

FREE INVERSION IN OLD HIGH GERMAN AND
CIMBRIAN: ON THE STATUS OF *THO/DA* AS
CP-EXPLETIVES AND THEIR CONNECTION WITH
*PRO-DROP**

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ABSTRACT In this paper I compare Old High German and the Germanic dialect Cimbrian, two languages which share the availability of free inversion in co-occurrence with an expletive-like element *tho* and *da* 'there', and I show that they share striking similarities which follow from their *pro-drop* nature. *Tho* is typically analysed as a narrative/ discourse-continuative marker (Axel 2007, Fuß & Hinterhölzl 2019) appearing in CP or in TP – an account which does not make sense though of the fact that its distribution is restricted to certain verb types (typically unaccusatives, verbs of saying) and constructions (such as passives). In this paper I reconsider the possibility that *tho* and free inversion are to be connected to the availability of *pro-drop* in Old High German (cf. Haerberli 2001 for this idea for Old English) and I show that if we apply a Topic-matching analysis for the licensing of null subjects (Frascarelli 2007, 2018) to the Old High German data we are able to solve the problems of Haerberli's account discussed in Axel (2007). These problems all follow from the assumption that *tho* lexicalises a *there*-type expletive appearing in Spec,TP which goes against the evidence for *tho*. In my alternative account I show that in Old High German free inversion involves the presence of an overt or silent expletive *tho*, a locative argument selected by the lexical verb which can be promoted to an expletive of the TopicP position in the left periphery in sentences in which the DP subject has not moved out of the VP (cf. Tortora 2001 on free inversion in Italian) and whose function is to satisfy the EPP feature associated with the Topic-criterion needed for the licensing of *pro* in Spec,TP (Frascarelli 2007, 2018). The availability of free inversion was lost in the history of German due to the loss of *pro-drop* but it is still available in the Cimbrian dialect spoken in the village of Luserna. In Cimbrian free inversion obligatory involves overt *da*, a CP expletive, en-

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clitic to the finite verb or the complementiser and whose function is purely formal, i.e. licensing *pro* in TP, as proposed by Bidese & Tomaselli (2018). I will suggest that the two elements are connected and that Cimbrian *da* is not an innovation but results from a grammaticalisation process of *tho* according to which the locative expletive develops from a maximal category with discourse properties (*tho*) into a head (*da*) with functional/grammatical status (van Gelderen’s 2010 Head Preference Principle).

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to analyse the syntactic distribution of free inversion in Old High German (henceforth: OHG¹) and in the German dialect Cimbrian, with particular reference to the expletive-like elements *tho* and *da* that correlate to this construction in OHG and Cimbrian, respectively.

Free inversion is a descriptive cover term (Corr 2016) to indicate different constructions in which a DP subject appears in a lower position found after a non-finite verb form. This construction, which typically involves a focus reading on the DP subject (Belletti 2004), is found in Romance languages (Benincà 1988, Sheehan 2010, Corr 2016) and has been traditionally connected to their null-subject nature (Rizzi 1982, 1986).²

- (1) (a) free inversion, Italian

Ha telefonato Luca
has.3PS phoned Luca
'Luca phoned.'

- (b) free inversion, Italian

Ha comprato il libro la mamma
has.3PS bought the book the mum
'Mum bought the book.'

Free inversion is ruled out in present-day German, the only exception being heavy DP subjects which can (but do not have to) appear after the non-finite verb form (cf. Axel 2007: 131). Present-day German, a non-null subject

¹ The label OHG refers to the phase of the German language dating between ca. 850 and c.a. 1050 and attested in around 150 texts, the most important of which are the translations of the texts of the Isidor Group (ca. 800), Tatian (ca. 850, East Franconian dialect) and Notker (ca. 950–1000).

² See Corr (2016) for the idea that cases of locative inversion involving wide focus in Ibero-Romance might not be connected to the null-subject parameter.

language,³ is characterised by another type of inversion construction involving DP subjects: the so-called Germanic inversion (henceforth: G-inversion, Vance 1997, Salvesen 2013) whereby DP subjects appear within the IP area between the finite and the non-finite verb forms. G-inversion can also be considered a descriptive cover term for different constructions, given that DP subjects can appear in different FPs within the IP area where they receive different pragmatic interpretations (topic/focus/unmarked) according to the language under investigation (cf. Ledgeway 2016 for evidence of G-inversion in late Latin involving lowFocusP; Cognola 2013a,b for G-inversion involving lowFocusP in Mòcheno; Casalicchio & Cognola 2018, 2020 for G-inversion involving TP and/or lowFocusP in different Rhaeto-Romance varieties).

(2) (a) G-inversion, German

Gestern hat Peter ein Buch gekauft
yesterday has Peter a book bought

(b) free inversion, German

**Gestern hat ein Buch gekauft Peter*
yesterday has a book bought Peter
'Yesterday Peter bought a book.'

(c) G-inversion, German

Was hat Peter gekauft?
what has Peter bought

(d) free inversion, German

**Was hat gekauft Peter?*
what has bought Peter
'What did Peter buy?'

(e) free inversion, German (cf. Axel 2007: 131)

Es sind schon angekommen [der Kanzler, seine
EXPL are already arrived the Chancellor, his
Gattin und der Außenminister]
wife and the foreign.minister

³ German only allows for null non-referential subjects, for instance expletive null subjects in impersonal passive constructions (Cardinaletti 1990).

(f) G-inversion, German

Es sind schon der Kanzler, seine Gattin und der
 EXPL are already the Chancellor, his wife and the
Außenminister angekommen
 foreign.minister arrived
 ‘The Chancellor, his wife and the foreign minister have already
 arrived.’

Unlike present-day German, in OHG, free inversion was possible, i.e. DP subjects could appear after the non-finite verb form. In OHG, free inversion frequently occurred with the expletive-like element *tho* in the sentence-initial position or within the clause.⁴

⁴ All examples discussed in this paper are taken from a single text, the OHG translation of Tatian’s *Diatessaron* written ca. 850 in an East Franconian dialect and transmitted in the Codex Sangallensis 56. The choice to use Tatian was determined by the fact that I am familiar with this text, since I have carried out qualitative work on it. Moreover, there is variation across the OHG texts in connection to the distribution of *tho* and free inversion and I have therefore chosen to only focus on a single text, in which *tho* and free inversion are frequent (Axel 2007). The data discussed in this paper are either taken from the literature, or from my own work on the text. My own examples are cited from the edition available in the TITUS database (based on Sievers 1878) in the version featuring the alignment with the original manuscript (<https://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/germ/ahd/tatianx/tatia.htm>). In the examples the symbol / indicates the line break; [...] indicates that the example is found within a sentence and is not followed/preceded by a line break but by some material that has been omitted in the example because not relevant. In Sievers’ edition *tho* also appears in the forms *thô* and *thó*, which are classified as ‘alternate forms’ of *tho* in the TITUS database. In the glossary to his critical edition (page 472), Sievers gives *thô* as the citation form and considers *tho* as an equivalent form.

As discussed in Axel (2007: 18–19), Tatian was long taken to be a non-reliable source for linguistic investigation, since the text was considered to be a sort of interlinear translation in which the OHG syntax was heavily influenced by the Latin. This claim is no longer valid. Despite the fact that the translation techniques in the OHG Tatian aimed at having a close alignment between the Latin and the OHG text, the translators did not slavishly reproduce the Latin word order (Dittmer & Dittmer 1998). According to Lippert (1974: 18), native OHG syntax is to be detected when it diverges from the Latin and asymmetries between the two languages occur with high frequency. I do not share Lippert’s (1974) methodological claim, which I consider too strict. I think that if a text is considered to be reliable, it should be considered entirely in linguistic investigation, and all the syntactic word orders found in it should be seen as grammatical constructions in the language. Let me give an example from Tatian. In Cognola & Walkden (2019), we considered the distribution of null subjects in Old Italian and OHG Tatian. We found that null subjects are only possible in OHG in sentences featuring a null subject in Latin. This piece of data is already mentioned by Eggenberger (1961) who considers it as an effect of contact. Therefore, in an approach to Tatian such as that proposed by Lippert (1974) these sentences featuring null subjects should be discarded as examples of a slavish/unreliable translation. In Cognola & Walkden (2019) we showed that the fact that overt Latin subjects are always translated, whereas null subjects in OHG are only possible in

- (3) (a) free inversion, OHG (T 117,5 [Axel 2007](#): 128)
 & audierunt eum discipuli/ loquentem
Thô gihortun Inan thie Iungiron/ sprechantan
 THO heard him the disciples speaking
 ‘then the disciples heard him speaking’
- (b) free inversion, OHG (Part 7, Chapter 4, sentence 3, line 14)
 Et repleta est spiritu saneto Elisabeth /
Uuard thô gifullit heilages geistes Helisabeth
 became THO filled holy.GEN ghost.GEN Helisabeth
 ‘Helisabeth was filled by the holy ghost.’

The first aim of this paper is to investigate the distribution of free inversion in OHG and to understand the connection between this construction and the expletive-like element *tho*, an element that has been analysed as a narrative-declarative marker ([Axel 2007](#)), discourse-continuative marker ([Fuß & Hinterhölzl 2019](#)) ‘used to mark (new) foregrounded actions/events/situations along the main story line of a narration’ ([Fuß 2009](#): 3; see also [Hinterhölzl & Petrova 2010](#), [Petrova & Solf 2008](#)) assumed to be hosted either in CP ([Axel](#)

sentences featuring a null subject in the Latin, follows from the fact that the overt subjects in the Latin cannot be null even in a null subjects language such as present-day Italian, because they are needed in the narration, since they are either topics or foci (see [Frascarelli 2007](#)). Moreover, we showed that null subjects can only be licensed in the contexts featuring a null subject in the Latin, because these contexts are precisely those in which a referential null pronoun can be silent in a *pro*-drop language such as present-day Italian (see below for the details). Therefore, the OHG translators were not reproducing the Latin grammar, but a grammar allowing for null subjects licensed through a Topic-matching mechanism like in present-day Italian (see [Frascarelli 2007, 2018](#) and below). This mechanism of licensing of null subjects diverged from that of present-day Italian due to the fact that OHG was a V2 language (i.e. a language in which the finite verb moved to a CP position in all main clauses, see [den Besten 1983](#), [Tomaselli 1990](#), [Holmberg 2015](#)): therefore, we find an asymmetric system in the distribution of null subjects between main and embedded clauses fed by the fact that the TopicP is less frequently available in embedded clauses and freely available in main clauses. Due to this property of their OHG grammar, the translators systematically inserted a subject pronoun in embedded clauses featuring a null subject in Latin. Moreover, as first noted by [Cognola & Walkden \(2019\)](#), null subjects are rare in main interrogative clauses in OHG ([Eggenberger 1961](#): 310 only distinguishes between main and embedded clauses), irrespective of the presence of a null subject in the Latin: this means that only 30% of all interrogative clauses featuring a null subject in the Latin were translated with a null subject. This again points in the direction of the fact that the OHG translators are following the rules of their grammar, which also happens to share some traits with the grammar of Latin: if we only focus on the sentences differing between the two languages we miss an important part of the story and misrepresent OHG. Therefore, I firmly believe that we should consider all the sentences in Tatian as a genuine manifestation of an OHG grammar.

2007) or in the IP area (Fuß 2009). Syntactically, *tho* exhibits a series of special properties, namely it i) is optional; ii) typically appears (but it is not obligatory) with free inversion; iii) either appears sentence-initially or immediately after the finite verb; iv) is not compatible with all verbs and all clauses.

In this paper, I propose an alternative account starting from the idea that free inversion and *tho* in OHG are fed by the asymmetric *pro*-drop nature of OHG, i.e. by the availability of referential *pro* in Spec,TP, and that free inversion must receive the same analysis as free inversion in present-day Italian due to the fact that it is parasitic on the presence of a null subject in TP. This idea, which updates an intuition in Haeberli (2001) for the realisation of subjects in Old English (also discussed by Axel 2007), will be implemented by relying on a parallel between null-subject languages featuring free inversion and OHG. Following Benincà's (1988) observation that free inversion involves the presence of a silent fronted locative in Italian, I will provide evidence that *tho* is the overt version of this extra locative argument as in free inversion in Romance languages (like Borgomanerese *nghi*, cf. Tortora 2001). In sentences in which the DP subject is not moved out of VP, the extra locative *tho* is moved out of the VP and is fronted to Spec,TopicP. I will show that null subjects are licensed via Frascarelli's (2007, 2018) Topic Criterion in OHG (Cognola & Walkden 2019, Cognola 2019a), i.e. *pro* must be licensed by a silent Aboutness/shift Topic in the left periphery and identified via verb agreement. Therefore, my claim is that *tho* realises Spec,TopicP in sentences in which the syntactic subject is not moved out of the VP and is thus comparable to CP expletive-like elements found in the null-subject languages (especially in Spanish varieties, see Camacho 2013) which are not obligatory and connected to special pragmatic/discourse interpretations of the DP subject. However, within the proposed analysis, *tho* does not only have a discourse function due to its Topic/anaphoric nature (i.e. to connect the clause with the previous sentence in the text, Fuß & Hinterhölzl 2019), but also the function of licensing *pro*.

In the second part of this paper, I compare the function and distribution of OHG *tho* with the distribution and function of *da* in present-day German dialects, with a special focus on Cimbrian, a Germanic dialect spoken by around 100 people in Luserna (Trentino). Cimbrian is one of the few present-day Germanic languages exhibiting free inversion with the expletive element *da* (cf. Kolmer 2005, Bidese & Tomaselli 2018).

(4) free inversion, Cimbrian

Baz hat-ta gakhofst dar Mario?
what has-DA bought the Mario
'What did Mario buy?'

I will show that free inversion and *da* in Cimbrian share crucial similarities with the OHG phenomenon, along with key differences. More specifically, *da* will be shown to be obligatorily required in all sentences featuring free inversion or an extracted subject and to be a CP-expletive which lexicalises the Fin head position (as suggested by Bidese & Tomaselli 2018). Following Bidese & Tomaselli (2018), I will account for this distribution by assuming that *da* has a purely formal meaning and that it is connected to the realisation of the syntactic subject: *da* is hosted in Subj° (cf. Cognola 2013b) and is required for the licensing of *pro* in Spec,TP in sentences featuring free inversion (cf. Bentley & Cruschina 2018, Sluckin, Martin & Cruschina 2021).

In the last part of the paper, I will discuss whether there is a connection between *tho* and *da* and I will propose that there is. The differences between OHG *tho* and Cimbrian *da* will be shown to follow from a regular grammaticalisation process from an element with discourse properties (*tho*) into an element (*da*) with functional/grammatical status along the lines of van Gelderen's (2010) Head Preference.

