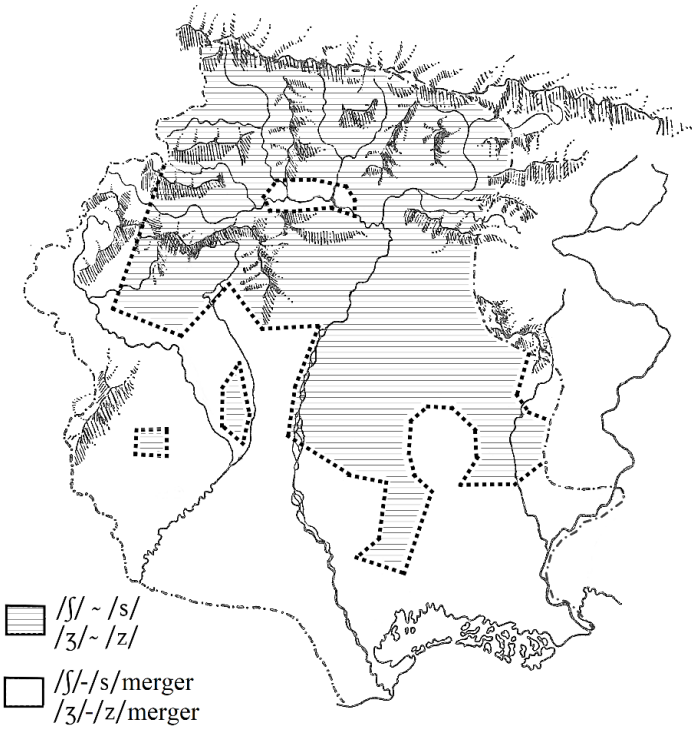Map 2. Presence of long vowels (source: adapted from Roseano 2015)
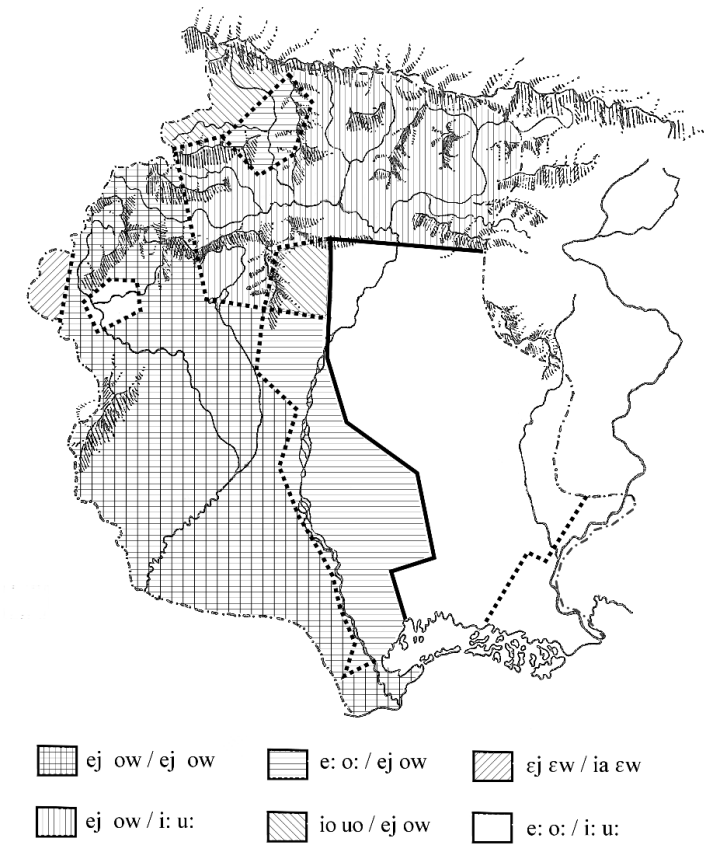
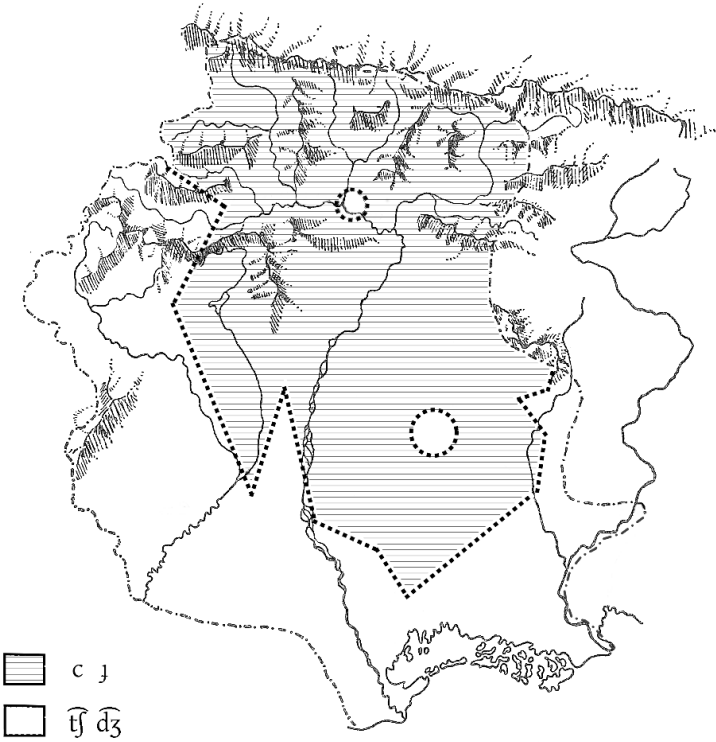Map 3. Presence of