Postverbal subjects in old Italo-Romance

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In the V2 syntax of old Italo-Romance, subjects can be both preverbal and postverbal in either topical or focal function, except for inaccusative sentence-focus structures, where they are consistently postverbal. The VS order of presentational Foci is found also in classical and late Latin and in modern Italo-Romance, suggesting that undergoer subjects are invariably postverbal over time. Since we deal with the diamesic dimension of early written texts, we capture the non-canonical status of postverbal subjects in the co-text of the written domain. In the sentence-focus structures of some northern vernaculars, we document the emergence of an expletive form, which spells out anaphoric agreement with an implicit spatio-temporal Topic. Interestingly, in the co-text of the written domain this Topic recurrently surfaces in the form of spatio-temporal adverbials, which provide the logodeictic coordinates in which all-new information sentences are embedded in narratives.

1.   *Introduction: Are postverbal subjects non canonical in old Italo-Romance?*

In this paper we examine postverbal subjects in old Italo-Romance. We will discuss their 'non-canonical' status later, as we first ought to point out that, in the V2 syntax of the medieval vernaculars under consideration, the VS order is not exclusively restricted to marked or specialized constructions. This is particularly evident in predications with unaccusative verbs, where the subject can occur in the postverbal position in either focal or topical function[1].

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[1] In a well-established line of research, the early Romance varieties are claimed to have been characterized by a 'verb second' (V2) syntax. For Romance in general, see Benincà (1984; 1995; 2006), Salvi (2001; 2004; 2016: 997-1012), Ledgeway (2011: 405-409; 2012: 140-180). For old Italian, i.e. Tuscan, see Vanelli (1986; 1999), Fesenmeier (2003), Poletto (2006; 2014), Benincà & Poletto (2010: 28-75); for French, see Adams (1987), Vance (1997), Labelle (2007); for Spanish and Iberic varieties, see Salvi (1990), Fontana (1993), Sitaridou (2011); for Portuguese, see Ribeiro (1995), Fiéis (2002). With regards to Romanian, the available texts do not seem to be characterized by a V2 syntax, although this may be due to their relatively late chronology (see Alboiu *et al.* 2014, Nicolae & Niculescu 2015, Hill & Alboiu 2016). Finally, we should point out that most studies on early Italo-Romance focus on Tuscan (see, for example, Salvi & Renzi 2010),

(1) old Tuscan
  a. *venne   un   matto   e   disse   loro…*
      come.PST.3SG   a   crazy (man) and   tell.PST.3SG to-them
      'There came a crazy man and told them…' (*Novellino*, XXVIII)
  b. *venne   il   beato   san   Gregorio   papa…*
      come.PST.3SG   the blessed saint Gregor   pope
      'There came the blessed saint Gregor pope…' (*Novellino*, LXIX)
  c. *venne   il   sire a doneiare e   domandò…*
      come.PST.3SG   the sir to court.INF and ask.PST.3SG
      'The sir came to court (the women) and asked…' (*Novellino*, LXI)

In (1a), *un matto* 'a crazy man' is introduced into discourse for the first time, as signalled by the indefinite article *un,* and is thus part of a sentence-focus structure. Likewise, the subject referent of (1b), although definite and probably known to the reader of the time, is nowhere mentioned in the tale, except occurring in this all-new information sentence. By contrast, in (1c) *il sire* 'the sir' is a referent already introduced into discourse, and is here repeated after previous occurrences, which are lexically identical throughout the text, i.e. reference to *il sire* is not understood or rephrased, but is restated, thus bearing topical continuity[2]. In this respect, the subject *il sire* is a Referential Topic, i.e. an element of discourse that is fully accessible, contextually given, and anaphorically linked with topics previously introduced into the discourse (Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007, Cruschina 2011: 19). Thus, the sentence in (1c) is an unmarked predicate-focus structure with a an established topical subject.

The examples in (1) shows that subjects that are within sentential Focus (1a-b) are postverbal, but so are subjects expressing a Continuing/Referential Topic (1c) (see Benincà 2010: 41-42).

Focal and topical subjects can occur also in preverbal position, but under different pragmatic conditions, as shown below. To capture the discourse function of the subject, the examples are given in context.

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although there are some exceptions (see Poletto 1995 for the north-east varieties, Ledgeway 2007; 2008; 2009 for Neapolitan, Wolfe 2014 for Sicilian (and Sardinian), Ciconte 2018 for a comparative analysis of Italo-Romance varieties).

[2] After being introduced as the main character of the tale, *il sire* occurs repeatedly: *et havvi un sire che si chiama messer Ruberto* […]. *Il sire lo spiò; fecelo ammazzare* […]. *Dopo il mangiare venne il sire a doneiare e domandò* […]. *Allora rispuose il sire* […] 'And there is a sir called lord Roberto […]. The sir spied on him; (the sir) made him killed […]. After dining, the sir came to court (the women) and asked […]. Then the sir replied […] (*Novellino*, LXI).

(2) old Tuscan

a. *Polinicies* […] *arrivò*   *nella*   *città d'Argis* […]. *E*   *chosì* *arrivato*
    Polynices   arrive.PST.3SG in-the city of-Argos   and thus   arrived.M.SG
    e   *stando*   *sotto*   *un*   *picciolo*   *coperto di tetto,*   *che* *pioveva,*   *e*
    and standing under a   small   cover of roof   that rain.PST.3SG and
    un   *chavaliere*   *ch'aveva*   *nome*   *Tideo*   *arrivò*   *quivi…*
    a   knight   who-have.PST.3SG name   Tideo   arrive.PST.3SG here
    'Polynices arrived in the city of Argos […]. Whilst (he) had thus arrived, standing under a small roofed shed, for it was raining, there also arrived a knight there whose name was Tideo…' (*Chiose dette del falso Boccaccio*, 15-17, p. 205)

b. *In questa stanza* *il*   *conte*   *d'Artese* *sconfisse*   *i*   *Fiamminghi*   *a*
    in this   stance the count of-Artese defeat.PST.3SG the Flemish people in
    Fornes, e   *lo*   *re*   *d'Inghilterra* *arrivò*   *in Fiandra…*
    Fornes and the king of-England   arrive.PST.3SG in (the) Flanders
    'In this stance, the count of Artese defeated the Flemish people in Fornes, and the king of England arrived in the Flanders…' (Villani, *Cronica*, IX, 19, 13-15)