The remainder of this article is organised as follows. In section 2, I discuss the syntax of DP subjects in OHG with a special focus on free inversion. I then propose a theoretical account for the distribution of *tho*. Section 3 examines the distribution of *da* in German dialects, with a special focus on Cimbrian, and reconstructs the grammaticalisation process leading from OHG *tho* to Cimbrian *da*. Section 4 presents the conclusions.

2 THE SYNTAX OF DP SUBJECTS IN OLD HIGH GERMAN

2.1 Three subject positions in Old High German

In OHG, NP subjects can appear in three positions within the clause: before the finite verb in the second or third linear position, after the finite verb in the so-called G-inversion construction and after the non-finite verb in the free inversion construction (Axel 2007).

The examples in (5a,b) illustrate the first option. In (5a), the DP subject *thin quena Elysaβeth* is an Aboutness topic appearing in Spec,ForceP (due to the V2 nature of OHG, see section 2.4.4 below).⁵ In (15b), the subject *Elysaβeth*

⁵ Constituents in Spec,ForceP can be preceded by an extra-sentential constituent (*inti*) leading

appears before the finite verb in a clause introduced by *bithiu uuanta* ('since, because').⁶

- (5) (a) it autem ad illum angelus / Ne timeas, Zacharia / quoniam
exaudita est deprecatio tua / et uxor tua Elysabeth / pariet tibi
filium, / et vocabis inti nomen eius Iohannem.

/Quad thô zi imo thie engil: / ni forhti thu
said THO to him the angel NEG be.afraid you
thir, Zacharias, / bidiu uuanta gihorit ist thin
REFL.PRON Zacharias because since heard is your
gibet, /inti thin quena Elysabeth gibirit thir sun,
pray and your wife Elisabeth gives.birth you son
inti nemmis thû sinan namon Iohannem./
and give.name you his name John

'The angel told him: don't be afraid, Zacharias, since your pray has been heard. And your wife Elisabeth will give birth to your son and you will give him the name John.'

Part 5, Chapter 2, sentence 5, line 22

- (b) Et non erat illis filius, eo quod / esset Elisabeth sterilis / et ambo
processissent in diebus suis

/inti ni uuard iu sun, bithiu uuanta / Elisabeth
and NEG became them son, because since Elisabeth
uuas unberenti / inti beidu gigiengun in iro tagun. /
was infertile and both went in their days

'They did not have children since Elisabeth was infertile and they were both old.'

Part 3, Chapter 2, sentence, lines 7–8

Example (6) illustrates G-inversion in OHG. Both given and new-information NP subjects can appear in this construction.

- (6) (a) /[...]Nonne mater eius / dicitur Maria [...]?

/ Ia ist sín muoter / ginemnit Maria [...]?
PART IS his mother called Mary

'Isn't his mother's name Mary [...]?'

Part 85, Chapter 78, sentence 3, line 6

to V3 word order in OHG, see [Coniglio & Schlachter \(2013\)](#) for an analysis of *inti*-sentences in Middle High German and [Cognola \(2022\)](#) for *inti* clauses in OHG.

⁶ Causal adverbial clauses could also appear with the same word order as main clauses (5b), as in present-day German (see [Selting 1999](#) and [Catasso 2018](#)).

- (b) / Et erat plebs expectans Zachariam, / et mirabantur quod tardaret ipse in / templo.

/Inti uuas thaz folc beitonti Zachariam, /
and was that people waiting Zachary
'And the people were waiting for Zachary.'

Part 5, Chapter 2, sentence 10, line 22

- (c) /In crastino voluit exire in Galileam; /

/In morgan uuolta her gân in Galileam; /
in morning wanted he go to Galilee
'In the morning he wanted to travel to Galilee.'

Part 21, chapter 17, sentence 1, line 29

- (d) / Iterum assumit eum diabolus / in montem excelsum valde /

/Abur nam inan ther diuual thô / in
for.the.second.time took him the devil there in
hohan berg thrato
high mountains very
'For the second time the devil took him to the very high mountain.'

Part 19, chapter 15, sentence 5, line 16

Finally, both given and new-information DP subjects can also appear after the non-finite verb in free inversion. This construction is found with i) verbs of movement (especially unaccusative verbs), ii) passivised predicates, iii) verbs of saying, iv) sentences featuring a negation (Axel 2007: 124–153).⁷ Moreover, it is also attested with verbs indicating a change of place/change of state (Fuß 2009: 3). In (7) we see some examples involving a passive construction:

- (7) (a) / Et sanatus est puer in illa hora./

/Uuard tho giheilít thie kneht in thero ziti./
become $\pi\theta\omicron$ cured that child in that time
'And the child was cured in that moment.'

Part 51, Chapter 47, sentence 8, line 7

⁷ I will not consider sentences featuring a negation further in this paper because they do not appear with *tho* in free inversion and might thus involve a different derivation from that proposed in this paper.

- (b) & contristatus est rex/

/Inti uuard gitruobit [ther cuning]/
 And became aggrieved the king
 'and the king was very sorry.'

(T 247, 21, Axel 2007: 127)

- (c) & dispergentur / oues gregis/

/Inti uuerdent zispreitit/ [thiu scaf thes euuites]/
 and become scattered the.PL sheep of.the flock
 'And the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.'

(T 565,3, Axel 2007: 127)

- (d) /Et factum est ut inpleti sunt dies officii eius, / abiit in domus suam. Post hos autem dies / concepit Elisabeth uxor eius [...]

/Inti gifulte uurdun tho taga sines ambahtes,/
 and completed became THO days his.GEN service.GEN
gieng in sin hus. After then tagon/ intfieng
 went in his house. After these days conceived
Elisabeth sin quena [...] /
 Elisabeth his wife

'Once the days of his service were over, he went back home.
 After these days his wife Elisabeth conceived.'

Part 5, Chapter 2, sentence 11, lines 28-29

In (8) examples of V1 sentences involving an unaccusative verb are given.

- (8) (a) Et discessit / ab illa angelus. /

Inti arfuor tho / fon iru thie engil. /
 and went away THO from her this angel
 'And the angel went away from her.'

Part 6, Chapter 3, sentence 9, lines 6-7

- (b) /Et accesserunt ad eum discipuli eius,/

/Inti giengun tho zi imo sine iungiron /
 and went THO to him his disciples
 'His pupils went to him.'

Part 26, Chapter 22, sentence 7, line 3

- (c) /... & accedens /unus scriba. ait illi /...
/... gieng tho zuo/ ein buochari inti quad imo
 went THO up a scribe and said to him
 ‘and a scribe came up and said to him ...’
 (T 425,16, [Axel 2007](#): 126)
- (d) et coeperunt qui simul accumbebant dicere Intra se:
tho bigondun thie dar sama sázzun quedan Inan
 THO began those that together sit say between
in:
 them
 ‘And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to
 themselves, ...’
 (T 239,17, [Fuß 2009](#): 3)

Finally, in (9) we see examples of V1 sentences involving a verb of saying and a negation.

- (9) (a) /Ait autem ad illum angelus:/
/ Quad thô zi imo thie engil: /
 said THO to him the angel
 ‘The angel told him:.’
 Part 5, chapter, sentence 5, line 22
- (b) Et ait angelus ei: [...]
/Quad iru ther engil: [...]
 said to.her the angel
 ‘The angel told her:.’
 Part 6, chapter 3, sentence 4, line 15
- (c) /Non enim [ad mensuram] dat deus spiritum/
/nigibit Imo [zi mezze] got geist /
 NEG.gives him to measure God spirit
 ‘God gives the Spirit without measure’
 (T 129,27, [Axel 2007](#): 152)
- (d) /Domine. [hominem] non habeo./
/ trohtin. nihaben [man]/
 Lord. NEG.have.1SG man
 ‘Lord, I have no man.’
 (T 285,14, [Axel 2007](#): 152)

Free inversion is also attested in embedded clauses, as shown in the following examples (Axel 2007: 233).

- (10) (a) *thothe* *erstigun sine bruoder* / *tho ersteig*
 then+REL.PART.CL up.went his brothers then up-went
her úf.
 he up
 ‘when his brothers had gone up, then he also went up.’
 (T347, 11)
- (b) *thode* *intfieng / ther heilant then ezzih /*
 then+REL.PART.CL received the Saviour the vinegar
quad...
 said
 ‘when the Saviour had received the vinegar, he said...’
 (T 645,32)

The examples in this section indicate that DP subjects can appear in three positions in the clause in OHG: i) sentence-initially; ii) within the clause (G-inversion) and iii) after the finite and the non-finite verb (free inversion). The last construction is only possible in a reduced number of contexts.

2.2 On the connection between free inversion and *tho*

2.2.1 Distribution of *tho* within the clause and across sentence types

Let us now focus on the third construction available for DP subjects in OHG: the free inversion construction. As previously noted (Axel 2007: 128ff), when the DP subject is postverbal, the element *tho* typically appears in the sentence. This element, which is not obligatory (11 a) but is very frequent, can appear in different positions. One option is for it to appear after the finite verb (11).

- (11) (a) /Et sanatus est puer in illa hora. /
 /Uuard *tho* *giheilít thie kneht in thero ziti.* /
 became THO cured that child in that time
 ‘And the child was cured in that moment.’
 Part 51, Chapter 47, sentence 8, line 7
- (b) Et discessit / ab illa angelus. /
Inti arfuor *tho /fon iru thie engil.* /
 and went.away THO from her that angel
 ‘And the angel went away from her.’
 Part 6, Chapter 3, sentence 9, lines 6–7

- (c) / [...] Et ceperunt cogitare / scribae et Pharisei dicentes:/ quis
est hic qui loquitur / blasphemias? [...] /
- / [...] *Bigondun tho thenken / thie buohhara inti Pharisei*
began.3PL THO think the scribes and Pharisees
sus quedante: / uuer ist these thie thar sprihhit /
like this saying who is this that there speaks
bismarunga? [...] /
blasphemies
'The scribes started to think and told the Pharisei: who is
blaspheming?'

Part 60, Chapter 54, sentence 5, lines 14–15

Alternatively, *tho* can also appear in the sentence-initial position (Axel 2007: 150, Reis 1901) in the same contexts, as shown in (12).

- (12) (a) / & audierunt eum discipuli / loquentem

Thô gihortun Inan thie lungiron / sprechantan
THO hear him the disciples speaking
'Then the disciples heard him speaking.'

(T 117,5, Axel 2007: 128)

- (b) /Et respondens angelus dixit ei:/

/Thô antlingonti thie engil quad imo: /
THO answering the angel said to.him
'The angel told him answering:'

Part 5, Chapter 2, sentence 9, line 13

- (c) / [...] Dixit autem Maria: /

/ [...] *Thô quad Maria: /*
THO said Maria
'Maria said.'

Part 6, chapter 3, sentence 9 lines 4–5

- (d) / [...] Dicit eis Ihesus: /

/ [...] *Thô quad ín ther heilant: /*
THO told them the Saviour
'Then the Saviour told them.'

Part 49, Chapter 45, sentence 4, line 30

(e) / Exierunt de civitate / et veniebant ad eum. /

/Tho giengun sie uz fon dero burgi / inti quamun
 THO went.3PL they out of that village and came.3PL
zi imo/
 to him

‘They left that village and went to him.’

Part 94, Chapter 87, sentence 7, lines 11–12

According to the counting by Reis (1901), cited in Axel (2007: 150), in sentences translating the Latin *dixit autem Maria* (Mary said), *tho* appears in the sentence-initial position (*tho quad Maria*) or after the finite verb (*quad tho Maria*) at the same rate in Tatian, i.e. 50% of the examples involve the former order, whereas the other 50% of examples feature the latter word order.

Finally, as reported in Axel (2007), *tho* can also follow the DP subject in the left periphery, leading to V3 word order. According to Axel (2007: 224–225), the word order *subject-tho-finite verb* involves a use of *tho* close to that of a discourse particle whose function is to put emphasis on the preceding subject. Catasso, Coniglio, De Bastiani & Fuss (2021) have recently shown that *tho* functions as a Topic particle in such cases.⁸

(13) (a) /Porro homines mirati sunt / dicentes ad invicem: /

Thie man tho vvuntrotun/
 Those men THO got.surprised.3PL

‘Those men there were surprised.’

Part 58, Chapter 52, sentence 7, lines 26–27

(b) /Ad ille egressus coepit / praedicare et diffamare sermonem,/

Her thó uzganganti bigonda / predigon inti maren thaz
 he THO going.out began preach and spread that
uuort, /
 word

‘He went out and began to preach and to spread the word.’

Part 50, Chapter 46, sentence 5 lines 2–3

⁸ I will not consider these cases further in this paper, which I suggest should receive a different analysis from the one offered here for *tho*. In sentence such as those in (13c) *tho* is not a locative expletive appearing in TopicP but a topic particle (Catasso et al. 2021) needed to topicalise the subject. It is clear that, despite the asymmetries, the two usages of *tho* share the fact of being both connected to topicality.

(c) /At ille respondens ait:/
 Er *tho* antuurtenti quad:/
 he THO answering said
 'He answered saying.'

Part 91, Chapter 84, sentence 7, line 11

I also searched for *tho* in all yes/no and *wh*- interrogative clauses in Tatian and found that there are no instances of preverbal or postverbal non-locative *tho* (cf. also Petrova & Solf 2009: 14ff showing that V3 word orders in *wh*-interrogative clauses involve constituents different from *tho* preceding or following the *wh*-element).

Tho as an expletive-like element can also appear with free inversion in embedded clauses, see the examples in (10) repeated in (14) (Axel 2007: 233).⁹

(14) (a) *thothe* *erstigun sine bruoder* / *tho ersteig*
 then+REL.PART.CL up.went his brothers then up-went
her úf.
 he up
 'when his brothers had gone up, then he also went up.'
 (T347, 11)

(b) *thode* *intfieng* / *ther heilant then ezzih* /
 then+REL.PART.CL received the Saviour the vinegar
quad...
 said
 'when the Saviour had received the vinegar, he said...'
 (T 645,32)

2.2.2 Meaning of *tho* and connection with subject gaps

As discussed in Axel (2007: 157ff), based on Behaghel (1928: 90), OHG *tho* formally corresponds to present-day German *da*. The locative OHG adverb *thār* became homonymous with *tho* in Middle High German (ca. 1050–1350), and *tho* acquired both a temporal and a local meaning. *Tho* has weak semantics and is often inserted contrary to the Latin or as a translation of Latin *et*.

