Optional Insitulessness in Northern Italian dialects: derivation(s)

**Background.** Differently from “pure in situ” languages like Chinese (Huang 1982), insitulessness in Romance languages co-exists with wh-fronting (Munaro 1999, Manzini&Savoia 2005). The in situ-ex situ alternation is seemingly optional, but actually applies to various degrees: some languages only allow “insitulessness” with non-D-linked wh-items (Bellunese, Munaro 1999) (1a-b), other license any wh-item sentence-internally (Trevigiano, Bonan 2018) (2a-b):

(1) a. * A-tu sièlt che vestito?  
    have=you chosen which dress  
    “Which dress did you choose?”

   a. A-tu parecià che?  
    have=you prepared what  
    “What did you prepare?”

(2) a. Ga-tu leto cuanti libri?  
    have=you read how many books  
    “How many books did you read?”

   b. Ga-tu leto cossa?  
    have=you read what  
    “What did you read?”

Also, while in languages like Bellunese “insitulessness” is a root phenomenon realized at the sentential edge (Munaro 1999), in some Lombard dialects and Trevigiano sentence-internal wh-words needn’t occupy the rightmost position and appear in embedded environments (Manzini&Savoia 2005, Bonan 2018). Bellunese-like languages have been argued to derive insitulessness using a low left peripheral projection (Munaro et al. 2001, Polletto&Pollock 2015). These approaches were criticised by Manzini&Savoia (2005;2011) discussing Lombard in-situ wh-words that appear in their argumental position. However, neither can account for the whole range of morpho-syntactic variations observed in Northern Italian Dialects (NIDs).

**Novel data.** Manzini (2014) mentions the possibility for sentence-internal wh-words to target the vP, as in Brazilian Portuguese (Kato 2013). Bonan (2018) develops this intuition using data from Trevigiano, whose sentence-internal wh-words systematically target a position below the finite V (3a-b):

(3) a. Ga-tu meso dove el me reojo?  
    have=you put where the my watch  
    “Where did you put my watch?”

   b. * Ga-tu meso el me reojo dove?  
    have=you put the my watch where

Another difference between Bellunese and Trevigiano is that the latter has “insitulessness” in long distance (4a) and in indirect questions (4b) (Bonan 2018):

(4) a. Pensi-tu ke-l ne ciamarà quando?  
    think=you that=he us call.FUT when  
    “When do you think he will call us?”

   b. A vol saver se-l ne ciamarà quando  
    she wants know se=he us call.FUT when  
    “She wants to know when he will call us”

Finally, whereas Bellunese excludes “insitulessness” both from weak (5a) and strong (5b) islands (Munaro 1999), this is perfectly fine in Trevigiano (6a-b):

(5) a. * No te-ol andar andé?  
    NEG you=want go where  
    “Where don’t you want to go?”

   b. * Te piase i libri che parla de che?  
    you like.it the books that speak of what  
    “You like books about what?”

(6) a. No te vol ndar dove?  
    NEG you want go where

   b. Te piase i libri che parla de cossa?  
    you like the books that speak of what

The properties listed so far clearly set Bellunese and Trevigiano apart - which makes it implausible to posit a derivation that is strong enough to explain “insitulessness” in both languages.
**Discussion.** In Comunnuovese, a Lombard dialect, different derivations can be posited for different types of wh-words (Donzelli 2018) - while both wh-items of the basic-type (cosa) and of the ù-type (cosè) appear sentence-internally (7a-b), only the latter can be embedded (8a-b):

(7) a. Te vest cosa?
you saw what
“What did you see?”

b. Te vest cosè?
you see what

(8) a. *Ma se domande al fa cosa
I myself ask he does what
“I wonder what he does”

b. Ma se domande al fa cosè
I myself ask he does what

Wh-words of the ù-type have a Trevigiano-like behaviour – they undergo IP-internal wh-movement (9a) and are fine inside of islands (9b):

(9) a. L’ha est cosè in-del prat?
He has seen what in=the garden
“What did he see in the garden?”

b. I vol mia cosè?
They want NEG what
“What is it that they don’t want?”

Predictably, wh-words of the basic-type have opposite behaviour.

Contra Munaro et al. 2001, Manzini&Savoia 2005;2011, Poletto&Pollock 2015, it appears implausible to posit a one-fits-all derivation of “insituness” for NIDs. In fact, intra- and interlinguistically, different wh-items target different wh-projections - a low left peripheral one in Bellunese, an IP-internal one in Trevigiano, either of the two depending on the wh-word in “mixed” languages like Comunnuovese. Also, Chinese-like argumental insituness ought to be posited for the Lombard varieties described in Manzini&Savoia (2005;2011).

**Conclusions.** A unique derivation cannot explain the wide range of variation observed in the in situ-ex situ alternation in NIDs. A novel model is proposed here, which ranges languages from Chinese-like varieties whose sentence-internal wh-elements are literally in-situ (in argumental position), to Bellunese-like varieties that exploit a left peripheral wh-projection – via many intermediate steps. The claim is that one can explain all cross- and intra-linguistic variations looking at two major variables:

i) the focal position(s) available for sentence-internal wh-words (left peripheral, IP-internal, argumental);

ii) the nature of wh-items and their movement properties.