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# The Diachronic Shift of Complement Clauses in Italian

—The Establishment of Complementizers in the Verbs *sembrare* and *parere*—

Takafumi UENO

## 1. Introduction

Ueno (2016) analyzes the diachronic shift of the finite complementizer *che* following verbs *sembrare* and *parere* in Italian and points out as follows:

(1) a. The verb *parere* is the only word in usage until Period V (1612-1840) and becomes a literary word in Modern Italian, whereas the use of the verb *sembrare* begins in period VI (1525-1612)<sup>1)</sup>.

b. The appearance of the formal subject and the raising predicate indicates the existence of the small clause (SC) structure:

[<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V</sub> [<sub>V</sub> V(-A)] ([<sub>PRN</sub> DAT]) [<sub>SC</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> *che*] [<sub>PRN</sub> *e'egli/el*]/[<sub>PRN</sub> *pro*]/[<sub>DP</sub> DP]]]].

c. C-omission scarcely appears in Old Italian and frequently occurs Renaissance in Italian. This syntactic structure is the unaccusative structure:

[<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V</sub> [<sub>V</sub> V(-A)] ([<sub>PP</sub> a NP]) [<sub>CP</sub> *che*]]]].

d. The focus-presupposition structure from Old Italian to Modern Italian shows that the focused element is mainly a subject in the complement clause (CC), but in Old Italian a predicate in the CC can also be the focus. The syntactic structure is the unaccusative structure:

[<sub>DP</sub> DP<sub>i</sub>] [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V</sub> [<sub>V</sub> V] ([<sub>PRN</sub> DAT]) [<sub>CP</sub> [<sub>C</sub> *che*] [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> t] [<sub>VP</sub> VP]]]]]]

This paper focuses on the structures of the CC following the verbs *sembrare* and *parere*. We quantitatively investigate diachronic corpora and analyze the shift of the structures. It will be found from this investigation how the complementizers develop and the syntactic structure changes.

The corpora, prior to 1861, are selectively based on geographical works written in the Tuscany dialect (Ueno (2016))<sup>2)</sup>. Concerning the corpora after 1861, we utilize the DiaCORIS Corpus and the CODIS Corpus, created by Università di Bologna.

## 2. The Raising Verbs *sembrare* and *parere*

Egerland & Cennamo (2010) point out that impersonal verbs like *sembrare* belong to the raising verb in Old as well as Modern Italian, since the subject of the subordinate proposition can also appear as a syntactical subject of the predicates.

- (2) a. **sembrava** *che i bambini* dormissero  
 seemed.3<sub>SG</sub> that the babies slept.3<sub>PL</sub>  
 "It seemed that the babies slept."

- b. *i bambini* **sembravano** dormire  
 the babies seemed.3<sub>PL</sub> to.sleep  
 "The babies seemed to sleep."

[Egerland & Cennamo (2010:828)]

The subject *i bambini* of the finite clause in (2a) emerges as the main clause in (2b). Ueno (2014) analyzes CCs like (2) as SC structures and proposes the derivation as shown in (3):

- (3) a. [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>PRN</sub> *pro*] [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V'</sub> [<sub>V</sub> **sembrava**] [<sub>SC</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> *che i bambini dormissero*] [<sub>PRN</sub> *pro*]]]]]]  
 ↑  
 b. [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> *i bambini*] [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V'</sub> [<sub>V</sub> **sembravano**] [<sub>SC</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> *i bambini*] [<sub>INF</sub> *dormire*]]]]]]  
 ↑

In (3a), which Moro (1997) calls "inverse copular sentences," the null subject *pro* in the predicate of the SC moves to the Spec of the TP, and *sembrava* which is the verb of the main clause, agrees with the feature of the CP (i.e. the third person singular), which is the subject of the SC. The fact that finite CCs derive from the SC is proven by the examples of the personal construction as in (4a) and the expletive subject as in (4b).

