

On the categorial status of *come* in old Florentine and modern standard Italian

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Abstract: Unlike what happened in main questions, in old Florentine embedded questions featured no verb movement to the left periphery; as a consequence, in embedded *wh*-questions the subject intervened between the *wh*-item and the inflected verb. On the other hand, the *wh*-phrase could either be preceded or followed by a left-dislocated constituent; interestingly, the possibility of inserting a constituent between the *wh*-item and the verb was particularly frequent in embedded questions introduced by *come*. I will argue in favor of the idea that the embedded clauses in which *come* is followed by a topicalized constituent can in fact be analyzed as relative clauses in disguise, where *come* is sitting not in the specifier of the Focus projection, but in the specifier of a higher functional projection, arguably Force, situated at the left of the (recursive) Topic projections. This hypothesis receives support precisely by the interpretive ambiguity that *come* displayed in several contexts in old Florentine, where it could either be analyzed as a *wh*-item, that is, as a maximal projection sitting in Spec,ForceP, or as a subordinating complementizer lexicalizing the head Force^o. The possibility for the corresponding item *como* to be used as a subordinating complementizer was independently attested in other old Italian varieties, like old Paduan. In modern standard Italian *come*, when used as a complementizer, is subject to some distributional constraints which do not affect the standard complementizer *che*. The categorial change from specifier to head within the left-periphery seems to be a relatively wide-spread phenomenon; the pervasive ambiguity of *come* reveals that old Italian varieties featured an ongoing process of reanalysis of this element that reflects a crosslinguistically well attested diachronic tendency.

1. Introduction

The aim of this work is to shed some light on the categorial status of the lexical item *come* in some old Italo-Romance varieties, where *come* displayed a structural ambiguity insofar as it could be analyzed either as a maximal projection or as a head. The categorial change from specifier to head within the complementizer layer seems to be a relatively wide-spread

phenomenon; the pervasive ambiguity of *come* reveals that old Italian varieties featured an ongoing process of reanalysis of this element that corresponds to a crosslinguistically well attested diachronic tendency.

The discussion will start by focussing on the respective order of *wh*-phrases and left-dislocated constituents in embedded questions in old Florentine: unlike what happened in main questions, embedded questions featured no verb movement to the left periphery, as a consequence, the subject tended to appear in preverbal position; in particular, in embedded *wh*-questions the subject intervened between the *wh*-item and the inflected verb. On the other hand, the *wh*-phrase could be either preceded or followed by a left-dislocated constituent; interestingly, the possibility of inserting a constituent between the *wh*-item and the verb was particularly frequent in – actually almost exclusively limited to – embedded questions introduced by *come*.

Following previous studies on this topic, I will argue in favor of the idea that the embedded clauses in which *come* is followed by a topicalized constituent can in fact be analyzed as relative clauses in disguise, where *come* is sitting not in the specifier of the Focus projection, but in the specifier of a higher functional projection, arguably ForceP, situated at the left of the (recursive) Topic projections and hosting, among else, relative pronouns.

This hypothesis receives support precisely by the interpretive ambiguity that *come* displayed in several contexts in old Florentine, where it could either be analyzed as a *wh*-item, that is, as a maximal projection sitting in Spec,ForceP, or as a subordinating complementizer lexicalizing the head Force^o. The possibility for the corresponding item *como* to be used as a subordinating complementizer meaning *that* was independently attested in other old Italian varieties, like old Paduan, and is still well attested in modern standard Italian (albeit with some distributional restrictions).

The article is structured as follows: in section 2 I discuss the respective order of *wh*-phrases and left-dislocated constituents in embedded questions in old Florentine, and in particular the distributional properties of *come* when introducing embedded clauses; in section 3 I deal with the XP > X^o reanalysis process that *come* is argued to have undergone and propose that the lexical item *come*, originally a maximal projection, has been reanalyzed by the speakers of old Florentine as a syntactic head; in section 4 I describe the use of *come* as subordinating complementizer in some old Italo-Romance varieties and point out its functional ambiguity, suggesting that in fact at least in some contexts its categorial status is ambiguous between maximal projection and syntactic head; in section 5 I discuss the use of *come* as a subordinator in modern standard Italian, pointing out the different distributional

properties with respect to the alternative complementizer *che*; section 6 concludes the paper with some summarizing remarks.¹

2. *Come* as *wh*-item introducing embedded clauses in old Florentine

Unlike what happened in main questions, in old Florentine embedded questions featured no verb movement to the left periphery, hence no inversion between subject and inflected verb. As a consequence, the subject, both nominal and pronominal, tended to appear in preverbal position; in particular, in embedded *wh*-questions the subject intervened between the *wh*-item and the verb, like in the following examples:

- (1) a. appresso dico come *altri* si piange de la sua partita...

(Dante, *Vita Nuova*, cap. 31, par. 7)

‘next I say how others complain about her departure...’

- b. Ben è nostro intendimento che pochi di appresso voi l’abiate saputo e da’ nostri compagni n’abbiate avuto lettera come *il fatto* è stato...

