



# Towards a typology of focus: Subject position and microvariation at the discourse–syntax interface



Ángel L. Jiménez-Fernández\*

University of Seville, Departamento de Lengua Inglesa, C/ Palos de la Frontera s/n, 41004 Sevilla, Spain

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Preverbal subjects in constructions involving focus fronting are possible in some varieties of Spanish.
- These preverbal subjects are interpreted as Given Topics, which move to Spec-TP.
- Fronting operations connected with focus include Contrastive Focus and Mirative Focus, and Quantifier Fronting.
- Resumptive Preposing is an instance of Aboutness-Shift Topic.

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 29 November 2014

Received in revised form

15 February 2015

Accepted 5 March 2015

Available online 16 April 2015

### Keywords:

Contrastive focus

Mirative focus

Resumptive preposing

Quantifier fronting

Preverbal subjects

Topics

## ABSTRACT

In this work I explore the different discourse–syntax interface properties of focus fronting in Standard Spanish (SS) and Southern Peninsular Spanish (SPS) including Andalusian and Extremaduran varieties. In SS it is taken for granted that in focus fronting the verb is obligatorily adjacent to the preposed constituent. I show that this is not the case in SPS, where this condition is optional. I carry out an analysis of three types of foci which involve movement to the left periphery (contrastive focus, mirative focus and quantifier fronting) and one type of topic (resumptive preposing). Discourse, syntactic, and semantic properties are taken into account to illustrate this typology. Crucially, only contrastive and mirative focus contexts allow for preverbal subjects in SPS, which are proposed to be Given Topics in this variety. On the other hand, resumptive preposing is shown to entail a case of topic fronting. I use different experiments with empirical data and judgements by native speakers to test my proposal that focus-verb (or topic-verb) adjacency is subject to microparametric variation in Spanish.

© 2015 The Author. Published by Elsevier Ltd.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This paper explores the discourse–syntax interface properties of the different constituents involved in focus fronting constructions in Spanish. As is well known, one of the main traits of focus fronting is that the V(erb) must be adjacent to the focused constituent in this type of language. Building on Roberts (2012) and Biberauer et al. (2010), I argue that this condition is subject

to microparametric variation as some varieties of Spanish (Southern Peninsular Spanish, SPS), especially the Andalusian and Extremaduran varieties, seem to obviate the adjacency condition. I discuss the syntax of different types of focus (Contrastive and Mirative foci) alongside Quantifier Fronting and Resumptive Preposing, all of which crucially hinge on the discourse interpretation of pre- or post-verbal subjects.

It is widely accepted that languages such as Spanish (as opposed to English, but along with Catalan and Romanian) instantiate an adjacency condition in focus fronting constructions (Rizzi, 1997; Uribe-Etxebarria, 1991; Uriagereka, 1995; among others) as the contrast in (1–2) illustrates:

- (1) a. *THIS BOOK I don't need (but that one I do).* (Haegeman, 2012: 8, her (4c))  
b. *\*THIS BOOK don't I need (but that one I do).*
- (2) a. *\*EL DIARIO Pedro compró.* (Zubizarreta, 1999: 4241, her 137)  
the newspaper Pedro buy-past.3sg  
b. *EL DIARIO compró Pedro.* (Zubizarreta, 1999: 4240, her 135)  
'Pedro bought the newspaper'.

Standardly, it is assumed that V must be adjacent to the focused constituent (Zubizarreta, 1999: 4241; RAE-ASALE, 2009/2011),

\* Tel.: +34 954551546; fax: +34 954551516.

E-mail address: [ajimfer@us.es](mailto:ajimfer@us.es).

<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper have been presented at the Workshop on Syntactic Variation at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and at the LAGB meeting at SOAS (London). I wish to thank the audience there for comments and feedback. In particular, I would like to thank Mara Frascarelli, M<sup>a</sup> Lluïsa Hernanz, Ana Ojea, Mercedes Tubino, Aritz Irurtzun, Antonio Fábregas and Silvio Cruschina for fruitful and insightful discussion. The research carried out in this work has been partially supported by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (FFI2013-41509-P).

which describes the unacceptability of (2a). In more theoretical terms, this adjacency condition has been explained by proposing movement of Tense to Complementiser (hereafter, T and C respectively) – or T to the designated category Focus in cartographic analyses –, after V's movement to T (Rizzi, 1997; Barbosa, 2001).

Descriptive surveys such as the one carried out by RAE-ASALE do not take into account different types of focus and include all kinds of fronting within a single group regardless of the distinct salient properties at the levels of interpretation and intonation. In this group phenomena such as the following are conflated: Contrastive Focus (as in (2a)), Mirative Focus (cf. Cruschina, 2012, inspired by the use of the notion of mirativity by DeLancey (1997, 2001)), Resumptive Preposing (cf. Cinque, 1990; Cardinaletti, 2004; Leonetti and Escandell, 2009), and Quantifier fronting/Negative Preposing (cf. Âmbar, 1999, 2003; Barbosa, 2001; Bosque, 1980; Quer, 2002). Researchers have agreed, though, that in all these cases the adjacency condition applies obligatorily. Example (3a) illustrates Contrastive Focus, (3b) exemplifies Mirative Focus, (3c) instantiates Resumptive Preposing and (3d) is a case of Quantifier Fronting<sup>2</sup>:

- (3) a. *LAS ACELGAS detestan los niños (y no la pasta).*  
 the chards detest-pres.3sg the children (and not the pasta)  
 'Children detest chard, not pasta'  
 (Hernanz, 2011: 251, her (3a))
- b. *¡Por Dios, dos botellas se han bebido!*  
 by god, two bottles CL have-pres.3pl drunk  
 'My God! They have drunk up two bottles!'  
 (adapted from Cruschina, 2012)
- c. *¿Dónde está Nin? Eso mismo preguntaba el folleto.*  
 where be-pres.3sg Nin? This same ask-pres.3sg the leaflet  
 'Where is Nin? The leaflet was asking the same question'.  
 (RAE-ASALE, 2009: 2988)
- d. *Algo tendrán que hacer ustedes.*  
 something have-fut.3pl that to.do you-pol.pl  
 'You will have to do something about it'.  
 (RAE-ASALE 2009: 2988)

Studies in generative grammar have emerged that distinguish some of these information-structure phenomena (Bianchi, 2012; Cruschina, 2012; Haegeman, 2012). In Spanish, some works have identified types of focus other than contrastive focus (Torrego, 1980; Uriagereka, 1988; Quer, 2002; Gallego, 2007; Leonetti and Escandell, 2009), yet all these analyses agree that T-to-C is compulsory in Spanish focus fronting.

In this work, I first show that interpretive and syntactic properties can be used to establish a more accurate typology of focus. Based on data from Spanish and especially its Southern variety, I propose that the adjacency condition is subject to microparametric variation in that, depending on the type of focus, preverbal subjects are readily found in some varieties of Spanish (Andalusian, Extremaduran). My proposal is crucially grounded in an experiment carried out with native speakers in which they had to judge the grammaticality of fronted focus constructions. In this experiment, speakers were presented with data in a randomised order, and they were given the context in which they had to correctly place the sentences that follow (a full description of the experiment is provided in Section 3). The informants were divided into two different groups. The first group includes areas from northern Spain and Madrid, whereas the second group comprises the south.<sup>3</sup>

The word order variation detected in the different discourse-related phenomena is accounted for in my analysis by proposing criterial features in dedicated categories which trigger

movement of a given constituent to a specific syntactic (but discourse-linked) position in the left periphery. I assume a split Complementiser Phrase system where specific designated categories like Force, Topic and Focus project (Rizzi, 1997, et subseq.). I hold that in the type of focused constructions studied here subjects may be topics, specifically Given Topics – also called Familiar Topics – (in the sense of Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl, 2007; Bianchi and Frascarelli, 2010; Frascarelli and Jiménez-Fernández, 2013). A Given Topic entails shared information which is familiar to everybody in a relevant context, as illustrated in (4), a dialogue between two friends (A and B) in a restaurant:

- (4) A: *¿Pedimos la cuenta ya?*  
 order-pres.1pl the bill already  
 'Shall we order the bill?'
- B: *Sí, pero la cuenta se paga al final*  
 yes but the bill CL pay-pres.3sg to.the end  
 'Yes, but the bill is paid at the end.'

I assume, with Jiménez-Fernández (2011), Frascarelli and Jiménez-Fernández (2012), Jiménez-Fernández and İşsever (2012) and Jiménez-Fernández and Miyagawa (2014), that subjects which function as Given Topics in discourse may move to a Tense Phrase (TP) internal position in Spanish, thereby justifying the pattern Focus+Subject+Verb Phrase. Moreover, in this type of focused construction the head Focus may not trigger movement of V in SPS, contrary to SS. As will become clear below, this happens with Contrastive Focus, Mirative Focus and Quantifier Fronting. On the other hand, as in Italian (Cardinaletti, 2004, 2010; Benincà and Poletto, 2004), in Resumptive Preposing (which is identified as a subtype of topic fronting) V must obligatorily move to the dedicated head Topic in the CP area in all varieties of Spanish, hence there is no slot for subjects in between the moved constituent and V.

I start off with two working hypotheses: (1) The different types of focus are encoded in the lexicon as syntactic features, which will reveal that CF, MF and QF are instances of focus whereas RP is shown to be a type of topic. (2) Different types of focus (and topic) fronting may display different behaviour with respect to the relative position of subject and verb both across languages and within a single language. Within Spanish, a crucial difference as regards Verb-to-Focus is detected between SPS speakers and speakers of other varieties of Spanish, thus pointing to a microparametric distinction.

The paper is organised as follows. In Section 2 I discuss the nature of the fronted focus constituent. I show its interpretive and grammatical properties which I argue demonstrate that CF, MF and QF are foci but RP is an Aboutness-Shift Topic (AS-Top), thereby validating my hypothesis 1. In Section 3 the methodology used in my empirical approach to the typology of focus is presented alongside sample examples of data that the informants had to judge. Section 4 discusses the distribution of foci in SPS and SS with special reference to the pre- or post-verbal position of subjects, confirming the microparametric variation suggested by hypothesis 2. Section 5 comprises empirical evidence in favour of analysing pre-verbal subjects as Given Topics (G-Tops) in SPS. I show that pre-verbal subjects are G-Tops moving to Spec-TP in SPS. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper and offers some further issues concerning types of focus which I will tackle in my future research.

## 2. The focused constituent: a multifactorial approach to different types of Focus

The term *Focus* is often used to refer to phrases serving two discourse functions, namely (a) to introduce new information, which is known as Information Focus (IF), and (b) to introduce a contrast with respect to a previous assertion by denying one part and proposing another part. The latter is what is typically referred

<sup>2</sup> The examples in (3) are just used for presentational purposes to show a sample of the type of data I discuss in this work. A fully detailed description of each type of fronting is given in Section 2.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding V-adjacency in Catalan, Quer (2002, 254–255, fn.3) suggests that there may be dialectal variation since for some speakers this condition can be dispensed with (see also Vallduví, 1993).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1100479>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1100479>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)