Word order in embedded contexts
and the categorial status of *come* in old Italian varieties

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The aim of this work is to shed some light on the status of the lexical item *come* in some old Italian varieties, where *come* displayed a categorial ambiguity in that it could be analyzed either as a maximal projection or as a head. The discussion will mainly focus on the respective order of *wh*-phrases and left-dislocated constituents in embedded questions, showing that the apparent freedom of word order should in fact be best described in terms of a precise characterization of the functional projections hosting the preposed constituents.

Unlike what happened in main questions, in old Florentine embedded questions featured no verb movement to the left periphery, hence no inversion between subject and inflected verb. As a consequence, the subject, both nominal and pronominal, tended to appear in preverbal position; in particular, in embedded *wh*-questions the subject intervened between the *wh*-item and the verb:

(1)a. appresso dico come *altri* si piange de la sua partita... (Dante, *Vita Nuova*, cap. 31, par. 7)

   b. Ben è nostro intendimento che pochi dì apresso voi l'abiate saputo e da' nostri compangni n'abbiate avuto lettera come *il fatto* è stato... (*Lettera di Consiglio de' Cerchi*, ecc., II, p. 1v., rr. 7-8)

   c. Fammi bene intendere come *l'uomo* è obligato a Dio naturalmente per via di religione (Bono Giamboni, *Libro*, cap. 71, par. 5)

   d. Al padre furono raccontate tutte queste novelle, e come *il suo figliuolo* avea dispensato tutto quello oro... (*Novellino*, 7, rr. 45-47)

On the other hand, the *wh*-phrase could either be preceded or followed by a left-dislocated constituent, as exemplified in (2) and (3) respectively:

(2)a. Or diciamo *sopra capo che* ha (*Novellino*, 28, r. 15)

   b. ...onde non ci n'à poscia rissposto *di questo che* fare si ne possa (*Lettera di Consiglio de' Cerchi,* ecc., II, p. 2v., rr. 2-3)

   c. Anche ordinaro e stanciaro che li detti capitani, co li loro consiglieri, siano tenuti di cercare e provedere e sapere [*fra*] *gli uomini dela detta Compangnia qual* ànno a pagare da vj mesi inançi (*Compagnia di S.M. del Carmine*, p. 1, rr. 50-53)

(3)a. ...acciò che ti sappi consigliare *che via sopra i nostri fatti* ti convegna tenere (Bono Giamboni, *Libro*, cap. 69, par. 9)

   b. ...queste tre Virtudi si trassero da una parte a consiglio, per vedere e per pensare *che sopra queste vicende* avessero a fare (Bono Giamboni, *Libro*, cap. 49, par. 12)

The contrast between (2) and (3) cannot be easily captured by Rizzi & Bocci (2017)'s layout of the left periphery, according to which the Qemb projection hosting the *wh*-phrase in embedded questions is not followed by any Topic projection; rather, one would be forced to assume that the *wh*-item occupies a higher position, namely Spec,FocP, thereby accounting for both (2) and (3), where the specifier of a (recursive) Topic projection is meant to be the landing site of the left-dislocated constituents.

Interestingly, the possibility of inserting a constituent between the *wh*-phrase and the verb is particularly frequent in embedded questions introduced by *come*, as witnessed by (4):

(4)a. Mostrami, verace maestra, *come la detta virtù* si puote usare per le dette vie (Bono Giamboni, *Trattato*, cap. 20, par. 4)

b. "Ditemi *come lo giovane* è stato nodrito". Fulli contato *come nodrito* era stato con savi e con uomini di tempo, lungo da ogni fanciullezza (*Novellino*, 4, rr. 27-29)

c. ...ched i' vidi Larghezza / mostrare con pianezza / ad un bel cavalero / *come nel suo mistero* / si dovesse portare (Brunetto Latini, *Tesoretto*, vv. 1365-1369)

Despite its prima facie attractiveness, the above mentioned account fails to capture the striking fact that the possibility for a topicalized constituent to follow a *wh*-item is almost exclusively limited to the cases in which the embedded question is introduced by *come* (cf. Munaro (2010)).

I would like to argue that a more adequate analysis of these data can be achieved adopting a more restrictive layout of the left periphery, according to which no Topic projection is available under the Focus projection, hence a *wh*-phrase can virtually not be followed by a topicalized constituent (cf. Benincà (2001)). More precisely, I will argue in favour of the idea that the embedded clauses in which *come* is followed by a topicalized constituent can in fact be analysed as relative clauses in disguise - as suggested by Benincà & Cinque (2010) - where *come* is located not in the specifier of the Focus projection, but in the specifier of a higher functional projection, arguably ForceP, situated at the left of the (recursive) Topic projections and hosting relative pronouns or other elements responsible for clause typing.

This hypothesis receives support by the interpretive ambiguity that *come* displayed in several contexts in old Florentine, where it could either be analyzed as a *wh*-item, that is, as a maximal projection sitting in Spec,ForceP, or as a subordinating complementizer lexicalizing the head Force°. The possibility for the item *como* to be used as a subordinating complementizer meaning *that* was independently attested in other old Italian varieties, like in old Paduan, as exemplified in (5), and is still well attested in modern Italian (albeit with some restrictions), like in (6):

(5)   a. …e gridando fortemente el ge dixe *como* l'è fiolo de Rebecha. (Bibbia, Genesi CLVII)
        b. …e sì ge dixe *como* uno homo de Egypto sì le ha defendù dali pastore…
                                                                      (Bibbia, Esodo XVII)
        c. …e sì ge disse *como* Dio sì lo aveva eleto a devere guidare, reçere e condure el so povolo in la terra de promission.   (Bibbia, Numeri CLVIIII)
        d. ...e sì ge dixe ordenàmente *como* Raab meretrixe li ha honorevolmente recevuti in chaxa e aschonduti…   (Bibbia, Giosuè XII)

(6)   Raccontò *come* avesse incontrato il suo amico il giorno prima.
        'He told how (= that) he had met his friend the day before.'

The basic categorial ambiguity of *come* reveals that old Italian (varieties) featured an ongoing process of reanalysis of this element from specifier to head that corresponds to a crosslinguistically attested diachronic tendency; as argued independently by van Gelderen (2004)/(2009) and Willis (2007), the categorial change from specifier to head within the complementizer layer seems to be a relatively wide-spread phenomenon.

References

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