

Effects of parametric change and active/inactive alignment: the case of C-omission*

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This paper deals with the diachrony of complementizer omission (C-omission) in Italian. C-omission is restricted to [-*realis*] clauses in Modern Italian (1), and to some types of declarative clauses in Modern Florentine (Cocchi & Poletto, 2005), i.e. to clauses in which the inflected verb of the subordinate clause is preceded by a functional head (e.g. negation, clitic pronoun) and no preverbal lexical subject or functional adverbial is merged, cf. (2).

- (1) a. *Penso (che) venga anche Pietro* (Modern Italian)
Think.1SG that come.SBJV;3PL also Peter
'I think (that) Peter is also coming'
b. *Maria dice *(che) viene anche Pietro*
Mary says that come.3PL all.PL

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‘Mary says that Peter is also coming’

- (2) a. *Dice __ lo porta* (Modern Florentine)
say.3SG ACC;3SG take.IND;3SG
‘He says he will bring it’
b. *?*Dice __ porta il libro*
say.3SG take.IND;3SG the book
‘He says he will bring the book’
c. **Maria m’ha detto __ Gianni un ha portato il libro*
Mary DAT;1SG has said John not has.IND brought the book
‘Mary told me John has not brought the book’
[Cocchi & Poletto, 2005, 12, 13, 15]

In Old Italian, which has V-to-C in main clauses, (cf. Benincà 1984, 2006, Benincà & Poletto 2010, a.o.), C-omission is highly restricted. Instead, the complementizer *che* (and its variants *ch’*, *ke*, etc.) may be doubled, as in the example below (cf. Vincent 2006).

- (3) *Trovò **che**, [chi continuo mangiasse nove dì*
Found C who continuously ate.SBJV nine days
*di petronciani], **che** diverrebbe matto*
of eggplants C become.COND crazy
‘He found out that whoever ate eggplants for nine days in a row would
become crazy’ [Novellino, 35, 208, 2]

C-omission is by contrast much more pervasive in the Renaissance period (Wanner 1981, Scorretti 1991) and invests basically all types of subordinate clauses. The present study concentrates on C-omission in Renaissance Italian relative clauses, which is attested in both subject, (4), and non-subject extractions, (5).

- (4) *...Che è faccenda __ tocca a noi*
that is issue touch.3SG to us
‘That is an issue we have to deal with’ [AMS, Wanner 1981]
- (5) *Se la divisione __ fece coi viniziani di Lombardia...*
If the division made.3SG with.the Venetians of Lombardy
‘If the division of Lombardy he made with the Venetians...’ [P, 4, l. 26]

A corpus study reveals that there is a quantified asymmetry in the frequency of C-omission in subject/non-subject relative clauses, which is analyzed as the result of the combination of the active/inactive alignment that characterizes both Old and Renaissance Italian (Ledgeway 2012 and ref. therein, a.o.), and the loss of V-to-C. More specifically, a closer examination reveals that C-omission in relative clauses is attested only in presence of inactive antecedents.

The active/inactive distinction is attributed to the presence of a strong (*) feature on the low-phase head, Voice*, which requires morphologically overt Merge (Chomsky 1995, Lasnik 1999, Biberauer & Richards 2006) and creates a low phase boundary in active but not in inactive structures (cf. Franco & Migliori 2014). The presence of * on Voice imposes a visibility requirement for recoverability at the

higher phase, once the EA undergoes relativization, which explains the absence of C-less relative clauses with active antecedents.

The fact that C-omission is attested in Renaissance, but not in Old Italian, is explained in relation to another parametric change, which affects the higher phase head. Specifically, the loss of V-to-C is attributed to a parametric change from Fin* to Fin, which permits the C-form to be non-overt in contexts in which syntactic visibility is not imposed otherwise (e.g. by a requirement on Voice or on another C-head). The argument is corroborated by further comparative facts from Old Occitan and Old French. These languages, despite some microparametric differences concerning the C-forms, share the same properties of Renaissance Italian and allow for C-omission in the same (inactive) contexts.

The hypothesis presented in this paper generates some predictions with respect to the distribution of C-omission, which are borne out by facts. Specifically, C-omission is unattested (=ungrammatical) in headless relative and interrogative clauses in which C is a pronoun and has a [+human, SA/A] value, as well as in headed relative clauses in which the extracted argument is [+human, SA/A].

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