Free relatives as defective *wh*-elements: evidence from the North-Western Italian dialects

Nicola Munaro
University of Padova

0. Introduction

The aim of this work is to provide an analysis of the internal structure of a class of *wh*-items attested in some Piedmontese, Valdotain and Ligurian dialects; the proposed hypothesis relies on the assumption that such interrogative elements are cognate with the demonstrative corresponding to English *that* and are therefore analyzable as instances of free relatives inside which the predication of the *wh*-element is missing; it will also be shown how this approach can account for some peculiar distributional properties of these items in main *wh*-questions in the North-Western Italian dialects under discussion.¹

The article is organized as follows: in section 1 I analyze the data reported in the *Atlante Italo-Svizzero* concerning the distribution of the demonstrative corresponding to *that* and the *wh*-element corresponding to *what* in the North-Western Italian dialects; in section 2 I present some evidence from various Northern Italian varieties showing that the demonstrative *that* can be used as an interrogative item; in section 3 I discuss the use and

¹ An earlier version of this work has appeared as part of the sixth chapter of Munaro (1997) and of the fourth chapter of Munaro (1999). In the elaboration of the ideas presented here I have benefitted from discussions with Paola Benincà, Guglielmo Cinque and Jean Yves Pollock whom I thank here; thanks are also due to the audience of Going Romance 1999 for helpful comments and suggestions.
the interpretation of *quello che* in free relatives and in embedded questions in standard Italian; in section 4 I present some data concerning the use of the demonstrative form *kwe(šu)* in interrogative contexts in some Ligurian dialects; in section 5 I analyze the distribution of the *wh*-item *kwe* in Central-Northern Piedmontese and I propose a plausible account of the internal structure and of the distributional properties of this element in Borgomanerese; the proposed analysis is extended in section 6 to account for the distribution of *quoi* in French main *wh*-questions; section 7 contains an hypothesis about the feature matrix for *wh*-demonstratives and section 8 is a summary of the main theoretical proposals put forth in the paper.

1. **The data of the AIS (1919-1926)**

The data reported in the *Atlante Italo-Svizzero* concerning the demonstrative pronoun *quello* and the interrogative pronoun *cosa* in the North-Western Italian area can be summarized in the following scheme (the relevant maps are VI 1113 and VIII 1589):

(1)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>what</th>
<th>that</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ligurian:</td>
<td><em>cos(a)/cose/cusi</em></td>
<td><em>kwelo/kwelu/kolu</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Piedmontese:</td>
<td><em>cosa</em></td>
<td><em>lo/lu</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Piedmontese:</td>
<td><em>kwe/kwa</em></td>
<td><em>lon/lun</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern-Piedmontese:</td>
<td><em>kwe</em></td>
<td><em>kul/lu</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdotain:</td>
<td><em>kye</em></td>
<td><em>(t)sò/sèn</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the comparison between the Ligurian, Piedmontese and Valdotain varieties we can draw the two following descriptive generalizations:

(a) only in the Ligurian dialects, which have the forms *kwélo/kwelu/kolu* for the demonstrative *that*, is attested the form *cosa* (or variants of it) for the *wh*-phrase *what*;
(b) the Central-Northern Piedmontese dialects and Valdotain, where the wh-phrase what is expressed mainly by (variants of) the form kwe, lack the form kwélo/kwélù of the demonstrative.

It is extremely tempting to interpret this situation as follows: the form kwe attested in Piedmontese (and Valdotain) derives from the reduction, through the loss of the second syllable, of the originary demonstrative form kwe(lo/lu) which has shifted to the wh-use and has been replaced in its demonstrative use by alternative forms.2 The hypothesis of a shift from demonstrative to interrogative use is empirically supported by the following data from the AIS map VI 1113 (...cosa ne fareste? = what would you do with it?); the examples reported in (2a-c) are taken from the dialects of Pianeza, Cavaglià and Sauze di Cesana (in Northern, Central and Western Piedmont respectively):

(2) a. kul è chi nu fe?
   that is that cl-do?
 b. lun chi na fey?
   that that cl-do?
 c. kela cu nèm farìa?
   that that cl-do?

These examples from AIS clearly show that in the Piedmontese dialects the wh-item what was expressed with the demonstrative that followed by the complementizer, which provides substantial support for the hypothesis proposed above.3

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2. Interestingly, all of these alternative forms are used themselves nowadays as wh-items, as will be shown below; this fact provides strong empirical support, from a diachronic perspective, to the hypothesis that there is indeed a tendency of the demonstrative forms to undergoing a semantic shift as a result of which they can be used as interrogative wh-items.

3. Another piece of evidence in favour of the hypothesis put forth here is the following: according to the AIS data, in the whole Piedmontese area there is only one dialect that has a demonstrative which is similar to the one found in Ligurian, namely the one spoken in Ornavasso (near Verbania, in Northern
Free relatives as defective wh-elements: evidence from the North-Western Italian dialects

2. The demonstrative *quello* as wh-element in some Northern Italian varieties

The interrogative use of the demonstrative corresponding to Italian *quello* is in fact well attested in some North(-Western) Italian dialects, where the demonstrative can be used both in main and in embedded interrogative contexts as a wh-element meaning *what*; in these cases the wh-phrase is invariably followed by the complementizer.

