**Subject agreement suspension from Old to Modern Tuscan: between syntax, morphology and information structure**

**Abstract**. *This paper examines the distribution of subject agreement suspension, i.e. the phenomenon whereby the verb does not agree in gender and number with the subject and appears in a default form, in a corpus of Old Tuscan texts and in three different varieties of Modern Tuscan. The main aim of the study is to identify the formal and functional factors governing the appearance of subject agreement suspension and its development over time. It will be argued that subject agreement suspension in main and subordinate clauses is not a unitary phenomenon. It will be shown that subject agreement suspension with post-verbal subjects in main clauses is associated with focal subjects, both in sentence- and argument-focus constructions. Subject agreement suspension in relative and complement clauses, not attested in Old Tuscan, is determined by agreement of the verb in the subordinate clause with the invariable relativiser/complementiser* che*, which bears no features and therefore triggers default agreement on the verb.*

1. **Introduction[[1]](#footnote-1)** 
   1. **Aims of the paper**

This paper examines the distribution of subject agreement suspension (henceforth, SAS) in a corpus of Old Tuscan texts and in some varieties of Modern Tuscan. I will examine the syntactic environments in which SAS occurs, and the possible formal and functional motivations behind this phenomenon, with particular regard to predicate types, information status of the subject, and types of subordinate clauses.

This paper has a twofold aim. First, it aims at showing that Tuscan SAS with post-verbal subjects is not restricted to sentence focus environments only (i.e. thetic sentences), contrary to what has been proposed in previous accounts, but also extends to argument-focus constructions. Second, it aims at demonstrating that the occurrence of SAS in relative, complement, and temporal clauses introduced by the relativiser/complementiser *che* is a distinct phenomenon that arises from agreement of the verb in the subordinate clause with *che*. In order to corroborate this hypothesis, I will show that, diachronically, SAS in main and relative clauses does not arise at the same time. In addition, I will discuss some cross-linguistic data that show the independence of the two constructions.

Following previous research on the phenomenon (e.g. Ouhalla 1993, Baker 2008, among others), by SAS in this paper I mean the occurrence of the verb in the “default” third person singular form with plural subjects, as well as the use of singular masculine participles in compound tenses or participial constructions with plural masculine subjects or feminine ones.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 is devoted to a discussion of previous treatments of SAS and introduces the key notions of information structure used in this paper. Section 3 examines the distribution of SAS in a corpus of Old Tuscan texts. In Section 4, I will describe the distribution of SAS in Modern Tuscan and I will argue that SAS in main and subordinate clauses is due to different principles. Section 5 discusses the findings of paper in a cross-linguistic perspective, and evaluates them against previous proposals. Section 6 summarises the main findings of the paper.

1. **Subject agreement suspension: definition and previous treatments**

**2.1. The phenomenon**

Verb agreement with agents of transitive verbs (A) and/or subjects of intransitive ones (S) is a very widespread phenomenon cross-linguistically and is usually taken for granted by linguists of different theoretical persuasions. As a matter of fact, in the majority of languages that display agreement with subjects (Bresnan and Mchombo 1987, Siewierska 1999, Siewierska 2004), such agreement cannot be omitted. In Standard Italian, for example, subject-verb agreement is compulsory, as shown by (1)[[2]](#footnote-2):

(1) Italian (Indo-European, Romance)

***Arrivano*** */ \*arriva* ***molte persone*** *dal Marocco*

arrive.PRS.3PL arrive.PRS.3SG many people from.the Morocco

"Many people are arriving from Morocco." (personal knowledge)

However, in a number of languages, subject-verb agreement can be suspended under certain conditions. The Tuscan varieties of Italian illustrate this pattern. In Florentine, for example, agreement is suspended in some specific contexts, as exemplified by (2), where full verb agreement is impossible with a post-verbal plural subject, and the verb is in the default third person singular form[[3]](#footnote-3):

(2) Florentine (Indo-European, Romance)

***Arriva*** */ \*arrivano* ***tante persone*** *dal Marocco*

arrive.PRS.3SG arrive.PRS.3SG many people from.the Morocco

"Many people are arriving from Morocco."

Another environment where SAS commonly surfaces is the relative clause. While in Standard Italian agreement within the relative clause is compulsory, as shown by (3a), in Florentine agreement in relative clauses is suspended, as in (3b):

(3)

(a) ***Le ragazze*** *che* ***sono***  */ \*è* ***venut-e***

the girls REL be.PRS.3PL be.PRS.3SG come.PTCP.PST-PL.F

*/ \*venut-o ieri*

come.PTCP.PST-SG.M yesterday

"The girls who came yesterday." (personal knowledge)

(b) ***Le ragazze*** *che* ***gl’è*** */ enno*

the girls REL CLIT.SUBJ.SG.M-be.PRS.3SG be.PRS.3PL

*venut-o /\*venut-e ieri*

come.PTCP.PST-SG.M come.PTCP.PST-PL.F yesterday

"The girls who came yesterday."

The phenomenon of SAS has been repeatedly noticed in the Romance linguistic literature (see Brambilla Ageno 1964, Diez 1863, Meyer-Lübke 1900, Tobler 1902), and has received quite a lot of attention in the formal literature, as will be briefly discussed in Section 2.2.

In this paper, I will examine the distribution of SAS with post-verbal subjects and SAS in relative, complement, and some temporal clauses in a corpus of Old Tuscan texts and three varieties of Modern Tuscan. I will argue that:

1. SAS with post-verbal subjects is regulated by information-structural properties of the subject NP. In particular, I will show that SAS with post-verbal subjects occurs both in sentence- and argument-focus constructions. I will show that information-structural factors explain also the optionality of SAS in Old Tuscan and its extension to all post-verbal subjects in the modern varieties;
2. SAS with relative and complement clauses is a consequence of formal factors, in so far as the verb in the subordinate clause agrees with the invariable relativiser/complementiser *che*, which bears no features and therefore triggers default agreement. Diachronically, SAS is virtually unattested in Old Tuscan, and appears to be a later development.

**2.2. Previous treatments**

The literature on SAS is vast and mostly cast in formal frameworks, ever since the seminal study by Ouhalla (1993), who named it "Anti-Agreement Effect" (AAE). Baker (2008) provides the following definition of the AAE:

"This effect [i.e. Anti-agreement, Author] can be characterized as follows: many languages that normally show agreement with an NP in a designated position -most often the subject position- eschew that agreement when the position is occupied by the trace of a *wh*-movement" (Baker 2008: 615)

In many of these works, the suspension of agreement is linked to subject extraction. That is, SAS takes places with subjects that have been extracted, i.e. *wh*-words in subject function, restrictive subject-relative clauses, and cleft sentences (cf. Ouhalla 1993, Ouali 2011, Henderson 2009a, b). In these contexts, agreement fails to appear and a default verbal agreeing form must be used. Tamazight Berber provides a well-known example of SAS, where a special participial form must be used with *wh*-words in subject functions and with subject-relative clauses, as exemplified by (4b, c):

(3) Tamazight Berber (Afro-Asiatic, Semitic)

(a)*̊****θəʕla******θamttut*** *aram*

3SG.F.see.PFV woman boys

"The woman saw the boys"

(b) ***mani θamttut*** *ag* ***ʕlan*** */ \*θəʕla araw*

which woman COMPL see.PFV.PTCP 3SG.F.see.PFV boys

"Which woman (that) saw the boys?"

(c) ***θamttut*** *ag* ***ʕlan*** */ \*θəʕla araw*

woman COMPL see.PFV.PTCP 3SG.F.see.PFV boys

"The woman that saw the boys." (Ouali 2011: 28)

Given the pervasiveness of SAS in many Romance languages, different analyses have been proposed in different generative frameworks. An influential treatment of SAS in Italian dialects, specifically Florentine and Trentino, was developed by Brandi and Cordin (1989). To demonstrate that extraction of the subject proceeds from a post-verbal position (Rizzi 1982), Brandi and Cordin examine the distribution of subject agreement in contexts of subject extraction (*wh*-questions and subject-relative clauses) and in cases of subject inversion, i.e. in clauses with post-verbal subjects. Specifically, they contend that with post-verbal subjects are not moved to the structural subject position (SpecIP), which is instead filled by an expletive null *pro*. This expletive *pro* is similar to French *il* "it", which is the element with which the verb agrees. Since both extracted and post-verbal subjects give rise to the same agreement pattern, Brandi and Cordin (1989: 124)[[4]](#footnote-4) argue for a link between SAS in extraction contexts and SAS with post-verbal subjects.

As will be discussed below, the evidence presented in this paper shows that the appearance of SAS in the two constructions is not related, but is rather the superficial manifestation of two different phenomena.

In more recent approaches couched in the Minimalist framework, such as the one developed by Mensching and Remberger (2006), SAS with post-verbal subjects in Romance languages derives from a defective T, which has no φ-features or shows a reduced set of φ-features (Mensching and Remberger 2006: 182-183).

In the functional literature, SAS has somehow received less attention, apart from the notable exceptions of Lambrecht (2000), Siewierska (2004), and Malchukov and Ogawa (2011). These studies, which deal only with SAS in main clauses, observe that subject agreement is likely to be suspended when the subject is non-topical and hence bears focal status. In particular, Lambrecht (2000) and Lambrecht and Polinsky (1998) argue that SAS is one of the grammatical features associated with thetic -or sentence focus- constructions, i.e. sentences in which the whole clause is in focus. The correlation between the lack of subject agreement and focus has also been discussed in studies on individual languages or language groups, such as Cushitic, Bantu, or Romance (e.g. Buell 2005, Tosco 2003, among others). An oft-cited example of SAS with sentence-focus constructions comes from French. French makes use of an impersonal construction, where the subject NP is placed in post-verbal position and does not control agreement, which is instead controlled by a preverbal "dummy" element *il* (Creissels 2007, Lambrecht 2000). This contrast is illustrated by the examples in (5): in (5a), the auxiliary and the participle obligatorily agree in number and gender with the preverbal subject, whereas in (5b), both the auxiliary and the participle agree with preverbal *il*:

(5) French (Indo-European, Romance)

(a) ***Les trois femmes******sont*** */ \*est* ***venues*** */*

the three women be.PRS.3PL be.PRS.3SG come.PTCP.PST.PL.F

*venu*

come.PTCP.PST.SG.M

"The three women came."

