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Exploring the Multi-tude of uses: *Tanto* and *molto* in Italian

Federico Schirato, Ludovico Franco, Greta Mazzaggio
Università degli Studi di Firenze
(federico.schirato@unifi.it; ludovico.franco@unifi.it;
greta.mazzaggio@unifi.it)

Abstract:

This study analyses the properties of the *m*-words *tanto* and *molto* in Italian. First, we will provide an overview of the distinct uses and interpretations of these elements in various syntactic and semantic contexts, and we will motivate them by analysing *tanto* and *molto* as degree modifiers. In particular, we will suggest that *tanto* can appear in a wider range of contexts because of its semantics. Then, we will discuss in detail the different positions that these elements can occupy in the clause, and we will avail of Phase Theory to account for the possibility of *tanto* to appear twice in the same sentence with distinct functions.

Keywords: Italian Syntax, Semantics, Degree Modifiers, M-Words, Phase Theory

1. Introduction

In this squib¹ we examine the semantic and syntactic properties of the Italian terms *tanto* and *molto*, which can be translated in English as ‘many, a lot of’ when they are used to modify nouns, ‘very’, when they precede adjectives and adverbs, or ‘much, a lot’, when they appear as adverbs after the main verb.

Although *tanto* and *molto* are often interchangeable, there are specific syntactic and semantic environments in which only one of the two is grammatical. *Tanto* and *molto* can be used to modify nouns, showing Agreement for gender and number (1), or to modify adjectives (2a), adverbs and adverbials (2b), in which case they do not show Agreement and appear with default masculine gender and singular number (2a, b).

¹ A preliminary version of this work was presented in the form of a poster at the IGG50 (50° Incontro di Grammatica Generativa), held at the University of Padua (19-21/02/2025). We would like to thank all the participants to the meeting, in particular Achille Fusco, for their observations, which have proved much helpful for us.

- (1) Gianni mangerà tante/molte mele.
 Gianni eat-FUT-3SG many-F.PL apple-F.PL
 ‘Gianni will eat many apples.’
- (2) a. Giulia è tanto/molto stanca.
 Giulia.F.SG be.PRS.3SG very tired-F.SG
 ‘Giulia is very tired.’
 b. Gianni mangia tanto/molto velocemente.
 Gianni eat-PRS.3SG very quickly
 ‘Gianni eats very quickly.’

When they are used in isolation as adverbs, these elements modify the magnitude of the event described by the matrix verb of the clause, referring, for instance, to its intensity (3a), or its duration (3b), cf. Doetjes (2007), Nakanishi (2007).

- (3) a. Il film mi è piaciuto tanto/molto.
 The film CLIT.DAT.1SG be.PRS.3SG like-PST.PTCP a.lot
 ‘I liked the film a lot.’
 b. I bambini hanno dormito tanto/molto.
 The.M.PL child-M.PL have.PRS.3PL sleep-PST.PTCP a.lot
 ‘The children have slept a lot.’

In all the above cases, *tanto* and *molto* are equally available, but there are other syntactic contexts in which only the former is accepted. First, only *tanto* can form equative constructions followed by *quanto* ‘as much as’ (4a, b), in which the comparandum introduced by *tanto* is put in relation with the comparandum introduced by *quanto*.

- (4) a. Gianni studia tanto/*molto quanto Giulia.
 Gianni study.PRS.3SG tanto quanto Giulia
 ‘Gianni studies as much as Giulia.’
 b. Andrea è tanto/*molto intelligente quanto pigro.
 Andrea be.PRS.3SG tanto clever quanto lazy
 ‘Andrea is as clever as he is lazy.’

Tanto can introduce equative clauses when it is followed by the preposition *da* ‘from; so as to, to’ plus an infinitive (5a), or by *che* plus a finite verb (5b), and also concessive clauses expressing an ineluctable event, in which case it means ‘anyway, in any case’ (5c), as pointed out by Mazzaggio and Stateva (2023).

- (5) a. Giulia studia tanto/*molto da impazzire.
 Giulia study.PRS.3SG tanto da go.crazy-INF
 ‘Giulia studies so-much that she goes crazy.’
 b. Il cane abbaia tanto che non dormiremo.
 The dog bark.PRS.3SG tanto that NEG sleep-FUT-1PL
 ‘The dog barks so much that we will not sleep.’
 c. Tanto/*molto Gianni non supererà l’esame.
 Tanto Gianni NEG pass-FUT-3SG the exam
 ‘Gianni will not pass the exam anyway.’