In present-day German, *da* has the following meanings: i) locative (15a); ii) temporal (15b); and can be used as iii) a complementiser (15c) (with the meaning of 'since'), see Light (2015). Crucially, *da* is not a subject expletive of

⁹I do not consider the cases in which *tho* translates Latin *cum* and thus corresponds to the present-day German complementiser *da*.

the *there*-type. The temporal function of *da* is typically found in stories, when *da* can be translated with "at this point", "then".

- (15) (a) *Da waren viele von seinen Büchern*
 there were many of his.DAT books.DAT
 'There were many of his books there.'
 (present-day German)
- (b) *Hänsel, dem das Dach sehr gut schmeckte, riss sich ein grosses Stück davon herunter, und Gretel stieß eine ganze runde Fensterscheibe heraus, setzte sich nieder und tat sich wohl damit. Da ging auf einmal die Türe auf, und eine steinalte Frau, die sich auf eine Krücke stützte, kam herausgeschlichen.*
 'Hänsel, who really liked the roof, took down a big piece of it and Gretel removed an entire round glass from the window, sat down and began to eat it. **At that point** the door opened suddenly, and a very old woman leaning on a crutch sneaked out.'
- Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm: 42–43*
- (c) *Ich ziehe um, da ich mit dem Studium fertig bin.*
 I move out because I with the.DAT studying done
 am
 'I am moving out because I am done with the university.'

Da also appears in so-called *Präpositionaladverbien* in German, i.e. in pronominal forms containing a preposition selected by a verb, where it functions as a demonstrative *pro*-form with anaphoric (16a) or cataphoric (16b) function and it combines with the preposition selected by the verb. When used anaphorically (16a), the *Präpositionaladverb* can refer to both an entire clause or to a phrase (Duden: 593).

- (16) (a) *Sport treiben? Nee, ich habe keine Zeit dafür*
 Make sport? No, I have NEG time for.that
 'Do sport? I do not have time for this.'
- (b) *Ich habe oft daran gedacht, meine Arbeit aufzugeben*
 I have often to.that thought, my work up-to-give
 'I have often thought of giving up my job.'

Therefore, *da* in present-day German can also be a *pro* form. Kratzer (2004) has in fact proposed that *da* is to be analysed "as a *situation pronoun*, i.e. as an

adverbial *pro*-form which may be used to refer to any salient information in the context situation” (Light 2015: 252).

As discussed in section 2.2.1 above, OHG *tho* was connected with free inversion with verbs of saying, passive constructions and unaccusative verbs. In the Early New High German (ENHG, ca.1350–1650) period, *do* was systematically inserted in embedded clauses featuring a subject gap (example from Light 2015: 248).

- (17) *Simon, der do heyst Petrus*
Simon, who DA is-called Peter
‘Simon, who is called Peter.’

(*Septembertestament*, Matthew 4:18)

Light (2015) has also shown that the function of ENHG *do* is carried out by *thār* in Tatian. She analysed 56 relative clauses, 41 of which had a subject gap, and found that *thār* with no clear locative meaning appears in around 50% of the cases.

- (18) (a) *bithiu uuanta mir teta mihhilu thie thār mahtīg ist*
because since to.me does much that DA mighty is
‘Because the Mighty One did great things for me.’

(Luke 1:49, Light 2015: 253)

- (b) *Thie thār habē oṛun thie hōre.*
that DA have ears that hear
‘He that has ears to hear, let him hear.’

(Matthew 13:43, Light 2015: 253)

2.2.3 Partial Conclusions

The data illustrate that free inversion often correlates with the presence of *tho*, which i) is an element with weak locative/temporal semantics; ii) it only appears with verbs of saying, negated sentences, passives and unaccusative verbs when the DP subject is in the free inversion construction; iii) is compatible with embedded clauses with a subject gap in ENHG (in contrast to OHG where the adverb *thār* is found); iv) is always excluded from interrogative clauses.

2.3 Axel’s account

The received analysis of V1 sentences featuring free inversion in OHG was proposed by Axel (2007: 131), who argued that free inversion results from

right-extraposition of the DP subject out of the VP (to the so-called *Nachfeld*). This analysis is supported by the fact that free inversion is still possible in present-day German with heavy subjects and with unaccusative verbs:¹⁰

(19) Free inversion, German (cf. Axel 2007: 131)

*Es sind schon angekommen [der Kanzler, seine Gattin
EXPL are already arrived the Chancellor, his wife
und der Außenminister]
and the foreign minister
'The Chancellor, his wife and the foreign minister have already
arrived.'*

The free inversion construction alternates in OHG (and present-day German) with G-inversion, which according to Axel (2007: 110) involves i) the absence of any movement of the DP subject out of its base position due to the absence of a projected IP/TP, and ii) an OV underlying structure.

(20) [_{CP} [_{C°} [_{VP} XP finite verb]]]

According to Axel (2007: 167ff), *tho* is to be analysed as a narrative-declarative marker appearing in the CP layer which attracts the finite verb.

This conclusion is reached by refuting two competing hypotheses, i.e. that *tho* has to do with *pro* and is an expletive of the TP position or that it has to do with topic drop. I briefly examine these two possibilities.

The first hypothesis proposed to account for the presence of *tho* is that *tho* is a *there*-type expletive appearing in Spec,TP (similar to the use of the *da* still found in present-day varieties of German, see Bayer & Suchsland 1997) and alternates with expletive *pro* in the same position in VS sentences, as shown in (21) (see also Haerberli 2001 for the presence of two subject positions in Old English).

(21) [_{CP} ... [_{AGRSP} *pro*/*tho* ... [_{VP} DP subject]]]

Axel (2007) discards the analysis in (21) for the following reasons. First, no definiteness effects can be found in OHG, which would be unexpected if *tho* were a *there*-type expletive. Second, if the distribution of free inversion were determined by the availability of *pro* in Spec, AgrSP, as in (21), no asymmetries

¹⁰ An alternative account, following Schallert (2007), is that free inversion was possible in OHG by virtue of its being a mixed OV/VO language due to an unfixed parameter setting in the VP. However, this account does not provide an explanation of the availability of VS word order, and precisely in the cases observed, and will not be considered in this paper.

in the distribution of free inversion across verb types were expected, contrary to facts.

The second hypothesis discussed by Axel (2007) is that the distribution of *tho* is an effect of topic drop, of the type found in present-day German (cf. Ross 1982, Trutkowski 2011, Haider 2010 on this construction). In this language a topicalised constituent appearing in Spec,ForceP can be dropped, as shown in (22).

- (22) *Was ist mit dem Putzen? Hab' ich schon erledigt*
 what is with the cleaning have I already finished
 'What about the cleaning?' 'I have already finished it'
 (Axel 2007: 153)

According to the topic-drop hypothesis as applied to *tho*, this element could optionally be dropped given the right pragmatic conditions, as in the structure in (23) from Axel 2007: 156).

- (23) [_{CP} *tho* / ∅ [_C V] [... t_j]]

This analysis would immediately account for cases of preverbal *tho* and sentences lacking *tho*, but not for those cases in which *tho* is postverbal. Therefore, Axel (2007: 157) rejected it.

The alternative analysis proposed by Axel (2007) is that *tho* is a kind of narrative-declarative marker appearing in the CP, whose function, like other OHG particles such as *inu/eno* found in interrogatives, and *nū* of imperatives, is that of marking declarative sentences.¹¹

A similar, though not identical, analysis has been put forth by Fuß (2009), who suggested that *tho* functions "as a discourse-anaphoric element whose function is to mark (new) foregrounded actions/events/situations along the main story line of a narration" (Fuß 2009: 3, see also Donhauser & Petrova 2009, Hinterhölzl & Petrova 2010, Petrova & Solf 2008). Moreover, Fuß (2009) suggested that *tho* can also mark turn-taking (with verbs of saying) and change of place/change of state.

Fuß (2009: 3) proposed that *tho* is base-generated in the highest portion of the IP layer and that it can optionally raise to Spec,CP (24b: adapted from Fuß 2009: 3).

- (24) (a) [_{CP} *tho*_j V_{fin} [_{FP} t_j ...]]
 (b) [_{CP} ∅ V_{fin} [_{FP} *tho* ...]]

¹¹ See Axel (2007: 41ff) for the discussion on the etymology of these particles.

Both Axel's (2007) and Fuß' (2009) accounts face the same problem as Haeberli's (2001) analysis of subject positions in Old English as applied to OHG, i.e. that the distribution across verb classes remains unexplained. Moreover, the connection between *tho* and free inversion also remains unclear. Finally, both analyses fail to account for the optionality of the distribution of *tho* and of its different positions within the clause. In the remainder of the paper, I will address these gaps and I will propose a novel account of free inversion and of the distribution of *tho* OHG.

2.4 A new proposal

In what follows, I put forth an alternative analysis of OHG *tho*, wherein I reconsider Haeberli's (2001) idea that different subject positions are fed by the availability of *pro* in Spec,TP. Unlike previous accounts, I will couch the *pro*-drop hypothesis for free inversion within Frascarelli's (2007, 2018) account for the licensing of null subjects (independently shown to hold for OHG, see Schlachter 2010, 2012, Cognola & Walkden 2019, 2021) according to which a null referential subject *pro* must be identified via an agree relation with an aboutness/shift Topic in the left periphery (Topic criterion). Frascarelli's analysis accounts for the licensing of *pro* through two operations which involve two FPs: a TopicP in the left periphery, and *pro* in Spec,TP.

The idea that the licensing of *pro* involves two operations and two FPs will allow us to solve a series of problems connected to the status of *tho*, while the connection between free inversion and *pro*-drop will give us novel tools with which to analyse *tho*.

The first issue that will be addressed is the status of *tho* as a *there*-expletive, i.e. as an expletive of the TP position of the type found in present-day English, especially since the evidence discussed so far has spoken against such an account. The expletives of Spec,TP, which are typically found in non-null subject languages such as English, show up obligatorily both sentence-initially and in inversion contexts (Biberauer & Roberts 2010). Conversely, OHG *tho* can apparently be optionally inserted in both the sentence-initial and the inversion positions. Therefore, *tho* does not pattern with TP-expletives, and thus cannot be analysed as an expletive of Spec,TP.

However, null-subject languages exhibit a type of expletive which shares striking similarities with *tho*. In null-subject Romance languages, expletives are i) not obligatory, ii) are connected to special pragmatic/discourse interpretations of the DP subject; and iii) are linked to the clause's left periphery. In the examples in (25), for instance, the optional expletive-like element *ele* found in Portuguese dialects co-occurs with the syntactic subjects *os lobos* and *eu* and has a pragmatic/discourse function (connected with deixis and

contextuality according to [Silva-Villar 1998](#): 267, and with the sentence's illocutionary force according to [Carrilho 2008](#)). A similar phenomenon is also found in Spanish dialects (25 c).¹²

- (25) (a) (*Ele*) *os lobos andan com fame*
 EXPL. the wolves go with hungry
 'Wolves are hungry.' (European Portuguese, [Camacho 2013](#): 49)
- (b) (*Ele*) *eu gosto de socorrer as pessoas!*
 EXPL. I like.1SG to help the people
 'I like to help people!' (European Portuguese, [Carrilho 2008](#): 1)
- (c) (*Ello*) *vienen haitianos aquí*
 EXPL come.3PL Haitianos here
 'People from Haiti come here.'
 (Dominican Spanish, [Camacho 2013](#): 44)

I propose that *tho* should be analysed as a CP-expletive of the type found in null-subject languages (25), and that its function, distribution and presence in free inversion are fed by the *pro*-drop character of OHG. Therefore, my proposal is that *tho* appears in OHG due to the fact that this language was a *pro*-drop language. This hypothesis also accounts for the connection between *tho* and free inversion, given that free inversion belongs to the cluster of properties associated with *pro*-drop (26) ([Perlmutter 1971](#), [Rizzi 1982](#), [Chomsky & Lasnik 1977](#), [Kayne 1980](#), [Taraldsen 1978](#), [Jaeggli & Safir 1989](#), [Roberts & Holmberg 2010](#)).

- (26) (a) The possibility of a silent, referential, definite subject of finite clauses.
- (b) Free subject inversion.
- (c) The apparent absence of complementiser-trace effects.
- (d) Rich agreement inflection on finite verbs.

¹² These non-obligatory overt CP-expletives are widely attested in Ibero-Romance languages, whereas they are less frequent in Italo-Romance languages (for an exception see the *chillu*-construction in Southern Italian dialects, [Ledgeway 2010](#), which, however, involves a demonstrative pronoun). In Ibero-Romance languages, these expletives are realised morphologically by third-person pronouns: in the case of *ello*, it is the neuter form. Crucially, it seems that sentences featuring an expletive appear to pattern pragmatically with sentences lacking the expletive but exhibiting free inversion in Ibero-Romance languages, since both sentences with overt expletive-like elements and sentences with free inversion are both connected with a deictic interpretation of the subject: see the analysis of [Corr \(2016\)](#) for free inversion in Ibero-Romance. See also [Holmberg & Nikanne \(2002\)](#) for expletives of the Topic position.

In order to provide evidence for this proposed analysis, I will discuss studies and arguments supporting the idea that OHG was a *pro*-drop language, i.e. a language in which referential null subjects were possible and I will focus on the topic-matching analysis for OHG whose core idea is that null subjects are licensed via Frascarelli 2007's (2007, 2018) Topic Criterion, i.e. *pro* must be licensed by a silent Aboutness/shift Topic in the left periphery and identified via verb agreement. I will then discuss free inversion in present-day Italian showing that it involves the presence of a fronted silent / overt locative and I will apply to OHG the analysis of free inversion in present-day Italian. Key to this account is that: i) OHG lexical verbs can select an overt/silent extra locative argument; ii) when the DP subject is not raised to Spec,TP, this extra locative argument can function as a subject expletive; iii) since null subjects are licensed through Frascarelli 2007's (2007, 2018) Topic Criterion in OHG, the locative argument is raised to Spec,TopicP and licenses *pro* in Spec,TP.

According to the analysis, *tho* is to be considered a special type of CP-expletive differing from CP expletives found in present-day V2 non-null subject languages, such as the expletive *es* found exclusively in the sentence-initial position in German in sentences in which no constituent is fronted to CP. These expletives have exclusively a syntactic function, i.e. they appear in CP when no maximal category is fronted. Crucially, these types of expletives are, unlike OHG *tho*, never allowed in the TP subject position, i.e. they disappear when another constituent is in CP (cf. Biberauer 2017).

