

# THE SYNTAX OF ITALIAN FREE RELATIVE CLAUSES: AN ANALYSIS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we would like to analyze the syntax of Italian free relative clauses with a [+animate] antecedent. Starting from a brief discussion of the model we will adopt (§ 2.1), we will first examine what the cross-linguistic characteristics of this construction are (§ 2.2), and we will then concentrate on Italian to describe in detail all the possible configurations and their underlying mechanisms (§ 3). We will then focus on the comparison between free relative clauses and indirect questions in Italian (§ 4), as this enables us to better understand the nature of the two constructions and to shed some light on the reasons that lead to ungrammaticality in some free relative clauses.

## 2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 The syntactic model

Free relative clauses have been thoroughly described by scientific literature and different models have been proposed. The main points of discussion concerned the nature of this construction, the identification of the constituents which are involved, and their placement in the structure. The deletion of the antecedent was first assumed by Chomsky (1973), who hypothesized that a free relative clause is similar to a restrictive relative clause without a lexicalized head. Bresnan & Grimshaw (1978) argued, instead, that the *wh*- itself is the head of the free relative clause and is therefore not in a Specifier position. Groos & van Riemsdijk (1981) proposed that the head of a free relative clause is a null category but didn't specify what this category is. Grosu (1994) tried to identify the nature of this constituent and argued that the silent head is a *pro*.

For our analysis we will adopt the model of Benincà (2010) which has been proposed on the basis of Cinque (2003):

- (i) [DP<sub>-</sub> [CP *who/what THAT* you saw]].

In this model the matrix verb governs a silent DP, an empty head, which is not lexicalized, though it is always present in the structure. The embedded verb selects a *wh*-argument (*chi* in Italian) that is assigned a Theta role and a Case and is then moved to the SpecCP. On the basis of the split CP hypothesis, first proposed by Rizzi (1997) and then further refined by Benincà (2001, 2006), the exact collocation of the *wh*- pronoun can be reconstructed more precisely: the *wh*- item *chi* is placed in the Specifier of a very high functional projection, which is different from the position occupied by *wh*- interrogatives, which are claimed to be lower in the structure.

- (ii)  $[\text{Force } C^\circ [\mathbf{Rel}wh \text{ chi } C^\circ \text{ che}] / \{_{\text{Frame}} [\text{HT}]C^\circ\} \{_{\text{topic}}[\text{LD}] C^\circ\} \{_{\text{Oper}} [\text{Focus}] / [\mathbf{Interr}wh / \text{Quant}] C^\circ\} \{_{\text{Fin}} C^\circ\}$

Evidence for the high position of the *wh*- relative in CP is provided by Italian examples such as (1) and (2):

- (1) a. Ho incontrato chi di pane ne mangia molto  
Have<sub>1stSING</sub> met who of bread it eats much  
'I have met who eats a lot of bread'  
b. \* Ho incontrato di pane chi ne mangia molto  
Have<sub>1stSING</sub> met of bread who it eats much  
'I have met who eats a lot of bread'
- (2) a. Apprezzo chi le bugie odia, (non la verità)  
Appreciate<sub>1stSING</sub> who the lies hates (not the truth)  
'I appreciate who hates lies (not the truth)'  
b. \* Apprezzo le bugie chi odia, (non la verità)  
Appreciate<sub>1stSING</sub> the lies who hates (not the truth)  
'I appreciate who hates lies (not the truth)'

In (1a) the *wh*- item *chi* precedes the left dislocated phrase *di pane*, which is placed in SpecLD, while the reverse order in (1b), with the *wh*- being lower than the dislocated item, leads to ungrammaticality. In (2) the same pattern is shown with a Focus, which cannot precede the *wh*- item as well.

Further clues for the high position of the relative item are also supplied by (substandard) German, in which the verb of a relative clause can possibly move to CP, while this is basically excluded in embedded interrogative clauses.

- (3) a. \* Ich weiß nicht, wer hat gewonnen  
I know not who has won  
'I don't know who has won'  
b. Wer hat Zeit, der ruft mich an  
Who has time that calls me  
'Who has time ha to call me'

In (3a) it is clearly shown that the verb of the embedded interrogative cannot access the CP area; this is possibly due to the fact that the interrogative pronoun prevents the verb from doing it. In (3b), instead, since the *wh*- relative is in an higher position, the movement of the verb is not inhibited.

## 2.2. The introducers of free relative clauses

Languages vary with respect to the way in which they can form a free relative clause and show that different constraints can be at work.

Most languages use *wh*- items (the same they use for interrogatives) to form free relative clauses<sup>1</sup>. Some exceptions for this are provided by Latin<sup>2</sup>, which uses the pronoun

<sup>1</sup>Other strategies such as the insertion of a *d*- pronoun instead of a *wh*- were currently used in Old English, as well as in Old German. Free relative clauses however can still be introduced by *d*- pronouns in Modern German and in some Low German varieties, although certain restrictions apply. The German cases in which a *d*- pronoun

*quis/quid* to introduce an interrogative clause, whereas it adopts *qui, quae, quod* to form relative clauses, both headed and headless:

- (4) Non quaero quis hic sit Claudius  
 Not ask<sub>1st Sing</sub> who this is Claudius  
 ‘I don’t ask who this Claudius is’ (Cic., verr. 2, 2, 107)
- (5) Qui amicus est, amat  
 Who friend is, loves  
 ‘Who is a friend, loves’ (Sen, ep. 4, 35)