- (4) a. [<sub>DP</sub> *scrittori e poeti*] **pare** [<sub>SC</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> *che* abbiamo molte amanti] [<sub>DP</sub> *t*]]  
 writers and poets seems.3<sub>SG</sub> that have.3<sub>PL</sub> many lovers  
 "It seems that writers and poets have many lovers."

[VI ②]

- b. [<sub>PRN</sub> *e'*] **par** [<sub>SC</sub> [<sub>CP</sub> *che* tu sia morto] [<sub>PRN</sub> *t*]]  
 it seems.3<sub>SG</sub> that you are.2<sub>SG</sub> dead  
 "It seems that you are dead."

[II ④]

The subject *scrittori e poeti* in (4a) and the expletive *e'* in (4b), which are the predicates of the SC, move to the main clause, and each verb *parere* agrees with the features of the CP (i.e. the third person singular). The reason for positing that the finite CC is treated as the SC is that a Topic element isn't able to move across the complementizer *che* introducing a subordinate clause that occupies a head in the higher portion of CP as shown in (5)<sup>9</sup>.

- (5) [<sub>DP</sub> *scrittori e poeti*] **pare** [<sub>CP</sub> *che* [<sub>DP</sub> *t*] abbiamo molte amanti]]]]]]  
 ↑  
 ×

Moreover, since it's impossible that the expletive *e'* in (4b) becomes an element in the CP, it seems to be appropriate to consider it as a predicate in the CP. Thus, *pros*, DPs, and expletives appear in the predicate of the SC in the finite CC; they raise to the subject position of the main clause at a level of derivation.

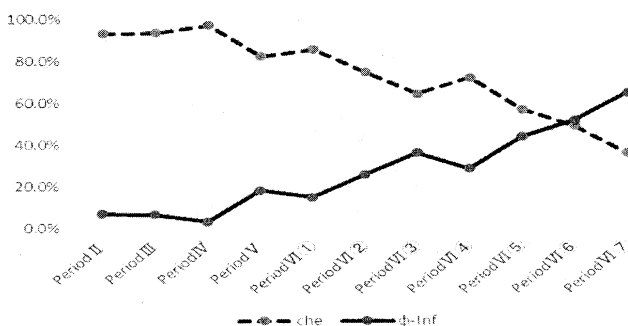
The non-finite CC as in (2b) is defined as a "canonical copular sentence" by Moro (1997). In (2b) *i bambini*, which is the subject of the SC, moves to the main clause, the main verb *sembrare* agrees with the features of the subject (i.e. the third person plural), and the sentence becomes a personal construction. The claim that the subject of the SC raises is confirmed by sentence (6), in which the gender and number of DP in the subject of the SC agrees with the past participle in the predicate of the SC.

(6) [TP [DP Venus<sub>s</sub>] non **pareva** [SC [DP t] [INF *essersi accorta*]]]  
 Venus not seemed.3sg to.be.clit. noticed  
 "Venus didn't seem to have noticed herself." [STAMPA\_3<sup>9</sup>]

In (6) the third-person-singular feature of *Venus* agrees with the past participle *accorta* in the predicate of the SC.

While the alternation between finite CCs (both personal and impersonal) and non-finite CCs comparatively freely occurs in Modern Italian, in Old Italian the frequency in use of each form differs depending on the degree of development of their structure. Graph 1 shows the distribution of use of the finite CC and the personal  $\phi$  non-finite CC. Personal non-finite CCs are sporadically found until Period IV, and the predominance of the finite complement clause is acknowledged. They gradually begin to be used from Period V, and they appear more than finite CCs in Period VI (1968-2001).

**Graph 1** The finite CC and the  $\phi$  non-finite CC (personal)



This indicates the establishment of the subject

raising of the SC (as shown in (2b)) from Period VI (1840) onward.

The impersonal  $\phi$  CC of the verbs *sembrare* and *parere*, on the other hand, appears as the unaccusative structure that has the *di*-Inf CC and the obligatory dative case (DAT) as an experiencer, as shown in (7).

