

ON NOMINAL WH-PHRASES
IN SOME NORTH-EASTERN ITALIAN DIALECTS*

Nicola MUNARO

1. Introduction

In this article I will investigate the distributional and structural properties of nominal *wh*-phrases in some dialects spoken in the Northern part of Veneto, and more precisely in the Central and Southern areas of the province of Belluno.

As originally noted in Benincà & Vanelli (1982), in these dialects in matrix interrogative sentences *wh*-phrases are characterized by very peculiar distributional properties: some *wh*-phrases occur only in initial position, as in standard Italian, others occur only in the argumental position occupied by the corresponding non interrogative phrase in a declarative sentence, still others occur in either position; in technical terms, some *wh*-phrases are obligatorily subject to overt *wh*-movement to a sentence initial operator position, some never undergo such movement, and some do so optionally.

The phenomenon of *wh-in situ* is most frequently attested in *alpagoto* (a dialect spoken in the South-Eastern part of the province of Belluno) but is also present in the varieties spoken in the main town Belluno and, albeit with decreasing intensity, in those spoken along the Val Belluna and around the town Feltre; it is further occasionally attested in some varieties of *agordino* in the North-Western part of the

* I'd like to thank here all the native speakers who accepted to fill in patiently the questionnaire which constituted the basis for the collection of the relevant linguistic data; I thank P. Benincà, A. Cardinaletti, G. Cinque, G. Giusti, C. Poletto and R. Zanuttini for helpful discussion and comments on a draft version of this work; thanks go also to the audience of the research seminar on generative grammar at the University of Venice where this material was presented in May 1995.

province¹; similar cases of *wh*-elements occurring *in situ* are also found in the dialects spoken in the Northern part of the province of Treviso in Veneto as well as in some Lombard; however, I will be concerned here only with the dialects spoken in the Northern territory of Veneto, which I will henceforth refer to with the cover term *bellunese*.

In most of these dialects the phenomenon of *wh-in situ* is optional, in the sense that those *wh*-elements which can occupy, in a direct question, the argumental position *in situ* can also occur in initial position; the only dialect in which there are *wh*-elements which occur only *in situ* is *alpagoto*, and mainly on this dialect (in order to provide a sufficiently clear and unitary overview of the relevant distributional properties) are based the descriptive generalizations given in section 2 concerning the distribution of the various types of *wh*-phrases in direct questions and the possibility of extraction from an embedded declarative sentence; in section 3, after reviewing briefly Rizzi's (1991) *Wh*-criterion and considering its adequacy in accounting for the possibilities of occurrence of *wh*-phrases in these dialects, I propose a condition to the effect that the intrinsic feature identification of the head of a nominal *wh*-phrase triggers its overt raising to Spec-CP; on the basis of this formal requirement in section 4 I assign to each kind of *wh*-phrase a specific internal structure which is assumed to determine its distribution in direct questions; section 5 contains some final remarks which summarize the main theoretical proposals.

2. Distributional properties of nominal *wh*-phrases in bellunese

2.1 Matrix *wh*-questions

2.1.1 Which

In its adjectival use the Italian *wh*-element *quale* is translated in these dialects with the invariable form *che*, which can be used either in the denoting reading (corresponding to the English *which*) to refer to a specific entity selected out of an already known set, or in the identificational reading (corresponding to the English *what (kind of)*) to merely determine the kind to which the entity referred to belongs; a *wh*-phrase introduced by *che* followed by a phonetically realized nominal head occupies invariably the initial position of a matrix interrogative, both when it is a subject (and in

1 For a more detailed analysis of the variation among the single dialects spoken in this geographical area with respect to the occurrence of nominal and adverbial *wh*-elements see Munaro (forthcoming).

this case we have a cleft structure, as in (1)) and when it is a nominal (see (2)) or prepositional (in (3)) internal argument of the verb:

- (1) che sòcio é-lo che à telefonà?²
'which colleague is-cl that has telephoned?'
which colleague telephoned?
- (2) che vestito à-tu sièlt?
'which dress have-cl chosen?'
which dress did you choose?
- (3) con che tosàt à-tu parlà?
'with which boy have-cl spoken?'
which boy did you speak with?

When *quale* is used pronominally, that is, if no nominal head is phonetically realized, it is translated with *qual*, inflected for number and gender; in this case two different possibilities of occurrence seem to be possible if the phrase functions as subject we have a cleft structure in which the interrogative element can either precede or follow the copula:

- (4) a. qual é-lo che à telefonà?
'which is-cl that has telephoned?'
b. é-lo qual che à telefonà?
'is-cl which that has telephoned?'
which one telephoned?

When *qual* functions as object (nominal, as in (5), or prepositional, in (6)) it can occur either in initial position (in (5a) and (6a)) or in the argumental position occupied by the demonstrative in the corresponding declarative sentence (in (5b) and (6b)):

2 In most Northern Italian dialects, among which the varieties we're studying here, there is in matrix questions inversion of inflected verb and clitic subject pronoun: while in assertive sentences the subject clitic is proclitic on the verb, in interrogative contexts it encliticizes onto it, which has been interpreted by Poletto (1993b) as an effect of the raising of the verb to a higher head position in interrogatives; Poletto suggests, on the basis of various empirical grounds that the series of assertive subject clitics should be actually distinguished from the interrogative series and assumes that the two kinds of subject clitics are generated in different head positions (see for details section 3.2). In the examples the interrogative subject clitic is glossed simply as *cl*.

- (5) a. qual à-tu sièlt?
 'which have-cl chosen?'
 b. à-tu sièlt qual?
 'have-cl chosen which?'
 which one did you choose?
- (6) a. con qual à-tu parlà?
 'with which have-cl spoken?'
 b. à-tu parlà con qual?
 'have-cl spoken with which?'
 which one did you speak with?

2.1.2. How much

The Italian interrogative element *quanto* (corresponding to the English *how much*) is translated, both in its adjectival and in its pronominal use, as *quant*, inflected for gender and number.

The *wh*-phrases introduced by *quant* followed by a realized nominal head always appear in these dialects in the initial position of a matrix interrogative sentence; in this case a cleft structure (as in (7a)) is preferred if the phrase functions as subject, while a simple interrogative structure is grammatical only with ergative verbs (see (7b) and (7c)); in any case there is no feature agreement between the subject phrase and the interrogative subject clitic pronoun:

- (7) a. quanti operai é-lo che à laorà?
 'how many workers is-cl that have worked?'
 b. ?? quanti operai à-lo laorà?
 'how many workers has-cl worked?'
 how many workers worked?
 c. quanti operai é-lo rivà?
 'how many workers is-cl arrived?'
 how many workers have arrived?

When the *wh*-phrase is a nominal or prepositional object it occupies the initial position of a simple interrogative structure:

- (8) quanti libri à-tu ledést?
 'how many books have-cl read?'
 how many books did you read?

- (9) con quanta jente à-tu parlà de 'sta roba?
'with how much people have-cl spoken about this thing?'
with how many people did you speak about this?

As we have seen above for *qual*, also *quant*, when used as an interrogative pronoun functioning as object of a transitive verb (see (10)) or subject of an ergative verb (in (11)), can optionally occur in both positions³:

- (10) a. quant ghen' à-tu magnà?
'how much of it have-cl eaten?'
b. ghen' à-tu magnà quant?
'of it have-cl eaten how much?'
how much of it did you eat?
- (11) a. quanti ghen' é-lo vegnest?
'how many of them is-cl come?'
b. ghen' é-lo vegnest quanti?
'of them is-cl come how many?'
how many of them came?

When the interrogative pronoun *quant* in the plural form functions as subject of an unergative verb or as prepositional argument of the verb it occupies the initial position provided that the phonetically unrealized nominal head is unambiguously interpretable as having the feature [+human], which can be determined by the sub-

3 That this particular syntactic behaviour of *wh*-elements used pronominally (that is, without a lexically realized head) isn't unique to *bellunese* is shown by the following data from the Lombard dialects of Rovato (in (i)) and Monno (in (ii)), both spoken in the province of Brescia:

- (i) a. n-é-(t) mangià quàta?
'of it-have-(cl) eaten how much?'
b. quàta n-é-(t) mangià?
'how much of it-have-(cl) eaten?'
how much of it did you eat?
- (ii) a. é-t cercà fò qual?
'have-cl sought out which?'
b. qual é-t cercà fò?
'which have-cl sought out?'
which one did you choose?

Similar facts are also found in some Ligurian dialects, like Cicagnino, spoken in the province of Genova.

categorization requirements of the predicate or simply by contextual reference; if the *wh*-element functions as subject, a simple interrogative structure is ungrammatical (see (12a)), and one finds again a cleft structure in which *quanti* preferably precedes the copular verb and there is no agreement with the subject clitic (see (12b) and (12c)), if it is a prepositional object, it occupies the initial position in a simple interrogative structure (see (13)):

- (12) a. * *quanti à-lo/à-li laorà ieri?*
 ‘how many has/have-cl worked yesterday?’
 b. *quanti é-lo che à laorà ieri?*
 ‘how many is-cl that have worked yesterday?’
 c. ?? *é-lo quanti che à laorà ieri?*
 ‘is-cl how many that have worked yesterday?’
 how many people worked yesterday?

- (13) *con quanti à-tu parlà de ‘sta roba?*
 ‘with how many have-cl spoken about this thing?’
 with how many people did you speak about this?

2.1.3 Who

When functioning as subject of an unergative verb, the interrogative element *chi* (*who*) follows immediately the copular verb in a cleft structure, that is, it occupies the focus position between the copula and the complementizer:

- (14) *é-lo chi che à magnà la torta?*
 ‘is-cl who that has eaten the cake?’
 who ate the cake?

- (15) *é-lo chi che laòra incoi?*⁴
 ‘is-cl who that works today?’
 who works today?

4 With an intransitive verb like *lavorare* the occurrence *in situ* is marginally attested in simple tenses (see (i)), while with *telefonare* this possibility seems to prevail in compound tenses (in (ii)):

(i) *laòre-lo chi incoi?*
 ‘works-cl who today?’
 who works today?

(ii) a. *é-lo chi che telefona stasera?*

With ergative verbs, in a simple tense there seems to be complete optionality in the collocation of the interrogative element *chi* (see (16))⁵, while in the compound tenses it can occur only in postverbal position, that is, *in situ* (see (17)):

- (16) a. *é-lo chi che vien?*
'is-cl who that comes?'
b. *viénlo chi?*
'comes-cl who?'
who's coming?
- (17) a. **é-lo chi che l' é vegnest?*
'is-cl who that cl-is come?'
b. *é-lo vegnest chi?*⁶

-
- 'is-cl who that telephones tonight?'
who telephones tonight?
- b. *à-lo telefonà chi ieri?*
'has-cl telephoned who yesterday?'
who telephoned yesterday?

- 5 In fact there is a slight interpretive contrast between (16a) and (16b): while (16b) is used with no presupposition, (16a) seems to be more adequately used in a presuppositional context, that is, it aims at identifying a specific individual out of a set known to the hearer (Poletto (1993b) notes the same contrast in standard Italian between a simple *wh*-interrogative and the corresponding cleft structure); when only one form is admitted, as is the case with unergatives or in the compound tenses of ergatives, this allows both readings.
- 6 When an ergative verb is accompanied by an explicitly realized locative argument we find a cleft structure in the simple tense (in (i)), while in the compound tenses there are the two possibilities represented in (ii):
- (i) *é-lo chi che va a casa?*
'is-cl who that goes to home?'
who's going home?
- (ii) a. *chi é-lo 'ndat a casa?*
'who is-cl gone to home?'
b. *é-lo 'ndat chi a casa?*
'is-cl gone who to home?'
who went home?

