

# On word order and case in Old Italian past participle constructions

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## Abstract

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While in Modern Italian, V1 is mandatory in absolute constructions, no such restriction is operative in Old Italian. On the surface, such a fact could be interpreted as a sign of residual V-to-Comp movement in Modern Italian. However, it is not: In Old Italian, participles targeted a position lower than Comp and, hence, the V1 pattern of Modern Italian is an innovation rather than a residue from the earlier stage. The difference between the two grammars lies in the interaction of independent properties of Old Italian and Modern Italian: First, in Old Italian, two arguments can be case licensed because of the presence of a Tense Phrase in the participle clause. In Modern Italian, where no Tense Phrase is projected, nominative can only be licensed by focus as an instance of default case assignment. Second, a general change relating to information structure has as its consequence that a focused argument is realized post-verbally in Modern Italian, which explains the obligatory V1 pattern.

**Keywords:** Old Italian, V1, participle, gerund, default case.

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## 1. Introduction

A long tradition of research on verb second has analyzed the phenomenon in terms of the scope of verb raising: the restriction on how many elements can precede the finite verb has been understood as the result of v-raising to Comp or, in cartographic-oriented approaches, to some position situated in the Comp field. Word order patterns in Romance nonfinite constructions have been analyzed along similar lines, though the result of such verb raising typically is V1 surface order rather than V2. The purpose of this article is to investigate the word order restrictions in nonfinite environments in Italian, and to shed light on how such restrictions relate to the analysis of V2.

In Modern Italian (henceforth MI) finite clauses, the verb raises to Infl, or some corresponding functional projection assuming a Split Infl approach (Pollock 1989, Belletti 1990). In Old Italian (OI), it has been argued that the finite verb raises to Comp, an assumption intended to derive V2 patterns common to Old Romance (e.g. Benincà 1983/1984; Poletto 2012; Salvi 2020).<sup>1</sup>

In nonfinite environments, however, the facts are different in an interesting way. In MI nonfinite adverbial clauses (or *absolute* clauses), the Verb is assumed to raise to Comp in the seminal work of Rizzi (1982) and Belletti (1990). One argument in favor of this view is the obligatory V1 word order attested in such constructions (example (1) from Belletti, 1990: 89):

- (1) *Arrivata Maria, Gianni tirò un sospiro di sollievo.*  
 arrived Mary Gianni heaved a sigh of relief  
 ‘As Mary had arrived, John was relieved.’
- (2) \**Maria arrivata, Gianni ...*  
 Mary arrived John

The question then arises whether the V1 pattern of MI participial clauses is a case of residual V-to-Comp movement. This is not the case, however: In OI nonfinite constructions, it can be shown that the verb raises to a position lower than Comp and, hence, is situated in a participial Infl-field: SVO word order is attested, as in (3), also when the participle clause is introduced by a filled Comp, as in (4) (examples (3-4) from Egerland 1996):

- (3) *e il santo data la benedizione a uno de' fedeli ...*  
 and the saint given the blessing to one of-the faithful  
*furono menati dinanzi a' farisei ...*  
 (they)were brought before the Pharisees  
 ‘And when the saint had given his blessings to one of his followers, they were all brought before the Pharisees ...’  
 (*Fra Michele Minorita*; Chap. 12, p. 49, 5-8)

<sup>1</sup> The V-to-Comp analysis of Verb movement in Old Romance develops in a fashion parallel to the analysis of V2 in Germanic (e.g. den Besten 1983; Thráinsson 1986; Vikner 1990; Holmberg & Platzack 1995). In the Germanic area, as well as in Old Romance, it is clear that V-raising to Comp does not relate to inflectional features of the verb.

- (4) ... dicono li soprascritti savi che,  
 (they)say the above-mentioned learned that  
*bene che quelli cotali uomini diventati<sub>[participle]</sub> animali,*  
 well that those such men become animals,  
 ... la mente dentro rimaneva loro umana, ...  
 ... the mind inside remained to-them human  
 ‘... and the wise say that, although those men had been transformed into animals,  
 ... their minds stayed human, ...’  
 (*Fatti d’Enea*: Chap. 27, p. 43, 21-24)

Since the Comp node in (4) is filled by *bene che* ‘although’, the participial verb is in a position lower than Comp, that is, in the Infl field. In the light of such examples, verb raising of MI appears to mirror that of OI, as summarized in Table 1:

**Table 1.** The scope of V-raising in finite and nonfinite clauses

	<i>Old Italian</i>	<i>Modern Italian</i>
Finite main clause	<b>V-to-C</b>	<b>V-to-I</b>
Nonfinite adverbial clause	<b>V-to-I</b>	<b>V-to-C</b>

Then, the question arises whether there is a principled link between the changes illustrated in Table 1. Such a hypothesis, too, is doubtful. Arguably, what is stated in Table 1 is to be understood as an empirical generalization. The precise nature of the positions will depend on what functional structure is assumed. This article is limited in scope: The aim is to shed light on the patterns emerging from Table 1. The proposal is that no principled link exists between the historical change in finite and nonfinite environments, but that the observed patterns emerge from independent but interacting factors.