It is important to note that the concessive function of *tanto* is compatible with all the other roles that this element can play, so that there can be two instances of *tanto* in the same clause, cf. (6a), where a second *tanto* modifies the duration of the event ‘to sleep’, or in the same sentence (6b), where a second *tanto* followed by *da* introduces an equative clause.

- (6) a. Tanto Gianni non dormirà tanto/molto.
 Tanto Gianni NEG sleep-FUT-3SG a.lot
 ‘Gianni will not sleep much anyway.’
 b. Tanto Giulia studierà tanto da superare l’ esame.
 Tanto Giulia study-FUT.3SG tanto da pass-INF the exam
 ‘In any case Giulia will study so much that she will pass the exam.’

Krapova and Cinque (2020) further note that only *tanto* can occur with *così* ‘so’, either appearing before (7a), or after it, as in the exclamative clause in (7b).

- (7) a. Giulia ha tagliato i capelli tanto/*molto così.
 Giulia have.PRS.3SG cut-PST.PTCP the.M.PL hair-M.PL so tanto
 ‘Giulia has cut her hair this much.’
 b. Giulia studia così tanto/*molto!
 Giulia study.PRS.3SG so tanto
 ‘Giulia studies so much!’

The differences and similarities of *tanto* and *molto* have not drawn the attention of many scholars. They are discussed by Montalto et al. (2010), which divide quantifiers into two categories, with low- and high-magnitude, respectively. In two distinct experiments, native speakers clearly distinguish between a low-magnitude and a high-magnitude quantifier, whereas uncertainties arise when two quantifiers belonging to the same category are compared. As noted by Montalto et al. (2010), this is unexpected, since a distinction between semantically overlapping items should always be detectable (Clark 1987; Bolinger 1977).

Mazzaggio and Stateva (2023) seek to test if *tanto* and *molto* are evaluated differently by Italian native speakers, elaborating on Stateva and Stepanov (2017), who distinguish the two semantically similar quantifiers *precej* and *veliko* in Slovenian on the basis of their association with distinct numerical values. Mazzaggio and Stateva (2023) find that the participants involved in their experiment do not appear to distinguish *tanto* and *molto* on the basis of numerical values, since these two elements are interchangeable as amount modifiers. They thus point out that more work needs to be done to investigate the subtle differences in the realm of quantifiers in a crosslinguistic perspective, as discussed in Mazzaggio and Stateva (2024).

In the present squib, we focus on the distributional restrictions of *tanto* and *molto*, treating them as degree modifiers, following Rett’s (2008, 2018) analysis of corresponding elements in English. Degree modifiers are not specified for a dimension of measurement and so they can take several degrees (i.e. intervals) of magnitude as their arguments, thus having the capability of directly modifying nouns as well as states or events. After proposing that *tanto* and *molto*’s distribution may derive from their freedom of argumental selection, we will clarify the syntactic restrictions that allow *tanto* to appear twice in the same sentence, elaborating on Chomsky’s (2001) Phase Theory. The division of the clause into two parts, and most importantly the Phase Impenetrability Condition, will enable us to posit a single instance of *tanto* in the lexicon that can be selected independently by each phase to play distinct roles.

2. *Tanto and molto as degree modifiers*

Rett (2018) analyses the semantic properties of the English quantity words *many*, *much*, *few* and *little*. In particular, *many* and *much*, which are the English counterparts of Italian *molto* and *tanto*, are referred to as *m(any)*-words. Rett argues that a definition of them as either adjectives, or quantifiers, cannot account for their distribution: on the one hand, quantity words display an individual use (ranging over nouns, e.g. *many women*, *few friends*, etc.) thus behaving like prenominal adjectives; on the other, they behave like quantifiers, since they cannot occur with determiners and may modify VPs, PPs, and comparative constructions (Rett 2018: 7).

Moving from Romero (1988) and Hackl (2000), which treat quantity words as quantifiers containing a degree argument, and Cresswell (1976), who suggests to distinguish between gradable and non-gradable adjectives, Rett proposes to treat *m*-words as degree modifiers, that is as modifiers that take a set of degrees (i.e. an interval) as their argument. For Rett (2008: 2018), degree modifiers are not specified for a single dimension of measurement, so that they can range over degrees of numerical quantity (allowing them to modify individuals), but also degrees of different magnitude, modifying events and states, as well as properties associated with adjectives and adverbs. The dimension entailed by the modification is often determined contextually (Schwarzschild 2006).