It looks then as if the distribution of subject *chi* were conditioned by various factors, among which the ergative nature of the verb, the choice of a simple or compound verbal tense and possibly also the presence of an implicit or lexically expressed locative argument.

'is-cl come who?'
who came?

When *chi* functions as nominal object of the verb it appears *in situ* (see (18)), while when it is inside a prepositional phrase (subcategorized or not by the verb, see (19) and (20)) the occurrence *in situ* is attested more frequently than the one in initial position, which sounds slightly deviant:

(18) à-tu vist chi?

'have-cl seen whom?'
who did you see?

(19) a. ?a chi ghe l' à-tu dat?

'to whom cl it have-cl given?'

b. ghe l' à-tu dat a chi?

'cl it have-cl given to whom?'
who did you give it to?

(20) a. ?de chi avé-o parlà?

'about whom have-cl spoken?'

b. avé-o parlà de chi?

'have-cl spoken about whom?'
who did you speak about?

It's interesting to note that when a sentential negation is present the *chi* subject of ergative verb (in (21)) or object (in (22)) cannot occupy the argumental position *in situ*: it occurs exclusively in the focus position of a cleft structure after the copula:

(21) é-lo chi che no l' é vegnest?

'is-cl who that not cl-is come?'
who didn't come?

(22) é-lo chi che no te à vist?

'is-cl whom that not you have seen?'
who didn't you see?

2.1.4. What

The Italian interrogative element *che cosa* (*what*) can be translated in these dialects in two different ways.

The form *cossa* is found, with interrogative meaning, only in some dialects, namely in the ones spoken in the main town Belluno, in Val Belluna and around the town Feltre; this interrogative element always occupies the initial position and, when functioning as subject (as in (23a)), it precedes the copula in a cleft structure:

- (23) a. *cossa é-lo che te intarèsa de pì?*
'what is-cl that you interests of more?'
what are you more interested in?
- b. *cossa à-tu parecià?*
'what have-cl prepared?'
what did you prepare?
- c. *de cossa se à-li desmentegà?*
'of what themselves have-cl forgotten?'
what did they forget?

In *alpagoto* the *wh*-element *cossa* is attested only in contexts like the ones exemplified in (24), where it does not really have an interrogative meaning:

- (24) a. *cossa compre-tu quèla roba là...?!*
'what buy-cl that thing there...?!'
why do you buy that thing...?!
- b. *cossa avé-o fat...?!*
'what have-cl done...?!'
what have you done...?!
- c. *cossa u-tu...*
'...what want-cl...'
...what do you want...

In (24a), as one can see from the translation, *cossa* has the meaning of *why*; the example in (24b) can be interpreted only as an exclamative sentence expressing amazement and blame, while (24c) can be used exclusively as a parenthetical expression; it looks then as if in these cases *cossa* is devoid of its primarily interrogative force and has a function according to which its semantic contribution varies depending on the context in which it occurs.

The second form for the *wh*-element *che cosa* is *che*, which is found mainly in *alpagoto* (where *cossa* is limited to the usages seen in (24)), but also in varieties in which *cossa* is used in interrogative contexts, in the latter group of dialects the two elements have complementary distribution: while *cossa*, as we have seen above, occurs exclusively in initial position, *che* occurs in the argumental position *in situ* (in *feltrino* *che* is attested less frequently, while in the dialects spoken in Val Belluna

and in Belluno the choice between the two interrogative elements is optional); when functioning as subject of an unergative verb *che* occupies, in a cleft structure, the focus position between the copular verb and the complementizer (see (25a)), while when functions as subject of an ergative verb it appears in postverbal position (see (25b)):

- (25) a. é-lo che che te disturba?
'is-cl what that you disturbs?'
what's disturbing you?
b. é-lo sucès che?
'is-cl happened what?'
what happened?

When functioning as nominal or prepositional internal argument of the predicate it appears *in situ*:

- (26) a. à-tu parecià che?
'have-cl prepared what?'
what did you prepare?
b. se à-li desmentegà de che?
'themselves have-cl forgotten of what?'
what did they forget?

As we observed in the previous section for *chi*, the presence of sentential negation forces the occurrence of *che* in the focus position of a cleft structure as well:

- (27) a. é-lo che che no te-à parecià?
'is-cl what that not cl-have prepared?'
what didn't you prepare?
b. é-lo de che che no i-se-à desmentegà?
'is-cl of what that not cl-themselves-have forgotten?'
what didn't they forget?

We will return below to this particular effect of negation on the possibilities of occurrence of some interrogative elements⁷.

7 In embedded interrogative sentences there are no cases, in the dialects considered, of *in situ* occurrence of *wh*-phrases; one finds, on the contrary, an absolute regularity in their distribution: all the kinds of *wh*-elements analyzed follow immediately the main verb and precede the complementizer *che* which is obligatorily realized; they occupy in other words invariably the introductory position of the subordinate clause selected by the matrix

2.2 Extraction from embedded sentences

The possibilities of extraction of nominal *wh*-phrases from an embedded declarative clause seem to directly mirror the possible occurrences of a *wh*-phrase in the corresponding matrix question, which means that the *wh*-phrases occupying only the initial position in an interrogative sentence have to be extracted and occur in the Spec-CP position of the matrix clause:

- (28) a. *che libro à-tu dit che te-à ledést?*
'which book have-cl said that cl-have read?'
- b. **à-tu dit che te-à ledést che libro?*
'have-cl said that cl-have read which book?'
- which book did you say that you read?

The interrogative elements which in a matrix question can occur either in initial position or *in situ* maintain both possibilities of collocation, that is, they occur either in the Spec-CP position of the matrix clause (as in (29a)) or in the basic argumental position inside the embedded clause (as in (29b)):

- (29) a. *quant à-tu dit che te-ghen' à comprà?*
'how much have-cl said that cl-of it have bought?'
- b. *à-tu dit che te-ghen' à comprà quant?*
'have-cl said that cl-of it have bought how much?'
- how much of it did you say that you bought?

Finally, those interrogative elements which appear only *in situ* in matrix questions have to occupy their basic argumental position, that is, they can't be extracted out of the embedded clause:

- (30) a. **che à-tu dit che te-à comprà?*
'what have-cl said that cl-have bought?'

verb. Moreover, embedded questions represent, in *alpagoto*, the only context in which the *wh*-element *cossa* is used, alternating with *che*, in its primarily interrogative function with the meaning of *what* (in this case the uses seen in (24) are excluded):

- (i) a. *me domande cossa che i-pòl aver comprà*
b. *me domande che che i-pòl aver comprà*
myself ask what that cl-can have bought
I wonder what they may have bought

- b. à-tu dit che te-à comprà che?
'have-cl said that cl-have bought what?'
what did you say that you bought?

As for those elements which can occupy the focus position of a cleft structure in a matrix interrogative sentence, since that position is not available in the case of extraction from a declarative clause, they occur preferably *in situ*, even with sentential negation:

- (31) a. ?? chi à-tu dit che à laorà ieri?
'who have-cl said that has worked yesterday?'
b. à-tu dit che à laorà chi ieri?⁸
'have-cl said that has worked who yesterday?'
who did you say that worked yesterday?
- (32) a. * chi à-tu dit che no te-à vist?
'whom have-cl said that not cl-have seen?'
b. à-tu dit che no te-à vist chi?
'have-cl said that not cl-have seen whom?'
who did you say that you didn't see?

8 A particular case is represented by subjects of transitive verbs when the object is overtly expressed; in this case it's not sufficient to leave the subject *in situ* :

- (i) ??à-tu dit che magna/a magnà chi la torta?
'have-cl said that eats/has eaten who the cake?'
who did you say that is eating/ate the cake?

It's necessary to right-dislocate the object introducing a coreferent clitic pronoun (see (iia)); if the subordinate clause contains a compound tense there is an alternative possibility, namely a cleft followed by an infinitival sentential complement with the *wh*-element occupying again the focus position (in (iib)):

- (ii) a. à-tu dit che lo magna/à magnada chi, la torta?
'have-cl said that it eats/has eaten who, the cake?'
b. à-tu dit che l-é stat chi a magnar la torta?
'have-cl said that cl-is been who to eat the cake?'
who did you say that is eating/ate the cake?

3. Some theoretical remarks

3.1. The Wh-criterion

Rizzi (1991), in revising May's (1985) *Wh-criterion*, reformulates it as a condition about the well-formedness of interrogative structures which ultimately determines the distribution and interpretation of *wh*-operators:

- (33) a. A *wh*-operator must be in a spec-head configuration with an X° [$+wh$]
b. An X° [$+wh$] must be in a spec-head configuration with a *wh*-operator

Rizzi assumes that this general structural requirement on the scope of *wh*-operators applies universally at the level of logical form and that in languages (like Chinese or Japanese) which lack syntactic *wh*-movement interrogative operators have to move at least at that level to meet this principle.

He proposes that the verbal inflection is specified positively for the feature [*wh*] and that the inversion of subject and auxiliary which applies obligatorily in English in matrix interrogatives is in fact the consequence of the raising of I° to the C° position triggered by the necessity of moving the [$+wh$] feature high enough in the structure to satisfy the *wh*-criterion: the inflected auxiliary in C° ends up in a structural configuration of spec-head agreement with the *wh*-operator raised to the specifier position of CP.

Rizzi gives then, in partially functional terms, the following definition of interrogative operator, where by scope position he means an A'-position at the left periphery of the sentence (a specifier position or an adjunction position):

- (34) *Wh*-Operator = a *wh*-phrase in a scope position

He suggests that a *wh*-phrase in itself is an argument unless it can be considered an operator on the basis of this definition, noting that this functional notion applying in syntax has to be substituted at the level of logical form by a more general principle according to which in that component of the grammatical system every element endowed with intrinsic quantificational force counts as operator and as such has to move to an appropriate scope position.

Rizzi turns then to the analysis of cases of *in situ* occurrences (that is, of LF movement) of *wh*-phrases which are found in French in matrix interrogative sentences like (35a):

- (35) a. elle a rencontré qui?
'she has met whom?'

- b. * a-t elle rencontré qui?
'has-cl she met whom?'
who has she met?

To account for the grammaticality of (35a) Rizzi assumes that French displays the following process of *dynamic agreement*, according to which a *wh*-operator can transmit the [+*wh*] feature by agreement to the C° position:

(36) *Wh-Op* X° ----- *Wh-Op* X°[+*wh*]

Rizzi is therefore forced to distinguish the traditional notion of agreement relation conceived of as a static configuration (in which a specifier and a head each independently possess a specific feature) from the kind of *dynamic* agreement represented in (36), in which the specifier can endow the corresponding head position with the relevant feature specification; Rizzi proposes that this particular option can apply freely in French at the level of syntax or logical form. Consider (35a): in syntax the *wh*-criterion is not violated as clause (b) does not apply, since there is no head marked [+*wh*] (as shown by the absence of inversion of pronominal subject and inflected verb), and clause (a) does not apply either because the *wh*-element, being in argumental position, does not count as an operator on the basis of the above definition; in the covert component the *wh*-element can raise to Spec-CP, from where it can transmit the [+*wh*] feature to C° by dynamic agreement, thus satisfying the *wh*-criterion. Potentially problematic is the example in (35b), where the inversion of inflected verb and pronominal subject is interpretable as an effect of the raising of the verb itself to C°, while the corresponding specifier position is not occupied by an interrogative operator; such a structure, correctly excluded by the *wh*-criterion, is indeed ungrammatical in French, but, as we saw in the previous section, it's perfectly grammatical in *bellunese*⁹.

