



**Citation:** L. Badan, P. Lorusso (2021) Subject clitics in nominal copular sentences: some insight from a North Eastern variety of Italian. *Qulso* 7: pp. 9-32. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/QUSO-2421-7220-12000>

**Copyright:** © 2021 L. Badan, P. Lorusso. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by FirenzeUniversity Press (<https://oaj.fupress.net/index.php/bsfm-qulso/index>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited

**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

## Subject clitics in nominal copular sentences: some insight from a North Eastern variety of Italian

Linda Badan and Paolo Lorusso

Ghent University (<linda.badan@ugent.be>),  
Università degli Studi di Firenze (<paolo.lorusso@unifi.it>)

### Abstract:

In this paper we describe the distribution of subject clitics in nominal copular constructions in the Veneto variety of Este (Padova province). In nominal copular sentences in a *pro-drop* language like Italian, the copula always agrees with the subject of the small clause both in canonical (preverbal NP subject) and in inverse (postverbal NP subject) structures. Since Veneto varieties are partial *pro-drop* languages, on the one side, the subject NP always agrees with the copula as in Italian. On the other side, the inflectional paradigm of both verbs and subject clitics interacts with the informational structure of the sentence. Namely, the allowance for subject proclitics and overt postverbal subjects in inverse copular sentences (which is not found in other constructions involving postverbal subjects) allows us to account for the preverbal position of the predicative DP in terms of informational structure: the preverbal predicative DP is a topic intensional element that instantiates the description of the subject of the sentence. The predicative DP, as in Italian, can cliticize onto an invariant *pro*-predicative clitic: the resulting clustering with the subject clearly confirms the reduced structure involved by copular constructions (as in Moro 1997). The present descriptive considerations allow us to update the analysis of Moro (1997). We characterize inverse copular sentences as involving some restriction on the topic-comment structure, showing a clear morphological counterpart (the inflected subject proclitics) in the operation of AGREE in a partial *pro-drop* language like the variety of Este (Padova province).

**Keywords:** *Agreement, Nominal Copular Constructions, Partial Pro-Drop, Subject Clitics, Veneto Variety*

### 1. Introduction

In this paper the distribution of subject clitics in copular sentences is described in the Veneto variety of Este (Padova province). The variety of Este, as other varieties with subject clitics, is a partial *pro-drop* language, since the null subject and

the inflected subject clitics alternate depending on argument structure, the salience of person within the inflectional paradigm (Manzini and Savoia 2005), and the informational structure of the sentence. Furthermore, as in other Veneto varieties (but not only), two clitics coexist (Benincà 1994; Poletto 2000; Manzini and Savoia 2005): a lower inflected subject clitic (in both proclisis and enclisis) and a higher uninflected one. The invariant higher clitic does not seem to be linked to the inflectional field (while inflected “lower” clitics are found to express D(efinite) denotation), but it is linked with scope discourse-semantics effects (Benincà 1994), or modality (Poletto 2000) or intensional semantics (Manzini and Savoia 2005).

In this paper, we describe the distribution of subject proclitics in nominal copular sentences. We show that both canonical (1a) and inverse copular constructions (1b) (as defined in the unified theory of Copular Construction proposed by Moro 1997) have different informational properties, arguing that inverse sentences are strictly linked to a marked informational structure.

- (1) a. I ragazzi sono la causa del problema  
 the boys be.3PL the cause of-the problem  
 ‘The boys are the cause of the problem’
- b. La causa del problema sono i ragazzi  
 the cause of-the problem be.3PL the boys  
 ‘The cause of the problem is the boys’

We argue that the marked information structure of inverse copular sentences introducing a postverbal subject is similar to the one of the constructions involving dislocated NPs and differs from the information structure of postverbal subjects with lexical verbs. Through the preverbal NP, inverse copular structures introduce a non-extensional meaning with a postverbal referential NP that encodes new information. This fact is confirmed by the agreement relation: the verb probes the postverbal referential NP (1b). The agreement is available only with one NP: as in Italian, the predicative NP can cliticize onto a non-inflected element which is syncretic with object clitics, but which does not show any overt agreement features.

The paper is organized as follows: in section 2 we present the data about the distribution of the clitics in the variety of Este; in section 3 we illustrate the properties of the agreement, while in section 4 we describe the distribution of clitics within copular sentences. Section 5 is devoted to the analysis of one of the other diagnostics individuated by Moro (1997) to distinguish between canonical and inverse copular sentences, namely the presence of a pro-predicative invariant clitic to refer to the predicate NP in canonical sentences. In section 6 we resume the syntactic relevant facts that emerge by our description, and in section 7 we present our concluding remarks.

## 2. *The subject clitics in Veneto varieties: paradigm and syntactic distribution*

In this section we briefly illustrate the system of clitic subjects in a Veneto variety spoken in the Padova province. We focus on the variety spoken in Este and the immediately surrounding municipalities.<sup>1</sup> As for their distribution, the clitic subjects in the variety examined here correspond to the system illustrated by Renzi and Vanelli (1983), Poletto (1993, 2000), Benincà

<sup>1</sup> Este is around 40 km far from Padova. The informants we have consulted are mainly from Este, but also from Ospedaletto, Baone, Lozzo Atestino, Carceri.

(1994), for Paduan: they can be enclitic and proclitic with respect to the verb, depending on the syntactic context in which they are realized. Both enclitics and proclitics agree in person and number with the verb, but while the enclitics present a full paradigm for all the singular and plural persons, the proclitics lack of the first person singular and plural and of the second person singular.<sup>2</sup> Both enclitics and proclitics codify the gender in their third person singular. In Tab.1 we illustrate the whole paradigm of cliticization in the Este variety.

	singular				plural			
	1	2	3		1	2	3	
			M	F			M	F
<b>proclitics</b>	-	te	el	ea	-	-	i	e
<b>enclitics</b>	-i	-to	-(e)o	-(e)a	-i	-o	-i	-e

Table 1 – Paradigm of clitics in the Este variety

The realization and the distribution of the subject clitics illustrated in Tab. 1 are determined by both syntactic and pragmatic factors. The proclitic subject is obligatorily realized in all (allowed) persons and numbers when the tonic subject pronoun or an overt subject DP is absent (2b), while it is optional in co-occurrence with a subject pronoun (2c) or an overt subject DP (2a) when it is topicalized (we illustrate a possible context in (2d; Poletto 2000; Benincà 2004; see also Raposo and Uriagereka 1996).

- (2) a. Me mama (ea) vien domàn  
 my mum CL.3SG.F come.3SG tomorrow  
 ‘My mum comes tomorrow’
- b. \*(Ea) vièn domàn  
 CL.3SG.F come.3SG tomorrow  
 ‘She comes tomorrow’
- c. Eo (el) vièn domàn  
 he CL.3SG.M come.3SG tomorrow
- d. A: E to mama?  
 and your mum  
 ‘And your mum?’
- B: Me mama, (ea) vièn domàn  
 my mum CL.3SG.F come.3SG tomorrow  
 ‘My mum comes tomorrow’

The optionality of subject clitics is not found when the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular is involved: in this case the clitic is obligatory in co-occurrence with the second singular of the tonic pronoun:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As for proclitics, in the paradigm of the Este variety there are not subject clitics for the first person singular and plural and for the second person plural. Moreover, across the paradigm of the proclitics, no syncretic forms are found showing similarity with the paradigm of franco provenzal variety of Sarre, among others, described by Manzini and Savoia (2005) and Manzini (2015).

<sup>3</sup> As for the status of 2<sup>nd</sup> person in the paradigm of subject clitics, the traditional view of Renzi and Vanelli

- (3)
- |    |         |          |          |          |
|----|---------|----------|----------|----------|
| a. | Ti      | te       | vièn     | domàn    |
|    | you.2SG | CL.2SG   | come.2SG | tomorrow |
| b. | *Ti     | vièn     | domàn    |          |
|    | you.2SG | come.2SG | tomorrow |          |
| c. | *Te     | vièn     | domàn    |          |
|    | CL.2SG  | come.2SG | tomorrow |          |
- ‘You come tomorrow’

Instead, the presence of the subject clitic is always excluded if (i) it is co-indexed with a wh-trace in interrogatives (4a-b) and in relatives (4c); (iii) if co-indexed with the clefted element in cleft sentences (4d); (iv) within sentences with atmospheric verbs (5); (v) when the subject is focalized (see (6a) with a contrastive focus and (6b) with an informational focus).

