

NOTES ON VOCATIVE CASE: A CASE STUDY IN CLAUSE STRUCTURE*

ANDREA MORO

Università "Vita – Salute" San Raffaele, Milano

1. *Vocative Case in modern syntax: two questions*

One of the major achievements of modern syntax is that all the different relations that are standardly referred to as 'Case assignments' have been unified under a single syntactic relation, namely a specifier – head relation holding between a noun phrase and a proper functional head (see Chomsky 1995 and references cited there). In this paper I would like to address some questions concerning the nature of the so called 'Vocative Case' which naturally arise under such perspective. As a premise, let me notice that the literature concerning Vocative Case is unusually scarce, especially if compared with the literature concerning other Cases. I think that this is not accidental, for the very existence of a specific morphological Vocative Case has been often denied as will be shown on the base of some citations from classical works in the field.

In this paper I will focus on two conceptually distinct questions:

- (1) a. What is the internal structure of a phrase assigned a Vocative Case?
- b. What kind of structural environment does Vocative Case assignment require?

This paper is organized as follows: in section 2. diagnostics for Vocative Case will be discussed attempting to approach question (1a), including references to classical works; in section 3 we will focus on the distribution of Vocative Case in the left periphery, addressing the issue posed in question (1b). It goes without saying that the present work can only be considered as a preliminary attempt to approach the relatively poorly understood phenomena related to Vocative Case

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and does not by any means aim at reaching definitive conclusions on the issue; rather, the goal of this paper is to address some interesting questions and possibly refute some unadequate answers.

2. *Diagnostics for Vocative Case*

Is there a Vocative Case? The question is not trivial. Let us preliminary clarify the situation from a terminological point of view. We can distinguish between a ‘Vocative Case’ and a ‘Vocative Phrase’. Vocative Case is a(n overt) morphological mark assigned to a Vocative Phrase;¹ a Vocative Phrase, instead, is a noun phrase which does not belong to the thematic grid of a predicate and is used to attract someone’s attention, in a broad sense. More precisely, from a purely denotational point of view, one can distinguish at least two types of Vocative Phrases depending on whether they refer to an entity which is not referred to in the thematic grid of the predicate (call it ‘Extradeictic Vocative’) or to an entity which is referred to in the thematic grid of the predicate by means of a pronoun (call it ‘Infradeictic Vocative’), being it the subject, the direct or the indirect object:²

¹ As usual, I will assume that morphological Case must not necessarily be overt and that in languages like Italian, morphological Case is overtly manifested only in the pronominal system. The pronominal system is partially sensitive to Vocative Case: for example, when first person pronouns are used as Vocative Phrases they cannot be assigned Nominative case and they show the Accusative or Default Case:

- (i) *O povero me / *io, dove posso andare?*
 o poor I-ACC-DEF/I-NOM, where can I go?

With second person pronouns the situation is different, though, since in that case Nominative can show up as in:

- (ii) *O tu / te che muovi la ruota...*
 o you-NOM/you-ACC. who move the wing..

² I will not discuss here the important issue concerning the type of relation between the noun phrase and the pronoun which corefers with it (whether it is Binding or independent coreference). Notice that non trivial coreference phenomena can also be detected by examples like:

- (i) a. *O mio/*suo/*tuo re, Gianni vuole un cavallo.*
 o my/ his/ your king, John wants a horse
 b. *O testimoni del suo arrivo, Gianni è il nostro re.*
 o witnesses of his coming Gianni is our king

First person pronoun is selected in (ia) as if the clause containing a Vocative Case had an implicit second person argument which the speaker obligatory refers to (leaving courtesy expression like *vostra altezza* (“your highness”) aside).

As for the nature of the coreference relation, it is interesting to notice that Vocative Phrases don’t give rise to Binding Opacity or Relativized Minimality Phenomena, witness examples like the following:

- (ii) a. *O povera Maria_i, i ragazzi non la_{i/j} / t_i/*_j aiutano.*
 o poor Maria the boys not her / you help
 b. *[Quale infermiera]_i credi, [Maria]_j, che i ragazzi denuncino t_i?*
 which nurse you think Mary that the boys impeach ?

