1. Introduction

This talk deals with the syntax of Subject Clitic Inversion (SCI) in Comunuovese (a Northern Italian dialect spoken in Comun Nuovo, a little town near Bergamo, Italy). It elaborates on a link between wh-items, SCI structures and temporal values. The main goals of this work are:

a) Section 2 addresses the syntax of wh interrogation in Comunuovese (CN). CN displays up to three forms of the same wh element: besides clitic, weak, and strong forms (Poletto/Pollock 2006), we focus on a fourth type, dubbed super strong (Pescarini/Donzelli 2017). They have different morphological structures and a different syntactic placement. The combination of wh-items and their placement gives rise to Special or Standard interpretation of wh interrogations.

b) Section 3 provides a description of the system of subject clitics in Comunuovese. Comunuovese is a null-subject language (Rizzi 1986), but subject clitics are obligatory with certain persons. The paradigm of subject enclitic is richer than the one of proclitic forms (Renzi/Vanelli 1983).

c) Section 4 deals the occurrence of SCI; this strategy is restricted to wh interrogation and, in particular, when a ClWh occurs. This interrogative syntactic strategy is rare and pragmatically marked.

d) Section 5 elaborates on a link between SCI and the deictic temporal value of verbs. Building on a parallelism with a Southern Italian dialect, this section provides an analysis based on informational content, level of presupposition and deictic temporal value.

SCI is restricted to certain wh-ex situ interrogation. These syntactic structures are a particular type of special Qs, which I term JustificationQs: the answer is already ‘given’, while the speaker expects a justification of the event that is happening. The special SCI Qs provides a deictic temporal value of the verb.

1. a. sa fa-l? What CIWh ex situ + SCI
    what do=he ‘what is he doing?’

 b. cosa fa-l ol Mario? What StrongWh ex situ + SCI
    what do=he the M. ‘what is Mario doing?’

c. ndo core-l? Where CIWh ex situ + SCI
    where run=he ‘where is he running?’
2. **An aside on interrogatives in CN**

Comunuovese exhibits different syntactic strategies to build a wh interrogation (wh ex situ, wh in situ, pseudoclefting, wh + COMP, Subject Clitic Inversion) and various types of wh-items, e.g. *ndo, indoe, indoe* ‘where’. The combination of morphological and syntactic structures yields different interpretations of the same interrogative sentence, i.e. (2) It. ‘dove corre?’, ‘where does he run to / is he running?’.

2. a. *indoˑe (a)l kor?*  
   where he= runs  
   ‘where does he run?’  
2. b. *ndo ’kore-l!?*  
   where runs=he  
   ‘where and why is he running!’?
2. c. *al kor in’døe!?*  
   he= runs where  
   ‘where (on earth) does he run!?’
2. d. *al kor indoˑe!?*  
   he= runs where  
   ‘where does he run!?’

Following (Cardinaletti/Starke 1999) and (Poletto/Pollock 2006), we argue that in Comunuovese there are four kinds of wh-items: clitic, weak, strong and super strong (Pescarini/Donzelli 2017). The taxonomy is based on three parameters: (I) if the wh element can co-occur with Subject-Clitic Inversion, (II) if they can co-occur with the complementizer *che*, ‘that’ and (III) if they can be placed in fronting:

3. **Inversion?**
   
   Yes  
   **CLITIC**
   No  
   **wh-**
   che?

   Yes  
   **WEAK**  
   No  
   **fronting**?

   Yes  
   **STRONG**
   No  
   **SUPER STRONG**

The inventory of wh-items is summarized in (4):

4. | clitic | weak | strong | super strong |
---|---|---|---|
| what | sa | - | *kəza* |
| where | *ndo* | - | *ndoˑe* |
| how | - | - | *kome* |
| who | Ki | - | |
| when | - | - | *kwando* |
| which | - | - | *kwál* |
| why | - | - | *perˑke* |
| how much | - | - | kwat |
| how many | - | - | *kwafje* |
The clitic wh-words *sa ‘what’, *ndo ‘where’ cannot be stressed, cannot occur in situ and cannot be isolated (Poletto/Pollock 2006). ClWh are the only wh-items that can co-occur with Subject Clitic Inversion – except for the StrWh cosa which could co-occur with SCI (cfr. § 4.1).