However this distinction seems to be weakened in Late and High Medieval Latin, in which we can find instances of *quis/quid* used instead of *qui, quae, quod* with verbs which would normally select a free relative clause:

- (6) De meis indumentis quid velis accipe  
 Among my clothes what want<sub>2nd Sing</sub> take  
 ‘Of my clothes take the one you want’ (*Chronicon Salernitanum*, 32)
- (7) Assum domine mi, iube quid velis  
 Am here lord my, command what want<sub>2nd Sing</sub>  
 ‘I am here, my lord, command what you want’ (Hrotsvitha, Gall. 139, 18)

The verb *iubeo* in Classical Latin selects a free relative clause, introduced by the *wh-quod*, as in the following examples:

- (8) Renuisti quod iubet alter  
 Refuse<sub>2ndSING</sub> you what commands the other one  
 ‘You refuse what another person commands’ (Hor., ep. 2, 2, 63)
- (9) Nec faciam quod Cicero facere Atticum iubet  
 Not will-do<sub>1stSING</sub> what Cicero to-do Atticus commands  
 ‘I won’t do what Cicero orders that Atticus does’ (Sen., ep. 118, 1)

The extension of the *wh-* interrogative is connected with some semantic properties of a group of verbs which can ideally select both an interrogative and a free relative, depending on the context they are used in. The status of the matrix verb has to be taken carefully into account since it enables to distinguish between a free relative clause and an interrogative and to judge the well-formedness of the sentence.

This phenomenon probably indicates the direction of the path from Latin to vernaculars, in which the interrogative form is used for free relative clauses (as happens in Italian).

A property that is cross-linguistically shared by free relative clauses is that the syntactic requirements of the embedded verb must be always met: the *wh* must display the morphological Case selected by the verb of the relative clause. This is a condition of primary importance in most languages, as evidently shown by Latin or German, which have a

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instead of a *wh-* item is inserted have recently been analyzed (Fuss & Grewendorf 2012) as headed relative clauses with haplogy of the antecedent, but this goes beyond the goals of the present research.

<sup>2</sup> Ancient Greek displays the same syntactic behavior of Latin with respect to the pronominal series used to introduce free relative clauses (see below for further discussion).

morphological distinction for Case. In these languages, if this requirement is not met, the clause is always ungrammatical: while the antecedent can remain silent, the *wh-* must always be expressed and bear the Case assigned by the embedded verb.

- (10) Cui permittit necessitas sua, circumspiciat exitum mollem  
 Who<sub>DAT</sub> allows necessity his, looks exit easy  
 ‘The person to whom his personal situation allows it, has to look for an easy way to go out of this’ (Sen., Ep. 70, 24)
- (11) Ich lade ein, wemdu geholfen hast.  
 I invite, who<sub>DAT</sub> you helped have<sub>2nd SING</sub>  
 ‘I invite the person you helped’

Ancient Greek challenges standard assumptions in that it can form free relative clauses with the *wh-* item bearing the Case of the silent antecedent, as in (12)<sup>3</sup>:

- (12) ἀλλ' εἶα φείδου μηδὲν ὧν ἐπίστασαι  
 But come spare<sub>IMP2ndSING</sub> nothing Ø which<sub>GENPL</sub> know<sub>IND2ndSING</sub>  
 ‘Come, don’t spare anything of what you know’ (Eur., Med. 401)

In (12) the *wh-* is assigned the Genitive, although it should have the Accusative Case as the embedded verb *ἐπίσταμαι* requires. Contrarily to what is generally observed, the *wh-* displays the Case that the antecedent should have if it were lexicalized. This could be an instance of *attraction directa* (Harbert 1989): the *wh-* receives the Case of the silent antecedent<sup>4</sup>. This strategy is helpful for free relative clauses, since it enables to make overt the Case which is higher in the Accessibility Hierarchy (Keenan and Comrie, 1977). In (12) the *wh-* displays the Genitive Case and not the Accusative, probably because the Structural Case is easily recoverable, while the partitive Genitive would be hard to reconstruct if not lexicalized at some point in the structure. We do not expect to find instances of *attraction* if the *wh-* is assigned an Oblique Case by the embedded verb, and the antecedent bears a Structural Case, as shown in (13):

- (13) καλῶς γ' ἂν οὐδέξαιντό μ' οἴκοις ὧν πατέρα κατέκτανον  
 Well prt.<sub>PROBABILITY</sub> welcome<sub>3rdPLUR</sub> me home<sub>DAT</sub> Ø which<sub>GENPL</sub> father  
 killed<sub>1stSING</sub>  
 ‘They would welcome me well at their home, they whose father I killed!’  
 (Eur., Med. 504-505)

<sup>3</sup>This phenomenon can be marginally observed also in Latin, although these rare cases can be traced back to Greek influences or to verb ellipsis; the influence of Greek is evident in that most examples come from Christian Latin (Hoffmann 1965). In general, in Classical Latin the *wh-* displays the Case required by the embedded verb, regardless of the fact it is higher or lower in the Accessibility Hierarchy:

- (i) Praemium proposuit qui invenisset novam voluptatem  
 Prize proposed Ø<sub>DAT</sub> who<sub>NOM</sub> should-invent new pleasure  
 ‘He offered a prize to the one who should invent a new pleasure’  
 (Cic., Tusc. 5, 20, from Grosu 1994)

<sup>4</sup> *Attractio* hasn’t been investigated so far within the cartographic approach. The main issue related to this phenomenon is the transmission of the Case from the higher item (the antecedent) to the lower (the *wh-*): at some point in the derivation the *wh-* is claimed to be in a position in which it can receive the Case which has been copied from the antecedent (Bianchi 1999).