- (4)
- |    |     |          |     |      |          |                       |
|----|-----|----------|-----|------|----------|-----------------------|
| a. | Non | so       | chi | che  | (*el)    | vièn                  |
|    | NEG | know.1SG | who | that | CL.3SG.M | come.3SG <sup>4</sup> |
- ‘I don’t know who comes’
- |    |     |          |          |
|----|-----|----------|----------|
| b. | Chi | (*el)    | vièn?    |
|    | who | CL.3SG.M | come.3SG |
- ‘Who comes?’
- |    |         |      |          |          |          |
|----|---------|------|----------|----------|----------|
| c. | El tozo | che  | (*el)    | vièn     | domàn    |
|    | the boy | that | CL.3SG.M | come.3SG | tomorrow |
- ‘The boy that comes tomorrow’
- |    |        |         |      |          |          |          |
|----|--------|---------|------|----------|----------|----------|
| d. | Ze     | Giorgio | che  | (*el)    | vièn     | domàn    |
|    | be.3SG | Giorgio | that | CL.3SG.M | come.3SG | tomorrow |
- ‘It’s Giorgio who comes tomorrow’
- (5)
- |        |          |
|--------|----------|
| *El    | piove    |
| CL.3SG | rain.3SG |
- ‘It rains’
- (6)
- |    |         |          |          |          |            |
|----|---------|----------|----------|----------|------------|
| a. | GIORGIO | (*el)    | vièn     | domàn    | (no Carlo) |
|    | Giorgio | CL.3SG.M | come.3SG | tomorrow | NEG Carlo  |
- ‘GIORGIO comes tomorrow (not Carlo)’
- |    |    |          |        |                  |     |      |
|----|----|----------|--------|------------------|-----|------|
| b. | A: | Cossa    | ze     | capità?          |     |      |
|    |    |          |        | ‘What happened?’ |     |      |
|    | B: | (*Ea)    | ze     | rivà             | ea  | tosa |
|    |    | CL.3SG.F | be.3SG | arrived          | the | girl |
- ‘The girl is arrived’

Moreover, notice that the proclitic subject is never allowed with postverbal subject in declarative sentences as in (7). This is particularly relevant for our analysis, since in inverse copular constructions subject clitics may instead appear with postverbal DP (see section 4).

(1983) is in an implicational scale for which 2<sup>nd</sup> person is more marked. The same implication is found also in Cardinaletti and Repetti (2008). A more recent approach such as the one of Manzini (2015) is derived by a parametric option linked to the relevance of first person (see section 2.2).

<sup>4</sup> Examples adapted from Benincà (1994: 18, ex. 3).

- (7) (\*Ea)                      ze        rivà                      to        mama.  
 CL.3SG.F                    is        arrived                    your     mum  
 ‘Your mother is arrived’

However, notice that the subject clitic obligatorily appears when the subject is a right dislocated topic (8).

- (8) (El)                      vièn                      domàn,                      Gianni<sub>i</sub>  
 CL.3SG.M                    come.3SG                    tomorrow                    Gianni<sub>i</sub>  
 ‘He comes tomorrow, Gianni’

As for the enclitic forms, they are used in interrogative clauses as in the following:

- (9) Ga-(e)o                      za                      magnà                      fora        tuto?  
 have-CL.3S.M                    already                    eaten                      out        everything  
 ‘Did he already eat everything?’

However, in this paper we will not address the issue of enclitics in interrogative inversion. The main topic of the present work focuses on the analysis of nominal copular sentences, where enclisis seems to be problematic due to the reduced inflectional layer found with copulas (Moro 1997: 73). However, it is worth pointing out that while subject enclitics are never found in declarative context (10a-b), they can be found in interrogative inversion of canonical copular sentences (10c), but not in inverse copular sentences (10d).

- (10) a. \*Ea causa    dea    baruffa                      ze-i                      i        tosi  
           the cause    of-the    fight                      be.3PL-CL.3PL.M                      the        boys  
           ‘The cause of the fight are the boys’  
 b. \*I    tosi    ze-i                      ea        causa    dea    baruffa  
           the boys    be.3PL-CL.3PL.M                      the        cause    of-the    fight  
           ‘The boys are the cause of the fight’  
 c. Ze-i                      i        tosi    ea        causa    dea    baruffa?  
           be.3PL-CL.3PL.M                      the        boys    the        cause    of-the    fight  
 d. \*Ze-i                      ea        causa    dea    baruffa                      i        tosi?  
           be.3PL-CL.3PL.M                      the        cause    of-the    fight                      the        boys  
           ‘Are the boys the cause of the fight?’

However, for a wide discussion on the differences between proclitics and enclitics see Calabrese (2011), Cardinaletti and Repetti (2008), or Manzini and Savoia (2005). See also Manzini (2015) who proposes that enclisis, in fact, is found under the scope of non-veridical operator (Giannakidou 1998) or a general raise to a functional projection in the CP domain.

### 2.1 The invariant “clitic” *a*

As in Paduan and other Veneto varieties, also the Este variety presents an invariant (subject) clitic consisting in the vowel *a*. Benincà (1994) and Poletto (1993, 2000) have examined *a* in detail concluding that actually *a* is not a “true” subject clitic. Indeed, *a* in Paduan is optionally used mainly, but not exclusively, for the first singular and plural persons and for the second

plural persons, and it appears in specific pragmatic conditions: it is strictly linked to the prosodic contour of the sentence expressing emphasis or surprise, indicating that the meaning of the whole clause is a rheme, a new information. Additionally, to its invariant morphology and its specific pragmatic role, *a* presents also a syntactic distribution that is crucially different from the distribution of subject clitics.

(I) *a* can appear with meteorological (11a) or impersonal verbs (11b). The appearance with meteorological verbs seems to confirm the analysis of *a* as an “expletive”<sup>5</sup> since the clitic does not refer to any overt argument. However, we follow Manzini and Savoia (2005, I: 183) arguing that the invariant clitic *a* does not refer to any referential individual or to its (D)efinite properties.

- (11) a. A            piove!  
           CL           rain.3SG  
           ‘It rains!’  
       b. A            bisogna            corare!  
           CL           need.IMPRS      run  
           ‘One has to run!’

(II) *a* is the only clitic that (optionally) appears in preverbal position when the subject is postponed (12). *a* is invariant and does not show any overt inflectional marking agreeing with the postverbal subject. The invariant *a* is also found in some other varieties (Manzini and Savoia 2005) in constructions where the agreement is missing between the verb and the postverbal subject as illustrated in (13) for the variety of Revere.

- (12) a. (A) riva            Giorgio  
           CL arrive.3SG      Giorgio  
           ‘Giorgio arrives’  
       b. (A) vago      mi  
           CL come      I  
           ‘I go’
- (13)            A            parla            i            om            *Revere*  
           CL            speak.3PL      the      men  
           ‘The men speak’

(Manzini and Savoia 2005, I: 300)

(III) In the case of the second person singular, i.e. the case with the subject clitic *te* always obligatory, *a* can co-occur with it, but it cannot substitute it (14).

<sup>5</sup> Manzini and Savoia, (2005), following Chomsky (1981), argue that meteorological verbs do not lack of argument structure, but they are associated with thematic properties (“aspectual” in Manzini and Savoia’s terms) which can be fulfilled by quasi-arguments. Recall that in Italian it is possible to say ‘pro *piove manna*’ (= *it rains manna*). We will not enter into the relevant discussion, but, for the purpose of the present work, we consider the quasi-argument as non-arguments.

- (14) a. A            te            parli            sempre            (ti)  
          CL            CL.2SG        speak.2SG     always            you.2SG  
       b. \*A            parli            sempre            ti  
          CL            speak.2SG     always            you.2SG  
       c. Te            parli            sempre            ti  
          CL.2SG     speak.2SG     always            you.2SG  
          ‘You are the one who always speaks’

In this case, as argued by Manzini and Savoia (2005), the 2<sup>nd</sup> person has a special status, since due to his “relevance” which is inferior to the 1<sup>st</sup> person (which is usually not found in the clitic paradigm), it is commonly lexicalized with an obligatory 2<sup>nd</sup> person clitic.