(b)*Il* ***est*** */ \*sont* ***venu*** */*

3SG.M be.PRS.3SG be.PRS.3PL come.PTCP.PST.SG.M

*\*venues* ***trois******femmes***

come.PTCP.PST.PL.F three women

"There came three women."

Creissels (2007:14) points out that these structures occur with unaccusative predicates whose subject argument shows properties typical of the patient of transitive verbs, such as inability to control agreement and post-verbal position. A similar point is made by Lambrecht (2000), who likewise observes that sentence-focus constructions tend to occur with intransitive predicates where the subject displays some syntactic and information-structural properties normally found on patients, viz. focality, indefiniteness, inability to control agreement, non-nominative case marking, etc.

Creissels’ and Lambrecht’s observations are closely related to the claims advanced in connection with the "Unaccusativity Hypothesis" put forward in Relational Grammar (Perlmutter 1978) or Government and Binding (e.g. Burzio 1986), according to which subjects of unaccusative verbs behave like patients (direct objects), in that they are not semantically agents and are generated as internal arguments of the predicate; see also Drubig 1992). For languages like Italian or Bantu (e.g. Kinande, see Baker 2008), where unaccusative subjects tend to occur in post-verbal position, the similarity between them and patients of transitive verbs has led various scholars to argue that post-verbal unaccusative subjects, exactly like transitive patients, occupy a VP-internal position in the sentence.

However, as will be shown in section 4.1, Modern Tuscan varieties do not comply with this prediction, in that SAS occurs also with transitive and unergative subjects, provided that they are in post-verbal position. In addition, some scattered examples of SAS with transitive verbs can already be found in Old Tuscan.

The data presented in this paper lend further support to the idea that information structure is the main trigger of SAS with post-verbal subjects. However, as we will see below, SAS both in Old and Modern Tuscan is not confined to sentence-focus constructions only, but extends also to argument focus constructions, where only the subject is in focus. That is, SAS is sensitive to the information-structural status of the subject NP only, and as such is not sensitive to the status of other elements in the sentence. As will be argued in section 4.1, this also explains why SAS also targets subject *wh*-words, where the non-*wh* portion of the sentence is normally presupposed.

Before presenting and analysing our data, a brief discussion of the basic notions of information structure used in the remainder in this paper are in order.

**2.3. About topic and focus**

Lambrecht (1994: 5) defines information structure as the component that serves to create a pragmatically structured proposition. A pragmatically structured proposition reflects the speaker’s assumption about an addressee’s state of knowledge at the time of an utterance. Within information structure, Lambrecht distinguishes two main categories: presupposition and assertion. Presupposition is defined as the portion (or rather, the set of propositions) that a speaker assumes an addressee already knows, while assertion is the proposition “which the hearer is expected to know as a result of hearing the sentence uttered” (Lambrecht 1994, 52). Based on the notion of pragmatic presupposition and pragmatic assertion, Lambrecht defines topic and focus as relational concepts that mirror the organisation of a sentence into presupposition and assertion. Topic is defined as the referent that the proposition is about (Lambrecht 1994: 127). Topic elements are presupposed discourse referents about which a speaker asserts something relevant. Usually, they are given information that is prosodically de-accented, identifiable, activated or accessible, definite.

The notion of focus has been often equated with the concept of "new information", syntactically and prosodically prominent within a sentence. In other approaches, mainly couched within generative syntax, focus expresses exhaustiveness (Szabolcsi 1981) or contrast (see, e.g. Krifka 2008). Different theoretical frameworks, however, agree upon an operational definition of focus as the element that replaces a *wh*-variable in a possible *wh-*question.

In the approach adopted in this work, focus is defined as the portion of a "pragmatically structured proposition whereby the assertion differs from the presupposition" (Lambrecht 1994: 213). Focus conveys new information, insofar as the relation between the presupposed portion and the assertion is unpredictable for the hearer and therefore non-recoverable (Lambrecht 1994: 207). The newness entailed by the concept of focus lies, according to Lambrecht, in the unpredictability of the relation between the focus and the presupposed portion, i.e. the topic. Lambrecht (1994: 221 ff.) differentiates between three possible kinds of focus structures, namely predicate focus, argument focus, and sentence focus. In what follows, I will discuss his classification with particular regard to VS sentences, given the importance these structures have in SAS.

Predicate focus (PF) is the unmarked type of focus structure (often equated with the topic-comment distinction). It serves to comment on a given topic: in this case, the subject is presupposed, and the predicate is the assertion that establishes the "aboutness relation between the topic referent and the event denoted by the predicate" (Lambrecht 1994: 226; Lambrecht 2000: 612).

(6) Q: *What happened to your car?*

A. *My car/It broke down*.

The presupposed (hence topical) status of the subject is due to the fact that it can be coded either via a de-accented pronoun or via a de-accented full definite NP. The focus instead bears the sentence accent that marks the predicate as the focus domain. The pragmatic presupposition of (6) can be represented as "speaker’s car is a topic for comment *x*", where the comment *x* is the assertion fulfilled by the VP "broke down". In PF structures, thus, the focus is constituted by the predicate and, in the case of transitive verbs, by all the constituents inside the VP. PF corresponds to the traditional topic-comment distinction, in which the subject NP is topical and the predicate and -generally some, if not all, - elements contained in it are focal. In Italian, the subject NP in canonical instances of PF may not occur at all. If overt, it occurs in preverbal position.

In argument-focus structures (AF), the focus domain is constituted by a single NP. Its function is to identify the missing argument in a presupposed open proposition, as shown by example (7):

(7) Q: *I heard your motorcycle broke down/What broke down?*

A. *My car broke down*

In (7), the presupposition is that "speaker’s *x* broke down", whereas the assertion is the missing argument "car". A chief example of AF structure is constituted by *wh*-words, where it is the *wh*-element that bears focal status, whereas the rest of the sentence is usually presupposed (Lambrecht 1994: 228). As will be shown below, post-verbal subjects can constitute instances of AF, in which the subject NP is the new argument with respect to a given predicate, or event.

Finally, sentence-focus structures (SF, called also "thetic" sentences, cf. Sasse 1987) lack the pragmatic presupposition altogether, insofar as the assertion extends over the entire sentence, i.e. assertion and focus coincide, as in (8):

(8) Q: *What happened?*

A: *My car broke down*.

With regard to the information status of the subject argument, Lambrecht (2000: 617) notes that the subject can be focal in AF structures, while it must be in SF ones. It indeed follows from the very definition of SF that subjects are focal. These sentences are by definition "topic-less", given that the subject has been "detopicalised" in order to avoid the default association of the subject with the topic of the sentence[[5]](#footnote-5). Other characteristics of SF constructions are their tendency to appear with unaccusative verbs (see Burzio 1986, Bernini 1995 on Italian) and a low degree of agentivity of the subject.

The focality -or detopicalisation- of the subject is indeed mentioned by Lambrecht (2000) as one of the triggers for the lack of subject agreement (see also Lambrecht and Polinsky 1998). However, Lambrecht explicitly contends that lack of agreement is one of the grammatical features morphologically associated with SF constructions, together with other features such as prosodic prominence, specific linear position relative to the verb, co-occurrence with focus particles, and non-nominative case marking of the subject (Lambrecht 2000, 625). In his view, the presence of specific features in SF constructions is due to the need to differentiate them from the unmarked PF constructions ("Principle of Paradigmatic Contrast"), where the subject would by default receive a topical interpretation.

SF and AF constructions can be used with a "presentative" function (Hetzron 1975, Lambrecht 1994: 176-181; Sasse 1987, 1995), i.e. they are employed to introduce a referent into the discourse which will be picked up as the new topic. Typical presentative constructions –such as the Italian existential *ci* "there"-construction or postposed subjects– assert the existence of an entity, present it, and enact topic shifts and introductions. Referents of the subject NPs tend to lack topic-worthiness and to be new. However, as noted, e.g. by Birner (1996), for English, and as will be observed in our corpus, the referents introduced in presentative constructions need not be new, and often represent discourse-familiar information (familiar in the sense of Prince 1981, 1992) already mentioned in the preceding context which is now picked up as the topic for the subsequent discourse. Sasse (1987)’s distinction between "event-central” and "entity-central” sentences captures the distinction between SF constructions –in which the whole sentence is in focus– and presentative constructions with a topic-shift / topic-introduction function, in which the subject argument is first introduced and then typically coded via an anaphoric means in the subsequent clause (Lambrecht 1994: 180).

In the remainder of this paper, based on a corpus study from Old Tuscan and elicited data from Modern Tuscan varieties, I will attempt to demonstrate that SAS with post-verbal subjects is not restricted to SF constructions only, where the whole sentence is under the scope of the assertion, but extends also to AF constructions where, crucially, only the subject is in focus. In addition, I will show that, when occurring in presentative constructions, the subject cannot always be analysed as focal, given that it represents familiar information found in the preceding context.

1. **SAS in Old Tuscan**

In this section I will examine the distribution of SAS in a corpus of Old Tuscan texts, both in main and relative clauses. It will be shown that SAS obtained optionally only in main clauses with post-verbal subjects, in AF, SF, and existential/presentative constructions, whilst it was completely absent in relative and complement clauses.

**3.1. Corpus and methods**

The corpus utilised in this study consists of texts of different genres –listed in the Appendix– mostly from the XIV to the XVI century. One text, namely "I Ricordi" by Giovanni di Paolo Morelli (XIV century), was examined in its entirety. Only half of "La Vita" by Benvenuto Cellini (XVI century) was examined. Other texts included in the corpus include excerpts from the "Lettere di una gentildonna fiorentina" by Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi (XV century) and the "Pecorone" by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino (XIV century). Further examples were gleaned from secondary sources (Brambilla Ageno 1964 and Durante 1981) and from the OVI corpus, and checked in critical editions.

Given the importance of VS word order in the appearance of SAS, examples involving a VS word order but full agreement with the post-verbal subject were also collected and analysed (total: 71). This was done in order to ascertain possible tendencies in the distribution of predicate types and information-structural properties in SAS as opposed to full agreement.

With respect to data coding and analysis, sentences were coded for information status of the subject (AF, SF, topic shift or introduction). Since the placement and interpretation of the subject depend upon the context, the preceding and following contexts up to ten sentences were also collected, in order to identify the given/new status of the subject referent, following Prince's (1981) taxonomy of assumed familiarity, which distinguishes between new, inferable, and evoked referents. As we have seen above, the identification of the focus domain is based on (often constructed) question-answer pairs. This method is not applicable to written texts for which no speaker's judgements are available. However, in line with Petrova and Solf's (2009) approach, which follows the *quaestio*-theory developed by Klein and von Stutterheim (1992), each sentence is taken to be the answer to an implicit question identified based on the preceding context. This procedure –together with the information about the givenness/newness of the subject referent– allowed for the annotation of SF vs. AF constructions.