In the example (2a), the correlative coordination of the subordinate (*E… arrivato*) and main (*e un chavaliere… arrivò*) clause is a case of para-hypotaxis, a frequent phenomenon of early Romance, which is devised to establish a relationship in meaning between the dependent and main clause, the former being cataphoric of the propositional content of latter. Since the coordinated clauses in (2a) share the same predicate (*arrivato, arrivò* 'arrived'), which is established first in the subordinate, the main clause is an argument-focus structure, where the new referent *uno chavaliere* 'a knight' is introduced in narrow focus[3]. By contrast, in (2b) the subject *lo re d'Inghilterra* 'the king of England' is a referent already mentioned in the book IX of the *Cronica*, figuring among the nobles at war. However, the coordinated clauses in (2b) do not bear topic continuity, as *lo re* 'the king' breaks the local thematic chain with the previous subject *il conte* 'the count'. In this respect, *lo re* is an Aboutness Topic, i.e. an active element of discourse that is newly changed or newly returned to (Givón 1983: 8, Cruschina 2015: 63).

The examples in (2) shows that (non-contrastive) argument-focus subjects can be preverbal (2a), but so can subjects expressing an Aboutness Topic (2b). In fact, the latter are invariably preverbal (Benincà 2006: 69, 2010: 40). We do not rule out the possibility for narrow-focus subjects to occur postverbally, but in our scrutiny we did not find

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[3] Note that in early Italo-Romance the conjunction *e* preserves, among other uses, the focalizing function of Latin ET (≈ ETIAM) 'also'. The propositional content of (2a) can in a nutshell be rephrased as 'Polynices arrived and so did (arrive) a knight'.

contexts in which unaccusative verbs followed by a subject could be unequivocally interpreted as an argument-focus structure. Rather, in this verb class the VS order with a focal subject seems to be associated only with sentence-focus structures (see 1a-b).

The correlation seen in (1) and (2) between pragmatic criteria and syntactic distribution of subjects is sketched below.

(3)   V2 Clause Structure: Subject in unaccusative predications

Periphery		$X_{TOPIC/FOCUS}$	V...	
(X)	|	Aboutness Topic	V	Referential Topic
(X)	|	Argument Focus	V	
(X)	|		[V S]	Sentence Focus

As illustrated in (3), topical and focal subjects can be both pre- and postverbal. Thus, in the V2 syntax of old Romance, the preverbal position is not the privileged position of subjects[4]. Accordingly, the VS order is not restricted to a single marked structure that deviates from a default word order[5]. In fact, VS obtains also in the binary Topic-Comment articulation, though reversed, of categorical sentences (see 1c). In this respect, VS licenses both predicate- and sentence-focus structure, although only the former is the pragmatic expression of the unmarked Focus (Lambrecht 1994: 296). Interestingly, whilst in argument-focus structures the subject can precede the verb, in sentence-focus structures this is invariably postverbal.

Predications with unergative verbs are characterized by the same correlation of pragmatic criteria and subject distribution attested for inaccusative verbs (see 3)[6].

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[4] The first position is accessible by any syntactic category bearing pragmatic relevance. In transitive predications, also topical (non-dislocated) and focal (non-contrastive) objects can be preverbal, as well as any predicative PP, AdjP, AdvP, etc. Here we are not concerned with the Periphery, which hosts circumstantial dislocated elements.

[5] Cartographic studies posit that the V2 system overlaps with an underlying [SVOX] default order, from which the verb is attracted to the sentence-initial position, i.e. it moves from its original position in the VP to the Head of CP, that is, the C° complementizer position (Benincà 2006, Poletto 2014, among others). Under this analysis, VS with a Referential Topic is an unmarked result of verb movement. We should mention that in some typological accounts the notion of 'markedness' has been questioned, in particular with regards to VS order and theticity (Matras & Sasse 1995, Sasse 2006, Sornicola 2006).

[6] Continuing/Referential Topic subjects are postverbal, e.g. *Dopo il pranzo parlò Socrate alli ambasciadori...* 'After lunch Socrates spoke to the ambassadors' (*Novellino*, LXI, [old Tuscan]), where 'Socrates' is repeated after several occurrences in previous sentences. Aboutness Topic

However, in sentence-focus structures the subject can both precede (4a) and follow (4b) the verb.

(4)   old Abruzzese
       a.   *Et   uno   parlò   fra   li   altri…*
             and   one (man)   speak.PST.3SG   among   the   others
             'And a man spoke among the others' (*Cronaca aquilana*, LXXXI, 9, p. 17)
       old Tuscan
       b.   *Allora   piansero   tutti…*
             then   cry.PST.3PL   all (people)
             'Then everybody cried…' (*Leggenda di messer Gianni di Procida*, 20, p.46)

In (4a), the subject *uno* 'a man' is an indefinite referent which is introduced into discourse for the first time. Nevertheless, since the sentence is found within an on-going narration, the subject *uno* can also be interpreted as an Aboutness Topic that breaks continuity with the local thematic chain. In this sense, the example in (4a) is not entirely presentative, as is also suggested by the postverbal prepositional phrase, *fra li altri* 'among the others', which makes reference to elements already introduced in discourse. The SVX sequence of (4a) patterns with the SVO order of transitive predications, with which unergative SV(X) constructions share the same pragmatic correlates. These will be discussed in the next section.

1.1.   *Transitive predications*

In transitive predications, the unmarked predicate-focus structure exhibits the subject in both pre- and postverbal position. In this type of sentence, the distribution of non-focal subjects correlates with the same pragmatic criteria observed for unaccusative verbs (see 1c and 2b).