2.4.1 OHG as an asymmetric *pro*-drop language

One of the syntactic properties of OHG that distinguishes it from present-day German is the availability of silent referential subjects in contexts ruled out in the present-day language (cf. Eggenberger 1961, Axel 2007, Axel & Weiß 2011, Weiß & Volodina 2018, Schlachter 2010, 2012, Walkden 2014, Cognola & Walkden 2019). The examples in (27) show two cases of third person null subjects which would require the presence of an overt subject pronoun in present-day German.

- (27) (a) Exsurgens autem Ioseph a somno / fecit sicut precepit ei
angelus domini
- Arstantanti thô Ioseph fon slafe / teta só imo*
Emerging thô Joseph from sleep did.3SG how him
gibot truhtines engil
commanded Lord.GEN angel
- 'Once Joseph got up, he did as commanded by the Lord's angel.'
(Part 8, Chapter 5, sentence line 1)

- (b) Et ascendens in nauicula .../
steig tho in skifilin /
stepped.3SG THO into boat
'He then stepped into the boat.'

(T 193,1, [Axel 2007](#): 293)

The presence in OHG of silent, referential, definite subjects has traditionally been accounted for in terms of loan syntax from the Latin (cf. [Eggenberger 1961](#)) – a hypothesis which has been shown by recent studies to be untenable. If we concentrate on Tatian, the text considered in this paper, it has been long established that it exhibits a sufficient level of autonomy from the Latin and can be used for syntactic research ([Dittmer & Dittmer 1998](#), [Axel 2007](#), [Fleischer, Hinterhölzl & Solf 2008](#)). The autonomy of the translators of Tatian is also evidenced in the area of null subjects ([Axel 2007](#), [Walkden 2014](#): 186–187). [Cognola & Walkden \(2019: 14\)](#) have shown that the translators consistently pattern against the Latin source in sentences featuring a null subject in main clauses, embedded clauses and interrogative clauses. In embedded clauses, null subjects are a minority of cases in comparison to the Latin (see [Axel 2007](#): 306 for the same observation); in main declarative clauses null subjects appear in 80% rather than in 100% of cases, which speaks against a slavish translation. In interrogative clauses subjects are null in a minority of sentences (around 30%) against the Latin. If we focus on the distribution of *tho*, we see a further piece of evidence for the autonomy of the OHG translators, since *tho* is consistently inserted against the Latin (see also [Axel 2007](#) for this observation). These data clearly indicate that the translators of Tatian did not slavishly reproduce the Latin syntax, but rather exhibited a certain autonomy from the original text.

The two existing theoretical accounts for null subjects in OHG must face the most problematic issue concerning the distribution of null subjects in OHG, i.e. the fact that null subjects are mostly found in main clauses and nearly excluded from embedded clauses (as first observed by [Eggenberger 1961](#)).

Both approaches start out from the idea that null subjects in OHG can involve a silent referential pronoun *pro* in the Spec,IP area. This is in contrast to present-day German, in which null subjects are instances of Topic drop. The two approaches differ in their assumptions about how *pro* is licensed.

The first approach ([Axel 2007](#), [Axel & Weiß 2011](#), [Weiß & Volodina 2018](#)) applies [Benincà's \(1984\)](#) and [Adams's \(1987\)](#) analysis of *pro*-drop in Old Romance to OHG. [Benincà's \(1984\)](#) and [Adams's \(1987\)](#) accounts argued that in Old Romance null subjects typically appear in main and not in embed-

ded clauses – a phenomenon they call “asymmetric *pro*-drop”.¹³ To account for the distribution of null subjects, they propose that the licensing of *pro* in INF (IP or TP in current terms) is parasitic on the position of the finite verb, which in Old Romance could either appear in C° (main clauses) or in I° (embedded clauses) given the V2 nature of Old Romance.¹⁴ They thus propose that *pro* is only licensed if governed by INFL, a condition which is only met in main clauses when V-to-C movement has taken place and not in embedded clauses in which V-to-C movement is blocked by an overt complementiser (den Besten 1983). This approach very neatly accounts for the asymmetric nature of *pro*-drop. However, it cannot account for those numerically reduced but still present null subjects in embedded clauses, and incorrectly predicts the distribution of null subjects in interrogative clauses. Cognola & Walkden (2019) show that null subjects are much rarer in this clause type than in main declarative clauses – a fact which is fully unpredicted by Benincà’s and Adams’s accounts which tie the presence of null subjects to the position of the finite verb, given that in interrogative clauses the finite verb is surely in C° (cf. Rizzi’s 1996 notion of residual V2 based on interrogative clauses).

The second approach, the topic-matching hypothesis, analyses null subjects by applying the same analysis offered by Frascarelli (2007, 2018) for null subjects in present-day Italian, a consistent null-subject language (Schlachter 2010, 2012, Walkden 2014, Cognola & Walkden 2019, 2021). According to Frascarelli’s approach, null subjects always require the mediation of a null Aboutness/shift Topic in the left periphery in order to be licensed in a language such as Italian. This approach has proven to account for the shortcomings of the syntactic analysis of OHG; more specifically, it allows us to make sense of the fact that null subjects are much more frequent in main declarative clauses and less frequent in interrogative clauses. The Topic-matching analysis immediately captures this fact, since it connects the licensing of the null subject with the availability of a Topic position in CP, which is expected to be subject to restrictions in a context such as interrogative clauses in which a *wh*-element/silent operator is in CP.

I outline the tenets of this approach in the following subsection.

13 As discussed in Cognola & Casalicchio (2018), asymmetric *pro*-drop languages can be considered a subtype of partial *pro*-drop languages, i.e. languages which allow null subjects but under more restricted conditions (always difficult to define; see Holmberg 2005) than consistent null subject languages (Holmberg, Nayudu & Sheehan 2009). The label “partial *pro*-drop” can thus be considered a cover term for languages featuring *pro* which is, however, licensed through different mechanisms.

14 The claim that the Old Romance languages are technically V2 languages, i.e. languages in which V-to-C movement takes place in all main clauses, is shared by most researchers working on the syntax of Old Romance (but see Kaiser 2002 and Kaiser & Zimmermann 2011 for a different view). For a discussion of the problem, see Holmberg (2015).

2.4.2 *Topic-matching analysis for null subjects in OHG*

According to [Frascarelli \(2007, 2018\)](#), null subjects involve the presence of a silent, referential subject pronoun, *pro* (cf. [Rizzi 1986](#)). The null, referential subject pronoun is interpreted in relation to the closest Aboutness/Shift topic (A-topic), a constituent that is “newly introduced, newly changed or newly returned to” (Givón 1983: 8 in [Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007](#)). The Shift head bears a feature which acts as a probe, and enters into an Agree relation with a *pro* in Spec,*v*P, as in (28) ([Frascarelli 2007](#): 718, her (30)).

- (28) [_{ShiftP} DP_[αPn] [Shift° [... [_{AggrSP} [Agr° [_{vP} *pro*_[αPn] [_{vP}]]]]]]]]

Frascarelli further assumes that ShiftP is a criterial position, at least in predicational sentences, and that a topic (possibly silent) must be present in the specifier of ShiftP. This ‘Topic Criterion’ is given in full in (29).

- (29) **Topic Criterion** ([Frascarelli 2018](#): 212)
- (a) The high Topic field in the C-domain contains a position in which the [+aboutness] feature (an extended EPP feature) is encoded and matched (via Agree) by the local (third person) N[ull]S[ubject].
 - (b) When continuous, the [+aboutness] Topic can be null (i.e. silent).

According to this proposal, null subjects in a consistent *pro*-drop language such as present-day Italian always involve the activation of a TopicP in the clause left periphery in which the aboutness feature is encoded. Note that the aboutness feature can be licensed by an XP which “is focused or is part of the Comment in the previous sentence” ([Frascarelli 2018](#): 221). The sentence in (30) (from [Frascarelli 2018](#): 2211) is an example of this:

- (30) *Vorrei presentarti Leo_k. pro_k è il mio migliore*
 want.COND.1SG introduce.to you Leo. is the my best
amico
 friend
 ‘I’d like to introduce Leo to you. He is my best friend.’

[Frascarelli \(2018: 221\)](#) proposed that in examples like (30), the antecedent of *pro* is not the object DP *Leo* in the previous Comment, but rather is a silent A-Topic in the local C-domain. Null topics are indicated in angle brackets (<>).

- (31) Vorrei presentarti Leo. [_{ShiftP} <Leo_k> [_{TP} pro_k è il mio migliore amico]]

The new topic chain can only be established in a clause that is capable of bearing illocutionary force. First and second person null subjects work differently: Frascarelli (2018: 219–222) argues that these do not interfere in topic chains and are not licensed by the same mechanism as third person null subjects. Instead, first and second person null subjects enter into an Agree relation with a logophoric agent (Λ_A) or logophoric patient (Λ_P), syntactically present in the left periphery. Like the [+aboutness] Topic feature, the features of Λ_A and Λ_P are C/edge linkers (CLn) in the sense of Sigurðsson (2011).

- (32) **C/Edge-Linking Generalisation** (Sigurðsson 2011: 282)
Any definite argument, overt or silent, positively matches at least one CLn in its local C-domain, where CLn is an element of the set { Λ_A , Λ_P , Top ... }

Based on Frascarelli's analysis, Cognola & Walkden (2019) proposed the following derivation for null subjects in OHG main clauses. As shown in (34), the subject *Ioseph*, which is introduced by the fronted adverbial clause, can remain silent in the main clause due to the fact that it licenses a silent Aboutness-Topic which enters into an Agree relation with *pro*.

- (33) /Exsurgens autem Ioseph a somno / fecit sicut p̄cepit ei angelus domini/

Arstantanti thō Ioseph fon slafe / teta só imo
emerging THō Joseph from sleep did.3SG how him
gibôt truhtines engil /
commanded Lord.GEN angel

'Once Joseph got up, he did as commanded by the angel.'

Part 8, Chapter 5, sentence 10, line 1

- (34) [_{FrameP} [Arstantanti thō Ioseph_[αPn] fon slafe] [_{ForceP} teta_k [_{TopicP} [_{<Ioseph>}_[αPn]] [_{Topic°} t_k [_{TP} pro_[αPn] t_k]]]]]

The key conditions for the licensing of referential *pro* in OHG are: i) the availability of a TopicP in the left periphery, and ii) the identification between the A-Topic and *pro* enabled by the strong *phi*-features on verb morphology. When these conditions are met, an Agree chain, probing for person, can be established between *pro*, the verb, and the Topic or the logophoric operator in the left periphery. This Agree chain cannot be established with third person

subjects in *wh*-interrogative clauses in Tatian (cf. [Cognola & Walkden 2021: 129](#)) – which follows from the fact that fronted *wh*-elements move through the FP hosting the A-topic on their way to Spec,ForceP, as shown in (35).

$$(35) \text{ [}_{\text{Force}} \text{ } wh\text{-element}_i \text{ finite verb}_k \text{ [}_{\text{TopicP}} \text{ } t_j \text{ } t_k \text{ [}_{\text{TP}} \text{ } pro \text{ } t_k \text{ [}_{\text{VP}} \text{ } t_k \text{]} \text{]} \text{]}]]]$$

In what follows I explore the connection between free inversion, *pro*-drop and the expletive-like element *tho* by focussing on free inversion in Italian, a consistent *pro*-drop language.

2.4.3 On the status of *tho* and its position within the VP

Free inversion in Italian

The idea proposed in this paper is that *tho* in free inversion correlates with the null-subject character of OHG and is directly fed by it. In order to capture the connection between *tho*, null subjects and free inversion, I begin with the discussion of free inversion in Italian.¹⁵ In this language, free inversion is found with a variety of verb types, such as unaccusative and unergative verbs, as shown in the examples in (36), adapted from [Pinto 1997: 20–22](#), cited in [Sluckin et al. 2021: 14](#)). As first noted in [Benincà \(1988\)](#), free inversion in Italian involves the presence of an implicit locative argument, typically a locative goal (cf. [Tortora 2001](#) for verbs such as *to arrive* or *to phone*) or a speaker-oriented deictic interpretation ([Sluckin et al. 2021](#) for Italian and [Sheehan 2010](#), [Corr 2016](#) for this deictic interpretation in Spanish and Portuguese) for verbs such as *to sleep* or *to leave*. In present-day Italian, the locative argument is null, although in some varieties it can also be overt ([Tortora 1997, 2001](#) on Borgomanerese).

- (36) (a) <GOAL> È entrata Beatrice.
 is entered Beatrice
 ‘Beatrice has come in (here).’ ([Sluckin et al. 2021: 173](#))
- (b) <GOAL> Ha telefonato Dante.
 has phoned Dante
 ‘Dante has phoned (here/us).’ ([Sluckin et al. 2021: 173](#))

As discussed in [Sluckin et al. \(2021\)](#), the locative can also be overt, and in this case the sentence is only felicitous if the PP is D-linked, whereas sentences involving a silent locative are compatible with out-of-the-blue contexts.

¹⁵ An analysis of free inversion in Romance languages goes beyond the scope of this paper.

- (37) *In questa casa ha abitato Giacomo Leopardi*
 in this house has lived Giacomo Leopardi
 ‘Giacomo Leopardi lived in this house.’ (Sluckin et al. 2021: 173)

The fact that free inversion is compatible with a variety of verbs in Italian and is not only limited to unaccusative verbs has been directly connected to the *pro*-drop character of the language (see Sluckin et al. 2021, Bentley & Cruschina 2018), as well as in the light of the fact that free inversion is listed among the correlated properties of *pro*-drop languages (Rizzi 1982, Roberts & Holmberg 2010).

To account for these facts, Tortora (2001) proposed that free inversion is fed by a silent locative (“locative goal argument” in her account) selected by the lexical verbs, which she calls “*pro*_{LOC}”, which raises to Spec,TP, thus blocking the movement of the DP subject out of VP.

Sluckin et al. (2021) and Bentley & Cruschina (2018) updated this approach following Rizzi’s (2006) and Cardinaletti’s (2004) idea that the realisation of the subject involves two FPs in Italian: TP for the realisation of the syntactic subject and SubjP, found above TP, which hosts the “subject of predication (SoP)”, as in (38) from Bentley & Cruschina (2018: 3).

- (38) [SubjP SoP [TP T -+V ... [VP DP]]]

Sluckin et al. (2021: 176) apply the derivation in (38) to free inversion and propose that free inversion involving a silent locative is derived through two mechanisms. The first is the movement of the silent locative argument *pro*_{LOC} (cf. Tortora 1997, 2001) selected by the verb from the VP area to Spec,SubjP, a possibility restricted to the verbs selecting a locative argument. For verbs which do not select a locative argument, they propose that the situational argument *pro*_{SIT} is merged directly in Spec,SubjP.