Following Cresswell's (1976) analysis of gradable adjectives, when no overt comparative element like *more*, *less*, etc., is present, Rett assumes that the quantity word selects an external degree argument, namely a contextual standard of measurement, for instance of quantity, as in (8), taken from Rett (2018: 12).

- (8) *The guests are many.*
 $\exists d[\text{the-guests were } d\text{-many} \wedge d > s_{\text{many}}]$

The interpretation of (8) is that the degree of measurement – in this case, the cardinality – of the noun *guests* exceeds a contextually established standard of individual quantification.

In comparative constructions (i.e., in their differential use), *m*-words appear alongside an overt comparative marker and serve two functions: first, they measure a set of degrees, which they select as their argument; second, they compare this measured value to a contextually determined standard of interval (Rett 2008: 24). For instance, in a sentence like *John is much taller than Sue*, the interval consists of the degree represented by John's tallness and that of Sue's tallness, and the quantity word *much* modifies this interval with respect to the standard interval of tallness *s*, as illustrated in (9). In this case, the comparative marker is overtly realised by the morpheme *er* in *tall-er*.

- (9) *John is much taller than Sue*
 $\exists d'[\text{tall}(\text{John}, d) \wedge \neg \text{tall}(\text{Sue}, d) = d' \wedge d' > s]$

We argue that Rett's analysis of quantity words as degree modifiers can be applied to *tanto* and *molto* in Italian to account for their individual and non-individual use.

In a sentence like (1a), repeated in (10a) and that can be rendered in logical form as in (10b), the degree associated with *tanto* and *molto* is above the standard of quantity of apples, just like in (2a) it is above the standard of tiredness, and in (2b) it is above the standard of quickness.

- (10) a. Gianni mangerà tante/molte mele.
 b. $\exists d[\text{Gianni will eat } d\text{-apples} \wedge d > s_{\text{quantity}}]$

As previously mentioned, quantity words can also modify VPs, so that (3b), repeated in (11a), means that the degree that modifies the event of sleeping is above a certain standard of duration.

- (11) a. I bambini hanno dormito tanto/molto.
 b. $\exists d[\text{the-children have slept } d \wedge d > s_{\text{duration}}]$

According to Rett (2008, 2018), when *m*-words occur in comparative constructions, they measure the interval between two degrees and evaluate it with respect to a contextually established standard interval of the same degree. For instance, in (12a) the degree of Gianni's studying compared to the degree of Giulia's studying creates an interval and this interval is evaluated as exceeding the standard interval of degrees of studying.

- (12) a. Gianni studia tanto/molto più di Giulia.
 b. $\exists d[\text{studying}(\text{John}, d) \wedge \neg \text{studying}(\text{Sue}, d) = d' \wedge d' > s]$

The same relation of comparison can be found with a negative quantity word such as *meno* 'less', modulo a reverse scale ordering (Bartsch and Venneman 1972; Rett 2018): in (13a), for instance, the interval between the degree of Gianni's and Giulia's studying is valued as being below the standard interval of degrees of studying.

- (13) a. Gianni studia tanto/molto meno di Giulia.
 b. $\exists d[\text{studying}(\text{John}, d) \wedge \neg \text{studying}(\text{Sue}, d) = d' \wedge d' < s]$

Crucially, in neither (12a), or (13a) do *tanto* and *molto* entail that Gianni's or Giulia's studying is quantitatively high, or low, respectively, and in fact their degree of studying may fall below the contextual standard. What is relevant is the magnitude of the gap between the two degrees, which is then evaluated with respect to a comparable standard of gaps.

2.1 *Tanto* in equative constructions

While both *tanto* and *molto* can modify comparative constructions with *più* 'more' or *meno* 'less', only the former can be used in equative constructions. We suggest that this asymmetry stems from the fact that *tanto* exhibits more freedom in terms of argument selection than *molto*, being able to measure a given interval not only as exceeding or falling below, but also as equalling another interval.

- (14) a. Gianni studia tanto/*molto quanto Giulia.
 b. $\exists d[\text{John studies } d\text{'-tanto} \wedge \text{Giulia studies } d\text{'-tanto} \wedge d' = d']$

In (14a), the degree of Gianni's studying is compared to the degree of Giulia's studying, and the former is measured as equal to the latter, and the equative relation is explicitly marked by *quanto* 'how much; as much as'. As in (12a), here *tanto* does not imply that Gianni's studying is above a given standard of studying (and in fact it can be below it), but only that it equals Giulia's studying.

