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## FREE CHOICE INDEFINITES IN OLD AND MODERN ITALIAN

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**ABSTRACT** This article deals with a specific meaning of Free Choice Indefinites (FCIs) such as *qualunque* and *qualsiasi* in Old and Modern Italian. Despite the existent synchronic and diachronic studies of FCIs that focus on the prenominal position (see [Aloni & Port 2013](#), [Chierchia 2006](#), [Stark 2006](#), [Becker 2014](#), among others), there are no synchronic or diachronic studies focusing on the postnominal position with the evaluative meaning. It is still unclear what distribution postnominal indefinites have in synchrony and diachrony and what the relation between prenominal indefinites with the FC meaning and postnominal indefinites with the evaluative meaning is (see also [Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2011](#) on *cualquiera* in Spanish). In this article, I will try to fill the gap with respect to *qualunque* and describe its distribution, as well as its syntactic and semantic properties in synchrony and diachrony. My main focus will be answering the question of how Italian *qualunque* developed an evaluative meaning component and why this interpretation is only available when *qualunque* is postnominal.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

This article deals with Free Choice Indefinites (FCIs), such as *qualunque* and *qualsiasi* in Old and Modern Italian, which have an evaluative meaning in predicative<sup>1</sup> position, as shown by (1) in Modern Italian (see [Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2011](#) for a similar function of the FCI *cualquiera* in Spanish, [Fălăuș 2015](#) for *oarecare* in Romanian, [Vlachou 2012](#) for *quelconque* in French):

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<sup>1</sup> Postnominal indefinites that occur as arguments of intentional verbs such as *buy*, *pick up* have a Random Choice (RC) meaning as in (i) (see [Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2011](#) on RCI). In this article, I focus on the evaluative meaning of postnominal indefinites.

- (i) Gianni ha comprato un libro *qualunque*.  
Gianni have.3sg bought a book any  
Existential inference: Gianni bought a book.  
RC: Gianni has chosen the book he bought randomly.

- (1) “*The Stars*” è un libro *qualunque/qualsiasi*.  
 the stars be.3sg a book any  
 ‘*The Stars* is an ordinary book.’  
 Evaluative meaning: I, the speaker, find the book *The Stars*  
 unremarkable/ordinary/nothing special.

These indefinites have a Free Choice (FC) meaning under modal verbs in prenominal position in Italian (see Chierchia 2006, Stark 2006, Aloni & Port 2013, among others):<sup>2</sup>

- (2) *Puoi scegliere qualunque/qualsiasi libro.*  
 can.2sg choose any book  
 ‘You can choose any book.’  
 Conventional meaning: You can choose a book and  
 FC meaning: Each book is a possible option.

Prenominal FCIs should be distinguished from postnominal indefinites (see Chierchia 2006, Aloni & Port 2013, among others). The former usually have a universal inference as in (2), that is, ‘each book is a possible option’ (see Aloni & Port 2013’s corpus analysis of Italian *qualunque*), whereas the latter have an existential inference, ‘*The Stars* is some book’, with an evaluative meaning, ‘the book is unremarkable’:

- (3) “*The Stars*” è un libro *qualunque/qualsiasi*.  
 Existential inference: *The Stars* is some book  
 Evaluative meaning: *The Stars* is an unremarkable book

In the remainder of the paper I will mainly focus on the indefinite *qualunque*. However, the observations and examples shown in this paper also apply to other FCIs in Italian such as *qualsiasi*, *qualsivoglia*.

Despite the existent synchronic and diachronic studies of FCIs that focus on the prenominal position as represented in (2) (see Chierchia 2006, Stark 2006, Aloni & Port 2013, Becker 2014, among others), there are no synchronic or diachronic studies focusing on the postnominal position with the evaluative meaning. It is still unclear what distribution postnominal indefinites

<sup>2</sup> There are cases with perfective verbs in episodic contexts that refer to past events, but FCI must then be modified by a relative clause (so-called ‘subtriggering’ cases). The relative clause modification triggers a modal interpretation of ‘anything possible’ (see Quer 2000 on subtriggering in Spanish):

- (i) *Ha mangiato qualunque cosa le venisse messa sotto il naso*  
 have.3sg eaten any thing her came put under the nose  
 ‘She ate anything that was put in front of her.’

have in synchrony and diachrony and what relation prenominal indefinites with the FC meaning have with postnominal indefinites with the evaluative meaning (see also [Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2011](#) on *cualquiera* in Spanish).

In this article, I will try to fill the gap with respect to *qualunque* and describe its distribution, its syntactic and semantic properties in synchrony and diachrony. My main focus will be how Italian *qualunque* developed an evaluative meaning component and why this interpretation is only available when *qualunque* is postnominal.

I will support the idea that the evaluative meaning is connected to the postnominal position of *qualunque* due to the predicate modifier function it has in this position. The predicate modifier function is the result of a grammaticalisation process whereby *qualunque* lexicalises into an indefinite from a relative clause (for lexicalisation from relative clauses into FCIs, see [Haspelmath 1997](#), [Company-Company & Pozas-Loyo 2009](#), among others). I will argue that the meaning ‘ordinary’ is a special case of an FC meaning, namely when *qualunque* is interpreted as a predicate over equal alternatives. When *qualunque* is focalised in some pragmatic context, the focalisation triggers the negative meaning ‘(just) ordinary, nothing special’.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a description of postnominal *qualunque* in Modern Italian and raises some questions with respect to its diachrony and development. The diachronic questions will be answered in sections 3 and 4. A summary and outlook will be presented in section 5.

## 2 POSTNOMINAL *qualunque* IN MODERN ITALIAN

In order to describe postnominal *qualunque* in Modern Italian, I used the CORIS corpus of written 20th-century Italian, which is tagged for lemma and part of speech. I also consulted native speakers for grammaticality judgements.

Despite the possible interpretation of postnominal *qualunque* as a gradable adjective with the meaning ‘ordinary/common’, it does not syntactically behave as a (gradable) adjective in Modern Italian because, according to our informants, *qualunque* is not accepted as a copular predicate (see ungrammatical example in (4)). It does not allow any degree modification either (see the ungrammatical example in (5)). However, both processes (predication and degree modification) are acceptable with comparable adjectives such as ‘ordinary/common/ unremarkable/standard’ (see grammatical examples in (4) and (5)).<sup>3</sup>

3 Note that the predicative function of *qualunque* is possible under FCI interpretation in an appositive clause:

- (4) È (molto) ordinario/ \*qualunque.  
 be.3sg very ordinary any  
 'It/He is very ordinary/\*qualunque.'
- (5) È un uomo molto ordinario/ \*qualunque.  
 be.3sg a man very ordinary any  
 'He is a very ordinary/\*qualunque man.'