(5)   old Roman
       a.   *li   sollati   se   mormoravano* […]. *Li   conestavili   todeschi*
             the   soldiers   RFL   grumble.PST.3PL   the   constables   German
             demannavano   moneta…
             demand.PST.3PL   money

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subjects are preverbal, e.g. *Il consolo parlò per tutti* 'The consul spoke for everybody' (*Deca prima di Tito Livio*, II, 48, 31-32 [old Tuscan]), where the 'consul' breaks the thematic chain with the previous subject (in context, *i Fabii* 'the men of the Fabia family'). We were not able to find contexts with argument-focus structures.

'The soldiers grumbled […]. The German constables demanded money…' (*Cronica*, XXVII, p. 250)

b. *Li   Englesi   se   fiongano* […]. *Una industria servano li   Englesi…*
The   English   RFL   throw.3PL   a   trick   hold.3PL the   English
'The English throw themselves at war. The English hold a trick…' (*Cronica*, XIV, 128)

In (5a), the subject *Li conestavili todeschi* 'The German constables' breaks the thematic chain with the previous subject *li sollati* 'the soldiers', and is thus an Aboutness Topic. By contrast, in (5b) the subject *li Englesi* 'the English' is repeated to maintain topical continuity. Being a Referential Topic, the subject occurs postverbally. Note that in (5b) the non-contrastive focal object *Una industria* 'a trick' precedes the verb, yielding the OVS order frequently found in old Romance.

The evidence in (5) shows that unmarked transitive predications exhibit both SVO and OVS orders. Since we are concerned with postverbal subjects, in what follows we contrast the (O)VS order with patterns in which, under the same pragmatic conditions, the subject can equally occur in preverbal position. We note that in predicate- and argument-focus structures the focal subject occurs in free variation between pre- and postverbal position, whereas in sentence-focus structures the subject tends to be postverbal, except for some marginal cases, which ought to be explained in the co-textual conditions of the written domain (see section 2).

In marked predicate-focus structures, i.e. constructions with a topicalized object, the focal subject is found in both pre- and postverbal position, as shown below.

(6)   old Neapolitan
a. *uno Iudice Guido de la Colonna de   Messina, homo de approbata*
a   judge Guido of the Colonna from   Messina man   of approved
descriptione […], *sì   l'ave   transontato in   chesta presente forma*
description   thus it-have.3SG translated   in   this   present   form
latina.
Latin
'a judge Guido de la Colonna of Messina, a man of excellent character […], translated it (= the book) into its current Latin form (*Libro de la destructionede Troya*, 30-33, p. 47)

old Tuscan
b. *il   fedì   nel   petto, che non avea   arme,   uno meser*
him rive.PST.3SG in-the chest   that NEG have.PST.3SG weapons a   sir
Filippo ungaro   e   poi lo   prese   uno   per li   capelli…
Fhilip Hungarian and then him take.PST.3SG one (man)   for the   hair

'A certain Hungarian sir Filippo rove him in the chest, for (he) was not armed, and then a man took him by the hair… (Villani, *Cronica*, XIII, 112, 23-25)

In (6a), the preverbal subject *uno Iudice…* 'a judge' conveys new information with respect to the 'book' (resumed by the object clitic *l'*) that has been translated into Latin[7]. Likewise, in the coordinated sentences of (6b), both posteverbal subjects, *uno meser* 'a sir' and *uno* 'a man', are rhematic elements together with the verbs they follow.

Argument-focus structures exhibit, too, the focal subject in both pre- and postverbal position.

(7)   old Tuscan

a. *Il   sole   lo   conobbe   in ciò,* […]. *I   sassi   e   le   pietre   lo*
    the   sun   him   know.PST.3SG in this   the   rocks   and   the   stones   him
    conobbero   in ciò…
    know.PST.3PL   in this
    'The sun recognized him in this. The rocks and the stones recognized him in this'
    (Cavalca, *La esposizione del simbolo degli Apostoli*, I, 6, 33-35)

b. *Suo   mantello   era   d' uno   drappo fatto* […]   *e   lo fecero*
    his   cape   be.PST.3SG   of-a   drape made.M.SG   and   it make.PST.3PL
    maestri di   nigromanzia in India…
    masters of   necromancy in India
    'His drape was made of a drape […] and masters of necromancy made it in India…'
    (Binduccio dello Scelto, *La storia di Troia*, CCLXXIV, 30-32)

In the second sentence of (7a), the subjects *I sassi e le pietre* 'the rocks and the stones' are the only focal elements that precede the verb *conobbero* 'recognized', which is a predicate already established in the previous sentence. In (7b), the coordinated sentences share the same predicate (*era fatto… fecero*), and the second subject, *maestri* 'masters', is introduced in narrow focus in postverbal position.

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[7] Examples of informational (non-contrastive) focal subject in preverbal position are found also in other texts, e.g. in old Lombard: *un de vu sì mi dé traire* 'One of you must drag me' (Barsegapé, 892 [Rohlfs 1969: 166]). With regard to the particle *sì*, there are diverging analyses. One view takes *sì* to be a Topic marker (Benincà 1995: 323, Vance 1995: 184, Salvi 2001: 1, Poletto 2005: 225). Yet this analysis does not account for examples such as that in (6a). Note that any kind of focal material can co-occur with *sì*, e.g. *cum gran furor si lo domanda* '(He) asked him with great fury' (Lorck, 76 [Rohlfs 1969: 166], old Lombard). Here we follow Ledgeway 2008, where *sì* is claimed not to express a full phrasal category, but to spell out a V2 requirement by merging directly in C°.

The distribution of narrow-focus subjects seems to correlate with their degree of referentiality within the context. In (7a) the subject referents *I sassi e le pietre* 'the rocks and the stones' denote members or subsets of existing discourse groups, i.e., the natural elements that 'recognize' Christ (resumed by the clitic *lo*), and are in this sense definite. In (7b), the subject referent *maestri* 'masters' is not drawn from a set of context-identifiable members, which, as for the making of the *mantello* 'cape', could be anybody. Indefinite narrow-focus subjects of this kind are always postverbal, whereas their definite counterparts are in free variation between pre- and postverbal position, as shown by the following examples.

