Cecilia Poletto

Goethe Universität Frankfurt/Universitá di Padova

poletto@em.uni-frankfurt.de

From government to spec-head: a tour on null and lexically realized subjects in Old Italian

One of the phenomena traditionally analyzed through the notion of government is the licensing of null subjects in Old French and Old (Northern) Italian. Since Adams (1987), Roberts (1993) and others, the empirical observation that that pro is only possible in main clauses and those (limited) embedded clauses that display V to C movement was interpreted as a typical case of licensing of a null category in SpecIP (i.e. SpecTP) through government by the inflected verb in C°. Recent work (see Zimmermann 2012, Wolfe 2015) has shown that the empirical observation is actually correct for Old French and Old Northern Italian. As for Old Italian (i.e. the variety spoken in Florence in the XIII century), the number of null subjects in embedded clauses is too high and not restricted to clauses embedded under bridge verbs, so that one might be lead to assume that Old Italian was a symmetric V2 language like Icelandic or Yiddish. However, the solution to the problem about the unexpected amount of null subjects in embedded contexts cannot be solved so easily, as it can be proven that Old Italian was indeed an asymmetric V2 language like Old French and modern German on the basis of a) the fact that the Tobler Mussafia law, which establishes proclisis/enclisis alternations is almost exclusively active in main clauses b) the lack of CP-expletives of the German *es* type (Old Italian *si´*) in embedded domains.

In this talk I will propose an alternative analysis and will try to show that the government relation between C° and SpecT can be reread as a Spec-head agreement relation plus an agree relation, i.e. doing away with the notion of government: in order to do so I will capitalize on recent work done on null topics in the Germanic and the Romance languages (see Frascarelli (2007), Bianchi and Frascarelli 2010, Cognola 2016, Sigurdsson, 2011 Walkden 2013). I will propose that pro is licensed through an agree relation with a null Topic, which in turn must obey some licensing conditions. Then the question concerning the distribution of null subjects can be reformulated as a question on the licensing conditions on different types of null topics in the left periphery of the clause of main and embedded clauses. It is well known that Old Italian had a split left periphery just like modern Italian (see Poletto 2014), however the licensing conditions according to which null topics could occur were different from the modern language. In particular, it can be shown that in Old Italian null shift and aboutness topics could be licensed through movement of the inflected verb to Topic° (as attested by the Tobler Mussafia effect of enclisis) in main clauses. As shown by Bianchi and Frascarelli (2010), this type of topics is generally never possible in embedded clauses for semantic/pragmatic reasons. However, in embedded domains, continuity topics could be licensed by the sentential particle *e* and familiarity topics could be licensed simply through pragmatic conditions on the recovery of the reference. This means that, if null topics can license a null pro in SpecTP through an agree relation between SpecTopP and SpecTP, we expect to find more null subjects in main clauses, where null shift, aboutness, continuity and familiarity null topics are possible, and fewer null subjects in embedded clauses, where only continuity and familiarity are possible. This explains the asymmetry between main and embedded clauses, but also the fact that in embedded clauses there are more null subjects than we would expect under the traditional analysis. If we assume that null shift and aboutness topics are licensed through the relation of Spec-head agreement with the inflected verb in Topic°, we can also tie null subjects to V to C, although in an indirect way. If there will be time, I will also address another problem found in Old Romance, i.e. the

occurrence of lexical full pronouns in main clauses where in the modern language there is none: I will show that also the pronominal system has changed, and that the dichotomy between full and clitic pronouns was not yet fully established.

In sum: analyzing in detail the distribution of null subjects in the Old Romance languages, we find some discrepancies that are not excepted if the licensing of pro is directly connected to V to C, with consequent government of the subject by the inflected verb. If we disconnect the licensing of null subjects from the structural relation of government and assume that pro is the secondary effect of the licensing of different types of null topics in the left periphery of the clause, one of which requires V to Topic° movement, i.e. Spec-head agreement, we can reduce the need of the government relation to the other typical structural relation licensing null elements, i.e. spec-head agreement between the verb and the null topic plus an agree relation between the topic and the null subject.