

MICROVARIATION IN THE OLD ITALO-ROMANCE LEFT PERIPHERY: THE CASE OF SI

Abstract. This article presents a novel analysis of four Old Italo-Romance texts to better understand the syntax of the particle *SI*. The proposal is that the variation attested can be understood in a model where *SI* is understood to be merged in distinct positions in the Old Italo-Romance left periphery. Furthermore, it is suggested that the distribution of *SI* may depend on the types of constituents that can act as satisfiers of the V2 constraint in a given language.

1. INTRODUCTION

Italy today is known for its rich linguistic diversity within a relatively small geographical area, with a truly vast number of studies of morphosyntactic microvariation appearing in the literature (see among very many others (Sorrento 1950; Rohlf's 1969; Benincà 1994; Maiden 1994; Parry & Maiden 1997; Poletto 2000; Poletto 2002; Kayne 2000; Kayne 2005; Ledgeway 2000; Ledgeway 2016a; Ledgeway 2016b; Damonte 2005; Damonte 2010; D'Alessandro, Ledgeway & Roberts 2010; Cruschina 2012; Tortora 2013; Benincà, Ledgeway & Vincent 2014; Schifano 2015; Schifano 2018). These studies have not only had a profound impact on formal theorising in the domain of parametric theory (cf. in particular (Kayne 2000; Kayne 2005; Kayne 2010; Kayne 2019), D'Alessandro, Ledgeway, and Roberts 2010, chap. 1, and (Roberts 2019: chap. 1) but have also had important methodological consequences regarding the collection and interpretation of dialectal microvariation (Poletto & Benincà 2007; Garzonio & Poletto 2018).

Only relatively recently, however, has it come to light how fine-grained distinctions between Old Italo-Romance varieties can shed light on formal debates in the synchronic and historical-diachronic domains; this work has undoubtedly been facilitated by the emergence of digitised textual editions and searchable corpora, such as the Opera del Vocabolario Italiano (OVI) database.¹ Vanelli et al.'s (1986) study of the null-subject syntax of Old Italo-Romance is the first significant formal work in the clausal domain. Since the mid-1980s, a variety of works have emerged highlighting important differences in the null-subject system (Benincà 1983; Poletto 2020; Cognola & Walkden Forthcoming), verb-subject inversion (Lombardi & Middleton 2004: 567–574; Parry 2010; Parry 2013; Ciconte 2015), the emergence of subject pronouns and clitics (Vanelli 1987; Poletto 1995; Roberts 2014; Vai 2014; Vai 2017), the dual complementiser system (Ledgeway 2005; Ledgeway & Lombardi 2014; Munaro 2015; Colasanti 2017), the syntax-pragmatics mapping (Vanelli 1986; Vanelli 1998; Cruschina 2011), and the VSO/V2 syntax of Old Italo-Romance varieties (Benincà 1983; Benincà 1995; Ledgeway 2007; Lombardi 2007; Benincà & Poletto 2010; Poletto 2014; Wolfe 2015). Whilst there are undoubtedly important points of continuity between the Old Italo-Romance varieties (Benincà 2004; Benincà 2006; Benincà 2013), this growing body of evidence renders the labels such as ‘Old Italo-Romance syntax’ increasingly unsustainable if used to refer to a hypothetically homogeneous entity.

Many of the case-studies that have been mentioned so far concern aspects left-peripheral syntax. Since Rizzi's (1997) seminal insight that the C-domain should not be conceived of as a single functional projection, but rather a richly articulated hierarchy of specialised functional projections, Italo-Romance research has both drawn on and contributed to cartographic models of the CP; Ledgeway (2010a) provides a synthesis and analysis of the Italo-Romance left periphery and, drawing on Benincà & Poletto (2004), presents the following schema:

- (1) [_{Frame} HT, AdvScene Setting [_{Force} Complementizer₁ [_{Topic} CILD, Aboutness Topic [_{Focus} FocusContrastive, QuantifierIndefinite, FocusInformation [_{Fin} Complementizer₂ [TP . . .]]]]]]]

One important theoretical consequence of the expansion of the C-layer is that specific classes of XPs or functional heads which may once have been conceived of as occupying a single position are now widely acknowledged to be able to occupy a variety of positions. Thus, Ledgeway (2005) shows clearly that finite complementisers in Italo-Romance varieties can be merged in a structurally higher position than where they are base-generated (cf. also Manzini & Savoia (2003; 2010) and Damonte (2010), internally merged topics and foci may target a rich field of positions in the Topic-Focus field depending on syntactic and pragmatic status (Quer 2002; Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007; Cruschina 2012), and there is an increasing body of evidence that, in certain languages, matrix declarative verb movement may target a range of head positions in the C-domain (Poletto 2002; Wolfe 2016; Greco & Haegeman 2020). It is this fundamental insight, that a functional item we might once have conceived of only ever occurring in a single position cross-linguistically may in fact have a richer distribution, that I apply to the Old Italo-Romance particle *si* in this article.