2.1. The Valdotain dialects

Some Franco-Provençal Valdotain varieties, for which the AIS reports the demonstrative form *sèn*, confirm the existence of a connection between the wh-phrase *what* and the demonstrative *that*.

In the Southern Valdotain variety spoken in Chatillon as well as in the Northern Valdotain dialect of Courmayeur we find indeed the form *sen-che* (as exemplified respectively in (3) and (4)):

\[(3)\]  
a. *sen-che* fi-yen? 
  that-that do-cl? 
  ‘what shall we do?’

  b. *sen-che* t' a-t feit?  
  that-that cl have-cl done?  
  ‘what have you done?’

\[(4)\]  
a. *sen-che* fièn-nô?  
  that-that do-cl?  
  ‘what shall we do?’

  b. dl-me *sen-che* meudgie Marie

Piedmont), where we find the form *kwel*; interestingly, in this variety the form of the interrogative is not *kwe* (as in all the dialects spoken in the surrounding areas) but *ke*. 
Basing on the fact that sèn is reported in the AIS as demonstrative, the form *sen-che* is straightforwardly analyzable as deriving from an agglutination of the demonstrative to the complementizer.\(^4\)

### 2.2. The Central-Northern Piedmontese dialects

Empirical evidence for a close relationship between demonstratives and interrogative pronouns is provided by some Central and Northern Piedmontese varieties as well.

Let’s consider for example the Provençal variety of Rodoretto di Prali, in the Germanasca valley (west of Turin), where the *wh*-phrase *what* is expressed by the form *soc*:

\[(5)\] a. e mi, soc minjou-lò?
and I, that eat-cl?

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\(^4\) If the hypothesis of the agglutination of demonstrative and complementizer (that is confirmed by the informants’ intuitions) is indeed correct, the fact that in (3a-b) and (4a) the subject pronoun is encliticized onto the inflected verb shows that the alleged process of merging of the two originary morphemes is by now completed, as the presence of the complementizer is usually incompatible with inversion (which is highlighted by the contrast between the examples in (6) and (7) from Torinese in the main text). In the Central Valdostain variety spoken in St Nicolas we find the form *kwe* cooccurring with inversion between inflected verb and subject clitic:

\[(i)\] kwe fant-i?
that do-cl?
‘what do they do?’

For an exhaustive treatment of the syntactic properties of the subject clitic pronouns of the Valdostain Franco-Provençal varieties see Roberts (1993).
Free relatives as defective wh-elements: evidence from the North-Western Italian dialects

‘and me, what shall I eat?’
b. *soc al aourè-lò dit Giorgio?*
   what cl would-have-cl said George?
   ‘what would George have said?’
c. *sabbou pa soc (a) fase Jan*
   know not what (cl) does Jan
   ‘I don’t know what Jan does’

Considering the fact that the demonstrative *sò* is attested in the AIS in this geographical area, the form *soc* is most likely resulting from the merging with the complementizer (especially in view of the indirect question reported in (5c)).

Similarly, in the dialect of Turin we find, beside normal interrogative structures employing the *wh*-phrase *cos(a)* exemplified in (6), interrogative structures introduced by the demonstrative *lon* followed by the complementizer, as exemplified in (7):

(6) a. *còs i dev-ne catè?*
   what cl must-cl buy?
   ‘what do I have to buy?’
b. *còsa it l’has-to fait?*
   what cl it-have-cl done?
   ‘what have you done?’

(7) a. *lon ch’i devo catè?*
   that that-cl must buy?
   ‘what do I have to buy?’
b. *lon ch’it l’has fait?*
   that that-cl it-have done?
   ‘what have you done?’
Again, *lon* was attested in the AIS in Central Piedmontese as demonstrative and is nowadays used as *wh*-item in the same varieties.⁵

2.3. The Northern Lombard dialects

The interrogative use of the demonstrative *quello* in main interrogative sentences is also attested in some Northern Lombard varieties, among which the one spoken in Albosaggia (near Sondrio) in Valtellina, where, exactly as in the structures exemplified in (3)-(5), the interrogative-demonstrative is by now agglutinated with the complementizer *ca* that follows it immediately:

(8) a. *chel-ca mai?*
    that-that eat?
    ‘what shall I eat?’

   b. *chel-ca fiv adess?*
    that-that do now?
    ‘what are you doing now?’

More generalized is the interrogative use of the demonstrative element in indirect questions, as exemplified in (9) again with the dialect of Albosaggia, where the demonstrative *chel* means *what*:⁶

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⁵ Differently from what happens in (3)-(5), in (7) the demonstrative form does not agglutinate with the complementizer; nonetheless, the contrast between (6) and (7) highlights the existence of a close connection between *wh*-demonstratives and the presence of the complementizer in these North-Western Italian varieties.

