

Remarks on Focus Structure and Non-Specificity

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‘¿Por qué te fuiste, mamá? Poca ropa me lavabas.
¿Por qué te fuiste, mamita? Raras veces te pegaba.’

Les Luthiers, *Pieza en forma de tango*

1. Verum Focus Fronting*

It is usually assumed, at least for most European languages, that two different fronting constructions should be distinguished, besides *wh*- constructions: (Clitic) Left Dislocation and Contrastive Focalisation (Focus Movement), as in the examples in (1) and (2):

- (1) *El libro, ya lo he terminado.*
The book, already CL have.PRS.1SG finished
‘The book, I have already finished (it).’
- (2) *EL LIBRO he terminado (no el artículo).*
The book have.PRS.1SG finished not the paper
‘It is the book that I have finished, not the paper.’

Some authors have pointed out that a third kind of fronting operation is available under certain conditions in Romance languages (see Cinque 1986, 1990:74-76, Vallduví 1993, Zubizarreta 1998:102-103, Ambar 1999, Barbosa 2001, 2009 for the basic data). The properties of such a construction have not received much attention, except in Quer (2002) and, under the label of *mild focalization*, in Gallego (2007), although it provides us a valuable testing ground for the study of definiteness / specificity constraints. More recently, an account of this construction in terms of information structure has been

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proposed in Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal (2008, 2009), with Quer (2002) as the main source of inspiration. The list of examples gathered in (3) represents the prototypical instances of this construction in Spanish:

- (3) (a) *Nada tengo que añadir.*
Nothing have.PRS.1SG to add
'I have nothing to add.'
- (b) *Algo debe saber.*
Something must.PRS.3SG know
'(S)he must know something.'
- (c) *Poco más te puedo decir.*
Little more you.OBL can.PRS.1SG say
'Little more can I say to you.'
- (d) *Bastante trabajo tengo ya.*
Enough work have.prs.1.sg already
'Enough work I have already.'
- (e) *A alguien encontrarás que te pueda ayudar.*
To someone find.FUT.2.SG that you.OBL can.PRS.3.SG help
'You'll find someone that can help you.'
- (f) *Mucho dinero debe tener.*
Much money must.PRS.3SG own
'(S)he must have a lot of money.'
- (g) *Demasiada concesiones hemos hecho ya.*
Too many concessions have.PRS.1.PL done already
'We have already made too many concessions.'
- (h) *Menos estudiantes teníamos el año pasado.*
Fewer students have.PST.1.PL the year past
'We had fewer students last year.'
- (i) *Tantas quejas hubo que tuvieron que suspenderlo.*
So many complaints there-be.PST.3.SG that have.PST.3.PL to suspend-it
'There were so many complaints that they had to suspend it.'

The construction, called *Quantificational QP-Fronting* in Quer (2002), shows the following cluster of grammatical properties:

- there is no emphatic stress on the fronted constituent, which can neither be interpreted as a contrastive focus nor as a narrow informative focus;
- there is no resumptive clitic, except in cases where it is independently licensed (this is the most salient difference with respect to Clitic Left Dislocation);
- the subject is postverbal, by virtue of an adjacency requirement between the finite verb and the fronted constituent, as in Spanish *wh*-interrogatives and contrastive focalization;
- the fronted constituent has been extracted from the clause and moved to some position in the left periphery:¹ thus, the construction displays the typical behaviour of operator-variable structures (sensitivity to island constraints, weak cross-over effects);

¹ I do not intend to discuss the nature of the position hosting the fronted constituent. I have a preference for taking it as an unspecified / all-purpose position, basically the same one where interrogatives and contrastive foci move, instead of a specific designated position in an articulated functional structure. See Barbosa (2009) for a recent proposal along these lines.

- almost any category can be fronted² (cf. Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal 2009);
- fronting does not affect truth conditions, but has some notable effects: the resulting interpretation is usually emphatic, affective, argumentatively oriented, i.e., in some sense marked with respect to the alternative version with canonical order.

Given this set of properties, the main question raised by the analysis of this kind of QP Fronting or *fronting without resumption* is this: what is the crucial distinctive factor that defines it among the remaining types of fronting? The answer presented in Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal (2009) is based on information structure, and goes along the following lines. Since the fronted constituent cannot be interpreted as a topic (see §2.1), nor as a contrastive focus, fronting forces an interpretation of the sentence with no informational partition, and focus is thus limited to sentence polarity, i.e. what is usually known as *Verum Focus*. The construction can thus be named *Verum Focus Fronting* (from now on VFF). It represents an instance of ‘altruistic movement’, in Erteschik-Shir’s (2007) terms, given that in this case syntactic movement does not obey any feature matching requirements between heads and phrases, but simply blocks the possibility of getting a Topic / Comment split, or a Focus / Background split, and thus induces a Verum Focus reading as a last resort interpretive mechanism—the only way to assign any information structure to the sentence.³ Fronting acts as the syntactic trigger for the Verum Focus reading. Focus falls on sentence polarity only and the rest of the explicit constituents form the background. The emphatic value, the explicit indication that the content is true, and the argumentative orientation that characterize VFF constructions should all be treated as effects of Verum Focus: focus overtly marks the assertion of the propositional content while rejecting any other alternative proposition.

