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The Interaction of Focus, Givenness, and Prosody

A Study of Italian Clause Structure

VIERI SAMEK-LODOVICI

OXFORD STUDIES IN THEORETICAL LINGUISTICS

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*To Raphael and Charlotte,
A Pinuccia ed Emilio*

General preface

The theoretical focus of this series is on the interfaces between subcomponents of the human grammatical system and the closely related area of the interfaces between the different subdisciplines of linguistics. The notion of 'interface' has become central in grammatical theory (for instance, in Chomsky's Minimalist Program) and in linguistic practice: work on the interfaces between syntax and semantics, syntax and morphology, phonology and phonetics, etc. has led to a deeper understanding of particular linguistic phenomena and of the architecture of the linguistic component of the mind/brain.

The series covers interfaces between core components of grammar, including syntax/morphology, syntax/semantics, syntax/phonology, syntax/pragmatics, morphology/phonology, phonology/phonetics, phonetics/speech processing, semantics/pragmatics, and intonation/discourse structure, as well as issues in the way that the systems of grammar involving these interface areas are acquired and deployed in use (including language acquisition, language dysfunction, and language processing). It demonstrates, we hope, that proper understandings of particular linguistic phenomena, languages, language groups, or inter-language variations all require reference to interfaces.

The series is open to work by linguists of all theoretical persuasions and schools of thought. A main requirement is that authors should write so as to be understood by colleagues in related subfields of linguistics and by scholars in cognate disciplines.

In this new monograph, Vieri Samek-Lodovici challenges the standard cartographic approach to the relationship between syntax and information structure, using the very domain (Italian topic and focus constructions) from which many of the original insights were derived. He argues that contrastive focus in Italian is always in situ, but that an independent process fronts focused elements when right-dislocation applies. At a theoretical level, this entails that there is no unique Focus Phrase projection in Italian, and opens up the question of the positions of other informationally marked elements in clausal structure. Samek-Lodovici argues that movement operations cannot always be motivated by feature-checking and he proposes, instead, a constraint-evaluation approach within Optimality Theory. The book weaves together syntactic, semantic, and prosodic arguments for an alternative approach to what has been thought, up to now, to be a well understood set of phenomena at the syntax-information structure interface.

David Adger
Hagit Borer

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List of abbreviations

\emptyset_F	Head of Focus projection
\emptyset_R	Head of Right dislocation projection
\emptyset_{Topic}	Head of Topic projection
\emptyset_X	Head of a generic XP projection
AP	Adjective phrase
AspV	Aspect phrase
CLLD	Clitic left dislocation
CP	Complementizer phrase
D	Determiner
DP	Determiner phrase
Dstr-RD	Destress-RD constraint
EPP	Extended Projection Principle constraint
F	Focus
Hd-ip	Head-of-intonational-phrase constraint
Hd-pp	Head-of-phonological-phrase constraint
Hd-up	Head-of-utterance-phrase-constraint
HT	Hanging Topic
<i>ip</i>	Intonational phrase
LD	Left dislocation
M	Marginalized
Marg	Marginalization constraint
NewF	New-information/presentational focus
NPI	Negative polarity item
Ob-Hd	Obligatory Head constraint
PF-phrase	Post Focus phrase
PP	Prepositional phrase
prt	Particle
<i>pp</i>	Phonological phrase
Q	Quantifier
R	Right-dislocated
RD	Right dislocation

RD ⁺	Right dislocation with clitic doubling
RD ⁻	Right dislocation without clitic doubling
RDisl	Right Dislocation constraint
refl	Reflexive particle
Rem. mv.	Remnant movement
RP	Right dislocation phrase
SEC	Single Event Condition
SF	Stress-Focus constraint
T	Tense (head of TP)
Top	Topic
TP	Tense phrase
up	Utterance phrase
V _{-Fin}	Non-finite verb
VP	Verb phrase
vP	The phrase projected by little <i>v</i> above VP
wh	Wh-phrase, interrogative phrase
XP	This term is used to indicate a generic projection, but also the projection immediately above RP in right dislocation structures
Y/N op	Yes/No operator
☞	Optimal structure/winning structure
☒	Harmonically bounded structure, losing across all rankings
	This symbol closes any preceding square brackets that are still open

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Introduction

This book challenges the current consensus on the analysis of Italian contrastive focalization. The most significant insights from a theoretical point of view are listed below. A detailed introduction to the analysis proper follows immediately after.