⁶ More generally, in all the Eastern Lombard dialects examined the demonstrative *chél* (invariably followed by the complementizer) is employed in embedded questions to express the *wh*-phrase *what*:

(i) a. *g'ò dumandà chél che l'à fat*
     him have asked that that cl-has done
     ‘I have asked him what he has done’
Free relatives as defective wh-elements: evidence from the North-Western Italian dialects

(9) a. al so chel c'al-fa al Gianni
   it know that that-cl-does the John
   'I know what John does'
   b. dim chel c'al-maja la Maria
tell-me that that-cl-eats the Mary
   'tell me what Mary eats'

Particularly striking is the pattern found in embedded questions in the dialect spoken in Monno, in the higher part of the Val Camonica, in North-Eastern Lombardy:

(10) a. dim col che la maja la Maria
tell-me that that cl-eats the Mary
   'tell me what Mary eats'
   b. m-domandio de col che j-à ciacolà
myself-ask of that that c-have spoken
   'I wonder about what they have spoken'

(11) a. 'I so miga cü ch' à ciacolà con la Maria
   it know not those that have spoken with the Mary
   'I don't know who has spoken with Mary'
   b. i domandarò cü che à telefonà 'stasera
him will-ask those that have phoned tonight
   b. so mia de chél che i à parlât
know not of that that cl-have spoken
   'I don't know about what they have spoken'

The same fact is attested in the Central Italian variety spoken in Fontana Liri (near Frosinone):

(ii) m dumand chéll ch nu siane fatt
myself ask that that not are done
   'I wonder what they have not done'
'I will ask him who has phoned tonight'

As exemplified in (10) and (11), in Monnese embedded questions the *wh*-items *what* and *who* are expressed by the forms *col* and *cui* respectively, the singular and plural form of the demonstrative *quello*, which provides further empirical evidence for our hypothesis.\(^7\)

\(^7\). That the *wh*-item *chi* can display plural verbal agreement is shown by the Venetian example reported in (i) where the past participle bears a plural masculine agreement morpheme:

(i) *chi ze stai?*
who is been?
‘who is the culprit?’

Moreover, according to Bellotto (1994) in the Friulian dialect of Andreis the *wh*-item *who* can have either singular or plural agreement with a finite lexical verb:

(ii) a. *cui puartal al pan?*
who brings the bread?

b. *cui puart al pan?*
who bring the bread?
‘who brings the bread?’

With the verb *have cui* admits in the present only the plural agreement:

(iii) a. *cui al fam?*
who has hunger?

b. *cui ani fam?*
who have hunger?
‘who is hungry?’
3. *Quello che* in standard Italian

In standard Italian the demonstrative *quello* can occur as the element heading a free relative clause, where it refers to a specific entity belonging to a known set:

(12) a. *quello che* hanno comprato non mi piace  
    that that have bought not me likes  
    'I don’t like the one they bought’  
    b. preferisco *quello che* hai comprato  
    prefer that that have bought  
    'I prefer the one you bought’

However, in the colloquial style *quello* is attested in embedded interrogative contexts with the meaning of *what*:⁸

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This particular feature of *chi* might possibly be connected to the fact that in the Northern Italian varieties in general as well as in standard Italian impersonal *si* triggers obligatorily plural masculine agreement on the adjective or on the past participle:

(iv) a. quando *che se* se contenti/criticati,...  
     when that se is happy/criticized,...  
     b. quando *si è* felici/criticati,...  
     when *si* is happy/criticized,...  
     ‘when one is happy/criticized,...’

Noteworthy in this respect is also the existence, in some North-Eastern Italian dialects, of such alternative forms as *nisun(i)/qualchidun(i)* for *noone/someone*, where the ending *i* might be analyzed as a plural agreement morpheme.

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⁸ According to the native speakers’ judgement, *quello* in the examples in (13) can, on a rather sloppy stylistic level, be
(13) a. non so \textit{quello *(che)} ha comprato
    not know \textit{that \ that} has bought
    'I don't know what he has bought'

   b. ho chiesto loro \textit{quello *(che)} hanno visto
    have asked \textit{them that \ that} have seen
    'I have asked them what they have seen'

In (13) the complementizer can not be omitted, differently from what happens in real embedded questions, where the complementizer is excluded, as one can clearly see from the contrast between (13) and (14):

(14) a. non so \textit{cosa *(che)} ha comprato
    not know \textit{what (*that) has bought}
    'I don’t know what he has bought'

   b. ho chiesto loro \textit{cosa *(che)} hanno visto
    have asked \textit{them what (*that) have seen}
    'I have asked them what they have seen'

Moreover, the subordinate clause of (13) can be embedded under predicates selecting DP as well as CP complements (such as \textit{non sapere} or \textit{chiedere}), but not under predicates interpreted as meaning \textit{which one}. Note that if the embedded sentences of (13) contain a subjunctive, the resulting structure is ungrammatical (which is usually not the case in embedded questions):

(i) a. * non so \textit{quello che} abbia comprato
    not know \textit{that \ that} have bought
    'I don’t know what he has bought'

   b. * ho chiesto loro \textit{quello che} abbiano visto
    have asked \textit{them that \ that} have seen
    'I have asked them what they have seen'
selecting only CP complements (such as domandarsi), as shown by the different degree of grammaticality of (13)/(15) and (16):

(15) a. non so la soluzione / il motivo / i dettagli
don’t know the solution / the reason / the details
b. ho chiesto la soluzione / il motivo / i dettagli
I have asked the solution / the reason / the details

(16) a. ??mi domando quello che ha comprato
myself ask that that has bought
‘I wonder what he has bought’
b. ??mi domando quello che hanno visto
myself ask that that have seen
‘I wonder what they have seen’
c. ??mi domando la soluzione / il motivo / i dettagli
I ask myself the solution / the reason / the details