- (39) (a) [CP [SubjP PP_{LOC} In questa casa [Subj° [TP TP ha [VP abitato [VP \forall [SC Giacomo Leopardi PP_{LOC} In questa casa]]]]]]]]
 (b) [CP C [SubjP SubjP *pro*_{LOC} [Subj° [TP TP è [VP entrata [VP \forall [SC DP Beatrice *pro*_{LOC}]]]]]]]]

In the structures in (39) the realisation of the subject is thus split in two FPs, with the null locative appearing in SubjP.

Free inversion in OHG: where does tho come from?

In this section and in the following, I apply to OHG the analysis put forth for free inversion in Italian. The key idea is that OHG *tho* corresponds to a locative argument selected by the lexical verb which can move out of VP and function as a subject expletive given the *pro*-drop status of OHG.¹⁶ Given that *tho* is not obligatory in OHG, this idea implies that the locative argument that can be promoted to subject can be either be overt (like Borgomanerese, Tortora 1997, 2001) or silent (as in present-day Italian). See section 2.6 below for a tentative account of this alternation.

In order to see how free inversion is derived, I consider first sentences featuring an unaccusative verb (40).

- (40) Et accesserunt ad eum discipuli eius,
/Inti giengun tho zi imo sine iungiron /
and went.3PL THO to him his disciples
'His pupils went to him.'

Part 26, Chapter 22, sentence 7, line 3

Following general claims (Perlmutter 1978, Rizzi 1982, Burzio 1986), I propose that VS is the unmarked word order with unaccusative verbs and that the subject of the unaccusative verb starts out as the thematic object (which is then promoted to syntactic subject in the derivation).

I further propose that for unaccusative verbs in OHG, a locative argument can be selected by the verb, as can be done in Italian. This expletive locative is compatible with further pure locative specifications (in the example here *fon iru*). Following Kayne's (1994) Universal Base Hypothesis, I assume that the underlying structure of OHG is VO.¹⁷

- (41) [_{VP} [_{V°} giengun] [_{NP} sine iungiron] [_{LOCP} tho]]

The same analysis can be carried over to passive constructions (42).

16 As discussed in Axel (2007) relying on Behaghel (1928: 90), *tho* had both a locative and temporal meaning in OHG since the locative adverb *thār* became homonymous with *tho* in OHG. See section 2.7 for a closer definition of the meaning of *tho*.

17 This is not a shared claim, since present-day German is generally considered to be a language with underlying OV word order (see Haider 2010 among others). See Hinterhölzl (2005) for a VO analysis of German.

(42) Et sanatus est puer in illa hora./

/Uuard tho giheilil thie kneht in thero ziti./
 became THO cured that child in that time
 ‘And the child was cured in that moment.’

Part 51, Chapter 47, sentence 8, line 7

Also in this case, the syntactic subject starts out as the direct object, which only receives theta role and no case from the verb. I assume that in this configuration a locative *tho* argument can be selected by the verb in VP.

(43) [_{FP} in thero ziti [_{VP} [_{V°} giheilil] [_{NP} thie kneht] [_{LOCP} tho]]]

The account proposed for unaccusative verbs and passive constructions cannot be applied to the verbs of saying, because these verbs are able to assign thematic role to Spec,VP and a case and a theta role to their object positions. Therefore, another account must be put forth. I propose that *tho* is not selected as a locative argument by the verb of saying, and that, as assumed by [Sluckin et al. \(2021\)](#), *tho* is a situational argument generated outside the thematic structure of the verb and corresponds to *pro*_{SIT}, as well as being directly merged in Spec,TopicP.^{18,19}

(44) /Ihesus autem ait illi:/

/Tho quad imo der heilant:/
 THO said him the Saviour
 ‘The Saviour said:’

Part 99, Chapter 92, sentence 5, line 29

(45) [_{oP} der heilant [_{VP} [_{V°} quad]]]

2.4.4 On the derivation of sentences featuring *tho*: pro-drop and V2

The aim of this subsection is to discuss how *tho* interacts with the realisation of the subject. Recall that OHG is a V2 language, i.e. a language in which V-to-C movement takes place in declarative and interrogative main clauses ([Axel](#)

¹⁸ It is possible that the weak semantics (locative and temporal meaning, [Axel 2007](#): 157f based on [Behaghel 1928](#): 90) of *tho* emerges from the different licensing positions of *tho*: either inside the VP or outside it.

¹⁹ It has to be noted though that in Tatian the verbs of saying are typically used without the direct object, since they are used to introduce direct speech, in forms such as: “He told him/her:”. Whether this might have played a role in the availability of *tho* precisely with these verbs I leave open for further research.

2007). Following [Cognola & Walkden \(2019, 2021\)](#) and [Cognola \(2022\)](#), I start out from the idea that V2 in OHG involves movement of the finite verb to Force^o, and that below this position a TopicP is found, as shown in (46). The TopicP in the left periphery hosts the null A-Topic needed for the licensing of *pro* within the clause, as according to [Frascarelli \(2007\)](#).

- (46) [_{FrameP} [Arstantanti thô Ioseph_[αPn] fon slafe] [_{ForceP} teta_k [_{TopicP} [_{Topic^o} t_k [_{TP} *pro*_[αPn] t_k]]]]]

Regarding clauses with free inversion, I propose that in the contexts involving an overt locative expletive selected by the lexical verb and nothing in the VP subject position, the locative raises to TopicP and licenses *pro* in Spec,TP. *Pro* in Spec,TP agrees in number (singular / plural) and person (third) with the finite verb. I take *tho* to be a weak element in the sense of [Cardinaletti & Starke \(1999\)](#), i.e. a maximal category which can be fronted to the sentence-initial position.

- (47) Et sanatus est puer in illa hora./

/Uuard tho giheilít thie kneht in thero ziti./

became THO cured that child in that time

‘And the child was cured in that moment’

Part 51, Chapter 47, sentence 8, line 7

- (48) [_{ForceP} uuard_k [_{TopicP} [**tho**_j] [_{Topic^o} t_k] [_{TP} *pro* t_k [_{FP} in there ziti [_{VP} [_{V^o} giheilít] [_{NP} thie kneht] [_{LOCP} t_j]]]]]]]

According to the structure in (48), V1 sentences represent a case in which the TopicP position responsible for the licensing of *pro* does not host a null A-topic, but rather a subject expletive whose function is though the same, i.e. checking the aboutness feature in TopicP.²⁰

²⁰ An alternative hypothesis is to assume that the FP hosting *tho* in OHG is SubjP, a position claimed to be connected to an Aboutness feature (cf. [Sluckin et al. 2021](#)). I am sympathetic to this idea, since I have claimed in favour of a key role of SubjP in the realisation of the syntactic subject and in the derivation of V2 in Mòcheno ([Cognola 2013b](#)). However, for OHG I do not have enough evidence to assume an involvement of SubjP in the licensing of *pro*. For Mòcheno and present-day Italian, it is straightforward that an articulated left periphery ([Rizzi 1997](#), [Benincà 2006](#)) is to be assumed, whereas for OHG evidence goes in the direction that the periphery might be reduced (but remains slightly more articulated than in present-day German). Therefore, I prefer to remain here in favour of the presence of a TopicP in the left periphery for the licensing of *pro* in OHG, for which we have independent evidence ([Cognola & Walkden 2019](#)), leaving open the possibility that in the case of a *tho* clause SubjP actually hosts *tho*. The idea that SubjP and not TopicP hosts *tho* would imply that sentences featuring *pro* in Spec,TP

In (49), I provide the derivation of a sentence with free inversion involving a verb of saying. In the example, *tho* appears in the sentence-initial position, i.e. Spec,ForceP in the proposed account. I propose that *tho* is not generated as a locative argument within the VP but it is directly merged in Spec,TopicP (like *pro_{-sit}*) where it checks the aboutness features and then raises to Spec,ForceP.²¹

- (49) [...] Dicit eis Ihesus: /
 / [...] *Thó quad ín ther heilant:* /
 THO told them the Saviour
 ‘Then the Saviour told them’

Part 49, Chapter 45, sentence 4, line 30

- (50) [_{ForceP} *tho_j* [_{quad_k} [_{TopicP} [_{t_j}] [_{Topic°} *t_k*] [_{FP} *ín* [_{TP} *pro* *t_k* [_{vP} *der heilant* [_{VP} *t_k*]]]]]]]]

differ according to the position in the left periphery occupied by the *pro*-licensing element. This conclusion might turn out to be untenable for OHG: in fact, Axel (2007: 164f) has argued that V1 sentences with free inversion do not differ from V2 sentences in strictly asserting that a proposition is true. Therefore, sentences with free inversion and canonical declarative V2 sentences do not differ in their structure. A different discourse is to be made for V1 clauses in present-day German. Reis (2000) has shown that V1 declaratives express/recount that a proposition is true (cf. Axel 2007: 165). I leave this issue open for further research.

²¹ For sentences involving a past participle we must provide a different explanation. In Tatian we find examples like the following:

- (i) /Et repleta est spiritu saneto Elisabeth /
Uuard thô gifullit heilages geistes Helisabeth,
 became THO filled holy.GEN ghost.GEN Helisabeth
 ‘Helisabeth was filled by the holy ghost.’

Part 7, Chapter 4, sentence 3, line 14

If we assume that both arguments are postverbal and the direct object precedes the genitive object (*heiliges geistes*) in the VO position, we must assume that the linear word order is derived via i) movement of the direct object (*Helisabeth*) to a position encoding discourse features (either to a lowTopicP or to a lowFocusP) above the VP, and ii) VP remnant movement to a position above the VP.

- (ii) [_{ForceP} *uuard_k* [_{TopicP} [*tho*] [_{Topic°} *t_k*] [_{TP} *pro*_[an] *t_k* [_{FP} [_{VP} *gifullit heilages geistes*] [_{FP} *Helisabeth_j* [_{VP} [_{v°} *gifullit*] [_{DP} *t_j*] [_{DP} *heilages-geistes*]]]]]]]]

If we assume that the direct object is generated above the VP starting from an underlying OV structure (as in Schweikert 2005, Cinque 2005, 2006, Haider 2010), then the past participle can be assumed to move as a head. For the sake of simplicity, I have assumed an underlying VO structure for OHG, but I am aware of the complexity of derivation for such a mixed OV/VO language (cf. Cognola 2013a, Cognola, Baronchelli & Molinari 2019.)

The expletive *tho* is not needed when the DP subject raises out of the VP, such as in sentences with G-inversion (51).

(51) Nonne mater eius / dicitur Maria [...]?

Ia ist sîn muoter / ginemnit Maria [...]?
 PART is his mother called Mary

‘Isn’t his mother’s name Maria [...]?’

Part 85, Chapter 78, sentence 3, line 6

I propose here that OHG projects TP and that this FP is responsible for nominative case assignment via subject-finite verb agreement. G-inversion is derived via the movement of the DP subject to Spec,TP, as in (52).²²

(52) [_{ForceP} *ia* *ist*_k [_{TopicP} [_{Topic°} *t*_k] [_{TP} *sîn muoter t*_k ... [_{vP} [_{VP} [_{V°} *ginemnit*] [_{DP} ~~*sîn muoter*~~] [_{FP} *Maria*]]]]]]]

2.5 Further evidence for the proposed theory: ban on *tho* in main interrogative clauses

As discussed in section 2.2.1, *tho* never appears in interrogative clauses in Talian, irrespective of the fact that null subjects are possible in this sentence type (though in a reduced fashion in comparison with main clauses, as shown by Cognola & Walkden 2019, 2021). Moreover, the absence of *tho* in interrogative clauses appears to correlate with the absence of free inversion. The examples involving overt third-person subjects are very scarce in the text and are given in (53). It is clear that in one case (53a) the NP subject is surely in G-inversion, whereas in the other cases the examples are ambiguous between G-inversion and free inversion (with a silent locative *tho*). Therefore, no straightforward cases of free inversion can be detected.

(53) (a) Nonne mater eius / dicitur Maria [...]?

Ia ist sîn muoter / ginemnit Maria [...]?
 PART is his mother called Mary

‘Isn’t his mother’s name Maria [...]?’

Part 85, Chapter 78, sentence 3, line 6

²² I therefore assume that TP is projected in OHG, a claim which is not controversial for both OHG (see Axel 2007 for an overview) and present-day German.

- (b) /[...] Nonne hic est / fabri filius? [...]/
 /[...] *Eno nist these / uuercmeistares sun? [...]/*
 PART NEG.IS this smith.GEN son
 ‘Isn’t he the smith’s son?’
 Part 85, Chapter 78, sentence 3, lines 5–6
- (c) /[...] Dicebant /ergo discipuli ad invicem: / numquid aliquis
 attulit ei / manducare? [...] /
 /[...] *Tho quadun the iungoron untar in*
 THO spoke.3PL the disciples between them
zuisgen: / eno ni brahta imo uuer / zi
 together PART NEG brought him someone / to
ezzanna?
 eat
 ‘The pupils were speaking among them and said: has
 somebody brought him something to eat?’
 Part 94, chapter 87, sentence 8, lines 17–20
- (d) /[...] quis est hic? /
 /[...] *Uuer ist therer? /*
 who is this
 ‘Who is he?’
 Part 124, Chapter 117, sentence 1, line 12
- (e) /[...] Dixerunt ergo Iudei / ad se ipsos: quo hic iturus est, /quia
 non inuenimus eum? /
 /[...] *Thô quadun thie Iudon / zi in selbon: Uuara*
 THO said.3PL the Jews to themselves Where
ferit theser, / thaz uuir in ni findemes?
 goes this-one that we him NEG find
 ‘Where is he going, so that we are not going to find him?’
 Part 136, Chapter 129, sentence 4, lines 29-31

I take the data discussed in (53) to indicate that *tho* is excluded from interrogative clauses, a fact that is very likely to correlate with the absence of free inversion.

In order to account for this, it is first necessary to make sense of interrogative clauses featuring a null subject. Cognola & Walkden (2019) show that third person null subjects are excluded from *wh*-interrogative clauses and are only found in yes/no interrogatives. This indicates that the licensing of third

person *pro* is blocked by the fronting of a *wh*-element. I propose that *pro* licensing is blocked by a fronted *wh*-element moving through all CP Spec positions on its way to ForceP, blocking the possibility of having a silent topic or a silent/overt *tho*.

- (54) [_{Force} *wh*-element_j finite verb_k [_{TopicP} t_j t_k [_{TP} *pro* t_k [_{VP} t_k]]]]

When Spec,ForceP hosts a null operator, as in *yes/no* questions, null third-person subjects are possible, I propose that this is because the Spec of the TopicP is available and can thus host a Null A-Topic, given that no XP has been moved to Spec,ForceP.