(8)   old Lombard

    a.   *Sancto Agostino   dixe   ke...*
          saint   Augutine say.3sg that
          'Saint Augustine states that...' (*Elucidario*, I, 64, 103)

    b.   *Dixe   sancto Agostino   che...*
          say.3sg saint   Augustine   that
          'Saint Augustine states that...' (*Elucidario*, II, 31, 149)

The examples in (8) are taken from distant sections and do not constitute a thematic chain. The verb *dixe* 'states' is an established predicate, in that it serves as the formulaic expression with which a priest replies to his disciple throughout the text, citing various theological authorities. Thus, both (8a) and (8b) are argument-focus structures. The subject *Sancto Agostino* is identifiable by the shared knowledge of the interlocutors (and possibly of the reader), besides denoting a referent of an existing discourse set, i.e. the cited theological sources. Being definite, the narrow-focus subject can occur in both pre- and postverbal position[8].

Examples of free variation such as that of (8) might have been the environment in which subjects started to undergo 'thematization' in first position, eventually leading to the grammaticalization of the SVO order of modern Romance. This change might have first originated in contexts where a non-presupposed subject is nonetheless definite, i.e. specific (in the sense of Enç 1991) or identifiable, oscillating between rhematic and thematic interpretation.

Finally, in sentence-focus structures the subject can be both pre- and postverbal. However, the discourse role of the subject ought to be captured in the context of the

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[8] The examples in the text are numerous, exhibiting both preverbal subjects, e.g. *Ezechiel profeta dixe, sancto Polo dixe, Santo Agustino dixe, Lo Evangelio dixe*, and postverbal ones, e.g. *Dixe Beda, Ma dixe santo Ambrosio, dixe Criste*, etc.

narration. The contrast of the examples below illustrates the lability of word order with transitive verbs in presentational contexts.

(9)   old Roman

      a. *Uno Francesco   prese   la   varva a questo Papirio e   disse…*

           a   French (man) take.PST.3SG the beard to this   Papirio and say.PST.3SG

           'A French man took the beard of this Papirio and said…' (*Cronica,* XXVII, 28-29)

    old Tuscan

      b. *Una volta trovò   una volpe un   muletto   in un   bosco*

           one time find.PST.3SG a   fox   a   little mule in a   wood

           'Once upon a time, a fox found a little mule in a wood' (*Disciplina Clericalis*, 1-2, p. 81)

The example in (9a) is a separated sentence starting with *Uno Francesco* 'A French man', but is found within an on-going narration of a series of events, as is suggested by the object *questo Papirio* 'this Papirio', which refers to a character previously introduced in the story. If taken on its own, the indefinite subject *Uno Francesco* carries no presupposition. In context, however, *Uno Francesco* can be construed as an Aboutness Topic that breaks continuity with the local thematic chain to establish the informationally neutral Topic the sentence is about. By contrast, the sentence (9b) sets the scene, introducing all-new information that does not rely on an on-going narration. Rather, the adverbial *una volta* 'once upon a time' is the topical (spatio-)temporal coordinate which is predicated of the event-reporting content carried by the focal material that follows. We will return to this point in the next section.

    The distribution of subjects and their pragmatic correlates in transitive predications is sketched below. In (10b), we report the scheme in (3) to make direct comparison with unaccusatives.

(10)   V2 Clause Structure: Subject in transitive and intransitive (unaccusative) predications

		$X_{TOPIC/FOCUS}$		V…	
a.	Transitive:	Aboutness Topic		V	Referential Topic
		Focal with predicate	Oclitic V		Focal with predicate
		Argument Focus	Oclitic V		Argument Focus
		[?? S		V	S] Sentence Focus
b.	Unaccusative:	Aboutness Topic		V	Referential Topic
		Argument Focus		V	

The sketch in (10) shows that, under the same discourse-related constraints, topical and focal subjects can be pre- and postverbal in both transitive and intransitive predications, although in the latter narrow-focus subjects appear to be restricted only to the preverbal position. Since the V2 syntax of old Romance allows non-contrastive focal elements in the first position, argument-focus structures with a preverbal subject are expected. Interestingly, subjects cannot be fronted in sentence-focus structures, which invariably exhibit the VS order. These types of subject can be said to have a 'non-canonical' behaviour, in that their restriction to the postverbal position does not mirror the free variation of other types of Focus in the V2 syntax.

Given that subjects are invariably postverbal only in sentence-focus structures with unaccusative verbs, in the remainder of this contribution we narrow the analysis to this verb class, but we first ought to capture the expression of 'presentative', i.e. all-new information, sentences in the written domain of the early sources.

2.   *Postverbal subjects in the written domain of the early sources*

Our analysis relies on the scrutiny of 24 edited texts (over 4000 pages), dating from C13[th] to C15[th]. To account for geo-linguistic variation, the corpus includes early Italo-Romance varieties from the north, centre and south of Italy. All texts were read in full to ensure adequate interpretation of the examples in context. This also allowed us to familiarize with the stylistic features of each source, which proved to be decisive in keeping distinct the uses of the vernacular, on the one hand, from the expressions modelled on the Latin literary canon, on the other hand. We selected texts with high frequency of direct speech, favouring dialogical narratives to plain expositions[9].

Written data, in particular those from early sources, constitute fixed representations of a language at a given time. Thus, the extant written forms represent only partially the variation of the spoken domain (Sornicola 2007: 558, 2013: 22). Yet tests cannot be performed, as grammaticality judgements are unattainable for the obvious absence of the speaker/author, leaving some conjectures unattested. Furthermore, written expressions lack intonational correlates, and even more so in the early texts, whose punctuation, absent in the manuscript tradition, is established later

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[9] We searched for question-answer sequences that could provide diagnostics of Focus domain, but this was not always a felicitous task. With regards to argument-focus structures, for example, we were able to find only elliptical replies to *wh*-questions, e.g. *Domandà chi rivà, dis: li fanti deli prediti Pero et Saracho* '(He) asked who arrived, (he) said: the infantry men (guards) of the above-mentioned Pero and Saracho' (*Atti dei Podestà di Lio Mazor*, 9-10, p. 18 [old Venetan]).

by the first editors, in some cases arbitrarily. Therefore, the generalisations are tentative and should be held falsifiable until new evidence is collected. However, one can assume that "what has not yet been found is ungrammatical" (Benincà 2004: 247), especially if the interrogation of the data is carried out on relatively large corpora of texts.