### 3. ITALIAN FREE RELATIVE CLAUSES

For the present research we will just consider Italian free relative clauses with the [+animate] feature. Free relative clauses with the [-animate] feature are impossible<sup>5</sup>, as shown in the following sentence:

- (14) \* Ho comprato (che) cosa hai consigliato  
 Have<sub>1stSING</sub> bought what have<sub>2ndSING</sub> suggested  
 ‘I bought what you suggested’

The *wh-* (*che*) *cosa* cannot be used as the introducer of a free relative clause, but can be used just in interrogatives.

Many configurations are instead possible with the [+animate] antecedent. Italian introduces this kind of free relative clauses with the *wh-* item *chi*, which is not morphologically distinct for Case: it can serve as subject (15), as object (16), or as other complements (in case of matching of the P which governs the *wh-*); an instance of the latter use is in (17) (see below for further comments on this type):

- (15) Invito a cena chi mi è simpatico  
 Invite<sub>1st SING</sub> to dinner, who<sub>NOM</sub> to me is nice  
 ‘I invite for dinner who is nice for me’

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<sup>5</sup> Partial exceptions for this are provided by Italian free relative clauses with [-animate] feature such as:

- (i) Non ho di che lamentarmi  
 Not have<sub>1st SING</sub> of what to-complain-me  
 ‘I don’t have anything to complain about’
- (ii) Non c’è di che lamentarsi  
 Not there is of what to-complain-oneself  
 ‘There is nothing to complain about’

However these apparent counterexamples are only limited to sentences with the verbs *avere* and *esserci* and always require an infinitive form. The fact that these cases are only restricted to these verbs is not by chance this seems to be due to the special nature of the verbs, which are not fully lexical. However, this topic needs to be further investigated, due to the peculiarity of the phenomenon. Moreover free relative clauses with a [-animate] antecedent are acceptable with perception verbs, as in (iii) and (iv):

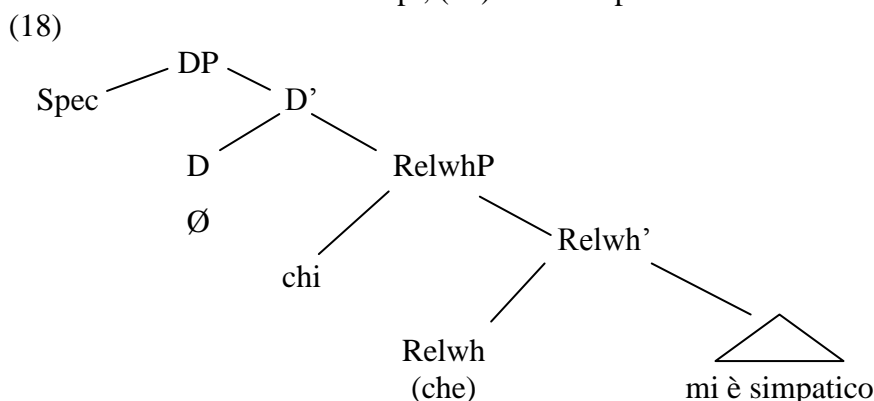
- (iii) Ho sentito che cosa hai detto!  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> heard what have<sub>2nd SING</sub> said  
 ‘I heard what you said’
- (iv) Ho visto che cosa hai fatto!  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> seen what have<sub>2nd SING</sub> done  
 ‘I saw what you did’

The fact that this kind of configuration is possible only with perception verbs suggests that the status of the embedded clause is ambiguous between a free relative and an interrogative structure, in which the *wh-che cosa* is fully acceptable, as in (v):

- (v) Non so che cosa hai fatto  
 Not know<sub>1st SING</sub> what have<sub>2nd SING</sub> done  
 ‘I don’t know what you did’

- (16) E' venuto anche chi hai avvertito ieri  
 Is come also who<sub>ACC</sub> have<sub>2nd SING</sub> told yesterday  
 'Even those you have told it yesterday have come for dinner'
- (17) Mario parla solo con chi gli conviene parlare  
 Mario talks only with who<sub>IND</sub> him it is worth to talk  
 'Mario talks only with those he thinks it's worth to talk'

Given the model we adopt, (15) can be represented as follows:



Some Northern Italian dialects, as well as substandard Northern Italian must introduce a free relative clause with a *wh*- item followed by a complementizer *che*. This possibility, which is very common in dialectal varieties also of Germany and England, is avoided in the standard.

- (19) Invito a sena chi che me ze simpatico (Paduan)  
 Invite<sub>1st SING</sub> to dinner, who<sub>NOM</sub> that to me is nice  
 'I invite for dinner who is nice for me'

### 3.1. The configurations of Italian free relative clauses

In this section we will consider all the possible configurations for Italian free relative clauses with a [+animate] antecedent and we will discuss the reasons why certain patterns are possible whereas other are not.