The particle *si*, derived from Latin *SIC* ‘thus, so, like this’ is characteristic of a range of early Romance texts in both Italo-Romance and Gallo-Romance:²

- (2) a. E poi **si** n' andò in Francia...
 and then *si* cl go.3SG in France
 ‘and then he went to France...’ (Old Florentine, *Rettorica* 7)
- b. che mo' de presente **si** fo morto in la
 that now of present *si* be.3SG.PST die.PTCP in the
 terra d' Urbiçano uno lo quale...
 land of-Urbiçano one the which
 ‘that now one who [...] died in the land of Urbiçano’ (Old Bolognese, *Documenti* 62)
- c. Poy che yo scrissi q(ue)sta lectera, **si**
 after that I write.1SG.PST this letter *si*
 pagay p(er) mano
 pay.1SG.PST by hand
 ‘After I wrote this letter, I paid by hand...’ (Old Campidanese, *Lettere* 123)

Despite being noted by a range of linguists and philologists throughout the 20th century (Sorrento 1950: 25–91; Schiaffini 1954: 283–297; Rohlfs 1969: 760), there is still no uniformly accepted analysis of its function or distribution. Nevertheless, almost all linguists working on *si* in Italo-Romance or elsewhere have acknowledged that its distribution is intimately connected to other aspects of left-peripheral syntax (Benincà 1995; Ferraresi & Goldbach 2002; Poletto 2005; Ledgeway 2008; Wolfe 2018a; Wolfe 2020a; Meklenborg 2020a; Meklenborg 2020b). In this article we will see that the mapping of the left periphery established in recent years can shed new light on *si*’s function and distribution which can, in turn, also improve our understanding of other aspects of the clausal syntax of the Old Italo-Romance varieties.

Following a very brief review of previous research on Old Italo-Romance *si* in Section 2, I present the findings of a novel corpus analysis in Section 3. The analysis is original in that it applies a uniform methodology to analyse *si* in four Old Italo-Romance varieties: Sicilian, Neapolitan, Venetian, and Piedmontese. In Section 4 I offer a formal analysis of the data before concluding in Section 5.

2. BACKGROUND

As already noted in the preceding section, SI has amassed a truly enormous literature, but certain analyses have come to particular prominence in the literature on Old Italo-Romance. I review these very briefly here before presenting the results of the corpus analysis.

Many traditional scholars have focussed on SI's role after an initial clause such as (2c) (Schiaffini 1954: 283–97; Rohlf's 1969: 760; Caprio 2010). Whilst such cases do account for some of the extant data (see Tables 1–4 below), it is arguably desirable to have an account which can also capture the data where SI occurs with an initial clause alongside its other uses, which include its ability to stand in initial position (3). Furthermore, recent work has improved our understanding of the syntax of resumptives which occur after constituents classically considered 'clause-external' (De Clercq & Haegeman 2018; Meklenborg 2020a), so a simple classification of SI as an element occurring after initial clauses should not be considered in any way a final analysis.

- (3) **Sì** viti molte fontane de diversi colori
 sì see.1SG.PST many fountains of diverse colours
 'I saw many fountains of different colours' (Old Venetian, Brendano 232)

A prominent analysis in recent years has been to view SI as a phrasal category, which can satisfy the V2 constraint, assumed to be operative in all varieties considered here.³ Both Benincà (2004: sec. 5.3) and Poletto (2005; 2014: 27–33) suggest that SI occupies a position within the Focus layer. However, as highlighted by Ledgeway (2008: 447) a location in Focus jars with the frequent claim in the literature that SI has a role in encoding Topic-continuity. Furthermore, this proposal would entail SI never co-occurring with focal XPs; Ledgeway (2008: 449–50) shows this to be an incorrect prediction for Old Neapolitan and Wolfe (2018a: 350–54) shows that the prediction also does not hold for Early Old French. As such, although the link between SI and V2 is attractive given that SI is lost from the Old Romance varieties at the same time as V2, its location in the Focus layer presents a theoretical and empirical problem.