These two properties (that is, the impossibility of omitting the complementizer and the restriction concerning a specific class of predicates) lead us to analyze the embedded sentences of (13) as instances of free relative clauses for which I propose an internal structure similar to the one hypothesized by Kayne (1994); I assume that the demonstrative quello, raising from the basic argumental position through the specifier of CP, lands in the specifier position of the DP projection, while the complementizer che heads the CP selected by D°, as represented in (17):

(17)  [DP quello [CP t quello che [IP pro hanno comprato t quello]]]

It looks fairly natural to consider embedded interrogatives as the structural domain inside which the wh-use of the demonstrative originated; a plausible assumption is that in embedded questions involving a demonstrative wh-element the predication of the demonstrative (heading the relative clause) is trivially fulfilled by the CP selected by the head D° (whose specifier I take to be occupied by the wh-item itself).
4. The Ligurian dialects

An interesting set of data which strongly suggests that the hypothesis put forth above might indeed be correct comes from some Ligurian dialects spoken in the geographical area around Genoa.

Let’s consider first some examples from the dialect of Arenzano, where the *wh*-element *which* in its interrogative use displays a curious behaviour in matrix *wh*-questions: when used adjectivally, that is followed by a nominal head, it is realized in the form *che* (a possibility existing also in standard Italian), while in its pronominal use, that is as bare *wh*-item meaning *which one*, it can be substituted by the demonstrative form *kwelu*; the two possibilities are exemplified in (18) and (19) respectively:

(18) a. *che culéga u ratéla cun tí?*
    what colleague cl quarrels with you?
    ‘which colleague quarrels with you?’

   b. *che libru ti e sermüu?*
    what book cl have chosen?
    ‘which book have you chosen?’

(19) a. *kwelu l’e cút a scoziu?*
    that cl is that cl you has criticized?
    ‘which one criticized you?’

   b. *cun kwelu ti te vedi?*
   with that cl yourself see?
   ‘which one do you meet?’

Even more interesting, in the light of the AIS data presented above, are the following examples from the dialect of Fontanigorda, where the *wh*-element *which* is expressed with the form *kwe* (the very same form that is attested in the Central-Northern Piedmontese dialects with the meaning of *what*); in this variety the form *kwe* can
sometimes have, beside a pronominal use (exemplified in (21)), an adjectival use as well, as an alternative to the prevailing forms *che* and *quale* (as shown in (20)):

(20) a. *kwe libbri* ti sërni?
that book cl choose?
‘which book do you choose?’
b. *cun che/quale culèga* ti t e incuntròù?
with what/which colleague cl yourself have met?
‘which colleague have you met?’

(21) a. *kwe* ti sërni?
that cl choose?
‘which one do you choose?’
b. *kwe* t e sernùù?
that cl have chosen?
‘which one have you chosen?’

Approximately the same pattern is found in the dialect spoken in Arzeno, where *kwe* can function both as adjective and as pronoun:

(22) a. *kwe culega* u l’a ratellòù cun ti?
that colleague cl-has quarrelled with you?
‘which colleague has quarrelled with you?’
b. *che/kwe libru* t’insërmi?
what/that book cl-choose?
‘which book do you choose?’

(23) a. *kwe* u te critiche?
that cl-you-criticizes?
‘which one criticizes you?’
b. *cun kwe* ti t’incuntri?
with that cl-yourself see?
As anticipated in section 1 above, I suggest analyzing the form *kwe* of these varieties as resulting from a process of truncation of the form *kwélu*, whose interrogative use is clearly attested in other Ligurian dialects (as witnessed by the examples in (19)).

Another dialect of this geographical area characterized by this peculiar use of the demonstrative is the one spoken in Cicagna; according to Cunéo (1997) in Cicagnino the demonstrative pronoun form *kölú* (corresponding to *quello*) can be used in main questions to express the *wh*-item *which*; as we can see in (24), interrogative *kölú* is followed in main interrogatives by the complementizer *che* and can function as subject, direct object, or prepositional object:

(24) a. *kölú* che t’ à *telefunò?*
   that that you has rung up?
   ‘which one has rung you up?’

b. *kölú* che t’ è *pestò?*
   that that cl have beaten?
   ‘which one have you beaten?’

c. *de kölú* che ti m’ è *parlò?*
   of that that cl me have spoken?
   ‘about which one have you spoken to me?’

This element can sometimes be used with a more neutral semantic characterization corresponding to the one of the *wh*-element *what*, as exemplified in (25b), this kind of usage is particularly frequent in embedded contexts (where *kölú* corresponds to the expression *quello che* of colloquial standard Italian, exemplified in (13) above):

(25) a. *kölú* che l’ è che ti m’ è *ditu?*
   that that cl is that cl me have told?
   ‘what is the thing that you have told me?’

b. *dime* *kölú* che ti gh’ è *acatò*
   tell-me that that cl him have bought
Free relatives as defective wh-elements: evidence from the North-Western Italian dialects

'tell me what you have bought him'

As we have just seen, in the Ligurian dialects the acquisition of a wh-feature is not associated with a replacement of the demonstrative by a different form; this is presumably due to the fact that in its wh-use the demonstrative retains the referential component of its semantics, which makes it still compatible with the original function.\(^9\)

Nonetheless, the data examined in this section provide further empirical support to the hypothesis that there is indeed a close connection between the wh-phrase kwe and the demonstrative form kwelu.

