

# On the categorial status of *come* and its distribution in Old Italian embedded clauses

Nicola Munaro

Università Ca' Foscari – Venice

[munaro@unive.it](mailto:munaro@unive.it)

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This work focuses on the respective order of *wh*-phrases and left-dislocated constituents in Old Italian embedded questions, showing that the apparent freedom of word order should in fact be best described in terms of a precise characterization of the functional projections involved.

In Old Italian embedded questions, unlike what happens in main questions, no verb movement to the left periphery obtains, hence the subject tends to appear in preverbal position; in particular, in embedded *wh*-questions, the subject usually intervenes between the *wh*-item and the verb; on the other hand, the *wh*-phrase can be preceded or followed by a topicalized constituent, a fact that can at first sight be easily captured by Rizzi (1997)'s analysis of the left periphery, according to which the Focus projection hosting the *wh*-phrase can be either preceded or followed by a (potentially recursive) Topic projection, whose specifier is meant to be the landing site of the left-dislocated phrase.

Despite its *prima facie* attractiveness, the mentioned hypothesis fails to capture the striking fact that the possibility of inserting a constituent (or even more than one constituent) between the *wh*-phrase and the inflected verb is almost exclusively limited to the cases in which the clause is introduced by *come*.

I will therefore suggest an alternative account of these data that is compatible with the more restrictive layout of the left periphery proposed by Benincà (2001), according to which no Topic projection is available under the Focus projection. More precisely, I will propose that the embedded clauses in which *come* is followed by a topicalized constituent can in fact be analysed as declarative clauses in disguise, where *come*, whose categorial status is ambiguous in Old Italian, works as a subordinating complementizer and occupies the head of a higher functional projection, ForceP, situated at the left of the Topic projection, and hosting elements connected to clause typing. This hypothesis is independently supported by the distributional and interpretive properties displayed by *come* in exclamative contexts.