A third analysis has been put forward by Ledgeway (2008) on the basis of Old Neapolitan, a variety I consider below.⁴ Rather than viewing SI as a phrasal category satisfying the part of the V2 constraint requiring movement or merger of a constituent in the left periphery, he presents a variety of theoretical and empirical arguments that suggests that SI is a head and thus an alternative to V-to-Fin movement in Old Neapolitan. Although appealing, as SI does indeed show many of the properties of a highly grammaticalised element and would thus be a classic case of Spec-to-Head reanalysis (Van Gelderen 2008; Van Gelderen 2009a; Van Gelderen 2009b), this analysis faces a major challenge: how can one reconcile a Head analysis of SI with verb-subject inversion structures which are standardly analysed as reflexes of V-to-C movement (4)? Although some of postverbal subjects could feasibly be in a *vP*-internal position, with the possibility that the verb occupies T, a growing body of evidence suggests that a postverbal Spec-TP position was active in a wide range of early Romance varieties (4b), meaning that the verb has to have been merged in a C-related Head in certain cases (Salvesen & Bech 2014; Wolfe 2018b: 27–8; Wolfe 2020b; Nicolae 2019).

- (4) a. Et intandu **sì** incumminzau la bactagla
 and then SI begin.3SG.PST the battle
 'And then the battle begun' (Old Sicilian, Eneas VII, 137)
 b. quasi per virtuti de Deu non potissi lu

as-if by virtue of God neg can.3SG.PST.SBJV the
 focu passari
 fire pass.INF
 ‘Seemingly through the virtue of God, the fire was not able to spread through [that place]’ (Old Sicilian, Gregoriu 36)

3. THE OLD ITALO-ROMANCE DATA

3.1. Old Neapolitan

Our task for the Old Neapolitan data is partly distinct to that for the three other varieties examined here, as the distribution of SI in Old Neapolitan has already been extensively discussed by Ledgeway (2008; 2009); its inclusion here is principally so that a sample of the Neapolitan data can be analysed in the same way as that for the other varieties included. 200 SI-clauses were extracted from the OVI database from the 14th-century prose text, the *Libro de la destructione de Troya* (henceforth *Troya*). A summary of SI’s distribution appears in Table 1:⁵

Table 1. SI in Old Neapolitan

	Matrix		Embedded	
SI-Initial	0	0%	1	2.8%
ET + SI	17	10.4%	0	0%
Subject	28	17.1%	19	52.8%
DP Object	4	2.4%	2	5.6%
Prepositional Phrase	18	11%	10	27.8%
Adverb	11	6.7%	0	0%
Adverbial Phrase	10	6.1%	3	8.3%
Clause	13	7.9%	0	0%
SI Third or More	63	38.4%	1	2.8%
Total	164	100%	36	100%

We see that by far the most frequent pattern for SI is to be preceded by two or more constituents (5), offering evidence for the rich left-peripheral structure assumed for Old Neapolitan by Ledgeway (2007; 2008; 2009). The second most frequent context for matrix SI is to be preceded by an initial subject as in (6). This is an important point as co-occurrence of SI with a subject DP is relatively rare in the well-studied (later) Old French system (Fleischman 1991; Wolfe 2018a: 345).

(5) a. In chilli tempi tucto lo puopulo de Thesalia, per una
 in those times all the people of Thesalia by a
 crudele infirmitate che a lloro sopervenne, si
 cruel illness that to them arrive.3SG.PST SI
 morio
 die.3SG.PST

‘In those times all the people of Thesalia died through a cruel illness that befell them’ (Troya 49)

b. Ancora chisto Hercules, secundo che dice la ,
 still this Hercules according what say.3SG the
 ystoria e se èy convenevole a credere, in
 history and REFL.CL be.3SG plausible to believe.INF in

tiempo che vippe s̄i se nde andao ...
 time that live.3SG.PST SI REFL.CL CL go.3SG.PST
 ‘Still Hercules, according to what the history says and what is credible, in the time that he lived, went...’ (Troja 41)

- (6) Questa citate s̄i era multo bellessema
 this city SI be.3SG.PST very beautiful
 ‘This city was very beautiful’ (Troja 55)

In keeping with the hypothesis that SI typically encodes Topic-continuity (Benincà 1995: 333; Salvi 2002: 378) or same-subject reference (Fleischman 1991), we might expect it to occur exclusively with null or highly topical subjects. However, as also noted by Ledgeway (2008: 443–444), we find cases where a seemingly focal subject, which categorically does not encode old information, precedes SI in the corpus:

- (7) E multi altri nobili homini de lo mundo s̄i nce so'
 and many other noblemen of the world SI CL be.3PL
 state venute
 be.PTCP come.PTCP
 ‘And many other noblemen of the world had come...’ (Troja 59)

We also find that other argumental XPs such as locative PPs (8) and DP objects (9, 10) can precede SI. The occurrence of objects with SI is notable as this pattern is heavily restricted in Old French (Marchello-Nizia 1985: 158). In contrast to (8) which refers to an entity already active in the discourse, the reading of (9) as well as (10) appears to be focal, with both DPs referring to constituents not previously mentioned in the text.⁶

