

The diachrony of Italian free relative clauses

In this talk we investigate the syntax of free relative clauses (RCs) in the diachrony of Italian. The focus lies on Case resolution in configurations where the Case assigned in the matrix clause to the DP containing the free RC (henceforth, external Case) conflicts with that assigned within the RC (henceforth, internal Case). Languages differ as to whether they allow conflicting configurations in free RCs (obligatory matching vs. mismatching languages) and if mismatching languages, as to whether the Case resolution is in favor of the internal Case or the external one (cf. Bresnan & Grimshaw 1978; Groos & van Riemsdijk 1981; Pittner 1991, 1995; van Riemsdijk 2006; Grosu 2003; Fuß & Grewendorf 2012; Cinque 2016, a.o.). We propose that this variation in terms of Case resolution in free RCs is determined by the mechanisms of feature inheritance and transfer between the phase head, D^0 , and its complement, $N(P)$, available to a given language (Chomsky 2007, 2008). Framing Chomsky's proposal in terms of Ouali's (2008) operations KEEP, SHARE, and DONATE, we argue that languages can resolve mismatch configurations in favor of the internal Case if and only if there is a SHARE or DONATE operation between D^0 and $N(P)$ and we claim that Italian underwent a diachronic change from being a language in which SHARE between D^0 and $N(P)$ was a viable option (Old Italian) to a language where the only option is KEEP on D^0 .

Free relatives in Modern Italian usually exhibit the Case matching configuration, such that the external Case is identical to the internal one, as in (1). Mismatch of Case between the external Case and the RC-internal one can be tolerated if the mismatch is resolved in favor of the external one, as shown by the contrast between (2) and (3).

		Matrix	RC	Configuration	
1)	[Free-RC Chi arriva per primo] vince la gara	NOM	NOM	Matching	✓
2)	Ho parlato con [Free-RC chi ha fatto questo]	OBL	NOM	Mismatch	✓
3)	*Ho incontrato [Free-RC con chi hai parlato]	NOM	OBL	Mismatch	*

However, Case mismatch in Modern Italian is resolved in favor of the external Case if and only if the external Case contains the internal one according to the Case containment hierarchy in Caha (2009), (4) (cf. Blake 1994, 2001; Grosu 2003): the marking of Cases on the right can morphologically contain Cases on the left, but not viceversa.

4) nominative > accusative > dative > genitive >

When the external Case does not contain the internal one but it is the internal Case that contains the external one, free RCs cannot be licensed (5a) and Modern Italian has to resort to light-headed RCs as in (5b).

- 5) a. *Ho incontrato [Free-RC **chi** hai parlato]
 b. Ho incontrato [Light-headed-RC **la persona con cui** hai parlato]

Old Italian patterns with Modern Italian in all respects except in one: Old Italian allowed mismatch configurations where the case resolution was in favor of the internal Case as in (6a/b).

- 6) a. Donna, invano labora [Free-RC **in cui** non è dirittura]
 Madam in vain works in whom not is rectitude
 “Oh madam, the person in whom there is no rectitude works in vain” (Monte Andrea,

Rime, vv.25-26)

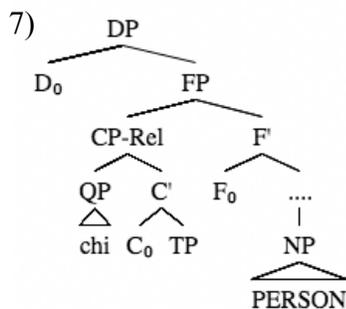
b. [Free-RC **chi** l'ira dà di piglio], perde senno e consiglio.

to.whom anger gives of grab loosens sense and judgement

“Who is taken by anger loosens good sense and judgement.” (Brunetto Latini, Tesoretto, v. 2681 - pag. 268, l. 16)

Notice that in (6) the case assigned within the RC contains the one assigned within the matrix clause. Comparing the examples in (6) with the one in (3) we conclude that a change occurred from Old to Modern Italian in the mismatch configuration where the internal Case contains the external one.

In order to derive the change in terms of Case resolution, we assume that (a) free RCs, as well as all restrictive RCs, are merged in a position below D^0 to the left of the nominal expression, (b) they contain two non-distinct heads, one RC-internal (QP in (7)) and one external (NP PERSON in (7)), (c) the head which ends up c-commanding the other is spelled out (Cinque 2008, 2013, 2016; Sanfelici & Poletto 2014, in press).



The external Case is assigned from the probe within the matrix clause onto D^0 , whereas internal Case is assigned from the probe within the RC onto the wh-pronoun. Assuming that Case containment applies under c-command since it is an instance of the Agree operation (cf. Caha 2009, Cinque 2016, a.o.), Case resolution in favor of the external head is by the fact that D^0 c-commands both heads. Case resolution in favor of the internal head applies only when the RC-internal head c-commands the external one. Since the RC-internal head never c-commands D^0 , we conclude that the Case on D^0 is at least shared onto the external head, namely PERSON in (7) in order for the internal head to contain the external Case.

In Old Italian D^0 shares its Case feature with the N(P), thus allowing for internal Case resolution. On the contrary in Modern Italian this option is not viable, since D^0 keeps the Case feature and therefore the internal Case on the internal head will never contain the external Case, not c-commanding D^0 .

In conclusion, whereas in Old Italian there was an operation of (at least) SHARE between the phase head D^0 and its complement N(P), Modern Italian only has KEEP operation, such that D^0 retains all its features (rephrasing Longobardi's (1994) proposal of Modern Italian having a strong D^0). The phenomenon at stake goes hand in hand with other phenomena attested in Old Italian and ungrammatical in the modern stage of the language, such as A' movement to Spec,DP, extraction of adjectives out of the DP (Giusti 2010; Poletto 2014), movement of PP complements to Spec,DP (Giorgi 2010; Poletto 2014). Time permitting, during the talk we will show that all these patterns receive the same explanation we put forward for free RCs in terms of SHARE vs. KEEP operations between D^0 and its complement.

Selected References: Cinque G. (2008). More on the indefinite character of the Head of restrictive relatives. *Rivista di grammatica generativa* 33. 3-24. Ouali H. (2008). On C-to-T ϕ -feature transfer: the nature of agreement and anti-agreement in Berber. In: R. D'Alessandro et al. (eds). *Agreement Restrictions*. Berlin: Mouton. 159–180.