The same equative role is played by *tanto* when it modifies *così* 'so, this much'. In this case, *tanto* selects a certain degree of measurement and judges it as equal to the degree that is expressed by *così*. It is clear that the magnitude of the degree of *così* is established contextually, and what *tanto* does is simply evaluate its argument with respect to such degree. With this respect, it is worth noting that there is a tight semantic link between *tanto* and *così* which can

account for their compatibility: in fact, Italian *tanto* continues the Latin adjective *tantus*, *-a*, *-um* ‘of such size; so much, so great’, which implicitly involves a relation of equality, and, in turn, this adjective derives from the adverb *tam* ‘so, so much, to such a degree’.

Its semantics allow *tanto* to appear in equatives involving *da* ‘so as, to’, as in (15a): here the degree of Giulia’s studying is compared to the degree of Giulia’s going crazy and is judged as equal to it, so that the whole construction is interpreted with the degree of the finite clause coinciding with the degree that is required for the event described in the infinitival clause to occur.

- (15) a. Giulia studia tanto da impazzire.
 b. $\exists d'[\text{Giulia studies } d'\text{-tanto} \wedge \text{Giulia goes.crazy } d''\text{-tanto} \wedge d' = d'']$

We argue that an equative function is played by *tanto* in concessive clauses, too. As observed, a clause introduced by *tanto* conveys that the propositional content is judged as bound to take place. We suggest that this inevitability of the event arises from *tanto*’s ability to participate in equative constructions, and from the fact that *m*-words are underspecified for dimensions of measurement. In particular, *tanto* would measure the degree of probability of a given event with respect to a standard of probability ($s_{\text{probability}}$), judging it as equal to it.

- (16) a. Tanto Gianni mangerà le mele.
 Tanto Gianni eat-FUT-3SG the.F.PL apple-F.PL
 ‘Gianni will eat the apples anyway.’
 b. $\exists d'[\text{Gianni will eat the-apples } d'\text{-tanto} \wedge d' = s_{\text{probability}}]$

In a way similar to the examples in (14) and (15), the interpretation of a sentence like (16a) is that the probability that the event described will take place is equal to a contextually-valued degree of probability, so that the propositional content is very likely to occur.

- (17) a. Tanto Gianni mangerà tante/molte mele.
 Tanto Gianni eat-FUT-3SG many-F.PL apple-F.PL
 ‘Gianni will eat many/a lot of apples anyway.’
 b. $\exists d'[\text{Gianni will eat } d''\text{-apples } d'\text{-tanto} \wedge d' = s_{\text{probability}}]$
 c. $\exists d''[\text{Gianni will eat } d''\text{-apples } d'\text{-tanto} \wedge d'' > s_{\text{quantity}}]$

The two functions of *tanto* can be found in (17a). First, as shown in (17b), it plays an equative role, measuring the degree of probability of the event with respect to the standard of probability ($s_{\text{probability}}$), and evaluating as equal to it. Second, in (17c), *tanto* (or *molto*) appears in its differential use, modifying the degree of quantity of apples with respect to a contextually-valued standard of quantity (s_{quantity}). In other words, (17b) illustrates *tanto*’s function as a modifier of the likelihood of the event, whereas (17c) reflects *tanto*’s role as a modifier of an internal argument of the event itself.

After this examination of the semantic distinction between *tanto* and *molto*, in the next section we will analyse in more detail the syntactic properties of these two *m*-words.

3. The loci of *m*-words

In the previous section we saw that *tanto* and *molto* cannot always be used interchangeably and we have motivated based on the more restricted semantics of *molto*, which can only modify

degree arguments for measures that do not equal a standard. Let us now try to identify the positions that these two *m*-words can occupy in the clause.

On the basis of data from Bulgarian and on Kayne's (2005) theory of silent heads, Krapova and Cinque (2020) propose that in Italian there are two instances of *tanto*, one in a phrase called P, the other in a phrase called Q-word QP. The overt or silent status of these two *tanto*'s may vary (as shown in (18), taken from Krapova and Cinque (2020: 166)), so that *tanto* in Q-wordP (which corresponds to Bulgarian *mnogo*) is overtly realised only if preceded by *così* 'so' in Degree QP.