- (8) Et in chesta insula de Colcos s̄i regnava uno re che
 and in this island of Colcos SI reign.3SG.PST a king that
 se clamava Oetis
 refl.CL call.3SG.PST Oetis
 ‘And a King named Oetis ruled reigned in this island of Colcos’ (Troja 50)

- (9) et onne thesauro e l'altra cose s̄i nde
 and all treasure and the-other things SI CL
 levaro
 take.3PL.PST
 ‘and they took all the treasure and other things’ (Troja 102)

- (10) e terrimoti orribile s̄i faceva
 and earthquakes horrible SI make.3SG.PST
 ‘and she could bring about terrible earthquakes’ (Troja 56)

As noted in Section 2, a highly productive pattern across many Medieval Romance varieties is the co-occurrence of a clause or other ‘clause-external’ element before SI. Witness in Old Neapolitan SI’s occurrence with an initial clause as well as with scene-setting adverbials (11):

- (11) a. E, voltandose ad Hector, s̄i le
 and turn.PROG.REFL.CL to Hector si him.CL
 diceva
 say.3SG.PST
 ‘And turning to Hector, he said to him...’ (Troja 88)

b. allora **sì** nce regnava questo re Laumedonta
 then SI CL reign.3SG.PST this king Laumedonta
 ‘Then this King Laumedonta reigned’ (Troja 54)

Finally, note that in contrast to other Medieval Romance varieties where SI is either absent or heavily restricted in embedded contexts (Marchello-Nizia 1985: 15; Lemieux & Dupuis 1995: 96), embedded instances of SI account for 18% of the collected sample for Old Neapolitan (see also the data in Ledgeway 2008: sec. 4.1.2.3):

(12) la quale lo re Priamo **sì** la concesse
 the which the king Priam SI it concede.3SG.PST
 ‘...which King Priam agreed to’ (Troja 193)

We now move on to consider the empirical generalisations emerging in the data from another medieval Southern Italian Dialect, Old Sicilian.

3.2. Old Sicilian

For Old Sicilian, I draw on 200 SI-clauses extracted from the *Libru de lu dialogu di sanctu Gregoriu* (henceforth *Gregoriu*), which like *Troja* is a 14th-century prose text. The text has recently been used in several studies of Old Sicilian V2 (Wolfe 2015; Wolfe 2018b: chap. 3). The findings on the distribution of matrix SI appearing in Wolfe (forthcoming) are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. SI in Old Sicilian

	Matrix	
SI-Initial	0	0%
ET + SI	1	0.5%
Subject	72	36%
DP Object	5	2.5%
Prepositional Phrase	21	10.5%
Adverb	7	3.5%
Adverbial Phrase	0	0%
Clause	9	4.5%
SI Third or More	85	42.5%
Total	200	100%

We see a degree of continuity with the Old Neapolitan data here. Firstly, orders where SI is preceded by multiple left-peripheral constituents are the dominant pattern, as they are in Old Neapolitan:

(13) a. et pir li lacrimi soy, Deu **sì** avj...
 and through the tears his God SI have.3SG
 ‘And through his tears, God has...’ (Gregoriu 35)
 b. Lo abbate, audendo ço, **sì** llo salutao...
 the abbot hear.PROG this SI CL greet.3SG.PST
 ‘Hearing this, the abbot greeted him...’ (Gregoriu 15)

Like Old Neapolitan but unlike Old French, we find that SUBJECT + SI orders are a fully productive pattern in the corpus. However, in contrast to Old Neapolitan, all of these 72

subjects are already ACTIVE in the sense of Lambrecht (1994) in the preceding discourse. Indeed, as the following examples in (14) show, there is often a clear syntactic indicator of their discourse-active status, such as a demonstrative determiner or the fact the subject is pronominal:

- (14) a. chisto monaco sî trovao uno grande serpente...
 this monk SI find.3SG.PST a big snake
 Lo serpente sî llo secutao
 the snake SI CL follow.3SG.PST
 ‘This monk found a great snake.... The snake followed him’ (Gregoriu 11)
- b. et illu sî prise lu cavallu
 and he SI take.3SG.PST the horse
 ‘And he took the horse’ (Gregoriu 31)

Five examples are found of direct objects occurring before SI, but again these constituents appear topical rather than focal and refer to an entity already mentioned in the preceding portion of text. It is important to note that preverbal Information Focus is licensed in Old Sicilian (Cruschina 2011; Wolfe 2018b: chap. 3), but appears to be incompatible with SI.