In addition, given the relevance of predicate types in previous studies of SAS, I encoded information about the different predicate types with which SAS appears in the corpus. This was done in order to ascertain whether the occurrence of SAS was extended over time to different predicate types.

Following the definition given in Section (1), all the examples of SAS (total: 137) involve either third person plural subjects with the finite verb in the default third person form (in number or, for compound tenses, also in gender), or participial forms not agreeing in gender and number with their subject. As mentioned above, SAS occurs with post-verbal subjects. However, two examples, given in (9) and (10) display SV word order. Interestingly, these examples come from poetry: on closer inspection, it is in fact apparent that SAS is due to metrical reasons, viz. rhyme:

(9) *Ancora regnava**in que' tempi un iddea /*

still reign.IPFV.3SG in those times a goddess

*la qual Diana si facea*

REL.PRO.SG.FDiana PASS/IMPERS make.IPFV.3SG

*chiamare* *e* ***molte donne******in divotion***

call.INFand many women in devotion

***l'avea***

OBJ.CLIT.3SG.F-have.IPFV.3S

"At that time a goddess was still ruling, whose name was Diana, and many women held her in great devotion." (Boccaccio, *Ninfale Fiesolano*, VII, 3; cited in Brambilla Ageno 1964: XXX)

(10) *Di ringraziar-ti la gran turba magna di tutti*

to thank.INF-CLIT.2SG the huge multitude big of all

*gli altri santi mai non fina;* / *E più* ***lagrime***

the other saints never NEG end.FUT.3SG and no.more tears

*e lor occhi* ***non bagna***

and their eyes NEG wet.PRS.3SG

"The multitude will never stop thanking you for the other saints. Their eyes are no longer wet with tears." (Bianco da Siena, *Laudi*, 88.15; cited in Brambilla Ageno 1964: XXX)

The remaining 135 examples all show VS word order. In the next section I will first discuss the distribution of SAS with regard to predicate types and information status of the subject. I will then turn to the analysis of relative clauses where, interestingly, no SAS is attested.

**3.2. Results**

**3.2.1 Predicate types**

Table (1) shows the distribution of SAS and full agreement with post-verbal subjects with different kinds of predicates.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **VERB TYPE** | **NOAGR** | **%** | **AGR** | **%** |
| Passive/Impersonal | 38 | 27,75 | 23 | 32,39 |
| Unaccusative | 54 | 39,41 | 25 | 35,21 |
| Existential/Presentative | 35 | 25,54 | 0 | 0 |
| Copula | 3 | 2.18 | 1 | 1,40 |
| Transitive | 3 | 2,18 | 13 | 18.30 |
| Anticausative | 1 | 0,72 | 0 | 0 |
| Causative | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2,81 |
| TOTAL | 137 | 100 | 71 | 100 |

Table 1: Distribution of subject agreement relative to predicate type

With regard to predicate types, SAS prototypically occurs with passive and impersonal predicates[[6]](#footnote-6), unaccusative ones, and existentials. I used Fisher's exact test to verify the association between the different verb types and SAS or full agreement. As expected, passive/impersonal and existential/presentative predicates are the only verb types that reached significance (i.e. p-value <0.01).

SAS occurs, as already mentioned, in VS structures. No example was found with a preverbal subject and SAS, with all the verb types listed in Table (1). An example of preverbal subject and full agreement with the impersonal *si*-construction is given in (11):

(11) ***I regni***  *non* ***si tengono*** *per*

the kingdoms NEG PASS/IMPERS keep.PRS.3PL for

*parole*

words

"Kingdoms are not kept with empty words." (*Novellino*, 6.49)

However, as can be seen from Table (1), there are quite a few instances in which post-verbal subjects governed by passive/impersonal and unaccusative predicates show full agreement with the preceding predicate. An example with an unaccusative predicate is given in (11):

(11) *E diliberato,* ***v'andarono ambasciadori***

and determine.PTCP.PST.M.SG CLIT.LOC-go.PFV.3PL messengers

*gran quantità, e d'ogni ragione gentili uomini*

great quantity and of.each reason nobles men

*popolani e artefici, i quai il Duca*

of\_the\_people and artisans REL.PRO.M.PL the Duke

*ricevette onorevolmente*

greet.PFV.3SG honorably

"And, having decided, a great multitude of messengers went there, men of every guild, nobles, men of the people, and artisans, whom the Duke greeted honourably." (Morelli, *Ricordi*, IV)

The situation detected in Old Tuscan shows considerable differences with the distribution of SAS in Modern Tuscan, where, as will be shown in Section (4), SAS is obligatory with passive/impersonal and unaccusative predicates.

Not surprisingly, transitive predicates tend not to occur in VS structures. When they do, they generally show full agreement, apart from three examples. The only verb type that consistently shows SAS in the corpus is existential/presentative predicates. This might be indicative of an advanced grammaticalisation of SAS with these constructions, which, for example, tend to display SAS even in varieties where SAS is generally absent (see Bentley, Ciconte, and Cruschina 2013).

**3.2.2. Information status of the subject**

Table (2) summarises the results of the analysis with regard to the information status of the subject NP:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **CONSTRUCTION** | **NO AGR** | **%** | **AGR** | **%** |
| Argument focus | 45 | 32,84 | 13 | 18,30 |
| Sentence focus | 40 | 29,19 | 10 | 13,08 |
| Topic shift | 48 | 35,03 | 48 | 67,60 |
| TOTAL | 137 | 100 | 71 | 100 |

Table 2: Distribution of subject agreement relative to information status of the subject

As can be gathered from the table, the majority of subjects triggering SAS are found in AF and SF constructions. However, a not negligible number of examples is found in topic-shift, topic-introduction contexts: the majority of these examples is constituted, not surprisingly, by existential and presentative constructions. However, the number of instances of SAS in topic-shift contexts equals the number of instances of full agreement in the same context (48 in both cases). This suggests that topic shifts are not as a strong trigger for SAS as AF and SF contexts. In order to ascertain the statistical significance of the association between the different constructions and SAS vs. full agreement, I used again Fisher's exact test. As expected, SAS is more likely to occur when the subject is in focus (i.e. p-value <0.01), while topic shifts represent a borderline construction, where no clear statistical preponderance for SAS or full agreement is found. In the following I will illustrate the various kinds of constructions attested in the corpus.

Examples (12) and (13) are two instances of SAS occurring with an AF subject.

(12) *L'anno vegniente, ciò fu 1393, fu*

the\_yearcoming that be.PFV.3SG 1393 be.PFV.3SG

*romore in Firenze. Era Messere Maso gonfaloniere di giustizia e* turmoil in Florence be.IPFV.3SG Messere Maso Gonfaloniere of justice and *Messere* *Rinaldo era […] de' Dodici […]* ***fu preso***

Messere Rinaldo be.IPFV.3SG of Dodici […] be.PFV.3SG take.PTCP.PST.M.SG

***Messere Cipriano e Alberto Grasso degli Alberti****, portarono rischio*

Messere Cipriano and Alberto Grasso degli Alberti take.PFV.3PL risk

*di morte.*

of death

"The following year, i.e. 1393, there was turmoil in Florence. The *Gonfaloniere* of Justice was Messere Maso, and Messere Rinaldo was part of the *Dodici*. Messere Cipriano and Alberto Grasso degli Alberti were captured, and they risked death." (Morelli, *Ricordi*, IV)

(13) *Negli anni 1363 fu in Firenze la mortalità pestilenziale:*

in.the years 1363 be.PFV.3SG in Florence the mortality pestilential

*fu grande e mori-cci assai gente […]*

be.PFV.3SG large and die.PFV.3SG-CLIT.LOC a.lot people

*ché nella detta moria****,*** *come dinanzi n'è memoria,*

that in.the said kill as before CLIT.PART-be.PRS.3SG memory

***morì tre fratelli di nostro padre.***

die.PFV.3SG three brother of our father

"In the year 1362, there was again pestilence in Florence. It was large and many people died in it. In the said pestilence, as we recalled before, three brothers of my father died." (Morelli, *Ricordi*, 305)

In (12), the presupposed, open proposition (because previously mentioned and frame-evoked in the preceding context, which describes the banishment of the Alberti family) is "*x* was captured", in which the missing argument *x* is filled by the subject NP "Messere Cipriano and Alberto Grasso degli Alberti". If one were to apply the question-answer test, a possible question would be "who was captured?". The following sentence *portarono rischio di morte* "they risked death" further corroborates the relation of agreement with information structure. Once the referent has been introduced via the lexical NP, it is coded only by means of the inflection on the verb which, in "pro-drop" languages like Italian, encodes topic continuity.

Example (13) provides another straightforward illustration of an AF construction with a post-verbal subject showing SAS. In this case, the presupposed proposition is "*x* died", x being constituted by the subject *tre fratelli di nostro padre*.