long vowels vs. diphthongs (source: adapted from Roseano 2015)
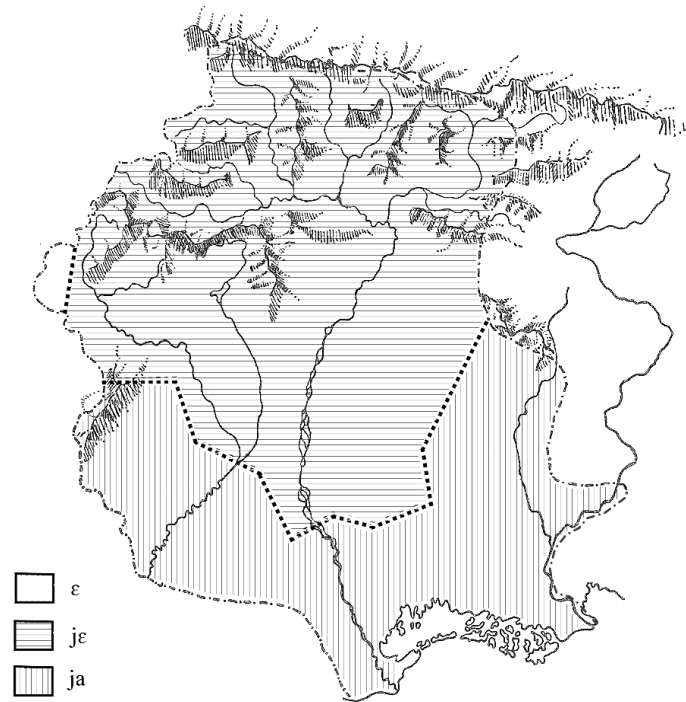
Map 4. Evolution of Vulgar Latin stressed */ɛ/ in certain contexts (source: adapted from Roseano 2015)