- (18) a. $\begin{bmatrix} \text{IntensifierP} \\ \text{Degree QP} \end{bmatrix} \text{ tanto } \begin{bmatrix} \text{Q-wordP} \\ \text{Q-wordP} \end{bmatrix} \text{ TANTO } \begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \\ \text{NP} \end{bmatrix}]]$
 b. $\begin{bmatrix} \text{IntensifierP} \\ \text{Degree QP} \end{bmatrix} \text{ molto } \begin{bmatrix} \text{Q-wordP} \\ \text{Q-wordP} \end{bmatrix} \text{ TANTO } \begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \\ \text{NP} \end{bmatrix}]]$
 c. $\begin{bmatrix} \text{IntensifierP} \\ \text{Degree QP} \end{bmatrix} \text{ così } \begin{bmatrix} \text{Q-wordP} \\ \text{Q-wordP} \end{bmatrix} \text{ tanto } \begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \\ \text{NP} \end{bmatrix}]]$

We suggest that the distribution of *tanto* and *molto* can be accounted for in a way that involves a lesser number of projections than proposed by Krapova and Cinque (2020). We argue that the two elements can be merged in two distinct positions which have scope over different constituents, and that there is only one instance of *tanto* in the lexicon, with no need for the postulation of a head that oscillates between an overt or covert status.

First, *tanto* and *molto* can be merged in the Spec of a Mod(ifier)P(hrase)², from where they can scope over a NP, as shown in (19a). The direct modification of the NP permits to establish a relation of strong Agreement, which holds even if an intervening DegP (whose head hosts elements like *più* 'more', or *meno* 'less'), or an AP, are present, v. (19a), and (19b), respectively. The external merge of *tanto/molto* in Spec,ModP involves the measurement of a degree with respect to a standard, as we discussed before.

- (19) a. $\begin{bmatrix} \text{ModP} \\ \text{ModP} \end{bmatrix} \text{ tante/molte } \begin{bmatrix} \text{ModP} \\ \text{ModP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{AP} \\ \text{DegP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{A}^\circ \\ \text{Deg}^\circ \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \\ \text{NP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{N}^\circ \\ \text{N}^\circ \end{bmatrix} \text{ (belle) } \begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \\ \text{NP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{N}^\circ \\ \text{N}^\circ \end{bmatrix} \text{ (mele)}]]$
 b. $\begin{bmatrix} \text{ModP} \\ \text{ModP} \end{bmatrix} \text{ tante/molte } \begin{bmatrix} \text{ModP} \\ \text{ModP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{AP} \\ \text{DegP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{A}^\circ \\ \text{Deg}^\circ \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \\ \text{NP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{N}^\circ \\ \text{N}^\circ \end{bmatrix} \text{ (più/meno) } \begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \\ \text{NP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{N}^\circ \\ \text{N}^\circ \end{bmatrix} \text{ (mele)}]]$

Second, *tanto* and *molto* can be merged directly in Spec,DegP, and in this case they modify only the element in Deg°, so that no strong Agreement is possible, for instance, with a following adjective that exhibits *phi*-features of gender and number (20a). This kind of modification involves adjectives, adverbs (20b), and, we suggest, also predicates (21), measuring the interval of two degrees with respect to a standard gap of intervals.

- (20) a. $\begin{bmatrix} \text{DegP} \\ \text{DegP} \end{bmatrix} \text{ tanto/molto } \begin{bmatrix} \text{DegP} \\ \text{DegP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{AP} \\ \text{AdvP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{A}^\circ \\ \text{Adv}^\circ \end{bmatrix} \text{ (più/meno) } \begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \\ \text{NP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{N}^\circ \\ \text{N}^\circ \end{bmatrix} \text{ (stanca)}]]$
 b. $\begin{bmatrix} \text{DegP} \\ \text{DegP} \end{bmatrix} \text{ tanto/molto } \begin{bmatrix} \text{DegP} \\ \text{DegP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{AP} \\ \text{AdvP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{A}^\circ \\ \text{Adv}^\circ \end{bmatrix} \text{ (più/meno) } \begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \\ \text{NP} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{N}^\circ \\ \text{N}^\circ \end{bmatrix} \text{ (velocemente)}]]$

When it comes to modifying a verb, we assume that the ModP hosting *tanto/molto* is located in a c-commanding position above VP, where the matrix verb is originally merged. If we interpret scope in terms of c-command (that is, structural precedence), the scope relation of the degree modifier over the verb holds even after the raising of the latter to a higher position in order to check aspectual features (v. (21a), cf. Belletti (1990) for the derivation of the Italian active past participle), as well as to check features of tense and person (21b), since the modifier still governs the trace left by the verb. The silent copies created by the movement of the verb from its original position are written between angled brackets.