In the diamesic dimension of the written register the organization of discourse varies from that of communicative situations of the spoken domain. With regards to tethicity, for instance, VS order obtains differently in the written and spoken domain, being statistically more frequent in the latter (Lombardi Vallauri 2004, Sasse 2006: 269-270, among others). In written texts information is built (or retrieved) with poor or no reference to the extra-linguistic context, and relies mostly on intra-textual deixis, i.e. logodeixis (Fillmore 1975: 70). Thus, the linguistic environment that surrounds a portion of text is the main source of its meaning, and determines the informational role of the discourse referents. We refer to this environment as 'co-text' (Conte 1983: 96), i.e. the organized linguistic material that provides the interpretative features of a written text (Van Dijk 1977, Petöfi 1979, Conte 1988, Givón 1995, Salkie 1995, Andorno 2003, 2006).

Below we contrast two examples that exhibit VS and SV order with an indefinite subject, in (11a) and (11b) respectively. Co-text is key to capture the different construal of these sentences.

(11) old Venetan
   a. *anche ven   uno   che à   nom   Ganbaudo   da   Noenta*
       also   come.3sg one (man)   who have.3sg name   Ganbaudo   da   Noenta
       et   dis…
       and   say.3sg
       'There also comes a man whose name is Ganbaudo da Noenta…' (*Atti dei Podestà di Lio Mazor*, 24-25, p. 26)
   old Tuscan
   b. *Uno borghese   di Bari andò   in romeaggio   e   lasciò…*
       a   bourgeois (man) of Bari go.PST.3SG in pilgrimage and   leave.PST.3SG
       'A bourgeois man from Bari went to pilgrimage and left…' (*Novellino*, IX, 1)

The example in (11a) is found within an on-going narration, but no presupposition is carried on from the co-text that precedes. Rather, all-new, non-derivable information is 'presented' in contrast with the course of events established in the co-text, introducing

an element of surprise in the narrative[10]. On the contrary, the example in (11b) is the opening line of the IX tale of the *Novellino*. Here, the co-text is being built, establishing a referent, *Uno borghese,* that carries no relational focal information. In this respect, the subject in (11b) is the Aboutness Topic of an informationally neutral Topic-Comment articulation. Note that in (11b) the verb is followed by other predicative material, i.e. *in romeaggio* 'in pilgrimage'. In our scrutiny, inaccusative verbs are *never* found to be the only predicative element if the subject is indefinite and preverbal, thus proving SVX order to be the expression of Topic-Comment articulations with a thematic subject[11]. By contrast, postverbal subjects can constitute with the inaccusative verb a single rhematic unit.

(12) old Tuscan

    a. *venne   una damigiella   e   disse…*
        come.PST.3SG a   young lady and say.PST.3SG
        'There came a young lady and said…' (*Trisatno Riccardiano*, II, 20)

    b. *E   andò   uno uomo di Dio, e   disse…*
        and go.PST.3SG a   man   of God and say.PST.3SG
        'A man of God went and said…' (*Bibbia volgare*, 28, 3)

The contrast between (11a) and (11b) and the evidence in (12) show that, in co-text, only presentative sentence-focus structures exhibit a postverbal subject.

Presentative sentences introduce all-new, focal information that, whilst carrying no special presupposition, is brought about by implicit reference to the spatio-temporal coordinates of the discourse context. In the spoken domain, these coordinates need not be overtly expressed, as they are understood in the deixis of the communicative situation. Interestingly, note that they often surface in the co-text of the written texts, as shown below.

(13) old Tuscan

    a. *Allora vennono   due valletti   e   dissono…*
        then   come.PST.3PL two servants and say.PST.3PL
        'Then there came two servants and said…' (Pieri, *Storia di Merlino*, XXXIX, 15)

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[10] In (11a) the predicate *ven* 'comes' is not previously established and the adverb *anche* 'also' has scope over the sentence.

[11] Whilst we find examples of [SVX] order, e.g. *Un bunfone venne ad uno re…* 'A buffoon came to a king…' (*Disciplina Clericalis*, 10, p. 80 [old Tuscan]), the conjectured [SV] order is never attested on its own if the subject is indefinite, e.g. hypoyhetically **Un bunfone venne* 'There came a buffoon'.

Old Piedmontese

b. *Adunc ven   un   petit   olifant...*
   then   come.3SG a   small elephant
   'Then there comes a small elephant...' (*Sermoni subalpini*, 10, 36)

old Sicilian

c. *Di ki   vinni   unu missaiu   di curti   di Ruma...*
   from that come.PST.3SG a   messenger   of court   of Rome
   'Hence there came a messenger of the court of Rome...' (*Rebellamentu*, 35, 5, p. 32)

old Genoese

d. *Donde   aven   grande aflicion...*
   Thereafter happen.PST.3SG great affliction
   'Thereafter there happened great pain...'(Anonimo Genovese, *Poesie*, 12, 480)

old Neapolitan

e. *Adunca vennero   tucti li   citatini   a vedere lo   re   loro*
   then   come.PST.3PL   all   the citizens   to see.INF the king their
   'Then there came all the citizens to see their king' (*Libro de la destructione de Troya*, XXXV, 4-5)

In the avaiable data, spatio-temporal adverbials such as *Allora, Adunc, Di ki, Donde, Adunca,* etc. are strikingly frequent in sentence-focus structures with unaccusative verbs.