Map 5. Evolution of Vulgar Latin stressed */ɔ/ in certain contexts (source: adapted from Francescato 1966)

Map 6. Presence of postalveolar fricatives (source: adapted from Roseano 2015)


Map 7. Presence of palatal stops or corresponding postalveolar fricatives (source: adapted from Roseano 2015)

Feature	Distribution
Suffix for feminine singular	The outcomes of an etymological final unstressed -*a* (in singular feminine nouns and 3ps of different verb tenses) are [-e] (e.g. in Central and Northern varieties [ˈlune] 'moon') or [-a] (like in westernmost and easternmost varieties [ˈluna] 'moon'). Some peripheral varieties have [ɔ] or [ə]. (Map 8).
Suffix for feminine plural	The geographic distribution of the outcomes of the etymological ending -*as* (in feminine plurals and 2ps of different verb tenses) is more complex. It is -*as* or -*os* in the conservative northwestern varieties (e.g. *netos* or *netas* 'clean (f.pl.)'), -*es* in some northern, western and central varieties (e.g. *netes* 'clean (f.pl.)'), -*e* in the westernmost varieties (e.g. *nete* 'clean (f.pl.)'), while -is typical of most central and western varieties (e.g. *netis* 'clean (f.pl.)'). (Map 9).
Suffix for 1pp present indicative	While Central-Eastern and Northern varieties have [-ˈiŋ] (e.g. [neˈtiŋ] 'we clean'), westernmost varieties have [-ˈeŋ] or [-ˈoŋ] (e.g. [neˈteŋ]/[neˈtoŋ] 'we clean')[1]. (Map 10).