(*Lettera di Consiglio de’ Cerchi*, ecc., II, p. 1v., rr. 7-8)

‘well it is our understanding that few days after you have learned it and from our mates have known how the fact has been...’

- c. Fammi bene intendere come *l’uomo* è obligato a Dio naturalmente per via di religione

(Bono Giamboni, *Libro*, cap. 71, par. 5)

‘Let me well understand how the man is bound to God naturally by way of religion’

- d. Al padre furono raccontate tutte queste novelle, e come *il suo figliuolo* avea dispensato tutto quello oro...

(*Novellino*, 7, rr. 45-47)

‘To the father were told all these tales, and how his son had bestowed all that gold...’

¹ This article is dedicated to Cecilia Poletto, whose overwhelming enthusiasm has been a constant spur to me during all our joint works; she taught me to carry out linguistic research without ever being afraid of discovering new elements which can challenge our past achievements. Some of the issues dealt with in this article have also been addressed in Munaro (2020). A preliminary version of this work has been presented at the 15th *Cambridge Italian Dialect Syntax-Morphology Meeting* organized by the University of Helsinki and held online on September 8th-10th 2021; I wish to thank the participants of this event as well as two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions, although the responsibility for what I claim is entirely mine.

In all these examples, the embedded clause is introduced by the interrogative element *come* followed by the nominal subject, which is followed in turn by the inflected verb occupying presumably a head position within the inflectional layer of the clause.

On the other hand, in old Florentine the *wh*-phrase introducing an embedded interrogative could be either preceded or followed by a left-dislocated constituent, as exemplified in (2) and (3) respectively:

- (2) a. Or diciamo *sopra capo che* ha

(*Novellino*, 28, r. 15)

‘Now we say what he has on his head’

- b. ...onde non ci n’*à* poscia rissposto *di questo che* fare si ne possa

(*Lettera di Consiglio de’ Cerchi*, ecc., II, p. 2v., rr. 2-3)

‘...hence he has not after answered what can be done about this’

- c. Anche ordinaro e stanciaro che li detti capitani, co li loro consiglieri, siano tenuti di cerchare e provvedere e sapere [*fra*] *gli uomini dela detta Compangnia qual* ànno a pagare da vj mesi inançi

(*Compagnia di S.M. del Carmine*, p. 1, rr. 50-53)

‘Also they ordered and established that said captains, with their counselors, are bound to search and know [among] the men of said Company which ones must pay from six months onwards’

- (3) a. ...acciò che ti sappi consigliare *che via sopra i nostri fatti* ti convegna tenere

(Bono Giamboni, *Libro*, cap. 69, par. 9)

‘...so that he can advise you which way about our facts you should follow’

- b. ...queste tre Virtudi si trassero da una parte a consiglio, per vedere e per pensare *che sopra queste vicende* avessero a fare

(Bono Giamboni, *Libro*, cap. 49, par. 12)

‘...these three Virtues retired and consulted, to see and to think what about these issues they could do’

The contrast between (2) and (3), and in particular the data in (3), cannot be easily captured by Rizzi & Bocci (2017)’s layout of the left periphery, according to which the *Qemb* projection hosting the *wh*-phrase in embedded questions is not followed by any Topic projection:

(4) Force > Top > Int > Top > Foc > Top > Mod > Top > *Qemb* > Fin

Rather, one would be forced to assume that the *wh*-item occupies a higher position, namely the specifier of Rizzi's (1997) FocP, thereby accounting for both (2) and (3), where the specifier of a (recursive) Topic projection is meant to be the landing site of the left-dislocated constituents:

- (5) a. ...onde non ci n'à poscia rissposto [TopP *di questo* [FocP *che* [TP fare si ne possa
(*Lettera di Consiglio de' Cerchi*, ecc., II, p. 2v., rr. 2-3)
- b. ...acciò che ti sappi consigliare [FocP *che via* [TopP *sopra i nostri fatti* [TP ti
convegna tenere

(Bono Giamboni, *Libro*, cap. 69, par. 9)

Adopting the latter hypothesis, the examples in (6), where more than one constituent intervenes between the *wh*-phrase and the inflected verb, could be explained assuming that the Topic projection at the right of FocP is indeed recursive, and that the constituents following *come* occupy the specifier position of each Topic projection:

- (6) a. Mostrami *come il padre al figliuolo e il figliuolo al padre e'l cittadino alla sua
cittade* è naturalmente obligato per via di pietade

(Bono Giamboni, *Libro*, cap. 71, par. 9)

'Show me how the father to the son and the son to the father and the citizen to his city is naturally bound through mercy'

- b. Vedi tu figliolo, *come per queste cinque vie di Prudenzia, che sono cinque virtù che nascono di lei, il bene dal male* si conosce...?

(Bono Giamboni, *Trattato*, cap. 10, par. 2)

'Can you see, my son, how through these five ways of Caution, which are five virtues originating from her, the good from the evil can be distinguished...?'

