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PART II

DIACHRONY AND OTHER
INDO-EUROPEAN
LANGUAGES

14

Null subjects in Old Italian

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14.1 Introduction

In this chapter I intend to analyse the complex distribution of null subjects in thirteenth-century Old Florentine, which, following the tradition of the ‘Grammatica dell’italiano antico’ (Grammar of Old Italian), I will henceforth refer to as Old Italian (OI). The main theoretical question I would like to answer is the following: what are the factors that rule the distribution of null and lexical pronominal subjects in OI?

The traditional view on this first proposed by Benincà (1986; 2006) for OI and Adams (1987) for Old French (OFr) is that the distribution of null subjects depends directly on the Verb Second property, since null subjects are mainly found in main clauses. The small number of embedded null subjects could be explained as an effect of main clause phenomena in embedded domains. This proposal has been systematically investigated for Old French, but not for OI. As I will show, the distribution of null subjects in OI is extremely complex and depends on the V2 property at best only indirectly. The chapter is conceived as follows: in the next section I will spell out the problem and then provide a broad general picture of the syntax of OI, and consider (a) the null subject system of Modern Italian, (b) the type of V2 OI displays, (c) the Tobler-Mussafia law, and (d) the syntax of the particle *sí*, which will be used as a test to show that OI is not a symmetric V2 language. Section 14.2 presents a critical look at previous proposals. In Section 14.4 I will present the data and show that the null subject system of Old Italian is different from that of its modern counterpart and cannot be accounted for either according to the analysis which is valid for Modern Italian or from the traditional analysis that *pro* is licensed by the verb moving to C in V2 contexts. Section 14.5 contains the main proposal: I will propose that null subjects in SpecTP can be licensed through Agree with a null Topics located in a SpecTopic in the CP layer. However, also null Topics must be licensed, and the complex distribution of *pro* drop in OI is due to the fact that different types of null Topics can be licensed in different ways. This explains the partial asymmetry between main and embedded clauses: main clauses have access to two licensing strategies, one of which is T° to Topic°, while in embedded clauses only one strategy is available.

I will limit my investigation to the thirteenth century because there are well-founded reasons (see Franco et al. 2016) to believe that after the turn of the fourteenth century the original V2 system is destabilized and data might be even more difficult to interpret than the already rather complex data I will present here. I will, therefore, rather consider one single system, that of the thirteenth century and examine it in detail. The set of examples I will use comes from the online database of the OVI (Opera del Vocabolario Italiano) and from a new database of Old Italian under construction at the University of Frankfurt as well as from manual screening of the data.

14.2 Null subjects and the structure of the clause in OI

Modern Italian is the language on which *pro* drop was first analysed (see Rizzi 1982) in syntactic terms as a null pronoun located in the SpecIP position licensed by the strong morphology of the inflected verb. As for its interpretation, the *pro* subject of an embedded clause is typically interpreted as coreferent with the subject of the main clause, i.e. *pro* has a subject bias (see Carminati 2002)

- (1) Gianni_i ha salutato Mario_j quando pro_i è tornato a casa
 Gianni has greeted Mario when pro is come to home
 ‘Gianni greeted Mario when he came home.’

When a tonic subject pronoun is spelled out, it is generally interpreted as a different referent with respect to the subject of the main clause, either another argument of the main verb or another referent already present in the discourse (see Carminati 2002 for a detailed discussion). This effect is reported for other *pro* drop modern Romance languages, like Portuguese, (see Flores and Rinke 2017, among others).

- (2) Gianni_i ha salutato Mario_j quando lui_j è tornato a casa
 Gianni has greeted Mario when he is come to home
 ‘Gianni greeted Mario when he came home.’

The system of OI is clearly different from the modern language, since embedded lexical subject pronouns can be coreferential with the subject of the main clause: in (3) the subject of the main verb *provò* is the same as that of the embedded verb *avea*, although the embedded clause has a lexical subject pronoun. This type of interpretation is not possible in Modern Italian:

- (3) E così ne provò _ de’ più cari ch’elli avea. (oFlor.)
 and so of-it tested3sg _ of-the most dear that-he had
 ‘So he tested some of the best friends he had.’ (Testi fiorentini,74)

This means that OI must have different interpretive conditions for lexical subject pronouns.

Also the interpretation of null subjects has changed, since OI does not display the subject bias typical of the modern language (see (1)). In (4) the null subject following the conjunction *e* ‘and’ does not refer back to the subject of the preceding clauses, namely *la gente d’oltremare* ‘people from overseas’, but is clearly coreferent with *a Romani* ‘to the Romans’, a typical context in which Modern Italian would need to use a lexical pronoun.

- (4) E [la gente d’oltremare] i vuol gran male [a’ Romani] j perché Ø_i
 and the people of overseas wants great evil to.the Romans since were
 fur già segnoreggiati da loro, e Ø_j fecero loro dura e aspra signoria
 already dominated by them and did.3pl them hard and harsh rule
 ‘The people from overseas hates the Romans because they have been ruled by those,
 and the Romans ruled in a hard and harsh way’ (VeV 100)

This means that the interpretive conditions regulating the reference of both null and lexical subject pronouns have changed. On the basis of this preliminary observation, I will try to develop a new analysis of the distribution of null subjects in OI. Before doing so, I will spell out some general properties of OI mainly capitalizing on Poletto (2014).

14.2.1 The OI V2 system: Subject inversion

OI is a V2 language which displays the typical unrestricted movement of any constituent to the left periphery in front of the inflected verb, i.e. it allows for the fronting of elements which nowadays cannot be fronted any longer (like the adverb *anche* ‘also’ in (5), which is sharply out in Modern Italian):

- (5) Anche dovresti avere a memoria
 also should.2sg have to memory
 ‘You also should remember’ (VeV 95)

OI displays subject inversion of the Germanic type, i.e. the subject is located in the SpecT position between the auxiliary and the lexical verb (in addition to low subject inversion located at the vP border, which are possible in OI as well as in Modern Italian). In order to prove that Germanic subject inversion is indeed possible, we have to find a subject located between the auxiliary in C° and the past participle in the vP. Furthermore, the subject must be on the left of aspectual and manner adverbs, thus excluding the possibility that these are regular cases of low vP subjects, where the past participle has raised only to v° and not to some aspectual position such as those identified by Cinque (1999), since low vP subjects are also possible in the modern Romance languages.

- (6) Adunque senza gramatica non potrebbe alcuno bene dire...
 so without grammar not could.3sg anyone well speak.inf
 ‘Without grammar one could not speak well...’ (Rettorica 48)

This type of example is not very frequent, but they exist, so we can state that OI has a type of inversion which has been lost in the modern language.¹

14.2.2 The OI V2 system: Recursive Topics

On the other hand, OI does not obey the linear restriction typical of modern V2 languages like German:

- (7) E per volontà de le Virtudi tutta questa roba tra’ poveri dispense
 and for will of the virtues all this stuff among poor dispensed
 ‘And according to the will of the Virtues dispensed all these goods among the poor.’
 (VeV 99)

¹ This type of subject inversion has always been seen as decisive proof that Old Romance was V2.

The hypothesis I will follow is the one originally put forward by Poletto (2002), i.e. that OI is a pragmatic V2 language, i.e. a language where the verb must move at least to the head of FocusP in a split left periphery, but can also reach a higher Topic^o when it licenses a null Topic in its specifier.