- (15) a. et chesta tentacione sî lo fice
 and this temptation SI CL do.3SG.PST
 And this (type of) temptation happened...’ (Gregoriu 12)
- b. e kista parte sî tene tuctu
 and this part si keep.3SG.PST all
 ‘and all (...) kept this part...’ (Gregoriu 77)

The final point to note with regard to matrix syntax is that clauses or scene-setting adverbials, which I take to lexicalise Benincà & Poletto’s (2004) Frame-layer can also precede SI, but they do so alone to a limited extent (16/200 cases of SI):

- (16) a. et partendusj da Ruma, sî vinne ad...
 and leave.PROG=REFL.CL of Rome SI come.3SG.PST to
 ‘And leaving Rome, he came to...’ (Gregoriu 37)
- b. Et tando sî disse lo fratre allo serpente
 and then si say.3SG.PST the brother to-the serpent
 ‘and then the brother [monk] said to the serpent...’ (Gregoriu 12)

We saw in the section immediately above that in Old Neapolitan embedding of SI is a fully productive pattern accounting for 18% of the data collected. Although Wolfe (forthcoming) does not deal with embedded SI, a search of the OVI database for the particle SI in *Gregoriu* reveals only two instances in the first 200 clauses analysed (an example is given in 16). This strongly suggests that Old Sicilian in this regard is more like Old French, where SI is rarely embedded in certain texts and entirely absent in others (Marchello-Nizia 1985: 15; Lemieux & Dupuis 1995: 96), than the Neapolitan system considered here.

- (17) ...lu qualj sî succexi a sanctu Benedictu in lu
 the which SI succeed.3SG.PST to Saint Benedict in the
 regimentu de lu monasteriu

regime of the monastery
 ‘Who succeeded Saint Benedict in the running of the monastery’ (Gregoriu 37)

3.3. Old Venetian

Since the seminal work by Benincà (1983) on the syntax of the *Lio Mazon* text, Venetian data have been used quite extensively in studies of Old Italo-Romance syntax (Vanelli 1987; Benincà 1995; Benincà 2004; Benincà 2006; Wolfe 2018b: chap. 3; Poletto Forthcoming). For this article, the corpus data are extracted from the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* (henceforth *Brendano*) which has not so far been extensively discussed in the literature. Within this text 127 instances of particle *SI* were found and their distribution is presented in Table 3:

Table 3. *SI* in Old Venetian

	Matrix		Embedded	
SI-Initial	15	12.3%	0	0%
ET + SI	27	22.1%	0	0%
Subject	29	23.8%	4	80%
DP Object	0	0%	0	0%
Prepositional Phrase	0	0%	1	20%
Adverb	6	4.9%	0	0%
Adverbial Phrase	5	4.1%	0	0%
Clause	17	13.9%	0	0%
SI Third or More	23	18.9%	0	0%
Total	122	100%	5	100%

In Venetian, we observe that the dominant pattern is for *SI* to be preceded by an initial subject, a pattern also attested with a lesser frequency in Neapolitan and Sicilian. Close examination of these SUBJECT + *SI* orders shows that all subjects in these configurations are either pronominal (18), discourse-OLD (19), or encode an entity we can analyse as forming part of the common knowledge of the speaker-hearer (20)(Ariel 1988). No cases are found with initial objects.

- (18) Et elo **sì** li respose in questo modo
 and he SI CL respond.3SG.PST in this way
 ‘And he respond to him in this way’ (Brendano 190)
- (19) Questa osiela **sì** aveva...
 this bird SI have.3SG.PST
 ‘This bird had...’ (Brendano 136)
- (20) E Dio **sì** dise
 and God SI say.3SG.PST
 ‘And God said’ (Brendano 224)

In contrast to Old Neapolitan, where *SI*-initial clauses are not generally found, and Old Sicilian where both *SI*-initial clauses and ET + *SI* clauses are (near)-absent, we find that together they make up nearly a third of occurrences of *SI*:

- (21) **Sì** viti molte fontane de diversi colori
 SI see.1SG.PST many fountains of diverse colours
 ‘I saw many fountains of different colours’ (Brendano 232)

(22) e sì montà su la so nave con li suo'
 and SI climb.3SG.PST in the his boat with the his
 frari
 brothers
 ‘And he climbed into his boat with his brothers’ (Brendano 264)

SI-third or greater cases make up a lesser proportion of the data than they do in either Old Neapolitan or Old Sicilian, but still constitute 18.9% of the data collected:

(23) E como fo pasado li tre di, in ora
 and as be.3SG.PST pass.PTCP the three days in hour
 de meza terza sì vene una osiela forte volando
 of mass third SI come.3SG.PST a bird strong fly.PROG
 ‘And as the three days had passed, at the time of the third mass, a bird came, flying hard..’ (Brendano 136)

In addition, a range of scene-setting elements such as clauses and adverbials can either be the sole constituent before SI (24) or precede it as we see with the initial clause of Example (23) above:

(24) e como lo ave conplido de cantar la
 and as CL have.3SG.PST finish.PTCP of sing.INF the
 canzon, sì parlà
 song si speak.3SG.PST
 ‘And once it had finished the song, it spoke...’ (Brendano 246)

Finally, note that although embedded SI is clearly licensed (25), Table 4 shows that it is restricted relative to Old Neapolitan, as was also the case in Old Sicilian and, as we noted above, as is reported for Old French SI:

(25) e devé saver che uno agnolo de Dio, meraveioso da
 and should know.INF that a lamb of God marvellous to
 veder, sì varda questa isola
 see.INF SI guard.3SG this island
 ‘And you should know that a lamb of God, marvellous to behold, guards this island’ (Brendano 44)

3.4. Old Piedmontese

The data appearing in Table 4 are an exhaustive presentation of SI’s occurrence in the *Sermoni Subalpini*. Questions about the date of composition remain, but it is likely from the 13th century (Parry 1998: 94–5; Delfuoco et al. 2005):

Table 4. SI in Old Piedmontese

	Matrix		Embedded	
SI-Initial	37	14.9%	0	0%
ET + SI	118	47.4%	0	0%
Subject	42	16.9%	6	60%
DP Object	0	0%	0	0%
Prepositional Phrase	1	0.4%	1	10%

Adverb	11	4.4%	0	0%
Adverbial Phrase	9	3.6%	0	0%
Clause	17	6.8%	3	30%
SI Third or More	14	5.6%	0	0%
Total	249	100%	10	100%

The dominant pattern in the text is for SI to occur in a clause introduced by the coordinator ET (26), in complementary distribution with an initial subject. We also find SI in co-occurrence with an initial subject (27) and in cases where it is in absolute initial position of the clause (28).

- (26) a. E **si** lo temptè per vana gloria
and SI CL tempt.3SG.PST through vain glory
‘And he tempted him through vain glory’ (Sermoni 276)
- b. Apres zo si ven una grant conpaigna d’angeil,
after this si come.3SG.PST a great company of-angels
e **si** comenceren a canter
and si begin.3PL.PST to sing.INF
‘After this a great company of angels came and they began to sing’ (Sermoni 273)
- (27) Aquesta passiun **si** est de la bestia
this passion SI be.SG of the beast
‘This passion is beastly’ (Sermoni 265)
- (28) **Si** ven la bona femena que vos savez
SI come.3SG.PST the good woman that you know.2PL
‘The good woman that you know came’ (Sermoni 225)

With reference to initial subjects, we do find a single instance that appears to be an instance of Information Focus; consider the question-answer pair in (29).⁷ Whilst we do not find any cases of SI being preceded by an object DP, we do find a single case of SI being preceded by an indirect object PP.

- (29) Or qual pera li trovarem sot lo pe?
now what stone CL find.1PL.FUT under the foot
Calcedoni, qui à pali color, **si** à tel
Calcedoni which have.3SG pale colour si have.3SG such
vertù que...
virtu that
‘Now which stone do we find under his foot? Calcedoni, which has a pale colour and such virtue that...’ (Sermoni 248)

The remaining SI data are accounted for through instances of scene-setting adverbials or clauses (30) or instances where SI is third or more in the ordering, which as we have seen are found across all the Italo-Romance texts considered in this article (31). It is worth noting, however, that the 5.6% of matrix clauses such cases account for is smaller here than elsewhere (18.9 - 42.5%):

- (30) a. Cum el of zo dit, **si** conduist lo
when he have.3SG that say.PTCP SI lead.3SG.PST the
rei ultra lo flum
king beyond the river

‘When he said this, he took the king beyond the river’ (Sermoni 227)

b. Or apres **si** dit que
now after si say.3SG that

‘Soon afterwards he said that...’ (Sermoni 108)

(31) Or quest bon hom, qui avia questi trei amì, **si**
now this good man who have.3SG.PST these three men si
era...
be.3SG.PST

‘Now this good man who had three friends, was...’ (Sermoni 238)

Finally, note that SI is found in embedded clauses, but only marginally as was also the case for Old Sicilian and Old Venetian, accounting for 10 of 259 occurrences of SI within the text (3.9%):

(32) ki dit in Actibus Apostolorum que, quant nostre Seignor
who say.3SG in acts apostles that when our Lord
montò en cel, **si** veneren doi ioven homen vestì
go-up.3SG.PST in sky si come.3PL.PST two young men dressed
de drap blanc
of cloth white

‘...who says that in Acts of the Apostles, when our Lord went up into the sky, two young men dressed in white cloth came...’ (Sermoni 240)

4. SI AND THE LEFT PERIPHERY

Given the scope of the data presented so far, which range across four distinct dialects of the Extreme South, Upper South, Northwest, and Northeast of the Italian Peninsula, it is unsurprising that the picture emerging is a varied one.⁸ Nevertheless, a number of revealing generalisations emerge from the data presented so far which suggest that the data concerning SI is systematic in a number of respects.