- (2) a. *O Gianni, Maria sta abbracciando Pietro!* Extradeictic Voc.
 o Gianni Maria is hugging Peter!
- b. *O Gianni_i, pro_i colpisci Pietro!* Infradeictic (Subj.)Voc.
 o Gianni, pro hit Peter!
- c. *O Gianni_i, Maria vuole abbracciare te_j, /lui_{j,i}!*
 o Gianni Maria wants to hug you/him!
 Infradeictic (Dir. Obj.) Voc.
- d. *O Gianni_i, Maria vuole dare un libro a te_j, /lui_{j,i}!*
 o Gianni Maria wants to give a book to you/him!
 Infradeictic (Ind. Obj.) Voc.

This, of course, is not sufficient to answer the question whether there is a Vocative Case. In fact, it could well be that the noun phrase involved here is assigned another Case (or, perhaps, no Case at all). Of course, one important piece of evidence that there is indeed a Vocative Case, in fact the very motivation for this discussion comes from those languages where such a noun phrase which does not belong to the thematic grid of the predicate is morphologically marked by a distinct inflectional ending. A classic example is Latin:

- (3) a. *Tityre tu patulae recubans sub tegmine*
 Tityr-VOC. you-NOM. leafy-GEN. laying under cover-ABL
fagi...
 beech-GEN
 “Tityrus, you laying under the cover of a leafy beech...”

The proper name *Tityrus* is put in its Vocative Case (*Tityre*) at the very beginning of the sentence, to attract the attention of Tytirus. Interestingly, such an overt piece of evidence has often been considered as insufficient to conclude that there be a Vocative Case, although it can hardly be denied that there is a Vocative Phrase. In fact, many influential scholars have proposed that Vocative Case is not a ‘real’ Case. The following citations illustrate such a rather murky situation:

- (4) a. “de même qu'un appel échappe au contexte de la phrase, de même le vocatif se trouvait en dehors de la flexion. Sa forme était celle du thème nu (gr. *koure*, lat. *domine*) comme

c. [*in che modo*] *credi, Maria, che i ragazzi denuncino questa infermiera t_j?*
 in what way you think o Mary that the boys impeach this nurse?

l'impératif, ou de la racine au degré réduit (gr. *pater*). Isolé dans la déclinaison, il devait disparaître, remplacé par le nominatif.” (Ernout -Thomas 1953²: 14)

- b. “un cinquième cas, le vocatif, que les Stoïciens [...] ne comptaient pas plus parmi les cas que les grammairiens indiens qui, n'étant pas dupes d'une forme qui le rapproche si fréquemment du nominatif, le laissaient en dehors de la flexion. [...] le vocatif n'existe pas dans des catégories aussi importantes que les pronoms personnels, les adjectifs possessifs, les adjectifs et pronoms démonstratifs.” (Humbert 1954²: 247; 294)
- c. “L'histoire du vocatif, d'Homère à la Koinè, est liée à l'extraordinaire développement qu'a pris l'interjection *o* [...]. Elle a fini par s'associer étroitement au vocatif et par perdre son autonomie.” (Humbert 1954²: 295)
- d. “En nostre Langue, et dans les autres vulgaires, ce cas s'exprime dans les noms communs qui ont un article au nominatif, par la suppression de cet article. Le Seigneur est mon esperance. Seigneur vous estes mon esperance.” (La grammaire de Port-Royal; p. 44, in Brekle (ed.) 1966)

All in all, despite the difficulties to agree on the existence of a separate morphological Case for Vocative, three purely syntactic factors emerge here that correlate with a Vocative Phrase: the Vocative Phrase does not belong to the thematic grid of the main predicate of the clause, the Vocative Phrase may not co-occur with an article, the Vocative Phrase may be preceded by an emphatic interjection. Clearly, these are quite weak diagnostics to conclude straightforwardly that there be a Vocative Case. Nevertheless, they clearly show that Vocative Phrases behave differently from argumental noun phrases and can be fruitfully used to explore and refine our understanding of the syntax of Vocative Phrases. Remember that the underlying issue we are concentrating on here is that if there is a Vocative Case one must find a head which assigns it to the Vocative Phrase it is associated with, if one wants to maintain the unified theory of Case assignment that is currently adopted.