The example (14a) also shows that the clitic *a* can appear with a postverbal 2<sup>nd</sup> person tonic pronoun, but never with a preverbal tonic pronoun (15), which is in a topic-like position in CP. So, the general status of the expletive-like and invariant *a* is the one of an element which deals with the universe of CP, which, in Manzini and Savoia’s (2005, I: 141) terms, deals with the intensional meaning of the sentence.

- (15) \*Ti            a            te            parli            sempre  
       You.2SG     CL            CL.2SG     speak.2SG     always  
       ‘You always speak’

(IV) *a* can co-occur with a subject clitic, always on its left:

- (16) A!                            parte            domàn!  
       CL-CL.3SG                leave.3SG     tomorrow  
       ‘He leaves tomorrow!’

(V) Differently from subject clitics, the invariant *a* always precedes the negation (17), showing that its position is higher than NegP, which is commonly assumed to be in a position within the inflectional layer. This also confirms the C position of the invariant *a* clitic.

- (17) a. A    no        te            parli            mai  
          CL NEG    CL.2SG     speak.2SG     never  
       b. \*Te        no            a            parli            mai  
          CL.2SG NEG    CL        speak.2SG     never  
          ‘You never speak’

(VI) *a* can appear in yes/no questions. Differently from subject clitics that trigger inversion appearing as the proclitic forms (see Table 1), the invariant *a* always remains in sentence initial position (18). Yes/no questions in fact, do not imply an overt movement to C of any element of the VP or IP.

- (18) A                            ve-to            via?  
       CL                        go.2SG-CL.2SG     away  
       ‘Do you go away?’

(VII) However, *a* is incompatible with a wh-element: that is, *a* may compete with *wh* for a position within the CP field.

- (19) \*A dove si-to 'ndà?  
 CL where be.2SG-CL.2SG gone  
 'Where did you go?'

(VIII) Similarly, *a* cannot occur with a left dislocation (20) or with a contrastive focus in sentence initial position (21).

- (20) a. \*Gianni, a eo gò visto 'ndar via.  
 Gianni CL CL.3SG.M have.1SG seen go.INF away  
 b. \*A Gianni, eo gò visto 'ndar via.  
 CL Gianni CL.3SG.M have.1SG seen go.INF away  
 'Gianni, I have seen it going away'
- (21) a. \*GIANNI a ze 'nda via (no Piero)  
 Gianni CL be.3SG gone away NEG Piero  
 b. \*A GIANNI ze 'nda via (no Piero)  
 CL Gianni be.3SG gone away NEG Piero  
 'GIANNI, he's gone away (not Piero)'

On the basis of the analysis of *a*'s syntactic behaviour and pragmatic interpretation, both Benincà (1994) and Poletto (2000) argue, even if in different terms, that *a* is strictly linked to the informational structure of the clause, and it occupies a structural position higher than the subject. Benincà calls such a position TOP, while Poletto defines it as a Modality projection above AgrTP, where the subject is realized. Manzini and Savoia (2005, I: 141) do not enter into details about the properties of the C position where the *a* clitic is realized. However, they find many varieties in which the *a* is also syncretic with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person form, therefore they propose that *a* can lexicalize the D properties. The D properties can be lexicalized either within the inflectional layer, where the D properties denote an individual, or within the C domain, where the D properties are individuated as part of the intensional meaning of the sentence, i.e. they refer to a set of individuals but not a concrete individual. When they refer to a concrete individual, *a* can coexist with inflected lexical subject clitics. Furthermore, *a* can be used as an expletive to satisfy the EPP principle (Extended Projection Principle) for which each sentence must contain a noun phrase or determiner phrase in the subject position. We will discuss and develop these proposals in section 3 and 4, to illustrate our analysis of inverse copular sentences.

### 3. Agreement in (partial) pro-drop languages

Subject clitics in Northern Italian varieties have been the object of a number of studies. Rizzi (1986), on par with Brandi and Cordin (1989), analyze subject clitics (in Trentino variety) as INFL heads. Poletto (2000) classifies subject clitics in two main groups, agreement elements or complementizer items, depending on their features. Roberts (2010) proposes that subject clitics are heads that incorporate with the head T, then in his book (2014) he develops the idea of conceiving subject clitics as inflections, consisting in bundles of features merged together with the verb in the head T.

While the accounts mentioned above rely on a movement or a partial movement analyses, other scholars argue for a base generation analysis. For instance, Sportiche (1992, 1996) introduces a clitic phrase within the inflectional layer, while Manzini and Savoia (2005) recognize



an inflectional string for clitic placement both in the INFL and in the C layer: the former being related to the individuation of personal reference (and showing overt inflectional morphology) and the latter being related to the attribution of intensional meaning associated with the sentence.

The analysis of subject clitics is inserted within a wide discussion on the *pro-drop* (null subject) parameter.<sup>6</sup> In the literature, languages are defined as: (i) Non-*pro-drop* languages, which never allow subject omission like French or English; (ii) full *pro-drop* languages as for instance Italian, Spanish, Greek, where the referential subject can be null and the null subjects can be referential or non-referential (expletive). Languages with a pronominal referential INFL can license referential null subjects; (iii) Radical *pro-drop* languages, where instead both subject and object can remain silent and generally they do not have any verbal inflection like Chinese (see Huang 1984); (iv) Expletive null subject languages, where only the expletive subject can be silent, while full referential subjects must always overtly realized, as in Dutch, or several Creole languages (Nicolis 2008); (v) Partial *pro-drop* languages where the null subject is regulated by syntactic conditions: some of them do not have full referential silent pronouns, but have only null indefinite pronouns, or null arbitrary pronouns. Finnish, Marathi, Assamese, as well as Brazilian Portuguese are classified as partial null subject languages (see Holmberg 2010; Holmberg and Sheehan 2010; Biberauer *et al.* 2010).

As all the varieties which involve subject clitics are partial *pro-drop* languages, also in the Este variety the distribution of null subject across the inflectional paradigm may involve: (i) the lack of subject clitics with the first singular and plural person and the second plural person; (ii) no 3<sup>rd</sup> person inflected subject clitic with meteorological and impersonal verbs (although the uninflected *a* is allowed in such configuration); (iii) no subject clitic with postverbal subjects (once more the *a* can do the job). Therefore, while in a *pro-drop* language like Italian, the inflection of the finite verb has a role in both identifying the phi-features of the referential subjects and to satisfy the EPP, in a variety of Este (as in other partial *pro-drop* languages) we have a finer graded identification of the phi-features of the referential subjects and the EPP requirements. In terms of Manzini and Savoia (2007), the EPP property corresponds to a D(efiniteness) closure requirement: the subjects DP or the finite verb morphology have the denotational content D(efiniteness). If we use the D(efiniteness) feature, we can define the *pro-drop* parameter as how different languages realize this feature (Manzini and Savoia 2007). The D position of the sentential INFL domain can be lexicalized by a specialized head (such as subject clitics the variety of Este), by a full noun phrase (as in English) or by either a specialized head or a full phrase (as in French). By contrast, in a language like Italian, the D position of the sentential I domain is not lexicalized, while the D argument is lexicalized only at the morphological level by the inflection of the finite verb. In terms of the parametric condition on the lexicalization of the D properties, Manzini and Savoia (2007: 45) propose a schematization like in (22). The divide between (a) and (b) in (22) corresponds to the classical divide between null subject languages and non-null subject ones.

- (22) Lexicalization of the D properties of the sentential I domain:
- a. i by clitic (e.g. Northern Italian dialects)
  - ii by clitic or noun phrase (e.g. Ladin dialects, French)
  - iii by noun phrase (e.g. English)
  - b. no lexicalization (e.g. Italian)

<sup>6</sup>For a recent collectanea of studies on the null subject parameter see Biberauer, Holmberg, Roberts and Sheehan (2010).

In our analysis, the *pro-drop* parameter can be restated in terms of Lexical Parametrization (Manzini and Wexler 1987): the parameter is given depending on how the D features are lexicalized, for instance in the variety of Este they are lexicalized by the subject clitic. However, within this general pattern of lexicalization, there are other lexical and morpho-syntactic features, which are in a sub-set relation to the general *pro-drop* parameter, that influence the distribution of subject clitics. In the variety of Este, the verbal frame, the informational status and the person morphology imply a lack or an overt realization of the subject clitic.