Interestingly enough, in the examples in (6) the embedded clause is introduced by the *wh*-element *come*; indeed, the possibility of inserting a constituent between the *wh*-item and the verb is particularly frequent with *come*, as one can see in (7) (cf. Munaro (2010)):

- (7) a. Mostrami, verace maestra, *come la detta virtù* si puote usare per le dette vie

(Bono Giamboni, *Trattato*, cap. 20, par. 4)

‘Show me, truthful teacher, how the said virtue can be used through the said ways’

- b. “Ditemi *come lo giovane è stato nodrito*”. Fulli contato *come nodrito* era stato con savi e con uomini di tempo...

(*Novellino*, 4, rr. 27-29)

‘Tell me how the young has been nourished’. It was told to him how he had been nourished with wise and with men of time...’

- c. ...ched i’ vidi Larghezza / mostrare con pianezza / ad un bel cavaleto / *come nel suo mistero* / si dovesse portare

(Brunetto Latini, *Tesoretto*, vv. 1365-1369)

‘...that I saw Length show plainly to a nice knight how in his mystery he should behave...’

In the following examples *come* is immediately followed by a prepositional phrase introduced by the preposition *per*:

- (8) a. E mostrami le vie di catuno, e *come per le dette vie* fanno la loro operazione...

(Bono Giamboni, *Trattato*, cap. 21, par. 3)

‘And show me the ways of everyone, and how through the said ways they do their operation...’

- b. ...vennemi volontade di volere dire anche, in loda di questa gentilissima, parole, per le quali io mostrasse *come per lei* si sveglia questo Amore...

(Dante, *Vita Nuova*, cap. 21, par. 1)

‘... I wanted to say also, in praise of this very gentle woman, words through which I could show how through her this Love awakes...’

- c. Vedi tu, figliuolo, *come per le dette vie* fa Avarizia le sue operazioni, e come si muove l’uomo per Avarizia...?

(Bono Giamboni, *Trattato*, cap. 26, par. 14)

Can you see, my son, how through said ways Greed operates, and how the man behaves for Greed...?’

- d. Et poi che Tullio à pienamente insegnato *come per le nostre parole noi* potemo fare intento l’uditore, si dirà come noi il potemo fare docile ...

(Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*, p. 191, rr. 15-16)

‘And after Tully has fully taught how through our words we can make the hearer careful, then he will say how we can make him tame...’

I would like to submit that an alternative account of these data which captures the above mentioned restriction on the presence of *come* can be achieved adopting a different perspective; more precisely, relying on the substantial identity of the lexical items introducing interrogative and relative clauses in old Florentine and crosslinguistically, I will argue in favour of the idea that in (at least some of) the embedded contexts in which *come* is followed by one or more topicalized constituents, *come* functions as relative subordinator, hence it is presumably not located in the specifier of the Focus projection, but in the specifier of a higher functional projection. As represented in (9), I would suggest that this projection can be arguably identified with ForceP, which in the functional sequence in (4) is situated at the left of all the (recursive) Topic projections:²

- (9) a. Mostrami [ForceP *come* [TopP *il padre al figliuolo* [TopP *e il figliuolo al padre* [TopP *e'l cittadino alla sua cittade* [TP *è naturalmente obligato per via di pietade*]]]]
(Bono Giamboni, *Libro*, cap. 71, par. 9)
- b. Mostrami, verace maestra, [ForceP *come* [TopP *la detta virtù* [TP *si puote usare per le dette vie*]]]
(Bono Giamboni, *Trattato*, cap. 20, par. 4)
- c. Et poi che Tullio à pienamente insegnato [ForceP *come* [TopP *per le nostre parole* [TP *noi potemo fare intento l'uditore, sì dirà come noi il potemo fare docile ...*]]]
(Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*, p. 191, rr. 15-17)
- d. ...vennemi volontade di volere dire anche, in loda di questa gentilissima, parole, per le quali io mostrasse [ForceP *come* [TopP *per lei* [TP *si sveglia questo Amore...*]]]
(Dante, *Vita Nuova*, cap. 21, par. 1)

The hypothesis that *come* occupies a relatively high position within the left-peripheral functional layout is confirmed by examples like the following, where *come* is separated from the preverbal subject by a temporal clause:

² The hypothesis that *come* in the above mentioned contexts works as a relative subordinator and therefore is located in the specifier of ForceP is fully compatible with the seminal proposals by Rizzi (1997) and Benincà (2001)/(2006), according to which Force typically hosts relative pronouns or other elements responsible for clause typing.