- (8) [HT [Scene setting [ForceP [TopicP [XP] [Topic^o V infl] [FocusP [XP] [Focus^o V infl] [WH [FinP [TP]]]]]]]]]]]

Following Benincà (2006), I will adopt the idea that the inflected verb remains in the head of Focus when the specifier of Focus is occupied, while it moves up to Topic when the specifier of Focus is empty and the verb must license a null Topic in the SpecTopic position. The reason for the movement to the C domain is thus related to the Focus and Topic projections located in the left periphery. One might debate whether this type of system is still a V2 language, since the reason for the T to C movement is not the same as in Germanic, where the feature attracting the inflected verb to the C domain is an agreement feature. Considering OI a V2 language clearly depends on the definition one adopts of V2. If one adopts a rather restrictive definition, i.e. V2 means that the verb moves to ForceP or must obey the linear restriction typical of modern German, and moves only because of an Agreement feature, then OI is clearly not V2.

The definition I adopt here is the following: a V2 language is a language where the inflected verb must move to the C domain (at least) in main declarative clauses. Under this definition OI is indeed a V2 language.

14.2.3 The OI V2 system: Enclisis and proclisis and the *sí* particle

Benincà's proposal also covers the so-called Tobler-Mussafia law: she proposes that proclisis of object clitics occurs when the inflected verb remains in Focus, and that enclisis occurs when the inflected verb moves higher to Topic^o leaving the clitic behind. I will not pursue the exact mechanism of excorporation of the clitic any further, since the problem of how enclisis and proclisis is obtained is too complex to be dealt with here and requires a whole investigation of its own. I will simply adopt enclisis and proclisis as a test which shows us the height of the inflected verb: when we have proclisis, the verb has stopped in Focus^o; when we have enclisis, it has raised further to Topic^o, as Benincà proposes.

The idea that OI is a 'pragmatic' V2 language also accounts for the distribution of the particle *sí* 'so'. The *sí* particle in front of the inflected verb only triggers proclisis; there are no cases of enclisis attested in the whole OVI data base. This means that *sí* blocks the verb below Topic in the Focus layer. The element *sí* is also an adverb meaning 'so' and is the short form of *cosí*, which also exists in OI. While *cosí* can only occur modifying an adjective or an adverb, the shorter form *sí* very frequently occurs in front of the inflected verb and also in front of the complementizer and the element *come* 'as'.

The fact that *sí* is a short form might indicate that it is a head and not a specifier. This is exactly the proposal that Ledgeway (2013) has put forward, assuming that *sí* is hosted in the head of FinP, which blocks V to C movement. I will not adopt this analysis, because it predicts that sequences like *sí*-subject-inflected verb are possible, but they do not exist in

the OVI corpus (see also Wolfe 2017 for a discussion on the problems of this analysis). I will rather adopt Benincà's analysis that when it is a particle in front of the inflected verb, *sí* is located in the SpecFocus position and keeps the verb in Focus^o, blocking its raising to Topic (and preventing enclisis).²

Now that we have spelled out the major assumptions concerning the syntax of OI, we are now ready to investigate the distribution of null subjects. This cannot be completely understood without making reference to (a) the types of null topics that were possible in OI (and are not possible in Modern Italian) and (b) the distribution of lexical full pronouns.

14.3 Old Italian null subjects

14.3.1 Previous accounts of null subjects in Old French

The phenomenon of pro drop has been traditionally tied to the property of Verb Second in Old French since Adams (1987). The analysis is supported by the observation that pro drop is mainly found in main clauses and rather rare in embedded clauses. When it occurs in embedded clauses, these are mainly contexts in which we might suppose embedded V2 to have occurred, like sentences embedded under bridge verbs or sentences introduced by the element which is the equivalent of German *weil*, which also allows for embedded V2 in the spoken language under specific discourse conditions. (9) is an example of the type of asymmetry we find in Old French texts, where the main clause displays pro drop and the embedded clause a lexical pronoun:

- (9) Si errerent _ tant en tele maniere qu'il vindrent en la
 so wandered = so-much in such way that-they came in the
 prairie de Wincestre (OFr)
 meadow of Winchester

'They wandered so much in such a way that they arrived at the meadow of Winchester.'

- (10) Or avoit _ tant les doiz gresliz qu'il s' en issi (oFr.)
 now had so the fingers frozen that-he cl-cl went
 'Now he had fingers so frozen that he left.' (Béroul, 63)

This state of affairs led Roberts (1993) and Vance (1997) to assume that null subjects are only licensed by V to C in OFr. Zimmermann (2012) states that OFr was not a null subject language, but actually shows with a detailed quantitative analysis that the distribution of null subjects is exactly that already noted in Adams (1987), i.e. OFr indeed displays a robust main/embedded asymmetry. Abstracting away from the label we want to give to this phenomenon, whether we can call this pro drop or not, there is general consensus on the fact that OFr displays null subjects and that they are different from those of 'standard'

² *Sí* can also be a modifier of adjectives and adverbs and be located on the left of the complementizer in embedded clauses, and in these cases it clearly has a different position (see again Poletto 2014 on this). The relevant cases are, however, those in which *sí* blocks further movement to Topic.

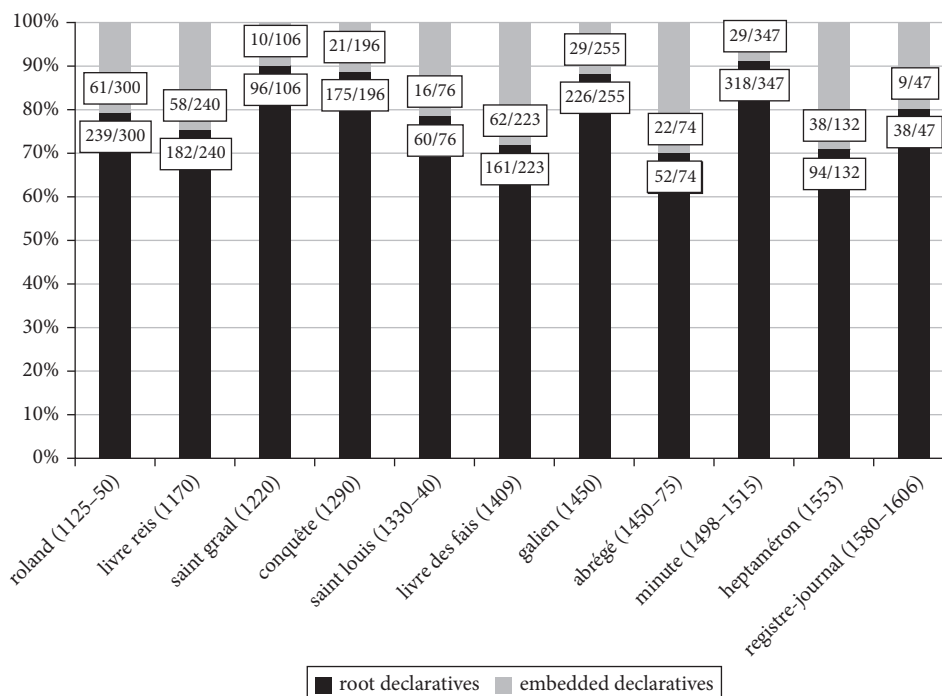


Figure 14.1 The distribution of null subjects in Old Italian

Source: Zimmermann (2012: 120, figure 5)

modern pro drop languages like Spanish, Portuguese, or Italian, as Zimmermann correctly points out. Before we undertake a systematic study of the distribution of null subjects in OI, let us briefly consider the major differences with respect to OFr: as Figure 14.1 shows, in OFr the asymmetry between main and embedded clauses is rather marked, although in French too we do not really find a clear-cut distinction between main and embedded clauses. However, since Zimmermann only considered embedded declaratives, the raw numbers of null subjects found in embedded clauses could actually be explained by means of assuming embedded V2 in the usual embedded V2 contexts also known from Germanic.³ Figure 14.1 shows for several texts starting in 1125 and ending in 1580 that the number of null subjects (dark in the columns) are much higher in main clauses than the number of null subjects in embedded clauses (lighter in the columns). The numbers shown at the top of each column show the clear asymmetry between main and embedded clauses, which varies in terms of percentages across different texts, but which is found in all texts throughout the period considered.