In what follows I will assume this approach to the syntax and semantics of the constructions in (3) in order to concentrate on one particular aspect of their grammar, namely the constraints they impose on definiteness and specificity in the fronted DPs/NPs. Notice that the fronted DPs in (3) are all indefinite. VFF with definite DPs and strong quantifiers gives anomalous results, as shown in (4), unless used under very specific contextual conditions (see §3.1).⁴

² In spite of this, I will concentrate on fronted DPs, in particular direct objects.

³ I believe there are interesting similarities between our proposal and the way Culicover and Winkler (2008) deal with English Focus Inversion constructions. In their analysis of so-called Stylistic Inversion the requirement that the subject be in focus triggers a suspension of EPP and forces the post-verbal position of the subject. What the two analyses share is the role of Focus structure as a factor that determines the shape of grammatical constructions, and the idea that the interpretive properties of the constructions under analysis do not follow in any obvious sense from general grammatical principles and could hardly be captured in a derivational approach, by encoding of idiosyncratic features in functional heads.

⁴ I will not discuss the interesting problem raised by constructions such as (i) and (ii), treated as cases of Resumptive Preposing in Cinque (1990) and Cardinaletti (in press), for Italian, and as a particular instance of VFF in Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal (2009):

- (i) *Lo mismo digo* (yo).
The same say.PRS.1SG (I)
‘I say the same.’
- (ii) *Eso creía* ella.
This believe.PST.3SG she
‘That’s what she thought.’

The issue raised by such constructions is whether they correspond to the same pattern in (3) or not.

- (4) (a) ??*El libro he terminado.*
 The book have.PRS.1.SG finished
 ‘I have finished the book.’
- (b) ??*Todos los detalles te voy a contar.*
 All the details you.OBL go.PRS.1.SG to tell
 ‘I am going to tell you all the details.’

There are two main reasons for paying attention to this aspect of VFF: one is purely descriptive and simply boils down to the need to obtain an adequate picture of the kinds of nominal expressions that are compatible with VFF, at least in Spanish; the other one is theoretical, and has to do with the possibility of explaining the constraints by resorting to general and well established principles governing DP interpretation, especially the distribution of specific and non-specific readings. As the approach to VFF I just sketched is built on basic notions of information structure and is not tied to any particular hypothesis about the syntax of the left periphery, my main interest will be in the connection between definiteness / specificity and information structure, which I rely on as one of the fundamental notions for understanding the interpretation of DPs in a grammatical context.⁵

The present paper has three main sections. Section 2 presents and discusses two previous views of specificity / definiteness constraints in fronting constructions: the first one is Cinque’s (1986, 1990), based on Italian data quite similar to the Spanish examples in (3), and the second one is Quer’s (2002), based on data from different Romance languages, where the main issues related to definiteness / specificity constraints were addressed for the first time. Section 3 is devoted to the nature of such constraints and includes a discussion of different facts in Spanish. Finally, section 4 aims at formulating a reasonable explanation for such facts that situates them in the context of the interactions between definiteness / specificity and information structure. I hope to provide a suitable basis for integrating Spanish VFF facts into a more general view of such interactions. The discussion will be predominantly data-oriented. A number of interesting issues will inevitably be left for future research: among them, the place of VFF within a general picture of crosslinguistic variation in information structure, the ways in which the constraints on VFF can be treated in a formal model, and the reason why restrictions on definiteness / specificity disappear when PPs or adjuncts are fronted.

2. Two views of the restrictions

2.1. Cinque (1990): Bare quantifiers as operators

Cinque (1990: 74) states that Italian bare quantifiers like *qualcosa* (‘something’) and *qualcuno* (‘someone’) in left-dislocated positions qualify as proper operators that are able to bind an empty category as a variable in argument position (the object position in most of the examples I will mention). As a consequence, bare quantifiers do not require that a clitic be inserted to identify the empty category (recall that the absence of a resumptive clitic is one of the salient properties of the constructions in (3)). In contrast,

⁵ For a discussion of the link between definiteness / specificity and information structure, with special attention to the interpretive effects of topicality, see Reinhart (1982), Gundel (1988), Gundel and Fretheim (2004), Erteschik-Shir (1997), Lyons (1999), Meinunger (2000), Portner and Yabushita (2001), Cohen and Erteschik-Shir (2002), Ebert and Endriss (2004).