Postnominal *qualunque* does not behave as a quantifier either, because it cannot be modified by 'almost, absolutely', in contrast to prenominal *qualunque* (as shown in (7)). This distinction is related to the universal quantificational force of prenominal but not postnominal *qualunque*:

- (6) un uomo (\*quasi) qualunque  
 a man almost any  
 'an ordinary man'
- (7) Quasi qualunque uomo può farlo.  
 almost any man can.3sg do-it  
 'Almost any man can do it.'

Given the unacceptability of degree modification and adjectival predication of *qualunque*, I can infer that the 'ordinary' meaning is a contextually derived meaning rather than a lexicalised meaning (but see Vlachou 2012 for a discussion of examples of French FCI *très quelconque* 'very ordinary' and Francia & Kellert submitted for a discussion of *cualunque* 'any' in Argentinian Spanish *la pelí es (re) cualquier* 'the movie is (quite) ordinary/unremarkable').

Something else that strengthens the hypothesis that postnominal *qualunque* is not a simple adjective is the fact that, in contrast to ordinary adjectives, postnominal *qualunque* is mostly used to modify indefinite nouns, as native speaker judgements and corpus data show.<sup>4</sup> This is not the case with postnominal adjectives, which can also modify definite nouns:

- (i) Dammi un oggetto qualunque esso sia.  
 give-me a object any that be.SBJV.3sg  
 'Give me an object whatever that object might be.'

<sup>4</sup> A few exceptions from the 20th century are found in the CORIS corpus: the definite noun *uomo* 'man' + *qualunque* or fixed expressions such as *la donna qualunque* 'ordinary woman' and *la gente qualunque* 'common people':

- (i) Fronte dell'uomo qualunque  
 front of-the man any  
 'front of the ordinary man' (political movement)

Note that in all these examples, *la/il NOUN qualunque* does not refer to a particular individual in the way that definite nouns such as that in (8) can.

- (8) *questa/la ragazza ordinaria*  
 this/the girl ordinary  
 ‘this/the ordinary girl’
- (9) *\*questa/\* la ragazza qualunque*  
 this/ the girl any

The restriction to indefinite nouns tells us something about the syntactic and semantic status of postnominal *qualunque*. Its distribution is restricted to indefinite nouns, which are usually interpreted as referentially vague and anti-specific. Referential vagueness and anti-specificity express uncertainty, ignorance or indifference with respect to the referent of the indefinite noun (see [von Heusinger 2011](#), [Giannakidou & Quer 2013](#), among others). FCIs have been also described in the literature as being referentially vague and anti-specific (see [Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2011](#), [Fălăuș 2015](#), among others). I can thus infer from the distribution of postnominal *qualunque* with the evaluative meaning that it has some meaning component similar to an FCI and is therefore restricted to indefinite nouns. This conclusion reinforces my idea that the evaluative meaning is a derived meaning and stands in a subset relation with the FC meaning.

Our corpus data show that the evaluative meaning is very common with postnominal *qualunque*. Postnominal indefinite *qualunque* often occurs in predicative position with copular verbs (100 out of 173 examples represent copular verbs, i.e. around 60%):<sup>5</sup>

- (10) *esempio perfetto della casualità che sta dietro un*  
 example perfect of-the randomness that be.3sg behind a  
*successo. Fu un film qualunque.*  
 success was a film any  
 ‘perfect example of the randomness behind a success. It was an  
 ordinary/unremarkable movie.’  
 [CORIS, MON2001\_04, *Repubblica* 04.01.2010]
- (11) *Il mio corpo infilato nella città era un corpo qualunque.*  
 the my body stuck in-the city was a body any  
 ‘My body stuck in the city was an ordinary body.’  
 [CORIS, MON2008\_10, *Il viaggio della speranza*]

<sup>5</sup> The RCI of postnominal *qualunque* (see fn. 1) has been observed with types of verbs other than copular verbs (see [Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2011](#) for the connection between the RCI of *cualquiera* in Spanish and intentional verbs such as *pick up*). In this article, I will not deal with the RCI of postnominal *qualunque* and refer the reader to [Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2011](#) for an analysis of RCIs in Spanish.

- (12) *Era un giorno qualunque, un giovedì, anonimo, piuttosto triste.*  
 was a day any a Thursday anonymous rather  
 sad

‘It was an ordinary day, a Thursday, anonymous, rather sad.’

[CORIS, MON2008\_10, *Venuto al mondo*]

If we look at the interpretation of the examples with the copula, we can see that the majority of occurrences have an evaluative interpretation of ‘ordinary/unremarkable/standard/common/ normal’. Moreover, the majority of the copular verbs with Noun + *qualunque* (N+Q) are in the present or past tense indicative without any overt modal verb typical for FCIs, such as (2) in section 1. This result is not surprising given that a copular verb in present tense or past tense indicative, such as *è/era + un(a) N qualunque*, describes the entity denoted by the noun as ‘common/standard/unremarkable’, and hence triggers an existential inference rather than the universal one typical for prenominal *qualunque* with the FC meaning (see section 1, example (2)). Copular verbs occur more frequently with N+Q than with *qualunque* + Noun (Q+N), as shown by the chi-square test in Table 1.

	Copular verbs	Other verbs	Total
<b>Q+N</b>	20	998	1018
<b>N+Q</b>	100	73	173
<b>Total</b>	120	1071	1191

The chi-square Figure is 508.8708. The p-value is < 0.00001.

Significant at  $p < .05$ .

**Table 1** Q+N vs. N+Q with respect to copular verbs

The observation that copular verbs appear more often under N+Q than under Q+N is not surprising given that prenominal *qualunque* is an FCI and that FCIs are usually restricted to modal contexts, such as modal verbs (see Chierchia 2006, Aloni & Port 2013, etc.).

The corpus data suggest that the existential interpretation of *qualunque* is a very restricted interpretation occurring under certain syntactic and semantic/pragmatic conditions, namely when *qualunque* appears in a postnominal position with an indefinite noun which triggers existential force. Postnominal *qualunque* thus acts as a noun modifier similar to adjectives, and not as a pure quantifier that assigns a quantificational force like prenominal *qualunque*.