This means that in OFr the main vs embedded asymmetry that we expect, given the traditional analysis that pro drop is related to T to C, is actually found in the data, i.e. OFr can be treated as a language in which null subjects depend on T to C.

³ A detailed quantitative analysis of pro drop in embedded domains according to the type of embedded clause still needs to be performed and might reveal interesting differences beyond the assumption made since Vance that pro only occurs when associated to embedded V2.

14.3.2 Previous analyses of OI null subjects

Zimmermann (2012) treats OI like Old Spanish and like Modern Italian in allowing for *pro* in both main and embedded clauses without distinction. However, this is not correct, as already shown by Benincà (2006), since OI has an astonishing number of lexical subject pronouns in embedded clauses that in Modern Italian cannot be interpreted as coreferent with the subject of the main clause (see (3) above). So, OI is much more similar to OFr than Zimmermann acknowledges. On the other hand, the main/embedded asymmetry in OI is not as clear as it is in OFr. Renzi, Vanelli, and Benincà (1984) have noted an unexpected high rate of lexical pronouns in embedded clauses and put forward the hypothesis that this might be tied to the type of V2 of OI. Benincà (2006: 16) formalizes her previous work, proposing that the asymmetric nature of *pro* drop for both OFr and OI is one of the direct indications (together with subject inversion, enclisis and proclisis, and the presence of CP expletive particles) of the V2 character of these languages. She also assumes, as Vance does for OFr, that *pro* can only be licensed in a government configuration when the inflected verb raises to C, i.e. higher than the preverbal subject position. Benincà provides some cases in which there is a null subject in the main clause but the following embedded clause displays a lexical pronoun and argues as follows:

This asymmetry can be taken as evidence for V movement to C° in main clauses, by making the following hypothesis. When the inflected verb moves to C (as it does in main clauses), it locally governs the subject position, so it transmits its features to *pro* and licenses it as a subject; but when the verb doesn't raise to C (as is typically the case in subordinate clauses), it cannot license *pro* as a subject. This hypothesis accounts for the asymmetry of *pro*-drop, as V movement to C° is primarily a root phenomenon.

(Benincà 2006: 63)

Benincà is perfectly aware of the fact that the asymmetry between main and embedded clauses in OI is not as clear-cut as one might want it to be,⁴ but is actually much less neat than that which Adams originally found in her investigation of OFr. She assumes that the cases of *pro* drop in embedded clauses are to be explained by V to C also in embedded contexts, a well-known phenomenon also in modern V2 languages of the Germanic family.⁵ She argues that T to C is actually systematically blocked only in embedded interrogatives, since they never display subject inversion, and proposes the following generalization on verb movement: 'In Romance the CP is only blocked for V movement in dependent interrogatives.'⁶ This means that if the hypothesis that *pro* drop is directly licensed by T to C, then embedded interrogatives should be the only context in which *pro* drop is never allowed, since it is the only structure where the triggering context is banned. Hence, the hypothesis that *pro* drop in OI is dependent on T to C should be immediately testable: it predicts that *pro* drop is never found in embedded interrogatives.

⁴ For the general assumption that V2 is primarily a V_2 phenomenon, see den Besten (1977).

⁵ In addition to this empirical problem, the traditional analysis of *pro* as being licensed by V to C faces a theoretical one: taking up Benincà's hypothesis, we need to update it, since lexical government is not a notion we can work with in present syntactic theory.

⁶ The same observation has actually been made by Salvansen (2009) for Old French.

However, in his chapter on interrogatives in OI Munaro (2010: 32) notices that embedded interrogatives can have both lexical or null subjects. The presence of null subjects in the only context where V2 is not allowed casts some doubt on the direct relation between T to C and null subject.

- (11) Lo re d’Ispagna mandó ad invenire come fu nodrito
 The King of Spain sent to inquire how was fed
 ‘The king of Spain sent someone to inquire how the child had been raised.’

This state of affairs in turn implies that OI is essentially a symmetric V2 language of the Icelandic type,⁷ in which T to C can be found in many more embedded clauses than in languages like standard German or Dutch. However, proving that pro drop is related to V2 becomes rather difficult, since we find at best a difference in percentages but not a clear-cut distinction between main and embedded clauses. On the other hand, simply tying the occurrence of null subjects to V2 misses a part of what I believe to be a single phenomenon, namely the fact that both in main and in embedded clauses the occurrence of lexical subject pronouns seems to be related to different discourse conditions with respect to Modern Italian, as shown in (1), (2) and (3), (4).

Furthermore, it is not possible to equate OFr and OI, since OFr displays a large presence of lexical expletive subjects, which are rather rare in OI. I looked at the whole of Dante’s *Vita nuova* and in the entire text there are only two examples of lexical expletive subjects, both of them resuming an embedded clause, in (12) a finite, in (13) an infinitival clause:

- (12) s’ **elli** avvenisse che molti le potessero audire.
 If it came that many them could hear
 ‘If it happened that many people could hear them.’ (VN ch. 20, pars. 1–2)

- (13) **Elli** era tale a veder mio colore, che faceva ragionar di morte altrui
 It was such to see my color, that made think of death others
 ‘My face colour was such that everybody thought of death.’ (VN ch. 23 pars. 17–18)

On the other hand, examples of null expletives are much more common: in the same text I counted twenty cases of null expletives just with the verbal form *parea* ‘seemed’, of which I give here one example:

- (14) E per questa cagione, cioè di questa soverchievole voce
 And for this reason, i.e. of this widespread rumor
 che **parea** che m’ infamasse
 that seemed that me defamed
 ‘And for this reason, i.e. for the widespread rumour that seemed to defame me...’

⁷ The problem of whether even Icelandic is a completely symmetric V2 language has been discussed in Hrafnbjargarson and Wiklund (2009). I will not investigate this any further, since it is possible to show that OI is a well-behaved symmetric V2 language of the German type and that the presence of null subjects depends on another factor.

Hence, we cannot adopt the view Zimmermann proposes that OI was similar to Modern Italian because of the data discussed in (3) and (4). On the other hand, we cannot say that OI and OFr were similar, since in OFr expletive subject pronouns behave like argumental subjects, while in OI expletives are generally null, as they are in Modern Italian.

The question now becomes whether and how much OI really displays the main/embedded asymmetry with respect to null subjects.

14.4 The distribution of null subjects in OI

We have just seen that OI expletive subjects work like Modern Italian ones, i.e. they are generally null. As for referential subjects, it is not possible to make as extensive an investigation as the one carried out by Zimmermann for OFr, since there is no syntactically tagged database for OI at the moment. This means that one has to extract all the contexts of null subjects manually from the texts. Therefore, I carried out a survey and counted all embedded clauses in just two texts: the anonymous *Fiori e Vita di Filosafi* and Dante's *Vita nuova*. The results are given in Figure 14.2.

Clearly, the proportion that Zimmermann notices for OFr is not the same, since here the number of null pronouns is more than double that of lexical pronouns. This means, on the one hand, that OI is not like OFr, where null subjects are rather rare in embedded clauses. On the other hand, the number of lexical pronouns is also too high for OI to function like Modern Italian and this has to be explained.