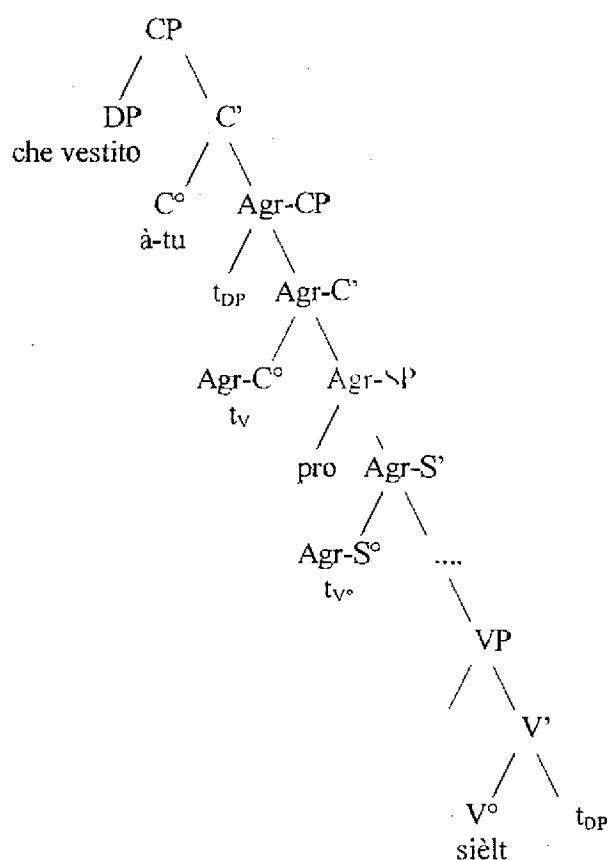
3.2. The *Wh-criterion* in *bellunese*

The theoretical assumptions which underlie the *wh*-criterion seem to be sufficient to account for those cases of *bellunese* in which the *wh*-phrase appears in initial position, hence, presumably, in Spec-CP. In matrix interrogatives we find in these dialects, as well as in numerous Northern Italian dialects, inversion between inflected verb and interrogative subject clitic, that is, the verb precedes the clitic which encli-

9 The absence of cases of *wh*-elements *in situ* in embedded contexts in French is explained by Rizzi simply postulating that the process of dynamic agreement is not active in this case.

ticizes onto it; this fact is usually interpreted as an effect of the raising of the inflected verb to C° from the head position of a functional agreement projection, perhaps through the head of an Agr-CP projection (where, as suggested by Poletto (1993b), interrogative subject clitics are generated) where it left-adjoins to the interrogative clitic; as a result we obtain the relevant structural configuration, as the *wh*-phrase, being in Spec-CP, counts as interrogative operator and is in an agreement relation with the inflected verb in C° , which is in turn endowed by hypothesis with the feature [+wh]. A sentence like (2) is then supposed to have the following structure:

(37)



The *wh*-phrase raises from the argumental position inside the VP (through the specifier position of the AgrCP projection) to Spec-CP, entering, as required by the *wh*-criterion, an agreement relation with the inflected auxiliary raised to C° (through the head Agr-C°) from the Agr-S° position (from where it licenses an argumental *pro* in Spec-Agr-SP).

On the other hand, the analysis proposed by Rizzi for the phenomenon of *wh-in situ* in French turns out to be inadequate to account for the corresponding phenomenon in *bellunese*, since here one finds realized exactly the structural configuration

corresponding to the one exemplified in (35b) (as is clear from the examples of *wh-in situ* reported in section 2), where the inversion of verb and subject clitic shows that the inflected verb has raised to C°; in these cases we therefore have a verbal head bearing the [+wh] feature in the relevant structural position but no operator in the corresponding specifier position, as the *wh*-element occupies the basic argumental position. We can conclude that the instances of *wh-in situ* found in *bellunese* seem to constitute a clear violation of Rizzi's *wh*-criterion.

Poletto (1993b) suggests a solution to the problem assuming that in fact in *bellunese* the presence of the inflected verb in C° can license in syntax a phonetically empty operator in Spec-CP by a process of dynamic agreement complementary to the one proposed by Rizzi for French: in this case the feature [+wh] would be transmitted not from the specifier to the head, but from the head (the inflected verb in C°) to the corresponding specifier already in syntax; the verbal inflection licenses a null operator coindexed with the *wh*-element, which occurs *in situ* in syntax and substitutes the operator at the level of logical form¹⁰; in this way, Poletto observes, the *wh*-criterion is violated neither by the head C° which contains the inflected verb marked [+wh] and agrees with the abstract operator in Spec-CP, nor by the *wh*-element *in situ* which, occupying an argumental position, does not count as an operator, according to Rizzi's definition¹¹. I

10 Poletto (1993b) bases her assumption on the existence in *mendrisiotto*, a Lombard dialect spoken in the Italian speaking part of Switzerland, of interrogative structures in which the *wh*-element *cusa* in initial position reduplicates in a sense a *wh*-element occurring in argumental position:

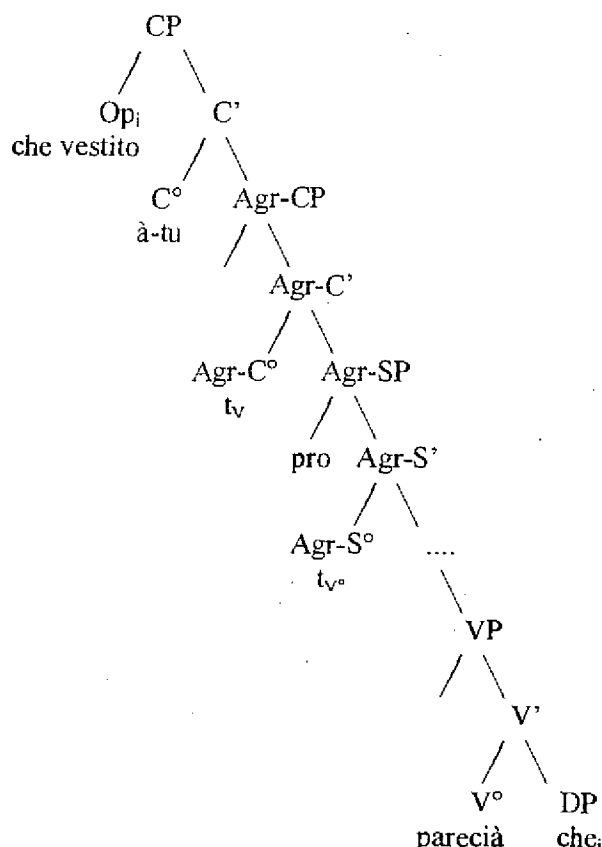
(i) *cusa ta-sa-vistissat cumè?*
 'what cl-cl-dress how?'
 how do you dress?

Poletto analyzes *cusa* as a phonetically realized *wh*-operator performing an expletive/resumptive function with respect to the phrase appearing *in situ* (on the possible uses of the *wh*-element *cusa* in *mendrisiotto* see Lurà (1987)); crucially, there are in this dialect three alternative possibilities of realizing the same *wh*-question, namely the canonical option with overt *wh*-movement, a version with two realizations of the *wh*-element (one in initial position and one *in situ*), and a version in which the *wh*-phrase is realized only *in situ*.

11 This hypothesis predicts, as Poletto points out, the possibility of having *wh*-elements *in situ* also in embedded interrogative sentences, where the head C° is marked with the feature [+wh] by selection from the matrix verb (hence, one would expect that also in this case the head C° could license an abstract operator in the embedded Spec-CP and consequently that a *wh*-element could occur in argumental position); but, as we have seen above, in *bellunese* there is always overt raising of the *wh*-phrase to the Spec-CP position of the embedded sentence, which seems to suggest that a null operator can be licensed

will assume here that Poletto's (1993b) proposal is essentially correct and that a sentence like (26a) has the following structure in overt syntax::

(38)



In the next section I will propose a formal requirement which I assume to be responsible for the distributional properties of the various kinds of nominal *wh*-phrases in the dialects we are considering.

3.3. *The relevance of the identification of the nominal head*

From the data reported in section 2 about the distribution of *wh*-phrases in matrix interrogative sentences in *bellunese* it follows rather clearly that the syntactic movement of such phrases to the initial position, that is, to an operator position, depends on a sufficient identification of the head of the phrase itself.

only by the presence of the inflected verb in C° but not, for instance, by a complementizer marked [+wh] by selection.

Rizzi (1991) notes that at the level of logical form the functional definition of *wh*-operator reported in (34) “is superseded by a stronger principle according to which all elements endowed with intrinsic quantificational force are operators ... and must be moved to an appropriate scope position” adding that “we need such a principle to enforce general LF movement (hence capture ECP effects) of *wh*-elements *in situ*” and that “this principle is perhaps to be restricted to non discourse-linked *wh*-phrases, along the lines of Pesetsky (1987)”; in my opinion this observation reveals the intuition underlying the definition of *wh*-operator itself and can be interpreted as stating that a *wh*-phrase raises in the syntax to a scope position, thus becoming a *wh*-operator, only if it possesses intrinsically sufficient quantificational force to bind a variable in its base position; differently, its movement is delayed until LF, according to the minimalist assumptions of Chomsky (1993) who views overt movement as a last resort to be adopted only when necessary to determine the convergence of a given syntactic derivation.

I will assume that, differently from other languages, like standard Italian, in which all *wh*-elements raise overtly to an operator position, the dialects considered here are characterized by more restrictive conditions on the syntactic movement of a *wh*-phrase and, consequently, on its qualification as an operator; I propose in particular that in *bellunese* the quantificational force of a *wh*-phrase is determined by the degree and the modality of identification of its nominal head: a head which is not intrinsically identified, that is, not sufficiently specified with respect to a given set of inherent features (essentially the features of gender, number and, possibly, [+/-*human*]) does not endow the maximal projection containing it, at least in syntax, with sufficient quantificational force to bind a variable from an operator position at the left periphery of the sentence; therefore the maximal projection does not move overtly; remaining in the base argumental position it counts, according to Rizzi’s definition, not as an operator but as an argument and in Spec-CP we have an abstract operator licensed by the presence of the inflected verb in C°. Following Cinque (1993b) and assuming further that, as in the other Romance languages, also in *bellunese* a (phonetically realized) nominal head raises from the N° position by at least two head positions, probably to acquire the grammatical features of gender and number from the corresponding functional projections, one could state the relevant generalization as follows: if the nominal head acquires derivationally identificational features which can be considered intrinsic, this endows the head itself with sufficient quantificational force to count as an operator binding a variable from Spec-CP; if, on the contrary, the non activation (or possibly the absence) of the functional projections responsible for these features imposes their contextual recovering, the nominal head, not having sufficient intrinsic quantificational force to count as an operator, remains *in situ*.