(7) [TP [PRN *pro*] [VP [PRN *gli*] [V [v **sembrava**] [CP [c *di*] [TP [PRN *PRO*] [T [T]] [VP *sentire qualcosa*]]]]]]]  
 to.him seemed.3sg di to.feel something  
 "He seemed to feel something." [NARRAT\_2]

A PRO subject within the *di*-Inf CC in (7) is controlled by the experiencer as a dative case. Such an unaccusative structure with the *di*-Inf CC, however, doesn't develop in Old Italian. Instead, it would be possible to consider that an impersonal construction derives from the form that a *pro* subject in the SC raises, as illustrated in (8).

(8) [TP [PRN *pro*] [VP [PP A Salabaetto] [V [v **pareva**] [SC [PRN *pro*] [INF *essere in paradiso*]]]]]  
 ↑  
 to Salabaetto                      seemed.3SG                      to.be    in paradise  
 "Salabaetto seemed to be in Paradise." [II ④]

The non-finite CC of (8) forms the SC structure comprised of the subject *pro* and the predicate *essere in paradiso*, and the subject *pro* of the SC raises to the Spec of the TP. Some evidence that these sentences derive from the SC structure comes from the phenomenon of the subject agreement with the predicate in the SC.

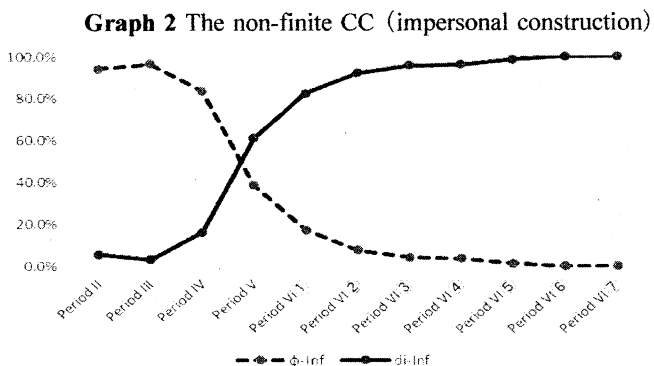
(9) a. *mi* **parrebbe** [SC [PRN *pro*] [INF *esser certa* che in parte m'avresti per iscusata]]  
 to.me seems.3SG                      to.be certain.FSG that in part mi-have.2SG for excuse  
 "It would seem certain to me that you would partly forgive me." [II ④]

b. **par** *loro* [SC [PRN *pro*] [INF *esser degni* d'essere reveriti e careggiati dalle loro donne]]  
 seems.3SG to.them                      to.be worthy.MPL di-to.be revered and caressed by-the their women  
 "They seem worthy of being revered and caressed by their women." [II ④]

The adjectives in the predicate of the SC agree with the gender and number of the dative case, a Sense Subject: the dative *mi* of (9a) with feminine and singular features agrees with the adjective *certa*, and the dative *loro* of (9b), which is masculine and plural, agrees with the adjective *degni*. Thus, the dative case in this structure controls *pro* and obligately emerges.

While impersonal constructions that use the complementizer *di* are typical in Modern Italian, constructions that use the  $\phi$ -Inf are commonly found in Old Italian. Graph 2 illustrates the shift of these impersonal constructions.

It shows that the *di* complementizer is not established until Period IV when the SC with the raising *pro* is the only impersonal construction. The *di* complementizer becomes further established in Period V



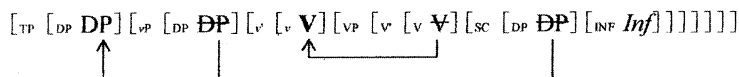
as the SC declines. In Modern Italian, *di*-Inf CCs are the sole impersonal construction<sup>5)</sup>.