Furthermore, ClWh cannot occur in PPs:

5. a. de *ndoˈe/*de ndo ˈve?
   from where he= comes
   ‘where is he from?’

   b. al ˈve de ndoˈe?
   he= comes from where
   ‘where is he from?’

6. a. *de *kɔza/* de sa ˈl ɛ dre a parlà?
   of what he= is talking
   ‘what is he talking about?’

   b. ˈl ɛ dre a parˈla de koˈzɛ?
   he= is talking of what
   ‘what is he talking about?’

ClWh are banned in embedded clauses, (7a).

7. a. ma sa doˈmande *koza/*sa (a)l dis.
   me REFLEX ask what he= says
   ‘I wonder what he is saying’

   b. ma sa doˈmande al dis koˈzɛ.
   me REFLEX ask he= says what
   ‘I wonder what he is saying’

[kι] ‘who’ is the only weak wh-form, in the sense of (Cardinaletti/Starke 1999) and (Poletto/Pollock 2006) as it may co-occur with the complementizer che ‘that’ in main interrogatives, (8).

8. a. ki/*kɔza ke ˈl ɛ!?
   who/*what that he= is
   ‘who is he?’

The wh-items cosa ‘what’, *ndo ‘where’, come ‘how’, etc. can be focused, can occur in situ and in isolation and can occur either ex situ or in situ, (9). These wh-items will be therefore referred to as strong wh (StrWh) – in the sense of (Poletto/Pollock 2006).

9. a. *kɔza?
   what?

   b. al *mandʒa *kɔza?
   he= eats what
   ‘what does he usually eat?’

   c. *kɔza al *mandʒa?
   what he= eats
   ‘what does he eat?’

Super strong forms (SupStrWh) occur only in situ, although they cannot occur in isolation or be coordinated, (10a) and (10b).
10. a. *koze?
   ‘what?’
   b. *ko’mɛɛ ndo’e ta set indaf?
      ‘how and where did you go?’

SupStrWh have a characteristic stressed final [ɛ]. We hypothesise that they result from clefts (Pescarini/Donzelli 2017). This analysis is supported by data from other Lombard Alpine dialects, such as the one of Cavergno (Switzerland). In this dialect, special questions are obtained by reversing the order of wh clefts; crucially, both structures exhibit Subject-Clitic Inversion, which means that the sentence in (11b) is not a plain case of wh in situ.

11. a. kuz e-u ke t e feʃ?
    what is=it that you have do
    b. t e feʃ kuz e-u!?
    you= have do what is=it
    ‘what did you do!’?

To recapitulate, different types of wh-items have different behaviours: ClWh in (12) is ex situ and co-occur with SCI, StrWh occur either in fronting or in situ and SupStrWh occur only in situ, (13) (14).

12. sa/*’kɔza/*ko’ze ‘maje-l?
    what eats-he=
    ‘what does he eat?’
13. sa/’kɔza/*ko’ze al ‘mandʒa?
    what he= eats
    ‘what does he eat?’
14. al ‘mandʒa sa/’kɔza/kö’e?
    he= eats what
    ‘what does he eat?’

2.1. Special questions

Different types of wh-items (see above) may occur in different types of interrogatives: the resulting combinations often express special questions (SpecQs). Building on Obenauer 2006, I assume the following classification of ‘special questions’ (see also Garzonio 2004):

- StrWh in situ → Surprise-Disapproval Questions
  Qs expressing ‘an attitude of surprise with a negative orientation’ (Obenauer 2006).

- SupStrWh in situ → Esclamative Interrogatives
  ‘very similar to surprise question on one hand and to rhetorical question on the other’ (Garzonio 2004). Differently from SDQs, they do not have a disapproval interpretation.