- (55) [_{Force} Null interrogative Operator_j finite verb_k [_{TopicP} <null topic> t_k [_{TP} *pro* t_k [_{VP} t_k]]]]

The fact that *tho* is not found in interrogative clauses follows straightforwardly from the proposed account. The movement of a *wh*-element to Spec,ForceP blocks the possibility of using TopicP in the periphery and thus the insertion of *tho*. Crucially, the impossibility of inserting *tho* also blocks the insertion of *pro*, and thus free inversion.

2.6 Overt/covert *tho* and information structure

I have shown that OHG *tho* can be analysed as an expletive of TopicP in the left periphery, and that its function is that of checking the aboutness feature in the left periphery and licensing *pro* with unaccusative verbs and in passive constructions or with the verbs of saying (cf. Frascarelli's 2007, 2018 Topic Criterion). In these configurations, the logical subject remains in its base position within the VP, while the expletive-like element moves to Spec,TopicP in the left periphery. Linearly, the position of the DP subject is derived through the assumption of an underlying VO word order (Kayne 1994). Within my approach, the cases of free inversion still attested in present-day German could be viewed as residues of this old free inversion construction, with a silent VP-internal locative acting as the syntactic subject and not as an instance of extraposition (contrary to the proposal in Axel 2007).²³

- (56) *Es sind schon angekommen [der Kanzler, seine Gattin
EXPL are already arrived the Chancellor, his wife
und der Außenminister]
and the foreign minister*

²³ I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

‘The Chancellor, his wife and the foreign minister have already arrived.’

free inversion, German (cf. [Axel 2007](#): 131)

While the proposed analysis neatly accounts for the cases involving overt *tho*, nothing is said about the variation between overt and null *tho* in the free inversion construction in OHG. This is because I assume that *tho* can remain silent but is still moved to Spec,TopicP.

Therefore, cases of free inversion with and without *tho* are not predicted to correlate with pragmatic differences. However, this conclusion might well turn out to be wrong if more data is considered. There are two lines of research that should be pursued in future work. The first should answer the question of whether there are fine-grained differences in the distribution of *tho* across verb classes, to establish whether *tho* is more frequent with some verbs within the verb classes/constructions already known to allow for the presence of *tho*, in order to arrive at a typology of expletive silent/covert locative arguments along the lines of the one proposed by [Corr \(2016\)](#) for free inversion in Ibero-Romance.

The second line of research has to do with the investigation of the exact information status of the construction. What appears to be certain is that free inversion correlates with both a newly introduced or a returned to subject in OHG ([Axel 2007](#), [Fuß 2009](#)), which I have suggested is to be analysed as an A-topic.²⁴

Let us consider a passage from Tatian. In (57 a) I give the last passage of chapter 50 in which *ther heilant* ‘the Saviour’ is introduced. In (57 b) and (57 c) the two first sentences of the next chapter (51) are given. This passage intro-

24 If sentences with free inversion involving overt *tho* were able to license an A-topic they would pattern together with the constructions involving an expletive-like element found in Southern Italian dialects and studied by [Ledgeway \(2010: 259\)](#):

(i) *Chella_j [DP a fibbia]_j s'è rotta*
that one.F the.F buckle.F self=is broke

(ii) *Chella_j s'è rotta [DP a fibbia]_j*
that one.F self=is broken the.F buckle.F

‘The buckle broke.’

(Neapolitan)

According to Frascarelli (in [Cognola & Casalicchio 2018: 7](#)), this construction introduces a shift in the discourse (realised through the Aboutness-Shift Topic) which is doubled by a co-referential Given-Topic and used as a sort of “afterthought”, the function of which is to make sure that the hearer has understood what the Aboutness topic is. Frascarelli notes that *chella* in this construction is able to introduce an Aboutness Topic due to the fact that it agrees in number, person and gender with the DP subject, whereas a true expletive would not be able to do this due to its reduced featural makeup.

duces a new subject, *ein buochari*, appearing in a V1 clause with postverbal *tho* (57b). In the second sentence (57c), *tho* is in the sentence-initial position of a sentence in which the DP subject is an A-topic and it resumes the background information *ther heilant*.

(57) (a) *Last sentence of part 50:*

/Videns autem Ihesus turbas multas / circum se, iussit / ire
trans fretum /

/Tho gisah ther heilant managa menigi /umbi sih,
tho saw the Saviour great crowd around him
gibót thaz sie fuorin/ ubar then giozon.
ordered that they travel.3PL over the lake
'since Jesus had seen a great crowd around him, he
commanded that they cross the lake.'

Part 55, chapter 50, sentence 3, lines 19–20

(b) *First sentence of the next part:*

/Et accendens unus scriba ait illi: /

/ Gieng tho zuo / ein buochari inti quad imo: /
came THO up a scribe and told to.him
'A scribe came up and said to him ...'

Part 57, chapter 51, sentence 1, lines 22–23

(c) /[...] Et dicit ei Ihesus: / vulpes foveas habent /

Tho quad imo ther heilant: /frohún habent loh /
THO told to.him the Saviour: /foxes have.3PL lair
'The Saviour told him: foxes have lairs...'

Part 57, chapter 51, sentence 2, lines 24–28

In (57b) *tho* has both a pragmatic (it introduces a shift in the discourse) and a formal function, i.e. it checks the aboutness feature and licenses *pro* according to the Topic criterion.

(58) [_{ForceP} gieng_k [_{TopicP} [<tho>_j] [_{Topic°} t_k]] [_{TP} *pro* t_k [_{FP} in there ziti [_{FP} ein buochari_j [_{VP} [_{V°} zuo t_k] [_{LOCP} t_j]]]]]]]

Note that in (57b) *tho* introduces a new argument in the discourse and appears in inversion: according to Petrova (2011), Donhauser & Petrova (2009) there is a correlation between the presence of a newly introduced argument and postverbal *tho*.

In (57c), on the contrary, *tho* is merged directly in SpecTopicP since it appears with a verb of saying and it introduces a shift in the discourse: the DP in *vP* qualifies as an A-Topic which resumes background information (the *heilant*). This is possible because *tho* is in TopicP, as in (59): in this structure I assume that the subject remains in its base position.

- (59) [_{ForceP} <**tho**>_m quad_k [_{TopicP} [_{t_m}] [_{Topic°} t_k] [_{FP} imo [_{TP} *pro* t_k [_{VP} [_{V°} t_k][_{NP} ther heilant]]]]]]]

In this example, *tho* is preverbal and the DP subject is returned to. According to Donhauser & Petrova (2009), this is systematic.²⁵

What needs to be investigated in further work is whether the discourse status of DP subjects in free inversion just illustrated is also found in the absence of overt *tho*—which would be predicted by the present account.

2.7 Conclusions: on the nature of *tho*

I have proposed that the distribution and the properties of OHG *tho* and its connection with the free-inversion construction follow from the *pro*-drop nature of the language. Specifically, I have proposed that, as in the *pro*-drop language Italian, *tho* is a locative argument selected by the verb which checks the aboutness feature in TopicP needed for the licensing of *pro* in sentences in which the semantic subject remains in the *vP* (cf. Benincà 1984, Tortora 1997, 2001, Bentley & Cruschina 2018). Following Frascarelli (2007, 2018) and Cognola & Walkden (2019, 2021), I have proposed that *tho* checks an “aboutness feature” in a TopicP of the left periphery which is needed for the licensing of *pro* in TP, thus blocking the movement of the semantic subject out of the *vP*. The syntactic distribution of *tho*, i.e. its being only found in main declarative clauses and being compatible with both the pre- and postverbal position, has been accounted for through the idea that *tho* is a maximal projection and interferes with other XPs fronted to the left periphery, as expected in a V2 language as OHG is claimed to be. In the proposed analysis, *tho* qualifies as an optional expletive of the Topic position (as expletives of the Romance languages) where the aboutness feature needed for *pro* licensing is checked.

The last question to be answered is why the proposed mechanism is possible, i.e. what properties of *tho* are responsible for its behaviour.

In this paper, I have assumed that *tho* behaves like the silent locative argument found in free inversion in Romance and it is associated with an anaphoric

²⁵ I do not know whether this is possible in the absence of the DP subject in free inversion. There are examples in Tatian in which *tho* appears to introduce a shift in the discourse in the absence of a DP subject, but a systematic investigation would be needed to properly address this issue.

component which allows *tho* to check the Aboutness feature in a TopicP in the left periphery (and thus function as a sort of topic marker and licenser of *pro*). Note, that this hypothesis finds interesting parallels with Old Italian. For OHG, it has been said (Lawson 1980, Axel 2007) that *tho* translates Latin *et*, which is taken as piece of evidence of its weak semantics (Axel 2007: 156f). What the hypothesis of a correspondence between *tho* and *et* does not clearly state is that *tho* does not translate *et* in all contexts, but only in the sentence initial position at the beginning of a new paragraph, whereas in real coordination *inti* is used throughout the text.

This indicates that *tho* is a translation of *et* only when *et* appears in the sentence-initial position in the left periphery, where it also has a discourse function. That *et* in this precise context might not be simply a conjunction is indirectly supported by the behaviour of its Old Italian version *e*. As discussed in Poletto (2014), *e* is taken to be a Topic marker licensing a Hanging Topic referring back to the previous context, which is partially consistent with the proposal that I have put forth for *tho*. The idea is therefore that *tho* is a locative argument selected by the verb which is moved to TopicP in the left periphery in sentences with free inversion and which checks the aboutness feature needed for the licensing of *pro* in TP, and by lexicalising TopicP it also functions like a Topic marker like Old Italian *e* (and possibly Latin *et*).

3 DA AND FREE INVERSION IN GERMAN DIALECTS

In present-day German *tho* is no longer available as an expletive of Spec,TopicP as a consequence of the shift of the language from an asymmetric *pro*-drop language to a non-null-subject language (see section 4 below). There are however traces of this expletive in German varieties, which will be discussed in this section.

3.1 German dialects: *da* in embedded clauses

As noted by Bayer & Suchsland (1997) and Grewendorf & Poletto (2015), the element *da* can be found in relative clauses of Bavarian and Hessian – an environment which recalls subject gaps discussed for OHG and ENHG above. In Bavarian *da* is generally combined with two further elements, a d-pronoun and the element *wo*. See the examples in (60) (from Grewendorf & Poletto 2015: 397).

- (60) (a) *Der Mo der wo da ins Wirtshaus kemma is*
 the man who.NOM where PRT into-the pub come is
 ‘The man who came into the pub.’
 (Bavarian, Grewendorf & Poletto 2015: 397)
- (b) *Der Mo den wo da da Hans troffa hot*
 the man who.ACC where PRT the Hans met has
 ‘The man whom Hans met.’
 (Bavarian, Grewendorf & Poletto 2015: 397)
- (c) *Der Kerl, der wo (da) alsfort motze duut*
 the guy who.NOM where (PRT) always grumble does
 ‘The guy who always grumbles.’
 (Bavarian, Grewendorf & Poletto 2015: 399)

Weiß (2013) has shown that *da* is nearly obligatory in free relatives and embedded *wh*-questions in the colloquial language of Leipzig.

Da in German dialects is analysed as a TP-expletive along the lines of Bayer & Suchsland’s (1997) analysis for sentences featuring overt *da* in present-day German. Bayer & Suchsland (1997) proposed that German does not normally project Spec,IP in the presence of an overt DP subject, and that a subject’s case and φ -features are checked covertly. Spec,IP can also host, following Bayer & Suchsland (1997), an expletive-like element *da*, which does not bear case or φ -features, which are assigned covertly to the subject within the VP. According to this analysis, *da* in present-day German should be analysed as a TP expletive, similarly to English *there*. Crucially, no *pro* is licensed in present-day German (Bayer & Suchsland 1997).

3.2 *Cimbrian: subject gaps and free inversion*

3.2.1 *On free inversion and the distribution of da*

In Cimbrian, a Germanic dialect spoken by around 100 people in Luserna (Trentino), free inversion is attested along with a locative expletive-like element *da*.

The presence of *da* in Cimbrian has received much attention in linguistic studies (Bidese & Tomaselli 2018, Grewendorf & Poletto 2015, Panieri, Pedrazza, Nicolussi Baiz, Hipp & Pruner 2006, Kolmer 2005, Cognola & Hinterhölzl 2020) due to the fact that its distribution and presence is remarkable compared to other German varieties.

In addition to its use as a locative adverb in the sense of ‘here’ (see Kolmer 2005: 56–59), in Cimbrian *da* appears in embedded clauses involving a subject

gap (see examples in (61), which are all from [Grewendorf & Poletto 2015: 407](#)), as in other German dialects and in a similar fashion to OHG and ENHG (see section 2.2.2 above).

- (61) (a) *Berda votart vorimen is a stock*
 whoever votes for him is a stupid
 ‘Whoever votes for him is stupid.’
 free subject relative clause
- (b) *Berda bart tün dizza, barzanen pentiern*
 whoever will do this, will.he.of.it regret
 ‘Whoever will do it, they will regret it.’
 free subject relative clause
- (c) *Die diarnen bo da hom gerede pit diar soin vo*
 the girls where da have spoken with you are from
Tria
 Trento
 ‘The girls who spoke with you come from Trento.’
 subject relative clause

Moreover, it is also found as an enclitic element following the complementiser in interrogative clauses involving long extraction of subject *wh*-elements, like in ENHG ([Bidese & Tomaselli 2018: 59](#)).

- (62) (a) *Ber gloabst=(t)o, az=ta khemm atz Lusérn?*
 who believe.2SG=YOU.CL that=DA comes.SBJV to Luserna
 ‘Who do you believe will come to Luserna?’
- (b) *Ber gloabst=(t)o, ke 'z khint=(t)a atz*
 who believe.2SG=YOU.CL that it comes.IND=DA to
Lusérn?
 Luserna
 ‘Who do you believe will come to Luserna?’

