

## Complementizers: zero, one or two?

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The alternation between the presence and the absence of overtly realized functional elements, which we may observe in certain languages, leads to wonder how optional phenomena in general can be accounted for in a theory which disallows any form of optionality, such as the minimalist one. Within such a vast topic, in this work we will analyse the constraints that rule the presence or the absence of lexical complementizers throughout the history of Italian, and explore the connections of double complementizers (DC, two complementizers with the same morphology in embedded declarative clauses) and complementizer deletion (CD, in both inflected and infinitival sentences) with other properties of the CP area, like V2 and clause typing.

Old Italian - which coincides with the Florentine dialect of the 12<sup>th</sup>-first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (cf. among others Benincà (1996)) - was a V-to-C language, where virtually no cases of CD were allowed, while DC was possible when a topic XP or an embedded temporal or if-clause occupied the CP layer, as shown in (1):

- (1) i savi strolagi providero **che**, s'ello non stesse anni dieci che non vedesse il sole, **che**  
perderebbe il vedere. (fonte)

The situation radically changes in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (in the variety we refer to as Middle Italian when the V2 system becomes less and less attested. At the same time, DC becomes ungrammatical, while CD becomes widespread in all embedded declaratives (cf. (2)), as well as in restrictive object and (less frequently) subject relative clauses (cf. (3)), and even in infinitival clauses (cf. (4)):

- (2) innanzi \_ mi partissi (Machiavelli, La Mandragola)  
(3) per indicare \_ le cose che l'uomo vuole \_ non si sappino, sia bene non le dire per intendere  
quello \_ avevo fatto (Machiavelli, La Mandragola)  
(4) io non credo \_ essere in quel numero (Machiavelli, Il Principe)

These facts strongly suggest the existence of a connection between the loss of V2 and DC on the one side, and the raising of CD on the other, in Middle Italian.

Modern Standard Italian, which is not a V2 variety, allows at most one complementizer per clause in embedded contexts (*che* for declarative clauses, *di/a* for infinitival ones, *se* for indirect interrogatives); DC is never admitted. Furthermore, the occurrences of CD are much more restricted with respect to Middle Italian, and limited to embedded declarative clauses selected by bridge verbs, and whose verb is inflected in the subjunctive, conditional or future indicative, as in (5) (cf. Giorgi and Pianesi (1997)):

- (5) a Credo lo faccia  
think it do+subjunctive  
'I think that he does it'  
b \* Ha detto viene  
has said comes(ind)  
He said he is coming

Modern Florentine, an Italian dialect, is more tolerant than Standard Italian in admitting CD, not only in the cases mentioned above, but also when the embedded verb is indicative and the main verb is not a bridge verb; however, in the latter case, CD is allowed only in the presence of either a clitic, or an auxiliary, or a negation particle, as in (6) (cf. Cocchi and Poletto 2002, 2006):

- (6) dice **un** porta nulla

she-says neg brings nothing  
'she says she won't bring anything'

Like Standard Italian, Florentine is not a V2 variety and admits no DC. Furthermore, no CD is ever admitted in infinitival and relative clauses, unlike Middle Italian.

On the other hand, the occurrence of DC, which characterizes Old Italian, survives in several modern Romance dialects (cf. Poletto (2000), Paoli (2003) among others), which display double complementizers of the same form; such a doubling preferably occurs either when a Topic (be it an XP or an embedded temporal or conditional clause; cf. Munaro (2003)) is found in the CP layer in between the two complementizers, or in connection to a specific modality, as in (7) below. As for CD, these dialects do not allow any occurrence of this phenomenon:

- (7) A venta **che** gnun **ch**'a fasa bordel Turin (Piedmontese)  
it needs that nobody that+cl do+subjunctive noise  
'It is necessary that nobody makes noise'

In order to account for this complex set of data, in this work we will try to propose an analysis based on the (by now) standard assumption that Italian has a split left periphery, as well as on the idea that different elements can be "alternative checkers" (see Obenauer (2003)) of the same feature located in the CP area. In particular, depending on the type of C° (whether high or low), the alternative checkers of the complementizer can be: a) an inflected verb with the appropriate modal morphology; b) clitic elements; c) negation; d) a raised inflected or infinitival verb; e) an empty relative wh-operator.

While the elements in a) are possible alternative checkers in all of the three varieties admitting CD, those in b) and c) are alternative checkers in Modern Florentine and Middle Italian, while those in d) and e) are alternative checkers only in Middle Italian. In other words, the implicational scale among the three types of CD noted above results from the expansion of the number of elements that can be alternative checkers of the complementizer in a given variety.

Furthermore, while alternative checking (AC) is usually assumed to be connected to movement, we will adopt here a more recent version of minimalism that views movement as a combination of several operations, including agree and pied piping, and claim that AC can also be performed simply by the operation Agree without pied piping, hence without movement.

On the other side, Old Italian, where no CD at all is observed, is to be analysed as a language where movement of I to a low C position (identified as FocusP) is obligatory, in a way that no alternative checking mechanism is allowed. A corollary of this proposal is that all the complementizers found in Old Italian are located higher within CP, i.e. in the Force projection, which cannot be reached by any alternative checker because the latter would be blocked in the Focus position, which contains strong features. In other words, movement of the inflected verb to the CP domain blocks not only movement of other elements, but also the agree operation without pied piping which is necessary for alternative checking. However, the phenomenon of DC illustrated in (1) above might also be seen as a special case of alternative checking, which is not performed by the Agree operation with an element inside the IP, blocked by V to Focus, but simply by merging another complementizer in the relevant head.

To conclude, our analysis provides a unitary account for different and apparently unrelated phenomena, such as: a) the different CD procedures found in different varieties; b) why V to Focus (V2) and CD are incompatible processes; c) the presence of DC in Old Italian and in some modern Italian dialects. Moreover, this work also attempts to shed light on a very general problem: which operations are more costly in the grammar and why optionality is found. Given that movement can be defined as "second merge", in the light of recent proposals, there is no distinction in terms of economy considerations between merging a new element or checking through movement or Agree, and this is why a certain degree of optionality can be admitted in the system.