Moreover, I will adopt here some aspects of the hypothesis, put forth repeatedly in recent literature, of the existence of a structural parallelism between the sentential and the nominal domain and, in particular, between the two functional projections CP and DP; hence I assume that, in the sentential domain as well as in the nominal domain, the interrogative interpretation is determined by the presence of a *wh*-element in the highest functional specifier position¹². I also assume, with Kayne (1995), that, if not universally, then at least in most languages, the *wh*-word needs to overtly occupy the highest specifier position of the *wh*-phrase¹³ and that the realization, within the highest functional projection, of an agreement process between specifier and head with respect to the feature [+*wh*] (and the consequent transmission of this feature to the head) inhibits the realization in D° of any kind of determiner (which would be incompatible with such feature and with the interrogative interpretation determined by it) forcing the raising of the whole DP to Spec-CP to satisfy the *wh*-criterion. Longobardi (1994) argues that articleless nouns correspond to full DPs headed by an empty determiner, and that whenever the null D° position is not filled by the noun at LF (as we assume to be the case in *wh*-phrases) the DP is assigned a default existential interpretation; I am therefore forced to assume that the presence of the feature specification [+*wh*] in D° is sufficient to block the assignment of such an interpretation to the *wh*-phrase, merely suggesting that the transmission of this feature could achieve automatically the checking in D° of the abstract feature [-R(eferential)], which Longobardi assumes to be the only one compatible with a D° interpreted as being in a chain/CHAIN not containing any object referring expression; alternatively, we might assume, with Longobardi, that D° in these cases is exis-

12 Siloni (1995) proposes, for instance, that a DP whose specifier position is occupied by a *wh*-element and whose head D° is consequently specified by spec-head agreement as [+*wh*] functions as an operator and has therefore to move to a scope position, namely the specifier position of CP, in the course of the derivation; that the highest functional specifier position is relevant for the interpretation of the whole extended nominal projection is suggested independently also by Giusti (1993).

13 To account for the contrast in grammaticality between (i) and (ii)/(iii):

- (i) We know whose articles those are
- (ii) * We know articles by who(m) those are
- (iii) * I wonder people from what city the game is likely to attract

Kayne (1995) proposes the following condition:

- (iv) The *wh*-phrase in interrogatives must asymmetrically c-command the [+*wh*] head

He also notes that, under the assumption that the *wh*-element occupies the highest functional specifier position inside the *wh*-phrase, this condition is compatible with Chomsky's (1993) proposal, as the specifier of the specifier of a head is in the checking domain of that head.

tentially interpreted and, counting as a single-membered chain, meets the checking conditions for [-R] but, due to the operator nature of the feature [+wh], requires reference to a kind by N° (when this is specified) in order to provide its variable with a range

Under these assumptions the distribution of *wh*-phrases in *bellunese* has to be considered as a function of their internal structure; we will see in the next section whether and how this hypothesis can account exhaustively for their distributional properties.

4. The internal structure of nominal *wh*-phrases in *bellunese*

4.1. *Wh*-phrases with unambiguously identified head

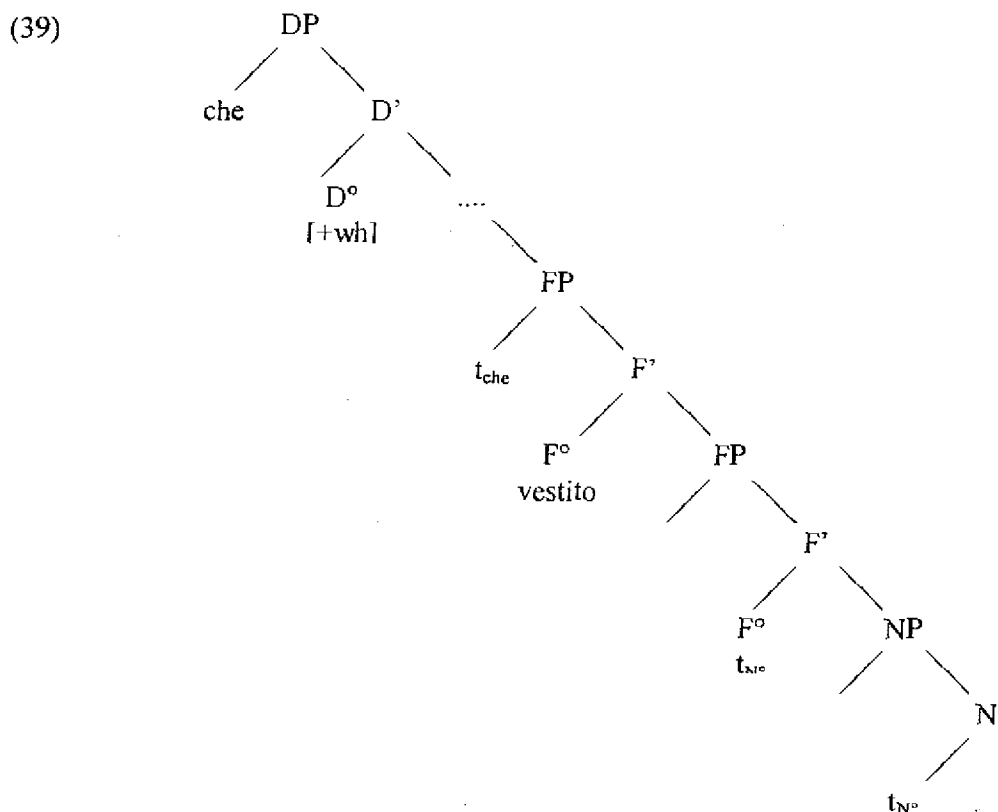
4.1.1. *Che* + head

The requirement concerning the identification of the nominal head proposed in the previous section is trivially met by the *wh*-phrases in (1)-(3) which are introduced by the *wh*-element *che* followed by a noun; in these cases the phonetically realized nominal head raises up to the second functional head position incorporating the features of gender and number and enters here an agreement relation with the *wh*-element *che* which I assume to occupy the specifier position of the same functional projection¹⁴ (the fact that the form *che* used in this case is invariable with respect to the features of gender and number shows that the overt realization of such features on the nominal head makes somehow superfluous their reduplication on the *wh*-element); *che* will eventually raise to Spec-DP¹⁵, transmitting in turn by spec-head agreement its own

14 The possible further raising of the noun to higher functional head positions inside an interrogative noun phrase is then to be correlated (following Cinque (1993), who links specific adjectival classes to each of the specifier positions of the nominal functional projections) to the speaker's intention of questioning an adjective belonging to the adjectival class connected to the specifier position corresponding to the functional head to which the noun raises; the examples relevant to test the correctness of this hypothesis belong to a stylistic level which is not found in the dialectal varieties considered here, but the Italian data seem to confirm it.

15 This assumption is compatible with Giusti's (1993) hypothesis that demonstratives, which are the non-interrogative counterpart of *che/quale* in a declarative sentence, are lexical specifiers that end up in the topmost functional specifier, overtly in some languages and covertly in all languages, because they pertain to the interpretation of the referential value of an extended noun phrase.

features to the D° position (which shares by transitivity the same features as the nominal head) determining the operator nature of the whole DP and its consequent raising to Spec-CP as required by the *wh*-criterion. The internal structure of the phrase *che vestito* in (2) is then the following:



As for the recourse to a cleft structure when the *che*+noun *wh*-phrase functions as questioned subject (as in (1)), a specific proposal will be put forth in the next section.

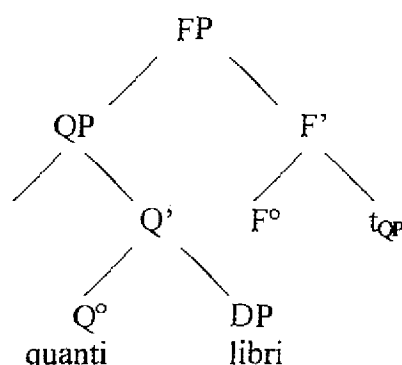
4.1.2. Quant + head

Consider now the kind of *wh*-phrase exemplified in (7)-(9): the *wh*-element *quant*, followed in these examples by a noun, constitutes conceivably the interrogative counterpart of the quantifier one finds in the corresponding declarative sentences; adopting Giusti's (1993) theory of quantifiers, according to which these elements are to be considered, at least in some cases, as lexical heads, it seems legitimate to assume that the *wh*-element *quant* has the categorial status of a heads; in particular it heads a lexical projection QP selecting as a complement a whole DP and

that to this QP, as well as to any other lexical projection, is associated, as proposed by Giusti, a functional projection inside whose specifier is determined the interpretation of the extended nominal projection.

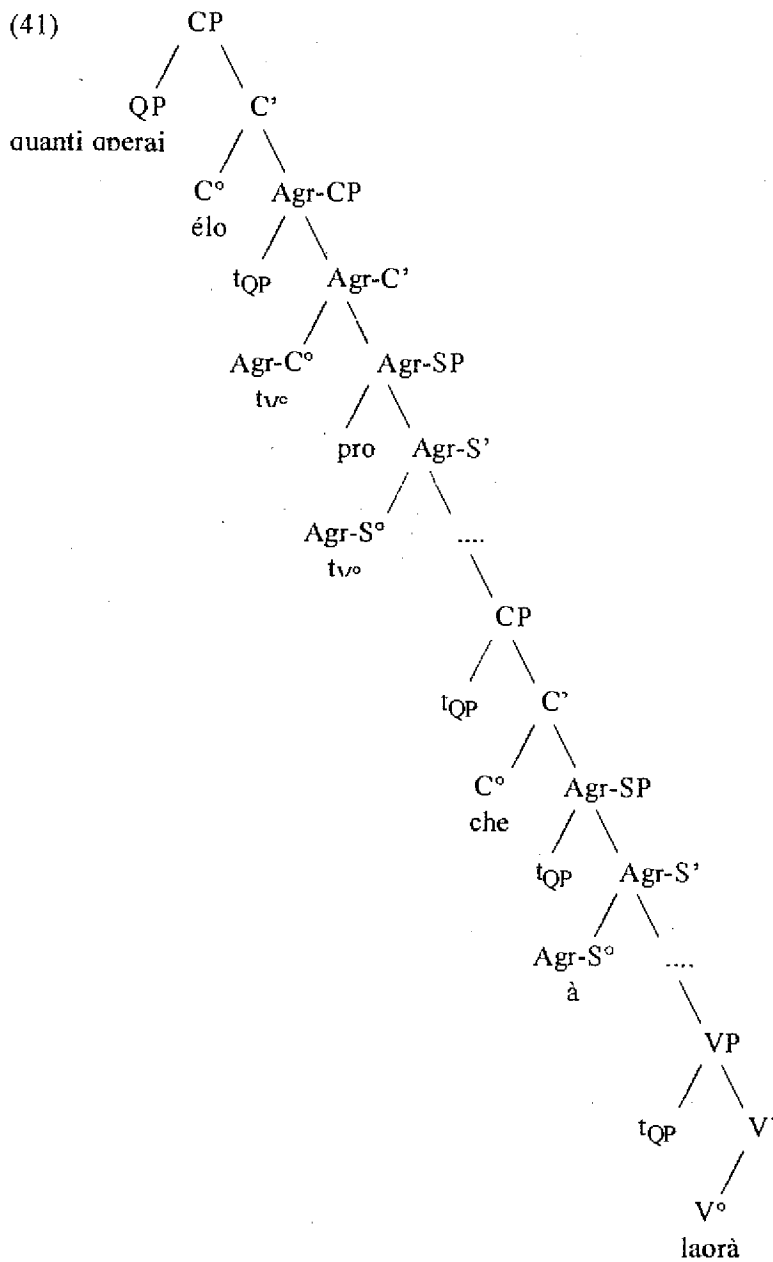
In this case there is complete sharing of gender and number features between the nominal head inside the complement DP and the quantificational head constituted by the *wh*-element; I propose that the necessity of checking overtly the [+*wh*] feature of the Q° head (determining its interpretation as operator) in the appropriate functional specifier position triggers the raising of the whole QP (with the DP complement inside it) to the specifier position of the functional projection associated to the QP itself, which triggers in turn the raising of the whole extended projection to Spec-CP to satisfy the *wh*-criterion. I assume that the phrase *quanti libri* in (8) has the following internal structure:

(40)



When the *wh*-phrase functions as subject (as in (7) or in (1)) the cleft structure (in (7a)) is clearly favoured; in order to account for the marginality of the simple interrogative structure (in (7b)) I will adopt an hypothesis formulated by Poletto (1993b) (to which we return below in greater detail) according to which a head C° marked with the feature [+*wh*] licenses obligatorily a *pro* in the subject position (that is, Spec-AgrP) that it governs; the presence of *pro* prevents the subject *wh*-phrase from raising to this position to get nominative case in an agreement relation with the inflected verb (which passes through the Agr-S° position in its raising to C°) so that we obtain a violation of the case theory; this can be eluded with an ergative verb (see (7c)) as in this case there exists the possibility for the subject to get case in the thematic position inside the VP, even without sharing of agreement features with the inflected verb, as it is generally the case in the Northern Italian dialects in the sentences with postverbal subject (the structure of a sentence like (7c) is then assumed to be analogous to the one represented in (37) above, with the *wh*-phrase in Spec-CP, the inflected verb in C° and the main verb inside the VP, the only difference consisting in the expletive, hence not argumental, nature of the *pro* occupying the subject

position). Resorting to a cleft structure when the *wh*-phrase is an unergative subject is then to be interpreted as a strategy to avoid a violation of the case filter by splitting the sentence into a biclausal structure formed by two complete CP projections, only the higher of which being marked as [+*wh*]; the structure of an example like (7a) is then the following:



The copular verb in the higher CP raises to the C° position marked [+wh] licensing an expletive *pro* in Spec-Agr-SP and entering a spec-head agreement relation with the *wh*-phrase, which in turn, starting from the thematic position of the external argument inside the lower VP, raises to Spec-Agr-SP of the lower CP to get case from the inflected auxiliary and moves eventually, through the lower Spec-CP, up to the higher Spec-CP position, as required by the *wh*-criterion.

Turning now to the examples in (12)-(13), we have noted above that in these cases the head of the *wh*-phrase, despite its being phonetically unrealized, maintains a semantic transparency owing to the subcategorization requirements of the verb and is unambiguously interpreted as having the features [+human] / [+plural] / ([+masculine]); the nominal complement of the quantifier is then represented by an empty category sufficiently identified as inherently specified for the relevant features and characterizable essentially as *pro*; this level of specification supplies the category, even if devoid of phonetic realization, with sufficient quantificational force; as a result we have here the same derivational process described above for a phrase with a realized head, which explains why in this case the *wh*-element appears only in initial position, that is, in Spec-CP. The stronger degree of agrammaticality of (12a) in comparison with (7b) is probably to be attributed to the fact that in the former the *wh*-phrase, beside being caseless, does not contain an empty category identifiable as *pro*, as the subject position where this category could be licensed in agreement with the inflected verb is not available, hence the occurrence of the *wh*-phrase in Spec-CP is not legitimate; differently, in the case of the cleft structure (in (12b)) the *wh*-phrase can receive case from the inflected verb of the embedded sentence which identifies also the *pro* as complement of *quanti*; this identification forces the phrase itself to raise, through the lower Spec-CP, to the higher Spec-CP position (which explains in turn the marginality of (12c) where the *wh*-phrase appears in postcopular position)¹⁶.

4.2. *Wh*-phrases with ambiguous identification of the nominal head

4.2.1. The notion of D(iscourse)-linking

Concerning the identification condition on the nominal head proposed above a particular problem is represented by the *wh*-elements *qual/quant* used pronominally (exemplified respectively in (4)-(6) and in (10)-(11)), where the phonetically unrealized

16 On the identification conditions and on the possible interpretations of the empty category constituting the complement of a quantifier in Italian see also Cardinaletti & Giusti (1991).

head is contextually identifiable owing to the presence of an antecedent in the discourse; the identification can take place in these cases with crucial reference to the linguistic context in which the interrogative sentence occurs as well as to extralinguistic factors. I will refer here to this kind of *wh*-phrases as *d-linked*, using in a slightly more restrictive way a term introduced by Pesetsky (1987), who analyzes some aspects of the syntactic behaviour of *wh*-phrases *in situ* in English. He proposes that the *wh*-phrases introduced by *which* occurring *in situ* in syntax, differently from the interrogative pronouns *who* and *what* occurring *in situ*, do not move even at the level of logical form and require therefore a process of scope assignment through *unselective binding* by an interrogative operator *Q*, hence dispensing with LF movement; the peculiarity of *which*-phrases consists in their being *discourse-linked*, that is, in their ability to refer to potential referents constituted by sets of elements that both the speaker and the hearer have in mind. According to Pesetsky these phrases, not counting as quantifiers/operators, can be interpreted also without movement (though nothing forbids their raising to an operator position), while non *d-linked wh*-phrases, being quantifiers, count as operators and as such have to move, at least in logical form, to an appropriate structural position to take scope¹⁷. The distinction between *d-linked* and non *d-linked wh*-phrases *in situ*, which the child cannot learn by experience, has to be reduced for Pesetsky to some UG principle.

The notion of *d-linking* proposed by Pesetsky (1987) has been subsumed by Cinque (1990a) under the notion of *referentiality* defined as "ability to refer to specific members of a set in the mind of the speaker or one preestablished in discourse"; the fact that *referentiality* implies *d-linking* is demonstrated according to Cinque by the possibility, for *d-linked wh*-phrases *in situ* (but crucially not for non *d-linked* ones) to establish a coreference relation with another element (such possibility being taken as a factor discriminating between referential and non referential constituents, as only the former can enter coreference relations)¹⁸.

17 Pesetsky notes then that in some Eastern European languages like Polish, Romanian and Czech non *d-linked wh*-phrases move overtly to an A'-position, while *d-linked* ones can remain *in situ*; he suggests that these languages show already in overt syntax the contrast that he assumes to take place at LF in English (and Japanese). For an analysis of the distributional contrast existing in Romanian between different kinds of *wh*-phrases and a possible correlation with their quantificational character see Dobrovie-Sorin (1990).

18 An extreme case of *d-linking* is represented by echo-questions, which have an intrinsically anaphoric character in that the reference of *wh*-phrases, which appear generally *in situ*, necessarily presupposes a linguistic context; Dumitrescu (1991d) links the lack of movement of *wh*-elements in echo-questions to their inherent *discourse-linked* nature which determines their interpretation without movement at the level of logical form and

As can be seen from the examples in (4)-(6) and in (10)-(11), this class of *wh*-phrases can occur in *bellunese* either in Spec-CP or *in situ*, which suggests that these varieties express overtly distributional contrasts between the two different kinds of *wh*-elements which in other languages show up only at the level of logical form. The fact that the relevant identificational features are not possessed inherently in these cases by the nominal head, but are on the contrary contextually recoverable, does not seem to affect in any way the informational efficacy of these interrogative sentences, which are, given the appropriate reference context, clearly interpretable; however, just in this peculiar modality of identification of the nominal head may lie the source of the ambiguous syntactic behaviour of these phrases, that is, their possibilities of occurrence in the sentence.

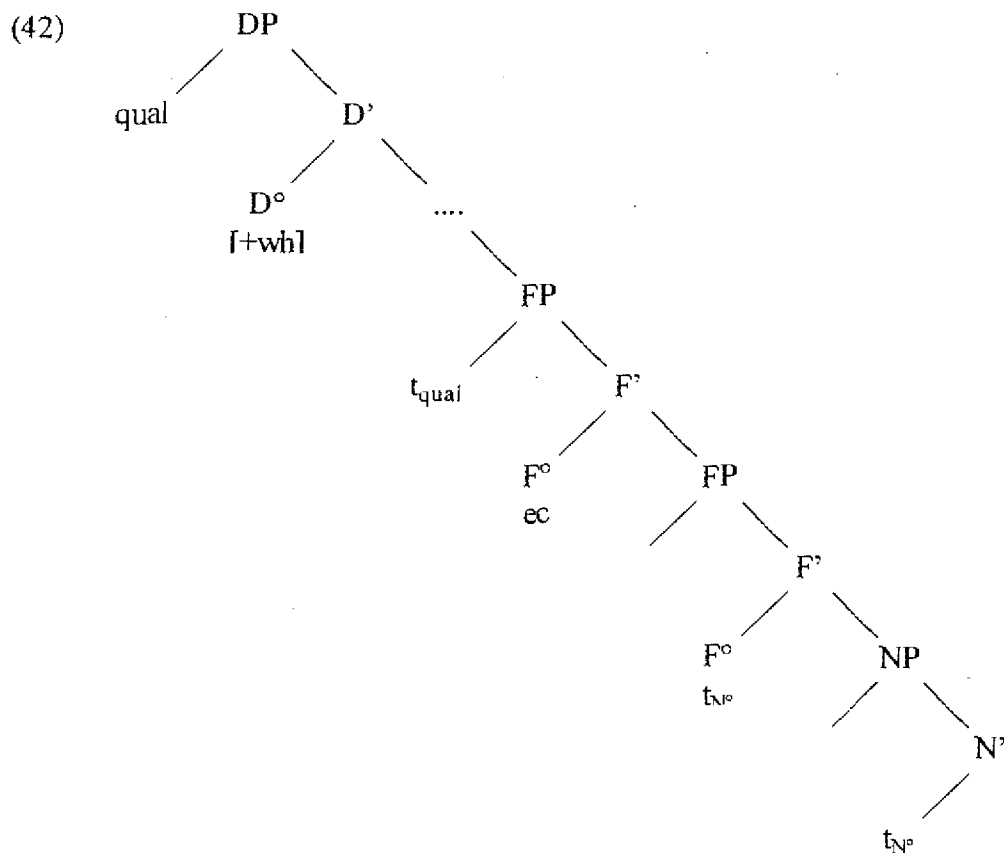
A notion like *contextual identification* seems to be actually hardly formalizable within a framework (like the *theory of principles and parameters*) in which pragmatic-(con)textual factors play, if any, an extremely marginal role and are anyhow unsatisfactorily integrated with other modules of the theory. I will propose an explicative solution to this problem which crucially relies on the minimalist perspective adopted by Chomsky (1993), who views every instance of syntactic movement as a last resort operation primarily triggered by the necessity of checking certain morphological features in order to let a given syntactic derivation converge; this new conception of movement seems to exclude a priori the possibility of having cases of (apparently) optional movement like the ones we are considering here; the conceptual necessity, inborn in this theoretical approach, to do completely away with optionality in syntax imposes in a sense the assignment of two different structural representations to the *wh*-phrase depending on the position of occurrence. That's what I will try to do in the next sections.

