

Wh-exclamatives, focus and criterial freezing

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Recent work on the functional architecture of the left periphery of the sentence, focussing on the relative order of *wh*-phrases and left-dislocated constituents, has highlighted that *wh*-phrases in main exclamatives target a landing site which is not activated in main *wh*-interrogatives (cf. Benincà (1996), (2001)).

However, data from various northern Italian dialects (as well as from standard Italian) provide evidence that a lower projection with focus properties can be activated in exclamative contexts; this hypothesis is supported by the fact that bare *wh*-phrases, unlike complex ones, must follow left dislocated phrases even in exclamatives.

Moreover, in the northern Italian dialects displaying subject clitic inversion in main interrogatives, the syntactic feature characterizing *wh*-exclamatives is (the absence of inversion and) the presence of the complementizer *che*. The overt realization of the complementizer is subject to variation both crosslinguistically and within the same dialect, as witnessed by the following data from Cremonese (Southern Lombard), where the presence of *che* seems to depend on the internal shape of the *wh*-phrase; in particular, we find a tripartition sorting out bare *wh*-phrases (which are incompatible with the complementizer), complex *wh*-phrases (which are compatible with the complementizer), and *wh*-phrases formed by *che* + adjective (which require the complementizer), as exemplified in (1a-c) respectively:

- (1)a. *A chi* l'àal dît!
To whom he told it!
- b. *Quanti student* (ch') i prooa l'ezàm stevòolta!
How many students try the exam this time!
- c. *Che spurch* che l'ò catàat
How dirty I found it!

Furthermore, in *wh*-phrases where the head noun is modified by an adjective, the order of the two elements affects the presence/absence of the complementizer.

It is tempting to view *che* as the lexical realization of (the head of) a focus-related projection which is activated in *wh*-exclamatives as intermediate landing site of the *wh*-phrase on its way to the final target; this double-step analysis has a bearing on - and will be discussed in relation to - Rizzi's (2004) recent *criterial freezing* principle - according to which a phrase meeting a criterion is frozen in place.