- ClWh with SCI → Justification Qs
  Qs in which, besides the answer, the speaker expects a justification.
3. Subject clitics in Comunuovese

Like all the Northern Italian dialects, CN displays subject clitics, which can be either proclitic or enclitic. It is interesting to notice that, in accordance with (Renzi/Vanelli 1983), the inventory of the enclitic forms is richer than the one of proclitic, (15).

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Subject clitics co-occur with DP subjects:

16. a. ol đjo’an al ‘bala
   (the) John he= dances
   ‘John dances’
   b. ly al ‘bala
   he he= dances
   ‘he dances’
   c. al ‘bala
   he= dances
   ‘he dances’

Subject proclitics are obligatory with 2 sg, 1 pl and 3 person subjects:

17. Luka *(al) bif ol vi
   Luca he= drinks (the) wine
   ‘Luca drinks wine’
18. te *(ta) ‘mandʒet trɔp
   you you= eat too much
   ‘you eat too much’
19. lyr *(i) va e ’noter *(an) ’resta
   they they= go and we we= stay
   ‘they go and we stay’

The first person subject clitic is not obligatory. It normally occurs in negative clauses when the subject, in (20a), is focalised, but not in (20b).

20. a. ME (a) ‘mandʒe ’mia, te ta ‘pödet fa kël ke ta ’ọlet
   I I= eat not you you= can do what you= want
   ‘I don’t eat, you can do what you want’
   b. me, la ’tyrta, (*a) la ‘mandʒe ’mia
   I the cake I= T.F. eat not
   ‘I do not eat the cake’

There is not an enclitic form for the 1 sg. person, (21).
21. ndo  ndo?
   where  go
   ‘where am I going!’

The 2 pl. person proclitic subject is not present. The enclitic form is obligatory in “special questions”, (22b), in the sense of (Obenauer 2006).

22. a. ˈvot ɛr  koˈri
       you    run
       ‘you run’
   b. ndo  koˈri-f  (ˈvoter)!?
       where run=you you
       ‘where are you running!’?

4. Subject Clitic Inversion

SCI is the most conservative interrogative structure in the Northern Italian dialects (NID) and it is really rare and marked in CN.
SCI is permitted in wh interrogation when it co-occurs with CIWh ex situ, (23).

23. a. ndo a-l?
       where go=he
       ‘where is he going?’
   b. sa mange-l?
       what eat=he
       ‘what is he eating?’

SCI cannot occur in declarative clauses:

24. a. *mange-l  tròp
       eats=he  too much
   b. al mangia tròp
       he=eats  too much
       ‘he eats too much’

Differently from other NID, such as some dialects spoken in Veneto or Friuli, see (Poletto 2000), SCI in CN cannot occur in exclamatives, (25a), counterfactual, (25b), hypothetical (25c), and disjunctive clauses, (25d):

25. a. *ri(a)-el!
       come=he
       ‘he is coming!’
   b. *(gh) er-el    de rià!
       had= was=he  to come
       ‘had he come!’
   c. *se  mang-el,  an và  vià
       if eats=he,  we=go away
       ‘if he eats, we go’
   d. *e-l  gial o e-l ros
       is=it  yellow or is=it red
       ‘it is yellow or it is red’
SCI is ungrammatical in yes/no interrogatives, (26a).

26. a. *ly maje-l?
    he eats=he
b. al maia?
    he=eats
    ‘does he eat?’

In CN there is *clitic doubling*, but restricted to the 1 pl. person, (27)a. Also other NID, for example some dialects of Piedmont, permit the co-occurrence of proclitic and enclitic forms of the subject, see (27c) – from (Parry 1997).

27. a. sa n fa-i (notèr)? CN 1pl.
    what we= do=we us
    ‘what are we doing?’
b. sa fa-i (lyr)? CN 3pl.
    ‘what do=we they
    ‘what are they doing?’
c. cos a fal-lo? Piedmont
    what he= do=he?
    ‘what is he doing?’