- (10) a. ...la terza dice *come, poi che questi fue alquanto stato meco cotale, io vidi e udio certe cose*

(Dante, *Vita Nuova*, cap. 24, par. 13)

...the third one tells how, after this had remained a long time with me, I saw and heard certain things'

- b. ...la terza dice [ForceP *come*, [TopP *poi che questi fue alquanto stato meco cotale*, [TP *io vidi e udio certe cose*

This proposal converges with the analysis of Benincà (2012), who observes that in headless relative clauses the verb could raise to the complementizer layer in old Italian (and other old Romance languages), while this was not possible normally in an embedded interrogative clause; she points out that a class of systematic exceptions to this generalization on verb movement are found precisely in embedded interrogative clauses introduced by *come*, and explicitly proposes that these interrogative clauses should in fact be analyzed as headless relatives.³

More recently, Poletto & Sanfelici (2018) challenge the dichotomy between relative complementizers and relative pronouns and, on the basis of both synchronic and diachronic evidence from Italo-Romance varieties, argue that this dichotomy does not hold, and that relativizers are *wh*-items which have the lexical property of requiring a nominal restriction.⁴

Under the analysis proposed here, according to which *come* can occupy in some embedded contexts the specifier of the Force projection, one could envisage the possibility for this element to have been reanalyzed as the corresponding head of this functional projection, namely as lexicalization of the head Force^o, in obedience to a well known diachronic tendency to reanalyze specifiers as heads. This process of reanalysis will be described in detail in the next section.

³ For a detailed description of the syntax of relative clauses in old Florentine the reader is referred to Benincà & Cinque (2010).

⁴ In the same vein, Poletto & Sanfelici (2019) entertain the hypothesis that the occurrence of *che* after *wh*-items found in embedded interrogatives in North-Eastern Italian dialects is not a case of violation of the doubly filled Comp filter, where the complementizer *che* sits in a low C^o head. They propose that these structures, just like relative clauses, are the spell out of more than one internal projection of the *wh*-item; this would explain why the first historically attested cases are indeed free relative clauses, since relative clauses generally spell out the existential portion of the internal relative head.

3. The process of reanalysis $XP \gg X^\circ$ affecting *come*.

In this section I will propose that the lexical item *come*, originally a maximal projection, has been reanalyzed by the speakers of old Florentine in some syntactic contexts as a syntactic head. Some empirical arguments in favour of this hypothesis will be presented lower in section 4 and section 5.

The basic categorial ambiguity of *come* reveals that old Florentine featured an ongoing process of reanalysis of this element from specifier to head that corresponds to a crosslinguistically attested diachronic tendency; as argued independently by van Gelderen (2004a/b)/(2009) and Willis (2007), the categorial change from specifier to head within the complementizer layer seems to be a relatively wide-spread phenomenon (cf. also Roberts and Roussou (2003)).

As pointed out by van Gelderen (2004a)/(2004b), there exists a systematic crosslinguistic tendency to reanalyze as heads lexical elements that occupy initially structural specifier positions. This crosslinguistic generalization is formalized in the following principle:

(11) *Head Preference or Spec to Head Principle*: Be a head, rather than a phrase.

In a series of diachronic changes which involve different domains of morphosyntax, some lexical items tend to modify their categorial status from specifiers to heads (and finally disappear) and this diachronic generalization is straightforwardly captured by the principle reported in (11).

In particular, van Gelderen observes that the relations between heads are more economical than relations between a specifier and a head.⁵

Considering the etymology from the Latin phrase *quo modo* (cf. Rohlfs (1969): § 945), which can be uncontroversially analyzed as a maximal projection, one could hypothesize that the same categorial status of XP has been initially transferred onto *come*, as represented in (12a); only afterwards has there been a potential reanalysis of *come* as syntactic head, which has determined its categorial, hence interpretive ambiguity, as represented in (12b):

- (12) a. [CP *quo modo* [C[°]]] >>>>> [CP *come* [C[°]]]
 b. [ForceP *come* [Force[°]]] >>>>> [ForceP [Force[°] *come*]]

⁵ Formulated as in (11), the principle would hold both for the operation *merge* (which projects syntactic structure) and for the operation *move* (which takes place in order to perform the checking of formal features).

The hypothesis put forth here, according to which *come* occupies in these embedded contexts the specifier of the Force projection, makes all the more plausible the possibility for this element to have been reanalyzed as the corresponding head of this functional projection, namely as lexicalization of the head Force^o, which is precisely the position occupied by the subordinating complementizer, under current assumptions (cf. Rizzi (1997)).

Willis (2007), analyzing a case of specifier to head reanalysis in the complementizer layer, observes that, generally, complementizers derive diachronically from an heterogeneous series of lexemes; in particular, he lists the following cases:

(13)

- (i) reanalysis of main-clause phrasal elements as complementizer heads;
- (ii) reanalysis of main-clause heads as complementizer heads;
- (iii) reanalysis of embedded phrases (e.g. specifiers of CP) as complementizer heads.

The case of *come* discussed here would be an example of type (iii), in which a maximal projection introducing an embedded clause is reanalyzed as a subordinating complementizer.⁶ Willis points out that, exactly as has been proposed above for old Florentine, also in English the *wh*-item *how* has been partially reanalyzed as a generic embedding complementizer used to introduce non-interrogative complement clauses after verbs of *saying* and *believing*, as in the following examples:

(14) a. Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter.

(Charles Dickens, *Christmas Carol* iii, 1844, OED)

b. I explained quickly about Sal's hospitalization and how we wanted someone to keep an eye, or an ear, open for Frank.