One further factor I have also controlled for is person. The reasons why a person split might be relevant are twofold: first, Walkden (2013) notices that Old English has almost exclusively third person null subjects, which means in his view that the logophoric agent and patient present in the left periphery (i.e. the speaker and the addressee) do not probe into TP. Second, recall that OI is actually Old Florentine. Modern Florentine has a subject clitic system where only some persons of the verb require a subject clitic, while others are

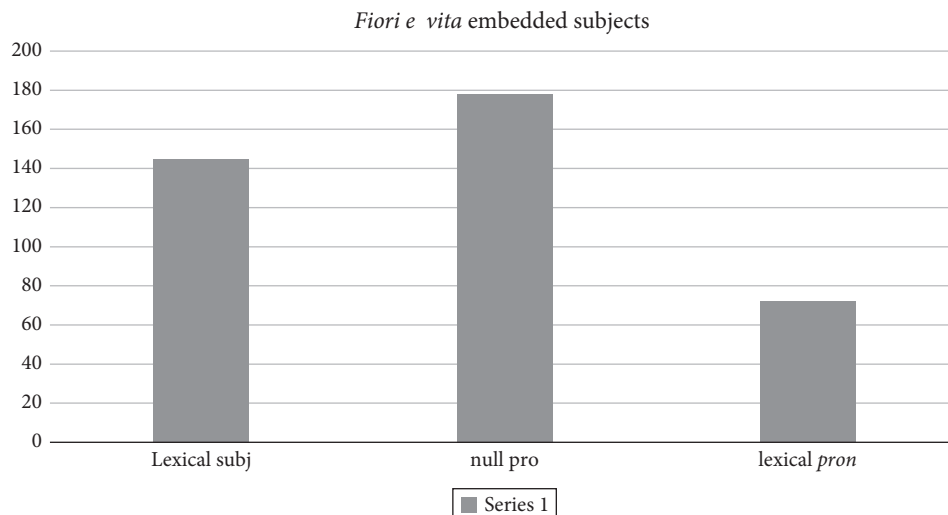


Figure 14.2 *Fiori e Vita di Filosafi*: distribution of subject in embedded clauses

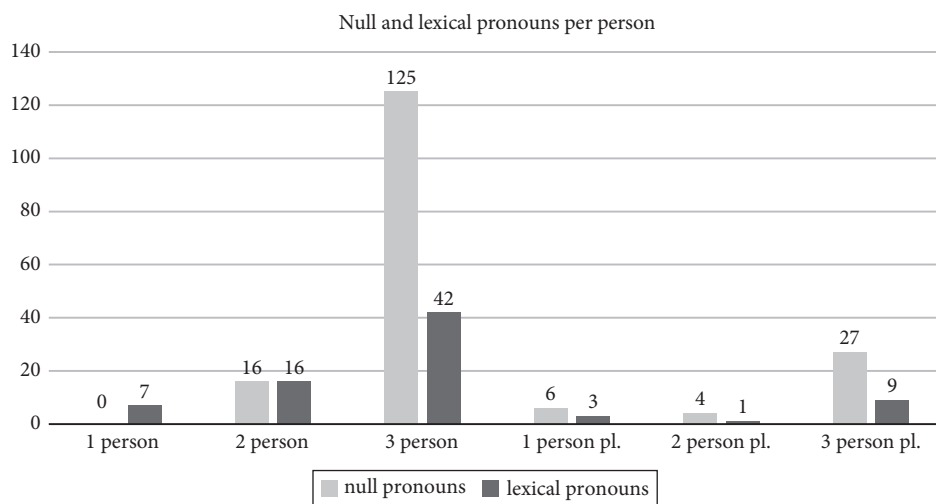


Figure 14.3 *Fiori e Vita di Filosafi*: Distribution of null pro in embedded clauses divided per person

pro drop, a system which is rather common in Northern Italy. We might expect that an asymmetry between the persons that have developed subject clitics and those that are null nowadays was already present in Old Florentine. Unfortunately, this rather appealing hypothesis is not empirically supported and I could not find any systematic distinction between persons.⁸ If we split the subjects by person for the text *Fiori e Vita di Filosafi*, we obtain the results shown in Figure 14.3.

The numbers are too small to be statistically relevant, but even in the case of the third person singular, where the numbers are larger, we do not find any clear split, and both null and lexical pronouns are possible.

As a result of these findings, I systematically searched the first ten chapters of Dante's *Vita nuova* (see Figure 14.4). The results are significant only for the first and third person singular, all other persons are either entirely missing from the text (first and second plural) or rather rare (second singular and third plural)

In the case of the first person singular we actually see a difference between main and embedded clauses, since null pronouns are more frequent in embedded clauses than in main clauses. This is exactly the opposite of what we would expect if null subjects were licensed by T to C. As for the third person, here I also included lexical DP subjects. However, if we compare main and embedded clauses, we see the same tendency to pro drop in both main and embedded clauses. We conclude that there is no asymmetry of the type found in OFr.

To salvage the T to C licensing hypothesis, one might suppose that OI is a symmetric V2 language, where T to C is also allowed in embedded declaratives. In order to prove whether this is correct, we need tests showing T to C in embedded clauses. The test that is generally used to test T to C is subject inversion. The problem in using subject inversion as a diagnostic for V2 is that OI also had vP internal subjects, which are not distinguishable from inverted subjects if the tense does not contain an auxiliary and a past participle so that the subject is

⁸ This number includes thirteen cases of *quello/quegli/colui*, which are demonstrative pronouns.

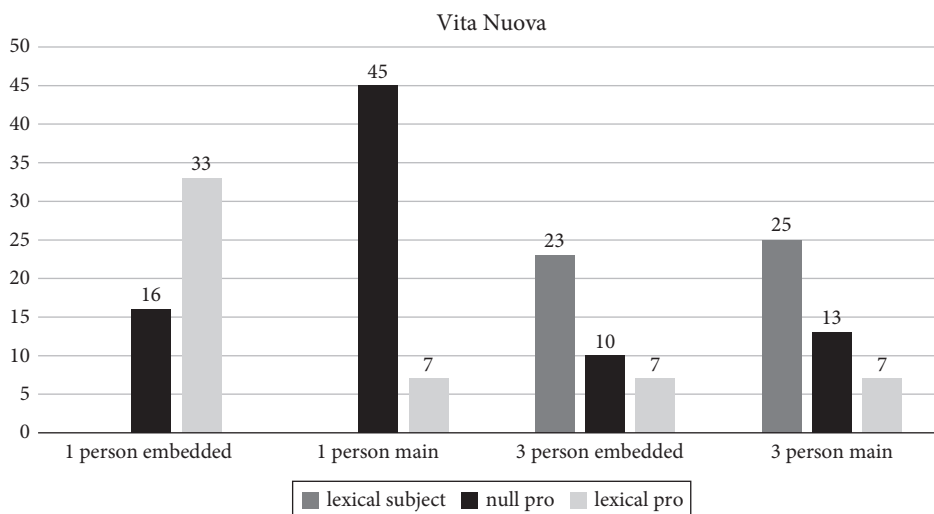


Figure 14.4 Dante's *Vita Nuova*: distribution of lexical and null subjects in main and embedded clauses

inserted between the two (see Section 14.2 above). Since the number of these examples is rather limited, also due to the fact that they alternate with null subjects, I use here two further criteria that diagnose a V2, namely (a) the presence of the particle *sì* directly before the inflected verb, i.e. in the position where it can be considered a SpecFocus element, as seen in Section 14.2.3 above, and (b) the possibility of enclisis, which signals T to Topic°.

In Dante's *Vita nuova* the number of relevant examples with the particle *sì* is twelve in main clauses, and only two in embedded clauses: one of the two embedded examples occurs after the verb 'say' (given here as (15) and one after the verb 'happened':

- (15) Dico che in questo tempo che questa donna era schermo di tanto
 Say that in this time that this woman was screen of such
 amore, quanto da la mia parte, sì mi venne una volontade
 love, as.well from the my part, so me came a will
 to want to.remember the name of that very.gentle
 di volere ricordare lo nome di quella gentilissima (VN ch. 6, pars.1–2)

On the other hand, in embedded clauses the particle *sì* occurs very frequently in front of the complementizer (36 examples) or in front of the element *come* 'how' (40 examples). However, in this case the *sì* can be considered a real adverb, and not a SpecFocus particle, since it is still found in Modern Italian, while the SpecFocus particle completely disappeared from the text in the Renaissance.