In conclusion SCI in CN is an interrogative structure that occur in restricted syntactic and pragmatic contexts.

Let’s now check the contexts in which we can find SCI when it co-occurs with the wh ‘what’ and ‘where’ – the only wh-items that have a clitic form.

4.1. WHAT?

SCI occur only when the wh ‘what’ is a direct object, (28a).

28. a. sa cant-el?
    what sing=he
    ‘what is he singing?’
b. *sa/cosa sun-el?
    what ring=it
    ‘what is it ringing? (the bell?..)’

SCI is permitted with the ClWh sa, but there are few cases, with a really special pragmatic import, in which some speakers accept SCI also with the StrgWh cosa. This structure is anyway marked and rare.

SCI with StrWh must occur with DP subjects, (29a), otherwise DP subjects are not obligatory in SCI with ClWh, (29b).

29. a. cosa fa-l *(ol Mario)?
    what do=he the M.
b. sa fa-l (ol Mario)?
    what do=he the M.
    ‘what is Mario doing?’
Differently from some other NID, SCI is not always obligatory in the context where it is permitted (Poletto 2000): SCI must occur with CIWh, (30)c, but it is not obligatory with the StrWh, (30)d.

30. a. sa mange-l/mange-la?
   what eats=he/she ‘what is he/she eating?’
   b. cosa mange-l *(ol Mario)?
      what eats=he the M. ‘what is Mario eating?’
   c. *sa al/la mangia?
      what he/=she eats ‘what does he/she eat?’
   d. cosa al/la mangia?
      what he/=she eats ‘what does he/she eat?’

There is a pragmatic difference between (30b) and (30d). If SCI co-occur with StrWh we have a JustificationQs; if SCI is not present, we have a StQs:

i) + CIWh, + SCI              JustificationQs
ii) + StrWh, + SCI            JustificationQs
iii) + StrWh, - SCI           StandardQs

4.2. WHERE?

SCI can occur only with the CIWh ndo, (31a,b).

31. a. ndo a-l?
   where go=he?
   ‘where is he going (now)?’
   b. ndo e-l?
   where is=he
   ‘where is he (now)?’

SCI in WhereQs is restricted to: (i) simple verbal forms, (ii) verbs of movement, (iii) ‘to be’ and ‘to have’ – when they do not appear with auxiliary function.

In (32) you can see an example of minimal pairs of WhereQs with progressive and deictic temporal values.

32. | Es – ‘to be’ | progressive/deictic |
    |   |       |
    | deictic |       |
    | I S     | ndo so? | ndoe so? |
    | II S    | ndo se-t? | ndoe ta set? |
    | III S   | ndo e-l/e-la? | ndoe (a)l è? |
    | I P     | ndo n sèi? | ndoe (a)n sè? |
    | II P    | ndo si-f? | ndoe si? |
    | III P   | ndo e-i? | ndoe i è? |

WhereQs with the verb ‘to be’ in progressive and stative forms
5. A deictic temporal value

The interpretations of Qs with SCI could be associated to the position of the verb, which differs from the position occupied by the verb in wh ex/in situ, wh-che and cleft interrogative structure. The left rising of the verb provides a different pragmatic value of the Qs (Munaro 2016).

The SCI CIfWh Qs in CN are SpecialQs marked in terms of presupposition: the information is 'given' and the speaker presupposes a strong common informational background with the listener (Calabrese 1982).

As you can see in (33), the most natural answer to a question with SCI is not the one which explains the real situation, (33A(ii)), but an answer that continues the presuppositional content of the Qs, (33A(i)).

33. Q. sa fa-l!? ‘what is he doing!’?
   A(i). eh. Tal sêt che l’è ‘n po màt!
   ‘eh. You know that he is a little bit crazy!’
   A(ii). l’è dre a cor
   ‘He is running’

SCI in CN is allowed with a deictic present tense, (34a). Conversely, the structures without inversion occur with a futurate and habitual present, (34b), and with past/future tense, (34c).