I assume that postnominal FCIs have a syntactic and semantic status different from that of prenominal FCIs. Postnominal FCIs act as adnominal modifiers of type  $\langle\langle e, t \rangle\langle e, t \rangle\rangle$ , similar to adjectives or compound

nouns. Prenominal *qualunque* acts as a quantifier on properties of nouns (see Aloni & Port 2013 on FCIs as quantifiers), and its semantic type is that of a generalised quantifier  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle t \rangle$ .

Despite the evaluative interpretation of *qualunque* being similar to that of the gradable adjective *ordinario*, which is of the type  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle d \rangle$  (see Kennedy 1999 for gradable predicates), *qualunque* lacks a degree argument, unlike gradable adjectives. The reason for the lack of degree argument is related to the diachronic origin of *qualunque* (see section 4).

Another observation is that 40% of the copular verbs that appear with *un(a) N qualunque* occur under negation (41 occurrences with Neg + copula + *un(a) N qualunque* out of 100 occurrences of copula + *un(a) N qualunque*):

- (13) *Ed io non sono un passeggero qualunque. Sono invece*  
 and I not be.1SG a passenger any be.1SG instead  
*il direttore generale della banca Huddleston & Bradford di*  
 the director general of-the bank Huddleston & Bradford of  
*Westminster.*  
 Westminster  
 ‘And I’m **not just any** passenger. Rather, I’m the general manager of  
 the Huddleston & Bradford bank in Westminster.’  
 [CORIS, NARRATTiRomanzi, *La grande rapina al treno*]

If we look at the interpretation of *qualunque* under negation of copular verbs, we observe that it has the same interpretation as the English FCI *any* under negation, as in (14), which Horn (2000) called the ‘indiscriminative’ interpretation (see Horn 2000, Aloni & Port 2013, among many others):

- (14) Pick a theory. Not just any theory.

The focus adverb *just* in *just any theory* triggers focus alternatives {theory a, theory b, theory c, ...} (see Horn 2000, Chierchia 2006, Fălăuș 2015, among others). The function of *just* is to interpret these alternatives on a scale of goodness or some other pragmatically determined value and to downgrade them, that is, to put these alternatives at the bottom of the scale of goodness. This is why every theory denoted by *just any theory* in (14) has a low value of goodness or, to put it differently, is a bad theory. The speaker in (14) is thus suggesting picking a good theory rather than a bad one. The sentence in (14) asserts that for none of these downgraded theories should be picked. The set of theories is contrasted with some special theory expressed by *a theory* in the preceding sentence. Thus, the negation has scope over a certain set of theories, restricted by the context, which can be described as not special or as ordinary/basic theories. The ‘ordinary/basic’ meaning is thus part of the focalisation process triggered by *just* and the set restriction of the noun



in a certain pragmatic context. The function of postnominal *qualunque* in (13), or English *just any*, is the same. The negation has scope over a set of passengers that does not include the general manager, who is a special or extraordinary passenger. Hence, the negation has scope over non-special passengers or passengers who are considered to have a lower value on the scale of extraordinary passengers. The negation over a set of non-special alternatives and the focalisation thus trigger a scale of goodness or some other pragmatic value, and the FC alternatives are interpreted at the bottom of this scale. I will refer to this type of inference as scalar inference. The indiscriminative reading observed by Horn (2000) for English *any* and the evaluative reading observed for postnominal *qualunque* in section 1 (example (1)) are thus related. The difference between English *any* and Italian *qualunque* is that *any* is licensed in negative or modal contexts, whereas *qualunque* can appear in affirmative non-modal contexts (e.g. under present or past tense copular verbs) as well and have an interpretation similar to the ‘just any’ interpretation without negation, that is, trigger alternatives and downgrade them. *Un giorno qualunque* is thus interpreted as ‘just some day like all other days’ and not a special day. Indeed, affirmative non-modal contexts account for 60% of all data with N+Q (e.g. *è un uomo qualunque* ‘He is a common/ordinary man’).

I assume that the evaluative meaning ‘ordinary/basic’ is a derived meaning and stands in a subset relation with the FC meaning. In a nutshell, the idea is that *qualunque* with the evaluative meaning denotes a predicate P that predicates over a set of free choice alternatives denoted by the noun N in N *qualunque* (see Fălăuş 2015 on the definition of FCIs as a set of alternatives). As all free choice alternatives are equal by the definition of Free Choice, predicate P denotes the predicate ‘common’, as it predicates over all free choice alternatives. All other meanings, such as ‘basic, simple, ordinary’, are synonyms, and their choice depends on the context in which *qualunque* is used. For instance, *un uomo qualunque* denotes properties of men that all men (or no matter which) share, hence the interpretation of a common or ordinary man. Depending on the context, *un uomo qualunque* can mean ‘an ordinary man without any special properties’. The negative connotation of the meaning ‘ordinary’ or ‘simple’ is context-dependent and is a pragmatic effect that may arise when *qualunque* is focalised.

The reason why the evaluative meaning is restricted to postnominal position is that in this position FCIs can be focalised in certain pragmatic contexts, such as when the speaker intends to contrast something extraordinary with an ordinary alternative (see Cinque 2010 on focalisation of postnominal modifiers in Romance in general). By focalisation they get a scalar inference ‘just ordinary’ as shown in (15):



- (15) *Gianni è un uomo [qualunque]<sub>Focus</sub>.*  
Gianni be.3sg a man any  
'Gianni is (just) an ordinary man (he is nothing more).'

Here, I assume that the focus feature on *qualunque* in (15) denotes a scalar operator with the meaning 'just' (see [Lee 1987](#), [Rooth 1992](#), [Coppock & Beaver 2011](#)):

- (16) (a) It was just Bill on the phone, nobody important.  
(b) He's just an employee, not a manager. ([Lee 1987](#): 379)

We can thus summarise that N *qualunque* and *qualunque* N have different distributions. The majority of all verbs occurring with N *qualunque* in Modern Italian are present or past tense copular verbs under which N *qualunque* has an evaluative meaning. N *qualunque* can appear under negation in the same way that *just any* in English does, but it also appears in affirmative contexts, unlike English *just any*. Negation of *qualunque* results in the 'not just any' interpretation, which downgrades alternatives of *qualunque*. I call this kind of interpretation scalar inference. The evaluative meaning 'ordinary' is a derived meaning which results from the definition of FCIs as a set of equal alternatives and predication over these alternatives.