- (16) Queste parole fa che siano quasi un mezzo, sì che tu nonparli
 These words make that are almost a means so that you not
 a lei immediatamente
 talk to her immediately (VN ch. 12, pars. 1–9)

- (17) *però che quella che ti dee audire, sì com' io credo, è ver di*
 But that that.one that you must help, so as I believe, is really of
me adirata.
 me angry (VN ch. 12, pars. 10–15)

The distinction between main and embedded clauses is rather striking, though the numbers are rather small. The same distribution is found in the *Fiori e Vita di Filosofia*, where the particle is found in main clauses in fourteen cases, and only three in embedded (one after the verb 'say' and two after the shortened form *che* with the value of 'then') while *sì* occurs twenty-one times before the complementizer of embedded declaratives and thirteen times before *come* 'how', i.e. in an adverbial function. Figure 14.5 summarizes the results. As we can see, in embedded clauses *sì* is massively present in its adverbial usage, but not in its particle usage.

The picture resulting from the diagnostic of particle *sì* is not that of a symmetric V2 language, but rather an asymmetric V2 language of the German and OFr type. The same type of result is provided by another typical phenomenon related to the V2 phenomenon, namely the Tobler-Mussafia law that governs the distribution of enclisis and proclisis of object clitics: enclisis is analysed as movement of the inflected verb to the Topic^o position leaving the clitic behind, i.e. enclisis is a diagnostic for movement to the C domain, but it is virtually non-existent in embedded domains, thus confirming the idea that OI was an asymmetric V2 language. Hence, OI does not have so much embedded V2 to justify the licensing of the quantity of null subjects we have observed above. In other words, if we assume that null subjects are licensed by T to C, the amount of null subjects occurring in embedded clauses remains to be explained. In what follows I will try to illustrate how the system of OI pronouns works before returning to the problem of the licensing of null subjects in embedded clauses.

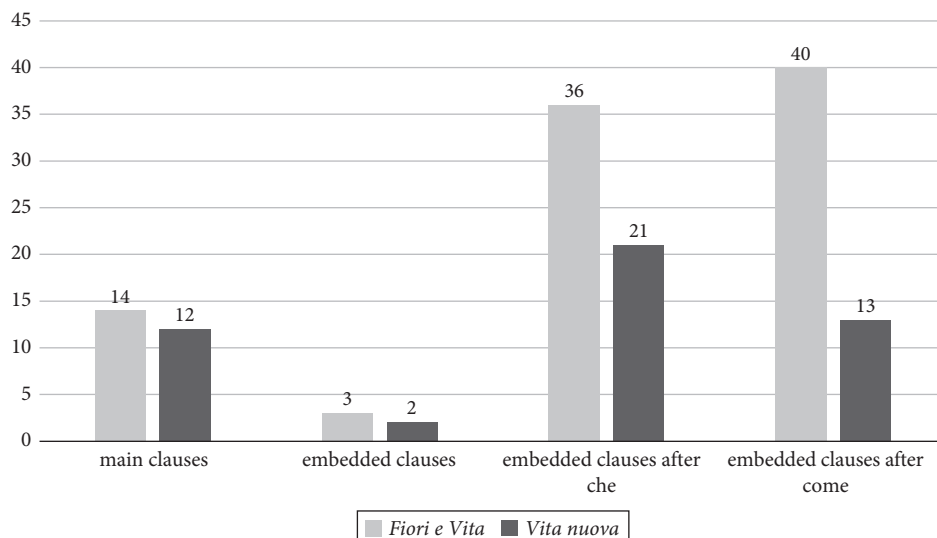


Figure 14.5 Distribution of the Focus particle *sì*

14.5 A new analysis of Old Italian

14.5.1 The pronominal system of OI

If we intend to understand the distribution of null subjects, we also have to consider lexical pronouns and the pragmatic conditions they are subject to. As we have seen, there is a general distinction between Modern and Old Italian in the way lexical and null pronouns are distributed. While in Modern Italian the *pro* of an embedded clause has a subject bias (as shown by Carminati 2002), this is not the case in OI.

Interestingly, the whole system of pronouns works differently: full object pronouns, which in Modern Italian are restricted to focused or topical contexts, in OI also do not obey such restriction and can occur in contexts in which in Modern Italian there would be a clitic, which is the object counterpart of a subject null *pro*:

- (18) Io imaginava di guardare verso lo cielo, e pareami vedere moltitudine d' angeli li quali tornassero

I imagined to look towards the sky and seemed.me to.see wealth of angels the which came

in suso, ed aveano dinanzi da loro una nebuletta bianchissima.

in upwards and had in front of them a small cloud very-white.

'I imagined I looked towards the sky and I thought I saw many angels who came back upwards and who had in front of them a snow-white cloud.

A *me* pareva che questi angeli cantassero gloriosamente, e le parole del loro canto mi pareva udire

To me seemed that these angels sing gloriously and the words of their song me seemed hear

che fossero queste

that were these

'It seemed to me that these angels sang gloriously and I thought I heard them sing the following words of their song' (VN ch. 23, pars. 1–16)

An example like (18), where the presence of the tonic pronoun *a me* is clearly not required either for Focus reasons or for change of Topic reasons, since it is clearly a continuation of a Topic, where the Topic remains the author, shows that OI used full pronouns in a different way from Modern Italian. The occurrence of the full pronoun in (18) might be due to the necessity to avoid the Tobler-Mussafia law, since this would be a case of V1 with an enclitic. However, examples like those following show that this is not an isolated fact and does not even have to do with the left periphery of the clause, since in (19), the full pronoun is located in its argumental post-verbal position:

- (19) a. Ella era in questa vita già stata tanto, che ne lo suo tempo lo cielo stellato era mosso verso la

She had in this life already been as.much that in the her time to sky starred was moved to the part

parte d'oriente de le dodici parti l'una d'un grado, sì che quasi dal principio del suo anno nono

part of orient of the twelve parts the one of one degree so that almost from beginning of her year

nono apparve a me, ed io la vidi quasi da la fine del mio nono.

ninth appeared to me, and I her say almost from the end of my ninth.

‘She had already been so long in this life, that in her time the sky’s stars had moved towards the eastern quadrant one of the twelve parts of a degree so that almost from the

start of her ninth year she appeared to me and I saw her almost from the end of my ninth.’ (VN ch. 2, pars. 1–10)

b. D’allora innanzi dico che Amore segnoreggiò la mia anima, la quale fu sì tosto a lui disponsata, ...

From then on I say that Love ruled the my soul, the which was so early to him disposed, ...

‘From then on I say that love has ruled my soul, which was dedicated to him so early, ...’ (VN ch. 2, par. 7)

Furthermore, also the distribution of subject pronouns is not only different from Modern Italian in embedded clauses, but also in main clauses, since we find lexical subject pronouns in main interrogatives precisely in those subject inversion contexts that should license pro drop through T to C:

- (20) a. Sa’ tu qua’ sono le credenze...?
 know.2sg you which are the beliefs
 ‘Do you know which are the beliefs...?’ (VeV 35)
- b. E sai tu quanti sono i comandamenti...?
 and know.2sg you how.many are the commandments
 ‘Do you know how many are the commandments...?’ (VeV 36)
- c. Vuo’ tu diventare nostro fedele, e giurar le nostre
 want.2sg you become.inf our faithful and swear.inf the our
 rules
 comandamenta?
 ‘Do you want to become our follower and swear on our rules?’ (VeV 38)
- d. Credi tu bene i detti sacramenti...?
 believe.2sg you well the said sacraments
 ‘Do you believe truly in the mentioned sacraments...?’ (VeV 37)
- (21) a. Cui mi saprestù contare...?⁹
 who to.me would.be.able.to.2sg-you tell.inf
 ‘About whom would you be able to tell me...?’ (VeV 21)

⁹ Notice that here the pronoun is clustered with the inflected verb and part of the inflectional ending has been deleted. The phenomenon is not very widespread, but one should keep in mind that this is Old Florentine and that Modern Florentine has subject clitics and (in its more conservative version) also displays subject clitic inversion of the typical Northern Italian type (see Poletto 2000; Manzini and Savoia 2005).