The evidence from the early written texts in (13) supports the view that presentational VS constructions are predications of an implicit spatio-temporal Topic (Benincà 1988, Saccon 1992, 1993, Erteschik–Shir 1997, Pinto 1997, Tortora 1997, 2014, Manzini and Savoia 2005, Parry 2013, Corr 2016, Bentley 2018). Whilst in the spoken domain the implicit Topic need not be overtly expressed, its deixis being understood from the discourse-context, in the co-text of the written texts, which lack extra-textual reference, this is spelled out by spatio-temporal adverbials that provide the coordinates in which all-new information is embedded[12]. Put differently, in the written domain the introduction of presentational Foci correlates with the explicit establishment of Topics in order to meet the conditions of textual coherence and cohesion, whereas in the spoken domain these conditions are met by the understood deixis of the discourse context. In this respect, (early) written texts are particularly revealing, in that they show features that may be phonologically null, or silent, in the spoken domain.

3.   Unaccusative sentence-focus structures in old Italo-Romance

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[12] The coordinates are temporal rather than spatial because narratives are concerned with progression in time rather than happening in space. However, note that many temporal adverbs derive from locative etyma, e.g. *donde* < Latin (DE)INDE 'from there, therefore, then'.

As we have seen, in the V2 syntax of old Italo-Romance, unaccusative sentence-focus structures invariably exhibit a postverbal subject. The information structure of these types of sentence interfaces with the semantic properties of the subject referent, which is low in agentivity, is non-specific and non-identifiable, and on account of these properties tends to be indefinite. In this respect, postverbal subjects of unaccusative verbs are accounted for also in terms of the lexical property of this verb class (see Perlmutter's (1978) Unaccusative Hypothesis and its reformulations: Centineo 1986, Van Valin 1990, Cennamo 1999, Sorace 2000, Bentley 2006, Rosemeyer 2013, among others).

In the available data, postverbal subjects are found in intransitive predicates of different Aktionsart types: state (14a), achievement (14b-c) and accomplishment (14d).

(14)   old Lombard

    a.   *e   stevano   tuti con lo   ventre in zoxo…*
        and stay.PST.3PL all   with the belly   in down
        'All (people) were face down…' (*Redazione lombarda del Purgatorio di S. Patrizio*, XVII, 8)

    old Tuscan

    b.   *Al   romor della   donna   corsero   molti…*
        at-the sound of-the woman   run.PST.3PL many
        'There came many (people) at the woman's screaming…' (Boccaccio, *Decameron*, II, 8, p. 144)

    old Sicilian

    c.   *Et in una altra   briga   oy   discordia   civili apparsiru   altri   chosi*
        and in a   other   fight   or   contention civil appear.PST.3PL other   things
        maravillyusi.
        marvellous
        'And in another civil fight or contention there appeared many wonderful things.' (Accurso di Cremona, *Libru di Valeriu Maximu*, I, 4, 16-17)

    old Tuscan

    d.   *negli   anni   di Cristo circa   IIII* […]*, scese   uno signore*
        in-the years   of Christ circa   C4th descend.PST.3SG a   sir
        ch'ebbe   nome Alberigo re   de' Gotti
        who-have.PST.3SG   name Alberigo king of   Goths
        'In the years of Christ around C4th […], there came down a sir whose name was Alberigo king of the Goths' (Villani, *Cronica*, II, 24, 9-12)

In the examples in (14), the subject immediately follows the verb, forming a 'tight' predicative unit. In some diachronic analyses, V-S adjacency has been regarded as a case

of (pseudo) Subject Incorporation (Mithun 1985, Bossong 1998, Sasse 2006), whereby patient/undergoer arguments are incorporated to the verb to form a complex predicate. This process usually takes place in environments of V-S adjacency where arguments that are low in referentiality (are perceived to) act as predicates. However, in our scrutiny we found examples in which the subject does not immediately follow the verb.

(15) old Roman

    a. *dello   mese   de agosto, apparze   nelle   parte de Lommardia   una   cometa*
        of-the month of August appear.PST.3SG in-the   part of Lombardy   a   comet
        'In the month of August, there appeared a comet somewhere in Lombardy' (*Cronica*, VII, p. 24)

    old Sicilian

    b. *In quillu   tempu signuriava   e   sidia   in la   sancta sedia   di Roma*
        in that   time   rule.PST.3SG and sit.PST.3SG in the   saint   chair   of Rome
        papa   Nicola terzu…
        pope   Nicola third
        'In that time it was Pope Nicola the Third who ruled and sat on the saint chair of Rome…' (*Lu Rebellamentu di Sichilia*, 16, 1)

Whether in immediate adjacency to the verb (see 14) or not (see 15), the postevrbal subject need not be the only predicative element with the verb, as other focal material can intervene between the verb and the subject.

    Sentence-focus structures exhibit the VS order also in classical and late Latin and in modern Italian, suggesting that undergoer subjects are invariably postverbal over time.

(16) classical Latin

    a. *Venerunt   Macedones   a   Philippo   mille   et*
        come.PST.3PL Macedonians.NOM.PL from   Philip   one thousand and
        quingenti
        five hundreds
        'There came fifteen hundred Macedonians from (king) Philip' (Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita*, 34, 26)

    late Latin

    b. *venerunt   harpyiae   inprovisae   de   montibus*
        come.PST.3PL harpies.NOM.PL unforseen.NOM.PL   from   mountains
        'There suddenly came harpies from the mountains' (Tiberius Claudius Donatus, *Interpretationes Virgilianae*, I, 3, 5 p. 297 [C 5th])

    old Italo-Romance (Tuscan)

c. *vennero alcuni cristiani e...*
come.PST.3PL some Christians and
'There came some Christians and... ' (*Leggenda Aurea*, LXIV, 4-5)

modern Italian

d. *Vennero alcuni Cristiani e...*
come.PST.3PL some Christians and to-him show.PST.3PL
'There came some Christians and...'

With the exception of the paraphrase in (16d), all the examples are found in co-texts where they unmistakably express a presentative function, i.e. they introduce all-new information with regards to the on-going narration.

Subjects are found to be invariably postverbal over time also in a subgroup of specialized presentative sentences, the existential constructions. These context-dependent structures express a proposition about the existence or presence of someone or something in an implicit, i.e. semantically unspecified, spatio-temporal domain, which is modified by the postcopular predicative (non-argumental) noun phrase (see Bentley *et al.* 2015 and references therein).