#### 3.1.1 Both silent antecedent and *wh*- in a Structural Case

In Italian a free relative clause can be formed with both the silent antecedent and the *wh*- in a Structural Case. Under this configuration Case matching is not required, since the silent antecedent and the *wh*- item can be attested in one of the following patterns:

- Antecedent Nominative/*wh*- Nominative
- Antecedent Nominative/*wh*- Accusative
- Antecedent Accusative/*wh*- Nominative
- Antecedent Accusative/*wh*- Accusative

This is shown by the following examples:

- (20) Chi mangia troppi dolci ingrassa  
 Who<sub>NOM</sub> eats too many sweets gets fat  
 ‘Who eats too many sweets, gets fat’
- (21) E’ venuto chi hai invitato  
 Is come who have<sub>2ndSING</sub> invited  
 ‘The person you invited has come’
- (22) Ho incontrato chi ha parlato alla conferenza  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> met  $\emptyset$ <sub>ACC</sub> who has talked at the conference  
 ‘I met the person who spoke at the conference’
- (23) Ho incontrato chi hai invitato  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> met who have<sub>2ndSING</sub> invited  
 ‘I have met who you have invited’

In (20) and (23) there is perfect matching between the Case required by the matrix verb and the Case governed by the embedded verb. As happens in most languages there is no problem in forming free relative clauses under these conditions. In Italian, configurations such as the one proposed in (22) and (23), with the free relative clause being the object of the matrix clause, require that it comes after the matrix, so that the canonical SVO order is respected. For parallel reasons (20) sounds more natural if the relative clause comes first. In (21) the presence of an unaccusative verb allows both the preposing and the postposing of the free relative clause with a light preference for postposing, since the subject is normally found in postverbal position, as in (24):

- (24) E’ arrivato Mario  
 Is arrived Mario  
 ‘Mario has arrived’

However the order can be reversed for pragmatic reasons, as clearly shown by the following sentences:

- (25) [<sub>FocP</sub> Chi ha sbagliato ho punito (non chi è stato onesto)  
 Who has made-a-mistake have<sub>1stSING</sub> punished (not who is been honest)  
 ‘I punished who has made a mistake (not who’s been honest)’
- (26) [<sub>LDP</sub> Chi ha sbagliato l’ ho punito  
 Who has made-a-mistake him have<sub>1stSING</sub> punished  
 ‘I punished who’s made a mistake’
- (27) Rischia il diabete [<sub>FocP</sub> chi mangia troppi dolci, (non chi preferisce le verdure)  
 Risks the diabetes who eats too-many sweets (not who prefers the vegetables)  
 ‘Who eats too many sweets risks diabetes, (not who prefers vegetables)’

The possibility of forming free relative clauses also when there is no matching in the Structural Cases is probably due to the fact that Italian doesn’t display any morphological distinction for Case on the *wh*-. This seems to be confirmed by data coming from languages with overt Case morphology. In German, for instance, not everybody would accept free relative clauses such as (28a), while (28b) is perfectly acceptable:

- (28) a. ?? Ich lade ein, wer kommen will  
 I invite, who<sub>NOM</sub> come wants  
 ‘I invite who wants to come’  
 b. Ich kaufe nur was billig ist  
 I buy only what<sub>NOM</sub> cheap is  
 ‘I buy only what is cheap’

Some authors such as Vogel (2001) claim (28a) is not possible because of morpho-phonological reasons, since there is no identity between the *wh-* in the Nominative and in the Accusative if the *wh-* has the [+animate] feature. When there is morphological identity -this happens for instance with the *wh-* used for the inanimate (*was* both for the Nominative and the Accusative) -sentences like (28b) are considered grammatical by all speakers. Instances of this can be found, as claimed in Fuß & Grewendorf (2012), also with a [+animate] antecedent if the free relative clause is introduced by the *d-* pronoun *die*, which can be both Nominative and Accusative for the feminine and the plural:

- (29) Die da stehen, kennen wir nicht  
 Who<sub>PL</sub> there stand, know we not  
 ‘We don’t know the people who were there’  
 (30) Die er eingeladen hat, war früher Moderatorin der Tagesthemen  
 Who<sub>FEM SING</sub> he invited has, was earlier Moderator of-the Tagesthemen  
 ‘The woman who he invited had been the moderator of the Tagesthemen’

### 3.1.2 *P* which governs a silent antecedent and *wh-* in a Structural Case

A second possible configuration is the one in which the silent antecedent is governed by a *P* and the *wh-* is in a Structural Case. This type is potentially grammatical with any preposition, regardless of the Case of the *wh-* (Nominative or Accusative).

- (31) Ho dato il libro a chi lo ha chiesto  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> given the book to Ø who<sub>NOM</sub> it has asked  
 ‘I have given the book to the person who asked for it’  
 (32) Ho comprato il regalo per chi hai ospitato  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> bought the present for Ø who<sub>ACC</sub> have<sub>2ndSING</sub> hosted  
 ‘I have bought the present for the person you have hosted’

In (31) the *P a* is selected by the verb of the matrix clause *dare* and introduces the Beneficiary; the *wh- chi* serves as the subject of the embedded clause. In (32) the silent antecedent is governed by the preposition *per* and the *wh-* receives the Accusative from the verb *ospitare*, whose subject is a *pro*.