In section 2, it is argued that one basic structural difference between MI and OI lies in the fact that, in OI, the past participle projects a Tense Phrase whereas no such projection is present in MI participles. This difference has consequences for case assignment in the sense that two structural cases are assigned in OI but only one in MI. However, the subject argument in MI can carry nominative and, thus, it needs to be explained why nominative case is available in the structure despite the absence of tense. Section 3 is concerned with the notion of default case. It is argued that default case can be analyzed as case assigned by focus. In section 4, it is suggested that such a focal case assignment can account for the difference in word order illustrated in Table 1, given certain assumptions about information structure in OI and MI. It is argued that there is no clear difference in the scope of V-raising in OI and MI, despite appearances to the contrary.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The empirical scope of this article is limited to word order facts in Italian. Admittedly, though, the issue extends beyond Italian, given that a V1 restriction holds for Modern Spanish as well (e.g. Hernanz 1991; Zagona 2002; Pérez Jiménez 2006). Moreover, the long-discussed issue of participial agreement will not be addressed (e.g. Kayne 1989; Belletti 1990; Egerland 1996; D’Alessandro & Roberts 2008; Loporcaro 2010).

## 2. The relevance of Tense for case licensing

Considering that the scope of V-raising can relate to what features are projected in the inflectional field, the first issue that needs to be addressed concerns syntactic Tense.

Belletti (1990) convincingly argues that the MI participle clause is tenseless. In contrast to this, there are several arguments in favor of the claim that a Tense Phrase was projected in OI past participles (Egerland 1996). These arguments are listed in Sections 2.1.–2.4. A comparison with the gerund follows in Section 2.5.

### 2.1. Reference Time

In OI, as generally in Old Romance, the past participle is endowed with a Reference Time in the Reichenbachian sense. As is the case in Latin, where *amatus sum* can mean ‘I am loved’ or ‘I have been loved’, depending on the context, the OI past participle can add a reference point to the expression as in the oft-cited example (5) (e.g. Agno 1971):

- (5) E vo’ che sappi che, dinanzi ad essi,  
and (I)want that (you)know that before to them  
spiriti umani non eran salvati.  
souls human not were saved  
‘And I want you to know that before them no human souls had been saved.’  
(Dante, *Inferno*, 4, 62-63)

What is expressed by the past tense *eran salvati* ‘they were saved’ corresponds to *erano stati salvati* ‘they had been saved’ in contemporary language. That is to say, instead of merely describing the eventuality of being saved, the participle expresses the eventuality and a Reference Time.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the participle is endowed with a tense interpretation which in modern language needs to be expressed by the adding of the participle *stato* ‘been’.

### 2.2. Clausal Negation

While Belletti (1990) argues that the MI past participle is not compatible with clausal negation, as in (6), in the OI past participle construction, negation is indeed attested (example (6) from Belletti, 1990: 95; example (7) from Egerland 1996: 204):

- (6) \*Non arrivata Maria, Gianni tirò un sospiro di sollievo.  
not arrived Mary John heaved a sigh of relief

<sup>3</sup> Assuming that Tense can be described as two relations, that between the Event and the Reference Time, and that between the Reference Time and the Speech Time, we conclude that the first one, the relation between E and R, can be encoded in a nonfinite clause, as suggested in Hornstein (1990: 115-117). The relation between R and S, on the other hand, is expressed by the finite verb. It follows from such a way of reasoning that the notion of finiteness cannot merely be understood in terms of Tense. Rather, finiteness is a matter of anchoring to the Speech Time, an intuition coming close in spirit to the logophoric approach to finiteness of Bianchi (2003).

- (7) ... , *il papa non dimenticato lo sdegno preso*  
 the pope not forgotten the resentment taken  
*contro alla parte bianca di Firenze,*  
 against to-the part white of Florence,  
*non volle che soggiornasse e vernasse invano.*  
 not wanted that (he)remained and spend-the-winter in vain.  
 ‘The pope, not having forgotten his indignation towards the white party in  
 Florence, did not want him to spend the winter in vain.’  
 (*Nuova Cronica*; book 8, chap. 49, 3-5)

According to the influential proposals of Laka (1990, 1994) and Zanuttini (1996, 1997), there is a universal link between clausal negation and Tense. Such a projection, then, is present in the OI past participle, but not in its MI counterpart.

