

# Subject Intervention in Free Relatives \*

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Subject intervention for A'-dependencies has been one of the most investigated topic in language acquisition studies and in the theory of syntax in recent years, due to the seminal paper by Friedmann, Belletti and Rizzi (2009) and subsequent work by Adriana Belletti and colleagues. Our starting point in this paper is the observation that subject intervention in A'-dependencies is observed in adult grammar as well. One well-known case is the degradation created by a preverbal subject in direct questions in several Romance varieties. The case we focus on here is free relatives. As pointed out by Greco (2013), in Italian there is a contrast between the subject free relative in (1) and the object free relative in (2),

- (1) Chi ha colpito Gianni è finito all'ospedale  
    who has hit Gianni is finished in the hospital  
    'the person who hit Gianni ended up in the hospital'
- (2) ?? Chi Gianni ha colpito è finito all'ospedale  
    who Gianni has hit has finished in the hospital  
    'the person Gianni hit ended up in the hospital'

However, Italian object pronominal relatives like (3) do not show any clear subject intervention effect.

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- (3) Ciò che Gianni ha fatto è orribile  
this that Gianni has done is horrible  
'What Gianni did is horrible'

Moreover, in other languages, including English, free relatives display no subject intervention effect whatsoever, cf. (4):

- (4) What John said is horrible

In this paper we will try to answer the following questions:

- (i) Why do subject intervention effects emerge in direct questions and in free relatives in Italian, French (and other Romance varieties)?  
(ii) Why don't they arise in pronominal relatives?  
(iii) Why don't they arise in free relatives in languages like English?

The answer to these questions will capitalize on the concept of Gross Minimality developed by Cecchetto and Donati (in press: chapter 5). An important observation that can help to explain the contrast between English and Italian is that Italian free relatives are modeled after direct questions while English free relatives are modeled after indirect questions.

## **References**

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