Table 2. Some morphological features used by Francescato and Frau for the classification of Friulian dialects

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[1] Few western varieties have different suffixes depending on the conjugation. Lower Cellina Valley (Barcis, Andreis), Colvera Valley (Poffabro, Frisanco), Tramonti Valley and Cordenons have three different suffixes, one for each conjugation: [-ˈaŋ] for the first conjugation (e.g. [canˈtaŋ] 'we sing'), [-ˈeŋ] for the second conjugation (e.g. [poˈdeŋ] 'we can'), [-ˈiŋ] for the third conjugation (e.g. [durˈmiŋ] 'we sleep'). Other varieties (Clauzetto, Cordovado, Maniago, Chions, Teglio have two suffixes: [-ˈaŋ] and [-ˈiŋ] / [-ˈeŋ].
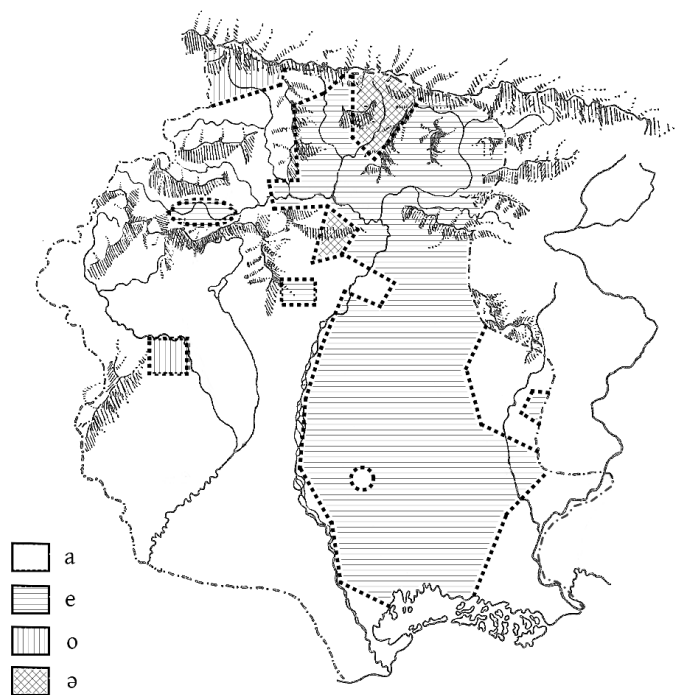
Map 8. Suffix for feminine singular (source: adapted from Roseano 2015)
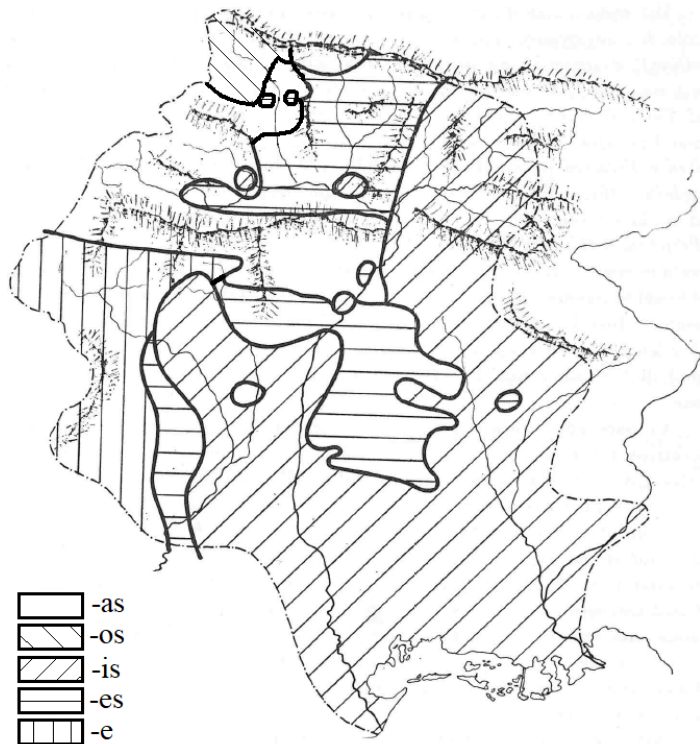
Map 9. Suffix for feminine plural (source: adapted from Francescato 1966, with integrations from Roseano 2015 and Roseano 2019)
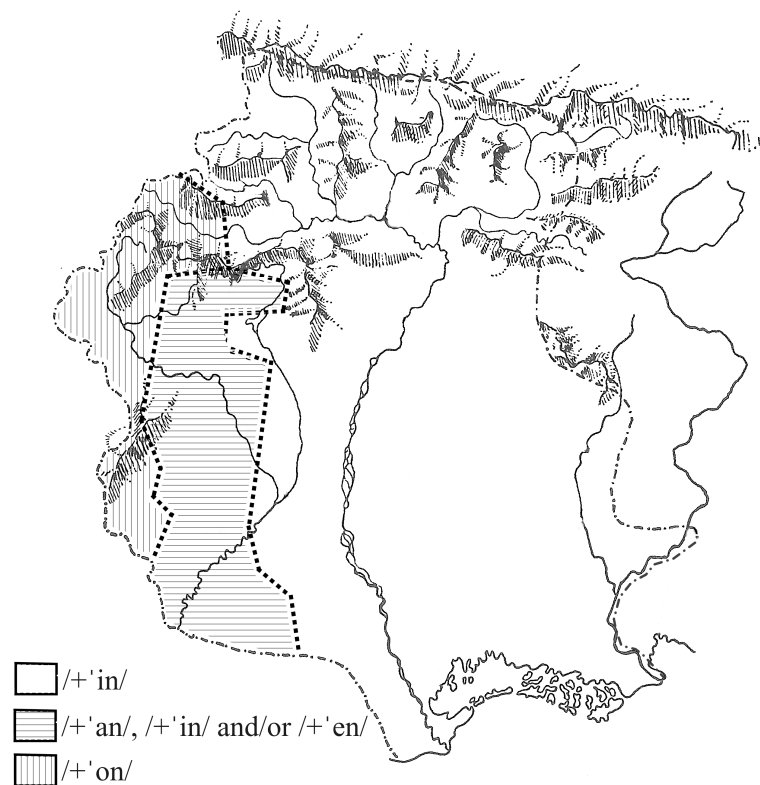
Map 10. Suffix for 1ps present indicative (source: adapted from Roseano 2015)