(*British National Corpus*, HWL 36)

As pointed out by Willis, in these examples *how* does not work as *wh*-element but rather as subordinating complementizer and this follows from the fact that *how*, initially used only as interrogative operator, develops into two distinct lexical items: the interrogative phrase and, as diachronic innovation, a declarative complementizer.

⁶ On this particular type of diachronic reanalysis from specifier to head the reader is referred to the extensive discussion in van Gelderen (2009).

A detailed and systematic crosslinguistic analysis of the syntactic and interpretive properties of *how* as subordinating complementizer has been carried out by Nye (2013), who observes, among else, that this phenomenon is attested in a series of typologically unrelated languages.⁷

The hypothesis on the reanalysis of the categorial status of *come* from specifier to head reflects therefore a generalized crosslinguistic tendency to reanalyze maximal projections as heads; the categorial ambiguity of *come* seems to be independently confirmed by the distributional and interpretive properties that still characterize *come* in modern standard Italian as well as in other old Italo-Romance varieties, as will be discussed in the next sections.

4. *Come* as subordinating complementizer in old Italian varieties

In this section I will discuss the use of *come* as subordinating complementizer in some old Italo-Romance varieties and point out the functional ambiguity of *come*, suggesting that in fact at least in some contexts its categorial status is ambiguous between maximal projection and syntactic head, as a consequence of the process of reanalysis from specifier to head described in the previous section.

The hypothesis put forth in the previous section receives support by the interpretive ambiguity that *come* displayed in several contexts in old Florentine, where it could either be analyzed as a *wh*-item, that is, as a maximal projection sitting in Spec,ForceP, or as a subordinating complementizer lexicalizing the head Force^o.

As already pointed out by Munaro (2010), in old Florentine the interpretation of *come* may be sometimes ambiguous between its primary function as interrogative adverb and the one of complementizer introducing an embedded clause:

(15) Vedi *come* cotale donna distrugge la persona di costui

⁷ For a very recent analysis of clausal complements introduced by *wie* in German, the reader is referred to Umbach, Hinterwimmer & Gust (2022). According to the authors, in German complement clauses embedded by the *wh*-word *wie* ('how') have either a manner reading expressing a manner or method of doing something or a different *eventive* reading expressing an event in progress. The basic semantic hypothesis is that *wie* expresses similarity; from the syntactic point of view, while in the manner reading *wie* has a base position next to the verb and is a modifier of the event type, in the eventive reading it is base-generated above VP and thus adds information about the event token. Manners are considered as sets of similar events (and methods, in particular, are considered as sets of similar sequences of subevents), whereas events in progress are seen as initial sequences in sets of similar natural continuations; consequently, an event in progress is like a method comprising sequences of subevents that share the same initial part. In their view, the proposed analysis provides a semantic interpretation explaining why the *wh*-word *wie* can express both the regular manner reading and the eventive reading depending on whether it modifies the event type or the event token.

(Dante, *Vita Nuova*, cap.5, par.2)

‘You see how such woman destroys the person of this guy’

Benincà & Munaro (2010), analyzing the syntactic and interpretive properties of the exclamative clause in old Florentine, point out the ambiguity characterizing *come* in the following examples, where it introduces an embedded clause:

(16) a. Guarda *come* conquise [prostrò] forza d’amor costui!

(Guido Cavalcanti, *Rime*, 30, vv.19-20)

‘Look how the strength of love prostrated this guy!’

b. Se voi sentiste *come* ‘l cor si dole, dentro dal vostro cor voi tremereste...

(Guido Cavalcanti, *Rime*, 19, vv.11-12)

‘If you felt how the heart aches, inside your heart you would tremble...’

They observe that in (16) *come* can be interpreted not only as element introducing an exclamative clausal complement with scope on the whole clause or on the verb phrase, but also as a generic subordinator or still as interrogative adverb.⁸

Similarly, Ferraresi & Goldbach (2010), in their analysis of reported speech in old Florentine, point out that, as in modern Italian, an embedded finite clause could be introduced not only by *che* but also by *come*:

⁸ As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, the following examples, where the *come* introducing the subordinate clause is preceded by the element *sì*, could provide a further empirical argument in favour of an analysis of these structures as lexically-headed relative clauses:

(i) a. ...ne la prima parte dico *sì come* virtuosamente fae gentile tutto ciò che vede...

(Dante, *Vita Nuova*, cap. 21, par. 6)

‘...in the first part I say how virtuously she makes gentle all that she sees...’

b. ...ne la seconda [parte] dico *sì come* era graziosa la sua compagnia...

(Dante, *Vita Nuova*, cap. 26, par. 4)

‘...in the second I say how her company was graceful...’

A similar analysis could be extended to the following examples from the *Bibbia Istoriata* written in old Paduan, where the comparative clause is introduced by the expression *cossì como* and is followed by the correlative clause introduced by *cossì*:

(ii) a. Mo’ debième çurare per lo vostro dio che *cossì como* e’ v’ò fato misericordia, *cossì* similemente me la debiè fare a mi.