(17) classical Latin

a. *Erant in quadam civitate rex et regina...*
be.PST.3PL in one town king.NOM.SG and queen.NOM.SG
'There were in a town a king and a queen...' (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 28)

late Latin

b. *Sunt in suburbanis loca publica*
be.3PL in suburbs places.NOM.PL public.NOM.PL
'There are public places in the suburbs' (pseudo Agennius Urbicus, *Commentum de controversis*, p. 67 [C 6th])

old Italo-Romance (Tuscan)

c. *Era una Guasca in Cipri...*
be.PST.3SG a Gascon (woman) in Cyprus
'There was a Gascon woman in Cyprus...' (*Novellino*, LI, p. 238)

old Italo-Romance (Sicilian)

d. *In quilli paysi ci fu unu grandi gintilomu...*
in those countries PF be.PST.3SG a great gentleman
'There was a great gentleman in those countries' (*Conquesta*, I, 12, p. 4)

modern Italian

e. *Ci sono molte persone in piazza*
PF be.3PL many people in square
'There are many people in the square'

As shown in (17), in the transition from Latin to modern Italian, the pivot, i.e the non-argumental noun phrase, of existential constructions is invariably postcopular[13].

Classical Latin is claimed to have been characterized by a default SOV order (Vincent 1988, Salvi 2005, Oniga, 2004, Devine & Stephens 2006, Ledgeway 2012, among others). Starting from C2[nd], late Latin texts are attested to exhibit a verb-initial (V1) syntax, where elements that bear pragmatic salience can precede the verb, yielding recurrent instances of 'verb-medial' SVO or OVS orders (Herman 2000: 86, Oniga 2014, Ledgeway 2017). This anticipates the V2 syntax of old Romance, where, at a late stage, subjects start to undergo 'thematization' in the first position (see 8a), leading to the grammaticalized SVO order of modern Romance. However, the diachronic evidence in (16-17) suggests that the VS order of unaccusative sentence-focus structures obtains over time, notwithstanding the typological changes that occur in the transition from Latin to modern Romance. In this transition, the reorganization of information structure interfaces with verb class and macrorole assignment, resulting in word order changes that mirror the shift from nominative-accusative alignment to (gradual and partial) active-stative split (La Fauci 1988, 1997: 41, Cennamo 1999, Ledgeway 2012: 317-352 and references therein). Interestingly, in inaccusative predications the VS order of presentational Focus does not appear to be affected by these changes. Rather, in sentence-focus structures the subject is consistently postverbal throughout the transition from Latin SOV to early Romance V2 to modern Romance SVO.

4.   *Expletives and grammaticalization of subject agreement in northern varieties*

In some early northern varieties, sentence-focus structures exhibit an optional expletive form in preverbal position. The following examples, taken from the same text, show the presence and absence of the expletive in similar presentational co-texts.

(18)   old Venetan

a.   *elo   li   vene   munegi incontra*
       EXPL to-him come.PST.3   monks across
       'There came monks towards him' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 13-14, p. 92)

b.   *e   vene   arquanti flantisi   e   toni*
       and   come.PST.3   several   lightnings   and   thunders

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[13] Late Latin exhibits also existential copular uses of HABERE and STARE, which are continued in early and modern Romance (Zamboni 2000: 106, Blasco Ferrer 2003: 56, among others). The VS order obtains in existentials with these copulas. Note that the existential proform *ci,* obligatory in modern Italian, emerges first in old Sicilian, taking a pro-argument role that spells out the spatio-temporal coordinates of the predication (Ciconte 2008, 2015).

'And there came several lightnings and thunders' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 16, p. 236)

c. *elo vene   una gran   nivola blanca*
   EXPL come.PST.3 a   great   cloud white
   'There came a great white cloud' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 22-23, p. 130)

d. *ora vene   uno frar de lo   monestier*
   now come.PST.3 a   friar of the monastery
   'Now, there came a friar of the monastery' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 2-3, p. 94)

In (18a) and (18c) the pronoun *elo*, third person masculine singular, is not co-referential with the postverbal subjects, i.e., respectively, the masculine plural *munegi* 'monks', and the feminine singular *nivola* 'cloud'. The pronoun *elo* is unequivocally a non-referential expletive, which, however, at this stage need not occur obligatorily, as shown in (18b) and (18d).

All sentences in (18) exhibit an invariant form of the inaccusative verb, *vene* 'came'. In the early northern varieties, verb morphology undergoes phonological erosion, resulting in syncretic forms that lack inflectional number feature in the third person. This in turn correlates with the retrenchment of grammatical V-S agreement in these vernaculars. The emergence of the expletive in VS sentence-focus structures like (18a) and (18c) may be indicative of the lack of agreement for any feature, since the pronominal form neither agrees in number with the finite verb nor in number or gender with the postverbal subject. However, at this stage the syncretic forms of the verb do not (yet) appear to trigger differential subject marking between focal undergoer subjects, on the one hand, and topical (unaffected) actor subjects, on the other hand. In fact, the expletive is only optional and subject clitics have not yet appeared. Thus, focal and topical postverbal subjects are found in the same V-S agreement pattern with the syncretic verb form.

(19)   old Venetan

a. *vene   altri   frari   incontra questi*
   come.PST.3 other friars towards these (monks)
   'There came other friars towards these monks' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 1, p.98)

b. *e trovà   li   frari lo monestir   de san   Abeo*
   and find.PST.3 the friars the monastery of saint Abba
   'And the friars found the monastery of saint Abba' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 27-28, p. 88)

c. *andà   innanti li   santi abadi infina la   gliesia*

go.PST.3   ahead   the   saint abbots up-to   the   church

'the saint abbots went ahead up to the church' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 13, p.96)