4.2.2. Qual

I'd like to propose that what distinguishes structurally the two instances of the *wh*-phrase is the different type of empty category which constitutes the nominal head. When there is overt movement to Spec-CP of the *wh*-element *qual*, the nominal head is intrinsically (that is, independently of any contextual reference) endowed with sufficient identificational features; these include the grammatical features of gender and number which are transmitted by spec-head agreement after the raising of the empty category to the appropriate functional head position, to *qual*, which I assume to occupy the cor-

through coindexation with a discourse operator (an *echo-operator*) which contains them in its scope.

responding functional specifier position; the fact that the noun is not phonetically realized determines in this case the realization of these features on the element *qual* (which is indeed inflectable both for gender and for number), which raises then to Spec-DP identifying the whole phrase as operator and triggering its overt raising to Spec-CP (the derivation is therefore completely parallel to the one proposed above for the phrases introduced by *che* followed by a realized nominal head). The *wh*-phrase in (4a)-(6a) is supposed to have the following internal structure:



When the *wh*-phrase occurs *in situ* (see (4b)-(6b)) there will be instead a contextual identification of the empty category constituting the nominal head, which I take to be essentially akin to the kind of empty category proposed by Rizzi (1992), Rizzi postulates the existence of a category characterized as empty referential expression occupying an argumental position and having the following features:

- (43) [-a -p -v] = null constant

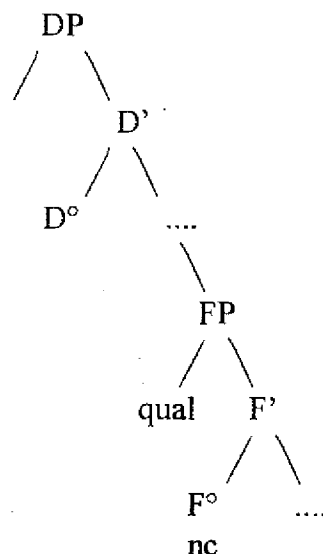
As to the identification requirement of this *null constant*, which Rizzi assumes to crucially lack a suitable c-commanding antecedent inside the sentence, he adopts the following version of the identification clause of the ECP:

- (44) ECP (Identification): *ec* [-p] must be chain-connected
to an antecedent...if it can

Rizzi proposes that, even if there is no adequate antecedent in the sentence, in order to satisfy this condition a null constant must “be chain connected to an A’ element...but by a non quantificational A’ element, typically a null operator...a non quantificational operator thus remains as the only possible identifier of the null constant”; the identification of such a category can ultimately be determined only through reference to an antecedent in the discourse in virtue of its being bound by a discourse identified null operator in Spec-CP, which as such possesses intrinsic features of third person.

In the cases we are investigating the empty category seems indeed to be characterizable with the combination of features reported in (43) and occupies an argumental position lacking an antecedent within the sentence. I assume therefore that when the *wh*-phrase does not move overtly and occurs in the basic argumental position, its head is constituted by a category of this type and that the contextual recovering of its identificational features blocks the overt raising of the *wh*-element *qual* from the corresponding specifier position to Spec-DP (this movement takes place possibly at the level of logical form to check the *wh*-feature of *qual* determining the interrogative interpretation of the phrase); moreover, the raising of the whole DP to Spec-CP is prevented by the presence in that position of an abstract operator whose function is precisely the contextual identification of the features of the empty category itself connecting it to an antecedent in the discourse. The interpretation of the sentence as a *wh*-question is determined by the raising of the inflected verb to C° , as shown by the inversion with the interrogative subject clitic, and by the *wh*-feature of *qual* (which I assume, as suggested above, to be checked at LF in the highest functional specifier position and to be eventually transmitted to D°). The internal structure of the *wh*-phrase in (4b)-(6b) in syntax is therefore the following:

(45)



As for the cases exemplified in (4) where *qual* functions as subject, one can note that, differently from the cases in (12) where the subject is constituted by *quanti*, the *wh*-phrase can in this case either precede or follow the copular verb; this fact follows directly from our analysis: while the quantifier *quanti* takes as a complement a whole maximal projection identifiable as *pro* in the appropriate structural configuration of agreement with the inflected verb (which triggers the raising of the *wh*-phrase to Spec-CP), the internal structure of the phrase which contains *qual* excludes the identification of any maximal projection as *pro*, as the empty category is in this case the head. The raising of this *wh*-phrase to Spec-AgrSP of the embedded CP is then uniquely triggered by the necessity of nominative case assignment, leaving free the possibility of a contextual identification of the empty category, in which case the phrase doesn't raise up to the higher Spec-CP (as in (4a)), but stops in the lower Spec-CP (giving rise to a sentence like (4b); I will return below in section 4.3.1 to a more detailed analysis of this instance of (partial) *wh*-movement).

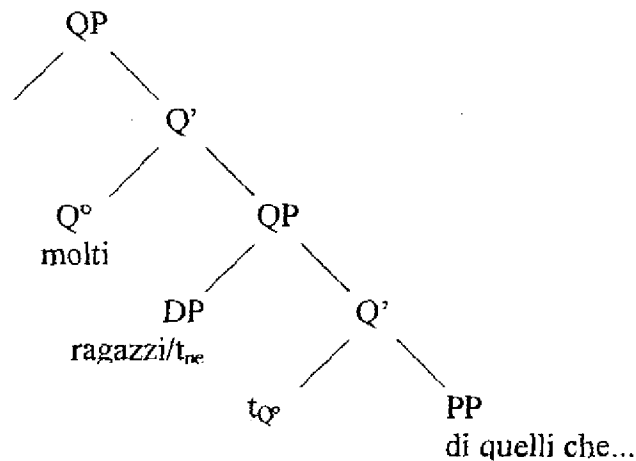
4.2.3. Quant

I propose to assign also to the *wh*-element *quant* when used pronominally an ambiguous syntactic status depending on the type of empty category which constitutes its complement (at least in the cases of *ne* pronominalisation exemplified in (10)-(11)).

I will adopt here the analysis proposed by Giusti (1993) (in fact a revision of Cardinaletti&Giusti (1990)) for the internal structure (represented in (47)) of the object DP in sentences like the following:

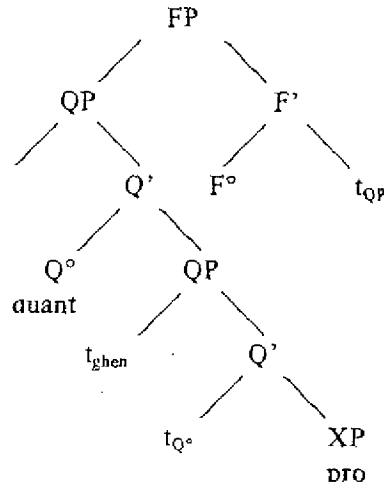
- (46) a. ho incontrato molti ragazzi di quelli che mi hai presentato
 'have met many boys of those that to me have introduced'
 I met many boys of those you introduced to me
- b. ne ho incontrati molti di quelli che mi hai presentato
 'of them have met many of those that to me have introduced'
 I met many of those you introduced to me

(47)



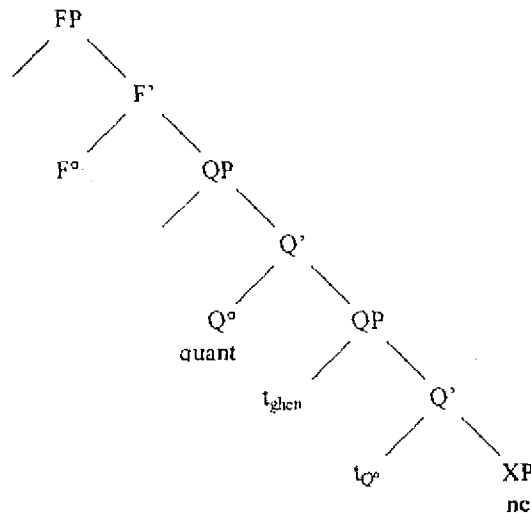
In this structure the quantifier *molti* is generated in the head Q° of the lower QP-shell and raises eventually to the immediately higher head; Cardinaletti & Giusti (1990) propose that the PP complement of the lower quantificational head defines the set of quantification, whereas the DP occupying the specifier position (or the trace of *ne* after its cliticisation onto the inflected verb) represents the predicate saturated by the quantifier itself; I will assume here that the set of quantification is present even when it has no phonetic realization, being determined in this case by a maximal nominal projection filled by an empty category on whose nature depends the overt movement of the whole extended projection to Spec-CP. When the *wh*-phrase occurs in initial position the maximal projection is assumed to be constituted by *pro*, endowed with intrinsic identificational features triggering the raising of the whole QP to the specifier of the higher functional projection, which determines in turn the further raising to Spec-CP to satisfy the *wh*-criterion; the internal structure of the *wh*-phrase in (10a) and (11a) is then supposed to be the following:

(48)



On the other hand, when the *wh*-phrase occurs in argumental position the empty category is instantiated instead by a null constant whose identification requires the presence of the abstract operator in Spec-CP thereby blocking syntactic *wh*-movement of the QP; this will probably raise to Spec-FP at LF to check the *wh*-feature of the quantificational head, determining the interrogative reading of the whole extended projection¹⁹; the internal structure of the *wh*-phrase in (10b) and (11b) in syntax will then be the following:

(49)



19 I will leave open here the question as to a possible covert raising to Spec-CP of *d*-linked *wh*-phrases (occurring *in situ* in syntax) in order to satisfy the *wh*-criterion at the level of logical form entering an agreement relation with the inflected verb in C° (I will return to this in note 24 below).

The hypothesis that in the case of overt *wh*-movement the empty category's identification takes place independently of any antecedent in the discourse (and can for example be identified through reference to pragmatic factors pertaining to the extralinguistic context) seems to be confirmed by the fact that only the version with the *wh*-phrase in initial position (hence only (10a) and (11a)), but not the alternative version without movement, can be used, given the appropriate pragmatic conditions and with the necessary intonation, as an exclamative.

4.3. *Wh*-phrases with insufficiently identified head

4.3.1. Subject *chi/che*

The *wh*-elements *chi/che* are only specified for the feature [+/- *human*], respectively as [+*human*] and [-*human*], whereas they lack any specification for the grammatical features of gender and number. I assume that these elements occupy one of the functional specifier positions inside the extended nominal projection and that their deficient specification for the relevant identificational features is not sufficient to adequately identify the empty category constituting the head of the phrase itself; as a result, on the basis of the proposed analysis, these *wh*-elements are expected not to be able to occur in the canonical position of *wh*-operators: indeed, when they function as subject of an unergative verb, they occupy the focus position of a cleft structure (see (14), (15) and (25a)), which I'm going to characterize now structurally in a more detailed way.

The use of cleft structures in *wh*-interrogatives (in order to question mainly a subject, but also other arguments) is a rather generalized phenomenon in the Northern Italian dialects (as well as in standard Italian), where a cleft structure is used, as noted by Poletto (1993b), as a normal *wh*-interrogative sentence in contexts where there is no particular presupposition (though it alternates freely with other interrogative structures; see for further details Poletto (1993b)); Poletto proposes for cleft interrogative structures a structural analysis according to which they consist of two complete CP projections: in the higher CP the C° position is occupied by the copula (and in some varieties also by a third person singular masculine interrogative subject clitic which licenses an expletive *pro* in the subject position Spec-AgrSP) while the corresponding specifier position is occupied by the *wh*-element, which is assumed to start from the argumental position inside the embedded CP and to raise through the

specifier position of the lower CP projection (in whose head C° we find the complementizer *che*) to the higher Spec-CP position²⁰.