(Bibbia, Giosuè IX)

‘Now you must swear on your God that as I pitied you, so similarly you must pity me.’

b. ...ché *cossì como* se magna el pan, *cossì* el porònu devorare ello.

(Bibbia, Numeri LXI)

‘...because as the bread is eaten, so it can be devoured.’

- (17) a. ... e te dee ricordar, se ben t'adocchio [riconosco], *com* 'io fui di natura buona scimia [imitatore]
- (Dante, *Inferno*, 29, vv. 138-139)
- '...and you must remember, if I recognize you well, how I was good imitator of nature...'
- b. Et poi che Tulio nel suo cominciamento [esordio] ebbe detto *come* molte fiata [volte] e lungo tempo avea pensato del bene e del male che fosse adivenuto...
- (Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*, p.9, rr.13-15)
- 'And after Tully in his debut had said how many times and for long time had thought what had become of the good and evil...'

Notice however that in the examples in (17) it is also possible to interpret the subordinate clause as embedded interrogative where *come* semantically corresponds to the prepositional phrase *in che modo* 'in what way'.

The possibility for the item *como* to be used as a subordinating complementizer meaning *that* was independently attested in other old Italian varieties, like old Paduan, as exemplified in (18), where I report some examples from the *Bibbia Istoriata* dating back to the end of the 14th century, in which the form *como* introduces a complement clause embedded under the main predicate *dire* 'say':

- (18) a. ...e gridando fortemente el ge dixè *como* l'è fiolo de Rebecha.
- (*Bibbia, Genesi* CLVII)
- '...and shouting strongly he told him how he is son of Rebecca.'
- b. ...e sì ge dixè *como* uno homo de Egypto sì le ha defendù dali pastore...
- (*Bibbia, Esodo* XVII)
- '...and he told him how a man of Egypt defended them from the shepherds...'
- c. ...e sì ge disse *como* Dio sì lo aveva eleto a devere guidare, reçere e condure el so povolo in la terra de promission.
- (*Bibbia, Numeri* CLVIII)
- '...and he told him how God had elected him to guide, govern and lead his people to the promised land.'
- d. ...e sì ge dixè ordenàmente *como* Raab meretrixè li ha honorevolmente recevuti in chaxa e aschonduti...
- (*Bibbia, Giosuè* XII)

‘...and he told him plainly how Raab the prostitute has honorably received them at home and concealed them...’

In old Florentine, also in formulaic expressions elliptical of the main verb and introducing subsections of a work, *come* can be ambiguous between the interrogative function and the one of complementizer when the embedded verb is in the indicative mood, like in (19); the presence of the subjunctive favours instead the interpretation of *come* as interrogative operator, like in (20):

(19) a. *Come* Ermagoras fue trovatore della questione translativa

(Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*, p.118, r.7)

‘How Ermagoras was inventor of the translative issue’

b. Concrusione di questo trattato, e *come*, dopo il consiglio dato, la Filosofia si partì dal figliuolo

(Bono Giamboni, *Trattato*, cap. 33, rubrica)

‘Conclusion of this treaty, and how, after the given advice, Philosophy departed from the son’

(20) a. *Come* l’uditore sia [possa essere reso] docile

(Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*, p. 192, r. 1)

‘How the hearer can be tamed’

b. *Come* s’impongano le penitenze

(*Compagnia di S.Gilio*, p. 50, r. 11)

‘How the penances can be imposed’

A similar use is attested in the *Bibbia Istoriata* written in old Paduan, as witnessed by the following examples, where the title of the subsection can be considered elliptical of a main clause like *here it is told, here the author tells...*; in (21) *como* is immediately followed by the subject, followed in turn by the inflected verb:

(21) a. *Como* Moyses priega mesier Domenedio *che* perdone al povolo...

(Bibbia, *Numeri XXXV*)

‘How Moses prays lord God that he forgive the people...’

b. *Como* Dio assera de fora la porta de l’archa, *quando* ognomo fo intrati dentro.

(Bibbia, *Genesi XXXII*)

- ‘How God closes from outside the door of the arch, when everybody had entered’
- c. *Como* Moyses comanda al povolo de Israel che li se guarde da biastemare Dio...
(Bibbia, *Levitico XXI*)

- ‘How Moses commands to the people of Israel to refrain from cursing God...’
- d. *Como* Moyses scrisse tuti li comandamenti li quale ge aveva dito Dio...
(Bibbia, *Esodo LXXXXIV*)

‘How Moses wrote all the commandments which God had told him...’

In the examples in (22) *como* is separated from the inflected verb by the lexical subject and by an additional constituent, presumably left-dislocated, which supports the hypothesis that *como* occupies a relatively high position within the left-periphery of the clause:

- (22) a. *Como* de mercore Dio sù fé el sole e la luna e le stelle, *perché* sù fosse la luxe...
(Bibbia, *Genesi IIII*)

‘How on Wednesday God made the sun and the moon and the stars, so that there was light...’

- b. *Como* Moyses per comandamento de Dio sù dà dui cari e quatro buò...
(Bibbia, *Numeri VIII*)

‘How Moses following God’s order gives two carts and four oxen...’