### 2.3. Auxiliary and Copular Verbs

According to standard assumptions in generative grammar, ultimately deriving from Chomsky (1957), certain functional verbs such as the copula *be* and the auxiliary (*have* or *be* depending on the language) are crucially dependent on Tense, either by being merged in T or by moving there at some point in the derivation (e.g. Pollock 1989, Belletti 1990). The participial form *stato* ‘been’ cannot head a participle clause in MI, as in (8), but is frequently attested in OI participle clauses, both as a copular and as an auxiliary (Egerland 1996: 243; example (10) from Loporcaro & Seiler 2009: 487):

- (8) \**Stato in Germania per dieci anni ...*  
 been in Germany for ten years
- (9) *E poi che ebbono udita la Messa e stati in orazione*  
 and after that (they)had heard the mass and been in prayer  
*infino a Terza, il prete ... prese il messale...*  
 until to third the priest took the missal ...  
 ‘And when they had attended mass, and had been praying until the third hour,  
 the priest ... took the missal ...’  
 (*Fioretti di San Francesco*: chap. 2, 17-19)
- (10) *Questa ... stata chiusa da Anfione ... nelle mani pervenne di Laio.*  
 this been closed by Anfione ... in-the hands came of Laio  
 ‘This, as it had been closed by Amphion, came into the hands of Laius.’  
 (Boccaccio, *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, 38)

### 2.4. Licensing of External Arguments

In the OI participle clause, an external argument can be case licensed, as in (11):

- (11) Ordinate le schiere de' due re nel piano ...  
 ordered the lines of-the two kings in-the field  
 e ciascuno de' detti signori ammonita  
 and each of-the said lords admonished  
 la sua gente di ben fare, ... il vescovo d' Alzurro ...  
 the his people to well do the bishop of Alzurro  
 assolvette e benedisse tutti quelli dell' oste  
 absolved and blessed all those of-the army  
 'When the kings had disposed their troops in the field and each one of them had  
 exhorted their men to fight well, the bishop of Alzurro absolved and blessed  
 everyone in the army.'  
 (*Nuova Cronica*; book 7, chap. 9, 9-16)

This fact, as well, can plausibly be derived from the presence of Tense in the OI participle, assuming that syntactic Tense correlates with the overt realization of an external argument, following a long-standing claim in generative grammar (e.g. Chomsky 1981: 50; Pesetsky & Torrego 2001). The consequences of such reasoning are discussed in section 3.

### 2.5. A Comparison with Gerunds

The claim that nonfinite verbforms can host a tense element, and that the projection of such a feature is a matter of cross-linguistic variation, is further supported by the comparison between gerundival and present participial forms in modern Romance and Germanic.

This can be illustrated with a brief overview of the Italian gerund and the German present participle.<sup>4</sup> Both forms can be used as adverbial phrases expressing events simultaneous with the main event, as in (12a-b).

- (12) a. It. Passeggiavamo attraverso la campagna  
 (we)walked across the countryside  
*godendo del paesaggio e del bel tempo.*  
 enjoying of-the landscape and of-the nice weather
- b. G. Wir haben auf dem Lande einen Spaziergang gemacht,  
 we have across the country a walk made  
*die schöne Landschaft und das tolle Wetter genießend.*  
 the beautiful landscape and the nice weather enjoying  
 'We walked through the countryside, enjoying the landscape and the  
 beautiful weather.'

In addition to such a usage, there is abundant evidence that the Italian gerund can describe events following and preceding the main event (Lonzi 1991; Solarino 1996).

<sup>4</sup> In some traditions, as in Italian, the terms *gerundio* and *participio presente* indicate morphologically distinct forms. In others, such as German or English, where only one form is found, the terms *gerund* and *present participle* are rather understood to refer to the semantic value or syntactic function of such forms. I assume that such terminological choices are irrelevant in this context, the important thing being that the German present participle can translate the Italian gerund given a simultaneous reading as in (12a-b), but not in (13a-b) and (14a-b).

On the contrary, König (1995: 72-73) and Kortmann (1995: 189) explicitly claim that no such interpretations are attested in German. Consider the contrast between the a-examples and the b-examples of (13) and (14):

- (13) a. It. *Passò la fine della sua vita in questa città,*  
 (he)spent the end of-the his life in this town  
*morendoci nel 1891 in età avanzata.*  
 dying-here in-the 1891 in age advanced  
 ‘He spent the last years of his life in this town, dying here in 1891 at a high age.’
- b. G. \**Er hat die letzten Jahre seines Lebens in dieser Stadt*  
*verbracht,*  
 he has the last years of.his life in this town spent  
*1891 in hohem Alter hier sterbend.*  
 1891 in high age here dying
- (14) a. It. *Lasciando il suo appartamento alle 8.15,*  
 leaving the his apartment at-the 8.15  
*è riuscito a prendere il treno delle 8.25.*  
 (he)is managed to take the train of-the 8.25  
 ‘Leaving his apartment at 8.15, he managed to catch the train at 8.25.’
- b. G. \**Seine Wohnung um 8.15 verlassend,*  
 his apartment at 8.15 leaving  
*gelang es ihm, den Zug um 8.25 zu erreichen.*  
 managed it him the train at 8.25 to take

This difference suggests that a tense element is indeed present in the Italian gerund but not in the German present participle.<sup>5</sup> Given our line of reasoning, such an assumption gives raise to three predictions all of which are born out: In fact, the Italian gerund is compatible with negation, auxiliary verbs, and the projection of an external argument, as in the a-examples of (15-17). The German equivalent is not acceptable in the same contexts, as in the b-examples of (15-17):

- (15) a. It. *Non parlando la lingua, non potevano*  
 not speaking the language not (they)could  
*comunicare con la popolazione locale.*  
 communicate with the population local  
 ‘Not speaking the language, they couldn’t communicate with the local population.’
- b. G. \**Die Sprache nicht beherrschend, konnten sie*  
 the language not mastering could they  
*sich mit der lokalen Bevölkerung nicht verständigen.*  
 themselves with the local population not understand

<sup>5</sup> It is often the case the temporal sequence is mirrored by the superficial ordering of the clauses. However, the surface ordering does not by itself explain the difference between the two languages. Hence, the tense interpretation cannot merely be ascribed to an effect of narrative sequencing.

- (16) a. It. *Essendo poveri*, non potevano sperare in nessun cambiamento.  
 being poor not (they)could hope in no change  
 ‘Being poor, they couldn’t hope for any change.’
- b. G. *\*Arm seiend*, konnten sie nicht auf Veränderung hoffen.  
 poor being could they not of change hope
- (17) a. It. *Abitando io in campagna*, i mezzi pubblici non offrono un servizio ottimale.  
 living I in countryside the means public  
 not (they)offer a service optimal  
 ‘Since I live in the countryside, public transport does not provide an optimal service’ (= ‘me living in the countryside, ...’)
- b. G. *\*Ich auf dem Land lebend*, bieten die öffentlichen Verkehrsmittel keinen optimalen service.  
 I in the countryside living offer the public  
 transport no optimal service

The Old Italian gerund is essentially similar to the Modern Italian gerund in all relevant respects. It can express eventualities preceding and following the main event (18-19), it can be negated (20), it can host copular and auxiliary Vs (21), and it is compatible with the projection of an external argument assigned nominative (22):

- (18) A questo domandamento, *suspirando imprima duramente*, dissi ...  
 to this question sighing first deeply (I)said  
 ‘To this question, after having sighed deeply, I said...’  
 (Bono Giamboni, *Libro*, cap 4, par 3.)
- (19) I Cerchi si rifuggirono nelle loro case,  
 the Cerchi REFL fled in-the their houses  
*stando con le porti chiuse*.  
 staying with the doors closed  
 ‘The Cerchi family fled to their houses and stayed there with their doors closed’  
 (Dino Compagni, *Cronica*, libro 2, cap. 18, p. 168, rr. 34-35)
- (20) Finalmente la nocte di venerdì sancto, *non potendo più sostenere*  
 finally the night of Friday saint not knowingmore hold  
*il castello*, abandonarò il castello e fugarono fuori ...  
 the castle (they)abandoned the castle and (they)fled out  
 ‘At last, on Holy Friday, they could not hold the castle any longer and abandoned it.’ (*Cronica fiorentina*, p. 130, 28-29)
- (21) ... disse che sarebbe stato molto contento l’ avessono fatto,  
 (he)said that (he)would been very satisfied it (they)had done  
*non l’ avendo saputo ...*  
 not it having known  
 ‘He said that he would have been happy that they did it although he didn’t know anything about it’



(Dino Compagni, *Cronica*, book 1, chap. 8, p. 137, 9-12)

- (22) *E dicendo io queste parole con doloroso singulto di pianto,*  
 and saying I these words with painful sob of cry  
*e chiamando la Morte che venisse a me ...*  
 and calling the death that (she)came to me  
 ‘And as I said these words weeping and called upon death that she might come to me...’  
 (Dante, *Vita Nuova*, chap. 23, par. 11, 1-3)

Hence, the verb forms endowed with Reference Time are compatible with clausal negation, an auxiliary or copular V, and allow for the overt realization of an external argument. These observations can be summarized as in Table 2:

**Table 2.** Syntactic properties of absolute gerunds and past participles in OI and MI

	Compatibility with negation	Compatibility with auxiliary/copula	Licensing of an external argument
OI Past participle	+	+	+
OI Gerund	+	+	+
MI Past participle	-	-	-
MI Gerund	+	+	+

## 2.6. Summary

Summing up this section, I conclude from the data discussed here that a Tense feature is indeed projected in OI participles and gerunds, as well as in MI gerunds, but not in MI participles.

It is clear from this generalization that the projection of TP does not account for the scope of V-raising. In MI, the V1 requirement of nonfinite clauses holds for past participles and gerunds alike. Hence, V-raising in nonfinite constructions does not correlate with what features are projected in the Infl-field. Given the paucity of nonfinite morphology, this is not an unexpected result. Intuitively speaking, V-raising in such environments is rather a matter of information structure, an intuition which is spelled out in the following section.

Furthermore, a problem arises concerning case licensing: The MI past participle is indeed incompatible with the projection of an external argument. However, the internal argument of an unaccusative predicate surfaces with nominative, as was shown by Belletti (1990) (example (23) from Belletti 1990: 97):

- (23) *Arrivata io, Gianni tirò un sospiro di sollievo.*  
 arrived I<sub>[Nom]</sub> John drew a sigh of relief  
 ‘When I arrived, John was relieved.’

Given that tense is absent from the past participle in MI, it remains to be established why the argument in question surfaces with nominative morphology. This is the topic of the following section.

### 3. Default case

To begin with, the idea of a principled link between nominative and tense is challenged by several authors (e.g. Tallerman 1998; Sigurðsson 2003; Bianchi 2003; Parrott 2007; McFadden & Sundaresan 2011). Even if such a direct link is rejected, however, it is possible to argue for another correlation, namely that between Tense and *the number* of arguments licensed. Such a conclusion may follow from different approaches to case licensing/checking: one such is the early minimalist Layered Case-Theory of Watanabe (1993), in which it follows that two cases can be licensed in a clausal structure endowed with T, assuming that such a structure has two layers. Moreover, given some version of Phase Theory (e.g. Chomsky 2001), if it is assumed that one argument can be case licensed per phase, the same result obtains: If the projection of a Tense Phrase creates a phase, it follows that two arguments can be licensed. In such a theory, the patterns emerging from Table 2 follow. The absence of TP in the structure accounts for the fact that MI participles can only take one lexical argument.

As for the morphological realization of nominative in the MI participle clause, D'Alessandro & Roberts (2008) put forth the possibility that nominative may be an instance of so-called *default case*, a suggestion which is criticized by Loporcaro & Seiler (2009). There is however an independent reason as for why the default case approach merits to be further explored, namely the fact that nouns can be case licensed in adverbial constructions which are not headed by a verb and do not host a TP. Consider the examples (24-28), in which the arguments *la pasta* 'the dough' (24), *il decreto* 'the decree' (25), and *il bottino* 'the loot' (26), are licensed in the absence of a verbal predicate:<sup>6</sup>

- (24) *Una volta pronta la pasta, bisogna lasciarla asciugare.*  
 once ready the dough (is)necessary leave-it dry  
 'Once the dough is ready you need to leave it to dry.'  
<https://www.lacucinaitaliana.it/tutorial/gli-strumenti/macchina-tirare-pasta-come-usarla-tagliatelle-lasagne-procedimento/>; consulted on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021)
- (25) *Una volta in mano il decreto esecutivo, le strade sono due ...*  
 once in hand the decree executive the ways are two  
 'Once you have the decree in your hand, there are two ways to go ...'  
<https://www.laleggepertutti.it/272542-prestito-di-denaro-non-restituito-cosa-fare>; consulted on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019)
- (26) *Una volta in mano il bottino la ladra fugge via,*  
 once in hand the loot the thief flees away  
 ma la vittima si accorge di essere stata derubata.  
 but the victim refl. realizes to be been robbed  
 'Once the thief has got hold of the loot, she escapes, but the victim realizes that (s)he has been robbed.'  
<https://www.teleclubitalia.it/giugliano-ruba-il-portafogli-ad-una-donna-che-fa-shopping-la-vittima-la-rincorre-lungo-via-roma/>; consulted on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015)

<sup>6</sup> Though not always accepted by native speakers, constructions such as those exemplified in (24-26) are relatively easy to attest in blogs and journalistic texts.

The predications are expressed by an adjective in (24) and by prepositional phrases in (25-26). Given the absence of both VP and TP, case assignment in absolute constructions cannot exclusively depend neither on a verbal head, nor on Tense. Then, a further case assigning mechanism must be assumed.

A much-cited approach to default case is that of Schütze (2001), elaborating on ideas of McCloskey (1985) and Zwart (1988). Default case is defined as in (27):

- (27) The default case forms of a language are those that are used to spell out nominal expressions (e.g. DPs) that are not associated with any case feature assigned or otherwise determined by syntactic mechanisms. (Schütze 2001: 206)

Default case is assumed to appear in a number of constructions, as for instance dislocation/hanging topic (28a-b), so called Mad Magazine-sentences (29a-b)<sup>7</sup>, and ellipsis (30a-b).

- (28) a. Eng. Me, I always wake up at six o'clock.  
 b. It. Io, mi sveglio sempre alle sei.  
 I<sub>[nom]</sub> me<sub>[cl.]</sub> wake<sub>[1st.]</sub> always at-the six
- (29) a. Eng. Me? Waking up at six o'clock?  
 b. It. Io? Svegliarmi alle sei?  
 I<sub>[nom]</sub> wake-me<sub>[cl.]</sub> at-the six
- (30) a. Eng. Who is waking up at six o'clock? - Not me.  
 b. It. Chi si sveglia alle sei? - Io no.  
 Who self<sub>[cl.]</sub> wake<sub>[3rd.]</sub> at-the six - I<sub>[nom]</sub> no

There are systematic cross-linguistic differences as for the morphological form of such a spell out: as is clear from (28a-30b), default case is oblique in English, but nominative in, for instance, Italian. The problem addressed by Schütze (2001) lies in the fact that, in the corresponding finite clauses with straight word order, the external arguments in question would surface with nominative (*I wake up...*).

The problem with a default case approach, on the other hand, is that the conditions on default case assignment have not been defined in detail. In order to pursue such an analysis, then, some basic assumptions need to be explicitly spelled out. To begin with, consider that the same distinction in case morphology is found in clefts: While the English argument appears in its oblique form, as in (31a), in Italian we attest nominative, as in (31b):

- (31) a. Eng. It was me who woke up at six o'clock.  
 b. It. Sono stato io a svegliarmi alle sei?  
 is been I<sub>[nom]</sub> to wake at-the six

<sup>7</sup> The Mad Magazine sentence, originally defined in Akmajian (1984), appears to be a hanging topic of sorts, though in relation to a nonfinite predication.

The cleft may give a clue to the nature of default case. Consider that the cleft is a focusing construction and that, in fact, the contexts in which default case is attested have precisely this in common: In dislocations, Mad magazine sentences, as well as in ellipsis, only strong pronominal forms can be used, not weak or clitic ones. Suppose, then, that default case is to be analyzed as a focus case of sorts. The idea that focus and case are structurally related notions is far from new. In the Government and Binding Theory, a principled link between case assignment and focus is proposed in Horvath (1986) for Hungarian, and further elaborated by e.g. Tuller (1992) for Chadic languages (also, Szendrői 2006). Vermeulen (2005) argues for a focus-related analysis of the nominative marker *-ga* in Japanese. I ignore to what extent the present discussion has bearing on these languages. For present purposes, suppose that default case can tentatively be defined as in (32):

- (32) Arguments which are semantically licensed can receive focal case when no structural case is available.

The formulation in (32) expresses the intuition that default case can license the occurrence of a DP in the absence of structural case, provided that such a DP is focal. I assume that the notion of focus referred to in (34) covers both identificational and information focus according to the distinction of Kiss (1998), leaving for future research the issue whether there are differences between different kinds of focus relevant for default case.<sup>8</sup>

Obviously, the notion of “semantically licensed” needs to be properly understood. Suffice is to say, an argument can be semantically licit in the sense of receiving a theta-role, as is the case in the absolute constructions in question, or the DPs selected by PPs and APs in (24-26).<sup>9</sup>

In the MI past participle clause, V assigns structural accusative to the object. The object receiving structural accusative can, but does not have to be, focused. It can be realized as a strong pronoun (33) and as a clitic (34) (Belletti 1990: 103):

- (33) Conosciuta me, ...  
 known me<sub>[acc]</sub> ...  
 ‘As x had made my acquaintance ...’

<sup>8</sup> Of course, it must be assumed, as well, that focus can be assigned in a way independent from case, given that elements can be focused regardless of case assignment. In OI past participles and gerunds, as well as in MI gerunds, the arguments receive structural case. In addition, they may or may not be focused but that has no bearing on case licensing.

<sup>9</sup> The thematic role clearly is of crucial importance for default case. As an anonymous reviewer points out that, in dislocation structures, for instance, the morphological realization of default case is dependent on the thematic role of the corresponding argument in the main clause.

Moreover, the issue of “semantic licensing” is far more complex: consider that the DPs marked with default case often appear in environments where they express introducing illocutionary acts, as in the hanging topic/left dislocation structures (Jacobs 1984; Krifka 2001; Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010). In such contexts, default case marked DPs occur in “an initiating speech act that requires a subsequent speech act, like an assertion, question, command, or curse about the entity that was selected.” (Krifka 2001: 25)

- (34) Conosciutami, ...  
 known-me<sub>[acc]</sub> ...

On the contrary, in OI, both Subject and Object receive structural case, which follows from the presence of Tense in the OI participle clause. Since both arguments can receive structural nominative or accusative in OI, it follows that neither argument needs to be focal.

Furthermore, the difference between Italian and German illustrated in Section 2.5 lies in the structural deficiency of adverbial nonfinite clauses in German: if neither the Tense Phrase nor the Focus Phrase are projected in the German nonfinite adverbial clause, it would follow that such clauses in German cannot be “absolute” at all, in the sense of projecting a lexicalized external argument. I believe that such a conclusion will extend to all of Germanic with the exception of English, however I will not pursue this line of reasoning here.

To conclude this section, consider that the argument crucially relies on the assumption that default case can only be assigned in the presence of a focus feature. In principle, the absence of a focus feature in the subordinate infinitival clause would then account for the absence of default case in *\*It seems (John) to be likely to win*. In such a structure, the subject *John* is interpretable in the sense of receiving a theta role, but fails to be assigned case in the absence of a focus projection. If default case could be spelled out freely, thus saving a derivation which otherwise would crash in the absence of structural case, it is less clear why such a structure should not be acceptable (but see Schütze 2001: 208-209 for discussion).

#### 4. Word order

As we have seen, the word order of MI participles can appear to be case of V-to-Comp superficially speaking. However, this not a necessary conclusion. In particular, the analysis needs to consider some facts of information structure.

Consider a well-known independent difference between OI and MI main clauses: In the OI main clause, focused arguments can appear in the sentence initial position, as in (35) (e.g., Fischer & Alexiadou 2001; Benincà 2006):

- (35) L' uno si fece avanti, e disse: - Messere, io sono.  
 the one self made forward and said: - Sire, I am  
 (*Novellino* 1.19, p. 174, 2-3)  
 ‘One of them stepped forward and said: Sir, it’s me.’

In MI, the equivalent argument must appear in the post-verbal position (e.g. Belletti 1999: 14):<sup>10</sup>

- (36) Sono io.  
 Am I

<sup>10</sup> There are still Romance varieties, and some Italian ones, in which focus can be expressed pre-verbally, in a fashion similar to example (35), such as Sardinian (Mensching & Remberger 2010) and some South Italian dialects (Cruschina 2010; Paoli 2010).

‘It’s me’

Suppose, then, that the V1 pattern of MI follows from information structure in the following way: At some point in the historical development, a new information structure pattern is generalized in the sense that focused elements surface post-verbally. Language learners infer from this that the verb raises higher than such a focus position and this, of course, for reasons entirely independent from agreement or tense.<sup>11</sup>

Belletti (1999) assumes a low focus position dominating the VP, in which inverted subjects are case licensed, given the assumption that no case licensing can apply within the VP. Such a claim, in fact, anticipates the present default case analysis, as is obvious from the following passage:

- (37) [...] I will assume that Focus is a syntactic feature heading a functional projection in the clause structure, thus creating a regular checking configuration. Under this proposal, the syntactic feature in question has licensing abilities. In a broader perspective, we can assume that Case is not the only licenser of overt DPs in the clause. It is probably the most typical widespread one, but others are available as well. Focus is one of them in this view. (Belletti 1999: 15)

Consider that the subject argument in absolute environments typically is focal (e.g., Szabolcsi 2009). For present purposes, it suffices to assume the position of such focal subjects is a low Focus Phrase, as in Belletti (1999), lower than the inflectional field and dominating the VP. The MI data follow from this, if default case assignment is understood as focus case assignment. The DP subject in MI raises to [Spec, Focus] and surfaces as nominative, which is the designated default case morphology in Italian. The nonfinite verb raises higher, but this is not due to the need of checking of inflectional features in the nonfinite clause, but because V-raising to Infl is a generalized option.

Belletti (1990) assumes that V-raising to Comp is necessary for case assignment to the subject. Note, however, that cases in which unaccusative participles cooccur with a lexical argument are attested also in the presence of a filled Comp, as in the examples (38-39):

- (38) *Benché migliorate le condizioni del capitano del Napoli,*  
 although improved the conditions of-the captain of-the Naples  
**Spalletti** sembra orientato a non rischiarlo dall’ inizio.  
 Spalletti seems oriented to not risk-him from-the beginning  
 ‘Even if the conditions of the team captain have improved, the coach does not want to let him play from the beginning.’  
 (<https://www.pianetazzurro.it/tag/insigne-partira-dalla-panchina/>; consulted on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021)

<sup>11</sup> Presumably, this change applies in the immediate post-medieval period. In fact, the V1 pattern of participle clauses is predominant already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Egerland 1996: 190-193).

- (39) l' inverno portò a casa qualcosa come 49 cm stimati  
 the winter brought to home something like 49 cm estimated  
 fra una nevicata e l'altra, *benché caduti tutti a*  
 between one snowfall and the-other althoughfallen all in  
*Febbraio.*  
 February.  
 'Winter brought home some 49 cm of snow, although it all fell in February'  
 (<https://forum.meteonetwork.it/meteorologia/165381-inverni-anni-80-come-son-2.html>; consulted on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Given such cases, I conclude that the participial verb in MI does not need to reach Comp in order to case license the subject. However, the verb still precedes the subject. In MI, the linear order is Comp-V-Subject, as in (38-39), whereas in OI, we attest Comp-Subject-V as in example (4), here repeated as (40):

- (40) ... dicono li soprascritti savi che, *bene che quelli cotali uomini*  
 say the above-mentioned learned that, *well that those such men*  
*diventati animali*, ... la mente dentro rimaneva loro umana, ...  
*become animals*, ... the mind inside remained to-them human  
 '... and the wise say that, although those men had been transformed into animals,  
 ... their minds stayed human, ...'  
 (*Fatti d'Enea*: Chap. 27, p. 43, 21-24)

This difference, however, follows from the assumption that in OI, the subject can receive structural case in the participial [Spec, Infl]. At this point, the generalization stated in Table 1 needs to be revised: The actual difference between MI and OI lies merely in the fact that the lexicalized argument in MI is postverbal. The landing site of the V remains an open issue. In fact, the evidence is compatible with the hypothesis that V raises to Infl in both OI and MI.

An additional difference between OI and MI lies in the fact prepositional complements may appear to the left of the V in OI (example (41) from Egerland 2010: 887):

- (41) *Di poca cosa tormentati*, in molte cose saremo ben disposti.  
 of small thing tormented in many things (we)will-be well disposed  
 'While we are tormented by small things, we will be rewarded in many other ways.'  
 (Bono Giamboni, *Libro*, chap. 8, par. 8)

Such data, however, do not imply anything concerning the scope of V-raising. The occurrence of preverbal complements in OI may stem from the scrambling property of OI, discussed at length in Poletto (2012). In other words, in OI, there may be a scrambling position available for prepositional phrases as in (41).

## 5. Conclusion

While in MI, V1 is mandatory in absolute constructions, no such restriction is operative in OI. On the surface, such a fact could be interpreted as a sign of residual V-to-Comp movement in MI. If so, the V1 pattern in MI absolute constructions could be understood as a continuation of the V2 restriction attested in OI. However, this is not the case: OI participles targeted a position lower than Comp and, hence, the V1 pattern of MI is an innovation rather than a residue from the earlier stage.

Moreover, there is no direct link between the change in word order patterns emerging from Table 1. The difference between the two grammars lies in the interaction of independent properties of OI and MI: First, in OI, two arguments can be case licensed because of the presence of a Tense Phrase. In MI, where no Tense Phrase is projected, nominative can only be licensed by focus as an instance of default case assignment. Second, a general change relating to information structure has as its consequence that a focused argument is realized post-verbally in MI, which explains the obligatory V1 pattern.

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