On the basis of the considerations above, we argue that the lexical class may influence the lack of subject clitics. With meteorological verbs, in the variety of Este there is a lack of subject clitics (see (5) above repeated below as (23)). However, as described in Manzini and Savoia (2005), this is a matter of parametric variation across varieties. There are, in fact, varieties in which there is a non-argumental (or “quasi-argumental” as in Chomsky 1981) expletive subject clitics with meteorological verbs. So, in the variety of Este, the subject clitics have to be [+argumental].

(23) (\*El) piove Este  
 CL.3SG rain.3SG  
 ‘It rains!’

(24) el pjøf. La Strozza  
 CL.3SG rain.3SG  
 ‘It rains!’

(Manzini and Savoia 2005: 43)

Similarly, in the Este variety, subject clitics cannot occur with postverbal subjects (25). Once more, while in the variety of Este we argue that when a postverbal subject is present, the subject clitic does not lexicalize the D properties (which are lexicalized just on the inflection on the verb and the full DP), in other varieties, the subject clitics still lexicalize the D properties also in the presence of a postverbal (focal) subject, as in the variety of La Strozza (26).

(25) (\*Ea) ze rivà to mama.  
 CL.3SG.F is arrived your mum  
 ‘Your mum has arrived’

(26) De la el dørma i stʃe:ʃ La Strozza  
 there CL.3SG.M sleeps the children  
 ‘The children sleep there’

(Manzini and Savoia 2005: 43)

However, remind that if the postverbal subject is a right dislocated topic, subject clitics are allowed (see (8) repeated here as (27)).

(27) (El) vièn domàn, Gianni<sub>i</sub>  
 CL.3SG.M come.3SG tomorrow Gianni  
 ‘He comes tomorrow, Gianni’

As for the last subset which intervenes in the lexical parametrization in the Este variety, Person has a central role on the distribution of overt/null subject clitics. As Manzini and Savoia (2005,

2011) and Manzini (2012) have suggested, language may differ on the lexicalization of Person<sup>7</sup> through subject clitics: while some languages lexicalize all persons,<sup>8</sup> other languages do not.<sup>9</sup> The main differences are linked, then, to a finer fault line, for example that between “speaker” participant and “hearer” participant. This may result in the externalization of just “speaker” reference or of “hearer” reference. However, while in the enclitic paradigm there is a richer variation on the pattern of lexicalization of Person among the inflectional paradigms of subject clitics (Manzini 2012), in the analysis of proclitic paradigm across varieties there is not such a degree of variation. All varieties have a 2<sup>nd</sup> person subject clitic, in other words, there is no variety with a null subject proclitic for 2<sup>nd</sup> person “hearer”. As we mentioned above, in the variety of Este, the second person clitic is always obligatory, while there is no 1<sup>st</sup> person subject proclitic.

(28)	a.	Ti	te	vièn	domàn
		Tu	CL.2SG	come.2SG	tomorrow
	b.	*Ti		vièn	domàn
		Tu		come.2SG	tomorrow
	c.	*Te		vièn	domàn
		CL.2SG		come.2SG	tomorrow
		‘You come tomorrow’			

This seems to be a parametric option: as proposed by Manzini (2015: 183) the 1<sup>st</sup> person may not be found due to the “salience of a speaker reference”. So, the variety of Este is in a subset relation of the varieties which have proclitic for all persons;<sup>10</sup> this subset is given by the non-lexicalization of the speaker, due to its referential salience. Therefore, the general configuration of agreement we observe for subject clitics is that the D feature can be deleted through agreement, after the subject clitic has been merged in spec,INFL, together with the rest of the phi-features that enter the AGREE relation (Chomsky 2001). The parametric variation among the distribution of subject clitics across varieties can be accounted in terms of lexical parametrization in the lexical element that lexicalizes the D features. Languages vary on when subject clitics lexicalize the D properties, depending on: (i) the [+/-argumental] status of the element bearing the D features, (i.e. in the variety of Este, subject clitics lexicalize only [+argumental]); (ii) the informational properties [+/-focal] of the D, (i.e. in the variety of Este, only [-FOCUS]); (iii) the lexicalization of D or P and in the latter case on the [+/-saliency] of the speaker.

In a partial *pro-drop* language as the variety of Este, the clitic *a* may imply the lexicalization of non-argumental (or quasi-argumental) NP. Furthermore, due to its invariant status, *a* is used to refer to a set of entities intentionally and not as an individual bearing overt nominal agreement features.

Given the considerations illustrated so far on the agreement configuration in partial *pro-drop* languages which lexicalize D properties through subject clitics, in the next section we turn to describe how the reduced agreement configuration of copular sentences might work in these varieties.

<sup>7</sup> Manzini and Savoia (2005 and subsequent work) refer to a categorial splits “speaker” vs. “hearer”, P (1<sup>st</sup> /2<sup>nd</sup> person) versus D (3<sup>rd</sup> person).

<sup>8</sup> As in the variety of Barcis (a North-Eastern variety spoken in the area of Pordenone) where the paradigm of subject clitics include not only 3<sup>rd</sup> persons but also 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person (see Manzini and Savoia 2005 and Manzini 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Although these varieties show a full-fledged subject clitic paradigm for 3<sup>rd</sup> person, they do not show any subject clitic for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> persons, as in the variety of Pozzaglio (in the area of Cremona).

<sup>10</sup> We refer always to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> persons, since as Manzini and Savoia (2005, 2007, 2011), Harley and Ritter (2002) Bobaliik (2008) emphasize, 3<sup>rd</sup> person is a non-person.

#### 4. Nominal copular sentences: agreement and clitics

As for nominal copular sentences, Moro (1997) claims that they involve a raising predicate (the copula) that selects a small clause as its complement, and it does not have any particular meaning. The small clause is the place where the predication occurs between two XPs: a subject and a predicate. Following Moro (1997), on the one hand, a canonical copular sentence is a configuration where the subject generated in the small clause raises to the higher position of the copula, while the predicate stays in situ (29a). On the other hand, an inverse copular sentence is a configuration where the predicate generated into the small clause can raise to the higher position of the copula while the subject DP stays in situ (29b):

- (29) a. [[Una foto del muro]<sub>i</sub> [IP è [SC t<sub>i</sub> [la causa della rivolta]]]]  
 [[A picture of the wall]<sub>i</sub> [IP is [SC t<sub>i</sub> [the cause of the riot]]]]  
 b. [[La causa della rivolta]<sub>k</sub> [IP è [SC [una foto del muro] t<sub>k</sub>]]]  
 [[The cause of the riot]<sub>k</sub> [IP is [SC [a picture of the wall] t<sub>k</sub>]]]

In *pro-drop* languages like Italian, in nominal copular sentences the verb always agrees with the subject, independently of its pre- or post-verbal position (30a-b). While in non *pro-drop* languages like English, the verb agrees with the subject DP only when it is in preverbal position (31a-b):

- (30) a. Le foto sono/ \*è la causa  
 the pictures be.3PL be.3SG the cause  
 'The pictures are /\*is the cause'  
 b. La causa sono/ \*è le foto  
 the cause be.3PL/ be.3SG the pictures  
 'The cause are/ \*is the pictures'
- (31) a. The pictures are/\*is the cause  
 b. The cause \*are/is the pictures

Moro (1997) proposes that what triggers agreement on the copula in Italian is not the pre-verbal DP but rather *pro*, which is obligatorily inserted and it indirectly agrees with the subject *in situ*. In Italian, then, *pro* behaves like an anaphor on a par with all inverse subjects and is licensed in a lower pre-verbal position in finite clauses (suggesting that, in Italian, both preverbal and postverbal subjects are dislocated, much in the sense suggested by Cinque 1979, Benincà and Cinque 1993). This happens also in the inverse copular sentences, where the DP predicate raises to a preverbal position, the DP subject is *in situ*, and *pro* refers to the subject of the small clause:

- (32) [DP pred [IP *pro*<sub>i</sub> copula [SC DP Sub<sub>j</sub> ~~DP~~<sub>pred</sub>]]]

English differs from Italian because no *pro* (or inflection) can lexicalize D properties and the preverbal full DP agrees with the verb. Also in partial *pro-drop* languages as the Este variety, the verb invariably agrees with the subject. The difference with Italian is that the D properties are lexicalized either by *pro* or by the subject clitic. In (33) we illustrate a canonical (33a) and an inverse (33b) copular construction in the Este variety. We notice that the 3<sup>rd</sup> person is syn-

cretic between subject and plural, so it is not possible to understand whether the agreement is with the subject DP or not.