To summarize this section, with regard to the structure and diachronic shift of the finite/non-finite CC, the following can be pointed out:

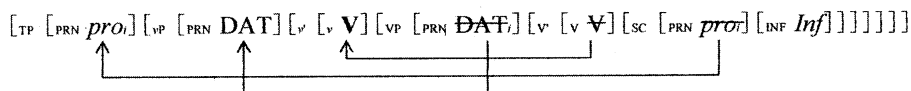
(10) i) the finite CC (personal/impersonal) coexists with the non-finite CC (personal) in Modern Italian:

[TP [PRN/DP *pro*/DP] [VP [PRN/DP *pro*/DP] [V [V<sup>6)</sup>] [VP [V [V V] [SC [CP *che*...] [PRN/DP *pro*/DP]]]]]]]]

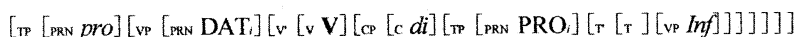
ii) the  $\varnothing$  non-finite CC (personal) frequently begins to be used in Period V, and predominates over the finite CC in Modern Italian:



iii) the  $\varnothing$  non-finite CC (impersonal) is the sole structure until Period IV, and after that is replaced by the *di* non-finite CC:



iv) the *di* non-finite CC (impersonal) develops as the unaccusative structure in Period V, and as the sole one in Modern Italian:



From the above, the whole CC derives from the SC structure until Period V. After Period V, the unaccusative structure is used in the impersonal construction with a developing *di* complementizer. From this it can be posited that the impersonal finite clause as shown in (10i) derives from the unaccusative structure as in (11) below:

(11)  $[_{TP} [_{PRN} pro] [_{VP} ([_{PRN} DAT]) [_{V'} [_{V'} V] [_{CP} [_{C} che] [_{TP} ]]]]]]]$

Furthermore, it can be pointed out that the  $\varnothing$  complementizer directly following *sembrare* and *parere* isn't established even in Modern Italian.

### 3. Unergative Adjectives and Unaccusative Adjectives

The verbs *sembrare* and *parere* have the impersonal non-finite CC as in (12) in addition to the structures shown in section 2.

- (12) a. mi **sembrava** così **brutto** non *riuscire* a far comprendere al proprio consorte  
to.me seemed.3<sub>sg</sub> so ugly not to.succeed to make to.understand to-the own consort  
"It seemed so terrible that I couldn't succeed in making my own consort understand." [NARRAT\_2]
- b. a Londra **sembra** impossibile *andare* a teatro  
at London seems.3<sub>sg</sub> impossible to.go to theater  
"It seems impossible to got to the theater in London." [MISCEL\_1]

Concerning adjectives in the sequence <*essere* + Adjectives>, Ueno (2017) proposes that adjectives which syntactically appear in the unaccusative structure are unaccusative adjectives and those in the unergative structure are unergative adjectives, and that sentence (12) derives from each different structure, as shown in (13).

(13) a.  $[_{TP} [_{PRN} pro] [_{VP} [_{PRN} mi] [_{V'} [_{V'} sembrava] [_{V'} [_{AP} \text{così brutto}] [_{VP} [_{PRN} mi] [_{V'} [_{V'} sembrava] [_{SC} [_{INF} \text{non riuscire} \dots] [_{AP} \text{così brutto}]]]]]]]]]]$

b.  $[_{TP} \text{a Londra} [_{PRN} pro] [_{VP} [_{V'} [_{V'} sembra] [_{AP} \text{impossibile}] [_{CP} [_{C} \varnothing] [_{TP} [_{T'} [_{T'} ] [_{VP} \text{andare a teatro}]]]]]]]]]]$

The adjective *brutto* of (13a) is an unergative adjective that lies within the predicate of the SC and moves to the head of the vP; the empty category *pro* in the VP emerges in the Spec of the TP of the main clause; (13a) forms the unergative structure and the impersonal construction as a whole. The adjective *impossibile* of (13b) is an unaccusative adjective that is immediately followed by the  $\varnothing$  complementizer and the infinitive *andare*; (13b) constitutes the unaccusative structure and impersonal construction. The structure with unaccusative adjectives is the same as structures with the verb *importare* that derives from the unaccusative structure, as shown in (14).