The following section focuses on the diachrony of *qualunque* in order to get an understanding of the development of postnominal *qualunque* and the evaluative meaning. It will answer the following questions:

- 1) Was postnominal *qualunque* a later development or did it occur simultaneously with the prenominal *qualunque*?
- 2) Was the evaluative meaning always present or did one meaning come about prior to the other, that is, does the FC meaning predate the evaluative meaning?
- 3) Did postnominal *qualunque* always appear in positive contexts? Or did it first start to appear in negative contexts, like English *any*, and subsequently become extended (unlike the English word) to include positive contexts?

### 3 DIACHRONY OF *qualunque*

In order to investigate the diachronic distribution of *qualunque*, I have chosen the MIDIA corpus (an acronym for *Morfologia dell'Italiano in Diacronia*), a diachronic corpus of Italian texts written between 1200 and 1945, which is considered to be representative and balanced by the corpus-builders.<sup>6</sup> Texts

<sup>6</sup> See corpus description in [Angster \(2017\)](#).

are fully annotated with indications of both the lemma and the part of speech (POS), as well as the literary genre: expository prose, literary prose, juridical prose, personal prose, scientific prose, poetry, or spoken language mimesis. The corpus contains 25 texts for each time period<sup>7</sup> and genre.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.1 Distribution of prenominal and postnominal *qualunque*

As the following Table 2 shows, the prenominal position is the most prominent syntactic position of *qualunque* in the MIDIA corpus.<sup>9</sup> It shows a significant increase in instances of postnominal *qualunque* in the last two periods. The significance according to the chi-square test is shown in Table 3.

Period	Postnominal	Prenominal	Total
1200–1375	0.39%	99.61%	100.00%
	3	765	768
1376–1532	0.12%	99.88%	100.00%
	1	854	855
1533–1691	0.34%	99.66%	100.00%
	2	580	582
1692–1840	9.78%	90.22%	100.00%
	57	526	583
1841–1947	15.45%	84.55%	100.00%
	68	372	440
Total	4.06%	95.94%	100.00%
	131	3097	3228

**Table 2** Distribution of different functions of *qualunque* in MIDIA

The corpus data show that bare nouns modified by *qualunque* (e.g. *vizio qualunque* ‘vice whichever it is’, *in filosofia qualunque* ‘in philosophy whichever it is’) appear earlier (already in the 13th century) than indefinite nouns (after the 17th century; e.g. *una cosa qualunque* ‘a thing whichever it is’). This is

<sup>7</sup> First period: 1200–1375 formation of Tuscan Old Italian; Second period: 1376–1532 consolidation of Italian outside Tuscany; Third period: 1533–1691 standardisation of Italian in the late Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque periods; Fourth period: 1692–1840 the birth of Modern Italian: the age of Arcadia, the Enlightenment and Romanticism; Fifth period: 1841–1947 the language of the political unification of Italy.

<sup>8</sup> The methodology and analysis presented in this article are partially the result of my work on quantifiers in Old Italian in the ‘Quantification in Old Italian’ project, funded by the German Science Society (DFG) (PIs: Cecilia Poletto and Guido Mensching). I am very thankful to Marika Francia, who assisted in the data extraction and annotation.

<sup>9</sup> I consider pronominal *qualunque* as in *Qualunque può farlo* ‘Anyone can do it’ to be a special case of prenominal *qualunque*, under the assumption that the noun modified is covert (e.g. *Qualunque [uomo] può farlo* ‘Any (man) can do it’).

	Postnominal	Prenominal	Marginal Row Totals
1692	57 (71.24) [2.85]	526 (511.76) [0.4]	583
1841	68 (53.76) [3.77]	372 (386.24) [0.52]	440
Marginal Column			
Totals	125	898	1023 (Grand Total)

The chi-square Figure is 7.5358. The  $p$ -value is .006048. Significant at  $p < .05$ .  
The chi-square Figure with Yates correction is 7.0158. The  $p$ -value is .008079.  
Significant at  $p < .05$ .

**Table 3** Chi-square test for the diachronic distribution of postnominal *qualunque*

expected as Old Italian had bare indefinites (and bare kind- referring nouns), which are no longer possible in Modern Italian (see [Salvi & Renzi 2010](#): 331).

I can thus answer our first research question: postnominal *qualunque* modifying an indefinite noun is a recent development.

With respect to the distribution of the evaluative and FC meanings, from all occurrences of postnominal *qualunque* (131 in total), there are 122 occurrences of postnominal *qualunque* with the FC meaning ‘any’:

- (17) *I metafisici che credono che la questione del*  
the metaphysicians that believe.3PL that the question of-the  
*libero arbitrio possa continuare ad avere un senso*  
free will can.SBJV.3SG continue to have a sense  
*qualunque all'infuori di ogni implicazione teologica*  
any to-the out of every implication theological  
*rassomigliano a quegli ...*  
resemble.3PL to those  
‘Metaphysicians who believe that the question of free will can  
continue to have **any** meaning other than any theological implication  
resemble those ...’

[MIDIA, *Scienza positiva*, 1901, Libero arbitrio ed imputabilità morale]

- (18) *Un villaggio qualunque di Lombardia potrebbe offrire un*  
 a village any of Lombardy can.COND.3SG offer a  
*soggiorno meno sgradevole di quella ...*  
 stay less unpleasant of that  
 ‘Any village in Lombardy could offer a less unpleasant stay than that...’

[MIDIA, *Fosca*, 1869, XI.2]

- (19) *egli vuole alle Alpi un apostolo qualunque della*  
 he want.3SG to-the Alps a apostle any of-the  
*pronuncia e della frase fiorentina ...*  
 pronunciation and of-the sentence Florentine  
 ‘... he wants any apostle of the Florentine pronunciation and sentence... for the Alps’

[MIDIA, *Proemio all’Archivio Glottologico Italiano*, 1872]

There are some ambiguous cases between the FC interpretation and evaluative meaning in the 19th century, as in (20):

- (20) *Crede lei che un giovanotto – un giovanotto*  
 believe.3SG she that a young-man a young-man  
*qualunque – possa non farsi più nessuno*  
 any can.SBJV.3SG not make-REFL more no-one  
*scrupolo, nessun rimorso ...*  
 scruple no-one remorse  
 FC meaning: ‘Do you believe that a young man – any young man/no matter which – could have any remorse’  
 Evaluative meaning: ‘an **ordinary** young man’

[MIDIA, *Pensaci Giacomino!*, 1916, 268]

I found only nine occurrences with the clear evaluative interpretation ‘(just) ordinary’. Most examples with evaluative meaning refer to a male person, and all examples are from the text genres *theatre* or *prose*:

- (21) *Se il vostro mastice non serve a nulla, voi siete*  
 if the your filler not serve.3SG to anything you be.2PL  
*un imbroglione qualunque.*  
 a cheater any  
 ‘If your filler does not serve at all, you are (just) an **ordinary** cheater.’

