1. Introduction.

In this talk we present novel data on the realization of subjects in Cimbrian (Germanic, spoken in Luserna, Northern Italy). More specifically, we discuss the complex relationship between the position of NP subjects, coupled with the presence of an enclitic subject pronoun or the expletive element da, and information structure.

We show that none of the previous analyses can account for the novel data. Bidese et al (2012) and Bidese & Tomaselli (2014) propose that subject clitics and da are hosted in FinP° and their function is that of controlling an EPP feature on T° since post-verbal subjects fail to raise to this position. Subject clitics realise Fin° with given/topicalised subjects, whereas da shows up when the subject is new information. Grewendorf & Poletto (2015) propose that da is not hosted in the same FP hosting clitics, but realises the Specifier of GroundP, whose function is to signal the Ground against which the new information in the clause is set. The two analyses are challenged by the fact that da is ruled out in i) some syntactic configurations involving a focussed subject, ii) possible in interrogatives with given subjects and iii) optional in some contexts.

2. The data.

2.1 Post-verbal subjects

In Cimbrian, post-verbal NP subjects always co-occur with a clitic pronoun or the expletive da. According to the literature, da is obligatory when the NP subject is new-information / focussed, whereas the subject clitic is obligatory if the subject is given information. Our novel data, which consider several fine-grained information-structure contexts, indicate that this generalization is partially correct. NP subject-finite verb inversion is possible in Cimbrian – as long as i) the subject is contrastively focussed, and ii) the expletive da follows the finite verb (1).

(1) In de botege hatta /*hat herta dar Mario gekoart s mel, net de mama in the shop has-da / has always the Mario bought the flour not the mum

“It is Mario who has always bought the flour in the shop, not the mum.”

When the NP subject is discourse given, post-verbal subjects cannot co-occur with the expletive da but must be doubled by the clitic, see (2).

(2) Luca and Maria are talking about Giada
   a. Luca asks: Pit bem ist=sej ausgönt di Giada? with whom is=she gone out the Giada?
   b. Luca asks: # Pit bem ist=da ausgönt di Giada with whom is=da gone out the Giada

The fact that da is restricted to focussed subjects seems to be further confirmed by the examples in (3) indicating that the NP subject can be dropped when it is doubled by a clitic (3b) but not when it is doubled by a da (3c). This follows from the fact that topics can be dropped / remain silent, and foci cannot (Frascarelli 2007).

(3) Luca and Maria are talking about Giada
   a. Luca asks: Pit bem ist=se ausgönt? with whom is= she gone out
   b. Luca asks: *Pit bem ist=da ausgönt? with whom is=da gone out

However, the connection between da and focussed post-verbal subject turns out to be less clear than expected when more data are considered. In (4) we show that in all sentences in which a discourse-
given object appears in CP and the subject is new-information, *da* is ruled out.

(4)  
  a. Someone asks: “Who watched the match on TV?”
  b. Answer: In television di partia hat-se geschaugt di momma on TV the match has=she watched the mum
c. Answer: *In television di partia hatta geschaugt di momma on TV the match has=*da watched the mum

Moreover, interrogative clauses with *da* are possible even when the subject represents given information, as can be deduced from the presupposition information seeking question in (5), namely that *Giada went out with someone.*

(5)  
Pit bem ist=*da ausgònt de Giada? with whom is=*da gone out the Giada

2.2. Preverbal subjects
The second set of arguments that will be discussed in the talk regards the generalization that *da* is restricted to post-verbal NP subjects. Our data confirm this view for discourse-given subjects (6a), but not for focused subjects or operators (like QPs and QP-phrases), which can optionally co-occur with *da* (6bc).

(6)  
  a. A: *What did Mario buy?*
     B. Dar Mario hat / *hatta gekhoaft in liber
        the Mario has / has=*da bought the-acc book
  b. Ber hat / hatta geprinkt in turt?
     who has / has=*da brought the-acc cake
  c. Niamat hat / hatta gekoaft in liber
     noone has / has=*da bought the-acc book

3. Our proposal.
We distinguish three types of subject positions according to their information structural role: post-verbal subjects represent new information; subjects that precede the non-finite verb are interpreted as contrastive focus and subjects that precede the finite verb are interpreted as given information.

The crucial point of data in (4) and (5) is that topicalization or wh-movement of an object blocks a pre-finite subject. We argue that Spec,FinP constitutes a criterial position for the subject and blocks movement into another criterial position across it (cf. Rizzi 1990, 2004).

The data in (6), however, have another explanation. We show that the presence of *da* in sentences with a preverbal NP subject in (6) has the function of turning an unmarked interrogative clause into a special interrogative (6b), and of turning a main declarative clause into an exclamative sentence (6c), by making the fronted operator / quantifier specific / referential. In this optional use *da* functions like Dutch *er* (Biberauer&van der Wal 2014). As for the position of *da*, we follow Bidese & Tomaselli (2014) and suggest that it is hosted in Fin° where also subject clitics are hosted, explaining why *da* is obligatory in (4c) but excluded in (4b).

References