Consider the very basic empirical generalisations emerging from the data. From the outset, it is clear that Old Italo-Romance SI is readily compatible with left-peripheral verbal arguments to some degree: all the varieties considered show SI co-occurring with one or more of a preverbal subject, DP object, or selected PP object. This already sets the Old Italo-Romance varieties apart from Later Old French (post-1180), where SI can only be preceded by an initial clause, scene-setting adverbial, or a Clitic Left Dislocation structure (Salvesen 2013; Wolfe 2018a). On this note, we can also observe from Tables 1-4 and the qualitative discussion in Section 3 that all the varieties here also permit SI’s co-occurrence with clauses or scene-setting adverbials. If we take a sub-class of clauses (Poletto 2002; Munaro 2010; Greco & Haegeman 2020) and scene-setting adverbials which scope over the entire sentence (Poletto 2000: 100; Öhl 2010; Ledgeway 2010a: 44–45) to lexicalise Benincà & Poletto’s (2004) Frame field, we can hypothesise that SI can be preceded by constituents in this field universally across Medieval Romance.

Beyond these points of continuity, however, there is also clear variation in a number of areas. Focussing first on the numerical data, we can observe that orders where SI is third or more in the linear ordering are considerably more frequent in the two Southern Italian Dialects than in the Northern Italian Dialects. Following the analysis in Wolfe (2018b), this may not be linked to the syntax of SI per se, but rather a reflection of the fact that V3* orders are more frequent in Southern Italian Dialects in general. A further point of variation concerns SI’s ability to be the sole constituent in a V2 clause: these orders are absent entirely

in matrix clauses in the Sicilian and Neapolitan texts,⁹ but are more frequent in the Venetian and Piedmontese texts. In addition, embedded SI constitutes a far larger proportion of the extant data for Neapolitan than in the other three varieties considered. A final point of variation concerns SI's ability to occur as the sole preverbal constituent in a clause beginning with ET, which I leave to future research to explore.

Turning to more detailed aspects of the syntax-pragmatics interface, there is further variation when we consider the Topic-Focus layer. Topical subjects, both pronominal and lexical, are found in all the varieties we have considered.¹⁰ However, topical objects are only licensed in Neapolitan, Sicilian and Piedmontese; in the latter case we only have evidence of PP-objects. Moving to the Focus layer, we observe that informationally focussed subjects are licensed in both Piedmontese and Neapolitan, whereas informationally focussed objects are only found in Neapolitan, as already reported by Ledgeway (2008: 449–450). We can schematise these findings as follows, which permits us to formulate an implicational hierarchy of the types of constituents that may co-occur with SI within a given system:

Table 5. Constituents Resumed by SI

Frame		Topic		Focus	
Clause _{Scene-Setting}	Adverbials _{Scene-Setting}	Topic _{Subject}	Topic _{Object}	Focus _{Subject}	Focus _{Object}
Neapolitan	Neapolitan	Neapolitan	Neapolitan	Neapolitan	Neapolitan
Piedmontese	Piedmontese	Piedmontese	Piedmontese	Piedmontese	
Sicilian	Sicilian	Sicilian	Sicilian		
Venetian	Venetian	Venetian			

Whilst it might be tempting to attempt to derive all the patterns in Table 5 from independent properties of the left periphery for the varieties in question, this would lead us to incorrect conclusions. For example, Old Piedmontese is shown in Wolfe (2018b: 44) to license informationally focussed direct objects in the *Sermoni Subalpini*, which we have seen do not co-occur with SI. Old Sicilian, likewise, licenses informationally focussed subjects and objects (Cruschina 2011) but not with SI. My proposal therefore is that the constituents co-occurring with SI are not determined by whether projections in the Topic-Focus layer are activated in the languages in question, but rather the position in which SI is merged. Specifically, in Old Italo-Romance, I suggest that SI can either be merged in SpecFinP and preceded by constituents in the Frame, Topic, and Focus fields or in a low specifier position within the Topic-layer, where it is preceded by Frame-Setters and Topics.¹¹ There is seemingly no Italo-Romance analogue to the situation in Later Old French where SI can only be preceded by scene-setting clauses and adverbials and thus appears to be in SpecForceP (Wolfe 2018a; Wolfe 2020a).¹²

- (33) [_{Frame} Adv/_{ClauseScene} Setting [_{Force} [_{Topic} Topic_{Subject}, Topic_{Object}, **SI**₁ [_{Focus} Focus_{Subject}, Focus_{Object} [_{Fin} **SI**₂ [_{Fin} V] [TP . . .]]]]]]]