Da is obligatory in all main VS sentences (see [Kolmer 2005](#) and [Bidese & Tomaselli 2018](#) on this).²⁶ As discussed in [Kolmer \(2005: 63–64\)](#), [Bidese &](#)

²⁶ An anonymous reviewer casts doubts on the parallel between OHG and Cimbrian free inversion due to the fact that OHG was an OV language whereas Cimbrian is a VO language, and therefore the derivation of free inversion would imply two different structures (subject extraposition in OHG and absence of movement of the subject in Cimbrian). As discussed in section 2, I adopt a theoretical framework ([Kayne 1994](#)) in which rightward movement is ruled out: therefore extraposition is not a licit operation. Given this, the two languages are taken to

Tomaselli (2018) and Cognola & Hinterhölzl (2020), *da* is obligatory in free inversion with definite and indefinite subjects (see also Grewendorf & Polletto 2015 on the absence of definiteness effects with Cimbrian *da*); given and focussed subjects; nearly obligatory with subject QPs, main declarative clauses and interrogative clauses; and all types of verbs (unaccusative, transitive, ergative).²⁷

- (63) (a) *Bas hat-ta herta gakhoaft dar Luca?*
 what has-DA always bought the Luca
 ‘What has Luca always bought?’
- (b) *Atz fest gestarn hon da getonzt alle de*
 at.the party yesterday have DA danced all the
costrittn
 conscripts
 ‘All the conscripts danced at the party yesterday.’
- (c) *Gestarn ist da gestorbet an oltm monn*
 yesterday is DA died an old man
 ‘Yesterday an old man died.’
- (d) *Atz fest bar ta singen a singer vo jodel*
 at.the party will-DA sing a singer of yodel
 ‘A singer of yodel will sing at the party.’

involve an identical underlying VO structure. Moreover, I do not believe that the OV/VO distinction plays any role here, because free inversion involves DP subjects and is a different phenomenon from object syntax, as the grammaticality of subject but not of object extraposition in present-day German shows (see discussion in section 2.6 above). Moreover, English allows for G-inversion in interrogative clauses irrespective of its VO status, while Rhaeto-Romance varieties allow for both G- and free inversion despite being VO languages (Casalicchio & Cognola 2018, 2020). Therefore, there appears to me to be no one-to-one relationship between free inversion and VO base word order either empirically or theoretically.

²⁷ The Cimbrian data discussed in this paper come from the literature (in such cases, references are provided) or from the author’s own fieldwork. For that fieldwork, carried out between 2015 and 2016, several one-hour interviews were carried out with a single informant in which he was asked to translate sentences from Italian to Cimbrian and to provide grammaticality judgments. Once a series of observations on the distribution of *da* were arrived at, I interviewed five more people from the village of Luserna selected according to sociolinguistic criteria (all middle-aged speakers; coming from different areas of Luserna; good gender balance) in order to test the key generalisations arrived at with the single informant. Informants were interviewed in single working sections and were asked to provide grammaticality judgments (on a 1-to-5 point scale with 1: fully ungrammatical to 5: fully grammatical) on 34 sentences featuring *da* in several positions and contexts. Sentences were read out to informants and their answers were written in the questionnaire. The details of this fieldwork can be found in Cognola (2019a) and Cognola & Hinterhölzl (2020).

- (e) *Mòrng ball ta khemmen de mai nevan*
 tomorrow want DA come the my nephews
 ‘Tomorrow my nephews will come.’

When the DP subject is fronted, *da* is ruled out, irrespective of the definiteness/indefiniteness of the subject or its information status (given, new, focussed), or of the verb type (transitive, intransitive, unaccusative) involved (Kolmer 2005: 63–64, Bidese & Tomaselli 2018 and Cognola & Hinterhölzl 2020).

- (64) (a) **Dar Mario hatta gakhoaft in libar*
 the Mario has-DA bought the.ACC book
 (b) **‘Z khinn hatta gisekk in has*
 the child has-DA seen the hare
 (c) **Belz khinn hatta bokhennt soin tatta?*
 which child has-DA met his father
 (d) **Dar Mario baz hatta gakhoaft?*
 the Mario what has-DA bought

As discussed by Bidese & Tomaselli (2018: 60), *da* is excluded from the sentence-initial position, where only the expletive ‘*z*’ can appear ((65), from Bidese & Tomaselli 2018: 60).²⁸

- (65) (a) *‘Z/Haiüt arbatan=da di maurar atti schual*
 EXPL/today work-DA the masons at-the school
 (b) **Da arbatan di maurar atti schual*
 DA work the masons at-the school
 ‘The masons are working at the school.’

The presence and the behaviour of *da* in Cimbrian correlate with the absence of G-inversion with DPs in the language (see (66), from Bidese & Tomaselli

²⁸ An anonymous reviewer noted that adverbial *da* may well appear in a preverbal position cooccurring with the enclitic expletive *da* in the same sentence, providing the following examples: *Da arbatanda di maurar atti schual*, ‘The workers are working at the school’ and *Da lautnda di klokkn*, ‘The bells are ringing there’. It is evident that in these cases the sentence-initial *da* is to be analysed as a pure locative adverbial element doubling the locative PP *atti schual* and is not comparable with the expletive-like element *da*, which cannot be fronted, as the examples given in the paper show. A sentence like **Da arbatan di maurar* featuring a single fronted *da* is in fact ungrammatical in Cimbrian.

2018: 54).²⁹

- (66) (a) **Gestarn hat dar pua gisekk in has*
 yesterday has the boy seen the hare
- (b) *Gestarn hat ar gisekk in has*
 yesterday has he seen the hare
 ‘Yesterday he saw a hare.’
- (c) *Bas hatt ar gisekk?*
 What has he seen
 ‘What did he see?’

3.2.2 On the nature of *da*

We have seen that Cimbrian *da* obligatorily appears in all (irrespective of verb type) main and embedded clauses involving a subject gap and in all main clauses involving free inversion of a DP subject and in impersonal passives. This correlates with the absence of G-inversion with DP subjects in Cimbrian.

Tho in OHG on the contrary can but does not have to appear in main declarative clauses involving free inversion of a DP subject; it is not compatible with all verb classes; it is ruled out from interrogative clauses.

It is evident that Cimbrian and OHG exhibit striking parallels in the distribution of *da* and *tho*; however, they also exhibit important differences. The

²⁹ Cognola (2019a,b) refined this result by showing that Cimbrian speakers accept sentences in which the DP subject appears between an auxiliary and a non-finite verb iff: i) *da* is present, ii) the DP subject is contrastively focussed and iii) it appears in the lower portion of the clause below sentential adverbs (therefore in a lowFocusP, see Belletti 2004 for the idea of low periphery and Cognola 2013a for the vP periphery in Mòcheno).

- (i) *In de botege hatta herta dar Mario gakhauft s mel, net dar*
 in the shop has-*DA* always the Mario bought the flour, not the
tata
 father
- (ii) **In de botege hat herta dar Mario gakhauft s mel, net dar tata*
 in the shop has always the Mario bought the flour, not the father
 ‘It was Mario who has always bought the flour in the shop, not dad.’

The sentences featuring G-inversion were rated possible but not perfect (average 3.5/5 with some informants rating it 4 or 5, see Cognola 2019a), whereas the version with free inversion was judged perfect (5/5) by all speakers:

- (iii) *In de botege hatta herta gakhauft s mel der Mario net dar tata*
 in the shop has-*DA* always bought the flour the Mario not the father
 ‘It was Mario who has always bought the flour in the shop, not dad.’

crucial difference between the two languages is that the expletive element is compatible with all verbs and all clause types in Cimbrian, whereas it can only occur with a subclass of constructions and sentences in OHG. Moreover, Cimbrian *da* exhibits the properties of a clitic since it cannot be fronted, whereas *tho* is a maximal category since it can appear in Spec,ForceP.

A further parallel between Cimbrian and OHG is their status as null-subject languages. Bidese & Tomaselli (2018) propose that Cimbrian is developing into a *pro*-drop language, since it exhibits two properties connected to the *pro*-drop parameter: free inversion and the absence of that-trace effects (see discussion in section 2.4 above). However, Cimbrian does not allow for sentences with pure *pro*-drop, i.e. either a clitic pronoun or *da*, and DP subjects are always needed for a sentence to be grammatical.

- (67) (a) **Bas hat herta gakhauft?* / *Bas hat-ta herta*
 what has always bought what has-DA always
gakhauft de nuna?
 bought the grandmother?
- (b) *Bas hat-ar herta gakhauft?*
 what has-he always bought
 ‘What has he always bought?’

There is consensus in the literature on Cimbrian that *da* is an expletive of the subject position (see Kolmer 2005 for the first description of this idea and for the observation that *da* should be connected to the enclitic locative *nghi* found in Borgomanerese discussed by Tortora 1997, 2001). Work couched within the framework of Generative Grammar (Bidese & Tomaselli 2018, Grewendorf & Poletto 2015) has shown that *da* cannot be analysed as a TP-expletive similar to English *there* and Bavarian/Hessian *da* (Bayer & Suchsland 1997) and that its position with respect to the finite verb is derived by V-to-C movement which is obligatory in main clauses (cf. Bidese & Tomaselli 2005 and subsequent work, and Grewendorf & Poletto 2011 for an analysis of Cimbrian as a V2 language).

There are two proposals for the exact position of *da* within the lower portion of CP. Bidese, Tomaselli & Padovan (2012), Bidese & Tomaselli (2018) and Cognola & Hinterhölzl (2020) have all proposed that *da* is hosted in FinP. Bidese & Tomaselli (2018) developed a formal syntactic account according to which *da* and subject clitic pronouns realise subject φ -features in C, thereby following the idea of Holmberg & Platzack (1995) that in V2 languages T features are features of C. In this account, the distribution of *da* and clitics is connected to the realisation of the syntactic subject and subject agreement. Grewendorf & Poletto (2015), on the other hand, proposed a semantic and

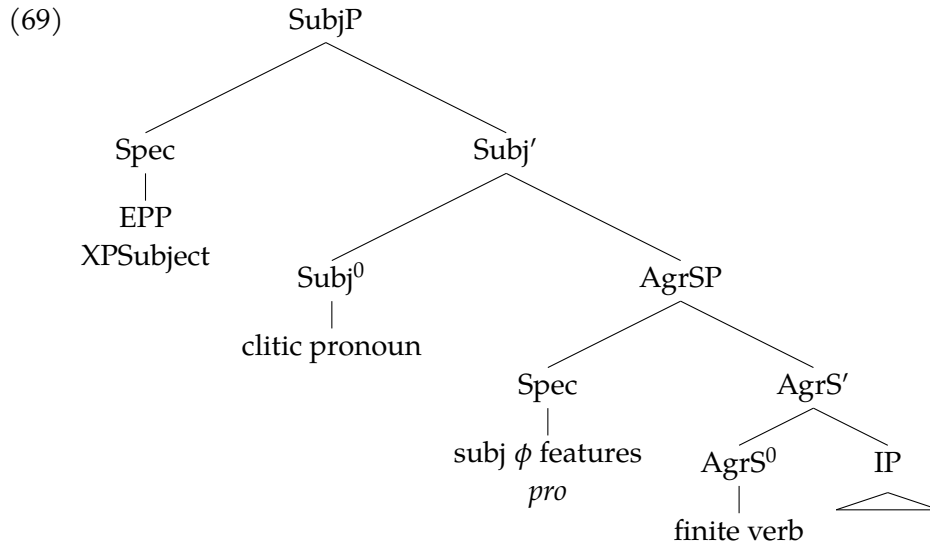
syntactic account analysing *da* as a Ground marker in CP (68).³⁰ They assume that *da* is a deictic element located in the specifier of GroundP above the Wackernagel position hosting clitics whose function is that of marking the distance from a given reference point. This GroundP also hosts weak pronouns (in the sense of [Cardinaletti & Starke 1999](#)), and this is why *da* is in complementary distribution with them.

(68) [_{ForceP} [_{TopicP} [_{FocusP} [_{GroundP} [_{FinP} [_{TP}]]]]]]]

In this paper, I propose a mixed approach of Cimbrian *da* which relies on the analyses of free inversion for Romance discussed in subsection 2.4.3 above and on the analysis I provided for Mòcheno – a variety very close to Cimbrian and which shows the same distribution of subject pronouns but does not exhibit *da*.

Following [Bidese & Tomaselli \(2018\)](#) and previous work, I propose that Cimbrian is a Fin-V2 language (cf. [Poletto 2002](#), [Wolfe 2018](#), [Cognola 2013b, 2019b](#)), i.e. a language in which the finite verb moves to a low head of the left periphery. Like Mòcheno, I propose that FinP is actually to be understood as SubjP, and that the EPP feature responsible for V2 is on Subj° ([Cognola 2013b](#)). Following cartographic work ([Rizzi 2006](#), [Cardinaletti 1997, 2004](#), [Rizzi & Shlonsky 2007](#)), I suggest that the realisation of the subject involves two projections: a lower FP (AgrSP or TP) encoding all φ subject features and a higher FP, in the Spec of which subjects are hosted. According to [Rizzi \(2006\)](#), SubjP is a criterial A-position whose head is endowed with an EPP feature: the subject has to move to the Spec position of this FP in order to satisfy the EPP feature and is “frozen in place” after the satisfaction of the Subject Criterion. According to this approach, the pragmatic subject (subject of the predication) (satisfying the Subject Criterion) and the syntactic subject (realising agreement with the finite verb) are actually the realisation of two separate FPs. Following [Rizzi \(2006\)](#), I propose that Subj° is realised morphologically by subject clitics, a claim which Rizzi made for Northern Italian dialects and which can also be applied to Cimbrian and Mòcheno. The articulation of the two FPs relevant for the realisation of the subject is given in (69), from [Cognola \(2013b: 117\)](#).

³⁰ [Grewendorf & Poletto \(2015: 413\)](#) assume that GroundP is a Functional Projection specified for *old information* ([Grewendorf & Poletto 2015: 413](#)) explaining why *da* is obligatory with NP subjects that represent new information in Cimbrian. They argue that “it is necessary to define a Ground [context] of already known information against which the new subject is set” ([Grewendorf & Poletto 2015: 414](#), see [Haegeman & van de Velde 2006](#) for a similar analysis of expletive *tet* in West Flemish).



In a Fin-V2 language, as Cimbrian is considered to be, the finite verb must raise to Subj° in all main clauses and an XP must move to Spec,SubjP. When an XP is moved to or through Spec,SubjP, enclisis of the subject clitic takes place. Since in Cimbrian (like in Old Romance languages, see [Benincà 2006](#), [Cognola 2013b](#), [2019b](#)) not all fronted XPs are moved to the left periphery, but some (like topics) are instead merged in CP, enclisis is only possible when an operator is fronted. According to the proposed analysis, only operators can be moved through Spec,SubjP and thus count as pragmatic subjects. When an XP different from the subject is moved to or through Spec,SubjP, a subject clitic must show up enclitic to the finite verb. Following [Rizzi \(2006\)](#), I thus propose that Subj° can be realised morphologically by subject clitics, as in Northern Italian dialects, and when the finite verb moves to Subj° for EPP reasons the clitic becomes enclitic to the verb. This view of subject clitics (see also [Brandi & Cordin 1989](#), [Poletto 2000](#), [De Crousaz & Shlonsky 2003](#)) implies that languages with subject clitics are technically *pro*-drop, since subject clitics do not appear in AgrSP, where the presence of *pro* therefore has to be assumed.