- (33) a. E   tose   ze       ea       causa   dea    barufa  
           the girls be.3PL the     cause of-the fight  
           ‘The girls are the cause of the fight’  
       b. Ea causa dea    barufa ze       e       tose  
           the cause of-the fight be.3PL the    girls  
           ‘The cause of the fight are the girls’

In the following examples of canonical sentences, we use tonic pronouns as subjects to show the morphological differences in the verb agreement across the inflectional paradigm. Notice that in the second person singular the presence of the clitic *te*<sup>11</sup> is always mandatory (see section 2). Obviously, the verb agrees with the preverbal subject.

- (34)       Mi so                    ea       causa   dea    barufa  
           I be.1SG                the     cause of-the fight  
           ‘I am the cause of the fight’  
       (35)       Noialtri semo ea       causa   dea    barufa  
           we            be.1PL the     cause of-the fight  
           ‘We are the cause of the fight’  
       (36)       Voialtri si       ea       causa   dea    barufa  
           you.2PL be.2PL the     cause of-the fight  
           ‘You are the cause of the fight’

As in canonical copular sentences (as in Italian (30)), in the inverse copular sentences, the verb invariably agrees with the subject that is post-verbal in inverse constructions:

- (37)       Ea causa dea    barufa so       mi  
           the cause of-the fight be.1SG me  
           ‘The cause of the fight is me’

For our analysis, we follow a more recent minimalist account (Chomsky 2001) that conceives the formulation of AGREE as a relation between a probe (the verb) and a goal within a minimal domain. On this basis, we can describe the fact that in the Este variety and in Italian, the agreement in inverse copular sentences with the postverbal subject is linked to a probe specification of the raising verb *be* (as proposed by Bejar and Kahnemuyipour 2017 for Iranian and Armenian) which agrees with the element involving both N(ominal) and *deictic* features (38). Since the preverbal NP predicate does not have D features (as also in Moro 1997) but only deictic features (remind that it refers to a set of elements sharing a property), it does not agree with the verb since the agree probe is specified for agreeing with an element involving both deictic and nominal feature.

<sup>11</sup> We will back on this in section 5, where we will be referring to the differences found in the paradigm depending on person and number.

- (38) Probe specification for the copula in Inverse copular constructions.

AGR	NP predicate	NP subject
[n]	[d]	[n]
[d]		[d]

In Este variety we notice different interesting phenomena. Firstly, in the second person singular, the proclitic *te* is always present, as in canonical copular structures. Remind that the 2<sup>nd</sup> person is a participant and a deictic, and can be the target of the specialized probe.

- (39) a. Ti te si ea causa dea barufa  
 you.2SG CL.2SG be.2SG the cause of-the fight  
 ‘You are the cause of the fight’  
 b. Ea causa dea barufa te si ti  
 the cause of-the fight CL.2SG be.2SG you.2SG  
 ‘The cause of the fight is you’

In the third singular and plural person the presence of the proclitic is always acceptable, but never mandatory:

- (40) a. Ea causa dea barufa ea<sub>i</sub> ze so mama<sub>i</sub>  
 the cause of-the fight CL.3SG.F be.3SG her mum  
 ‘The cause of the fight is her mum’  
 b. Ea causa dea barufa i<sub>k</sub> ze i so fradei<sub>k</sub>  
 the cause of-the fight CL.3PL.M be.3PL the his brothers  
 ‘The cause of the fight is his brothers’

However, in other constructions with lexical verbs, a subject proclitic is never allowed with a postverbal subject.

- (41) (\*Ea) ze rivà to mama.  
 CL.3SG.F is arrive.PRT your mum  
 ‘(She) is arrived your mum’

This difference suggests that there is a structural distinction between the two types of postverbal subjects. While sentences like (41) can be used to answer to questions like ‘what happened?’, confirming that they can be interpreted as broad focus, inverse copular sentences can never be broad focus. Roughly, while the preverbal predicate DP has a clear topic reading, the postverbal subject DP may be interpreted as a narrow focus. Specifically, the postverbal DP seems to be in a lower IP criterial position (in terms of Rizzi 2010) encoding a marked informational status (focus) which is not found in the postverbal subject with lexical verbs. Subject clitics can lexicalize D properties when the subject is in a criterial position (postverbal narrow focus or in a right dislocated topic position) and such a position is not available for a full computation of the agreement (as also suggested in Bianchi and Belletti 2016 for postverbal focus), therefore the D properties need to be expressed by the preverbal clitic subject.

Another possibility to account for the difference between copular sentences and sentences involving a lexical verb with postverbal subject is linked to the fact that the inflection of the

lexical verb in (41) parametrically identifies the D properties of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person subject. In (41) the clitic is obligatory since the raising verb *be* is a mere raising predicate and it does not involve meaning. Furthermore, the 3<sup>rd</sup> singular person of the verb *be* is syncretic with the plural, so it is a verb with a particular status: it does not have lexical meaning, it does not assign any thematic role, but it is mere inflection (Moro 1997) that cannot lexicalize the D properties. The D properties are lexicalized by the subject clitic. The same is true for other raising verbs such as *seem* in (42):

- (42)      Ea causa    dea      barufa    ea                    me      pare      so      mama  
               the cause   of-the   fight    CL.3SG.F    to-me   seem    her/his   mum  
               ‘The cause of the fight to me seems her/his mother’

In sentences involving person and number that lacks subject clitics (in the singular and plural person and in the second person plural), proclitics are not allowed because these forms are lacking in the paradigm. The D properties can only be lexicalized by the inflection of the verb. In the case of the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular, the inflection is useful to identify the referential individual (i.e. the speaker), due to the contextual relevance of the speaker (Manzini and Savoia 2005; Manzini 2012). However, in the Este variety, in all the structures in which inflected subject clitics are missing, it is possible to have the invariant clitic vowel *a* (discussed in section 2) in preverbal position:

- (43)    a. Ea causa    dea      barufa    (a)      so                    mi  
               the cause   of-the   fight    CL      be.1SG            I  
               ‘The cause of the fight is me’
- b. Ea causa    dea      barufa    (a)      semo                noialtri  
               the cause   of-the   fight    CL      be.1PL            we  
               ‘The cause of the fight is us’
- c. Ea causa    dea      barufa    (a)      si      voialtri  
               the cause   of-the   fight    CL      be.2PL    you.2PL  
               ‘The cause of the fight is you’

In the case of the second person singular, when the invariant clitic *a* can co-occur with the obligatory proclitic *te*, *a* must precede it:

- (44)      Ea causa    dea      barufa    (a)      te                    si                    ti  
               the cause   of-the   fight    CL      CL.2SG          be.2SG            you.2SG  
               ‘The cause of the fight is you’

As for the interpretation of the clitic *a*, due to its invariant status and to its co-occurrence with an inflected subject clitic (obligatory with 2<sup>nd</sup> person), *a* seems to lexicalize the D properties of the intensional meaning of the set to which include the referential subject(s), and it can be used as an informational/modal marking of the sentence. It does not lexicalize the D features as the inflected subject clitics.

Remind that the inverse copular constructions, sometimes called “specificational copular” constructions (see Bejar and Kahnemuyipur 2017 among others), imply an interpretation for

which the preverbal predicative NP “introduces something like a description” and the subject NP “specifies the entity or entities that fit the description” (Bejar and Kahnemuyipur 2017: 8). The postverbal NP represents new information. This is perfectly compatible with an interpretation for which the preceding preverbal DP predicate is either a topic or a modal operator. This observation allows us to make some generalizations on the position of the preverbal predicate DP. It is important to notice that *a*, due to its intensional meaning, is compatible with the postverbal subject with lexical verbs and can cooccur with subject clitics in inverse copular sentences with a postverbal subject DP. However, *a* is incompatible with topic left dislocation and contrastive preverbal focus (see examples (20)-(21)), since the informational properties of the dislocated element may ban the “intensional” presentation of the sentential subject encoded in the invariant clitic *a*.

Furthermore, in inverse copular sentences, the preverbal predicate DP cannot raise to a contrastive focus position. Although it has a topic reading, it does not work like a topic within a clitic left dislocation because it is not a l-marked argument (in the sense of Cinque 1990), it represents a property (with intensional meaning) and it can only cliticize in an invariant pro-predicative clitic (no resumptive inflected clitic is available). Next section is devoted to the occurrence of the invariant pro-predicative clitics found to refer to predicative DP in (mainly canonical) copular sentences.