Recall that Old Neapolitan shows the most widespread distribution of embedded SI (Section 3.1). Looking at (33), this may not be surprising. If, following Ledgeway (2005: 380–389), we take Old Italo-Romance complementisers to be merged in several left-peripheral head positions (Force, Top(ic), Foc(us) and Fin), the expectation holds that the lower SI's position in the left periphery, the more likely it will be able to appear in an embedded clause. Thus, all things being equal, SI₂ in the grammar of Old Neapolitan could readily be embedded under all but a Fin complementiser.

The further variation we observe with regard to the ability of SI to occur in initial position of a matrix clause may be due to independent properties of the languages in

question. Holmberg (2020) puts forward the hypothesis that in V2 languages the V2 constraint can only ever be satisfied via internal merge. However, if one adopts the assumption that this may be true of some V2 systems but not others a particular line of analysis opens up for our data. Suppose that in Old Neapolitan and Old Sicilian V2 is, as Holmberg proposes, only satisfied by an internally merged constituent. It would then follow that SI, as a base-generated particle, would not be able to satisfy V2 in the absence of another constituent in the left periphery, which is precisely what we see in the data. By way of contrast, if, in the two Northern Old Italo-Romance varieties, V2 can also be satisfied by external merge (i.e. base-generation), SI is predicted to be able to occur in initial position in the absence of other constituents, which we can see is precisely what we find. One independent piece of evidence for this speculation comes from the left-peripheral syntax of Italo-Romance varieties today. Whilst in Southern Italo-Romance, a wide variety of operations are licensed which target the Topic and Focus layer via internal merge (Cruschina 2006; Cruschina 2012: chap. 3; Mensching & Remberger 2010; Ledgeway 2010b), this is typically not the case in Northern Italo-Romance varieties, where licensing of both Information and Contrastive Focus is often restricted and the topics which are licensed are plausibly analysed as base-generated (Paoli 2003; Paoli 2010). This split as regards argument-fronting operations is seen as a significant part of the North/South Italo-Romance divide in Ledgeway (Forthcoming). If the tentative proposal here is correct that the class of V2 satisfiers was fundamentally distinct in the South and North, this may account for this major point of distinction we see today.

5. CONCLUSION

In this article we have seen that the distribution of SI across four early Italo-Romance vernaculars is far from uniform. This contributes to the growing body of evidence that medieval Italy was home to a comparable amount of microvariation to that which we find in the syntactic domain today, even if the widespread use of the particle SI does constitute part of the bundle of features which are points of continuity across early Italo-Romance varieties (cf. Benincà 2004, 2006). The proposal outlined above is that the most significant of the distributional differences between the four varieties considered can be understood as the result of two converging factors: the height at which SI is merged within the extended C-domain and whether both externally and internally merged constituents, or internally merged alone, can act as V2-satisfiers.

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¹ The OVI database can be found at <https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/ovi>. For complete bibliographical information on all the editions cited in the article, I refer to the database.

² On Old French see discussion and references in Marchello-Nizia (1985), Fleishman (1991), and Wolfe (2018a). On Old Occitan see Donaldson (2015), Wolfe (2017), and Meklenborg (2020a; 2020b).

³ See Benincà (1983) for Old Venetian, Parry (2019) on Old Piedmontese, Wolfe (2015) on Old Sicilian and Ledgeway (2007; 2008) on Old Neapolitan, alongside the references in Section 1 for Italo-Romance in general.

⁴ See also Meklenborg (2020b) for a recent analysis suggesting SI in Old French can also be a Head.

⁵ Note that DP objects appearing in the tables in this article are not resumed by a resumptive clitic.

⁶ Note that Example (9) also undermines both the Topic-continuity and same-subject reference analysis of SI, as the indefinite DP ‘uno re...’ is clearly not a continuing Topic.

⁷ See Cruschina (2012: 71) for discussion of the question-answer test for Information Focus.

⁸ For recent discussion of dialect grouping in Italo-Romance, see Ledgeway (2016b) on the South and Benincà et al. on the North (2016).

⁹ Adam Ledgeway (p.c.) confirms that such orders are occasionally found in Old Neapolitan but are very rare.

¹⁰ See also Donaldson (2015) on Old Occitan, where SUBJECT + SI orders are widely attested.

¹¹ One would need to assume that this variant of SI is still base-generated in Spec-FinP before moving to its eventual position within the Topic-layer; this is to rule-out non-attested *SI + Focus + Verb orders.

¹² This analysis is reminiscent of Ledgeway’s (2005) proposal for Old Italo-Romance complementisers which can also be merged in a variety of left-peripheral fields.