[MIDIA, *La giara*, 1917, 260]

- (22) *Alcuni guardavano con molta attenzione un oggetto*  
 some looked.3PL with much attention a object  
*qualunque, come la valigia o la seggiola d'un vicino,*  
 any like the suitcase or the chair of a neighbour  
*o un numero scritto sopra una cassa.*  
 or a number written above a box  
 'Some people looked at some **ordinary** object with a lot of attention,  
 like the suitcase or the chair of a neighbour, or a number written on a  
 box.'

[MIDIA, *Sull'oceano*, 1889, L'imbarco degli emigranti]

- (23) *Mi credevo un uomo nella vita, un uomo qualunque,*  
 me believed.1sg a man in-the life a man any  
*che vivesse così alla giornata, una scioperata vita in fondo,*  
 that lived such at-the day a idle life in deep  
*benché piena di curiosi pensieri vagabondi ...*  
 although full of curious thoughts wandering  
 'I believed myself to be a man in life, an ordinary man, who lived  
 from day to day, an idler life, though full of curious wandering  
 thoughts ...'

[MIDIA, *Uno, nessuno e centomila*, 1924–1926, III, 14]

As for the evaluative meaning, it first started to appear in the late 19th century.<sup>10</sup>

I also checked the historical corpus DiaCORIS, which is also tagged for text genre. This showed that the evaluative meaning is genre-specific; that is, all occurrences with the evaluative meaning in DiaCORIS belong to subcorpora such as (everyday) press, essays and literary texts. Not a single occurrence was found in academic or scientific texts. Evaluative meaning is thus text genre-restricted, which is expected given that a speaker's evaluation is rarely used in formal text genres such as academic or law texts:

<sup>10</sup> The evaluative meaning became very common in the early and mid-1940s with the nominal phrase *uomo qualunque*, which refers to a common man and, especially in politics, to a man who is indifferent with respect to political ideologies (see fn. 4). In 1944, the journalist Guglielmo Giannini started the satirical journal *L'uomo qualunque*, in which he expresses mistrust of all political institutions and traditional parties. The success of his ideas encouraged him to found his own political movement and party, known as the *Fronte dell'Uomo Qualunque*, which enjoyed remarkable success during the Constituent Assembly and local elections in 1946.

- (24) *Ciuffettino indicò un punto qualunque*  
 Ciuffettino pointed a point any  
 ‘Ciuffettino pointed to some point.’  
 Evaluative meaning: The speaker finds the point  
**ordinary/unremarkable.**  
 [DiaCORIS, *Le avventure di Ciuffettino*, 1920]
- (25) *Giulio disse: – Ho detto ...una cosa qualunque.*  
 Giulio said have.1SG said a thing any  
*Piuttosto, ora dovremo andare*  
 rather now must.FUT.1PL go  
 Evaluative meaning: ‘I said... **a stupid thing/bullshit.**’  
 [DiaCORIS, *Tre Croci*, 1920]
- (26) *capi ch’era troppo presto per andare dalla*  
 understood that was too-much early for go to-the  
*madre, si fece portare in un albergo qualunque,*  
 mother REFL made.3SG bring in a hotel any  
*del centro della città.*  
 of-the centre of-the city  
 Evaluative meaning: ‘... an **ordinary** hotel’  
 [DiaCORIS, *Vita e morte di Adria e dei suoi figli*, 1930]

The first occurrences with the evaluative meaning were observed between the late 1860s and early 1870s in DiaCORIS. These examples have a scalar inference; that is, in (27) and (28) the speaker refers to some excuse that can be described as very low on a scale of good excuses:

- (27) A: *Che cosa intendete di fare?*  
 what thing intend.2PL of make  
 ‘What do you want to do?’  
 B: *(Intendo) Ritornare, giustificare con un pretesto*  
 intend.1SG turn justify with an excuse  
*qualunque la mia rinuncia alla licenza*  
 any the my rejection to-the leave  
 ‘(I want to) Come back and justify with an ordinary /some bad  
 excuse my rejection of the leave’  
 [DiaCORIS, *Fosca*, 1869]
- (28) *Con un pretesto qualunque andò a trovarlo*  
 with a excuse any went.1SG to find-him  
 ‘He went to visit him with just any (possible tiny) excuse’  
 [DiaCORIS, *Mastro Titta*, 1891]

The data from both corpora, MIDIA and DiaCORIS, show that the FC meaning is more prominent than the evaluative meaning. This observation strengthens my hypothesis that the FC meaning is the basic meaning and that the evaluative meaning is a derived meaning (see section 2). The observation that the FC meaning appears prior to the evaluative meaning also confirms the aforementioned hypothesis. The fact that postnominal *qualunque* with the evaluative meaning occurred with scalar inference is a sign that the rise of the evaluative meaning is context-dependent; that is, it depends on a context that implies some scale of goodness (see section 2).

### 3.2 Summary and evaluation of the diachronic results

I have observed that postnominal *qualunque* modifying an indefinite noun (*un(a) N qualunque*) appears later than *qualunque* modifying bare nouns in pre- or postnominal position (i.e. *qualunque N* or *N qualunque*). The evaluative meaning was observed in the 19th century with ambiguous scalar meaning. The fact that the evaluative meaning was only found with *un(a) N qualunque* and not with prenominal *qualunque* strongly suggests that it is correlated with existential FCIs and the adnominal property of *qualunque*. This suggests that postnominal *qualunque* should be interpreted as a nominal modifier on a par with adjectives or nominal compounds, rather than as a quantifier. This conclusion is confirmed by the comparison with English *whichever*. English *whichever* is a compound similar to *qualunque* in that it consists of *which* + temporal adverb *ever*. However, *whichever* is not accepted in the same contexts as *qualunque*, as it is not used in an adnominal position (\*Determiner N *whichever*) (Robert Truswell, p.c.).<sup>11</sup> This explains why English *whichever* never acquired the meaning of ‘ordinary/unremarkable’. However, the fact that N *qualunque* is restricted to indefinite nouns and does not allow degree modification shows that *qualunque* is not a simple (gradable) adjective either, because adjectives do not show the same restriction. We thus need an explanation that accounts for both properties of *qualunque*: acting like a quantifying element and like a nominal modifier similar to an adjective. The following section offers a diachronic explanation of this ambiguous status, and analyses the historical development of the properties mentioned in section 2.