We believe that in Italian constructions like (32) are fully grammatical because of two factors: (i) in (32) *chi* serves as subject of the embedded clause and fully meets the requirements of the verb *ospitare*; (ii) thanks to the fact that *chi* has no morphological mark, it can be at least superficially read as the complement of the *P per*. This impression is somehow preserved by the fact that the *wh-* has the same morphological form it would have if it were governed by a preposition, as happens for instance in interrogative clauses, as in (33):

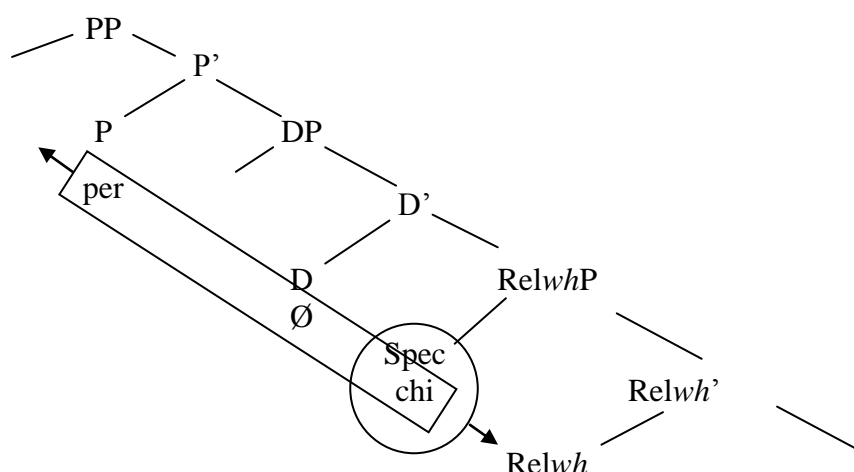


- (33) Dimmi con chi sei andato al mare  
 Tell<sub>2ndSING</sub>-me with whom are<sub>2ndSING</sub> gone to the seaside  
 'Tell me with whom you went to the seaside'

In (33) there is no silent antecedent, since the *wh*- item *chi* is directly governed by the P *con*.

The structure of (32) is provided in (34):

(34)



In (34) the scheme highlights the fact that the *wh*- *chi* can be reinterpreted as the complement of the matrix verb as well as the subject of the embedded clause. Note that this pattern doesn't violate the theta criterion: as expected, the *wh*- is assigned only one thematic role, which is the Theme: it only superficially fills the gap left by the silent antecedent, which is assigned the Beneficiary.

The possible reinterpretation of the *wh*- as the superficial complement of the P seems to be a key factor and this can be proved if we observe free relative clauses in which the antecedent and the *wh*- are governed by two different prepositions:

- (35) \* Ho letto l'articolo di con chi hai lavorato  
 Have<sub>1stSING</sub> read the article of with who have<sub>2ndSING</sub> worked  
 'I have read the article of the person you worked with'

The sentence in (35) is decidedly ungrammatical because the *wh*- *chi* cannot be read as the complement of the P *di* since it is governed by the P *con* which blocks the relation with the matrix clause: it is an intervener in the terms of Rizzi's Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990)

The configuration in which the silent antecedent is governed by a P and the *wh*- is in a Structural Case leads to ill-formedness in some other languages such as German<sup>6</sup>, as shown in (36); however if the P selects the same Case required by the embedded verb, the sentence improves (see 37):

<sup>6</sup>It is generally said that this configuration is impossible in German because the antecedent cannot keep silent if it is lower in the Accessibility Hierarchy (Keenan & Comrie 1977) than the *wh*-.

- (36) \* Ich kaufe ein Geschenk für wer mich geschimpft hat  
 I buy a present for Ø who<sub>NOM</sub> me injured has  
 ‘I buy a present for the person who has injured me’
- (37) Ich kaufe ein Geschenk für wen ich liebe  
 I buy a present for Ø who<sub>ACC</sub> I love  
 ‘I buy a present for the person I love’

(37) is marginally acceptable, surely more acceptable than (36), because the same surface impression we described for Italian takes place for German, too. Morphological identity between the actual *wh*- and the form that the *wh*- would have if it were governed by the preposition re-establishes a kind of surface grammaticality. This means that the fact that the form *chi* could be used for both functions rescues the acceptability of the sentence, which would otherwise be lost.

There are however languages such as Classical Latin and Old Italian which admit the sequence of a preposition, which governs a silent antecedent, followed by a *wh*- in the Case required by the embedded verb, although it is not the same of the antecedent. These languages maintain, with different degrees, a morphological distinction for Case which helps to disambiguate the sentence and to properly interpret each item. This is convincingly shown for Old Florentine in Benincà(2010):

- (38) Zappa a chi la tiene e spada a cui s’aviene  
 Hoe to Ø who<sub>NOM</sub> it has and sword to whom<sub>IND.OBJ</sub> it suits  
 ‘The hoe suits who can carry it and the sword suits who deserve it’  
 (Garzo, *Proverbi*, p. 313)

In Old Florentine *chi* served only as the Nominative *wh*-, for the Accusative and for the indirect Case the form was *cui* as is evident from the second part of (38) *spada a cui s’aviene*. It is therefore clear that the *P a* in (38) governs a silent antecedent and cannot directly govern the *wh*- item *chi*, which otherwise would have had the form *cui*.

A similar configuration is attested in Latin as well (see 39):

- (39) Scipio cum quos paulo ante nominavi interiit  
 Scipio with Ø who<sub>ACCPL</sub> a short time ago cited<sub>1st SING</sub> died<sub>3rd SING</sub>  
 ‘Scipio died with those who I have just cited’ (B. Afr. 96.2)

### 3.1.3 *P* which governs a silent antecedent and *wh*- governed by a *P*

This configuration is the most problematic in Italian, since it deeply affects the interface between syntax and semantics.

