The irrealis subordinating particles in Romanian, Salentino and Calabrese: a case of downwards grammaticalization?

Many Romance varieties are characterized by a dual complementizer system, where one complementizer marks ‘irrealis’, e.g. Southern Italo-Romance che/chi (Rohlfs, 1969; Ledgeway, 2003, a.o.), Romanian să (Alboiu & Motapanyane, 2000; Dobrovie-Sorin, 1994 a.o.) and Salentino cu and Calabrian/Northeastern Sicilian mu/mi/ma (Trumper & Rizzi, 1985; Calabrese, 1993; De Angelis, 2017 a.o.). Cu, mu and să replace many uses of the infinitive in these varieties, on a par with Balkan languages (Rohlfs, 1969; Calabrese, 1993; De Angelis, 2013; Ledgeway, 2013).

This paper will focus on this latter category of subordinate particles, which have a dual character. On the one hand, they show properties of a modal particle, marking the subjunctive mood and combining with wh-elements and complementizers (1); on the other, they seem to behave as complementizers themselves, introducing embedded complement and adjunct clauses (2). Examples are given for Romanian:

(1) *Vreau ca Ion să meargă la petrecere.*
   *I want that Ion să goes.subj to party*
   ‘I want Ion to go to the party.’

(2) *Vreau să merg la petrecere.*
   *I want să I.go to party*
   ‘I want to go to the party.’

Therefore, these particles have been analyzed variously as modal particles (Rivero, 1994; Paoli, 2003; Damonte, 2011) and complementizers (Dobrovie-Sorin, 1994; Nicolae, 2015).

This paper will argue that both cu, mu and să present us with a case of downwards grammaticalization (contra Roberts & Roussou 2003). Să is argued to derive from the Latin si ‘if’ (Joseph, 1983; Nicolae, 2015; Sandfeld, 1930), an irrealis and conditional complementizer occupying a high position within the CP (Rizzi 2001). However, in modern Romanian it occupies the lower position Fin.

For mu and cu a unified analysis is proposed, according to which both have the question word QUOMODO ‘how, in what manner’ as etymon, with the former eliding QUO- and the latter -MODO (Bertoni 1905, anonymous in prep). Since cu and mu can occupy various positions along the clausal spine depending on the matrix verb selecting them (Ledgeway, 2012; Taylor, 2014; Squillacì, 2016), also mu and cu present us with a case of downwards grammaticalization.

It will be argued that these elements develop from irrealis, C-related elements into heads in a lower position the C-domain (Fin and lower). This development has led to their change in status from phrases to head (Van Gelderen, 2009). Furthermore, these elements are taken to be a counterexample of the generalization put forward by Roberts & Roussou (2003) that grammaticalization is the result of upward reanalysis. This downwards grammaticalisation process will be discussed in relation to the irrealis modality that these elements mark.