Examples (14) and (15) illustrate two instances of SF, where both the event denoted by the predicate and the subject are presented as unitary information (i.e. event-central SF constructions in Sasse's 1995 terminology), in which there is no presupposed part:

(14) *onde io salvato-mi ringraziai Iddio*

so.that I save.PTCP.PST.M.SG-CLIT.1SG thank.PFV.1SG God

*Lo dissi al conte: lui dette*

CLIT.3SG.M say.PFV.1SG to.the count he give.PFV.3SG

*a l'arme* ***si vidde le fuste in mare****.*

to the.alarm PASS/IMPERS see.PFV.3SG the galleys in sea

*L'altro giorno a presso sano**e lieto me ne*

the.other day after sound and happy CLIT.1SG CLIT.LOC

*ritornai in Roma*

return.PFV.1SG in Rome

"Since I saved my life, I thanked God. I told the count (the accident that happened, Author). He gave the alarm and the galleys could be seen coming in the sea. The day after I went back to Rome safe and sound." (Cellini, *Vita*, I, 29)

(15) *Da l'altra banda il fanciullo, che era*

from the.other side the boy REL be.IPFV.3SG

*sotto il pintacùlo, ispaventatissimo dicea che*

under the pinnacle frightened.SUPERL.SG say.IPFV.3SG COMPL

*in quel luogo* *si era un milione di uomini bravissimi,*

in that place PASS/IMPERS be.IPFV.3SG one million of men very.good

*e' quali tutti ci minacciavano: di più*

REL.PRON.M.PL all CLIT.1PL threaten.IPFV.3PL of more

*disse, che* ***gli era comparso***

say.PFV.3SG that CLIT.SOGG.3SG.M be.IPFV.3SG appear.PTCP.PST.M.SG

***quattro smisurati giganti****, e' quali erano armati e*

four enormous giants REL.PRON.M.PL be.IPFV.3SG armed and

*facevan segno di voler entrar da noi*

make.IPFV.3PL sign to want.INF enter.INF ALL.HUM us

"One the other hand, the boy standing under the pinnacle was very frightened. He said that in that place there were a million of very valiant men, who were threatening us. Furthermore, he said that there appeared four enormous giants, who were armed and wanted to get in our place." (Cellini, *Vita*, I, 64)

In (15) both the event denoted by the predicate *vedere* "see" and the referent denoted by the subject NP *fuste* "galleys" are asserted. The whole situation is new in relation to what was said before. Applying the question-answer test, the sentence in (14) could be the reply to an answer such as "what happened then?". There is previous mention of the NP *fuste*, which also shows no cataphoric persistence, since the topic shifts again to the narrator. Example (15) illustrates a similar situation. Here, both the event denoted by the predicate of appearance *era comparso* "appeared" and the subject *quattro* *smisurati* *giganti* "four enormous giants" are part of the assertion. Again, this sentence would be the answer to a hypothetical "what happened then?" question.

SAS can also occur in topic-shift contexts, in which a referent is introduced into the discourse and then picked up as the new topic. As mentioned above, typical constructions with a topic-shift function are existential-presentative ones[[7]](#footnote-7). All the examples of existential and presentative constructions in the corpus exhibit SAS. Existential and presentative constructions semantically assert the existence or presence of the named entity. From an information-structural point of view, they serve to introduce a referent in the universe of the discourse "by asserting its presence in a given location" (Lambrecht 1994, 179). For this reason, Lambrecht (2000) analyses them as SF constructions, with no presupposed or topical elements in it. In Lambrecht’s view, the referent must be new and this provides a strong link with focality. Example (16) illustrates a typical the topic-shift function. The subject *dumila uomin*i "two thousand men" is introduced in post-verbal position. However, the referent is not new in Lambrecht's sense. The entire passage regards the siege and conquest of Vico Pisano. The NP *uomini*, here to be understood in the sense of soldiers, was previously mentioned at the beginning of the section. Then the topic shifted to two men, negotiating with the Florentine government about their future shares during the siege of Vico Pisano. The sentence is (16) re-introduces the soldiers in order to make it of the subsequent text. In addition to being previously mentioned, the post-verbal subject triggering SAS is also frame-evoked, since the topic of the whole excerpt is the conquest of Vico Pisano:

(16) *Però* ***v'era dumila uomini*** *,*

but CLIT.LOC-be.IPFV.3SG two.thousand men

*rimasi che ottocento ve*

leave.PTCP.PST.M.PL REL eight.hundred CLIT.LOC

*n'erano da combattere*

CLIT.PART-be.IPFV.3PL to fight

*e questi erano sì isvenuti, non poteano*

and these be.IPFV.3PL so fainted NEG be.able.IPFV.3PL

*pella fame tenere il balestro fermo in mano*

for.the hunger hold.INF the crossbow fixed in hand

"But there were two thousand men left, of which eight hundred were there to fight. However, these were so exhausted and hungry that they could not hold the crossbow stable in their hands." (Morelli, *Ricordi*, 4)

As expected, existential/presentative constructions exhibit SAS, which became the only possibility in Modern Tuscan varieties (see La Fauci and Loporcaro 1997, and section 4.1). However, as we have just discussed, the characterisation of these sentences as thetic is not entirely accurate: in addition to the possibility to have a discourse-old subject, many examples can be found in which the prepositional phrase is outside the scope of focus and already known and presupposed in the context, as illustrated by (17):

(17) ***Ebbe in Velletri due uomini****, i quali*

have.PFV.3SG in Velletri two men REL.PRON.PL.M

*posero in cuore con loro industria*

put.PFV.3PL in heart with their industry

*di vituperare il Comune di Roma*

to vituperate.INF the Comune of Rome

"There were in Velletri two men, who set their minds on discrediting the Comune di Roma with their deeds." (*Pecorone di Ser Giovanni Fiorentino* 5.1.109)

**3.3. Relative and complement clauses**

The most striking aspect of the Old Tuscan data is the absence of examples of SAS with relative and other subordinate clauses introduced by *che* as well as with *wh*-words, as opposed to the situation attested in Modern Tuscan. While the lack of examples with *wh*-words might be due to the non-dialogic nature of the texts utilised for this study, the absence of SAS with relative clauses can be explained by the fact that SAS in main clauses and SAS in relative clauses are in fact two different phenomena that only superficially resemble each other. In fact, if the two phenomena were governed by the same principle, one would expect them to be diachronically connected and arise at the same time. I will return on this in Section 5.2.

65 instances of relative clauses were collected for this study. 35 examples are relative clauses formed with the invariable relativiser *che*, while 30 show the relative pronoun *il quale*, which can be inflected for gender and number. In Modern Italian, the two relativisation markers are in complementary distribution: the invariable relativiser *che* is used for subject and object relative clauses, while the relative pronoun *il quale* can be used in oblique relative clauses or in subject relative clauses only if these are non-restrictive (Cinque 1988). In older stages of Italian, the relative pronoun *il quale* could be also sporadically found in restrictive relative clauses (see Giacalone Ramat 2005 and references therein). Only one example, given in (18), was found in which subject agreement suspension appears in a subject relative clause, where the participle in the passive periphrastic form does not agree in number, nor in gender with the feminine plural head noun *cose* "things". This example is however highly dubious, since the predicate *venne fatto* in this context is an impersonal form meaning "to happen" which does not agree with the controller: this is confirmed by a search in the OVI corpus of Old Italian texts, where *venne fatto* with the meaning of "to happen" always occurs in the third person singular form:

(18) *Se io volessi descrivere* ***le gran cose che***

if I want.IPFV.SBJV.1SG describe.INF the great things REL

***mi venne fatto*** *insino a questa età,*

CLIT.1SG come.PFV.3SG do.PTCP.PST.M.SG until to this age

*e i gran pericoli della propria vita, farei*

and the great perils of.the own life do.PRS.COND.1SG

*maravigliare chi tal cosa leggessi.*

surprise.INF who such thing read.IPFV.SBJV.3SG

"If I wanted to describe the great things that happened to me until that age and the great risks I ran, I would surprise the one who would read about it." (Cellini, Vita, 1.7)

Similarly, 50 examples of complement clauses were collected and analysed. Similarly to relative clauses, no instances of SAS were found:

(19) *E però dico* ***che i savi hanno***

and but say.PRS.1SG COMPL the sage have.PRS.3PL

*vantaggio ché conoscono Idio,*

advantage since know.PRS.3PL God

"But I say that the sages are favoured, since they know God" (Morelli, *Ricordi*, III)

As we will see in Section (4.2), SAS in relative clauses is a widespread phenomenon in Modern Tuscan, where it was also extended to object and oblique relative clauses as well as to complement clauses introduced by *che*.

1. **SAS in Modern Tuscan**

In this section I will describe the distribution of SAS in three varieties of Modern Tuscan. I will show that SAS in Modern Tuscan, apart from occurring with post-verbal subjects, has been extended to a variety of other contexts:

* *wh*-elements in subject function;
* relative clauses;
* complement and temporal clauses introduced by *che*.

In the following section, I will examine the distribution of SAS in each of these contexts, in addition to main clauses, and will also highlight some issues related to dialectal micro-variation among these Tuscan varieties. The varieties taken into consideration in this paper are Florentine (both the urban and the rural varieties), Volterrano, and Lucchese.

The data used in this study come either from existing literature (especially Brandi and Cordin 1981, and Brandi and Giannelli 2011) or elicitation. I elicited examples from five speakers of Tuscan varieties, one of Lucchese, one of Volterrano, and three of Florence (two of them being speakers of the so-called "fiorentino rustico", i.e. the variety of Florentine spoken in the countryside, and one of the variety spoken in the city). The two elicitation techniques employed in this study were grammaticality judgements and translation tasks. Informants were asked to evaluate 10 sentences gleaned from the literature and to translate 10 sentences into their local varieties. Given the small number of examples, I did not perform a statistical analysis, but analysed the data qualitatively.

As will be discussed below, SAS in subordinate clauses exhibits an interesting split. On the one hand, there is a group of subordinate clauses, comprising relative clauses, complement and temporal clauses introduced by *che*, in which SAS is no longer linked to the post-verbal position of the subject. I will argue that in these cases, SAS is triggered by agreement with the relativiser/complementiser *che*. In the second group, comprising, e.g., temporal clauses, SAS appears under the same conditions as in main clauses, viz. with post-verbal subjects.

In addition, this split shows some variation depending on the variety under consideration. SAS with preverbal subjects in subordinate clauses introduced by *che* seems to be widespread in Florentine, whilst Volterrano and Lucchese show a strong dispreference for SAS to appear with preverbal subjects.

**4.1. SAS in main clauses**

As we have seen in Section (3) SAS in Old Tuscan was not obligatory with post-verbal subjects. By contrast, in the modern varieties of Florentine, Volterrano, and Lucchese, SAS suspension becomes compulsory when the subject is in post-verbal position (see also Brandi and Cordin 1981, Brandi and Giannelli 2011).

As in Old Tuscan, SAS involves lack of agreement in number and, for compound tenses, gender. Interestingly, as will be discussed below, subject agreement suspension is disallowed with first and second person pronouns, regardless of their position or information-structural properties. Another fact to be noted is the optional presence in the rural variety of Florentine of subject clitics: when present together with post-verbal subjects, they must obligatorily be in the third person masculine singular form *e* (*gli* before vowel).