## 4 THE ORIGIN OF FCIs

In this section, I will show how FCIs have developed in Italian. This will explain certain properties of postnominal *qualunque*, such as the modifier

<sup>11</sup> *Wh-ever* is a very late construction, which was first used in the 15th century in unconditionals, as *wh-so-ever* (Robert Truswell, p.c.).



function and the lack of degree modification (see section 2 for properties of *qualunque*).

According to some linguists, *wh*-based FCIs such as Spanish *cualquiera* developed from relative clauses (Haspelmath 1997, Company-Company & Pozas-Loyo 2009, among others). These authors claim that *wh*-based FCIs such as Spanish *cualquiera* have emerged as a result of a grammaticalisation process in which Free Relative clauses were reanalysed as indefinite noun phrases (see also Palomo 1934, Brucart 1999: §7.5.7, Company-Company & Pozas-Loyo 2009, Girón Alconchel 2012). I represent their analysis of the grammaticalization, as shown in (29a–c), in a generative framework in Figure 1. These authors assume that FCIs such as Spanish *cualquiera* (literally ‘which(ever) one would want’) start out as Free Relative clauses introduced by the *wh*-element *cual* ‘which’ (see (29a) and step 1 in Figure 1) (cf. Company-Company & Pozas-Loyo 2009: 1086).<sup>12</sup> The *wh*-element contains a *wh*-feature [+wh] which motivates movement of the *wh*-element to Spec,CP (see Kellert 2015 on *wh*-features). The noun modified by the *wh*-element can either move to Spec,CP together with the *wh*-element (Step 1 in Figure 1) or stay in situ in its argument position (Step 2 in Figure 1). The latter possibility creates adjacency between the *wh*-element and the verb *quiera* ‘want.SBJV.3SG’, which is necessary for the lexicalisation of the *wh*-element and the verb into an indefinite compound *cualquier* (see Figure 1).<sup>13</sup> The lexicalisation has the effect that the relative clause becomes reanalysed as an indefinite compound which is no longer perceived as clausal but as a DP (determiner phrase) without the *wh*-feature (see Figure 1). The indefinite acts as an argument of the main verb *haga* (step 3, Figure 1). The biclausal structure (i.e. the main sentence and the Free Relative clause at step 1) is reanalysed as monoclausal at step 3.

12 There is also the hypothesis that Romance FCIs represent a direct translation of FCIs in Latin. Menéndez Pidal (1928) assumes that *qual quier*, *qui quier*, *qual-se-quiera*, and so forth represent the Old Spanish equivalents of the Latin *quilibet*, *qualis-libet*, etcetera, that is, indefinite relatives compounded of a pronoun and an impersonal verb. Cortelazzo & Zolli (1979: 335, 1295) follow this hypothesis and assume that *qualunque* has been derived from the analogy to *chiunque* from Latin *quī* ‘chi’ and *ūnquam* ‘talvolta’ (see also Rohlf 1968: vol. II, 222–223). According to Meyer-Lübke (1899: 57), *qualunque* is derived from Latin *qualiscumque*, composed from *qualis* ‘which’ + *cumque* ‘ever’ (*qualiscumque* > *qual[is]-unqua[m]* > Old and Modern Italian *qualunque*). For our argument, it does not matter whether Romance FCIs are a direct translation from Latin or a Romance invention; both hypotheses have in common that FCIs result from relative clauses.

13 Actually, the loss of the ending *-a* in the prenominal *cualquier* is problematic under the assumption that *cualquier* derives from *cualquiera* and *-a* represents a subjunctive. There is no empirical evidence that the basis form for the derivation was a subjunctive rather than the indicative *quiere*.

- (29) Grammaticalisation path of *cualquier* in Spanish  
(Company-Company & Pozas-Loyo 2009: 1086)
- (a) *Haga en él cual castigo quiera*  
do-IMPER in him which punishment want-you  
'Do upon him the punishment which you may want'  
→ Free Relative with *cual* NP in Spec,CP (Step 1)
- (b) *haga en él cual quiera castigo*  
→ Free Relative with only *cual* in Spec,CP and NP in situ  
(Split DP, see Giusti & Iovino 2011<sup>14</sup>) (Step 2)
- (c) *haga en él cualquier(a) castigo*  
'Do to him whatever punishment you want'  
→ Postverbal Indefinite, monoclausal analysis (Step 3)

Although the grammaticalisation path has not been empirically testified for Spanish *cualquiera* due to the fact that the first Old Spanish data already contain the lexicalised item *cualquiera* (see Aloni, Aguilar Guevara, Port, Schulz & Šimík 2010), there is empirical evidence that Italian FCIs such as *qualsiasi* and *qualsisia* have undergone a grammaticalisation path along the lines in Figure 1, as I will show below. I assume that *qualunque* had a development similar to that of *qualsiasi*. The latter form is another indefinite of Italian with FC interpretation.

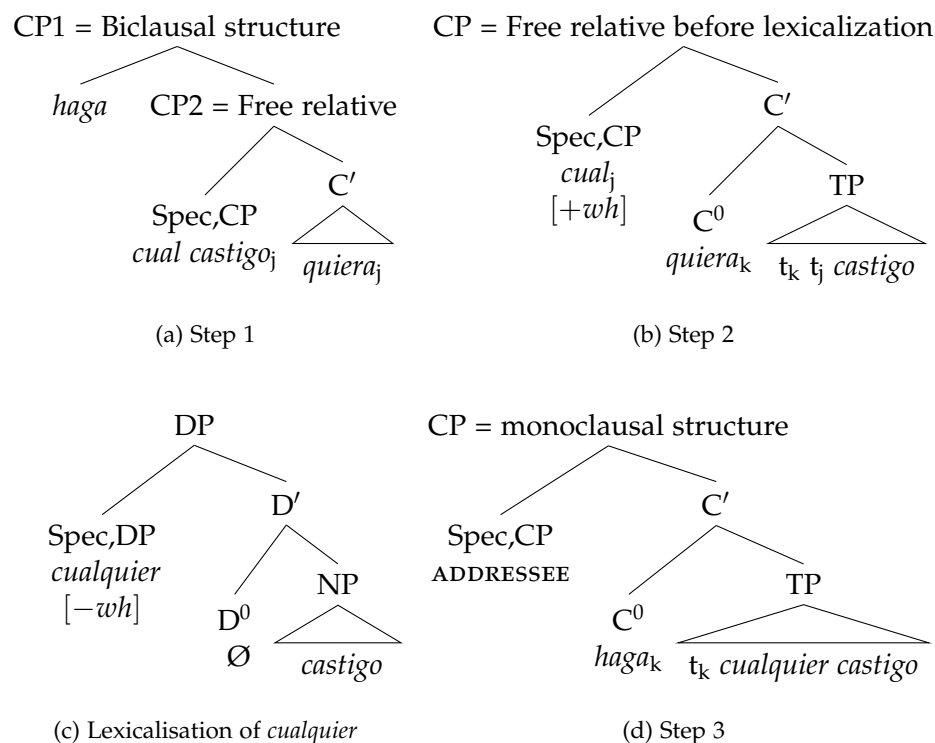
The form *qualsiasi* with the postnominal position of *si* is a grammatical variant of *qualsisia*. *Qualsisia* with the impersonal subject pronoun *si* in the prenominal position first appeared in the 16th century in Tuscan varieties. After the change of the pronoun *si* to the postverbal position, *qualsisia* changed to *qualsiasi*, which appeared later, in the 17th century.

