Microvariation in Romance inversion: from northern Italian dialects to a pan-Romance perspective

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1. Introduction

With this poster I aim to analyse the extent of microparametric variation in Romance inversion structures triggering non-veridical polarity readings. Building on data from (not only) northern Italian dialects (NIDs), I show that the licensing of inversion is subject to restrictions that are not connected only to the type of illocutionary value but also, among others, to the person-paradigm and the type of predicate involved. Some of these restrictions can lead to more refined hypotheses about the status of subject clitics in NIDs, as well as to considerations on the availability of V-to-C movement and its relation with the type of predicate involved.

2. The issue

As is well known, some NIDs display a phenomenon of "interrogative inversion", which, within the generative framework, has usually been analysed as the verb movement to the left periphery, resulting in the inverted linear position of the inflected verb and the subject clitic. Since Benincà (1989), it has been shown that subject clitic inversion (SCI) does not only trigger the interrogative interpretation, but a much broader set of non-veridical readings, including – but not limited to – the exclamative, optative, hypothetical, and imperative ones (cf. Munaro 2010; Ledgeway 2015). As a result, enclitic elements have been sometimes analysed as a separate paradigm (Poletto 2000), in particular, as a series of clause markers directly merged in the CP layer triggering different readings related to the speaker's representation of the propositional content (Munaro 2010). Research has mainly focused on whether, for each variety, V-to-C movement is licensed for a given illocutionary value, but a more fine-grained investigation can show that, when V-to-C is available, this is limited by other restrictions that seem to be implicationally ordered for all the contexts.

3. The problem: further instances of microvariation

The distribution of "non-veridical" inversion goes well beyond the northern Italo-Romance environment and, interestingly, in other Romance (and Germanic) varieties in which inversion is grammatical it always occurs in all or in a subset of the aforementioned readings. The distribution of inversion across Romance is not uniform (Ledgeway 2015), and V-movement to C seems to be often subject to additional restrictions which make up a set of microparametric choices of which the clause type represents only one. Starting with data from the varieties of Alto Polesine – the western area of the province of Rovigo –, I show that the grammaticality of inversion may be affected by other factors, such as grammatical person (1), and type of predicate, whether functional, *quasi*-functional (Cardinaletti and Shlonksy 1994), or lexical (2):

(1) a. ?fusse-lo / *fussi-to rivà in tempo! be.SBJV.IMP.3SG=SCL.3MSG / be.SBJV.IMP.2SG=SCL.2SG arrive.PTCP in time 'I wish he/you had arrived in time!'

(Badia Polesine)

(2) a. Fuss/?Riéss /*Magnéss-at rià prima, aréssan pudèst...

be/arrive/eat.SBJV.IPFV.2SG=SCL.2SG arrive.PTCP earlier have.COND.PRS.1PL be.able.PTCP

'Had you arrived earlier, we could have...'

Data from NIDs – as well as French and Italian – show that the loss of non-veridical V-to-C seems to respect the CP hierarchy proposed in Munaro's (2010) – the acceptability of (2b) and (2c) indeed seems to increase in with counterfactuals whose optative flavour is more emphasised, for example through the use of adverbs such as *almanco* 'at least', and without a following main clause.

Nevertheless, within that macro-hierarchy, lower predicates (2c) systematically seem to lose the possibility of raising to C before functional ones (2a). The status of "quasi-functional" predicate (Cardinaletti and Shlonsky 1994) also seem to be relevant for the possibility of V-to-C movement (2b). With respect to the person paradigm, data shows that if a variety allows inversion with the 1st person, it will also allow inversion with the 2nd and 3rd persons for the same non-veridical context, making it possible to establish the implicational hierarchy $3^{rd} > 2^{nd} > 1^{st}$ for the preference of inversion. Data from the aforementioned Romance varieties seems to confirm both observations and, although the exact nature of the relation between the height of the predicate in the TP-spine and its ability to undergo movement to C remains to be understood, a preliminary investigation can show that not only does loss of verb movement starts with the highest projections of the CP, but also with the lowest starting positions of the predicate in the T/vP domain.

The behaviour of the enclitic subjects in some of the NIDs analysed can also lead to considerations on their status: in particular, I show that in most Polesine varieties, they do not behave as clause markers as the conditions for their appearance are tied to the presence and position of co-referent elements in the TP-spine -(3a') is grammatical if the DP is dislocated:

- (3) a. Chi vien(*-lo)? who come.IND.PRS.3SG=SCL.3MSG 'Who comes?'
 - b. Chi è*(-lo)?
 who be.IND.PRS.3SG=SCL.3MSG
 'Who is he?'

a'. Vien(*-lo) Giani? come.IND.PRS.3SG=SCL.3MSG Gianni 'Is Gianni coming?'

This analysis of enclitic subject, on the line of Cardinaletti and Repetti (2004), seeks to avoid the separation of proclitic and enclitic elements into two series but, unlike their work, still assumes a high verb-movement of the inflected verb to the left periphery for all the non-veridical readings triggered.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, I argue that a more fine-grained analysis of inversion is needed to correctly assess how those non-veridical values can be triggered, as well as to understand the direction of the diachronic development in the grammaticality of V-to-C movement. In particular, with this poster I attempt to analyse two restrictions to V-to-C movement, the extent of their validity and draw some preliminary conclusions on the interaction between the featural makeup of the elements involved in inversion structures and the possibility of V-to-C movement.

Selected references

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