### 5. Pro-predicative clitics

Pro-predicative clitics are proforms found in copular sentences to refer to either the predicative NP (45) or to the AP (46). The pro-predicative clitics are invariant in gender and number, also when they refer to a feminine predicative NP as *la causa* ‘the cause’ in (45b) or to an inflected AP as *simpatiche* ‘funny’ (feminine plural) in (46b).

- (45) a. Le ragazze sono la causa del litigio.  
           the girls be.3PL the cause of-the fight.  
       b. Le ragazze \*la / lo sono [la causa del litigio]<sup>12</sup>  
           the girls CL.3SG.F CL.3SG.N be.3PL the cause of-the fight  
           ‘The girls are the cause of the quarrel’
- (46) a. Le ragazze sono simpatiche  
           the girls be.3PL funny  
       b. Le ragazze \*le/ lo sono (simpatiche).  
           the girls CL.3PL.F CL.3SG.N be.3PL funny  
           ‘The girls are funny’

Although the accusative masculine object clitic is syncretic with the *lo* pro-predicative clitic, the former is inflected for gender and number (47), the latter is invariant (46).

- (47) a. La ragazza la / \*lo riconobbe [la zia]  
           the girl CL.3SG.F CL.3SG.M recognize.3SG the aunt  
           ‘The girl recognized her [the aunt]’

<sup>12</sup>The square brackets indicate that the phrase is not overtly realized: the clitic refers to the DP within the brackets.



- b. La ragazza \*la / lo riconobbe [lo zio]  
 The girl CL.3SG.F CL.3SG.M recognize.3SG the uncle  
 ‘The girl recognized him [the uncle]’

As in Italian, also in the Este variety the pro-predicative object clitic is realized as *eo*, which is invariant both in gender and number (masculine third person singular). For instance, in (48) the pro-predicative clitic *eo* refers to a singular feminine DP *ea causa dea barufa* ‘the cause of the fight’, in (49) it refers to an inflected (plural masculine) adjective *bei* ‘beautiful’. The invariant pro-predicative clitic is syncretic with the accusative masculine clitic (50).

- (48) a. I tosi ze ea causa dea barufa  
 the boys be.3PL the cause of-the fight  
 ‘The boys are the cause of the fight’  
 b. I tosi \**ea<sub>i</sub>* / *eo<sub>i</sub>* ze [ea causa]  
 the boys CL.3SG.F CL.3SG.N be.3PL the cause  
 Lit. ‘The boys are it [the cause]’
- (49) a. I tosi ze bei  
 the boys be.3PL beautiful.3PL.M  
 ‘The boys are beautiful’  
 b. I tosi \**i<sub>i</sub>* / *eo<sub>i</sub>* ze [bei]  
 the boys CL.3PL.M CL.3SG.N be.3PL beautiful  
 Lit. ‘The boys are it [beautiful]’
- (50) E tose eo ga visto  
 The girls CL.3SG.M have.3SG seen  
 ‘The girls have seen him’

The same invariant pro-predicative clitic *eo* appears also in inverse copular sentences as in (51a-b). However, while the subject proclitics are available when a full predicate is in preverbal position (see 40 above), when the predicative NP is cliticized, it can never co-occur in a position higher than the subject clitics (51c-d) (as it was the case for *a* clitic, see 14-16) or can occur between a subject clitic and an inflected verb (51e). We argue that the two clitics share the same position within the inflectional layer. Although *eo* is invariant, it does not share any property with the higher *a* clitic (in the CP layer), since it is syncretic with masculine object clitic *eo*, which is within the inflectional layer.<sup>13</sup>

- (51) a. Eo ze e tose [ea causa]  
 CL.3SG.N be.3PL the girls the cause  
 b. Eo ze i tosi [bei]  
 CL.3SG.N be.3PL the boys beautiful

<sup>13</sup> Manzini and Savoia (2005) account for the distribution of clitics proposing a string in which Definite clitics (subject clitics) are higher than 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person clitics (P) and 3<sup>rd</sup> person object clitics (N) which lexicalize N properties.

(i) [D...[P .. [N]]]

c.	*Eo	e	ze	e	tose	[ea	causa]
	CL.3SG.N	CL.3PL.F	be.3PL	the	girls	the	cause
d.	*Eo	i	ze	i	tosi	[bei]	
	CL.3SG.N	CL.3PL.M	be.3PL	the	boys	beautiful	
e.	*I	eo	ze		[i	tosi	]
	CL.3SG.N	CL.3SG.N	be.3PL		the	boys	

If we refer to the clitics within the inflectional layer (so excluding the *a* clitic in C) of nominal copular sentences, we find or subject clitics or invariant pro-predicative clitics. While the invariant *eo* clitic is found in both canonical and inverse sentences (see examples above in 48b, 49b, 50) when no other clitic is present and when the predicative NP is not overtly realized, inflected subject clitics are found in canonical sentences (see 40). However, when subject clitics appear in inverse copular sentences, they can only refer to the element targeted for agreement by the verb, i.e. the postverbal subject:

(52)	Ea causa	dea	baruffa,	*ea/	*eo/	e <sub>i</sub>
	the cause	of-the	fight	CL.3SG.F	CL.3SG.N	CL.3PL.F
	ze	e	tose <sub>i</sub>			
	be.3PL	the	girls			

The status of subject clitic, in fact, is crucially linked to the verb inflection and to the element that is probed for agreement. However, subject and object clitic can co-occur with transitive verbs:

(53)	I	(e)o	gà	visto
	CL.3PL.M	CL.3S.M	have.3PL	seen
	‘They have seen him’			

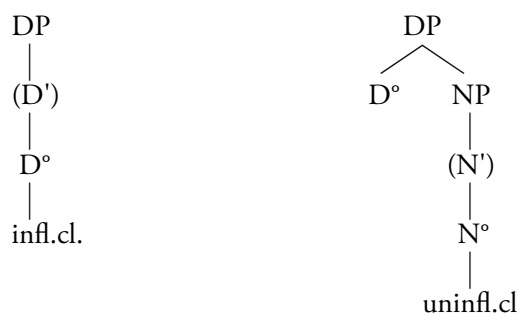
One question remained to be solved is why subject and pro-predicative clitic cannot co-occur. We argue that the answer is linked to the reduced structure of copular sentences, as proposed by Moro (1997), which is shared by other verbs which select a small clause as a complement. The verb *be* is merely inflection and selects a predicational phrase (small clause) as a complement in which the predication happens between a DP subject and a DP predicate. The clitic position available in a language with subject clitics such as the variety of Este (with the differences across the inflectional paradigm for number and person we have illustrated above) is used to lexicalize (optionally for 3<sup>rd</sup> person clitics) the D properties: that is, subject inflected clitics (not of the *a* type) are merely inflectional endings.

However, as for the invariant pro-predicative *eo*, we argue that predicate NPs can cliticize but they cannot show overt inflectional morphology. Predicative NPs (as sketched in section 4) introduce something like a description and have no referential status. Applying Moro’s (1993, 1997) analysis for the invariant pro-predicative *lo* in Italian, we argue that the invariant *eo* in the Este variety should be analyzed as being generated in N0 rather than D0<sup>14</sup>:

<sup>14</sup> Recall that Moro (1997) shows (following the insight of Longobardi 1994) that the predicate NP can also be found with no determiners in nominal copular:

(i)	Le	ragazze	sono	(la)	causa	del	litigio.
	the	girls	be.3PL	(the.SG.F)	cause.SG.F	of-the	quarrel
	‘The girls are (the) cause of the quarrel’						

(54) Moro (1997: 72)



Furthermore, the *eo* invariant clitic can be used only in strong pragmatic contexts, that is when the predicate NP can be inferred by the pragmatic context. Apparently this is a contrast with the subject clitic that represents mere inflection. However, we have seen that also subject clitics can be found with postverbal subjects (see 40 above) only in inverse copular sentences (with a topic-comment structure, where the predicate is the topic). We suggest that this general description may lead to the conclusion that clitic+copula represents always a configuration with comment interpretation (in a topic-comment configuration). While the invariant propredicative clitic refers to a description (non-referential) already presented within the discourse (recall that it cannot co-occur with overt predicative NP), the inflected subject clitic refers to the D properties of the focal postverbal subject. With this in mind, we try to sketch some syntactic considerations on the difference between canonical and inverse copular sentences that influence either the characteristics of agreement and the informational structure.