Modern Florentine varieties allow SAS not only with unaccusative, existential, and passive verbs, but also with unergative, as in (20a), and transitive predicates, as in (20c). We saw in Section (3.2.1) that SAS with transitive was marginally present already in Old Tuscan. In Modern Tuscan, as Brandi and Giannelli (2001: 2) observe, SAS is fairly rare with unergative and transitive verbs. However, these examples constitute a problem for the explanations of SAS as a consequence of i) subject extraction and ii) the internal status of the subject argument, in that the subjects of unergative and transitive verbs cannot be analysed as underlying patients. In particular, the presence of subject agreement suspension with transitive predicates as in (20c) renders such an analysis even more problematic. In this example, the subject *ragazzi* is not immediately adjacent to the predicate, being separated from it by a lexical direct object NP (*la* *minestra*). Nonetheless, all these examples do have some commonalities with regard to information structural properties. They in fact tend to be used in specific contexts, viz. in either argument focus or sentence focus structures, as well as in cases of topic re-introduction or change. This is confirmed, e.g., by the fact that the subject NPs of these sentences typically bear the primary stress of the sentence:

(20) Florentine

(a) ***('e) dorme i ragazzi***

CLIT.SUBJ.3SG.M sleep.PRS.3SG the boys

"The boys are sleeping."

(b) ***('e) fu fatto le chiese*** */*

CLIT.SUBJ.3SG.M be.PFV.3SG do.PTCP.M.SG the churches.F

***la chiesa***

the church.F

"The churches were built / The church was built."

(c) ***('e) mangia la minestra 'ragazzi***

CLIT.SUBJ.3SG.M eat.PRS.3SG the soup DET.boys

"The boys eat the soup."

With *wh*-elements in subject function, the same pattern holds. Thus, no agreement is permitted in (20a, b), due to the presence of the *wh*-element. SAS in these structures is clearly correlated to the focal status of the subject. If the subject is right dislocated, full agreement surfaces again. This is illustrated by the difference between (21b) and (21c). In (21b), the subject is focal and then does not trigger agreement on the verb, as shown by the default masculine form of the participle. When the subject in a topical position again, as in (21c), agreement must be obligatorily present:

(21) Florentine

(a) ***Quante ragazze gli è venuto***

how.many girls CLIT.SUBJ.3SG.M be.PRS.3SG come.PTCP.PST.M.SG

*con te?*

with you

"How many girls came with you?"

(b) ***che è venuto la Maria?***

INT be.PRS.3SG come.PTCP.PST.M.SG the Mary

"Has Maria come?"

(c) ***che è venuta, la Maria?***

INT be.PRS.3SG come.PTCP.PST.F.SG the Mary

"Has she come, Maria?"

The crucial role of information structure in determining the presence of agreement in the Tuscan varieties under discussion can be clearly observed in transitive clauses, exemplified in (22) from Florentine. The direct object is left dislocated and, in addition to clitic doubling, also triggers number and gender agreement on the past participle. The subject-agreeing auxiliary, however, is inflected in the third person singular, and thus does not agree with the focal post-verbal subject:

(22) *questi funghi,* ***l'ha trovati***

these mushrooms CLIT.OBJ.3PL-have.PRS.3SG find.PTCP.PST.M.PL

***'mi figlioli***

DET.my sons

"These mushrooms, my sons found them" (Brandi and Giannelli 2011: 9)

The distribution of SAS with intransitive predicates is more or less similar in Volterrano and Lucchese, where it is consistently used when the subject is post-verbal. With transitive predicates, my informants consistently rejected examples of SAS with transitive predicates, regardless of the post-verbal position of the subject. Thus, in example (23) from Volterrano, full agreement must be used:

(23) *\*****mangia*** */* ***mangiano*** *la minestra* ***'ragazzi***

eat.PRS.3SG / eat.PRS.3Pl the soup DET.boys

"The boys eat the soup."

An interesting fact is the ban of subject agreement suspension with first and second person pronouns. When an overt first- or second person pronoun is used in post-verbal position, no SAS is allowed, as shown by the utter ungrammaticality of the examples in (24):

(24) Florentine

(a) ***\*Venne io!***

come.PFV.3SG I

"i came."

(b) ***\*Ha dormito tu*** *in quella stanza?*

have.PRS.3SG sleep.PTCP.M.SG you in that room

"Did you sleep in that room?"

**4.2. Relative and complement clauses**

We saw in the previous section that no unambiguous instances of SAS in relative clauses were detected in the Old Tuscan texts examined for this paper. Unlike Old Tuscan, Modern Tuscan varieties display widespread agreement suspension in restrictive relative clauses, as already noticed in the literature (Brandi and Cordin 1981, Brandi and Giannelli 2011). This fact has been taken as chief evidence for the role of subject extraction in determining the occurrence of subject agreement suspension. Thus, in the varieties under investigation in this paper, SAS is found with subject relative clauses introduced by the invariable relativiser *che*, as in (25). Note the absence of subject agreement is absent both in the main clause headed by an existential predicate as well as in the relative clause in example (25a) from Volterrano:

(25)

(a) ***C'è ll'operai che pulisce*** *le gore*

CLIT.LOC-be.PRS.3SG the.workers REL clean.PRS.3SG the millstreams

"There are workers cleaning the millstreams." (Brandi and Giannelli 2011: 9)

(b) ***Le ragazze che gl'è venuto ieri***

the girls REL CLIT.SUBJ.3SG.M-be.PRS.3SG come.PTCP.PST.M.SG

*sono belline*

be.PRS.3PL nice

"The girls who came yesterday are nice."

However, a closer inspection of the Tuscan data reveals that the situation is far more complex. Based on the definition of SAS discussed in Section (2.2), which maintains that subject agreement is sensitive to the extraction of the subject, one would expect SAS to occur with **subject** **relative** **clauses** only, as commonly reported in the literature. This is not the case in Tuscan, where SAS appears also with object relative clauses (26a), relativised indirect objects (26b), and even obliques (26c) introduced by *che*. In these cases, obviously, the subject NP of the relative clause must be overtly realised. The syntactic role of the relativised element in (26 b, c) is recovered by means of the dative and the oblique clitics respectively:

(26) Florentine

(a)*Si mangia* ***i funghi che*** *ha*

IMPERS eat.PRS.3SG the mushrooms REL have.PRS.3SG

***portato i mi figlioli*** */* ***i mi***

bring.PTCP.PST.M.SG the my sons the my

***figlioli ha portato***

sons have.PRS.3SG bring.PTCP.PST.M.SG

"We eat the mushrooms that my sons brought."

(b) ***I ragazzi che gli porta***

the boys REL CLIT.DAT.3SG.M bring.PRS.3SG

***da be' le mi figliole / le mi figliole***

to drink.INF the my daughters the my daughters

***gli porta da be'***

CLIT.DAT.3SG.M bring.PRS.3SG to drink.INF

"The boys to whom my daughters give to drink."

(c) ***I carri che ci andava l'omini al mercato***

the carts REL CLIT.OBL/LOC go.IPFV.3SG the.men to.the market

***l'òmini andava al mercato***

the.men go.IPFV.3SG to.the market

"The carts with which men used to go to the market." (Brandi and Giannelli 2001: 7)

The examples in (26) also show another interesting characteristic of SAS in relative clauses. As observed by Brandi and Giannelli (2011: 6), SAS in relative clauses does not seem to be bound to the post-verbal position of the subject NP[[8]](#footnote-8). If it were, one could simply argue that SAS in relative clauses is conditioned by the post-verbal position of the subject, in the same way as in main clauses. However, this analysis is untenable for various reasons. First, as we have just discussed, SAS in non-subject-relative clauses can appear also with preverbal subjects, which are not extracted. A second piece of evidence for an alternative analysis comes from the fact that SAS is not confined to relative clauses only: in fact, the phenomenon also appears in other subordinate clauses, such as complement clauses, as exemplified in (27), Example (27a) is from Florentine: (27b) and (27c) are from Volterrano and Lucchese respectively:

(27)

(a)*Te dici* ***che******questi ragazzi***

CLIT.SUBJ.2SG say.PRS.2SG COMPL these boys

***vende*** *la droga*?

sell.PRS.3SG the drug

"You're saying that these boys sell drugs?" (Brandi and Giannelli 2011: 7)

(b) *m'ha detto* ***che 'su figlioli***

CLIT.1SG-have.PRS.3SG say.PTCP.PST.M.SG COMPL his sons

***studia*** *a Firenze*

study.PRS.3SG at Florence

"He told me that his children study in Florence."

(c) *aspetto* ***che i ragazzi va*** *e poi*

wait.PRS.1SG COMPL the boys go.PRS.3SG and after

*vo' anch'io*

go.PRS.1SG also-I

"I wait for the boys to go and then I go too."

Brandi and Giannelli claim that SAS can also appear, regardless of the position of the subject, in other kinds of subordinate clauses, such as temporal ones introduced by *quando* "when" and *mentre* "while", as in (28). They also mention that SAS is strongly disfavoured with compound tenses:

(28)

(a)*quando* ***le macchine******parte*** */ \*****è***

when the cars leave.PRS.3SG be.PRS.3SG

***partito***

leave.PTCP.PST.M.SG

"When the cars leave / have left…"

(b) *mentre* ***'fagioli******bolle*** */ \*****ha bollito***

while DET.beans boil.PRS.3SG have.PRS.3SG boil.PTCP.M.SG.SG

"While the beans boil / have boiled…" (Brandi and Giannelli 2011: 9)

The data collected for this study do not confirm Brandi and Giannelli's (2011) observations. My informants consistently rejected all the instances of SAS with subordinate clauses other than relative and complement clauses, unless the subject was in post-verbal position. With post-verbal subjects, SAS appears both with simple and compound tenses, as exemplified by (29a, b) from Volterrano:

(29) Volterrano

(a)*quando* ***parte*** */ \*****è*** ***partito le macchine,***

when leave.PRS.3SG be.PRS.3SGleave.PTCP.PST.M.SG the cars

*ce ne andiamo*

CLIT.LOC PART go.PRS.1PL

"When the cars leave / have left, we go."

(b) *mentre* ***bolle*** */ \*****ha bollito******'fagioli,***

while boil.PRS.3SG have.PRS.3SG boil.PTCP.M.SG.SG DET.beans

*butta la pasta*

throw.PRS.3SG the pasta

"While the beans boil / have boiled, toss the pasta in."

Interestingly, in three three varieties surveyed in this paper, SAS can appear with pre-verbal subjects in, e.g., temporal clauses introduced by *prima che* "before", *quando che* "when", and *dopo che* "after", as in (30a, b), from Volterrano:

(30) Volterrano

(a)*prima che* ***le macchine parte,*** *ce*

when COMPL the cars leave.PRS.3SG CLIT.LOC

*ne andiamo*

PART go.PRS.1PL

"Before the cars leave, we go."