5. The wh-item kwe in the Piedmontese dialects

5.1. Kwe in Central-Northern Piedmontese

As already pointed out with reference to the AIS data, in the Central-Northern Piedmontese dialects kwe is attested as wh-item with the meaning of what; like the other demonstrative forms used interrogatively, it appears generally in sentence initial position and is immediately followed by the complementizer che; the examples reported in (26) and (27) are from the dialects of Borgofranco d'Ivrea and Livorno Ferraris:

\[(26) \quad \text{a. kwe che foma adess} \]
\[
\text{that that do now}
\]
\[
\text{‘what shall we do now?’}
\]

---

\(^9\) Given the absence of the complementizer and the particular semantic value associated with the demonstrative in this case, there is no need to postulate a relative clause structure for the wh-item in Ligurian; following Longobardi’s (1994) idea that the referentiality of a nominal expression is associated with the DP projection, one might suggest that, internally to the wh-phrase, the checking of the wh-feature by raising to [spec,DP] provides the constituent with referential features whereby the specific reading becomes available. In section 7 I will present a technically more detailed proposal exploiting this assumption.
b. *kwe che* devo catar?
   that that must buy?
   ‘what shall I buy?’

(27) a. *kwe ch’ i-mangg?*
   that that cl-eat?
   ‘what shall I eat?’

b. *kwe ch’ a-fann?*
   that that cl-do?
   ‘what are they doing?’

As expected, also in embedded questions the form *kwe* is followed by the complementizer *che* (as shown by the following examples from Livorno Ferraris):

(28) a. *i-sai nen kwe ch’ al faja Gianni*
   cl-know not what that cl-does John
   ‘I don’t know what John does’

b. *dimi kwe ch’ a mangia Maria*
   tell-me that that cl-eats Mary
   ‘tell me what Mary eats’

As shown by the examples examined in this section, in Central-Northern Piedmontese the *wh*-item *kwe* is associated with a less restricted potential reference with respect to what happens in the Ligurian varieties.\(^\text{10}\)

\(^{10}\) The form *kwe* is attested not only in Central-Northern Piedmontese, but also in the high Val Grana and in the high Val d’Esturo, in South-Western Piedmont:

(i) a. *kwe péi far?*
   that can do?
   ‘what can I do?’
5.2. *Kwe* in Borgomanerese

As observed by Tortora (1997), in the North-Western Piedmontese variety spoken in Borgomanero *wh*-items in general can optionally be followed by the complementizer both in matrix and in embedded questions:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(ii)} & \quad \text{*Kwe* a fan?} \\
& \quad \text{what cl-do?} \\
& \quad \text{"what do they do?"}
\end{align*}
\]

Parry (1997) suggests analyzing the form *kwe* attested in these dialects as the residue of a cleft structure; basing on the existence of the form *ko* in the variety of Rueglio, she proposes to analyze the form *kwe* of the dialect of Oglianico (exemplified in (ii)) as deriving from the expression *ko è che*, where *ko* merges with the copular verb *è*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{b. } & \quad \text{*Kwe* fasèn?} \\
& \quad \text{that do?} \\
& \quad \text{"what shall we do?"}
\end{align*}
\]

This hypothesis is supported, according to her, by the fact that in some varieties (such as the ones of Corio or Oglianico) the subject clitic pronoun *l(o)* enclites to the *wh*-item producing the form *kwe-l(o)*, as exemplified in (iii) again with the dialect of Oglianico:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(iii)} & \quad \text{*Kwel* che pos faje?} \\
& \quad \text{what that can do?} \\
& \quad \text{"what can I do?"}
\end{align*}
\]

Parry proposes therefore that the final stressed vowel of *kwe* derives from the copula of an inversion structure, pointing out that the agglutination of the pronoun would be unexplainable otherwise. The analysis proposed here accounts differently for the existence of such forms.
(29) a. chi (ca)l venja stasera?
   who (that)cl comes tonight?
   ‘who is coming tonight?’

   b. cus (ch)i mòngiu?
   what (that)cl eat?
   ‘what do they eat?’

   c. quòndu (c)i l à parlà?
   when (that)cl-has spoken?
   ‘when has he spoken?’

(30) a. i so mìja chi (c)i l à mangìà la torta
   cl-know not who (that)cl-has eaten the cake
   ‘I don’t know who ate the cake’

   b. i so mìja cus (ca) tal mòngi
   cl-know not what (that) cl-eat
   ‘I don’t know what you eat’

The only exceptional wh-item in this respect is kwe;11 Borgomanerese is the only dialect in which kwe is never followed by the complementizer either in matrix or in embedded questions:

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11. The form kwa was attested beside cus in Borgomanerese at the beginning of the XX century, when some residual cases of inversion between inflected verb and subject clitic pronoun appeared in crystallized expressions like the following (reported in Pagani (1919)):

   (i) a. kwa dis-tu?
      what say-cl?

   b. kwa zi-vu?
      what say-cl?
      ‘what do you think about that?’
Free relatives as defective wh-elements: evidence from the North-Western Italian dialects

(31) a. i so mija kwe (*ca) tal möngi
   cl-know not (*that) cl-eat
   'I don't know what you eat'

b. me i ciamn-mi kwe (*ca) tal fê
   I cl-ask-myself (*that) cl-do
   'I wonder what you do'

This fact can be interpreted as evidence that, unlike what happens in other dialects (and in standard Italian, as represented in (17)), in this case the landing site of the wh-element inside the embedded clause is not the specifier position of DP, the highest functional projection, but the specifier of a lower CP projection, which prevents, under some version of the doubly-filled Comp filter, the overt realization of the complementizer in the corresponding head:12

The wh-item kwa that we find in the examples in (i) has disappeared nowadays from the Piedmontese dialects but is attested in the AIS in some Central-Eastern Piedmontese varieties; if the hypothesis about the reduction of the demonstrative kwelù to kwe is correct, it looks in principle possible to extend the analysis to derive kwa from the interrogative kwal(a), which is occasionally attested in the AIS (for example in the Northern Piedmontese variety of Antronapiana in the Antrona valley).