I thus claim that the function of the subject clitic (and of *da*) is that of licensing *pro* in Spec,TP (cf. [De Crousaz & Shlonsky 2003](#)). In Cimbrian, when the DP subject is not raised to Spec,SubjP *da* must appear. Following [Sluckin et al. \(2021\)](#) I propose that this *da* targets Subj°, i.e. it functions as an expletive of the subject of the predication and its function is that of licensing *pro*. Given the distribution of *da* across verb types and constructions (obligatory in all VS sentences), I propose that *da* corresponds to both *pro*_{LOC} and *pro*_{SIT},

i.e. it is either selected by the lexical verb, or directly merged in Spec,SubjP.³¹ The DP subject either moves to a lowFocusP (when it is focussed, as in 70 a) or it remains in its base position (when it is given, as in 70 b). Note that for Cimbrian it has to be assumed that the past participle moves out of the VP because the verbs allowing for *da* are all verbs and not only unaccusative verbs and passive constructions as in OHG in which the DP subject is hosted in the object position. Following Grewendorf & Poletto (2012), I propose that the past participle moves out of the VP in Cimbrian and targets an FP above the low FocusP, given that focussed DP subjects typically appear in free inversion.³²

- (70) (a) [_{SubjP} Atz fest bar_k-ta [_{TP} *pro* t_k [_{FP} *singen* [_{FocusP} a singer vo jodel [_{VP} *singen*]]]]]]
- (b) [_{SubjP} bas_j hatt_k-ta [_{TP} *pro* t_k [_{FP} herta [_{FP} *gakhoaft* [_{vP} dar Mario [_{VP} *gakhoaft* t_j]]]]]]]]

31 The claim that both *pros* present in Italian are also found in Cimbrian allows us to explain cases in which *da* expresses a slight meaning of location in subject wh-interrogative clauses featuring optional *da* discussed in Cognola & Hinterhölzl (2020: 309–310). These cases are very difficult to analyse since they do not involve a locative meaning for *da* for all the speakers, but only for some of them. Therefore, it might be assumed that those speakers who feel that some kind of location is connected with the optional presence of *da* move it from the VP, whereas the others insert *da* directly in Subj°. Moreover, in the descriptive grammar of Cimbrian (Panieri et al. 2006: 314–316) it is claimed that there is an interpretative difference between SV (*Di klokkng laütn*, The bells ring) and VS sentences (*'Z laütnda die klokkng*, The bells are ringing). In the former a generic statement is made, whereas in the latter a deictic interpretation involving a locative (here) is implied. This would imply that in the *da* construction *da* still retains a locative meaning. I leave this issue open for further research.

32 The examples discussed in footnote 28 from Cognola (2019a,b) allow us to refine the derivation for Cimbrian.

- (i) *In de botege hatta herta dar Mario gakhoaft s mel, net dar tata*
in the shop has-DA always the Mario bought the flour, not the father
- (ii) **In de botege hat herta dar Mario gakhoaft s mel, net dar tata*
in the shop has always the Mario bought the flour, not the father
'It was Mario who has always bought the flour in the shop, not dad.'

The examples show that the past participle can also move as a remnant VP along with the direct object:

- (iii) [_{SubjP} in de botege_j hatt_k-ta [_{TP} *pro* t_k [_{FP} herta [_{VP} *gakhoaft s mel*] [_{FocusP} dar Mario_m [_{VP} t_m *gakhoaft s mel*]]]]]]

Moreover, the data discussed in Cognola (2019a,b) show that the movement of the past participle out of the VP is optional if a contrastive Focus is involved, as in:

- (iv) [_{SubjP} in de botege_j hatt_k-ta [_{TP} *pro* t_k [_{FP} herta [_{FocusP} dar Mario_m [_{VP} t_m *gekauft s mel*]]]]]]

According to the analysis in (70), the features associated with Subj° are the subject phi-features, which are lexicalised by subject clitics and *da* in the case in which the NP subject is not moved to or through Spec,SubjP . I propose that subject clitics express person, number and gender features, whereas the expletive *da* is only endowed with person and number features.

The fact that subject clitics are endowed with all subject phi-features implies that they can license referential *pro* and do not have to co-occur with an NP subject for a sentence to be grammatical, since all subject features are expressed by clitic and *pro*. *Da*, on the contrary, only expresses number and person features, and must co-occur with an NP whose function is to express gender features. This hypothesis accounts for the fact that *da* is obligatory with NP subjects in the free-inversion construction, and ruled out when the NP subject is missing:³³

- (71) (a) *Atz fest gestarn hon da getonzt alle de*
 at.the party yesterday have DA danced all the
costrittn
 conscripts
 ‘All conscripts danced at the party yesterday.’
- (b) *Bas hat-ar /*da herta gakhooft?*
 what has he / DA always bought
 ‘What did he buy?’

Da is assumed to also license expletive *pro* in impersonal passives, see its presence with impersonal passives. Note, however, that the idea is that in this configuration *da* still appears in Subj° and not in TP, unlike in Dutch where the expletive *er* ‘there’ can appear in unaccusative and passive contexts, checking a D-related EPP in Spec-TP (Sluckin et al. 2021).

- (72) (a) *Gestern wurde pro getanzt*
 (b) *Gestarn iz=ta khent getânzt*
 yesterday is= DA come danced
 ‘Yesterday, it was danced’

(Bidese & Tomaselli 2018: 61, footnote 18)

³³ An alternative analysis would be to assume that sentences featuring *da* are derived in the way proposed here, whereas the DP subject appears in Spec,TP in SV sentences. This would imply that Cimbrian is an asymmetric V2 language, as proposed for some Germanic languages by Travis (1984), Zwart (1993, 1997) and Diesing (1990). This analysis, despite its appeal, is untenable since, in all sentences with a fronted DP subject, object clitics obligatorily appear in enclisis to the finite verb. Given that enclisis is a strong indication of V-to-C movement, the presence of enclisis with fronted DP subjects implies that both DP subject and finite verb are in the left periphery. I am thus keen to reject the asymmetric V2-analysis for Cimbrian.

- (c) *Gisteren werd er gedanst.*
 yesterday got EXPL danced
 ‘Yesterday there was dancing.’

(Sluckin et al. 2021: 189)

I suggest that this mechanism of *pro* licensing is also operative in sentences involving a subject gap: the extracted subject moves cyclically through Spec, SubjP on its way to the higher clause, which forces the insertion of *da* in Subj° of the lower clause.

3.3 Comparing *tho* and *da*

The final issue to be addressed in this article is whether there is a connection between OHG *tho* and Cimbrian *da*. I believe there is. More specifically, I suggest that the syntax of Cimbrian *da* results from a regular grammaticalisation process of OHG *tho*. It should be highlighted that this hypothesis does not imply that *da* is a direct continuator of OHG *tho* (since *da* does not replicate the discourse and syntactic properties of *tho*) but that it is surely a continuator of a grammar requiring a locative expletive in the left periphery needed to license *pro*.³⁴

The starting point for supporting my claim is the fact that *tho* and *da* exhibit the same function:

³⁴ In the history of Cimbrian this expletive might also have been covert. As discussed in Kolmer (2005: 63), in the texts collected in Luserna by Bacher at the beginning of the 20th Century which were edited by Bellotto (1978), informants corrected the language of texts written in Old Cimbrian according to their present-day variety. One change they made was precisely the insertion of *da* with postverbal subjects in some cases. Kolmer (2005) does not provide a quantitative analysis of these divergent examples. It would be interesting to see whether *da* was already obligatory in some contexts in older texts, for instance with passives and unaccusative verbs. This implies that *da* was not always inserted in older Cimbrian, which, according to the account proposed here, possibly correlated with the availability of a silent locative in sentences featuring free inversion, as in present-day Italian. In the Cimbrian variety of Giazza documented by Schweizer (1939, texts edited in Bidese 2011), *da* appears to have a slightly more restricted distribution in comparison to the present-day variety of Luserna documented in the literature: *da* tends to appear only in embedded clauses and in locative constructions, and not with the free-inversion construction. This would point in the direction of the fact that the presence with *da* with all verbs in free inversion is an innovation, but does not confute my account here, but simply points in the direction that the expletive locative was not obligatory required in all cases and could remain silent (as in present-day Italian). My prediction is that *da* became obligatory overt starting from the cases in which it corresponds to *pro*_{loc}, i.e. when selected by lexical verb. I thank Ermenegildo Bidese for drawing my attention to older Cimbrian and to the Giazza variety.

- (73) *Tho* and *da* appear in the left periphery and are needed for the licensing of *pro* in Spec,TP.

Moreover, *tho/da* appear in sentences with a subject gap, which appears to be a very conservative trait (cf. the examples from ENHG in (17)-(18) in section 2.2.2 above) and it is also found in present-day German dialects.

However, Cimbrian *da* differs from *tho* in the following respects: it is obligatory in a) sentences involving a subject gap; b) main clauses with free inversion; c) impersonal passives. Moreover, *da* d) is incompatible with the sentence-initial position.

Tho in OHG on the contrary: a) can but does not have to appear in main declarative clauses involving free inversion of a DP subject; b) it is only compatible with a reduced number of verbs; c) it can appear sentence-initially; d) it is ruled out in interrogative clauses.

I suggest that the differences between *tho* and *da* are due to a grammaticalisation process of Cimbrian *da*. The first change has to do with the status of the expletive-like element: *da* is a head, *tho* is a maximal category. I suggest that the two elements can be considered to be connected if we assume that *da* results from a process of grammaticalisation along the lines of van Gelderen's (2010) Head Preference Principle and Late Merge Principle. As a result of this grammaticalisation process, *tho* has lost its status as a maximal category and has become a clitic, fully in line with the Head Preference Principle. This shift might have been favoured by the presence of ambiguous input according to which *tho* could be either a head or a specifier, in essence cases in which *tho* follows the finite verb.

Another difference fed by grammaticalisation manifests itself in the development from an element (*tho*) with discourse properties appearing in TopicP into an element (*da*) with pure grammatical status appearing in SubjP like subject clitics, which is also typical of grammaticalisation.

In summary, *da* is obligatory in all main and embedded clauses involving a subject gap since it signals cyclic movement of the finite through Spec,Subj°. It is obligatory in all main clauses involving free inversion of a DP subject because it can be merged directly in Subj° where it carries out a function identical to that of a subject clitic. It cannot appear in sentence-initial position because it is a head (there can be no head in Spec position in V2 languages, see Cardinaletti & Starke 1999). It always realises the subject features connected with TP, which does not host a DP subject (G-inversion is ruled out).

Given the proposed account, it is evident that Cimbrian *da* is not to be considered a syntactic loan, i.e. it is not an innovation due to contact, but is a conservative trait of its grammar which has evolved due to a grammaticalisation process. This implies that Cimbrian is not becoming a *pro*-drop language,

but rather has retained some traits of OHG as a *pro*-drop language and has generalised them as a consequence of grammaticalisation.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This paper has compared OHG and the Germanic dialect Cimbrian, showing that they share a close distribution of free inversion in co-occurrence with a locative expletive-like element. For OHG, I have reconsidered the idea (Axel 2007, relying on Haerberli 2001) that the presence of the expletive *tho* in co-occurrence with free inversion follows from *pro*-drop, showing that a theory couched within Frascarelli (2007, 2018), Schlachter (2010, 2012), Cognola & Walkden (2019, 2021) allows us to make sense of the data. The OHG free inversion construction is shown to involve an overt/covert *tho* – a locative argument selected by the lexical verb which can be promoted to an expletive of the TopicP position in the left periphery in sentences in which the DP subject has not moved out of the VP, as assumed for free inversion in Romance languages (Benincà 1988, Tortora 1997, 2001, Sheehan 2010, Sluckin et al. 2021) and whose function is to satisfy the aboutness feature associated with the Topic-criterion needed for the licensing of *pro* in Spec,TP (Frascarelli 2007, 2018). According to this analysis, OHG *tho* carries out a functional and discourse function, since it licenses *pro* and sits in TopicP where it checks an Aboutness feature whereby the DP subject can be newly introduced or returned to. *Da* therefore functions as a narrative marker (Axel 2007) or “discourse-continuative marker” (Fuß & Hinterhölzl 2019).

In Cimbrian, free inversion obligatorily involves covert *da* with all verbs, in all sentence types and in all syntactic constructions featuring a postverbal or extracted DP subject. *Da* has also been analysed as an element connected to CP, which, unlike OHG *tho*, is directly merged in Subj^o (it is not selected by the verb) and whose function is purely formal, i.e. licensing *pro* in TP, and does not function as a Topic (cf. Bidese & Tomaselli 2018).

I have suggested that Cimbrian *da* is not an innovation but instead results from a grammaticalisation process of *tho* according to which the locative expletive develops from a maximal category with discourse properties (*tho*) into a head (*da*) with functional/grammatical status (van Gelderen 2010 Head Preference Principle). This hypothesis accounts for the fact that *da* has become obligatory in Cimbrian, because its function is purely formal and not connected with the discourse.

The free inversion construction and the usage of *tho* described here for OHG have been lost in present-day German due to the fact that this language is no longer a *pro*-drop language. This implies that referential *pro* cannot be licensed and that all instances of referential null subjects are to be analysed as

cases of topic drop.³⁵ According to the proposed account, the impossibility of licensing *pro* is possibly to be connected with a reduction of the left periphery, more specifically with the unavailability of TopicP. Cases of *da* in present-day German involve Spec,TP (Bayer & Suchsland 1997) or Spec,CP, but there is no evidence for the double articulation of Topic-Spec,TP activated by the movement of *tho* to Spec,TopicP in OHG described in this paper. This double articulation is still available in Cimbrian, though in a different, lower, area of the left periphery and with a purely formal function. This is in my view a conservative trait of the language which has been maintained and grammaticalised, possibly due to the contact situation of Cimbrian. As we have seen, a silent locative argument is always present in Italian free inversion constructions and this correspondence might have played a role in shaping the syntax of *da*. Therefore, my findings are consistent with Benincà's (1994) view on contact in syntax according to which syntactic traits shared by the languages in contact are likely to be maintained. In the case of Cimbrian, precisely the locative in free inversion could be maintained due to the contact with Italian, a language with free inversion and a null locative. Therefore, Cimbrian differs from present-day German (which has developed into a strict V2, non-null subject language and lost free inversion) but still shares some syntactic traits with OHG.

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³⁵ As discussed in Cognola & Walkden (2021) this is primarily due to a change in the structure of the left periphery and in second line to a reduction of verbal morphology.

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