### 6. Syntactic analysis

All the considerations sketched above do not contradict in any respect the unified theory of copular sentences as proposed by Moro (1997). The syntax of nominal copular sentences interacts with the parametric difference linked on how the (D)efinite properties are lexicalized (that is, how we presented the *pro-drop* parameter in section 3). The N (predicative NP) versus D (subject NP) status of the NP may account also for the agreement differences in partial *pro-drop* languages where D properties can be lexicalized through subject clitics. The same syntactic configuration may imply different scope discourse semantic interface representations: namely the marked status of inverse copular sentences where a predicate NP introduces a description (N) and the postverbal NP specifies the entity that actually fits the description.

In sum, the background syntactic analysis coincides with Moro (1997): copular sentences involve a raising predicate that selects a small clause as its complement and does not have any particular meaning. The small clause is the place where the predication occurs between two XPs: a subject and a predicate. The subject generated in the small clause raises to the higher position of the copula as in (55), while the predicate stays *in situ*: this configuration was defined by Moro (1997) as the “canonical copular sentence”.

- (55) [[Una foto del muro]<sub>i</sub> [IP è [SC<sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub> [la causa della rivolta]]]]  
 [[A picture of the wall]<sub>i</sub> [IP is [SC<sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub> [the cause of the riot]]]]

The predicate generated into the small clause can raise to the higher position of the copula, while the subject DP stays *in situ* (56): this configuration is what Moro (1997) calls “inverse copular sentence”.

- (56) [[La causa della rivolta]<sub>k</sub>                    [IP è    [SC [una foto del muro]t<sub>k</sub>]]]  
 [[The cause of the riot]<sub>k</sub>                    [IP is    [SC [a picture of the wall]t<sub>k</sub>]]]

Among many other diagnostics, Moro (1997) noticed that languages may differ on the NP target of the agreement with the verb in inverse copular sentences. While in Italian the verb always agrees with the subject NP, in English the verb agrees always with the preverbal NP. Moro accounts for this difference through the presence of *pro* in the language. In inverse copular constructions, in Italian the predicate NP is in a position higher than IP, and the postverbal subject agrees since the *pro* is coindexed with it. In English, since no *pro* is available, the verb agrees with the only raised NP, i.e. the predicate NP.

In a partial *pro-drop* language, as the variety of Este, agreement works like in a *pro-drop* language (as Italian): the presence of *pro* determines agreement with the postverbal subject NP in inverse constructions. However, we have a specific agreement configuration for inverse copular sentences which is not found with other verbs: a subject proclitic co-occurs with a postverbal full DP (see example 40). Since subject clitics represent inflectional features, the use of subject clitic in inverse copular sentences needs to be linked to the pattern of agreement in inverse constructions.

If we reformulate the *pro-drop* parameter through differences across languages on how D properties are lexicalized, we argued that in the variety of Este the D properties are lexicalized either by the subject clitic or the inflectional morphology on the verb. However, this is not enough to account for the presence of a proclitic in inverse copular constructions. We have been pursuing that depending on person (1st person for saliency), quasi-argumental status of the NP bearing D properties (with meteorological verbs) and on the informational status of the the NP subject (right dislocated) there are differences in the overt realization of D properties. Therefore, comparing (57), where subject clitic is allowed, with (58), where subject clitic is forbidden, since we do not find any contrast linked to person or argumental status, we propose that in this case we are dealing with a contrast in the informational structure. While in (57), the predicative preverbal NP that defines the property of a subset that includes the postverbal NP appears before the verb, in (58) the predication is identified directly on the verb that bears agreement morphology.

- (57) Ea      causa    dea      barufa    i<sub>k</sub>                    ze      i      so      fradei<sub>k</sub>  
 the      cause    of-the    fight    CL.3PL.M      be.3PL    the      his      brothers  
 ‘The cause of the fight is his brothers’
- (58) (\*Ea)                    ze      rivà                    to      mama.  
 CL.3SG.F      be.3SG    arrived                    your      mum  
 ‘Your mum has arrived.’

In (57) there is an instantiation of a topic and the clitic + verb + NP is a *comment*, whereas the sentence in (58) can be interpreted as a broad focus sentence (used to answer to questions like ‘What happened?’). The inverse copular sentences are informationally marked structures in which the preverbal predicative NP does not refer to an entity, but to a property representing the subset that includes the subject NP.

Following Moro (1997), who implements the account of Longobardi (1994), DPs are arguments and NPs are predicate, so the predicative NP defines a property and not an argument. Importantly, as mentioned in section 5 ff.14, NPs can be found without D determiner. The different status of the NP in inverse copular construction creates an informational marked sentence. Along this line, also the obligatory agreement with the subject in inverse copular constructions can be interpreted as an effect of the D versus the N status of the two NPs.

Following the minimalist analysis for AGREE (Chomsky 2001), the copula probes the nominal element that bears D features (as proposed for Persian and Armenian by Bejar and Kanemuyipour 2017) and agrees always with the subject NP with D properties: the probe has specified property as its goal, in this case the D properties. Predicative NPs never have D features and cannot be targeted by agreement. In the variety of Este, the lower subject clitics (excluding the invariable *a*) are purely inflectional, so when the verb targets a NP with D properties, such properties are lexicalized by verbal morphology and/or subject clitics (depending on person, argumental status or informational structure).

As for the syntactic structure of both canonical and inverse copular sentences, what we proposed so far is perfectly compatible with Moro's analysis, the only difference is linked to how we analyze agreement if we use a probe/goal mechanism or a spec-head relation in INFL between a DP and a *pro*.

However, for the preverbal DP in copular sentences, we propose that both in inverse and canonical copular sentences the preverbal DP is higher than the specifier of INFL in the variety of Este. We follow the idea of Cinque (1979), Benincà and Cinque (1993) (among others) for which all subjects in Italian are dislocated. Since EPP and D are lexicalized by verbal morphology (or by subject clitics in partial *pro-drop* languages), the overt subject is realized when it has a clear scope discourse semantic effect ("criterial" in terms of Rizzi 2010). The high *a* clitic, which is in the C layer, is found after the preverbal NP and before the inflected subject clitic:

- (59) Ea    causa    dea    barufa    (a)    te                    si                    ti  
       the    cause    of-the    fight    CL    CL.2SG            be.2SG            you.2SG  
       'The cause of the fight is you'

One more issue about the syntax of copular sentence which is confirmed by the data of the variety of Este is the reduced inflectional structure, as proposed by Moro (1997) to account for different phenomena including the presence of an invariable clitic to refer to the predicative NP. We have seen, in fact, that in the variety of Este (a part for the C clitic *a*) the inflected subject clitic and the invariant propredicative clitic compete for the same proclitic position (although subject clitics have D properties, while the propredicative clitics N properties). This is a further evidence of the fact that: (i) copular sentences (and probably also unaccusative verbs) have a reduced inflectional structure; (ii) the alternation between subject clitics and propredicative clitics depends mainly on the referential properties of the subject versus the predicative NP, and it is strictly correlated to the informational structure: in the variety of Este, propredicative clitics can only be found when the predicative NP is omitted.

## 7. Concluding remarks

In the present work we described the distribution of inflecting subject clitics, propredicative clitics, and higher invariant subject clitics in the variety of Este. Our description was focused on the distribution of clitics in copular sentences. Since nominal copular has always been rep-

resented as a challenge to the theory of predication because the predicate is nominal, we have described how clitic proforms interact with the syntax of copular constructions. In the variety of Este while subject clitics are allowed in canonical copular sentences, following the characteristics of the inflectional paradigm, with inverse copular sentences an overt subject clitic appears also with postverbal subject (configuration which is not allowed with lexical verbs). We analyzed this data as linked to the peculiar informational structure of the inverse copular sentences where the preverbal predicate NP represents a topic and the cluster subject clitic+copula+postverbal DP represents a comment to that topic. Since dislocation plays a crucial role in determining the appearance of subject clitics, we argued that the inflectional features encoded in subject clitics interacts with the informational structure. The co-occurrence with the invariable *a* clitic confirms that while inflected subject clitics deal with the inflectional layer, *a* clitics deal with the C layer. The impossibility of finding inflected subject clitics in co-occurrence with invariant pro-predicative clitics confirms the reduced inflectional layer of copular sentences.