- b. Perché mi facesti tu venire in questo misero mondo...?
 why me did.2sg you come.inf in this miserable world
 ‘Why did you put me in this miserable world...?’ (VeV 3)
- c. Come ti contien tu nel servizio e nella grazia di Dio?
 how refl stay.2sg you in.the service and in.the grace of God
 ‘How are you doing in the service and grace of God?’ (VeV 32)
- d. Onde credi tu che nascan tanti dolori di capo?
 from.where believe.2sg you that are.born many pains of head
 ‘What source do you think many headaches have?’ (VeV 42)

Again, this is by no means obligatory, as the following example with a null subject attests:

- (22) a. E credi le credenze...?
 and believe.2sg the beliefs
 ‘Do you believe in the beliefs...?’ (VeV 37)
- b. E chi fa contra le dette comandamenta, credi che pecchi
 and who acts against the said rules think.2sg that sins
 mortalmente?
 mortally
 ‘Do you think that he who breaks those rules commits a mortal sin?’ (VeV 37)

But it is striking to find so many second person pronouns precisely in contexts in which they are rather clearly not needed, either syntactically or for reasons of interpretation.¹⁰

Furthermore, some cases of continuation of a Topic are marked by a subject pronoun, which is generally not used in Modern Italian:^{11,12}

¹⁰ Munaro (2010) notices that in general the presence of a lexical subject in main interrogatives is related to the presence of an object clitic. Hence, there are also other factors interfering in the realization of a subject pronoun. The occurrence of lexical pronouns when Modern Italian would use a pro are not only found in embedded but also in main clauses, as the following examples attest:

- (i) a. Io confesso ch’ io feci questo fatto e non domando che voi mi perdoniate
 I confess that I did this fact and not ask that you me forgive
 ‘I confess that I did this and I am not asking for you to forgive me.’ (Br. Latini Rett. 112)
- b. Dice la reda: «Io ti debbo dare que’ ch’ io vorrò»
 says the heirsch: ‘I you have to give what that I will.want’
 ‘The heirsch says: “I will have to give you what I want.”’ (Br. Latini Rett. 127)
- c. che s’ io allora non perdessi ardire, farei parlando innamorar la gente. E
 that if I then not lose courage, I.would speaking make.fall.in.love the people. And
 io non vo’ parlar si altamente, ch’ io divenisse per temenza vile.
 I not want to.talk so highly, that I became for fear coward
 ‘That if I then were not to lose courage, I would make people fall in love through speaking. And I would not speak so highly that I become a coward through fear.’ (VN ch. 19, pars. 4–14)

The formula in (i.a) is particularly interesting, since it can be compared with the same types of fixed expressions in Modern Italian where the subject pronoun at the beginning is not necessary at all.

¹¹ Notice that these forms *elli/ella/ egliino* are similar to the Modern Italian *egli/ella/essi* analysed as weak pronouns by Cardinaletti and Starke (1999), which might indicate that they had different properties from those of the full pronouns of Modern Italian.

¹² In looking for an explanation to the problem pointed out above, the first observation to be made concerns the fact that in OI the link between morphology and syntax is looser than in Modern Italian. While Modern Italian has six distinct endings out of six for all indicative tenses, OI displays five distinct endings in the imperfect, in the past subjunctive, where the first person singular is identical to third person singular and in the simple past, where

- (23) a. E però lo dolcissimo signore, lo quale mi signoreggiava per la virtù de la gentilissima donna, ne la mia imaginazione apparve come peregrino leggermente vestito e di vili drappi. Elli mi pareva disbigottito, (VN ch. 9 pars. 1–8)
- b. D'allora innanzi dico che Amore signoreggiò la mia anima, la quale fu sì tosto a lui disponsata, e cominciò a prendere sopra me tanta sicurtade e tanta signoria per la virtù che li dava la mia imaginazione, che me convenia fare tutti li suoi piaceri compiutamente. Elli mi comandava molte volte che io cercasse per vedere questa angiola giovanissima. (VN ch. 9 pars. 1–8)

That Topic continuity is marked differently in OI from Modern Italian is also attested by the fact that it can be marked by the morpheme *e* in cases like the following (see Poletto 2014 for a detailed analysis of *e* as a continuity topic marker) where the whole temporal and locative frame setting continues:

- (24) quando entrò nella chiesa, et uno parlò e disse
 when got.3sg into.the church, and one spoke and said
 'when he entered the church, one of them spoke and said ...' (Nov. XXV, 189)

There are good reasons to believe that this instance of *et* is not the normal conjunction, since it is impossible to conjoin an embedded clause with a main clause. Notice, furthermore, that the continuity Topic marker can co-occur with the conjunction head *e* (thus giving the impression of 'conjunction doubling').

- (25) e, innebriato il pane dell' odore che n'uscita, del mangiare,
 and put the bread in.the smoke that of.it came.out of.the food,
 e quelli lo mordea, e così, il consumò di mangiare, ricevendo il
 and he it bit.3sg and so, it finished.3sg of eat.inf getting the
 fumo e mordendolo
 smoke and biting-it
 'He was putting the bread close to the smell which came out of the meat and then he ate the bread up biting it and breathing the smoke' (Nov. VIII, 147)

Summing up, we have noticed that the distribution of subject and dative personal pronouns is not limited to contexts of Focus or Topic as in Modern Italian, so that full pronouns occur in contexts in which Modern Italian would have either a pro or a clitic (in the case of the object). This is true even for T to C contexts like main interrogatives, where

the third plural can drop the *-no* plural ending and become identical to the third singular. All these endings are distinct in Modern Italian. In addition to this, also the endings of the first person singular of the present subjunctive are syncretic, as they are in Modern Italian. Nevertheless, null subjects seem to be licensed also in ambiguous contexts, as the following example attests where the auxiliary *avea* is ambiguous between the first and the third person singular but there is no lexical subject pronoun.

- (i) ...ricordandomi che già l' avea veduta fare compagnia a quella gentilissima,
 remembering that already her had seen do company to that very.gentle,
 '... remembering that I had already seen her paying company to that very gentle lady'
 (VN ch. 8, pars. 1–3)

Modern Italian would use a null subject. Furthermore, OI has a continuity Topic marker, the conjunction particle *e(t)*, which resumes the whole preceding context, and not a single topical XP. This shows that the licensing of null Topics in OI obeys different conditions from those found in Modern Italian. In the next section I will tie this observation to the distribution of null subjects.

14.5.2 Different types of Topics

Let us now go back to the problem we formulated at the end of Section 14.2: OI is an asymmetric V2 language, but if we assume that null subjects are only licensed in T to C contexts, then there still remains a number of null subjects in embedded clauses that are unaccounted for. Cases like the following are particularly striking, since exactly the same syntactic context seems to give different results in terms of pro drop:

- (26) *Le quali io non intendea se non poche; tra le quali Ø intendea queste.*
 The which I not meant if not few, among the which meant these
 Which I only meant few, among which I meant these (VN ch. 3 par. 3)

On the other hand, we have seen in Section 14.3.2 above that OI also uses lexical subject pronouns in contexts in which Modern Italian typically does not, i.e. cases in which the pronoun is neither a new Topic nor a Focus. The hypothesis I want to put forward is the following: what has changed from OI to Modern Italian is the way null Topics are licensed. This explains at the same time the distribution of lexical and null pronouns as a single system.