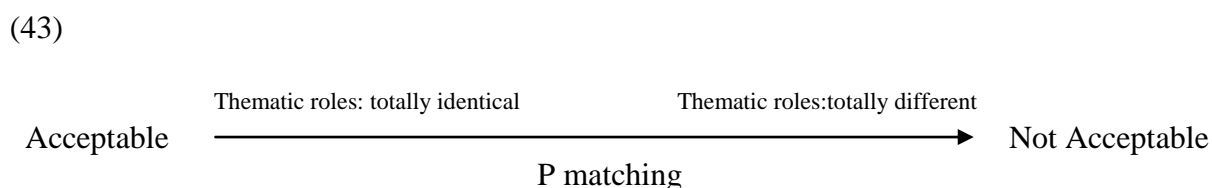
As has been shown in (35) this configuration is impossible if the antecedent and the *wh*- are governed by two different prepositions. Anyway, the identity of the two *Ps* is not sufficient to guarantee the grammaticality of the sentence. This is evident if we compare sentences such as (40), (41) and (42):

- (40) Ho parlato con chi hai parlato tu  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> talked with Ø *P* who<sub>IND.OBJ</sub> have<sub>2nd SING</sub> talked you  
 ‘I talked to the person to whom you talked’

- (41) ? Ho dato il vocabolario a chi hai prestato gli altri libri  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> given the vocabulary to who have<sub>2ndSING</sub> lent the other books  
 ‘I have given the vocabulary to the person you have lent the other books’
- (42) \* Ho comprato la torta per chi soffri  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> bought the cake for who suffer<sub>2ndSING</sub>  
 ‘I have bought the cake for the person you suffer for’

(40) is grammatical for most speakers, as there is full identity between the embedded and the matrix verb with the selection of the same P and of the same thematic role. In (41) both the matrix and the embedded verb independently select the P *a* and assign the same thematic role, the Beneficiary; in fact the two verbs *dare* (to give) and *prestare* (to lend) have a certain semantic contiguity, although they are not fully overlappable; this guarantees that the sentence is partially acceptable. In (42) there are two different verbs which select the same P but different thematic roles: the verb *comprare* (to buy) selects a Beneficiary, while the verb *soffrire* (to suffer) selects in this context a Cause; this leads to the total ungrammaticality of the sentence.

From the examples above it becomes clear that this kind of configuration, with a P assigned by the two verbs, involves an acceptability scale based on semantic and syntactic factors: the more different the thematic roles assigned by the two verbs are, the less acceptable the sentence is, although there is preposition matching. This can be schematized as follows:



The semantic mismatching does not necessarily lead to ungrammaticality in all the configurations; this is proved by free relative clauses in which both the antecedent and the *wh*- are assigned a Structural Case but there is no matching between the thematic roles. A sentence like (44), in which the *wh*- is the Experiencer and the silent antecedent is the Agent, is perfectly grammatical:

- (44) Chi si annoia troppo a teatro, se ne va prima che finisca lo spettacolo  
 Who gets-bored too-much at theatre, goes away before ends the show  
 ‘Who gets to bored at theatre goes away before the show ends’

In (45) both the silent antecedent and the *wh*- are in the Accusative:

- (45) Maria adorava chi hai ucciso  
 Maria adored who have<sub>2ndSING</sub> killed  
 ‘Maria adored who you killed’

Even though the thematic roles assigned to the object of *adorare* and *uccidere* are different, the sentence is perfectly grammatical.

When the embedded and the matrix verb assign two different prepositions, and the free relative clause is therefore not acceptable, speakers adopt different strategies to form

grammatical sentences to convey the same message. One possible way to restore the grammaticality of sentences like (42) is to insert a light head, such as *colui*, as antecedent:

- (46) Ho comprato la torta per colui per cui soffri  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> bought the cake for the one for who suffer<sub>2ndSING</sub>  
 ‘I have bought the cake for the one you suffer for’

Otherwise it is possible to use a form such as *la persona*, a noun which generically refers to a human being:

- (47) Ho comprato la torta per la persona per cui soffri  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> bought the cake for the person for who suffer<sub>2ndSING</sub>  
 ‘I have bought the cake for the person you suffer for’

Speakers may choose to rephrase also sentences like (41) in order to make them sound more natural:

- (48) Ho dato il vocabolario alla persona/a colui a cui hai prestato il libro  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> given the vocabulary to the person/the one who have<sub>2ndSING</sub> lent the other books  
 ‘I have given the vocabulary to the person/the one you have lent the other books’

It’s quite hard to establish if light headed relative clauses, whose head is either a pronoun (*colui/quello*, with no deictic content) or a noun generically referring to a human being such as *la persona*, can be really considered a semantic equivalent of free relative clauses. There are cases in which they are, depending on the information which can be inferred about the context or on the basis of the world-knowledge, and cases in which the interpretation is not exactly the same. Therefore (49):

- (49) Chi guidava l’autobus delle 15.00 di ieri era certamente ubriaco  
 Who drove the bus of-the 15.00 of yesterday was certainly drunk  
 ‘Who drove yesterday’s 15.00 bus was certainly drunk’

can be rephrased as (50):

- (50) Colui che guidava l’autobus delle 15.00 di ieri era certamente ubriaco  
 The one who drove the bus of-the 15.00 of yesterday was certainly drunk  
 ‘The one who drove yesterday’s 15.00 bus was certainly drunk’
- (51) La persona che guidava l’autobus delle 15.00 di ieri era certamente ubriaca  
 The person who drove the bus of-the 15.00 of yesterday was certainly drunk  
 ‘The person who drove yesterday’s 15.00 bus was certainly drunk’

since it is well-known that only one person at a time drives a bus; moreover, the event is placed in a specific time and refers to a specific person. In cases like this, the free relative clause and the light headed relative are semantically equivalent; anyway, in most cases the two different structures give rise to different nuances of meanings, as in the following sentences:

- (52) Chi ama la musica compra molti CD  
Who loves the music buys many CDs  
'Who loves music buys many CDs'
- (53) Colui che ama la musica compra molti CD  
The one who loves the music buys many CDs  
'The one who loves music buys many CDs'
- (54) Coloro che amano la musica comprano molti CD  
The ones who love the music buy many CDs  
'The ones who love music buy many CDs'

These sentences show that the *wh*- item *chi* can refer both to a singular and to a plural entity, mostly when the context is not specific and the world-knowledge doesn't prevent the sentence from being interpreted as referring to any people who find themselves in that situation.