One important issue concerning the identification of a Vocative Case from a syntactic point of view is that the role of the absence/presence of the article is not uniform across and within languages nor diachronically stable. Consider Italian, for example (the presence of the interjection *o* is irrelevant here):

- (5) a. *O* (**il* /*un*) *ragazzo* / (**il*) *Gianni, la Maria è partita.*
 o the /a boy / Gianni, the Maria has left

- b. *O [DP donna [NP mia i]], Maria è partite.*
 o woman my Maria has left
 ‘*O quel giovine [...] per i vostri poveri morti, fate la carità d’andare...*’ (A. Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*, XXXIV)
- d. ‘*Ditemi, quel giovine, al vostro paese che regola si usa?*’
 tell me, young man, your country what rule governs?
 (C. Goldoni, *Le femmine puntigliose*; in Mazzoleni 1995)
- e. *?O il mio caro ragazzo, esci di qui!*
 o the my dear boy, get out of here!
- f. *O caro il mio ragazzo, esci di qui.*
- g. *O (povero) me/*io, Maria è partite.*
 o poor me/ I, Maria has left
- h. *O tu/te, che non sai nulla...*
 o you, who not know anything..

Prima facie, the example in (5a) shows that the definite and indefinite article must be omitted in the Vocative phrase in Italian, even in those varieties of Northern Italian which allow the article to precede the proper name. A simple minded solution could be that the syntactic position where articles occur in a noun phrase, namely D° , must be omitted. This conclusion, however, is not correct for several reasons. First, adopting Longobardi’s 1994 theory of N° -to- D° raising, (5b) shows that such a position can be realized, witness raising of *donna* “woman” over the possessive adjective *mia* “my”; second, in XIX century Italian examples such as those in (5c) and (5d) (the latter reproduced from Mazzoleni 1995) D° can be clearly realized and occupied by a demonstrative; third, if an emphatic adjective like *caro* “dear” precedes the noun phrase, the definite article can easily occur with the Vocative Phrase as shown in (5f); fourth, pronouns, which arguably occupy a D° position as standardly assumed, can occur as Vocative Phrases as in (5g-h), whether or not an emphatic adjective co-occurs with it. All in all, one cannot conclude that the absence of a D° projection be a diagnostics for Vocative case. Rather, it must be the case that some different reason explains the absence of the article with Vocative Phrase, possibly related to the referential capacities of the noun phrase involved. In fact, notice that the only other case where the definite article is impossible with proper names, of course in those varieties which allow proper names to occur with articles such as in many Northern Italian varieties, is the case where the proper name plays the role of a predicate such as in:³

³ I will not consider here the predicative use of proper names in copular sentences; see Moro 1997 for a detailed discussion.

- (6) a. *Il Gianni lo chiama (*il) Mario.*
 the Gianni him calls the Mario
 b. *Mi chiamo (*il) Mario.*
 me call the Mario
 “My name is Mario.”

These examples suggest that the reason why the article is absent most arguably depends on the referential capacities of the noun phrase involved and, crucially, is not specific to Vocative Case. Thus, the absence of the article cannot be used as a diagnostic.⁴

Interesting facts also correlate with Vocative Phrases on phonological grounds. This has been noticed in different domains of analysis. Floricic (2000) pointed out that in Southern Italian varieties proper nouns can occur in a truncated form, such as *Antò* vs. *Antonio*. These truncated forms can only be used as Vocative Phrases. Interestingly, Floricic noticed that truncation can also occur with verbs but only in the imperative form and that the two (Vocative Phrase and imperatives) can co-occur. The paradigm is as follows:

- (7) a. *Antò/Antonio, Lucì/Lucia, Robbè/Roberto*
 b. *Lucì/Lucia, vieni qua!*
 Lucì/Lucia come here!
 c. *Lucia/*Lucì viene qua!*
 Lucia/ Lucì comes here!
 d. *Tie'/Tieni* (“Keep”), *Gua'/Guarda* (“See”), *To'/Togli* (“Take this”)
 e. *Lucia guarda/*gua' il panorama.*
 Lucia looks at the panorama

This paradigm not only shows that Vocative Phrases in fact behave differently than other noun phrases in that they allow truncation, it also draws a parallelism between Vocative Case and imperative whose co-occurrence is often attested. Although Floricic’s discussion of the various facets of this parallelism cannot be reproduced here, it is at least worth emphasizing that the absence of the article in Vocative Phrases is paralleled by the absence of negation in second person imperatives, indirectly reinforcing our conjecture that the absence of the article

⁴ French, for example, is interesting. Most grammars indicate that the definite article must be present with plural noun phrases and absent with singular:

(i) *(*Le) garçon/(Les) garçons, Jean est arrivé.*
 o the boy / the boys, Jean is arrived

Nevertheless, some speakers do accept definite articles with singular. I am indebted to Richard Kayne for having pointed this out to me.

in Vocative Phrases is not specific to Case assignment but it is rather the consequence of a more general condition on interpretation : “Ce n’est pas un hasard si la forme *non canta* (“Il ne chante pas”) n’est possible que dans le plan délocutoire, de même que le syntagme nominal *i ragazzi* dont nous avons vu qu’il ne pouvait être interprété comme vocatif [fn. omitted]” Floricic 2000: 261. Similar considerations have been addressed by Lazzeroni 1995. Studying the well-known phenomenon of stress retraction in Vocative Case morphology in languages like Ancient Greek and Sanskrit, Lazzeroni concludes that “nelle coppie diatoniche del greco e del sanscrito la baritonesi segnala il termine caratterizzato dal tratto che occupa il posto più alto nella gerarchia dell’individuazione: il nome proprio rispetto al nome comune, il sostantivo rispetto all’aggettivo, il nome d’azione rispetto al nome d’agente (assimilato all’aggettivo), l’agente individuato rispetto all’agente generico” (Lazzeroni 1995: 4-5). Typical examples could be the following:

- (8) a. *adelphós* / *ádelphe*
brother Nom. / brother Voc.
b. *leukós* / *léukos*
white - adjective / white thing
c. *karpós* / *Kárpos*
fruit / fruit proper name
d. *tómos* / *tomós*
cut / cutter

The conclusion Lazzeroni suggests is that retraction of the stress in Vocative Case is not special: “l’assegnazione dell’accento non è vincolata a categorie semantiche o morfologiche specifiche, ma alla gerarchia di individuazione che oppone i termini di una coppia” (Lazzeroni 1995:5). In both case studies illustrated here the phonological phenomena affecting Vocative Phrases cannot be related to the necessity to distinguish a special Case from the others; rather, these phenomena (truncation and retraction of stress) are due to independent factors, most arguably related to ‘semantic’ reasons, in the broad sense involving denotation, predication, etc.

We can conclude this section exploring the possible diagnostics for Vocative Case and its internal structure. We have seen that the situation is rather unclear and can be summarized as follows. A Vocative Phrase is a full noun phrase containing both N° and D° projections which does not belong to the thematic grid of the predicate, although it might be related to it by means of a pronoun; a Vocative Phrase may display anomalous behavior both syntactically (absence of the article, presence of an interjection which immediately precedes the noun phrase, selective referential capacities) and phonologically (truncation

and stress retraction); a Vocative Phrase appears to be marked by a special inflection in some languages, although many scholars suggested that Vocative is just a bare root form rather than a specific Case ending. All in all, even if the very existence of a separate Case inflection cannot be undisputedly proved, still the question as to whether there is a specific syntactic configuration where a Vocative Phrase can occur can be properly raised. In the next section we will approach such an independent issue.

3. *On the distribution of Vocative Phrase in the left periphery*

Where can a Vocative Phrase occur? To answer this question we will focus on Italian data. Prototypically, Vocative Phrases occur at the very beginning or at the very end of the sentence:

- (9) a. *(O) Maria, pro vieni qui!*
 o Maria pro come here!
 b. *pro vieni qui, (o) Maria!*
 pro come here, o Maria!

The obvious preliminary question then is what portion of the left periphery they occupy, assuming the non-neutral assumption that (9b) is a derived form from (9a) by remnant movement.⁵ To answer this, I will assume the split Comp field

⁵ To support this assumption consider the following case. In Central Italian varieties like Marchigiano spoken in Fano, for example, it is possible to have a wh-word like *perché* ‘why’ to precede or follow the IP it refers to as in:

- (i) a. *Perché [sei venuto]?*
 why did you come?
 b. *[Sei venuto] perché?*

That this process is syntactically governed, and not just ‘stylistic’, can be proved by showing that the same type of ‘inversion’ cannot take place with *come* ‘how’:

- (ii) a. *Come [sei venuto]?*
 how did you come?
 b. **[Sei venuto] come?*

Now, assuming that *perché* is generated in the left periphery (cf. Rizzi 1990), one can conclude that (ib) is derived from (ia) with remnant movement of IP over the position where *perché* is generated. Interestingly, a Vocative phrase can occur at the end of the sentence only if *perché* precedes the sentence:

- (iii) a. *Perché [sei venuto] Mario?*
 why did you come Mario?
 b. **[Sei venuto] perché Mario?*
 c. *Mario [sei venuto] perché?*

This can be explained by assuming that remnant movement is already involved in generating ‘*perché* inversion’, suggesting that the impossibility of a Vocative Phrase at the end of the sentence is due to the fact that the same strategy cannot be exploited twice.

analysis stemming from Rizzi's 1997 work (see also Cinque 1979) which can be synthesized as follows:

(10) $C^\circ = \dots \text{Force}^\circ > (\text{Top}^\circ > \text{Foc}^\circ > \text{Top}^\circ >) \text{Fin}^\circ \dots$ (Rizzi 1997)

Different types of elements fill different positions in (41) [(10) here, a.m.]. Straightforward distributional evidence suggests that relative pronouns are in the spec of Force° , while interrogative pronouns in main questions compete with focused phrases for the spec of Focus° . Complementizers such as *that*, *que*, etc. are in Force° (when the topic-focus field is activated), while prepositional complementizers in Romance are in Fin° (Rizzi 1997: 325).

Thus, the obvious step to take is to see if a Vocative Phrase can occupy any of the split Comp field specifier positions. Let us start by considering Fin° , i.e. the lowest head. Since Fin° can be activated in different contexts in Italian, we can provide different tests, namely infinitival declaratives, absolute small clauses and Aux-to-Comp constructions:

- (11) a. *Gianni dice, (o) Maria/(o) ragazza, di andare a Roma.*
Gianni says, o Maria / o girl, to go to Rome
- b. **Gianni dice di, o Maria, andare a Roma.*
Gianni says to o Mary go to Rome
- c. **Con, *o Maria, Gianni malato, Pietro non può partire.*
with o Maria Gianni sick Pietro not can go
- d. *O Maria, con Gianni malato, Pietro non può partire.*
o Maria with Gianni sick Pietro not can go
- e. **Avendo, (o) Maria, Pietro letto il libro...*
having o Maria Pietro read the book...
- f. *O Maria, avendo Pietro letto il libro...*
o Maria, having Pietro read the book...

As each pair indicates, the Vocative Phrase must precede the material contained in the Fin° head (i.e. *di*, *con* and *avendo*, respectively) indicating that it must occupy a higher specifier position.⁶

⁶ This conclusion fits in with the following contrast in English where *did* occupies the Fin° position, as suggested in Rizzi 1997:

- (i) a. did, (*o Mary), John read the book?
b. o Mary, did John read the book?

Consider now a Top° head. In Italian, such a head is exploited in the so called Clitic Left Dislocation constructions (CLLD) in the sense of Cinque 1990. In such constructions involving a phrase in the specifier of Top° , a clitic is in fact involved in Italian. Consider then the following cases:

- (12) a. *O Maria, I ragazzi, li aiuta Gianni.*
 o Maria the boys them helps Gianni
 b. *?I ragazzi, o Maria, li aiuta Gianni.*
 the boys o Maria them helps Gianni
 c. *O Maria, I ragazzi, (*o Pietro), li aiuta Gianni.*
 o Maria the boys o Pietro them helps Gianni
 d. *?I libri, o Maria, in questo scaffale, ce li mette Gianni.*
 the books, o Mary, on this shelf, there-them puts Gianni

A Vocative Case is clearly compatible with a CLLD constructions proving that it does not compete with the same specifier position as Topic Phrases. Moreover, there is clear preference for the Vocative Phrase to precede the Topic Phrase. Interestingly, the paradigm in (12) allows a further refinement: since Top° heads can occur recursively, one may ask whether Vocative Phrases can occur higher than the lower or the higher Top° or both. The case in (12c) clearly indicates that there cannot be two Vocative Phrases: a Vocative Phrase can be licensed only once and only higher than the higher Top° head.