² We follow Cinque (1999) in assuming that modifiers are generated in the Specifier position of dedicated projections, whose head is generally silent.

- (21) a. $[\text{AspP} [\text{Asp}^\circ \text{ mangia-to} [\text{ModP} \text{ tanto/molto} [\text{Mod}^\circ <\text{mangia}> [\text{VP} [\text{V}^\circ <\text{mangia}>]]]]]]]$
 b. $[\text{TP} [\text{T}^\circ \text{ mang(ia)-er-à} [\text{ModP} \text{ tanto/molto} [\text{Mod}^\circ <\text{mangia}> [\text{VP} [\text{V}^\circ <\text{mangia}>]]]]]]]$

We hypothesise that the position of the degree modifier is the same in both equative constructions and comparative constructions with *più* ‘more’, or *meno* ‘less’, i.e. Spec,DegP, since both are based on a relation of comparison (22). From the semantic restrictions of *molto* derives the fact that only *tanto* can appear in both.

- (22) a. $[\text{AspP} [\text{Asp}^\circ \text{ mangia-to} [\text{VP} [\text{V}^\circ <\text{mangia}> [\text{DegP} \text{ tanto} [\text{Deg}^\circ \text{ quanto} \dots]]]]]]]$
 b. $[\text{AspP} [\text{Asp}^\circ \text{ mangia-to} [\text{VP} [\text{V}^\circ <\text{mangia}> [\text{DegP} \text{ tanto} [\text{Deg}^\circ [\text{CP} [\text{C}^\circ \text{ da} \dots]]]]]]]]]$
 c. $[\text{AspP} [\text{Asp}^\circ \text{ abbaia-to} [\text{VP} [\text{V}^\circ <\text{abbaia}> [\text{DegP} \text{ tanto} [\text{Deg}^\circ [\text{CP} [\text{C}^\circ \text{ che} \dots]]]]]]]]]$

Finally, the position and the function of concessive *tanto* ‘any way, in any case’, which appears very high in the structure of the clause and serves to convey the speaker’s judgement regarding the (lower) propositional content, strongly resemble the position and function of high adverbs (Cinque 1999), like *probabilmente* ‘probably’, etc. However, if co-occurring in the same clause, *tanto* precedes high adverbs (23a), and follows the complementiser *che*, as in (23b).

- (23) a. Tanto probabilmente non pioverà.
 Tanto probably NEG rain-FUT-3SG
 ‘Probably it will not rain anyway.’
 b. Ho sentito che tanto domani non pioverà.
 Have.PRS.1SG hear-PST.PTCP that tanto tomorrow NEG rain-FUT3SG
 ‘I heard that tomorrow it will not rain in any case.’

We suggest that concessive *tanto* is merged in the Spec of a ModP that follows the CP expressing *che*, before high adverbs (24), and that this is so because *tanto* needs to have scope over the entire clause, in order to measure its degree of probability.

- (24) $[\text{CP} [\text{C}^\circ \text{ che} [\text{ModP} \text{ tanto} [\text{Mod}^\circ \dots [\text{AdvP} \text{ probabilmente} [\text{Adv}^\circ \dots]]]]]]]$

We thus propose that the degree modifiers *tanto* and *molto* are merged in different positions according to their scope functions and to their semantics, with the former being able to participate in a wider range of constructions, even in the modification of a whole clause. Therefore, it is not necessary to posit two distinct instances of *tanto* in the lexicon (corresponding to its differential and concessive use), but only one, which, depending on its merge position, is associated with distinct functions. In the next section we will discuss in details how Phase Theory can explain why *tanto* can be selected twice in the same clause.