12. That the option of omitting the complementizer in free relatives can be in some cases connected with the presence of the demonstrative quello is independently shown by complementizer deletion phenomena attested in 15th/16th century Italian varieties. The example in (iia) is from 15th century Tuscan (analyzed by Scorretti (1981) and Wanner (1981)) while the one in (ib) is an example of 16th century Venetian (from Benincà (1995)):

(i) a. nulla di quello _ mi fia possibile
   nothing of that _ me be possible
   'nothing of what may be possible for me'
b. *in quello _ desideré
   in that _ wish
   'in what you wish'

The omission of the complementizer is attested in modern standard Italian in free relatives introduced by *quanto*, which are semantically equivalent to the corresponding structure introduced by *quello che* analyzed in section 3 above:

(ii) a. *quello che* hai fatto non mi stupisce
   that have done not me astonishes
   'what you have done doesn’t astonish me’
b. *quanto _* hai fatto non mi stupisce
   how much _ have done not me astonishes
   'what you have done doesn’t astonish me’

The same holds when the free relatives exemplified in (ii) occur in comparatives:

(iii) a. hanno fatto più _ di *quello che* credevo
   have done more than that thought
b. hanno fatto più _ (di *quanto _* credevo
   have done more than how much _ thought
   'they have done more than I thought’

I assume that *quanto* in structures like (iiib) and (iiib) heads a Q(uantifier)P projection which, differently from *quello* in (iiia) and (iiia), does not raise up to the [spec,DP] position of the relative clause, but occupies the specifier of a lower CP projection (which inhibits the realization of the complementizer *che*); the structure I propose to assign to the free relatives of the examples in (ii) are the following:

(iv) a. [dp *quello D* [cp [che [dp pro hai [vp fatto *quello*]]]]]
b. [vp [cp [cp [quanto]]] [vp pro hai [vp fatto *quanto*]]]
Free relatives as defective wh-elements: evidence from the North-Western Italian dialects

(32) \[ [_{\text{IP}} \ i \ so \ mij\a \ [[_{\text{IP}} \ kwe \ [_{\text{IP}} \ tal \ möngi \ t_{\text{kwe}}]]]]] \]

The wh-item *kwe* is characterized in Borgomanerese by another peculiarity, namely the fact that, differently from the wh-item *cus*, it appears obligatorily *in situ* in a matrix question (as shown by the contrast between (33) and (34)):

(33) a. *cus* l’è ca tal serchi?
    what cl-is that cl-seek?
    ‘what are you seeking?’

   b. *cus* t’è mangià?
    what cl-have eaten?
    ‘what have you eaten?’

   c. *da cus* i Ôn parlà?
    of what cl-have spoken?
    ‘what have they spoken about?’

(34) a. tal serchi *kwe*?
    cl-seek that?
    ‘what are you seeking?’

   b. t’è mangià *kwe*?
    cl-have eaten that?
    ‘what have you eaten?’

   c. l’e *kwe*?
    cl-is that?
    ‘what is it?’


The data presented here provide further evidence that free relative clauses, and in particular those containing the demonstrative *quello*, represent a context in which the omission of the complementizer is made possible by peculiar structural conditions.
remnant IP-raising analysis): according to the authors, in a dialect like Bellunese (a North-Eastern Italian variety) the raising of the wh-item to the specifier position of OpP is followed by remnant IP raising to the specifier of FocusP and by adjunction of the inflected verb to the interrogative subject clitic generated in the head Int-Force⁵; a main wh-question like (35a) is assigned the structural representation in (35b):

(35) a. à-lo fat che?
    has-cl done what?
    ‘what has he done?’

    b. \[\text{Int-Force}[\text{Int-Force} \ à-lo][\text{Focus}][\text{IP} \ t \ \text{t}_\text{che}][\text{Focus}][\text{OpP}][\text{che}][\text{Op}^*] \ t_\text{IP}]]

I propose therefore to analyze Borgomanerese interrogative structures such as the ones exemplified in (34) as represented in (36):

(36) \[\text{Int-Force}[\text{XP} \ [\text{IP} \ t \ \text{tal möngi} \ t_{\text{kwe}}] \ X^*] [\text{OpP} [\text{CP} \ kwe \ [\text{IP}]] \ Op^*] \ t_\text{IP}]]

After wh-movement of the relative clause containing kwe to [spec,CP], remnant IP raises to the specifier of a higher projection of the CP-layer, thereby identifying from this c-commanding position the IP internal to the relative clause.¹³

¹³. The hypothesis that the interrogative use of a demonstrative form is indeed connected to the sentence internal occurrence of the same form in main interrogatives (hopefully in the way suggested in the text) gains empirical support from Bellunese itself, where the demonstrative kwel, differently from the ordinary wh-item kwal, can appear in a main question only in sentence internal position, as shown by the contrast between (iia) and (ib):

(i) a. à-tu ciot kwal/kwel?
    have-cl taken which/that?
    ‘which one have you taken?’
This analysis of wh-demonstratives as ‘masked’ free relatives crucially relies on the possibility of establishing a structural configuration which permits to satisfy one.

b. *kwel*/kwel à-tu ciot?
   which/that have-cl taken?
   ‘which one have you taken?’