### 3.1.4 Silent antecedent in a Structural Case and *wh*- governed by a P

In Italian free relative clauses with the silent antecedent in a Structural Case and the *wh*- governed by a P are basically impossible, as (55) shows:

- (55) \* Ho incontrato con chi hai viaggiato  
Have<sub>1st SING</sub> met  $\emptyset$ <sub>ACC</sub> with who<sub>IND.OBJ</sub> have<sub>2nd SING</sub> travelled  
'I have met the one with whom you travelled'

In (55) the matrix verb selects a direct object, which is not lexicalized; the embedded verb selects a PP, whose head is *con*, which can in no way be read as the complement of *incontrare*. For (32) (here repeated as (56)):

- (56) Ho comprato un regalo per chi hai ospitato

we argued that the sentence was grammatical because the *wh*- item, being morphologically indistinct for case, could be superficially read both as the complement of the P *per* (governed by the matrix verb) and as the object of the embedded verb. In (55) we have the reverse order, and the sentence is ungrammatical, as can be seen in (57):

- (57) \* [<sub>IP</sub> ho incontrato [<sub>DP</sub>  $\emptyset$  [<sub>CP</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> con [<sub>RelwhP</sub> chi]] C<sup>o</sup> [<sub>IP</sub> hai viaggiato ]]]]

In (57) it is clear that the preposition *con* is inserted in the complex CP and its presence prevents the *wh*- from being, at least superficially, read as the complement of the matrix verb. Italian cannot recover the silent antecedent and is obliged to lexicalize it. The consequence of this morpho-syntactic constraint affects semantics, since the obligatory lexicalization of the antecedent forces the speaker to be more precise and to make explicit the grammatical number of the referent, which in a free relative clause can, as already noted, remain ambiguous:

- (58) Ho incontrato la persona/colui con cui hai viaggiato  
Have<sub>1st SING</sub> met the person/the one with who<sub>IND.OBJ</sub> have<sub>2nd SING</sub> travelled  
'I have met the person/the one with whom you travelled'

- (59) Ho incontrato le persone/coloro con cui hai viaggiato  
 Have<sub>1st SING</sub> met the people/the ones with who<sub>IND.OBJ</sub> have<sub>2nd SING</sub> travelled  
 ‘I have met the people/the one with whom you travelled’

Parallely to what we observed for free relative clauses with the [-animate] feature, partial exceptions for the ungrammaticality of the configuration with the silent antecedent in a Structural Case and the *wh*- governed by a P can be provided by sentences such as (60) and (61)<sup>7</sup>:

- (60) Non ho a chi chiedere aiuto  
 Not have<sub>1st SING</sub> to who to-ask help  
 ‘There’s nobody I can ask for help’
- (61) Non c’è di chi fidarsi in questo posto  
 Not there is of who to-trust in this place  
 ‘There is nobody you can trust in this place’

As we noted for the sentences with a [-animate] antecedent, this configuration is possible only with the verbs *avere* and *esserci*, which have a peculiar status and cannot be assimilated to the other lexical verbs.

The fact that the constraints on this configuration are language specific is proved by the grammaticality of this construction in other languages and in earlier stages of Italian as well. See the following sentences:

- (62) Qui amat quoi odio ipsus est, bis facere stulte duco  
 Who loves Ø<sub>ACC</sub> who<sub>DAT</sub> hate himself is, twice behave in a silly way think<sub>1st SING</sub>  
 ‘Who loves the person by whom he is hated, I think that he is definitely silly’  
 (Terence, Hecyra, 343)
- (63) Ich habe eingeladen, wem ich zu Dank verpflichtet bin  
 I have<sub>1st SING</sub> invited, who<sub>DAT</sub>I to thanks obliged am  
 ‘I have invited the person I have to thank’
- (64) Villania in cui regna, cortesia lo disdegna  
 Villainy in whom reigns courtesy him disdains  
 ‘Courtesy disdains those, in whom villainy reigns’  
 (Garzo, *Proverbi*, cited in Benincà 2010)

In the Latin sentence in (62) the antecedent (in the Accusative) is kept silent although the *wh*- bears the Dative Case (an Oblique Case); in the German sentence in (63) the syntactic configuration is the same of Latin. In (64) the antecedent is in the Accusative Case and the *wh*- is contained in a PP. All these sentences cannot be translated into Italian if the antecedent is not lexicalized.

#### 4. FREE RELATIVE CLAUSES COMPARED TO INDIRECT QUESTIONS

To better understand the nature of Italian free relative clauses it can be helpful to compare them with indirect question, which are introduced by the same series of pronouns, *chi/che*

<sup>7</sup> For a comment on this type see footnote 5.