Clause structure—Italian contrastive focus will be shown to occur in situ. Deviations from this position will be shown to be systematic and always caused by the independently attested and highly productive process of right dislocation, which will be examined at length in its own right. As explained later in this introduction, when right dislocation applies to a constituent containing a focus, the focus is extracted from the right-dislocating phrase and eventually occurs at its left. As a result, a focus may occur in several distinct positions depending on what constituent is targeted by right dislocation.

If this analysis is correct, as this study of contrastive foci across several constructions would suggest, the commonly assumed view of Italian split CPs since Rizzi (1997) needs to be revised because, as will be amply demonstrated starting in this introduction, a unique fixed projection dedicated to contrastive focus cannot be posited. The consequences are substantial: if a focus projection is absent, then the analyses where it is used as a sign post for determining the position of other left-peripheral constituents and projections need to be reconsidered. This book starts addressing this issue by examining the syntactic status of the constituents immediately following left-peripheral foci. But more needs to be done and I hope the arguments presented here will prove both the necessity for such a re-analysis and its potential for further insights.

Empirical coverage—The analysis proposed in this book provides a unified and coherent account of the entire distribution of Italian contrastive focalization. It applies to clause-initial, clause-medial, and clause-final foci. It applies to moved and unmoved foci; to focused phrases but also focused heads, such as focused verbs; to familiar left-peripheral foci, but also to as yet unstudied TP-internal foci acting as left-peripheral foci relative to TP-internal constituents such as VPs and PPs. The same analysis also accounts for the discourse status and syntax of unfocused constituents following focus in each of the above cases.

This extensive and comprehensive empirical coverage is an important property of the analysis proposed here. Analyses that work well on a large but structurally homogeneous set of cases may turn out to be untenable when the empirical coverage is further enlarged. As I will show, partly already in this introduction, there are strong reasons to believe that this is the case with focalization analyses positing a unique fixed focus projection. They successfully account for a large set of cases, but they will be proved unable to address in a unified and convincing way the larger distribution of focalization examined in this book.

Cartographic hypothesis—The evidence examined here excludes contrastive focus from the scope of the cartographic hypothesis. The multiple positions available to contrastive foci could be accounted for through multiple focus projections, but this would leave the original hypothesis with little explanatory and predictive power. We may wonder, however, whether the hypothesis still holds for other discourse-related projections. In this respect, the investigation of right dislocation is particularly interesting. The analysis proposed here will assume a dedicated projection above TP and could therefore be described as cartographic in spirit (Neeleman p.c.). Yet, on closer inspection right dislocation will turn out to be more dynamic than assumed and require a higher position with specific dislocated phrases. These cases are briefly discussed in Sections 4.4.4 and 5.4.5. They suggest that even apparently fixed discourse-related non-focal projections require more structural mobility than expected under a cartographic approach.

Movement as feature checking—Two important movement operations in this study appear to defy an analysis in terms of feature checking. The first, called ‘focus evacuation’ and discussed in Chapter 5, concerns the extraction of focus from constituents targeted by right dislocation. This movement is triggered by right dislocation and absent otherwise. Its ultimate cause can be debated (I will attribute it to the impossibility of leaving a stressed focus within a right-dislocated phrase, since right dislocation disallows for stress). But its dependency on right dislocation defies modelling in terms of feature checking because the same features forcing movement of the focused constituent when right dislocation is present would remain available and incorrectly trigger movement even when right dislocation is absent. The same issue emerges with a second phenomenon, called ‘left-shift’ and discussed in Chapter 6, where lower unfocused constituents move above a higher stressed focus, arguably to ensure a better alignment of stress with the right edge of the clause. When the higher constituent is not focused, and hence not stressed, the same movement is ungrammatical, arguably because it no longer serves any purpose. As before, feature checking appears unable to account for the fact that movement of one constituent here depends on the discourse-status of another. Here, I do not debate this issue further, since it would require a book of its own. But I consider it to be important that we note the existence of productive movement operations that appear to challenge a model of movement based on feature checking.