Similarly, in Cicagnino *kolu* can appear not only in initial position followed by the complementizer, as we have seen in section 4 above, but also in sentence internal position:

(ii) a. *kolu* che ti vo?
       that that cl-want?
       ‘which one do you want?’

b. ti vo *kolu?*
   cl-want that?
   ‘which one do you want?’

If the analysis proposed in the text for Borgomanerese *kwe* is extendable to Monnese *kwe* then the sentence internal occurrence of the latter in main questions can be amenable to the same account:

(iii) a. ch’ à-l fat *kwe?*
       what has-cl done that?
       ‘what has he done?’

b. ch’ è-t cumprà *kwe?*
   what have-cl bought that?
   ‘what have you bought?’

The hypothesis that *kwe* in Monnese derives from the reduction of a demonstrative is supported by the fact that the demonstrative form reported in the AIS for this geographical area is *kwèl(a)*; as we have said in section 2.3 above, the form of the demonstrative is no more the same in Monnese nowadays, which is expected under the assumption that *kwèl* has been reduced to *kwè*.
requirement: the relative clause internal predication of the *wh*-element (i.e. the head of the relative clause itself), which amounts to a proper identification of its IP; I propose that this requirement can be satisfied through remnant IP-raising to a functional specifier position of the CP-layer.

In main *wh*-questions in which the demonstrative appears in sentence initial position followed by the complementizer (such as the ones analyzed in section 2 above), the *wh*-constituent (that is, the relative clause containing demonstrative and complementizer) raises to a specifier of the CP-layer (possibly the specifier of *OpP*) and eventually remnant IP-raising to a higher position makes the identification of the IP constituent internal to the relative clause possible.\(^{14}\)

\(^{14}\). The surface order is plausibly determined by further raising of the relative clause to the specifier of a higher CP-projection; such a movement operation is possibly triggered by some linearization condition banning final complementizers in Romance. Note that the hypothesis that demonstrative and complementizer in an example like (i) form a constituent behaving like any ordinary *wh*-phrase, hence moving to some operator position of the CP-layer, accounts for the fact that in Torinese the *wh*-item *lon* is the only one which admits the cooccurrence of complementizer and subject elitic inversion:

(i)  
\[ \textit{lon c'a l'a-lo fat?} \]
\[ \text{that that cl-has-cl done'?} \]
\[ \text{"what has he done?"} \]

An alternative possibility consists in treating the kind of *wh*-questions discussed in sections 2.1-2.3 as embedded free relatives lacking the main predicate and reanalyzed as main questions. A natural assumption is that the structure attested with *wh*-demonstratives is then extended to any *wh*-question, as shown by the fact that in Central-Northern Piedmontese *wh*-items are (or can be) followed by the complementizer.
6. French *quoi*

I suggest here an extension of the analysis proposed for examples like (34) to account for the sentence internal occurrence of French *quoi*, whose distributional properties strikingly resemble the ones of *kwe* in Borgomanerese.

As exemplified in (37), in French main *wh*-questions *quoi* must appear in sentence internal position and can not occupy the sentence initial position: 15

(37) a. *tu as fait quoi?*
   you have done what?
   ‘what have you done?’

b. *quoi tu as fait?*
   what you have done?
   ‘what have you done?’

According to Obenauer (1994) *quoi* is characterized by a higher degree of specificity than *que*; this fact is formalized in the assumption that *quoi* is endowed with a inherent feature [+determined].

15. It is noteworthy that when inversion between the subject clitic pronoun and the inflected verb obtains, *quoi* can not appear either in sentence initial or in sentence internal position:

(i)  a. *quoi as-tu fait?*
   what have-you done?

b. *as-tu fait quoi?*
   have-you done what?
   ‘what have you done?’

Interestingly, *quoi*’s incompatibility with subject clitic inversion is correctly predicted by the present hypothesis in conjunction with Pollock et alii’s (1999) analysis of the inversion between finite verb and subject clitic in French.
We can reasonably assume that this intrinsic characterization of *quoi* requires a proper form of identification; hence, the raising of *quoi* to the specifier position of the relevant projection of the CP layer is followed by (obligatory) remnant IP-raising to a higher functional specifier of the left periphery, as represented in (38):

\[
(38) \quad \left[ \text{Int-ForceP} \left[ \text{XP[IP, tu as fait t}_{\text{quoi}}]\right] \times^{*} \left[ \text{Opp[QP, quoi \ e]} \right] \text{CP}\right] \text{IP}]
\]

The hypothesis that the distribution of French *quoi* and Borgomanerese *kwe* can be amenable to the same account is strengthened by the fact that both these wh-items can optionally appear either in initial position or *in situ* when they are inside a prepositional phrase:

(39) a. *de quoi* a-t-il parlé?
    of what has-cl spoken?
    'what has he spoken about?'

b. *il-a parlé de quoi?*
    cl-has spoken of what?
    'what has he spoken about?'