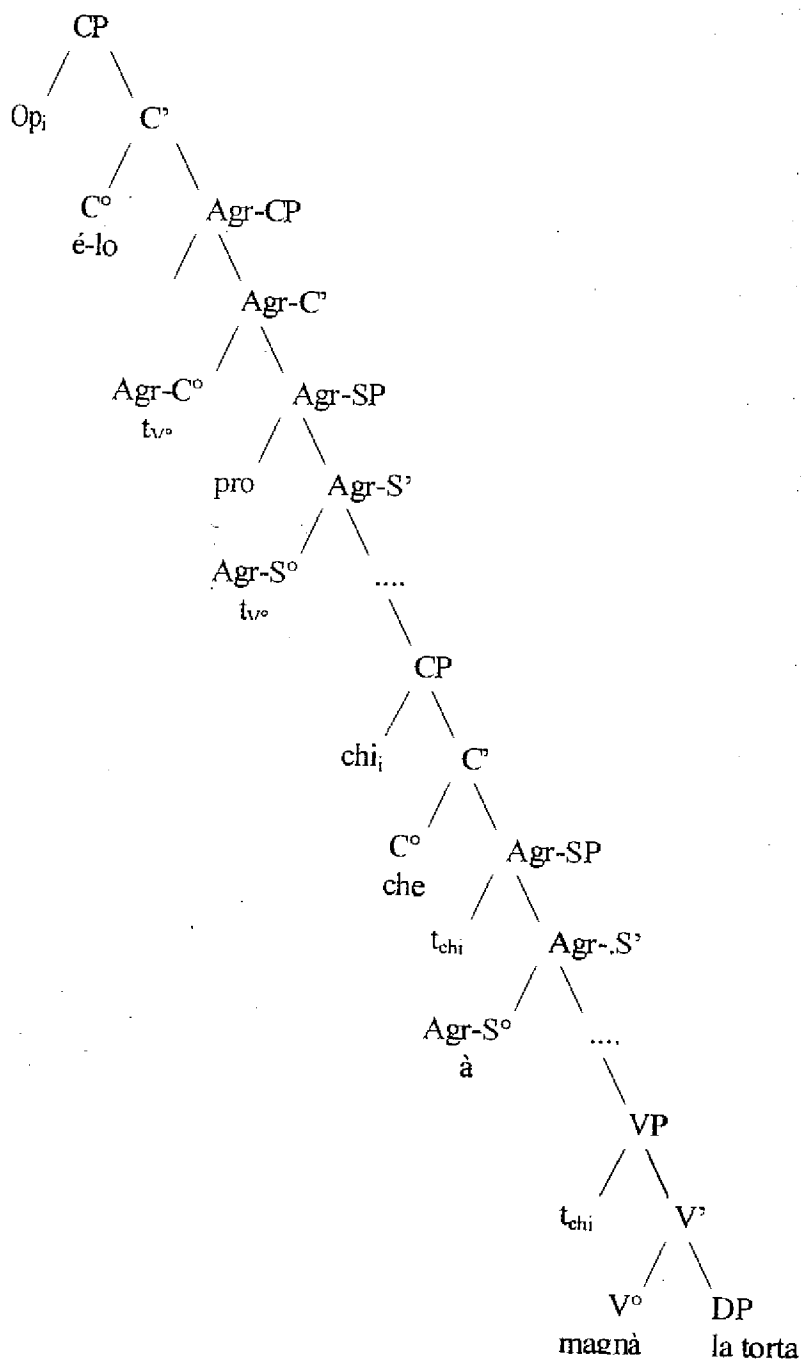
As anticipated in section 4.1.2, I assume with Poletto (1993b), that when a head C° is marked with the feature [+wh] it becomes a head legitimating *pro* and that when C° governs Agr *pro* is obligatorily realized in Spec-AgrP in the structural configuration of government (if there is an argumental *pro* it is identified by a subject clitic); under these assumptions there is no possibility for a subject *wh*-phrase to get nominative case in the canonical structural configuration of spec-head agreement with the inflected verb in a monoclausal interrogative structure, the Spec-AgrSP position being occupied by *pro*; hence, the resort to a cleft structure is to be ultimately interpreted as a strategy to avoid a violation of the case theory. In particular, I propose that the *wh*-element, starting from the basic argumental position inside the embedded CP, raises to Spec-AgrSP to get case in agreement relation with the inflected verb occupying the head Agr-S $^\circ$, thereby acquiring from the verbal inflection also the default grammatical features of third person singular, these features contribute to a further (albeit not yet complete, as the gender feature is still missing) identification of the empty category which constitutes the head of the phrase²¹; I take this partial default identification of the empty category to be the trigger of the further raising to the Spec-CP position of the embedded CP, which isn't a canonical operator position (such a position would be precluded to elements like *chi/che* whose internal structure in *bellunese* does not qualify them, at least overtly, as normal *wh*-operators); this is because the corresponding C° position, differently from the higher

20 Such a general diffusion of the cleft structure is ultimately to be traced back, as Poletto observes, to the general tendency of the Northern Italian dialects to reduce and gradually eliminate the movement of the inflected verb to C° ; in particular, Poletto (1993a) proposes that in interrogatives on the subject, the verb has to satisfy at the same time two different formal conditions which require the same structural configuration of spec-head agreement: the *wh*-criterion (which requires that the verb be in agreement relation with the *wh*-element raised to Spec-CP) and the visibility principle (which requires identificational features for an argumental subject *pro*); the insertion of a copular verb is therefore necessary to satisfy the *wh*-criterion inside the higher CP projection, allowing the inflected verb to remain in the head position of the Agr-SP projection inside the lower CP licensing an argumental *pro* in the corresponding specifier position.

21 The identificational features of subject *chi/che* are thus more specific than those of object *chi/che* (which occur in argumental position) but still less specific than those of a *wh*-element like *qual*, which is specified also for gender and, when functioning as subject, can either precede or follow the copula (as can be seen in the examples (4) in the text), while as object can occur either in initial position or *in situ* (see (5) and (6) in the text).

one has the feature [*wh*]: The structure I propose for a sentence like (14) is therefore the following:

(50)



As shown by the inversion with the interrogative subject clitic, the copula, an inflected verb, occupies, the C° position of the higher CP projection, licensing the abstract operator in its specifier and an expletive *pro* in the Spec-Agr-SP position²².

The possibility of having subject *chi in situ* with ergative verbs is probably to be explained assuming an alternative way of nominative case assignment in the basic thematic position, which has to be admitted independently for ergative subjects; however, since in this case no structural configuration of spec-head agreement between *chi* and the inflected verb is realized, there is no sharing of features either and the empty category inside the *wh*-element remains unidentified²³; hence, while (16a) is supposed to have a structure analogous to (50), for (16b) I propose the following structure in syntax:

22 That there exists in this case a sort of selectional relation (possibly of categorial nature) between the copular verb and the embedded CP is shown by the fact that the inflected verb of the complement CP must have the same verbal tense as the copula:

- (i) a. *é-lo chi che magna/à magnà la torta?*
'is-cl who that eats/has eaten the cake?'
who is eating/ate the cake?
b. *ère-lo chi che magnéa/avéa magnà la torta?*
'was-cl who that ate/had eaten the cake?'
who was eating/had eaten the cake?
c. *sarà-lo chi che magnarà/avarà magna la torta?*
'will be-cl who that will eat/will have eaten the cake?'
who will eat/will have eaten the cake?

Moreover, if the copula is inflected in a perfect form the embedded CP is infinitival:

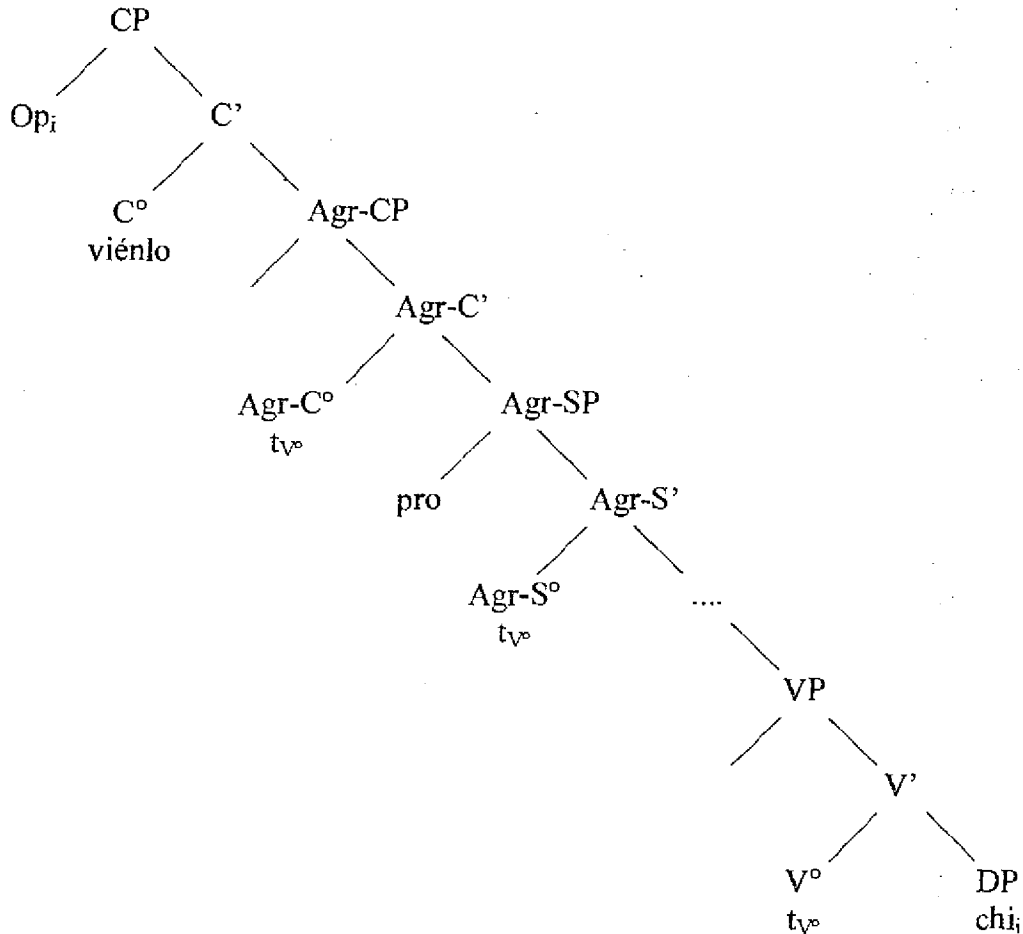
- (ii) *é-lo/ère-lo/sarà-lo stat chi a magnar la torta?*
'is-cl/was-cl/will be-cl been who to eat the cake?'
who ate/had eaten/will have eaten the cake?

23 It's not possible to assume a process of transmission of features, since as even in the case of a *yes/no* question with postverbal subject there is no sharing of features between the inflected verb and the subject:

- (i) *vien-lo i to amighi?*
'come-cl the your friends?'
are your friends coming

On the absence of agreement between verb and inverted subject in some Northern Italian dialects see also Brandi & Cordin (1989).

(51)



Here the main verb raises to C° licensing the abstract operator in Spec-CP, while the *wh*-element remains in the argumental position inside the VP receiving case from the verb itself. In compound tenses, which admit only the version *in situ* (see (17) and (25b)), one could think that, if a cleft structure is used, the possibility of raising the inflected auxiliary verb (which has the very same form *éto* as the copular verb utilized in the cleft) to the higher C° position (licensing the abstract operator) by head movement makes the insertion of another copular verb unnecessary; moreover, there would be no way of inserting the complementizer in the lower C°, occupied by the trace of the verb; the recourse to a biclausal structure, which implies the further raising both of the auxiliary verb and of *chi*, is anyway excluded on minimalist assumptions, as there is still the more economical possibility of case assignment *in situ* for the ergative subject. The example (17b) will then have in syntax a structure analogous to (51), the only difference consisting in the fact that C° is occupied by the auxiliary while the main verb remains in its base V° position.