14.5.3 Walkden's analysis of null subjects

In order to solve the puzzle, I would like to make use of an idea that has been proposed to account for the licensing of pro originally by Holmberg (2010) and in the Germanic languages by Walkden (2013) and Volodina and Weiß (2016, submitted), i.e. the idea that there is no unitary way to license null subjects and that different types of null arguments are also possible within the same language. I will adopt here the technical implementation put forward by Walkden (2013), which seems to me the most straightforward basis to implement the peculiar system of OI.¹³

According to Walkden's (2013) typology (see his Table 7, shown here as Table 14.1) null subjects are licensed by a null Topic. Since there are several types of Topics, there are also languages which allow for partial pro drop according to the type of null Topic they allow for.

¹³ Volodina and Weiß (2016) also investigate a type of null subjects that I have left out from this investigation, namely null arguments that occur at the beginning of a clause which is the second member of a clause coordination with the same subject. This is an different structure from the ones I investigate here and therefore I think it is justified to leave it out.

Table 14.1 Locus of probing feature

Λ_{AP} , A_pP	Null Aboutness Topic	Examples
(a) Yes	Yes	Greek, Italian, Japanese
(b) Yes	No	Finnish, Hebrew, Marathi
(c) No	No	English, French, Bambara
(d) No	Yes	?

According to Walkden, the logophoric agent and patient (i.e. the speaker and the addressee) as well as null Shift/Aboutness Topics can bear a probe which looks directly into SpecT and establishes an agreement relation with it. Table 14.1 above represent how languages vary with respect to the licensing of null Topics, and as a consequence with respect to the associated null subjects. Languages like Italian or Greek have pro drop for all persons because null aboutness Topics as well as the logophoric agent (the speaker) and the logophoric patient (the addressee) Topics are allowed. Languages like Finnish, which have null Topics for the logophoric agent and patient have first and second person pro subjects, but not third person null subjects, since null Aboutness Topic are not licensed. Languages like English or Modern French do not allow for any type of null Topic, so they do not have null subjects. According to Walkden, the last slot in the table, marked by a question mark is the case of Old English. The idea that different types of null subjects are related to different types of null Topics explains why Old English null subjects are mainly found in main clauses and are primarily third person: since Old English only allows for null Shift Topics/AboutnessTopics to directly probe into TP, the licensing of null arguments can only occur in main clauses where Aboutness/Shift Topics are possible and in the third person, since Aboutness/Shift Topics are generally of this type. Walkden assumes for Old English that the speaker and the addressee (the logophoric agent and patient in Sigurdsson's 2004 terms) do not probe into TP, which means that Old English does not have first and second person null subjects.

Modern Italian is assigned by Walkden to class 1 in his Table 7, i.e. among those languages in which all left peripheral null topics can probe into TP. OI would be a language of the same type, since there are no distinctions between the persons in the licensing of null subjects. However, we have just seen that the distribution of null subjects in OI is different from that of Modern Italian. Therefore, the system proposed by Walkden requires further fine-tuning to account for the changes across the history of the Italian system. It also requires something more for Modern Italian itself for two reasons: (a) a language like Modern Italian freely allows for null subjects in embedded clauses, and not just in main clauses, as Old English. There must be something else that licenses embedded null subjects, where Aboutness/Shift Topics are not licensed. (b) Frascarelli (2007) has shown that Modern Italian does not allow for Null Shift/Aboutness Topics: when there is shift of a Topic, the subject is generally realized as a lexical tonic pronoun (Frascarelli 2007: 703). On the contrary, Familiarity Topics are those which are resumed by a pro.

Notice that there is actually precisely one type of Topic missing in Walkden's table, namely familiarity or given Topics, if we adopt Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl's (2007) terminology, based on Reinhard (1981). Familiarity/given Topics are different from

Aboutness/Shift Topics because they can also occur in embedded clauses, not just in main clauses. Suppose we add Familiarity Topics to Walkden's table, as in Table 14.2:

Table 14.2 Locus of probing feature

	Λ_{AP} , A_pP	Null Aboutness Topic	Familiarity Topic	Examples
(a)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Old Italian
(b)	Yes	No	No	Finnish, Hebrew, Marathi
(c)	No	No	No	English, French, Bambara
(d)	No	Yes	No	Old English
(e)	Yes	No	Yes	Modern Italian
(f)	Yes	Yes	No	Old French
(g)	No	No	Yes	? ¹⁴

Now the distribution looks a bit different from that of Walkden's table: Modern Italian is different from Old English because it does not allow for null Aboutness/Shift Topics, but it allows for Familiarity Topics, which crucially occur both in main and in embedded clauses. This accounts for the fact that Modern Italian has embedded null subjects (as shown in (1) in Section 14.1). Old French would be similar to Old English, because it allows for null subjects only in main but not embedded clauses (so no null Familiarity Topics are allowed in this language) but similar to Italian and Finnish because it allows for the logophoric agent and patient to be null. Old Italian would be similar to Old French in allowing for null Aboutness/Shift Topics, but different from it because it also allows for Familiarity Topics. On the other hand, the difference between Old and Modern Italian is captured by the fact that OI has null Aboutness/Shift Topics, while Modern Italian does not (see Frascarelli 2007).

The table can thus be reorganized as follows, as in Table 14.3:

Table 14.3 Locus of probing feature

	Λ_{AP} , A_pP	Null Aboutness Topic	Familiarity Topic	Examples
(a)	No	No	No	English, French, Bambara
(b)	Yes	No	No	Finnish, Hebrew, Marathi
(c)	No	Yes	No	Old English
(d)	Yes	Yes	No	Old French
(e)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Old Italian
(e)	Yes	No	Yes	Modern Italian

OI had two different ways to license a null subject, one of which is the same as that advocated for OE by Walkden: Aboutness Topics¹⁵ and Shift Topics as well as the logophoric patient and agent can be null in OI, and probe into TP. There are independent cases which clearly show that null Aboutness/Shift Topics exist in OI. I give here an example with the whole context to show that this is really a case of Aboutness/Shift Topic:

¹⁵ The notion of Aboutness Topic was first formalized by Reinhart (1981) as what the sentence is about. It has been recently used by Frascarelli (2007).

- (27) a. Uno cavaliere pregava un giorno una donna d'amore e diceale intra l'altre parole com'elli era gentile e ricco e bello a dismisura, 'e 'l vostro marito è così laido come voi sapete'; e quel cotal marito era dopo la parete della camera.
 Ø Parlò e disse: 'Eh, messer, per cortesia: acconciate li fatti vostri spoke.3sg and said.3sg sir for courtesy grace.imp the facts your e non isconciate li altrui'.
 and not disgrace.imp the others
 'A knight was courting a lady and telling her how he was noble, rich, and measurelessly handsome, "and you husband is ugly, as you know". And that husband was behind the wall of the room. He spoke and said: "Sir, please mind your own business and do not disgrace the others."' (Nov. XLVII, 231)

The null subject of the verb *parlò* 'spoke' is the husband, which is not the Topic of the previous clause. Hence this is an Aboutness/Shift null Topic which changes Topic from 'the knight' to 'the husband'. Such a sentence is not interpretable as such in Modern Italian, unless there is a lexical pronoun in front of the verb *parlò*. Once we have established that the distinction between Old and Modern Italian is the licensing of null Aboutness/Shift Topics, we can ask the next question: what exactly is the property that changed from Old to Modern Italian? It is clearly tempting to connect this change with other changes that have occurred in the grammar, like the loss of the V2 property. Since null Topics have to be licensed, the change must have affected the mechanism of licensing.¹⁶ Benincà (2006) proposes that the licensing of null Topics in OI is done through verb movement to the Topic° position typical of V1 constructions.