- (14) [TP [PRN *pro*] [VP [V' [V non importa] [CP [C  $\varnothing$ ] [TP [T ] [VP *saperlo*]]]]]]]  
 not matters.3sg to.know.it [PRACC\_4]  
 "It doesn't matter if you know it."

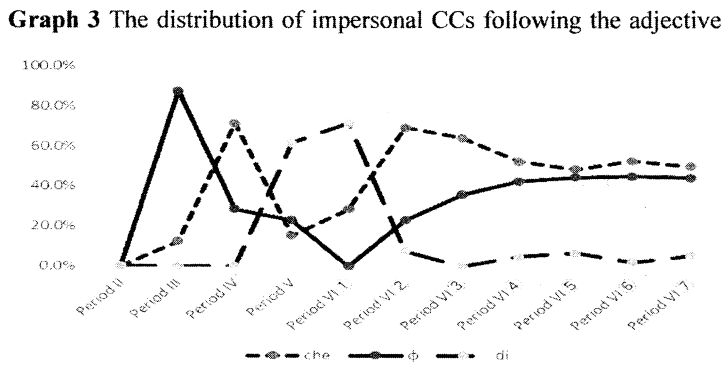
The same is true of impersonal finite CCs as well as non-finite CCs in that there is a distinction between unergatives and unaccusatives.

- (15) a. gli **sembra giusto** *che* ci abbiano cacciato dalla Libia  
 to.him seems.3sg right that to.us have.3pl thrown from-the Libya [VI ⑥]  
 "It seems right to him that they have thrown us out of Libya."  
 b. a tutti **sembrava chiaro** *che* la Chiesa cattolica non era più la stessa  
 to everybody seemed.3sg clear that the Church Catholic not was more the same [STAMPA\_3]  
 "It seemed clear to everybody that the Catholic Church wasn't any longer the same."

The sentences in (15) each derive from the structures in (16)<sup>79</sup>.

- (16) a. [TP [PRN *pro*] [VP [PRN *gli*] [V' [V **sembra**] [V' [AP *giusto*] [VP [PRN *gli*] [V' [V **sembra**] [SC [CP *che*...] [AP *giusto*]]]]]]]]]]]  
 b. [TP [PRN *pro*] [VP [PP *a tutti*] [V' [V **sembrava**] [AP *chiaro*] [CP [C *che*] [TP *la Chiesa cattolica*...]]]]]]]

The diachronic distribution of use of such impersonal CCs is shown in Graph 3. The *di* CC is predominantly used during Period V and VI



(1840) on behalf of the finite CC and the  $\varnothing$  CC which are formed from the SC structure. After that the  $\varnothing$  CC is reestablished as a non-definite CC in Period VI ② (1861-1900). It can be said that the establishment of the impersonal  $\varnothing$  CC relates to the development of the complementizer  $\varnothing$ . After this period, the impersonal *di* CC is only used occasionally as an idiomatic expression, as shown in (17), and as Ueno (2017) points out, the

accusative structure with the complementizer  $\varphi$  is established in Modern Italian<sup>8)</sup>.

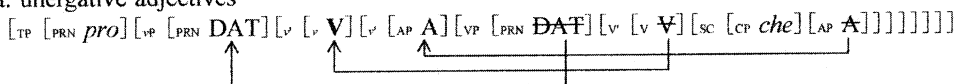
- (17) non mi **sembra** vero *di* essere libero  
 not to.me seem<sub>3sg</sub> true *di* to.be free  
 "It doesn't seem true that I am free."