(b) *mentre che* ***'fagioli bolle,***

while COMPL DET.beans boil.PRS.3SG

*butta la pasta*

throw.PRS.3SG the pasta

"While the beans boil, toss the pasta in."

The data presented above seem to point to a fundamental difference in the distribution of SAS in subordinate clauses. On the one hand we have relative and complement clauses, as well as some temporal clauses, where SAS appears irrespective of the position of the subject, which can be pre- or post-verbal. These clauses have in common the presence of the subordinator *che*.

On the other hand, we find SAS in subordinate clauses, such as temporal ones introduced by *quando* and *mentre*, only when the subject is in post-verbal position, thus mirroring the constraints that regulate the appearance of the phenomenon in main clauses. What brings about the different syntactic behaviour with regard SAS within different subordinate clauses? I will take up this issue in the following section, which summarises the findings discussed so far.

1. **Discussion**

In this section I will summarise and discuss the findings about the distribution of SAS in Old and Modern Tuscan. I will first tackle the link of SAS and post-verbal position of the subject (section 5.1), and I will then turn to the discussion of SAS in relative and subordinate clauses.

**5.1. SAS and post-verbal position**

We have seen in the previous sections that SAS shows quite extensive changes from Old Tuscan to Modern Tuscan.

The Old Tuscan texts examined in this paper show that SAS was not compulsory whenever the subject was in post-verbal position. Quite a few examples are found in which post-verbal subjects trigger full agreement in number and gender. The only context in which SAS is obligatory in my corpus is in existential/presentative constructions. As for verb classes, SAS is mostly found with passive, unaccusative, and existential predicates, although some scattered examples with transitive and causative predicates are attested.

In Modern Tuscan, SAS is obligatory with post-verbal subjects, and occurs also with unergative and transitive ones, although with these verbs SAS still remains quite marked an option.

It is well known, both in generatively- and functionally-oriented approaches, that a post-verbal subject in Italo-Romance is usually focused (Cinque 1993, Bernini 1995, Brunetti 2004, among others). The presence of SAS has been taken as a feature characterising SF constructions: however, as I have shown above for Old Tuscan, SAS also occurs in AF constructions, in which only this subject is focal, as well as in cases of topic (re)-introduction, the latter being generally existential/presentative constructions. As I have discussed in section (3), topic (re)-introduction is not a strong trigger for SAS in the Old Tuscan texts examined in this paper. In fact, there appears to be a strong preference for full agreement in VS clauses to be used in topic-shift or topic-introduction environments as opposed to focal subjects, which tend to occur with SAS.

The change from Old to Modern Tuscan can be described in terms of extension. The post-verbal position of the subject in Modern Tuscan is a sufficient condition for the appearance of SAS, while in Old Tuscan it was only necessary. That is, in Modern Tuscan, once the subject is post-verbal, it triggers SAS. In Old Tuscan, SAS obtained if an additional condition was met, namely the focal status of the subject, as demonstrated by the statistical preponderance of focal subjects with SAS.

The data discussed so far pose several problems to analyses that link SAS to extraction. Assuming that extraction is possible from internal arguments only, such as subjects of unaccusative verbs (Chomsky 2005), we would then expect SAS to be confined to configurations where the post-verbal subject is more patient-like. However, we have seen that SAS in Modern Tuscan (as well as, very marginally, in Old Tuscan), targets also subjects of unergative and transitive predicates, which are external arguments of the predicate, whether they occur pre- or post-verbally.

A different explanation, put forward by Lambrecht (2000) and Manzini and Savoia (2002), takes post-verbal subjects as foci or part of focus of the sentence (see also Belletti 2004). That is, post-verbal subjects, staying inside the VP, are in Focus position, as opposed to preverbal subjects, which are instead in a Topic position. Such characterisation is in general in line with the data examined above, but ignores two facts. First, as I have shown in section (3) for Old Tuscan, sentences with post-verbal subjects need not be instances of SF constructions. In fact, AF constructions in which only the subject is focal are also well attested. This entails that SAS is primarily sensitive to the information status of the subject, rather than to the whole sentence. Second, we have seen that, in Old Tuscan, post-verbal subjects need not be focal: this fact has been noticed, among others, by Renzi (1988) and Suzuki (2001) for Old Italian. Similarly, as also observed by Bernini (1995), post-verbal subjects in Modern Italian need not be necessarily focus or part of the focus domain, which can contain topical elements (see also Lambrecht 1994, Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011). Let us consider the example in (31):

(31) *[…] vengono confermati anche mettendo in relazione*

[…] come.PRS.3PL confirm.PTCP.PST.M.PL also put.GER in relation

*l'occupazione con l'anno di arrivo, aggregato, dei*

the.occupation with the.year of arrival aggregate.PTCP.PST.M.SG of.the

*ragazzi. Emerge infatti, che quanto più tardi*

boys. emerge.PRS.3SG indeed COMPL as\_much more late

***sono arrivati i ragazzi****, più i padri*

be.PRS.3PL arrive.PTCP.M.PL the boys more the fathers

*sono occupati nell'industria come operai […]*

be.PRS.3PL employ.PTCP.PST.M.PL in.the.industry as workers

"[The analysis] are [sic!] confirmed also when correlating and aggregating the occupation with the year of arrival of the boys. It indeed emerges that the later the boys arrived, the more their fathers are employed in the industry as workers." (from *Tracce di G2. Le seconde generazioni negli Stati Uniti, in Europa e in Italia*, p. 143)

The post-verbal subject *ragazzi* "boys" cannot be held as focal, in that it cannot be the answer to a hypothetical *wh*-question, such as "What happened?" or "Who arrived?", nor is it informationally new or contrastive. Rather, the focal part of the sentence bearing the main stress here is constituted by the comparative conjunction *quanto più*.

Another example is provided in (32), where the post-verbal subject *prostitute* "prostitutes" of the unergative predicate *lavorare* "to work", is presupposed, unstressed, and already known to the reader, having been repeatedly mentioned and commented upon across the whole paragraph. At the level of the sentence, we could certainly argue that the whole sentence is sentence-new: however, many of the characteristics of foci, such as newness and being part of the assertion, are absent. The post-verbal subject has been mentioned in the previous paragraph and the predicate is accessible since it is evoked via reference to a certain lexical frame (see Chafe 1987, Givón 2001, Prince 1981). Similarly, the relation between the post-verbal subject and the predicate cannot be said to be unpredictable (see Lambrecht 1994), given that it is evoked by the lexical frame of prostitution and brothels. The focal part of the sentence is *della categoria più bassa* "low-level" which adds up information on the prostitutes:

(32) *[…] oltre che nei bordelli la prostituzione ateniese si*

[…] besides that in.the brothels the prostitution Athenian IMPERS

*sviluppò in alcune zone della città dove*

develop.PFV.3SG in some areas of.the city where

*ferveva il traffico come ad esempio il porto.*

swarm.IPFV.3SG the traffic as to example the harbour

*Qui* ***lavoravano le prostitute*** *della categoria più bassa*

here work.IPFV.3PL the prostitutes of.the category more low

"Apart from brothels, prostitution in Athens developed also in some areas of the city swarmed with traffic, such as the harbour. Here low-level prostitutes used to work." (from *Porca Puttana*, p. 17)

Another factor to be taken into consideration in the examples discussed above is the present of preverbal material, usually spatio-temporal adverbials, which provide the setting for the event described by the predicate. The presence of preverbal material has indeed been acknowledged as one of the factors triggering VS word order in Italian (see, e.g., Bernini 1995).

Characterising post-verbal subjects as inherently focal is probably too a simplistic explanation: we have seen above that In Old Tuscan the post-verbal position could be exploited to (re)-introduce new topics. To a lesser extent, instances of non-focal post-verbal subjects seem to be found in Modern Italian in special contexts, e.g. contexts with preverbal material, as the examples discussed above show. It might then well be that the post-verbal subject position in Italian tends to correlate with focality or (re)-introduction of (new) referents. This is different enough from claiming that it is a dedicated position for the realisation of focal elements, for in the examples discussed above the subjects do not display any properties typical of foci, nor can they be felicitously applied to the question-answer criterion.

One possible line of explanation, which will not be pursued here given that it goes beyond the scope of the present paper, is that the post-verbal subject position is employed as a discourse-organising device determined relative to the overall discourse structure and context. That is, the post-verbal subject position might be underspecified in terms of information-structural properties, being exploited not only for what has been traditionally labelled as focus, but rather for subjects which are less prominent. In addition, other factors come into play: as is well known, VS order is the preferred option with unaccusative predicates, in which case the post-verbal subject does not necessarily convey any focal interpretation. Thus, (33a) with the post-verbal subject is pragmatically unmarked as opposed to the preverbal one in (33b):

(33) Standard Italian

(a)*E' morto Luca*

be.PRS.3SG die.PTCP.PST.M.SG Luca

"Luca died."

(b) *Luca è morto*

Luca be.PRS.3SG die.PTCP.PST.M.SG

"Luca died."

With existential predicates such as *esserci*, the postverbal position is the only possible option. The link between focality and existential-presentative constructions has been widely discussed in the literature (see, e.g., Abbott 1993, McNally 1997, Ward and Birner 1995, Lambrecht 2000). According to these accounts, the fundamental focal nature of NPs in existential constructions is due to the "Novelty Condition", that is the requirement for the referent i) to be presupposed with regard to its existence, and ii) to be presented as new at the time of assertion. While this is certainly true, many scholars have pointed out that the main function of existential or presentative constructions is to (re-)introduce a referent in the universe of discourse rather than merely asserting its existence (see, e.g., Givón 2001: 741; Ward and Birner 1995, and Leonetti 2008, among others). That is, while at the sentence-level the NP in an existential sentence is focal, based on a definition of focus which relies on newness, the situation becomes more complex if one looks at the broader discourse context.

Example (34) from Old Tuscan illustrates some of the difficulties in analysing existential sentences as structures which serve to merely introduce a new referent into the discourse.

