

Clause typing in main polar questions: evidence from Italo-Romance

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In this work I will propose that the syntactic codification of main *yes/no* questions is characterized across Italo-Romance by crosslinguistically different strategies, which involve the activation of at least two dedicated left-peripheral functional projections. The higher projection responsible for the encoding of the interrogative reading of the clause is currently identified with Rizzi's (2001) *Int(errogative) P(hrased)*; as for the lower projection, labelled here *Pol(arity) P(hrased)* – following previous work on this topic (cf. Hernanz (2010) among others) – I will argue that it is located at the right periphery of Rizzi's (1997) split CP layer.

In main polar interrogatives, raising of the verbal head to a dedicated functional position for clause typing purposes is widely attested across Romance. For example, a pronominal subject may invert with the inflected verb, which appears in sentence initial position, like in (1a); moreover, in languages with subject clitic pronouns, like the Northern Italian dialects or French, polar interrogatives are marked by the enclisis of the subject clitic onto the inflected verb, like in (1b):

- (1) a. Estùdias tu una nòva lenga? Occitan b. Ghe-to magnà la torta? Paduan
study you a new language have-you eaten the cake
'Are you studying a new language?' 'Have you eaten the cake?'

- (2) a. [PolP [Pol° Estudios_x] [TP tu [T° t_x] [VP [V° t_x] [DP una nòva lenga]]]]?
b. [PolP [Pol° Ghe_x-to] [TP pro [T° t_x] [VP [V° magnà] [DP la torta]]]]?

The distribution of subject clitic inversion in the North-Eastern Italian dialects which still display this phenomenon reveals that inversion is invariably associated to (both polar and constituent) interrogatives, as opposed to other clause types; in other words, if a dialect has subject clitic inversion, it obtains at least in interrogatives. Assuming that the inflected verb with enclisis of the pronominal subject can occupy more than one structural slot, the attested crosslinguistic variation can be traced back to verb raising to different functional heads of the CP layer, as a result of the incremental loss of verb movement (cf. Munaro (2002)). If this account is on the right track, we can conclude that the functional head responsible for the interrogative interpretation must be the lowest one in the left-peripheral hierarchy, hence arguably coincides with PolP, as represented in (2). Furthermore, Remberger (2010), Mensching & Remberger (2010), Mensching (2016) observe that in polar questions Nuorese Sardinian optionally features the preposing of phrasal constituents; for the examples in (3) they propose a structural representation where either the PP *a Nùgoro* or the whole VP *andadu a Nùgoro* has been raised to the specifier of FocP, while the inflected verb raises from T° to Foc° entering a spec-head agreement relation with the preposed constituent; again, we can assume that on its way to Foc° the inflected verb must go through the intermediate head Pol° in order to achieve clause typing, as represented in (4):

- (3) a. A Nùgoro ses andadu? b. Andadu a Nùgoro ses? Sardinian
to Nuoro are gone gone to Nuoro are
'Did you go to Nuoro?' 'Did you go to Nuoro?'

- (4) a. [FocP [PP A Nùgoro]_y[Foc° ses_x][PolP [Pol° t_x][TP pro [T° t_x][VP andadu t_y]]]]?
b. [FocP [VP Andadu a Nùgoro]_y[Foc° ses_x][PolP [Pol° t_x][TP pro [T° t_x] t_y]]]]?

A different clause typing strategy, namely the overt realization of a sentence initial *yes/no* operator, is attested in Catalan, where polar interrogatives may be introduced by the question marker *que* (cf. Prieto & Rigau (2007)), as well as in various Central and Southern Italo-Romance varieties displaying the sentence initial interrogative marker *che/ce/chi* (cf. Rohlfs (1969)):

- (5) a. *Que* ho sap, la Maria? Catalan b. *Ce* sta cchiovi? Salentino
 Q it knows, the Mary Q stays rain
 ‘Does Mary know?’ ‘Is it raining?’

According to Cruschina (2011), in Sicilian the question marker *chi* can be preceded by a topicalized constituent, like in (6a), or followed by a fronted informational focus, like in (6b), which provides direct empirical evidence for the hypothesis that it occupies precisely the head Int°, while the corresponding specifier is occupied by a null interrogative operator, as represented in (7):

- (6) a. A Maria *chi* a salutasti? b. *Chi* A MARIA salutasti? Sicilian
 to Maria Q her greeted Q to Maria greeted?
 ‘Did you greet Maria?’ ‘Was it Maria that you greeted?’

- (7) a. [TopP A Maria [Top°] [IntP Op [Int°chi] [TP *pro* a salutasti]]]?
 b. [IntP Op [Int°Chi] [FocP A MARIA [Foc°] [TP *pro* salutasti]]]?

Consider now that in the dialect spoken in the Marchigian city of Macerata and some surrounding areas, it is possible for *che* to appear both in sentence-initial and in sentence-final position, as exemplified in (8) (cf. Lusini (2013)); under the present analysis, we can surmise that the sentence initial *che* lexicalizes the projection IntP, while the lower one lexicalizes the projection PolP, with the clause raising to a left-peripheral intermediate specifier position, as in (9):

- (8) *Che* vai a scola *che*? Maceratese
 Q go to school Q
 ‘Are you going to school?’

- (9) [IntP [Int° Che] [PolP [TP *pro* vai a scola]_x [Pol° che] t_x]]?

As discussed in detail by Lusini (2013), in Sieneese, a Southern Tuscan variety, polar interrogatives display a sort of verbal reduplication to the effect that the lexical verb is preceded by an inflected form of the verb *fare* ‘do’, preceded in turn by the interrogative marker *che*:

- (10) *Che* *facesti* andasti al mare? Sieneese
 what did went to-the seaside
 ‘Did you go to the seaside?’

Lusini (2013) provides convincing evidence in favour of the monoclausal nature of this construction, where ‘fare’ is analyzed as a light verb directly inserted in a low head position of the C-layer entertaining a spec-head agreement relation with *che* and entering at the same time an Agree relation with the real predicate which occupies the adjacent T-layer. Capitalizing on this analysis, I will suggest that the projection lexicalized by *che* - *fare* is precisely PolP:

- (11) [PolP Che [Pol° *facesti*] [TP *pro* [T° andasti]_x] [VP [V° t_x][PP al mare]]]?

Interestingly, in a few Eastern Lombard dialects (polar) interrogatives are characterized by a similar ‘do support’ strategy featuring an inflected form of the verb *fà* ‘do’ endowed with full inflectional morphology, followed by the infinitive of the lexical verb (cf. Benincà & Poletto (2004)).

Summing up, here I have explored the possibility that clause typing in main *yes/no* questions may be linked to the activation of a projection located in the low left-periphery. This hypothesis seems to be supported by empirical evidence from different Romance varieties and is crucially based on the intuition that negation and affirmation can be reduced to a more abstract category encoding the polarity of the sentence, which is underspecified for either negative or positive value (cf. Laka (1990), Belletti (1990), Zanuttini (1997), Poletto & Zanuttini (2013)).