All the concluding remarks presented above do not contradict the unitary analysis of copular sentences presented by Moro (1993, 1997). The same syntactic structure can provide different interpretation at the semantic interface. In our perspective, the syntax of canonical and inverse sentences is mapped to informational interpretation that interacts with the overt realization of subject clitics.

#### *Acknowledgements*

We would like to thank Maria Rita Manzini for her preliminary feedback and two anonymous reviewers for the precious insights and suggestions. All mistakes are our own. A special thank goes to our native informants. This work is the result of the collaboration of the authors in all respects. Nevertheless, for Italian administrative purposes Linda Badan takes responsibility for Section 1, 2 and 5 as well as for the joint redaction of Section 7. Paolo Lorusso takes responsibility for Sections 3, 4, 6 as well as for the joint redaction of Section 7.

#### *References*

- Béjar, Susana, and Kahnemuyipour Arsalan. 2017. "Non-canonical Agreement in Copular Sentences." *Journal of Linguistics* 53 (3): 463-499. doi: 10.1017/S002222671700010X.
- Benincà, Paola. 1994. *La variazione sintattica: Studi di dialettologia romanza*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Benincà, Paola, and Guglielmo Cinque. 1993. "Su alcune differenze fra enclisi e proclisi." In *Omaggio a Gianfranco Folena*, ed. by Paola Benincà, and Guglielmo Cinque, 2313-2326. Padova: Editoriale Programma.
- Bianchi, Valentina, and Adriana Belletti. 2016. "Definiteness Effect and Unaccusative Subjects: An Overview and Some New Thoughts." In *Definiteness effects: Bilingual, Typological and Diachronic Variation*, ed. by Susann Fischer, Tanja Kupisch, Esther Rinke, 14-65. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Biberauer, Theresa, Anders Holmberg, Ian Roberts, and Michelle Sheehan. 2010. *Parametric Variation: Null Subjects in Minimalist Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Bobaljik, Jonatan D. 2008. "Missing Persons: A Case Study in Morphological Universals." *The Linguistic Review*, special issue, *Examples of Linguistic Universals* 25 (1-2): 203-230. doi: 10.1515/TLIR.2008.005.
- Brandi, Luciana, and Patrizia Cordin. 1981. "Dialetti e italiano: un confronto sul parametro del soggetto nullo." *Rivista di grammatica generativa* 6: 33-87.
- Calabrese, Andrea. 2011. "Investigations on Markedness, Syncretism and Zero Exponence in Morphology." *Morphology* 21 (2): 283-325. doi: 10.1007/s11525-010-9169-y.
- Cardinaletti, Anna, and Lori Repetti. 2008. "The Phonology and Syntax of Preverbal and Postverbal Subject Clitics in Northern Italian Dialects." *Linguistic Inquiry* 39 (4): 523-563.

- Cardinaletti, Anna, and Lori Repetti. 2010. "Functional Vowels in Main Questions in Northern Italian Dialects." In *Romance Languages and Linguistics Theory 2008: Selected papers from 'Going Romance' Groningen 2008*, ed. by Reinecke Bok-Bennema, Brigitte Kampers-Manhe, and Bart Hollebrandse, 37-58. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1981. *Lectures on Government and Binding. The Pisa Lectures*. Dordrecht-Cinnaminson, NJ: Foris.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2001. "Derivation by Phase." In *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*, ed. by Michael Kenstowicz, 1-52. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. doi: 10.7551/mitpress/4056.003.0004.
- Cinque, Guglielmo. 1979. "Left Dislocation in Italian: A Syntactic and Pragmatic Analysis." In *Studi di sintassi e pragmatica*, ed. by Guglielmo Cinque, 97-146. Padova: Clesp.
- Cinque, Guglielmo. 1990. *Types of A'-Dependencies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia. 1998. *Polarity Sensitivity as (Non-)veridical Dependency*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Harley, Heidi, and Ellen Ritter. 2002. "Person and Number in Pronouns: A Feature Geometric Analysis." Manuscript, University of Arizona and University of Calgary.
- Holmberg, Anders. 2010. "Null Subject Parameters." In *Parametric Variation: Null subjects in Minimalist Theory*, ed. by Biberauer, Theresa, Anders Holmberg, Ian Roberts and Michelle Sheehan, 88-124. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Holmberg, Anders, and Michelle Sheehan. 2010. "Control into Finite Clauses in Partial Null-Subject Languages." In *Parametric Variation: Null subjects in Minimalist Theory*, ed. by Biberauer, Theresa, Anders Holmberg, Ian Roberts, and Michelle Sheehan, 125-152. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Huang, C.-T. James. 1984. "On the Distribution and Reference of Empty Pronouns." *Linguistic Inquiry* 15 (4): 531-574.
- Longobardi, Giuseppe. 1994. "Reference and Proper Names: A Theory of N-Movement in Syntax and Logical Form." *Linguistic Inquiry* 25 (4): 609-665.
- Manzini, M. Rita. 2012. "From Romance Clitics to Case: Split Accusativity and the Person Case Constraint." In *Romance Languages and Linguistic Theory 2010: Selected Papers from 'Going Romance' Leiden 2010*, ed. by Irene Franco, Sara Lusini, and Andrés Saab, 1-20. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Manzini, M. Rita. 2015. "On the Substantive Primitives of Morphosyntax and their Parametrization: Northern Italian Subject Clitics." In *Representing Structure in Phonology and Syntax*, ed. by Marc van Oostendorp, and Henk van Riemsdijk, 167-194. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. doi: 10.1515/9781501502224-007.
- Manzini, M. Rita, and Leonardo M. Savoia. 2005. *I dialetti italiani e romanci. Morfosintassi generativa*. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso.
- Manzini, M. Rita, and Leonardo M. Savoia. 2007. *A Unification of Morphology and Syntax. Investigations into Romance and Albanian Dialects*. London: Routledge.
- Manzini M. Rita, and Leonardo M. Savoia. 2011. *Grammatical Categories: Variation in Romance Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Manzini M. Rita, and Kenneth Wexler. 1987. "Parameters, Binding Theory, and Learnability." *Linguistic Inquiry* 18 (3): 413-444.
- Moro, Andrea. 1993. *I predicati nominali e la struttura della frase*. Padova: Unipress.
- Moro, Andrea. 1997. *The Raising of Predicates*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Nicolis, Marco. 2008. "The Null Subject Parameter and Correlating Properties: the Case of Creole Languages." In *The Limits of Syntactic Variation*, ed. by Theresa Biberauer, 271-294. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Poletto, Cecilia. 1993. *La sintassi del soggetto nei dialetti italiani settentrionali*. Padova: Unipress.
- Poletto, Cecilia. 2000. *The Higher Functional Field: Evidence from Northern Italian Dialects*. Oxford-New York, NY: Oxford UP.
- Raposo, Eduardo, and Juan Uriagereka. 1996. "Indefinite *se*." *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 14 (4): 749-810.
- Renzi, Lorenzo, and Laura Vanelli. 1983. "I pronomi soggetto in alcune varietà romanze." In *Scritti linguistici in onore di Giovan Battista Pellegrini*, vol. I, ed. by Paola Benincà, 391-419. Pisa: Pacini.

- Rizzi, Luigi. 1986. "On the Status of Subject Clitics in Romance." In *Studies in Romance Linguistics*, ed. by Osvaldo Jaeggli, and Carmen Silva-Corvalan. 391-419. Dordrecht: Foris. doi: 10.1515/9783110878516-025.
- Rizzi, Luigi. 2010. "On Some Properties of Criterial Freezing." In *The Complementizer Phase: Subjects and Operators*, vol. 1, ed. by E. Phoevos Panagiotidis, 17-32. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Roberts, Ian. 2010. *Agreement and Head movement: Clitics, Incorporation, and Defective Goals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Roberts, Ian. 2014. "Subject Clitics and Macroparameters." In *Diachrony and Dialects. Grammatical Change in the Dialects of Italy*, ed. by Paola Benincà, Adam Ledgeway, and Nigel Vincent, 177-201. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Sportiche, Dominique. 1992. "Clitic Construction." Manuscript, UCLA.
- Sportiche, Dominique. 1996. "Clitic Constructions." In *Phrase Structure and the Lexicon*, ed. by Johan Rooyck and Louise Zaring, 213 -277. Dordrecht: Kluwer.