2.1.2 Classification of dialects and subdialects

Basing on the analysis of isoglosses, Francescato puts forward a classification of Friulian in three hierarchical levels: dialects, varieties, and sub-varieties. While Francescato is basically cohesive in defining the varieties throughout his fundamental work *Dialettologia Friulana* (1966), he is more flexible when dealing with subvarieties and -interestingly- also with dialects. The fluctuation regarding subvarieties is simply due to the fact that in some chapters he gives a general description of them, while in others he is more detailed.

On the other hand, his oscillation concerning the main dialects is more intriguing. In some sections of his book, Francescato (1966: 91, 179) posits a dichotomic division between Eastern Friulian and Western Friulian. In other parts (1966: 95) he talks about four dialects (Eastern, Western, Carnian, Gorto Valley); nevertheless, elsewhere (1966: 109, 123) he suggests that Gorto Valley Friulian belongs to Carnian. For the following graphic illustrations of Francescato's classifications (Figure 1, Map 11), we have chosen

the latter option: we present three main dialects (Carnian, Central-Eastern, and Western or Concordiese), which are subdivided into sub-dialects and are separated by transitional dialects that the author does not explicitly ascribe to any of the dialectal areas they connect. These transitional areas are represented by the *Fornese* dialects (transition between Carnian and Western), the area along the Tagliamento river (transition between Central-Eastern and Western), and of the area of the Middle Tagliamento and Fella rivers, which marks the gradual transition between Central-Eastern and Carnian Friulian. In addition, Francescato points out that *Ertano* and the varieties of the Friulian-Veneto transition represent a transition of Western Friulian towards the northeastern Veneto dialects. In Figure 1, the dialectal areas are reported on a map, with a certain degree of approximation and simplification. The letters identifying the dialects in the graph of Figure 1 also appear on the Map 11.