- (28) [_{SpecLD} NULL TOPIC] [_{LD°}V] [_{FOCUSP} [_{TP}]]¹⁷

If we adopt this idea only for Aboutness/Shift Topics, we have the solution to the riddle: the special character of OI with respect to Modern Italian is precisely that, being a V2 language, the verb can move to Topic°, which licenses null Aboutness/Shift Topics, which in turn license third person null subjects in SpecTP in main clauses. All the rest remains equal between the two languages: they can have null logophoric Agent and Patient (which license first and second person null subjects in SpecT) and can have third person Familiarity Topics, which typically occur in both main and embedded clauses (see Bocci and Poletto 2016 for a presentation of the distribution of different types of elements in the left periphery). We still have to deal with the following facts: (a) the fact that in OI null subjects are possible also in embedded clauses where no Shift or Aboutness Topics are possible, and (b) the fact that in OI there are unexpected lexical pronouns in both main and

¹⁶ Sigurðsson (2011) assumes that any definite argument, overt or silent, positively matches at least one *C*/edge linker in its local *C*-domain, where *C*/edge linkers include Top(ic) features and speech participant features ('speaker', 'hearer'). This means that all pronouns must be linked to some element in the left periphery in order to be interpreted. Sigurðsson assumes that in standard pro drop languages like Modern Italian the morphological ending of the verb acts like a weak pronoun, an idea which has been used by several authors (see, e.g., the implementation made by Taraldsen 2002). Sigurðsson argues that radically null arguments can circumvent the potential interveners in the left periphery of the clause by moving the null elements to the left periphery themselves.

¹⁷ I use here a simplified left periphery to show the relation between the inflected verb and the null Topic relevant to the present discussion.

embedded contexts in which Modern Italian would have a *pro*. In embedded clauses there are no Aboutness/Shift Topics, but notice that familiarity Topics are allowed without any problems in these contexts. In OI embedded Topics are present from the very first attestation of the ‘vulgar’ language, the *Placiti cassinesi*, which has a set of embedded left dislocations:

- (29) Sao ko kelle terre, per kelle fini que ki contene, trenta anni
 Know that those lands, for those borders that here are, thirty years
 le possette parte Sancti Benedicti
 them possessed S.B.
 ‘I know that the S.B. possessed those lands with those borders for thirty years’

If familiarity Topics are possible in embedded clauses, then null familiarity Topics can indeed be licensed in embedded domains, although by a different mechanism from that of null Aboutness/Shift Topics. In contrast to Aboutness/Shift Topics, null familiarity Topics are immediately linked to the preceding discourse, since they take up an XP that is already immediately present in the universe of the discourse (either explicitly mentioned or implicit in previous information) and as such are subject to different licensing conditions, i.e. they do not need the inflected verb in their Topic^o position because their link is recoverable from the preceding discourse. The reason why we do not find any person distinction is that speaker and addressee are rather akin to familiarity Topics, since they are already clearly presupposed in the universe of the discourse. This solves the problem of the apparent contradiction we noticed between the fact that while OI seems to be a well-behaved asymmetric V2 language, the number of embedded null subjects seems to be too high for the licensing to occur only in V to Topic contexts, which is strictly limited in embedded domains. Notice, furthermore, that a well-known difference between OI (and in general Old Romance) and its modern counterpart is the possibility of having null resumption in the case of direct object Topics, which is sharply ungrammatical in the modern language.

- (30) queste tre cose in uno uomo ragunate ha sì per bene Dio
 these three things in one man gathered has so for well God
 onnipotente
 almighty
 ‘God almighty has gathered these three things in one man’

This suggests that the very same mechanism of licensing of a null familiarity Topic through linking to the previous context is active for both the subject and the direct object.

The last piece of the puzzle that remains to be explained is why OI allows for lexical subject pronouns that are coreferent with the subject of the main clause, a context in which Modern Italian typically requires a *pro*, i.e. cases like the following, where the embedded lexical pronoun is coreferent with the subject of the main clause:

- (31) Lo figliuolo lil domandò tanto [ch’elli’ebbe]
 The son DAT.ACC_{3SG} asked much that he ACC_{3SG} had
 ‘The son asked him of it so much that he got it.’

In order to explain this, I would like to capitalize on another difference between Familiarity and Aboutness Topics, i.e. the fact that in general Familiarity Topics are not base-generated in the left periphery but are moved from inside the clause. In Modern Italian they generally leave behind a clitic form or a *pro* (see Cinque 1990), which can be analysed as the remnant of the original DP containing both the clitic and the topic category moved to the left periphery. Hence, Sigurðsson's hypothesis for German null Topics is applicable to OI as well, but only to familiarity Topics, which raise to the C domain to reach their link (I adopt here the terminology proposed by Sigurðsson 2011) located in the previous discourse without the interference of other C-links. To be even more precise, I think that in Romance it is not the whole null nominal expression that raises to the Topic position, but only part of it, leaving behind a remnant containing a null or lexical pronoun.¹⁸ Recall that we have seen that in OI full pronouns do not necessarily occur as Foci or Topics, as in Modern Italian; they can also occur in contexts that are unmarked from the pragmatic point of view, as is the case in non *pro* drop languages. This holds in main as well as embedded clauses for subjects but also in the case of datives, and suggests that one additional distinction between Old and Modern Italian lies in the pragmatic/formal properties of the full pronominal series, which in OI spells out a smaller category that does not lexicalize Focus or Topic features. This means that full pronouns are syntactically small enough to be used as the remnant left from the null familiarity Topic that moves to SpecLD, i.e. as resumptive pronouns. The cases of embedded clauses where we see full pronouns can also be analysed as cases of null Topics where the Topic has split from its remnant pronoun and has moved to the left periphery. OI has two lexical realizations for the same structure where a remnant/resumptive pronoun is left behind by movement to SpecTopic, one in which the remnant is null, the other where the remnant can be a full pronoun. This explains why cases like (31) are possible in OI: the occurrence of embedded subject pronouns does not depend on the fact that OI cannot license a *pro* in embedded clauses. It depends on the fact that the lexical full pronoun is small enough in its structure and/or in its feature composition to be treated as a resumptive for the null familiarity Topic that has moved to the left periphery of the embedded clause.

14.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have examined the distribution of null subjects in OI. I have shown that there is no clear-cut asymmetry between main and embedded clauses as there is in OFr or Old English, since null subjects are also numerous in embedded domains. Nevertheless, it cannot be stated that the syntax of null subjects is identical in Old and Modern Italian, as proposed for instance by Zimmermann (2012), since in OI embedded clauses we find subject pronouns in contexts in which there is obligatory *pro* drop in Modern Italian. I have also discarded the possibility that *pro* drop in embedded domains depends on the fact that OI was a symmetrical V2 language, since typical diagnostics for V2 do not hold in

¹⁸ In Poletto (2008) I examined cases of subject clitic doubling in Modern Italian dialects and noticed that full pronouns, which always have a Focus or Topic feature, are the first nominal expressions to be doubled in any Northern Italian dialect investigated. This empirical generalization can be explained assuming that the split inside the original DP starts out from the outer layers of the DP, i.e. from the Topic and Focus features that are encoded in the internal left periphery of the nominal expression itself.

OI embedded clauses. Capitalizing on Walkden (2013) I have proposed that in OI *pro* drop licensing is performed through linking to a null Topic: in main clauses, Aboutness/Shift can be licensed through a Spec-head relation with the verb, i.e. by V to Topic°, while familiarity Topics are possible through a pragmatic linking procedure to the immediate context enabled by the movement part of the nominal expression itself which reaches SpecTopic. Furthermore, I have shown that the pronominal system of OI has different properties from those of Modern Italian: while in Modern Italian full pronouns always lexicalize Topic or Focus, this is not necessarily so in OI, which means that OI full pronouns can resume, i.e. be left behind by a null Topic moving to the left periphery, while Modern Italian can only use either *pro* or clitics for this purpose. The distribution of null and lexical subject pronouns in OI is thus accounted for as the combined effect of the licensing conditions of different types of Topics and the lexical properties of full pronouns.