In the V2 syntax, VS order obtains in both sentence- (19a) and predicate-focus structures (19b-c), the latter being either transitive (19b) or unaccusative (19c) predications. In (19a), the focal undergoer subject *li frari* 'the friars' cannot be said to fail (or not to fail) to control grammatical agreement more distinctively than the topical actor subject *li frari* in (19b) does (or does not), though the former is an argument that may be treated as part of the predicate, thus losing properties of controller, whereas the latter is a Continuing/Referential Topic of a binary Topic-Comment articulation. At this stage, inaccusative VS structures (19a, c) appear to be undifferentiated, at least formally, insofar as a Continuing/Referential Topic subject can follow the syncretic verb (19c) as equally as the subject of sentence-focus structures (19a). However, this might have been the environment where the grammaticalization of subject agreement started, though layered in two stages. First, there emerges an expletive, which spells out the implicit Topic that sentence-focus structures presuppose. This is testified by the early northern texts under examination, which date C14[th]. This type of agreement can be described as 'anaphoric', in that it involves agreement with an implicit, semantically unspecified, discourse-dependent antecedent (Bentley 2018, building on Bresnan and Mchombo's 1987, and references therein). Then, at a later stage, i.e. after C16[th], concomitantly with the loss of the V2 syntax, there emerge subject clitics (Haiman 1974, Benincà 1995, Poletto 1995, Parry 2013), which are extended exponents of finite (person and number) agreement (Rizzi 1986, Brandi & Cordin 1989, Poletto 2000, among others). This type of agreement is grammatical, in that it involves agreement with subject features. In the layering of the two diachronic stages, grammatical agreement is derived from anaphoric agreement (Givón 1976; Siewierska 1999; Corbett 2003; Mithun 2003, among others)[14].

The northern texts under examination testify to the earliest stage of the grammaticalization of subject agreement, when an expletive form starts to appear, though not consistently, to spell out anaphoric agreement with the implicit Topic of sentence-focus structures with a postverbal subject.

(20)   old Piedmontese

    a.   *El   fo   un   reis   qui   avea…*
        EXPL   be.PST.3SG   a   king   who   have.PST.3SG

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[14] Synchronic tension between anaphoric agreement and grammatical agreement is still found in the VS structures of the northern varieties (Bentley 2018).

'There was a king who had…' (*Sermoni subalpini*, X, 28-29)

b. *Anc no   fo   hom qui la   poes   veeir*
    yet NEG be.PST.3G man who her   can.PST.SUBJ.3SG see.INF
    'There has not yet been anyone who has been able to see her' (*Sermoni subalpini*, X, 14)

old Lombard

c. *El   sera   gran   guerre*
    EXPL   be.FUT.3 great   wars
    'There will be great wars…' (*Parafrasi*, 56[b], 20, p. 84)

d. (*sul   sabion…*) *e   fo   gran   piouei*
    on-the riverbank and be.PST.3SG   great   rains
    '(On the riverbank…) and there were great rains' (*Parafrasi*, 23[b], 35, p. 28)

old Venetan

e. *Ora elo   comenzà   grandi flantisi   e   toni*
    now EXPL   start.PST.3 great lightnings and thunders
    'Now it started great lightnings and thunders' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 37, 3)

f. *Et atanto comenzà   le   zostre del   cavalier*
    and then   start.PST.3 the   jousts of-the knight
    'And then (it) started the jousts of the knight' (*Tristano veneto*, 14-15, p. 406)

g. *el   vene   da   zielo uno gran flantiso   e   uno ton*
    EXPL   come.PST.3 from   sky   a   greatlightning and a   thunder
    'There came from sky a big lightning and a thunder' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 39, 18)

h. *da diverse parte ne   vene   incontra molti   munegi*
    from different parts   INDE come.PST.3 towards   many   monks
    'From different places there came towards (him) many monks' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 1, 19)

i. *elo li   aparse   una isola   piziola*
    EXPL to-him appear.PST.3   a   island   small
    'There appeared to him a small island' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 26-27, p. 180)

j. *un dì, sì li   aparse   una nivola molto granda*
    one day thus to-him appear.PST.3 a   cloud very   big
    'One day there appeared to him a very big cloud' (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani veneta*, 29-30, p. 108)

As shown by the contrasted pairs of examples in (20), at this stage the emerging expletive form in preverbal position is not yet stable. Incidentally, note that spatio-temporal reference (*anc, sul sabion, atanto, da diverse parte, un dì*) is explicit in the

absence of the expletive, but need not be overtly expressed if the expletive occurs, suggesting that the expletive spells out anaphoric agreement with an implicit Topic that is non-referential and non-presupposed in the co-text.

5.   *Conclusion*

In this paper we have examined postverbal subjects in old Italo-Romance. Since the V2 syntax of old (Italo-)Romance is characterized by a pragmatically motivated variability of word order, subjects can occur in pre- and postverbal position in either focal or topical function. Thus, we outlined and compared the word order patterns licensed by the V2 syntax in order to single out those in which the subject is postverbal under pragmatic and semantic conditions that cannot be met if the subject is in preverbal position. The available data show that subjects are invariably postverbal only in sentence-focus structures with inaccusative verbs. To occur postverbally in these constructions, the subject referent must carry no special presupposition and must be low in agentivity, non-specific and non-identifiable, whether formally indefinite or definite.

However, since we dealt with sources diamesically restricted to the written domain, we captured the discourse role of the postverbal subjects in the co-text of the written register. Our findings show that VS presentational Focus structures frequently exhibit preverbal spatio-temporal adverbial forms that provide the logodeictic coordinates in which all-new information is embedded within on-going narrations. This supports the view that sentence-focus structures are predications of an implicit spatio-temporal Topic. Whilst in the spoken domain the Topic is presupposed and understood in the discourse context, this is overtly spelled out in the written domain, which lacks extra-textual reference.

We also noted that sentence-focus structures exhibit the VS order in classical and late Latin and in modern Italo-Romance, suggesting that patient/undergoer subjects are invariably postverbal over time, notwithstanding the typological changes that affect the default word order in the transition from Latin SOV to early Romance V2 to modern Romance SVO.

Finally, we documented the emergence of a preverbal expletive form in the presentative sentences of some northern Italo-Romance vernaculars. Even though, at this stage, the presence of the expletive is not consistent, we note that its occurrence in VS patterns with a syncretic form of the verb appears to correlate with the grammaticalization of subject agreement, in that the non-referential pronominal form spells out anaphoric agreement with the implicit Topic that sentence-focus structures presuppose.

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