Both in Figure 1 and in Map 11 Northern or Carnian varieties have been shaded in blue, Central-Eastern varieties in yellow, and Western or Concordiese varieties in red. The transition areas are colored in a way that reflects which dialects they join: green is used for transition areas between Carnian and Central-Eastern, orange for transition varieties between Central-Eastern and Western, violet for transition zones between Carnian and Western, and pink for varieties that link Western Friulian to neighboring Romance areas.
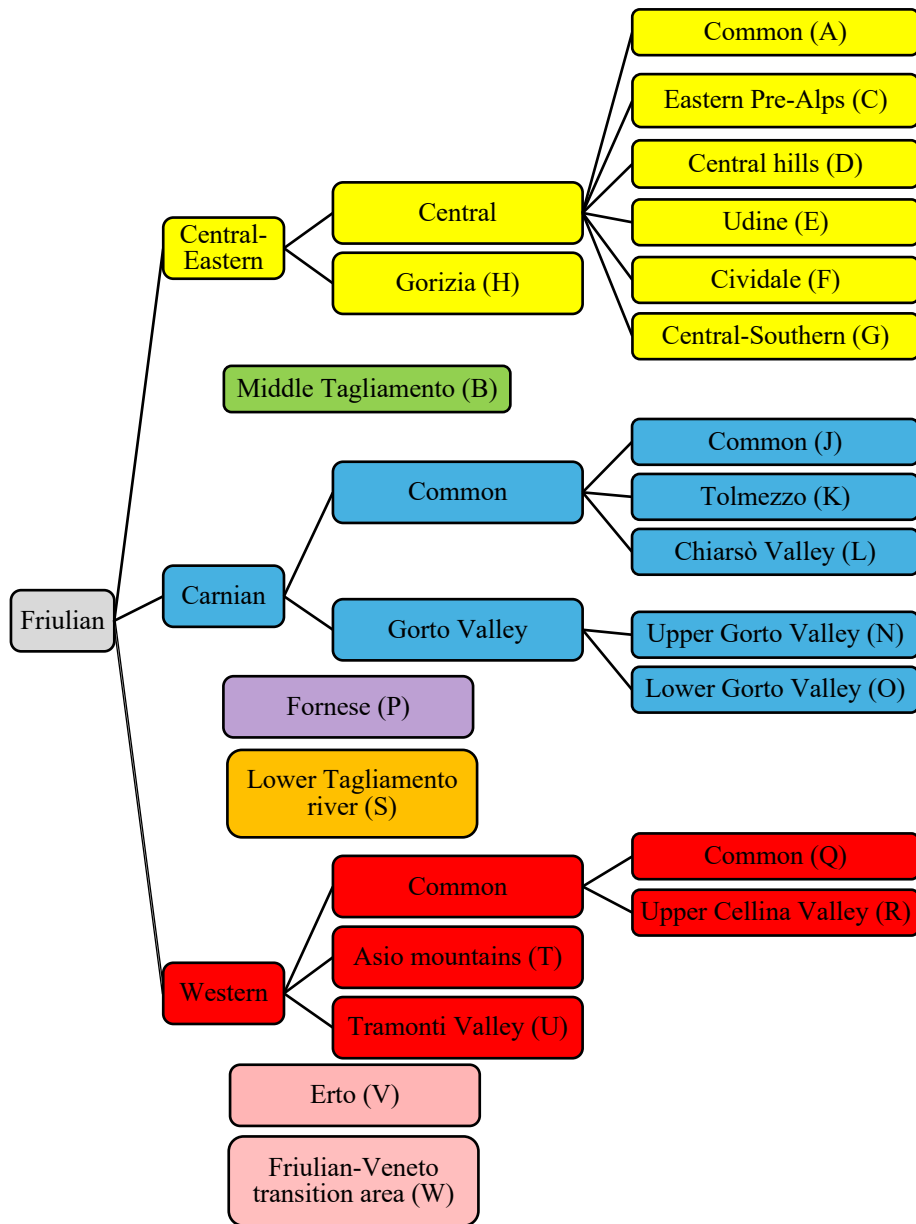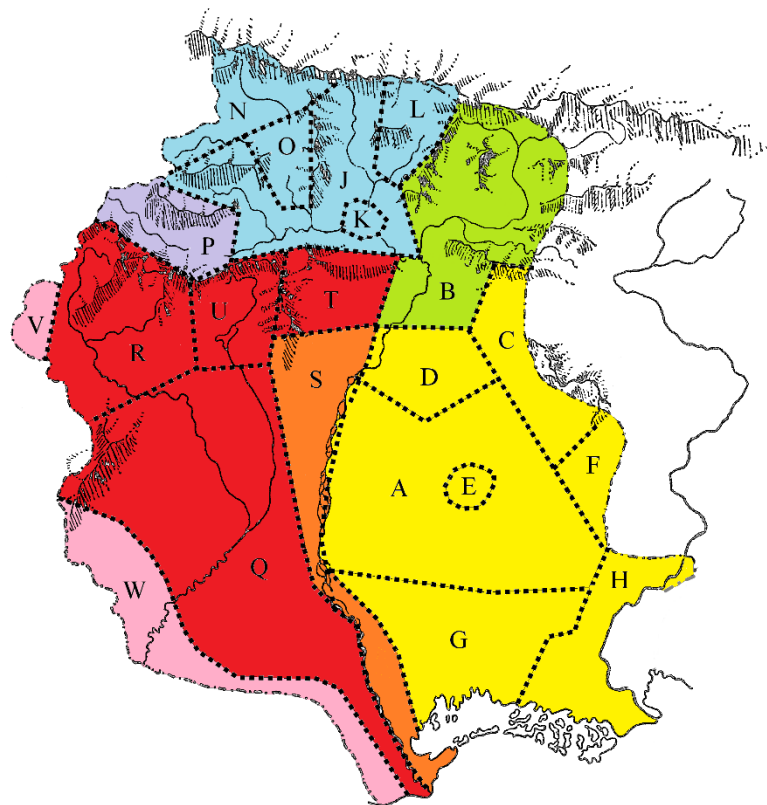
Figure 1. The dialectal classification of Friulian according to Francescato