*cosa*. Differently from free relative clauses, Italian embedded interrogatives can be introduced by any kind of *wh-*, regardless of the fact that it is governed or not by a preposition:

- (65) \* Anna ha incontrato a chi hanno dato il premio  
 Anna has met  $\emptyset_{ACC}$  to who have<sub>3rd PL.</sub> given the prize  
 ‘Anna has met the person to whom they gave the prize’
- (66) Anna non sa a chi hanno dato il premio  
 Anna not knows, to who<sub>IND.OBJ</sub> have<sub>3rd PL.</sub> given the prize  
 ‘Anna doesn’t know to whom they gave the prize’

In (65), which is a free relative clause, the verb of the matrix clause lacks its argument, which is silent; as we expect, the sentence is ungrammatical. (66) is instead grammatical, but the embedded clause is not a free relative clause: it is an indirect question. This means that the PP *a chi* is the indirect object of the embedded verb, but there is no silent antecedent and the *wh-* has no relation at all with the matrix verb. The verb of the matrix clause takes as its argument the whole CP introduced by the prepositional *wh-*. We can schematize the relations above as follows:

- (67) \* V  $\emptyset_{ACC-P}$  + *wh-* V
- (68) V CP

If the verb of the matrix clause can select an indirect question, sentences like (65) can be interpreted as grammatical, as the following examples show:

- (69) \* Ho aspettato a chi hai dato il biglietto del teatro  
 Have<sub>1stSING</sub> waited to who have<sub>2ndSING</sub> given the ticket of-the theatre  
 ‘I have waited for the person who you gave the ticket for the theatre’
- (70) Ho visto a chi hai dato il biglietto del teatro  
 Have<sub>1stSING</sub> seen to who have<sub>2ndSING</sub> given the ticket of-the theatre  
 ‘I have seen who you gave the ticket for the theatre’

In (69) the verb *aspettare* cannot select an interrogative clause and, therefore, the embedded clause is interpreted as a free relative, which is not grammatical. (70) can be considered grammatical in that *vedere* selects an interrogative clause (which is possible, differently from *aspettare*). The interpretation of (70) as a free relative clause is always ungrammatical and the speaker is forced to rephrase the sentence as a light headed relative. We will give the two structures of (70) as (71) and (72):

- (71) \* [<sub>IP</sub> ho visto [<sub>DP</sub>  $\emptyset$  [<sub>CP</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> a [<sub>RelwhP</sub> chi]] C<sup>o</sup> [<sub>IP</sub> (...)]]]]]
- (72) [<sub>IP</sub> ho visto [<sub>CP</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> a [<sub>IntP</sub> chi]] C<sup>o</sup> [<sub>IP</sub> (...)]]]

This asymmetry between free relative clauses and indirect questions supports the idea that Italian does not have a restriction on the *wh-* *per se*; Italian free relative clauses suggest that the antecedent and the *wh-* are not completely blind to each other, although they receive Case independently: if there is no antecedent there is no restriction on the *wh-*. Any constraint

is strictly dependent on the one hand on the relation between the antecedent and the *wh*- item and, on the other hand, on the configuration in which they are inserted.

The different restrictions on the *wh*-, as well as the absence of a silent antecedent in embedded interrogatives, are just some pieces of evidence of a very robust syntactic diversity between free relative clauses and indirect questions.

## 5. FINAL REMARKS

In this last section we would like to summarize and highlight the peculiarities of free relative clauses in Italian. We will make explicit what the underlying mechanisms we argued for are and we will try to define the nature of the main constraint on this construction.

Firstly, Italian always introduces free relative clauses with a *wh*- item, which belongs to the interrogative paradigm; in this it behaves differently from both languages that use two distinct pronominal series to form free relative clauses and interrogatives (like Latin and Ancient Greek), and from languages, such as German, which can introduce free relative clauses also with a *d*- pronoun belonging to the paradigm of the determiners.

The *wh*- item which Italian uses to introduce free relative clauses is morphologically indistinct and always has to satisfy the requirements of the embedded verb; in Italian there are in fact no cases in which this constraint can be overcome. The immediate consequence for this, is that phenomena of Case attraction are completely impossible.

At first glance, it could seem that the only restriction on Italian free relative clauses is on the *wh*- and that the ungrammaticality of some free relative clauses is due to the mismatch between the Case assigned by the matrix and the embedded verb. A further, and probably ultimate constraint - which can explain the ungrammaticality of some configurations - is related to the antecedent; crucially, even though Italian can keep the antecedent silent, it must be somehow recovered in the linear structure of the sentence; the restoration is purely superficial, as the *wh*- can in no way be syntactically governed by the matrix verb; the fact that *chi* has no morphological distinction for Case allows for this process. If the superficial restoration fails (i.e. if the *wh*- is governed by a P and the antecedent is in a Structural Case), the result is the ungrammaticality of the sentence: the preposition prevents the *wh*- from serving as the superficial object/subject of the matrix (minimality effect).

The *wh*- does not necessarily have to bear a Structural Case to guarantee the well-formedness of the sentence. It can also be governed by a P, provided that there is syntactic matching, i.e. the embedded and the matrix verb independently select the same preposition. In this case it is highly preferable that the thematic roles assigned by the two verbs are the same; semantics plays a decisive role in determining whether this configuration is acceptable or not. Even if the two verbs select the same preposition, a total mismatching between the thematic roles leads to ungrammaticality; different degrees of acceptability are possible depending on the semantic contiguity between the thematic roles.

Finally, from a theoretical point of view, we can observe that the presence of a silent antecedent in the syntactic structure of free relative clauses is proved by the asymmetry with indirect questions; the comparison between the two different structures can explain why indirect questions are basically always possible, while free relative clauses undergo certain constraints: the key factor is that in free relative clauses there is a non lexicalized head, which completely lacks in interrogatives.



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