- c. *Como* Moyses, *inanço che* ‘l morisse, sù dé la soa benedizione al povolo de Israel sul monte Abarim.
(Bibbia, *Deuteronomio XV*)

‘How Moses, before dying, blessed the people of Israel on the mountain Abarim.’

- d. *Como* Saray, moiere de Abram, molto affliçe Agar, soa schiava...
(Bibbia, *Genesi LXVII*)

‘How Sarah, wife of Abraham, much afflicts Agar, her slave...’

Summing up, on the basis of evidence drawn from some old Italo-Romance varieties, in this section I have discussed the use of *come* as subordinating complementizer, pointing out its basic functional ambiguity and suggesting that, at least in some contexts, it could be parsed as a syntactic head. The process of reanalysis from maximal projection to head described in section 3 receives support by the interpretive properties that *come* displayed in the syntactic contexts presented here, where it could either be analyzed as a *wh*-item, that is, as a maximal

projection sitting in Spec,ForceP, or as a subordinating complementizer lexicalizing the head Force^o.

5. *Come* as subordinating complementizer in modern standard Italian

The use of *come* as subordinating complementizer has survived until the present. In this section I discuss the use of *come* as a subordinator in modern standard Italian, pointing out the different distributional properties with respect to the alternative complementizer *che*. In modern Italian *come* displays some distinguishing properties with respect to *che*, the most evident of which is that, if used as subordinator, it requires obligatorily the subjunctive mood in the embedded clause it introduces, while no such restriction is attested with *che*:

- (23) a. Gianni mi raccontò che Alberto aveva/*avesse incontrato il suo amico.
b. Gianni mi raccontò come Alberto avesse/*aveva incontrato il suo amico.⁹
‘John told me that/how Albert had met his friend.’

Moreover, unlike *che*, *come* as subordinator seems to be limited to contexts in which the main verb entails a transfer of knowledge (like *dire*, *riferire*, *raccontare*, ecc.), while it is excluded with other types of predicates:

- (24) a. Suppongo che/*come i tuoi amici siano arrivati in treno.
‘I assume that your friends have arrived by train.’
b. Hanno ipotizzato che/*come Gianni abbia reagito alla provocazione.
‘They hypothesized that John has reacted to the provocation’
c. Maria sostiene che/*come Alberto sia una persona onesta.
‘Mary claims that Albert is an honest person.’
d. Mi dispiace che/*come Gianni sia partito all’improvviso.
‘I regret that John left suddenly.’

Exactly like *che*, also *come* preferably precedes left-dislocated constituents, which confirms the hypothesis above according to which it occupies the head Force^o, situated at the left of the Topic projections hosting topicalized elements:

⁹ Notice that the example (23b) is perfectly grammatical with the verb in the indicative under the interpretation of *come* as a *wh*-phrase meaning *in che modo* ‘in what way’.

- (25) a. Gianni ci ha riferito come, per la partenza di Alberto, tutti si siano dispiaciuti.
 ‘John has told us how, for the departure of Albert, everybody was sorry.’
 b. ??Gianni ci ha riferito, per la partenza di Alberto, come tutti si siano dispiaciuti.
- (26) a. Gianni ci ha riferito come, ad Anna, Alberto abbia regalato una preziosa collana.
 ‘John told us how, to Ann, Albert has donated a precious necklace.’
 b. ??Gianni ci ha riferito, ad Anna, come Alberto abbia regalato una preziosa collana.

Another peculiarity regards the impossibility for an embedded clause introduced by the complementizer *come* to appear in preverbal subject position and, analogously, the impossibility for the embedded clause to be fronted across the main clause (a possibility which exists instead for clauses introduced by the complementizer *che*):

- (27) a. E’ strano che/come Gianni sia partito all’improvviso.
 ‘It is strange that/how John left suddenly.’
 b. Che Gianni sia partito all’improvviso, è strano.
 ‘That John left suddenly, is strange.’
 b’. *Come Gianni sia partito all’improvviso, è strano.
- (28) a. Mi hanno detto che/come Gianni è/sia partito all’improvviso.
 ‘They told me that/how John left suddenly.’
 b. Che Gianni è/sia partito all’improvviso, me l’hanno detto.
 ‘That John left suddenly, they told me.’
 b’. *Come Gianni sia partito all’improvviso, me l’hanno detto.

Furthermore, it is not possible to use in isolation a declarative clause introduced by *come* as an answer to a question:¹⁰

¹⁰ Notice finally that, if the main verb is under the scope of the negative marker *non*, *come* cannot be interpreted as a complementizer, and the only possible interpretation is the interrogative one:

- (i) a. Non mi hanno riferito come Gianni abbia viaggiato all’estero.
 ‘They did not tell me how John travelled abroad.’
 b. Gianni non ha detto come Roberto abbia vinto il primo premio.
 ‘John did not say how Robert has won the first prize.’

The same seems to hold with *come* under the scope of modals, like in the following example:

- (ii) Gianni deve dirmi come Maria abbia/ha viaggiato all’estero.