The referent *castella* "castles" is mentioned in the previous sentence and becomes the discourse topic of the following stretch of discourse (not reproduced here). The referent following the existential predicate "to have" does not abide by the novelty condition, since it cannot be held as "new", having been previously mentioned and present in the discourse context:

(34) *se è grande di castella o fortezze o d'altri*

if be.PRS.3SG big of castels or fortresses or of.other

*edifici, di casamenti tu l'hai già*

buildings of houses you CLIT.OBJ.3SG.M-have.PRS.2SG already

*veduto: cioè che nel detto Mugello ha*

see.PTCP.PST.M.SG that.is COMPL in.the said Mugello have.PRS.3SG

***sei* *grosse castella***

six big castels

"You have already seen if it is large enough with regard to castles, fortresses, or other buildings and houses. That is that in the afore-mentioned Mugello there are six large castles." (Morelli, *Ricordi* 103).

The NP *castella* in the existential sentence serves to establish this not yet prominent referent as the main topic of the following discourse. This correlates with syntactic marking, such as post-verbal position and lack of agreement. The problem here lies in the conflation, already identified by Gundel (1988), between newness as a referential property and newness as a relational property. While the former refers to the relation between a linguistic expression and a non-linguistic entity (be this entity, e.g. a discourse entity or not), the latter overlaps with the notions of topic and focus, since it refers to the relations between different parts of a sentence. Referential newness per se is thus not a sufficient and necessary property of NPs in existential constructions, as demonstrated by example (32) above, where the referent is in fact given (*pace* Prince 1992, Ward and Birner 1995, who maintain that referents of existential constructions should be hearer-new).

As is clear from the counts in Table (1), in the corpus used for this study there is a significant correlation between focality and agreement suspension with post-verbal subjects: focal elements, be they AF or part of SF constructions, correlate to a large extent with subject agreement suspension, while post-verbal subjects and full agreement seems to be less common with these elements. No conclusive evidence can be drawn as far as topic-introduction strategies are concerned, in that numbers are almost identical and reached no statistical significance.

A related, albeit slightly different, issue, concerns the ban of SAS with first and second post-verbal subjects, not attested both in Old and Modern Tuscan. One possible explanation for this fact lies in the features of first and second person pronouns as opposed to third ones. As already proposed by Benveniste (1946) and Jakobson (1971), first and second person is characterised by a feature [+person], while third person is negatively defined as "non-person", given its "impersonal, non-referring nature" (Benveniste 1946: 228).

Following Benveniste and Jakobson, Manzini and Savoia (2002) claim that SAS involves the suspension of gender and number agreement only, given the absence -or rather the underspecification- of the person feature in third person. This explanation can be also complemented with a discourse-based account. As noted by Benveniste himself, first and second pronouns must necessarily refer to the participants in a given communicative context, viz. the speaker and the addressee, and are thus inherently given. Third person does not, since its interpretation is not bound, and hence can be either given or new in the discourse. This explanation is certainly appealing and might indeed be the principle that blocks the appearance of SAS with first and second pronouns in Tuscan. However, it seems to be just one of the possible scenarios under which SAS surfaces. In fact, there do exist languages where subject agreement suspension targets also first and second person pronouns: an example of such language is Jamsay (Dogon), where subject agreement is suspended when a focal pronominal subject appears, usually at the beginning of the clause. This is illustrated by the difference between (35a), which shows the agreement suffix on the verb (-*m*), and (35b), where the verb has no agreement suffix and only the tonic independent pronoun appears at the beginning of the clause:

(35) Jamsay (Dogon)

(a)*yà: ù* ***ɛ̀-sá-m***

yesterday 2SG.OBJ see-RES-1SG

"Yesterday I saw you."

(b) ***mì-ý*** *jɛ́rù* ***jɛ́rɛ́***

1SG-FOC harvest harvest.PFV

"It was me who did the harvesting." (Heath 2008: 401)

Summing up, SAS with post-verbal subjects in Old Tuscan, as well as in Modern Tuscan varieties, seems to be driven by general discourse-organising principles: SAS seems to target two different groups of subjects: the first group comprises focal subjects, i.e. asserted, new elements whose relationship to the presupposition is unpredictable. Contrary to previous accounts, SAS appears not only in SF constructions, but also in AF ones.

The second group comprises topic (re)-introduction structures, in which the post-verbal subject is (newly) (re)-introduced and becomes the topic of the following sentences. What the two groups seem to have in common is the low degree of prominence of the subject referent, which is not (or not yet) in the current focus of consciousness of the speaker (Chafe 1994).

**5.2. SAS in subordinate clauses**

We have seen in section 3.3 that SAS in subordinate clauses is virtually absent in our Old Tuscan corpus, while it is a widespread feature of Modern Tuscan varieties, where it occurs not only with subject relative clauses, as predicted by the extraction account, but also with non-subject relative clauses, complement clauses, and some temporal clauses. As I have observed above, these clauses have in common the presence of the overt relativiser/complementiser *che*.

The presence of SAS with subject relative clauses has been taken as crucial evidence for the role of subject extraction in determining the appearance of the phenomenon both with post-verbal subjects and relative clauses (Brandi and Cordin 1989, Ouhalla 1993).

However, the data presented in this paper seems to point to a fundamental difference between SAS with post-verbal subjects and relative/complement clauses, undermining, in my opinion, a unified analysis for the data presented in this paper. In the following, I will summarise and review the evidence in favour of an analysis that sets apart SAS in main clauses from SAS in subordinate clauses.

First of all, as we have seen, SAS in Modern Tuscan varieties surfaces also in non-subject relative clauses, where there must be an overt subject NP in the relative clause. In these cases, it is not clear why there should be SAS, given that the subject NP of the relative clause is overtly realised. In addition, as we have seen, the requirement that the subject be post-verbal in the sentence disappears, a fact that is unexpected under a subject extraction analysis.

Second, as we have seen in section (4.2), SAS also occurs in complement clauses, introduced by *che* and in temporal clauses introduced by *prima che* or *mentre* *che*. Similarly to relative clauses, the post-verbal position of the subject is not necessary to trigger the appearance of the phenomenon under investigation. It is then apparent that we are here dealing with two different kinds of constructions in which SAS appears.

As has been repeatedly pointed out in the literature (Keenan and Comrie 1977, Hendery 2012, among others), relative markers like French *qui/que* or Italian *che* are invariable subordinating conjunctions which started out in relative clauses and were later generalised across different types of subordinate clauses (see also Cristofaro 1998).

I have shown above that the common property of the subordinate clauses showing SAS is the presence of the complementiser *che*. My proposal to account for SAS in subordinate clauses introduced by *che* is that the verb in these subordinate clauses agrees with the invariable complementiser. Being an invariable form bearing no features, the complementiser *che* can be analysed as bearing no person/number features. Given that Italian requires overt realisation of agreement morphology, it comes as no surprise that agreement is realised via the default, "unmarked" form, namely third person singular masculine (Corbett 2003: 147).

Decisive evidence for this hypothesis comes from two facts. First, SAS appears in non-subject relative clauses and in other subordinate clauses with an overt subject. In these cases, one would expect SAS to be blocked by the presence of the subject NP, which normally triggers full agreement on the verb. In addition, the post-verbal position of the subject NP, which triggers SAS in main clauses, is no longer relevant in the subordinate clauses introduced by *che*, where SAS obtains both with preverbal and post-verbal subjects.

A second piece of evidence comes for the agreement of the verb in the subordinate clause with *che* comes from the different behaviour of temporal clauses. Temporal clauses introduced by simple complementisers such as *quando* "when" and *mentre* "while" show SAS only when the subject is post-verbal, thus obeying the same constraint found in main clauses. By contrast, temporal clauses introduced by a complex complementiser comprising *che* pattern with relative and complement clauses, allowing SAS both with preverbal and post-verbal subjects. The different behaviour of the two kinds of subordinate clauses, the ones introduced by *che* and the ones that are not, is summarised in Table (3):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Preverbal subject* | *Post-verbal subject* |
| + *che* | + SAS | + SAS |
| - *che* | - SAS | - SAS |

Table 3: SAS in subordinate clauses

The independence of SAS in main vs. subordinate clauses is also corroborated by cross-linguistic data. A particularly interesting example of SAS comes from Bare (Arawakan), which shows SAS in main clauses with focused subjects, as well as SAS in cleft, headless relative, and complement clauses, as well as with *wh*-words in subject function (Aikhenvald 1995: 28-30). Example (36a) illustrates full subject agreement, expressed by a prefix on the verb, while (36b, c, d) illustrate SAS with a *wh*-word in subject function, a relative clause, and a complement clause respectively[[9]](#footnote-9):

(36) Bare (Arawakan)

(a) ***me-mada kuhuni*** *pem-'danika-waka ada biñehe*

3PL-leave they 3PL-take.care-PURP that village

"They (revolutionaries) left them (the villagers) to take care of the dwellers."

(b) ***abadi a-diña*** *nu-yaka-w iku*

who INDEF-speak 1SG-parent-FEM mother

"Who spoke with your mother?"

(c) *me-bíhitẽ* ***bakú-naka******kwáti duwã a-d'awí-ka-na***

3PL-encounter one jaguar body INDEF-die-THEM-PFV

"They encountered a body of one jaguar which was dead". (Aikhenvald 1995: 48)

(d) *duwã me-khiñahã* ***mawáya a-kháruka i-d'áwika***

body 3PL-think snake INDEF-bite 3SG.NONF-die

"His body, they think that the snake bit him and he died." (Aikhenvald 1995: 28-30)

Subject agreement is suspended in the environments illustrated above, which correspond to the environments in which SAS occurs in Tuscan. In these cases, regular agreement marking is replaced by the prefix *a-*, which Aikhenvald (1995: 28) labels "indefinite person marker".

In main clauses, interestingly, SAS does not involve the presence of a default agreement prefix, but rather the complete suppression of agreement morphology, as in (37), where the plural subject *kwati-ñu* "jaguars" is not cross-referenced on the verb. SAS in these cases is regulated by the focality of the subject NP (Aikhenvald 1995: 30):

(37) *u-dumá-ka-ni u-ʧana-ka kwati baɻika*

3SG.F-sleep-THEM-IPFV 3SG.F-stay-DECL jaguar dig

*idi* ***kwati-ñu kása-ka*** *wehebíte*

then jaguar-PL come-DECL 3SG.F.over.DIR

"She (the aunt) was asleep, the jaguars dug, then the jaguars came over to her." (Aikhenvald 1995: 28-30)

If SAS was determined by the same principles in both cases, one would legitimately expect it to show the same morphological makeup. The markedly different realisation of SAS, involving a "default" agreement prefix in subordinate clauses and complete suppression of agreement morphology in main clauses, does not uphold such an explanation, given that the synchronic facts are remarkably dissimilar.