We find the transparent relative clause *qual si sia* before the lexicalised form *qualsisia* in the OVI<sup>15</sup> corpus due to the possibility of separation by lexical elements such as the complementiser *che*, nouns or personal pronouns:

14 In Latin, *wh*-modifiers could be separated from the nouns they modified (see Giusti & Iovino 2011: 113):

(i) *quales<sub>i</sub> legimus [t<sub>i</sub> panegyricos]?*  
what.ACC.PL read.PRES/1PL panegyric.ACC.PL  
'What kind of panegyrics do we read?'  
(Quint. Inst. 2,10,11, cited in Giusti & Iovino 2011: 113)

15 OVI is a corpus of Old Italian texts, comprising 17,677,486 tokens of Tuscan texts from the 13th and 14th centuries. It is available online. [http://gattoweb.ovi.cnr.it/\(S\(tynfgizf4mkq2l55jmdhn45\)\)/CatForm01.aspx](http://gattoweb.ovi.cnr.it/(S(tynfgizf4mkq2l55jmdhn45))/CatForm01.aspx), January 2020.



**Figure 1** Grammaticalisation path of *cualquiera*

- (30) *Or vedi non ne incresca piuè a me che a*  
 or see.2SG non part regret.SBJV.3SG more to me that to  
*tte, inperò ch'io dimorrò qui techo tanto che no*  
 you but that I stay here with-you that not  
*sia nero, che de' miei compagni, qual che*  
 be.SBJV.3SG black that of(-the) my partners which that  
*ssia, non ci arrivi.*  
 be.SBJV.3SG not there arrive.2SG

'Look, it doesn't bother me any more than you, because I will stay here with you as long as it is not dark, so that any of my companions, whoever he might be, might not get there.'

[OVI, *Panciatichiano*, 1355, 180]

- (31) *E se tu forse a me sopravvivi, quale che si*  
 and if you maybe to me outlive.2SG which that REFL  
*sia della mia morte il modo, ...*  
 be.SBJV.3SG of-the my death the mode  
 ‘And when you perhaps outlive me, whichever way my death may  
 be ...’  
 [OVI, *Madonna Fiammetta*, 1344, 186]
- (32) *che quando tu vedrai quel crudele cavaliere, qual che*  
 that when you see.FUT.2SG that cruel knight which that  
*egli si sia, che verso te dirizzerà l’*  
 he REFL be.SBJV.3SG that against you direct.FUT.3SG the  
*aguta lancia, ...*  
 sharp lance  
 ‘... that when you see that cruel knight, whoever he may be, that  
 points his sharp lance towards you ...’ [OVI, *Filocolo*, 1338, 94]
- (33) *E però che a tanto non mi pareva essere sufficiente,*  
 and but that to many not me seemed be sufficient  
*e per la grazia di Dio avendo questa operetta, quale*  
 and for the grace of God having this work.DIM which  
*ella si sia, conchiusa, ...*  
 she REFL be.SBJV.3SG concluded  
 ‘And yet that did not seem to me to be enough, and by the grace of  
 God after having this little work, whatever it may be, done, ...’  
 [OVI, *Brieve collezione*, 1374, 225]
- (34) *li nuovi spiriti non sanno di quale parte si*  
 the new spirits not know.3PL of which part REFL  
*sia la via che mena a Stige ...*  
 be.SBJV.3SG the route that lead.3SG to Styx  
 ‘the new spirits don’t know where the route that leads to Styx might  
 be ...’  
 [OVI, *Ottimo commento – Inferno*, 1334, 149]

The *wh*-word *quale* inside the relative clause has a predicative status in all corpus examples. It is a copular predicate. The subject of the copular predicate is a definite NP (*la cagione* in (35)). This NP is modified by *qualsisia* after the latter has been lexicalised:

- (35) *che roso si è dirupinato, e cascato, quale si*  
 that eroded REFL is broken and fallen which REFL  
*sia la cagione* (BEFORE LEXICALISATION)  
 be.SBJV.3SG the reason  
 ‘that eroded has crashed down, collapsed, whatever the cause might be’  
 [OVI, *Ottimo commento – Inferno*, 1334, 218]  
 → *qualsisia cagione* (AFTER LEXICALISATION)  
 ‘any reason’ [MIDIA, *Discorso sopra la calamita*, 1639]

The subjunctive of the copula inside the relative clause triggers the FC meaning; that is the NP (e.g. *la cagione* in (35)) refers to any possible reason: this reason or that reason if alternatives are individuals, or any kind of reason if alternatives are kinds or properties.<sup>16</sup>

Our data show that *quale* inside the relative clause predicates over definite NPs such as *l'amante* in (36) or *quella cosa* in (37). The definite NP either precedes the relative clause as in (36) or follows it as in (37). Either the subject argument of the relative clause is an anaphorically bound pronoun (covert *pro*) as in (36), or the definite NP is realised as the subject argument of the copula clause as in (37). In the former case, the relative clause acts as an appositive relative clause to the main sentence; that is, it gives additional information about the referent expressed by the NP (e.g. *l'amante* in (36)).

- (36) *Ancora vedemo che l'amante, qual sia, a tutte*  
 again see.1PL that the lover which be.SBJV.3SG to all  
*cose tardo si truova e pigro, se non cose che*  
 things late REFL find.3SG and lazy if not things that  
*paiono d'appartenere ad amore.*  
 seem.3PL of belong to love  
 ‘and again we see that the lover, whoever he may be, is slow and lazy in all things, except in those things that seem to belong to love.’  
 [OVI, *Trattato d'amore di Andrea Cappellano*, 1310, 379]

<sup>16</sup> The ambiguity between individual or kind/property interpretation is due to the ambiguity of copular clauses in general (see Kellert 2015, among others).