3.1 M-words in Phase Theory

Phase Theory, as formulated in Chomsky (2001) and, more recently, in Chomsky et al. (2019), and Chomsky (2021), can provide a framework to explain the differences between *tanto* and *molto* at the syntactic level. Under this approach, the syntactic derivation proceeds cyclically through phases, which are conceived as domains of locality that constrain the range of syntactic operations. The two primary phases are vP (the thematic domain) and CP (the propositional domain), reflecting a so-called duality of semantics between the former, which essentially expresses

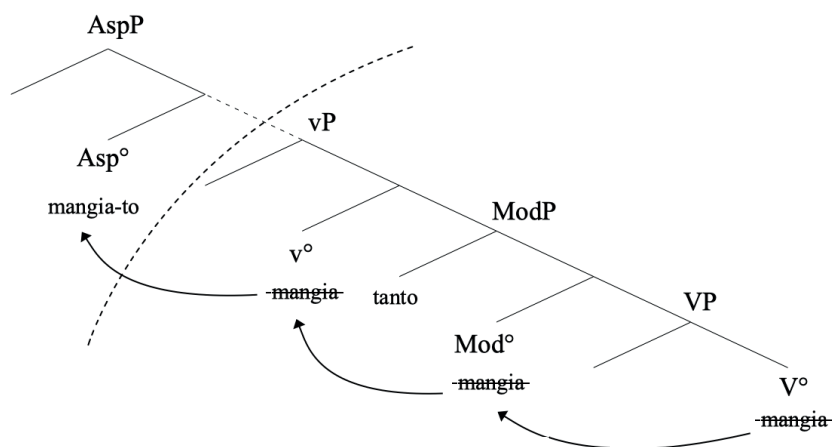
argument structure and is characterised by External Merge (EM, selecting items directly from the lexicon), and the latter, which involves scope and discourse properties and is characterised by Internal Merge (IM, targeting items that are already present in the derivation, v. Chomsky et al. (2019)).

Chomsky hypothesises that a fundamental operation Transfer sends syntactic objects to the Conceptual-Intentional interface (SEM), and to the Sensori-Motor interface (PHON), to receive meaning and phonetic form, respectively. Transfer is assumed to be cyclic, limiting memory to the current domain and preventing unbounded search (Chomsky et al. 2019), so that a given syntactic object already sent to the interfaces cannot be further modified, by a principle referred to as the Phase Impenetrability Condition (or PIC, Chomsky 2001).

Therefore, once a phase is completed, its content is sent to the interfaces and becomes inaccessible for further operations, and the selection of items from the lexicon takes place only once via EM. Chomsky (2021) notes that the most economical operation is IM, since it can only target the restricted set of elements that are already present in the derivation and that are accessible in the current phase, but he also suggests that if the target element is not already present in the derivation, the computation has to resort to the more costly operation EM³.

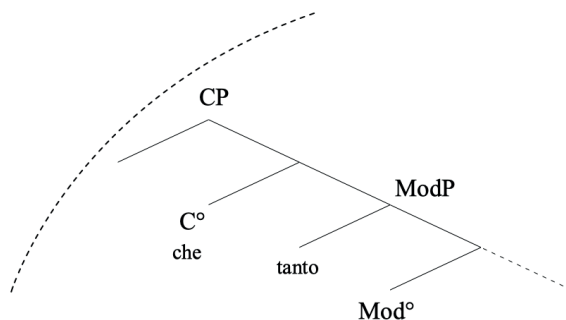
Let us assume that either *tanto* or *molto* (for the time being leaving aside the possible more subtle differences between them) can be selected within vP via EM to modify individuals, adjectives, adverbs, as well as predicates (25), as shown in Figure 1, while *tanto* in its concessive meaning can be selected in CP via EM to modify the propositional content (26), v. Figure 2. In both figures, the boundary of a phase is marked by a dashed line.

- (25) Gianni ha mangiato tanto(/molto).
 Gianni have.PRS.3SG eat-PST.PTCP tanto(/molto).
 ‘Gianni has eaten a lot.’