The Bare pattern raises another point, which brings us back to the Tuscan data. We have seen in section (3.3) that no instances of SAS are attested in the Old Tuscan corpus examined in this paper. Under the hypothesis of the independence of the two types of SAS I put forward here, it is not unexpected that the two types developed separately at different times. One piece of evidence for this comes again from cross-linguistic comparison. There are languages in which SAS appears in, e.g., main clauses, but not in subordinate ones. An example of such a language is Sheko (Afro-Asiatic, Omotic), in which SAS is obligatory with focalised subjects and *wh*-words in subject function (Hellenthal 2010: 429-451). This is illustrated by (38a), which exemplifies a PF structure with full agreement, as opposed to (38b), which is an instance of AF on the subject:

(38) Sheko (Afro-Asiatic, Omotic)

(a)*ʔiʛ-ʛoyra* ***mur-t-i***

2-tree cut-2-PFV

"You cut a tree."

(b) *kee ʛoyra* ***mur-e***

you tree cut-PFV

"It's you who cut a tree." (Hellenthal 2010: 451)

The reverse situation, in which SAS appears only with relative clauses but not in main clauses is attested in some non-standard varieties of French, where there is SAS only with subject relative clauses, but not in main ones. (39a) illustrates SAS in relative clauses in non-standard French, while (39b) is an example of the Standard French version:

(39) French (Indo-European, Romance)

(a)*J'aime pas* ***les femmes qui boit***

I-love.PRS.1SG NEG DET.PL.F women REL drink.PRS.3SG

"I don't like the women who drink." (Frei 1929: 163)

(b)*J'aime pas* ***les femmes qui boivent***

I-love.PRS.1SG NEG DET.PL.F women REL drink.PRS.3PL

"I don't like the women who drink." (personal knowledge)

It seems plausible to assume that invariable relativisers, which have (pro)nominal origin, have synchronically no agreement features: in languages where the realisation of agreement morphology is obligatory, such as Romance languages, the verb will be marked for third person singular (masculine).

What remains to be explained is the diachronic path that led to the rise and the extension of SAS in subordinate clauses in Tuscan. Given the clear tendency for SAS to be found mostly with subject relative clauses, one might hypothesise a scenario in which SAS in subordinate clauses first began with subject relative clauses and then spread to other clauses in which the same relativiser/complementiser is used. There are two arguments for this reconstruction, which however needs to be verified through a cross-linguistic examination of the diachrony of SAS.

The first one concerns the lack on an overt agreement controller in the relative clause: it seems plausible to assume that, if the proposal advanced above is correct, the agreement with the invariable relativiser started out in contexts where there was no other possible controller for agreement, such as subject relative clauses.

Then, through a process of extension (Harris and Campbell 1995), SAS was generalised to other kinds of relative clauses, irrespective of the position of the subject NP within the subordinate clauses. The extension to complement clauses and temporal clauses with complex complementisers comprising *che* constitutes a later development, motivated by the conventionalisation of the agreement pattern with *che*.

The second one concerns the common cross-linguistic tendency for SAS to be confined to subject relative clauses. SAS in relative or complement clauses appears **only** in conjunction with an invariable relativiser or complementiser, as in, e.g., Romance languages, Breton, and several Cushitic languages (Author 2014).

Indeed, an oft-cited case of SAS where SAS has the same morphological makeup in main and subordinate clauses, viz. Breton (Celtic; Borsley and Stephens 1989), may be invoked as a counterexample to the hypothesis advanced here of the independence of SAS in main and subordinate clauses. However, the Breton data can be easily reconciled with the idea put forward in this paper. Breton displays SAS with sentence-initial focused constituents marked by the particle *a*, as well as with *wh*-subjects, subject relative clauses, and clefts, as exemplified by (40a, b, c) respectively. Example (40d) shows SAS with an embedded subject:

(40) Breton (Indo-European, Celtic)

(a) ***ar vugale a lenn*** */ \*lennont levrioù*

the children FOC read.3SG read.3PL books

"The children read books."

(b) ***Petore paotred a lenne*** */ \*lennent al levrioù*

which boys FOC read.3SG read.3PL the books

"Which boys read the books?"

(c) ***ar vugale eo a lenne***  */ \*lennent al levrioù*

the children COP FOC read.3SG read.3PL the books

"It is children that read books."

(d) ***ar baotred a soñj din a lenne***  */ \*lennent al*

the boys COMP think to.1SG COMP read.3SG read.3PL the

*levrioù a zo amañ*

books COMP is.REL here

"The boys that I think read the books are here." (Borsley and Stephens 1989: 408; some data are originally from Stump 1984)

Breton displays SAS with all the structures involving extraction, and hence constitutes the perfect evidence for the validity of such synchronic explanation. However, a crucial fact is overlooked in synchronic descriptions of Breton SAS, namely the presence of the particle *a*. The particle *a* synchronically functions as:

1. An invariable relativiser;
2. A complementiser;
3. A focus marker.

Historically, *a* was first a relative pronoun, originally made up of a relative pronoun (PIE \**yo*) bearing third person features (Thurneysen 1946: 324). When the subject was relativised, the verb in the relative clause was with the relativiser or relative pronoun (Wojcik 1976), as we have seen for Tuscan and French (see also Harris and Campbell 1995: 155-158 for similar considerations). The focus marking use in main clauses derives from cleft sentences of the type "Cop X REL V", in which the copula was lost once the bi-clausal cleft construction was reanalysed as a mono-clausal focus-marking structure (cf. Heine and Reh 1984: 177).

To sum up, SAS originally started in relative clauses in which the subordinate verb agreed with the relativiser. Since clefts are usually built upon relative clauses, they also show SAS. When the former cleft became grammaticalised as a focus-marking strategy, it inherited the agreement pattern found in the original relative construction.

1. **Conclusions**

This paper has investigated the distribution and the factors affecting SAS in Old and Modern Tuscan. I have argued that SAS with post-verbal subjects in Tuscan can be best accounted for in terms of the information structural status of the subject. Contrary to what has been commonly assumed in the literature, I have shown that SAS in Old Tuscan is not associated with SF constructions only, but also occurs in AF constructions, as well as in topic (re)-introduction structures. From a diachronic perspective, I have shown that SAS with post-verbal subjects underwent a process of extension from Old to Modern Tuscan, in so far as it became obligatory with post-verbal subjects.

On a general level, the data analysed in this paper confirm the findings for object agreement. Object agreement is either disfavoured or disallowed with focal direct objects and diachronically emerges with and is synchronically often confined to topical direct objects (Croft 1988, Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011, Nikolaeva 2001, Siewierska 2004, among others).

With regard to predicate types, SAS overwhelmingly appears with unaccusative, existential, and passive verbs, but already in Old Tuscan sparse instances of SAS with transitive and causative predicates are found. We have also seen that Modern Tuscan allows SAS with unergative and transitive predicates, a fact that undermines the subject extraction hypothesis and can be explained only if information structure is taken into account.

Contrary to previous proposals, which view SAS in main and subordinate clauses as the same phenomenon, I have argued here that a unified explanation for SAS in main and subordinate clauses introduced by *che* is not borne out by the data examined in this paper.

I have shown that SAS in main clauses and in subordinate clauses not introduced by *che* is linked to the post-verbal position of the subject. By contrast, subject position is not the triggering factor for the presence of SAS in relative clause and subordinate clauses introduced by che, since the phenomenon appears also with preverbal subjects. I have hypothesised that the rise of SAS in relative clauses and the subsequent spreading to other relative clauses and complement clauses is due to the fact that the verb in the subordinate clause agrees with the invariable subordinator, which bears no person-number-gender features, thus triggering default agreement on the verb.

**Appendix**

**Old Tuscan texts used in the study (with dates)**

MORELLI Giovanni di Pagolo Morelli. *Ricordi*, Firenze: Le Monnier, 1969. XIV century.

MACINGHI STROZZI Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi. *Lettere di una gentildonna fiorentina Firenze*: Nabu Press, 2010. XV century.

CELLINI Benvenuto Cellini. *La Vita*, Milano: BUR, 2007. XVI century.

SER GIOVANNI Ser Giovanni Fiorentino. *Pecorone*, Ravenna: Longo, 1974. XIV century.

OVI: <http://www.ovi.cnr.it>

**Modern texts:**

Anonymous. 2009. *Porca Puttana. Manuale dell'allegra battona*. Valenzano: Scipioni.

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1. Glosses follow the conventions of the Leipzig Glossing Rules. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In all the examples, the relevant predicates and subjects are in bold. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In addition to verb endings, Florentine possesses a system of non-obligatory subject clitics: the use of these clitics seems to be in decline, being perceived by speakers as rural. See Section (4) for more examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In fact, they claim that in extraction contexts "agreement patterns as if inversion has taken place" (Brandi and Cordin 1989: 124). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Lambrecht (2000, 624) provides the following definition of "detopicalisation": "SF marking involves cancellation of those prosodic and/or morphosyntactic subject properties which are associated with the role of subjects as topic expressions in PF sentences". This cancellation usually involves the use of full lexical NPs as opposed to pronominal ones, post-verbal position of the subject NP, accent on the subject (see also Sasse 1987, Sasse 1995). The marking of SF constructions will depend on language-specific rules. In languages with rigid word order like English, marking will be only prosodic (Lambrecht’s "prosodic inversion"), while languages with freer word order will allow changes in word order as well as special prosody. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the analysis of the corpus, passive and impersonal *si*-constructions have been grouped together, since the different morphosyntactic properties of passive constructions vis-à-vis impersonal ones is not relevant for the purposes of this paper (Mocciaro 2007, Giacalone Ramat and Sansò 2011, among others). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Some scholars have argued, based on semantic and informational-structural evidence, that existential and presentative constructions differ from each other and should thus be considered as two distinct constructions (see, e.g. Berruto 1986, Cruschina 2012 and references therein on Italian and Romance languages). However, for the purposes of the present paper, the differences between the two types of constructions are not relevant, in so far as subject agreement suspension can surface in both sentence types. In addition, in both constructions, the post-verbal NP is in focus or newly-introduced into the discourse [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. My informants of Volterrano and Lucchese judged the examples with preverbal subjects as uncommon yet possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Relative and complement clauses in Bare do not make use of special relative pronouns or complementisers (Aikhenvald 1995: 46). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)