(40) a. *da kwe* i ön parlà?
    of that cl-have spoken?
    'what have they spoken about?'

b. *i ön parlà da kwe?*
    cl-have spoken of that?
    'what have they spoken about?'

The fact that the two languages under discussion display optionality when the wh-item is part of a prepositional phrase can be interpreted as an argument in favour of the
hypothesis that the distribution of the two wh-elements must be traced back to the same underlying structural conditions.\(^{16}\)

7. A feature matrix for wh-demonstratives

In this section I propose a possible characterization, in terms of inherent semantic features, for demonstratives when they are used as wh-elements in interrogative contexts.

On the basis of evidence taken mainly from Spanish, Brugè (1996) analyzes demonstratives as elements characterized by the two following features: [+referential] / [+deictic].

I propose that the acquisition of the wh-feature implies at least the loss of the feature [+deictic], as shown by the impossibility for the wh-demonstrative kwel to cooccur with the deictic particle là in Bellunese; indeed (41a), where kwel is interpreted as which one, can only be a wh-question (in which remnant IP-raising has obviously applied), while (41b), where kwel is interpreted as a real demonstrative, is only a yes/no question:

\[
\begin{align*}
(41) & \ a. \ à-tu \ ciot \ kwel \ (*là)\? \\
& \hspace{1cm} \text{have-cl taken that (*there)?} \\
& \hspace{1cm} \text{‘which one have you taken?’} \\
& b. \ à-tu \ ciot \ kwel \ *(là)\? \\
& \hspace{1cm} \text{have-cl taken that *((there)?} \\
& \hspace{1cm} \text{‘have you taken that one?’}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{16}\) At the time being, I am not in a position to propose a plausible explanation for the optionality exemplified in (39) and (40). A very tentative hypothesis is that the presence of the preposition is a sufficient condition in order to provide the (defective) wh-item with inherent semantic content, hence to achieve some form of identification of the empty category inside it, thereby dispensing with remnant-IP raising in (39a) and (40a).
Since both in Bellunese and in the Ligurian dialects analyzed in section 4 the wh-demonstrative is interpreted as meaning which, that is, it requires the identification of a specific member out of a well-defined set, in these varieties the feature [+referential] must be maintained beside the new wh-feature.

Referring to Vanelli (1992)'s analysis according to which the vowel of the definite article in Italian can be considered epenthetic, I suggest assigning to the Ligurian wh-demonstrative forms kwe/lu/kölu the following internal structure.\(^{17}\)

\[(42) \quad [\text{DP kwe/lu} [\text{D}^0 \text{ lu}] t_{\text{kwel}u}]\]

Under this analysis, we can assume that in the Ligurian varieties the feature [+referential] is checked in overt syntax by raising of the wh-morpheme to [spec,DP], thereby providing the DP with sufficient referential content and dispensing with remnant-IP raising; this accounts for the fact that wh-demonstratives in Ligurian always appear in sentence initial position.\(^{18}\)

In the Piedmontese (including Borgomanerese), Valdotain and Lombard dialects the wh-demonstrative is interpreted as what, hence it does not require the identification of a specific member out of a set known both to the speaker and to the hearer; we can reasonably assume that in this case also the feature [+referential] has been lost and only the acquired wh-feature is retained.

\(^{17}\) I am borrowing this structural analysis of the demonstrative kwe/lu from Pollock et alii (1999), where it was introduced to account for the fact that the wh-item kwal can optionally appear either in sentence initial position or in sentence internal position in main wh-questions in Bellunese (as shown by the examples in (i) in footnote 13 above). Note that, as wh-demonstrative, kwe/lu can not appear in sentence initial position, which means, under the present analysis, that remnant-IP raising applies obligatorily in this case.

\(^{18}\) Alternatively, one might assume that, after remnant-IP raising has applied to target the specifier of FocusP, kwe/lu raises in turn past it to check the feature associated with the higher projection Int-ForceP; this approach would however leave open the question as to how the same derivation is not available in Borgomanerese.
Free relatives as defective wh-elements: evidence from the North-Western Italian dialects

8. Summary

In this paper I have proposed that the wh-item kwe attested in some North-Western Italian dialects is analyzable as deriving diachronically from the truncation of the demonstrative kwelu. This assumption has been empirically supported by the presentation of extensive synchronic evidence from various Northern Italian dialects and from standard Italian showing that the demonstrative corresponding to English that can function as wh-element in main or embedded interrogatives and in free relatives. In order to account for its sentence internal occurrence in main wh-questions in one of the examined varieties, I have argued that kwe can be viewed as an instance of free relative clause lacking the predication of the wh-item and that such inherent defectiveness can be made up for through the application of remnant-IP raising to a functional specifier of the CP layer higher than the one hosting kwe; this analysis has been carried over to account for the distributional properties of French quoi as well. Finally, I have proposed that, depending on the semantic value of the item involved, the acquisition of a wh-feature in demonstratives implies in some dialects the loss of the feature [+referential] while in others both the feature [+referential] and the feature [+deictic] are necessarily lost.

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