- (29) a. A: Cosa ti hanno detto?
 ‘What did they tell you?’
 B: Che Gianni è partito all’improvviso.
 ‘That John left suddenly.’
 B’: *Come Gianni sia partito all’improvviso.
- (30) a. A: Cosa ti ha sorpreso?
 ‘What surprised you?’
 B: Che Gianni è partito all’improvviso.
 ‘That John left suddenly.’
 B’: *Come Gianni sia partito all’improvviso.¹¹

A final remark concerns the possibility to have complementizer deletion in standard Italian in subjunctive clauses introduced by *che*, as opposed to the impossibility to have complementizer deletion with *come*. This phenomenon has been investigated by Poletto (2001), who considers some cases of complementizer deletion in subjunctive clauses, analyzing them as cases of movement of the inflected verb to the complementizer layer; in particular, her analysis is meant to contribute to shed some light on the number and the type of functional projections which are usually ascribed to the CP-layer; she assumes a split-CP perspective, partially modifying Rizzi’s (1997) proposal on the number of the functional positions activated in the left periphery in standard Italian. Poletto notes that cases of complementizer deletion were well known in the literature of languages like English and modern standard Italian, where it had been noticed that in subjunctive clauses introduced by *che* embedded under bridge verbs the lexical realization of the complementizer is optional:

- (31) a. Gianni credeva (che) fossero già partiti.
 ‘John believed (that) they had already left.’
 b. Rossella ritiene (che) non abbiano telefonato a nessuno.
 Rossella considers (that) they did not phone anybody up.’
 c. La mamma pensa (che) sia arrivato a casa tardi.
 ‘Mum thinks (that) he has arrived home late.’

‘John must tell me how Mary travelled abroad.’

¹¹ An anonymous reviewer points out to me that this example is grammatical for some speakers.

Poletto examines precisely cases of complementizer deletion in subjunctive clauses embedded under a bridge verb, trying to put forth an analysis of this effect in terms of verb movement to a low C° position, which has been assumed to encode a $[\pm\text{finite}]$ feature by Rizzi (1997); this structural position can be easily identified with the functional head Fin° , the lowest C position of the CP layer according to the functional sequence proposed by Rizzi & Bocci (2017), repeated here for convenience:

(32) *Force* > Top > Int > Top > Foc > Top > Mod > Top > Qemb > *Fin*

Interestingly, the possibility of deleting the complementizer is not attested in modern standard Italian in subjunctive clauses introduced by *come*, as witnessed by the following examples:

- (33) a. Gianni aveva riferito *(come) fossero già partiti.
 ‘John had told *(how) they had already left.’
 b. Rossella ha osservato *(come) non abbiano telefonato a nessuno.
 ‘Rossella observed *(how) they did not phone anybody up.’
 c. La mamma notò *(come) fosse arrivato a casa tardi.
 ‘Mum noticed *(how) he has arrived home late.’

The clear contrast between (31) and (33) follows straightforwardly from the hypothesis put forth above that *come* used as complementizer lexicalizes the head Force° in the sequence in (32), a structural position which is too high to be reached by the raising inflected verb in a language like modern Italian.

Summing up, the distributional properties of *come* as subordinating complementizer are different from the ones of *che* in modern Italian and constrain its use to specific syntactic contexts; by contrasting the distributional properties of the standard embedding complementizer *che* with the ones of *come*, in this section we got additional empirical evidence for the different structural position occupied by the two items, and, in particular, for postulating a very high first merge position of the complementizer *come* within the left periphery (most likely the functional head Force°).

6. Summary

In this article I have taken into account the structural and interpretive ambiguity characterizing the lexical item *come* in old Florentine, whose categorial status turned out to be ambivalent. I have preliminarily observed that in embedded interrogative clauses in old Florentine verb movement to the left periphery did not take place, hence the subject tended to appear in preverbal position and that, in particular, in embedded *wh*-interrogatives the subject used to appear between the *wh*-item and the inflected verb. On the other hand, the *wh*-phrase could be preceded or followed by a topicalized constituent, although the possibility to insert one constituent (or more than one constituent) between the *wh*-phrase and the inflected verb was almost exclusively limited to clauses introduced by the element *come*. Following some previous studies on this subject, I have suggested that in embedded clauses where *come* is followed by a topicalized constituent it lexicalizes a functional projection higher than Focus, namely the projection Force, situated at the left of the recursive Topic projections. I have also proposed that the categorial status of *come* in old Florentine (and the one of corresponding items in other old Italian varieties) was ambiguous between specifier and head, and it still is in modern Italian, as a result of a specifier-to-head reanalysis process which is well attested diachronically and crosslinguistically; some of the examples reported above can be reduced to a different structural representation, depending on whether *come* is analyzed as *wh*-item situated in the specifier of Force, or as subordinating complementizer lexicalizing the corresponding head Force^o; this ambiguity has survived in modern Italian, where the complementizer *come* is subject to some distributional constraints which do not affect the other subordinating complementizer *che*.

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