What about the Foc° head? Tests show that Focus constructions in Italian are compatible with a Vocative Phrase and that the Vocative Phrase must occur higher than Foc° :

- (13) a. *O Maria, I RAGAZZI, Gianni aiuta, non i conigli.*
 o Maria, the boys Gianni helps not the rabbits
 b. **I RAGAZZI, o Maria, Gianni aiuta, non I conigli.*
 the boys, o Maria, Gianni will help not the rabbits

This also correlates with the fact that a Vocative Phrase cannot occur between a *wh*-word and *do* but in the case the *wh*-word is *why*, which we independently know is higher than the other *wh*-words (see Rizzi 1990 and references cited there)

- (ii) a. why (John) did you do that?
 b. what (*John) did you do today?

Similarly, notice also that a Vocative Case cannot separate existential *there* from the copula: if so, the sentence is interpreted as a locative sentence (cf. precopular *here*):

- (iii) a. there (o Mary) is a solution to the theorem.
 b. here (o Mary) is a solution to the theorem.

Moreover, a further test can be provided with respect to Foc° , since we know that wh-phrases compete for the same position as Focus Phrases. Consider the following cases:

- (14) a. *Mi chiedo, o Maria, quale libro leggi?*
I wonder o Maria which book read?
b. *?*Mi chiedo quale libro, o Maria, leggi?*
I wonder which book o Maria read?

Vocative Phrases must precede the Foc° head even in the case the specifier position hosts wh-phrases such as *quale libro* “which book”. Notice that there is no intrinsic prohibition for a wh-word to precede a proper noun (or more generally a noun phrase), witness the following examples involving CLLD and wh-movement:

- (15) a. *Mi chiedo Maria quale ragazzo la sopporti.*
I wonder Maria which boy her stands
b. *Mi chiedo quale ragazzo Maria la sopporti.*
I wonder which boy Maria her stands
c. *Mi chiedo quale negoziante il vino lo venda di Domenica.*
I wonder which dealer the wine it sells on Sundays

Leaving Top° and Foc° heads, let us now make one step further up in the left periphery, exploring the co-occurrence of Force° with a Vocative Phrase.⁷ In fact, the phrase stemming from Force° can involve different elements. First, the specifier of Force° can host relative operators such as *i quali* “the who”:

- (16) a. **Coloro, o Maria, i quali sono arrivati ieri partiranno domani.*
those o Maria the who are arrived yesterday will leave tomorrow

⁷ The tests involving Top° and Foc° heads suggest a further test involving Vocative Phrases. Consider the following case:

- (i) a. *O povero/carso ragazzo, Gianni è troppo intelligente.*
o poor /dear boy, Gianni is too intelligent
b. **O nessun/ogni ragazzo, Gianni è troppo intelligente.*
o no /every boy, Gianni is too intelligent
c. *Nessun/ogni ragazzo, Gianni (*lo) odia.*
no /every boy Gianni him hates

Vocative Phrases appear to behave like Topic Phrases in that they cannot be quantificational, unlike Focus Phrases.

- b. *O Maria, coloro i quali sono arrivati ieri partiranno*
 o Maria those the who are arrived yesterday will leave
domani.
 tomorrow

This contrast indicates that the Vocative Phrase must be higher than the relative operator occupying the specifier position of Force^o.⁸ Second, Force^o can be realized as an overt complementizer such as declarative *che* “that”:

- (17) a. *Gianni pensa, (o) Maria/(o) ragazza, che Pietro abbia letto un*
 Gianni thinks o Maria/ o girl that Pietro has read a
libro.
 book
 b.. **Gianni pensa che, (o) Maria/(o) ragazza, Pietro abbia letto un*
 Gianni thinks that o Maria/ o girl Pietro has read a
libro.
 book

Also in such a case, the Vocative Phrase must precede Force^o. Notice that there is no independent prohibition for a noun phrase to occur lower than declarative *che*, witness the possibility for a proper noun to be in such a position in a CLLD construction like the following:

- (18) a. **Gianni pensa Mario che lo vedrà domani.*
 Gianni thinks Mario that him will see tomorrow.
 b. *Gianni pensa che Mario lo vedrà domani.*
 Gianni thinks that Mario him will see tomorrow.