34. a. ndo corr-l (*a nedal/*tocc i martedè sira)? where running=he (*at Christmas/*every Tuesday evening)
   ‘where is he running (*at Christmas/*every Tuesday evening)?
   b. ndoe al cor (a nedal/tocc i martedè sira)? where he = runs (at Christmas/every Tuesday evening)
   ‘where does he run (at Christmas/every Tuesday evening)’
   c. ndoe l a ko’rit / kore’ra (a nedal/tocc i martedè sira)? where he=run / will run (at Christmas/every Tuesday evening)
   ‘where did he run? / where will he run?’

The unmarked progressive verbal structure is realized in CN with the periphrastic form [ès dre a + INF] – literally EN ‘to be after to’. This periphrastic structure is permitted in declarative clauses, (35), and in polar or wh Qs, (36).

35. a. Maria l’è dre a laàs so Maria she=is after to REFLxwash
   ‘M. is washing herself’
   b. adès l’è mia dre a piof now it=is not after to rain
   ‘at the moment is not raining’
   c. l’è mia dre a cantà he=is not after to sing
   ‘he is not singing’

36. a. l’è dre a mangià? he=is after to eat
   ‘is he eating?’
   b. cosa l’è dre a mangià? what he=is after to eat
‘what is he eating?’

SCI is never permitted with the progressive periphrastic structure. It is not permitted in yes/no Qs, (37a), and also in wh-ex situ Qs, (37b).

37. a. *e-l dre a bif?
  is=he after to drink?
  ‘is he drinking?’
 b. *sa/cosa e-l dre a fa?
  what is=he after to do
  ‘what is he doing?’

SCI is permitted in pseudocleft and it is mandatory with a deictic present tense, see (38). With past or future tenses, where inversion is not permitted, pseudo-clefts are marginal, see (39).

38. a. Chi *l’è/e-l chèl che lè dre a durmì?
  who he=is the.one that he=is sleeping

39. a. *Cosa l’èra chèl che ta séret dre a mangià?
  what it=was the.one that you= were eating
 b. *Cosa l’èra chèl che l’era dre a sunà?
  what it=was the.one that he= was playing

It is possible now to establish minimal pairs based on different informational value given by the wh Qs, (40). Both structures express the imperfective progressive aspect of the verb, but (40a) is a Justification Qs, with a deictic temporal value, while (40b) is a Standard Qs.

40. a. cosa fa-l ol M.?
  what do=he the M.
 b. cosa l’è dre a fa ol M.?
  what he=is after to do the M.?
  ‘what is Mario doing?’

A parallelism is now useful. The NID are not the only Italian dialects to show subject clitic paradigms; in (Loporcaro, D’Ancona, Fatini 2010) the presence of pronominal proclitic subjects is also attested in Pantesco, the dialect of Pantelleria – a Sicilian island in the south-west of Italy.

The subject clitics present in PAN have a semantic function: they mark the progressive aspect in finite verbs, as shown with the minimal pair in (41): the progressive aspect is expressed in (41a) through the periphrastic structure ‘stare (be) + gerundio’, in (41b) through the presence of the subject proclitic ddu.

41. a. ku sta vvenennu?
  who be coming
 b. ku ddu veni?
  who SbjCl come
  ‘who is coming?’

There are obviously some differences between CN and PAN: in PAN the two progressive structures have the same restriction and use; in CN the inversion is permitted only in CIWh Qs and only with a deictic temporal value; whereas the periphrastic structure is always possible if the verbs have the progressive aspect.
The position of the verb with a deictic value seems to be different from the position of verb with a progressive aspect: in CN the deictic form seems to be higher than the progressive ones.

To sum up, SCI in CN:

- is a syntactic strategy to build a wh interrogation
- is permitted only if it co-occurs with CIWh ex situ interrogative – though there are few residual cases of SCI in co-occurrence with the StrWh cosa.
- occurs in SpecQS called JustificationQS
- is permitted in informational context where there is a high level of presupposition
- provides a deictic temporal value of the verb

Bibliography:


