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***For an information structure typology:
Cleft sentences
in a Gallo-Italian dialect***

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Outline

1. Introduction: Cleft sentences in Bergamasco
2. Corpus description and research questions
3. Results of the analysis
4. Conclusion: Discussion of findings

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Cleft sentence



It is the wife that decides

It is [the wife]_i that_i decides

«a complex sentence structure consisting of a matrix clause headed by a copula and a relative or a relative-like clause whose relativized argument is coindexed with the argument of the copula»
(Lambrecht 2001: 467)

Cleft sentence

“The two-clause sequence of a cleft expresses a logically simple proposition: the sentence *it is the wife that decides* is semantically equivalent to the canonical noncopular sentences *The wife decides*”

Cleft sentence:

its function is that of specifying the value of a variable in a presupposed open proposition.

In *It is the wife that decides*

the relative clause conveys the presupposition ‘x decides’; the variable x of the open clause is specified by the clefted phrase (therefore x = *the wife*).

Bergamasco

- a non official variety, at the boundaries of the local language repertoire
- belonging to Eastern Lombard (or *Transabduan* ‘beyond Adda river’; *origo*: Milan), together with dialects of Brescia, Cremona and Mantova

Bergamasco < Eastern Lombard < Lombard < Gallo-Italian < Northern dialects... < Romance ...

Why this study?

- a first step in filling a descriptive gap in the grammar of Bergamasco;
- a contribution to a typology of structure information:

Non standard varieties offer a privileged position to observe linguistic features considered undesirable in standard varieties.

Outline

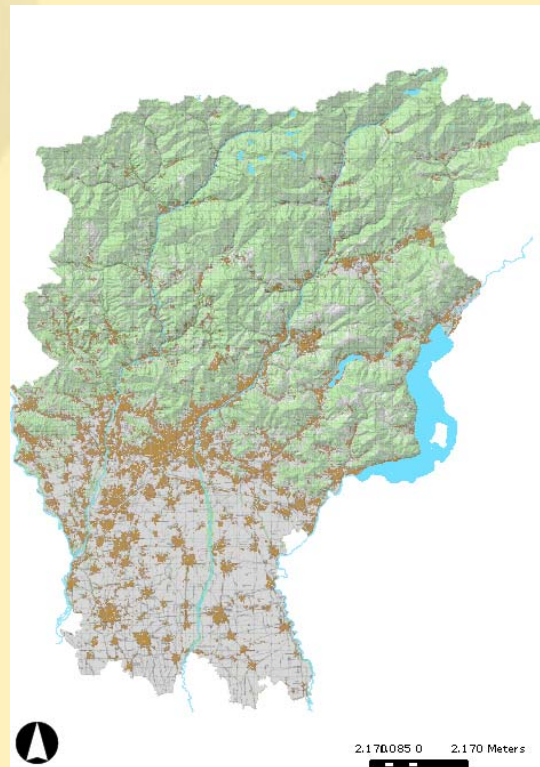
1. Introduction: Cleft sentences in Bergamasco ✓
2. **Corpus description and research questions**
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the corpus (Anesa/Rondi 1981) +

a collection of 54 fairy tales told orally by 26 native speakers and transcribed (phonemic-based transcription system; see *RID* 1977-1981)



Lombardy >



Province of Bergamo >



valleys of Bergamo

The corpus

a collection of 54 fairy tales told orally by 26 native speakers and transcribed:

estimated corpus size: 109.000 words

textual genre: narrative discourse

Fairy tales orally delivered to customary audience

Research questions

1. Are there clefts in Bergamasco?
2. What are their structural properties?
3. What is their function as far as information structure is concerned both at the utterance and at the discourse level ?

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1. Introduction: Cleft sentences in Bergamasco ✓
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1. Are there clefts in Bergamasco?

49 occurrences (*+ 2 in Italian)

Clefts are well-distributed among speakers
(present in the speech of 18 speakers = 69%)

Corpus	frequency	Normalized freq. per 10.000 words
<i>Bergamasque Fairy Tales</i> (109.000 words)	49 +2*	4,7
<i>LIP = spoken Italian</i> (Roggia 2009) (490.000 words)	180	3,7

Example (1)



Ó ìst mé che l'=érå miå lü che
have realize.PP 1SG COMP 3SG=was NEG 3M.SG COMP

l'=éå cup-àt ol drago-dèle-sètte-tèste!
3SG=had kill-PP DET.M.SG dragon-of.the-seven-heads

‘I realized that it was not him that had killed the
seven headed dragon’

Example (2)

[– yes, but why are you carrying the door?]

Te=sé pò stàt té e dìm

2SG=AUX.PRS.2SG then be.PP 2SG to tell.INF=me

«tìres dré la pórtå» e mé é-e capìt de
pull.REFL behind the door and 1SG had understood of

tö=lå hö!

take.INF=it on

– it was you that told me: «take the door» and I
thought I had to carry it

2) structural properties

Subject clefts:

- copula and verb of subordinate clause show agreement (in person and number) with clefted NP;

Agreem. on COP and subordinate verb

l'=érå *mìå* *lï* *che* *l'=éå* *cup-àt* *ol*
3SG=COP.PST.IPFV NEG 3M.SG COMP 3SG=had kill-PP the
drago-dèle-sètte-tèste!
dragon-of.the-seven-heads

‘it was not him that had killed the seven headed dragon’

am=sé *nòtre* *che* *'m=ciàpa* *la curuna!*
1PL=COP.PRS.1PL 1.PL.F COMP 1PL=take.PRS.1PL the Crown

‘it will be us that will take [= inherit] the Crown’

2) structural properties

Subject clefts:

- copula and verb of subordinate clause show agreement (in person and number) with clefted NP;
- verb of subordinate clause can be in the infinitive (half of the occurrences)

Te=sé pò stàt té e dìm «tìres
2SG=AUX.PRS.2SG then be.PP 2SG to tell.**INF**=me pull.REFL
*dré la pórtà» – it was you that told me
behind the door*

2) Structural properties of temporal clefts

- temporal adverbial:
usually an NP ('the whole day', 'two days', '100 years') with a duration meaning;
2 cases of PrepP ('ever since time_x');
- copula does not agree with NP, diverging from Italian, where the copula does agree in number with NP (sg vs. pl.)

2) Structural properties of temporal clefts

“m gh'avrèh amò öna ròba de domandaga / he 'l gh'èh vergót de mangià perché *l'è töt ol dé che 'm camina* / m'à amò d'mangià / e 'm gh'à fàm”

‘we would have something else to ask, if you have something to eat because we have been walking all day long, we haven't eaten yet and we are hungry’

l'=è *töt* *ol* *dé* *che 'm camina*

3SG=COP.PRS whole the day COMP we walk

Since-clefts: ‘since time_x’

’ndóe sarà=l chél vîl suldât / che só ché ’ssè
where be.FUT-3.SG.M that cowardly soldier COMP be.1SG here so

famådå / câ l’=è finå de gér sérå che mange
hungry COMP 3SG=is ever since last night that eat.1SG

piö?
anymore

‘where will that cowardly soldier be? I am so hungry
because I have not been eating since last night

2) Structural properties of temporal clefts

l'=è dòi nòc che só ché a spetà /
3SG=be.PRS.3SG two nights COMP be.1SG here to wait-INF

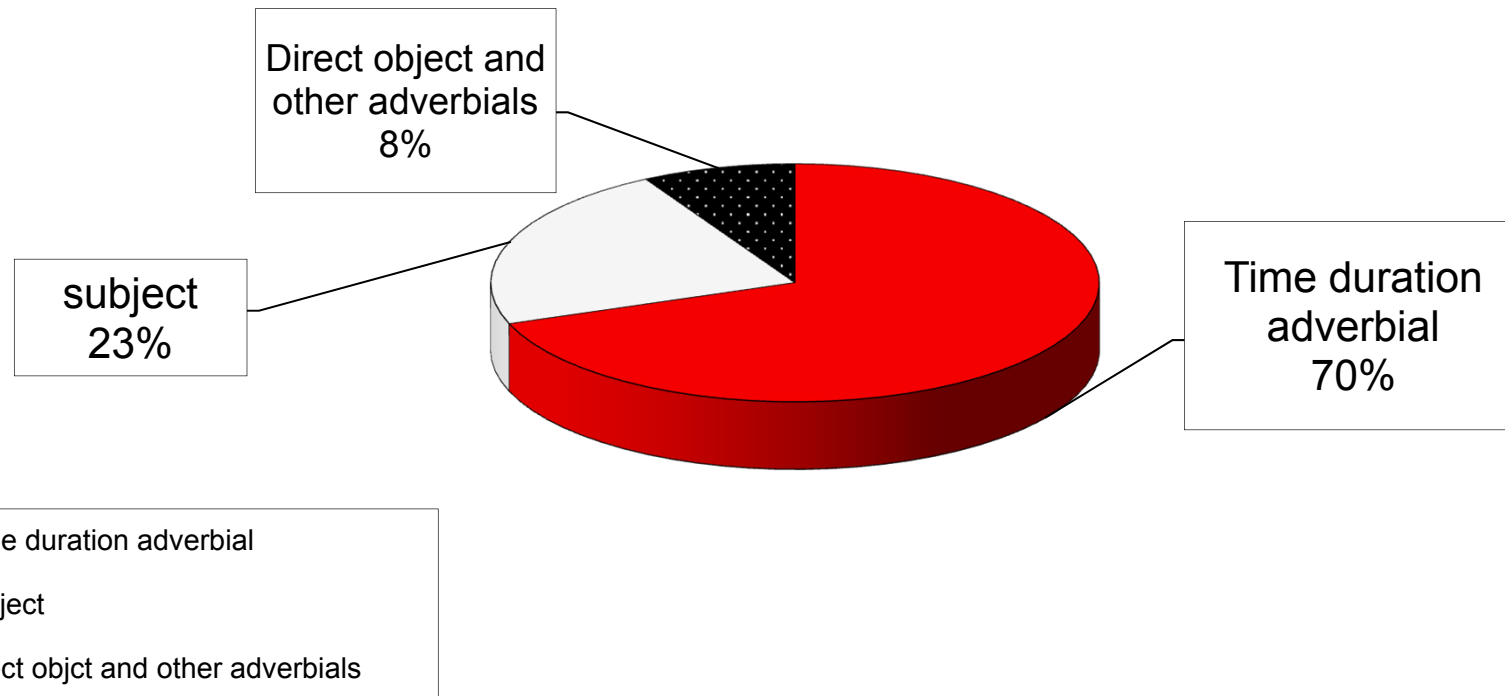
e 'l=vé nigü
and 3SG=comes nobody

‘I have been waiting for two nights and nobody is coming’

Clefted phrase: Syntactic role

<i>Syntactic role of clefted phrase in subordinate clause</i>	frequency	%
time duration adverbial	34	70%
subject	11	22%
direct object and other adverbials	4	8%
TOT.	49	100%

Clefted Phrase: Syntactic roles



3) inform. structure: utterance level

At the utterance level all clefts can be split up in focus and presupposition, as shown by the negation test and by the question test

l'=è stàc un ministro dè-la còrte de-l rè
3SG=AUX COP.PP a minister of-the court of-the king

che à ferit ol sò gàl
that has wounded the your rooster

‘It was a minister of the king who wounded your rooster’

3) inform. structure: discourse level

At the discourse level the first group of clefts (i.e. non temporal clefts) typically express corrective or contrastive focus

3) inform. structure: discourse level

– *am sè nòtre che 'm ciàpa la curuna!* –

am=sé *nòtre che* *'m=ciàpa* *la curuna!*

1PL=be.PRS.1PL 1PL.F COMP 1PL=take.PRS.1PL the Crown

‘it will be us that will take [= inherit] the Crown’

3) inform. structure: discourse level

gh'=ó ché ö falì d'polènta / làc / e ö falì de halàm /
I.have.got here a bit of polenta milk and a bit of salami

che *l'=è* *mìa tàt* *ca* *m'=à* *copàt ol sunì*
COMP 3SG=COP NEG long COMP 1PL=we.have killed the pork
'I have got here a bit of polenta, milk and salami,
because we have just killed the pork'

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 - a. Why are time clefts so frequent in our corpus?**
 - b. Do they have a specific discourse function?**

a) high frequency of time clefts: Why?

- strong correlation between the high incidence of time clefts and narrative texts
- under certain conditions temporal clefts seem to be the unique (or preferred) structure to provide a duration meaning (at a more advanced grammaticalization stage than that suggested for Italian by Scarano 2003).

“gh’ó ché ö falì d’ polènta / làc / e ö falì de halàm /
che *l’è mìa tàt ca m’ à copàt ol sunì*”

‘I have got here a bit of polenta, milk and salami, because
we have just killed the pork (lit: it not long since we killed
the pork)’

<i>l’=è</i>	<i>mìa tàt</i>	<i>ca</i>	<i>m’=à</i>	<i>copàt ol sunì</i>
3SG=COP	NEG long	COMP	1PL=we.have	killed the pork

Quando *l’è ön ’ùra / che l’è ’ndàc chèl lé / ’l ne ’é*
ön óter

‘as that guy had left since an hour ago, another guy
arrived’

a specific discourse function?

Ah pòvera mè! / *l'è tace àgn ca só ché / e
ga só mài ri-àda a ciapà ü ca l'è bù / lèsc e
da scrìf!*

l'=è tace àgn ca só ché

3SG=COP many years COMP be.1SG here

‘oh, dear me! I have been here for many years
and I could never find someone that could write
and read!

a specific discourse function?

Temporal cleft provides a temporal frame to following clause. The following clause provides the more significant meaning, a kind of textual climax

“the information in the *it*-clefts, though discourse-initial, is background material – subordinate in importance (in terms of what the discourse is about) to what follows “(Prince 1978).

Quando *l'è òn 'ùra / che l'è 'ndàc chèl lé / 'l ne 'é òn óter* ‘as that guy had left since an hour ago, another guy arrived’

IT WAS JUST A YEAR AGO THAT THE CITY'S MAJOR BANKS LAUNCHED ... THE PHILADELPHIA MORTGAGE PLAN ... TO FOSTER INVESTMENT IN OLDER NEIGHBORHOODS.

Today, PMP is still in business and going strong. The thirteen ... banks ... have 1,037 mortgages in force for a total of \$10.7 million.

(ex. 46 in Prince 1978: 901).

“The *it*-clefts in 46 have the (sub-)function of bringing the reader up to date so that s/he can appreciate the actual ‘news’, in both cases set off as the second (and final) paragraph). [...] Note that, in 46 [...], the information in the *it*-clefts, though discourse-initial, is background material – subordinate in importance (in terms of what the discourse is about) to what follows” (Prince 1978: 902).

Conclusions: towards a typology of cleft sentences

two different kinds of information structure
expressed by clefts:

- a) Contrastive focus, i.e. the clefted element (typically a subject NP) carries a counter-presupposition meaning;
- b) Completive, non contrastive focus; typically with the clefted element as a time duration adverbial in the form of a NP; more advanced stage of grammaticalization in comparison to Italian

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Thank you!
Grazie per l'attenzione!

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