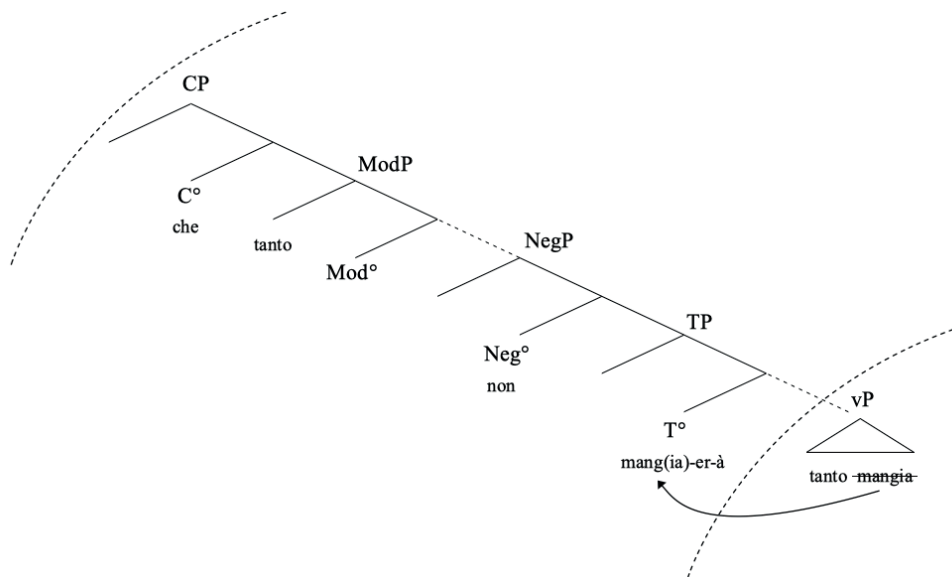
- (26) Gianni ha detto che tanto Giulia non verrà.
 Gianni have.PRS.3SG say-PST.PTCP that tanto Giulia NEG come.FUT.3SG
 ‘Gianni has said that Giulia will not come anyway.’

³ While phases indeed divide derivations into domains, we are aware that the assumption by which CP can only resort to Internal Merge for existing material and must otherwise externally-merge a new copy is not universally endorsed, see among others Uriagereka (1999), and Abels (2012).

Figure 2. The position of *tanto* in CP

In our analysis, one copy of *tanto* merges in vP and another in CP, but Minimalist theory generally treats each lexical item as having a single insertion (one token) per derivation (cf. Chomsky's (2001) Lexical Array). Thus, allowing the same item to be drawn twice can appear unusual. In fact, we assume that the PIC (or simply Transfer, cf. Chomsky et al. (2019: 241)) forces an additional External Merge of *tanto* at CP because the vP-instance is inaccessible. If an instance of *tanto* already appears in vP and a concessive interpretation of the whole proposition is required by the pragmatic environment, the CP necessarily has to select another instance of *tanto* from the lexicon, through EM. The instance of *tanto* already present in vP cannot be used, first, because this element cannot take as an argument a constituent that contains an element that is already its argument (for instance, a clause containing a verb modified by *tanto*, v. (27)), and, second, because Transfer limits CP's search domain to the sole phase CP. In this respect, EM is the sole alternative, however costly it may be, v. Figure 3.

- (27) Gianni ha detto che tanto Giulia non mangerà tanto
 Gianni have.PRS.3G say.PST.PTCP that tanto Giulia NEG eat-FUT-3SG tanto
 'Gianni has said that Giulia will not eat much anyway.'

Figure 3. The positions of *tanto* in vP and CP

We thus see that if, on one hand, the possibility for *tanto* and *molto* to appear in the phase vP reflects the possibility shared by both to modify individuals (NPs), properties (AP, AdvPs) and events (VPs), on the other, the use of *tanto* to introduce concessive clauses can be accounted for both by its semantics, which allows it to modify a degree of probability, and by the division of the sentence in distinct phases, the lower not communicating with the higher, and thus forcing the EM of *tanto* in the Spec of a higher ModP. Theoretically, a selection of *molto* in Spec,ModP by CP would be equally possible from the syntactic point of view, but this option is ruled out by its semantics, which do not permit the modification of a degree of probability.

4. Conclusions

In this squib, we have argued that the Italian *m*-words *tanto* and *molto* can be analysed as degree modifiers, ranging over degrees of various dimensions of measurement as proposed by Rett (2008, 2018) for their English counterparts *many*, *much*, etc. We showed that both elements can modify individuals, properties and events, but that only *tanto* can take scope over a whole proposition, in order to judge its degree of probability. In this case, it must be merged very high in the structure, right below the complementiser. This broader distribution is due to *tanto*'s freedom of argument selection, in particular, to its ability to establish equative relations between degrees, something which *molto* lacks.

We also proposed that the distribution of these *m*-words in the clause can be accounted for within the framework of Phase Theory (Chomsky 2001, 2021), especially by the PIC, which may force a second EM of *tanto* in CP to modify a degree of likelihood, if another instance of the same element has already been selected in vP for the modification of an entity, property, or event. This double EM could theoretically apply to *molto* as well, but its semantics do not permit to modify a degree of probability.

Further research is still needed to determine whether the apparent cases of interchangeability of *tanto* and *molto* reflect subtle differences in degree evaluation, scalar implicatures, or sociolinguistic factors, such as register or speaker preference.

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