- (37) *ma veramente abbiate ordinato col siniscalco che*  
 but truly have.SBJV.2PL arrange with-the seneschal that  
*qual che si sia quella cosa ch' ella*  
 which that REFL be.SBJV.3SG that thing that she  
*apporterà, celatamente di veleno sia piena.*  
 bring.FUT.3SG secretly of poison be.SBJV.3SG full  
 'but have you really discussed with the seneschal that whatever thing  
 she may bring will secretly be full of poison'  
 [OVI, *Filocolo*, 1338, 166]

The appositive modifier function of the relative clause and the predicative status of the *wh*-word *quale* are two important ingredients that explain the properties of postnominal FCIs in Modern Italian mentioned in section 2, namely their modifier function and the lack of degree modification. Postnominal FCIs have preserved their function as nominal modifiers and as elements that give additional information about the NP they modify, like appositive relative clauses. As relative clauses cannot be degree-modified (they belong to a certain sentence type, and sentences do not undergo degree modification), postnominal FCIs cannot be degree-modified either.<sup>17</sup>

I suggest that postnominal *qualunque* in Modern Italian should be analysed along the same lines as *qualsisia*, that is as a hidden relative clause that modifies the preceding noun (*un uomo* 'a man') in (38). The relative clause has a predicative function similar to postnominal adjectives in Italian (see Cinque 2010). The item *qualunque* is syntactically analysed as a predicative noun/adjective of a copular verb in the subjunctive. The whole relative clause describes a property of the entity/person denoted by the noun (*un uomo* 'a man'), and the subjunctive copula contributes to the FC interpretation of *qualunque*; in (38), *Gianni* is described as having some property, which can be any of the possible properties a man might have.

- (38) *Gianni è un uomo qualunque (egli sia)*  
 Gianni be.3SG a man any (he would be)  
 'Gianni is a man whatever property this man has.'

The predicative nature of *qualunque* in Modern Italian results from the use of *qualunque* in copular sentences along the same lines as *qualsisia*:

<sup>17</sup> Note that *qualunque* inside the relative clause *qualunque sia* cannot be degree-modified either, because it is a *wh*-element and not an adjective. This is why postnominal *qualunque* cannot be degree-modified.

- (39) *io vi chiamo a testimonio che questo popolo (e*  
 I you.PL call.1SG to testimony that this people and  
*nominalo, qualunque ello si sia) è*  
 name-it any he REFL be.SBJV.3SG be.3SG  
*oltraggioso ...*  
 offensive  
 ‘I call you to testify that this people (and name it, whatever it may  
 be) is offensive ...’  
 [OVI, Tito Livio, 1350, a59]
- (40) *Adunque sofferiamo questa onta qualunque ella si*  
 thus suffer.1PL that disgrace any she REFL  
*sia, ...*  
 be.SBJV.3SG  
 ‘Thus we suffer that disgrace (of) whatever (kind) it may be, ...’  
 [OVI, Tito Livio, 1350, b259]
- (41) *niuno affetto, o vero accidente qualunque egli sia,*  
 no-one affect or true accident any he be.SBJV.3SG  
*è tanto universale e tanto comune a tutte le*  
 be.3SG much universal and much common to all the  
*cose, quanto l’amore.*  
 things how-many the love  
 ‘there’s no affection, or rather, accident, whatever it may be, that is as  
 universal and as common to all things as love’  
 [MIDIA, Varchi, *Due Lezioni*, 1543]

To sum up: I have shown historical data that provide evidence for a grammaticalisation of Italian FCIs by which FCIs such as *qualsisia* start out as relative clauses with an FC interpretation modifying an NP and lexicalise as indefinites with an FC interpretation such as Indefinite NP *qualsisia*.

The origin of FCIs explains their licensing in contexts without overt modality, where the overt modal verb or some modality-inducing element is missing. What licenses the use of FCIs in positive contexts in Romance is the subjunctive inside the FCI (see [Rivero 2011](#) for a similar idea in Spanish).

- (42) *È un uomo qualsiasi.*  
 be.3SG a man qualsiasi  
 ‘He’s an ordinary man.’
- (43) *Ho comprato un libro qualsiasi/qualunque (sia).*  
 have.1SG bought a book qualsiasi/qualunque (be.SBJV.3SG)  
 ‘I bought some book (whichever it may be).’



Another property that I can account for by the lexicalisation process from relative clauses to indefinites is the predicative nature of postnominal FCIs, as the example in (44) shows. The *wh*-word *qual* in *qual sia* operates on alternative predicates (the lover can be nice, beautiful, etc.):

- (44) *Ancora vedemo che l'amante, qual sia, a tutte*  
 again see.1PL that the lover which be.SBJV.3SG to all  
*cose tardo si truova e pigro, se non cose che*  
 things late REFL find.3SG and lazy if not things that  
*paiono d'appartenere ad amore.*  
 seem.3PL of belong to love  
 'and again we see that the lover, whoever he might be/whatever  
 property he may have, is slow and lazy in all things, except in those  
 things that seem to belong to love.'  
 [OVI, *Trattato d'amore di Andrea Cappellano*, 1310, 379]

The predicative nature of postnominal FCIs is still present in Modern Italian. Thus, *un uomo qualsiasi* can be interpreted as a man with any kind of property. As I argued in section 2, it is the predicative property of postnominal FCIs that makes the evaluative meaning possible because the postnominal FCI is analysed as some predicate which all alternatives have in common. The predication over a set of equal alternatives is what has given the interpretation of *qualunque* as 'common' or 'basic'.

To sum up, I have explained the modifier function, the FC property and the predicative nature of postnominal FCIs diachronically by the relative clause origin of FCIs.

## 5 SUMMARY

I have shown that postnominal *qualunque* can be interpreted as a Free Choice Indefinite and have an evaluative meaning. In many cases the evaluative meaning appears with copular verbs rather than with modal verbs, as in *è un uomo qualunque* 'he is a common/ordinary man'. I have argued for a relative clause analysis of N *qualunque* as N *qualunque* (sia) 'any property (whatever property it might be)'. This can account for aspects such as the modifier function of postnominal *qualunque* and the lack of degree modification. I have derived the evaluative meaning 'ordinary/common' from the definition of Free Choice as predication over free choice alternatives. The negative connotation of 'ordinary (nothing special)' was derived from focalisation of *qualunque* in certain pragmatic contexts.

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