4.3.2. Object *chi/che*

Also when functioning as nominal or prepositional objects these *wh*-elements, being uniquely specified for the feature [+/- *human*], are supposed to endow the nominal head with a deficient specification which blocks their raising to Spec-DP and consequently the raising of the whole DP (which does not have quantificational force sufficient to bind a variable) to the operator position Spec-CP; as suggested in section 3.2, this position is arguably occupied, at least in syntax, by an abstract interrogative operator coindexed with the *wh*-phrase which occurs in this case in the base argumental position²⁴. To the sentences in (18), (19b), (20b) and (26) I assign therefore a structure analogous to the one represented in (38) above.

Consider now the examples in (21), (22) and (27) where, as observed in section 2.1, the presence of negation requires a cleft structure in which the *wh*-element follows the copular verb. To explain this particular effect of negation we could follow Cinque (1990a), who observes that the presence of negation provides certain quantifiers with quantificational force, licensing their left dislocation, otherwise impossible; more generally, Cinque claims that the possibility of *amalgamating* with negation is decisive for a phrase to acquire quantificational force, given the intrinsically quantificational character of negation (for further details see Cinque (1990a)); similarly, we can reasonably expect that the *wh*-elements *chi/che*, not being inherently endowed with such force, can inherit it from negation, raising eventually to the focus position of a cleft structure (as I assume to be the case when they are subjects). An alternative solution to the problem relies on a recent proposal by Zanuttini (in preparation), who analyzes the compatibility of question operators with the verbal head and with the negative head in some Northern Italian dialects; Zanuttini proposes that *yes/no* question operators and *wh*-constituents have different requirements with respect to the head they can adjoin to: while both can adjoin to the projection of a finite verb in main sentences, only the former can adjoin also to the projection of negation; *wh*-operators (either lexically realized or abstract) can therefore adjoin to an inflected verb but not to negation, which can provide the adequate structure for adjunction of the operator only in the case of negative *yes/no* questions (see (52)), but not in the case of negative *wh*-questions (independently of the presence of inversion

²⁴ It's worth noting that, abstracting away from echo-questions, the strategy of contextual recovering of the identification features of the nominal head is in the normal case independently excluded with *chi/che* due to the absence of a presupposed linguistic context one can refer to.

between inflected verb and interrogative subject clitic, that is, of the raising of the verb to C°, as can be seen in (53)):

- (52) no-te-sé vegnest?
'not-cl-are come?'
didn't you come?
- (53) a. *no-te-à fat che?
'not-cl-have done what?'
b. *no-à-tu fat che?
'not-have-cl done what?'
what didn't you do?

Zanuttini concludes from this that *wh*-interrogatives have to meet the structural requirement which demands the presence of a head to license the adjunction of an XP and moreover, differently from *yes/no* questions, restrict the choice to the verbal head (which explains the ungrammaticality of (53) where negation is assumed to occupy the C° position providing (part of) the necessary head for the adjunction of the abstract *wh*-operator)²⁵. I will leave open here the choice between the two solutions, merely suggesting for (21), (22) and (27) a structure analogous to the one represented in (50) with the *wh*-element occupying the specifier position of the lower CP projection.

4.3.3 Cossa

We have seen above that this *wh*-element always appears in the initial position of an interrogative sentence, that is in the operator position Spec-CP. To explain this fact I propose that *cossa* is in fact a nominal head, generated as such in the position N° and identified (exactly as *che*) only by the feature [-*human*]; the phonetic realization of the element constituting the nominal head will be enough in this case, independently of its inherent feature specification, to endow the phrase with sufficient quantificational force to raise head by head up to D°, transmitting its own *wh*-feature

25 Also in *bellunese* non negative *yes/no* questions have inversion of verb and subject clitic, hence raising of the verb to C°, probably licensing a null operator in Spec-CP; adopting Rizzi's (1990) assumption that null operators are not specified for the feature [+/- *wh*] we are forced to postulate in the case of *wh*-elements *in situ* some device of checking by the *wh*-phrase of its own feature [+*wh*] on the null operator, possibly by coindexation or, alternatively, by covert raising to Spec-CP, hence substituting the abstract operator or adjoining to it (differently, the sentence would be interpreted as a *yes/no* question).

to this position and, by agreement, to Spec-DP as well²⁶; this will achieve the identification of the phrase as an operator forcing its raising to Spec-CP, as required by the *wh*-criterion.

The assumption that *cosa* must actually raise from N° to D° can account for a number of facts: firstly, that it never occurs *in situ*, as its overt movement activates the DP projection where the *wh*-feature has to be checked; secondly that, not occupying the N° position, it never has, at least in the modern varieties of *bellunese*, a referential use (differently for instance from Italian *cosa*, which can function both as noun and as interrogative element); thirdly, it can explain the semantic opacity this element may acquire in some cases when functioning as an interrogative operator: as we have seen in section 2.1, in *alpagoto*, *cosa* can indeed function as a sort of expletive operator whose meaning varies depending on the context of occurrence²⁷.

5. Conclusions

In this article I tried to provide an explanatorily adequate account of the distribution of nominal *wh*-phrases in matrix *wh*-questions in some Northern varieties of the Veneto dialect.

After presenting the relevant distributional properties I proposed that in these dialects the occurrence of a *wh*-phrase in initial or in argumental position depends on its internal structure, and more specifically on the degree of identification of its head. I argued that overt *wh*-movement to a sentence initial operator position is only available to those phrases whose head is either phonetically realized or intrinsically endowed with a feature specification sufficient to properly identify the empty category which constitutes it; I assumed, following some recent theoretical proposals, that the

26 Turano (1994) proposes that in Albanian the element *kush* (which can function as interrogative element, as negative polarity item or as bound morpheme) raises to D° in its interrogative use; she suggests that interrogative structures with *kush* are in fact focalized structures obeying the Focus Criterion proposed by Brody (1991)

27 It's interesting to note that this expletive use of *cosa* is limited to matrix contexts, which, together with the observation that *wh-in situ* (hence a null operator in Spec-CP) is found only in matrix interrogatives, leads to the conclusion that an expletive *wh*-element (be it null or phonetically realized) can be licensed only by the presence of the inflected verb in C°; for an alternative account of the distribution of *che* and *cosa* in the Northern Venetian varieties and of the corresponding *wh*-elements in French see Poletto (1992). The data reported in section 2.2 on the possibility of extraction of *wh*-phrases from an embedded declarative clause seem to be amenable to the theoretical assumptions proposed in accounting for the distribution of the various types of *wh*-phrases in unembedded questions.

highest functional specifier position of these nominal phrases is occupied already in syntax by the *wh*-element, which qualifies the whole extended projection as an operator, thus triggering its overt raising to Spec-CP, where it enters a spec-head agreement relation with the inflected verb raised to C^0 , as required by the *wh*-criterion.

I argued further that those *wh*-phrases whose head is either insufficiently specified for the relevant grammatical features or identified contextually acquiring its reference from an antecedent in the discourse do not undergo movement to Spec-CP (at least overtly); in this case, the deficient or non inherent identification of the nominal head does not supply the phrase with quantificational force sufficient to trigger the raising of the *wh*-element to the highest functional specifier, hence to qualify the phrase as operator, so that *wh*-movement can fail to take place; Spec-CP is supposed to be occupied in syntax by an abstract operator whose presence is licensed by the raising of the inflected verb to C^0 , thereby satisfying the *wh*-criterion owing to a process of dynamic agreement to the effect that the verbal head transmits its *wh*-feature to the corresponding specifier position.

References

- Benincà, P. & L. Vanelli (1982), "Appunti di sintassi veneta", in M. Cortelazzo (ed.), *Guida ai dialetti veneti IV*, CLEUP, Padova, pp. 7-38
- Brandi, L. & P. Cordin (1989), "Two Italian Dialects and the Null Subject Parameter", in O. Jaeggli & K. Safir (eds.), *The Null Subject Parameter*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 111-142
- Brody, M. (1991), "Economy, Earliness and LF-based Syntax", *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 3, pp. 25-32
- Cardinaletti, A. & G. Giusti (1991), "Partitive *ne* and the QP-Hypothesis. A Case Study", *University of Venice Working Papers in Linguistics* I.4
- Chomsky, N. (1993), "A Minimalist Program for Linguistic Theory", in K. Hale & S.J. Keyser (eds.), *The View from Building 20: Essays in Linguistics in Honor of Sylvain Bromberger*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., pp. 1-52
- Cinque, G. (1990a), *Types of A'-Dependencies*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Cinque, G. (1993b), "On the Evidence for Partial N Movement in the Romance DP", *University of Venice Working Papers in Linguistics* III.2, pp. 21-40
- Dobrovie-Sorin, C. (1990), "Clitic Doubling, Wh-Movement and Quantification in Romanian", *Linguistic Inquiry* 21, pp. 351-397

- Dumitrescu, D. (1991d), "Spanish Echo Questions and their Relevance for Current Syntactic Theory", *Southwest Journal of Linguistics* 10, pp. 42-65
- Giusti, G. (1993), *La sintassi dei determinanti*, Unipress, Padova
- Kayne, R.S. (1995), *The Antisymmetry of Syntax*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Longobardi, G. (1994), "Reference and Proper Names: a Theory of N-movement in Syntax and Logical Form", *Linguistic Inquiry* 25.4, pp. 609-665
- Lurà, F. (1987), *Il dialetto del mendrisiotto: descrizione sincronica e diacronica e confronto con l'italiano*, Edizioni Unione di Banche Svizzere, Chiasso, Mendrisio
- May, R. (1985), *Logical Form: Its Structure and Derivation*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Munaro, N. (forthcoming), "Proprietà distribuzionali degli elementi interrogativi in alcuni dialetti bellunesi", *Quaderni di lavoro dell'ASIS I*, C N R., Padova
- Pesetsky, D. (1987), "Wh-in-situ: Movement and Unselective Binding", in E.J. Reuland & A.G.B. ter Meulen (eds.), *The Representation of (in)definiteness*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., pp. 98-129
- Poletto, C. (1992), "On wh-words", manuscript, University of Venice
- Poletto, C. (1993a), "Subject Clitic/Verb Inversion in North-Eastern Italian Dialects", in A. Belletti (ed.), *Syntactic Theory and the Dialects of Italy*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino, pp. 204-251
- Poletto, C. (1993b), *La sintassi del soggetto nei dialetti italiani settentrionali*, Monografie dei quaderni patavini di linguistica 12, Unipress, Padova
- Rizzi, L. (1990b), *Relativized Minimality*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Rizzi, L. (1991), "Residual Verb Second and the Wh-Criterion", *Technical Reports in Formal and Computational Linguistics* 2, University of Geneva
- Rizzi, L. (1992), "Early Null Subjects & Root Null Subjects", *GenGenP* 0.1-2, pp. 102-114
- Siloni, T. (1995), "On Participial Relatives and Complementizer D^o: A Case Study in Hebrew and French", *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 13.3, pp. 445-487
- Turano, G. (1994), "Elementi wh e indefiniti in albanese", in G. Borgato (ed.), *Teoria del linguaggio e analisi linguistica*, Unipress, Padova, pp. 409-424

Zanuttini, R. (in preparation), "Negation and Clausal Structure. A comparative Study of Romance Language", manuscript, Georgetown University