Map 11. The dialectal map of Friulian according to Francescato

2.2 Frau (1984)

As mentioned above, Frau (1984) shares with Francescato (1966) the most important methodological aspects. For this reason, in this section we will only present his classification, which differs From Francescato's in few aspects. The first difference between the two authors is that Frau is more systematic and consistently divides Friulian in three main dialects (Central-Eastern, Western, Carnian) throughout his book *I Dialetti del Friuli* (1984). A second relevant difference is that Frau attributes each transition area to one of the three main dialects. Finally, Frau splits two of Francescato's transition areas: the Middle Tagliamento is divided into Middle Tagliamento and Fella Valley, and the Lower Tagliamento is divided in Northwestern Lower Tagliamento and Southeastern Tagliamento. Figure 2 and Map 12 represent graphically Frau's classification.
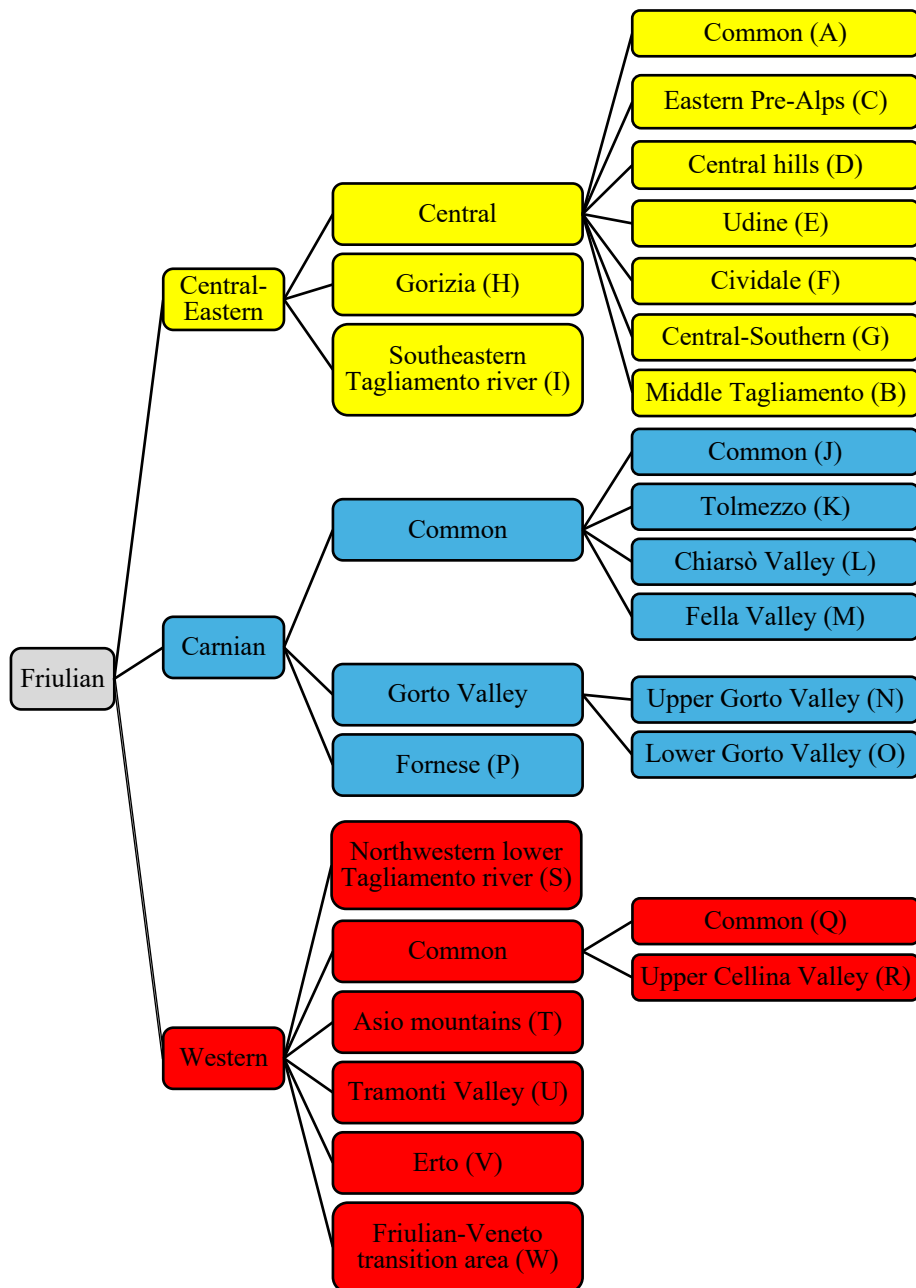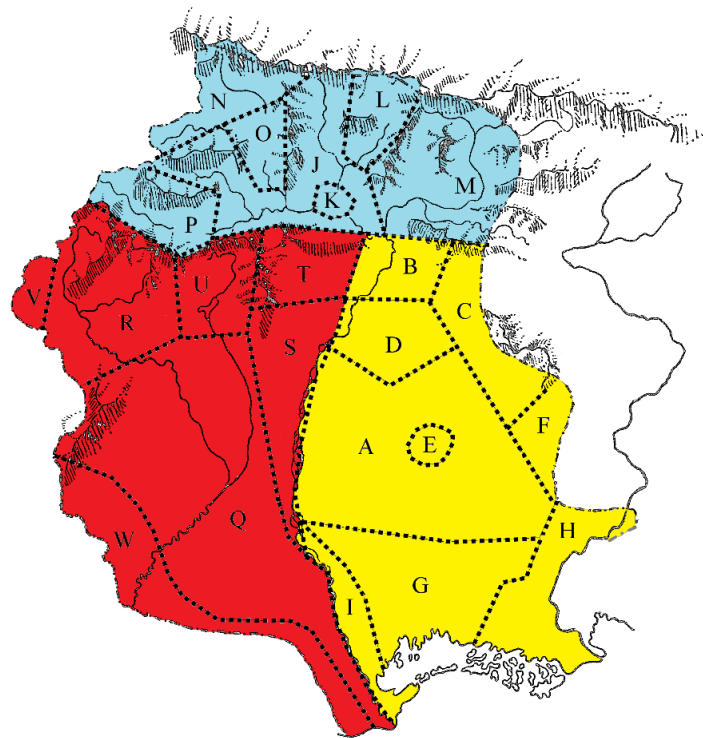
Figure 2. The dialectal classification of Friulian according to Frau (Source: adapted from Roseano 2015)

Map 12. The dialectal map of Friulian according to Frau (Source: adapted from Roseano & Finco 2022)

3. Discussion

The literature about Friulian dialectology agrees in dividing the language in three main dialectal areas (Northern or Carnian, Central-Eastern, and Western or Concordiese), each of them being divided in subdialects. This classification relies on the qualitative observation and comparison of isoglosses carried out by Francescato (1966) and Frau (1984), who took into consideration mainly phonological and morphological features.

The tripartition of Friulian dialects largely mirrors the borders between Roman *municipia* and paleochristian dioceses whose territories, on their turn, corresponded to areas defined by orography and hydrography.

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