[VI ⑥]

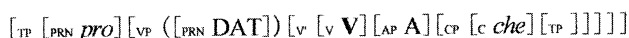
In summary, with regard to CCs of *sembrare* and *parere* being followed by the adjective, the following can be pointed out:

- (18) i) the finite CC (impersonal) coexists with the  $\varphi$  non-finite CC (impersonal) in Modern Italian:

a. unergative adjectives

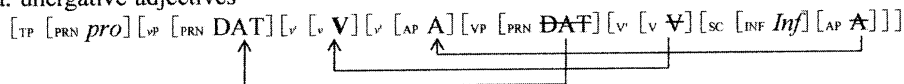


b. unaccusative adjectives



- ii) the  $\varphi$  non-finite CC (impersonal) replaces the *di* non-finite CC in Period VI:

a. unergative adjectives



b. unaccusative adjectives



- iii) the *di* non-finite CC (impersonal) is used only in Period V and as an idiomatic expression in Modern Italian:



Our discussion here leads us to the conclusion that CCs following unergative adjectives derive from the SC structure, and those following unaccusative adjectives derive from the unaccusative structure. Furthermore, it can be pointed out that the complementizer  $\varphi$  develops in Period VI.

#### 4. Conclusion

As argued, this paper quantitatively investigated diachronic corpora and analyzed how the structure of CCs following the verbs *sembrare* and *parere* shifts. It is roughly divided into two types of structures with the CC: the structure of simple raising verbs which immediately follow CCs (V-CC) and of adjectives being followed by CCs (V-A-CC). Each structure, moreover, has both personal and impersonal constructions. There are three forms appearing in the first position of these CCs, the complementizer *che* (*che*), the complementizer  $\varphi$  or the infinitival constituent ( $\varphi$ -Inf), and the complementizer *di* (*di*-Inf). From a diachronic perspective, the shift of these structures is shown below:



**Table 1** The diachronic shift of the structure

Structure	V-CC					V-A-CC		
	Personal		Impersonal			Impersonal		
CC	<i>che</i>	$\varphi$ -Inf	<i>che</i>	$\varphi$ -Inf	<i>di</i> -Inf	<i>che</i>	$\varphi$ -Inf	<i>di</i> -Inf
Derivation	SCS	SCS	SCS → UaS	SCS	UaS	SCS	UaS	UaS
Period II	↓	↓	↓	⋮		↓		
Period III								
Period IV								
Period V					↓			⋮
Period VI	↓	↓	↓		↓	↓		

The finite *che* CC remains in all structures in Modern Italian<sup>9)</sup>. It derives from the SC structure (SCS), with the exception that the impersonal V-CC structure derives from the unaccusative structure (UaS) (probably since Period IV or V), when the predicate of the SC is the empty category *pro*. The fact that the personal non-finite  $\varphi$ -Inf CC also derives from the SC structure indicates that personal constructions in Modern Italian are generated from the SC structure. The impersonal  $\varphi$ -Inf CC of the structure V-CC which derived from the SC declines at Period V. This means that in the structure V-CC the complementizer  $\varphi$  doesn't develop, but is established in the structure V-A-CC in the case that the adjective is unaccusative. The same can be said about the verb *essere* (Ueno (2017)). It can be said that the complementizer  $\varphi$  develops for unaccusative adjectives, not for the CC of verbs. The impersonal *di*-Inf CC of the structure V-CC which derives from the unaccusative structure has been the sole form since Period V, including the period of the establishment of the complementizer *di*, though it didn't succeed in the structure V-A-CC. Concerning the non-finite CC in Modern Italian, there is a clear-cut distribution between personal constructions for  $\varphi$ -Inf which use the SC structure and impersonal constructions for *di*-Inf which use the unaccusative structure.

**Notes**

\*I am grateful to Lynn Anne Cooper for stylistic improvements. All remaining errors are my own.

- 1) This can refer to both finite clauses and non-finite clauses.
- 2) Cf. Ueno (2016:2) in detail.
- 3) As shown in Benicà (2006), there are two kinds of Topic in Italian: the "Hanging Topic" (HT) which is in the Frame field and "Clitic Left Dislocation" (LD) in the Top field. HTs can precede the complementizer *che*, necessarily requiring a resumptive pronoun as shown in (i). In contrast, LD topics cannot precede it as shown in (5).

(i) Perdipiede, mi pare *che tu stia* esagerando



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