We have thus reached the leftmost head of the split Comp Field. There is but one option left, namely that a Vocative Phrase occurs as a specifier of an independent head assigning Vocative Case to it. In other words, we must extend the split Comp field including (at least) one more head/feature: the Vocative Phrase is hosted in the spec of the head projected by a Voc^o feature governing Force^o. Formally, the split Comp Field must accordingly be increased as follows:

⁸ Notice that a Vocative Phrase cannot be exploited to yield a Verb Second construction such as:

- (i) a. **O lieber Andreas habe ich endlich das Buch gelesen.*
 o dear Andreas have I eventually the book read
 b. *Gestern habe ich endlich das Buch gelesen.*
 yesterday have I eventually the book read

(19) $C^\circ = \dots \text{Voc}^\circ > \text{Force}^\circ > (\text{Top}^\circ > \text{Foc}^\circ > \text{Top}^\circ >) \text{Fin}^\circ \dots$

Although this is *prima facie* not a very satisfactory solution, as all solutions stipulating an ad hoc entity are, it seems to me that this proposal can be regarded as less expensive on theoretical grounds once one explores the distribution of the interjection *o*, which many classical authors considered a diagnostics for Vocative Case. In the remaining of this section I will briefly explore the syntax of such an element.

A priori there are two options for the syntax of *o*: either *o* is a functional projection belonging to the noun phrase (i.e. to the D° -system) or *o* is a functional projection belonging to the clausal structure (i.e. to the C° -system). How can we choose between the two hypotheses? We have already seen that D° can be exploited in Vocative Phrases, even if the article for independent reasons might not be compatible with a Vocative Phrase. In fact, there are good reasons to assume that *o* does not compete for D° . A first piece of evidence comes from the (rather trivial) fact that *o* cannot occur with other noun phrases, even if they occur in the left periphery, such as in the CLLD construction in (20d) or in Focus constructions (20e):

- (20) a. *O Pietro, Gianni baciava Maria in giardino.*
 o Pietro, Gianni kissed Maria in the garden
 b. **Gianni baciava o Maria in giardino.*
 Gianni kissed o Maria in the garden
 c. **O Pietro baciava Maria in giardino.*
 o Pietro kissed Maria in the garden.
 d. **O Pietro, Maria lo ama.*
 o Pietro Mary him loves
 e. *O PIETRO, Maria ama.*
 o Pietro, Maria loves

The crucial piece of evidence, however, comes from testing coordination of two distinct Vocative Phrases:

- (21) a. *O Maria, Gianni è arrivato.*
 o Maria, Gianni is arrived
 b. *O Maria e Pietro, Gianni è arrivato.*
 o Maria and Pietro, Gianni is arrived
 c. **o Maria e o Pietro, Gianni è arrivato.*
 o Maria and o Pietro, Gianni is arrived

If *o* belonged to the DP system it would be hard to understand why it cannot be iterated by coordination, as in a simple coordination of two DPs such as *il ragazzo e la ragazza* “the boy and the girl”. Thus, we are forced to conclude that *o* rather belongs to the split Comp Field on empirical grounds. If this conclusion proves tenable, then, it diminishes the ad hoc flavor of the solution proposed here, i.e. that Vocative Phrases are generated in a special extra head not previously included in the split Comp Field. In fact, *o* provides overt evidence that such an inventory must be independently increased to include more slots. Of course, it remains for us to understand what kind of information such a higher portion of the left periphery contains. A full understanding of such a role can only be the topic of future research, but it is not unreasonable to conjecture that such a higher head conveys deictic and propositional information pertaining to the root clause. Notice also that the idea that *o* is a feature/head belonging to the left periphery of the root clause can be independently attested by examining cases like the following from a dialect of Tuscany (Pratese):

- (22) a. *(O) i che tu fai costì?*
 o what that you do there?
 b. *La mamma, la vole sapere (*o) i che tu fai costì?*
 the mother she wants know o what that you do there?

The contrast in (22) shows that the interjection *o* can only occur in the higher left periphery, yielding independent evidence that this element is part of the informational endowment of the root clause.

We can conclude our preliminary approach to the field of Vocative Case. If on the one hand we have seen that there is no straightforward diagnostics to identify a Vocative Case, on the other we have been able to isolate some definitory aspects of Vocative Phrases. Vocative Phrases are noun phrases which do not belong to the thematic grid of a predicate, although they can corefer with a pronoun playing the role of an argument of a predicate; Vocative Phrases behave anomalously with respect to the distribution of articles and certain phonological phenomena (such as truncation and retraction of the stress), although these characteristics may well be independently motivated. Moreover, we have explored the position of Vocative Phrases in the left periphery suggesting that they occupy the spec position of a dedicated Voc° head which is higher than Force° in the split Comp field and arguably contains propositional and deictic information specific to the root clause.

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