according to Cinque,⁶ quantified DPs fail to qualify as operators when they appear in left-dislocated positions, and thus require resumptive clitics, as shown in (5)-(6):

- (5) Italian (Cinque 1990)
- (a) *Qualcosa, di sicuro, (*lo) farò.*
 Something of sure it do.FUT.1.SG
 ‘Something I will do, for sure.’
- (b) *Tutto, non dovrà vender(*lo).*
 Everything not must.FUT.3.SG sell it
 ‘(S)he will not have to sell everything.’
- (c) *{Molto / Troppo / Poco}, non (*lo) ha fatto, per noi.*
 {Much / Too much / Little} not it have.PRS.3.SG done for us
 ‘(S)he has not done {much / too much / little} for us.’
- (6) (a) *Qualche sbaglio, ogni tanto, *(lo) fa anche Gianni.*
 Some mistake every such it make.PRS.3.SG also Gianni
 ‘A mistake now and then, even Gianni makes one.’
- (b) *Tutti i tuoi libri, prima o poi, dovrai venderli.*
 All the your books sooner or later must.FUT.2.SG sell-them
 ‘All your books, sooner or later, you will have to sell them.’
- (c) *Molte lettere, *(le) ho ricevute in ufficio.*
 Many letters them have.PRS.1.SG received in office
 ‘Many (of the) letters I have received in my office.’

Therefore, the distinction between bare quantifiers and quantified DPs correlates with the distinction between fronting without resumption and clitic dislocation: when the clitic is inserted, the fronted phrase is a topic, as usually assumed, but without it the information structure must be a different one, since the fronted phrase cannot be interpreted as a topic. Moreover, the fronted phrase has a non-specific interpretation in (5). I assume that, when there is no resumption, Cinque’s examples correspond essentially to what I have called *Verum Focus Fronting*. VFF seems thus to be allowed with bare quantifiers only. Now the question is why VFF should be limited to bare quantifiers, if indeed the Italian examples require exactly the same analysis as the Spanish ones (see below).

A number of remarks are in order here to clarify the scope of the basic generalization and to obtain a complete picture of the situation. First of all, Cinque is not clear about which bare quantifiers behave like operators in ‘fronting without resumption’ constructions; not all quantifiers should be considered as inherent operators, given that the following examples, where the quantifiers *ciascuno* ‘each one’ and *parecchio* ‘a lot’ have been fronted, are ill-formed in Italian:

- (7) (a) *?A ciascuno l’ avrai sicuramente detto.*
 To each one it have.FUT.2.SG surely told
 ‘You will have surely told it to each one.’
- (b) *?Parecchio ha già guadagnato.*
 A lot have.PRS.3.SG already earned
 ‘(S)he has already earned a lot.’

Notice that several bare quantifiers are compatible with clitic resumption, which means that the correlation between ‘fronting without resumption’ and the bare status of

⁶ See Cinque (1986) and Benincà (1988: 142-143) for additional remarks.

quantifiers does not hold: this is the case of numerals, as shown in (8), with two instances of Clitic Left Dislocation where the quantifiers have topical status.

- (8) (a) *Tre, li avevo già ascoltati.*
 Three them have.PST.1.SG already listened to
 ‘Three of them, I had already listened to.’
 (b) *Dieci, cerco di spedirli oggi.*
 Ten try.PRS.1.SG of send-them today
 ‘Ten of them, I try to send today.’

Second, Cinque is not explicit either with respect to the interpretation of the fronted constituents: Are they topics, or foci? He does not really address this issue, but he seems to maintain that bare quantifiers occupy the same position as left-dislocated topics — a claim that is incompatible with the analysis advocated in Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal (2009). In any case, it seems clear that fronted constituents are not interpreted as topics in (3): there is a clear interpretive difference between (3) and (8).

Third, as rightly pointed out by Quer (2002), quantified DPs (which according to Cinque are not operators) can however appear in a fronted position without requiring a resumptive clitic, at least in Spanish and Catalan:

- (9) (a) *Bastante trabajo tengo ya.*
 Enough work have.PRS.1SG already
 ‘Enough work I have already.’
 (b) *Pocs col·legues hi ha convidat.*
 Few colleagues there have.PRS.3SG invited
 ‘(S)he invited few colleagues.’

The same happens in Italian with the indefinite *qualche* ‘some’ and with negative quantifiers ((10b) is adapted from Benincà 1988: 143):

- (10) (a) *[Qualche libro] avrai pur letto.*
 Some book have.FUT.2.SG also read
 ‘You must have read some book.’
 (b) *[Nessun caso simile] possiamo trovare invece nel nostro paese.*
 No case similar can.PRS.1.PL find however in our country
 ‘But no similar case can be found in our country.’

This suggests that the contrast between bare quantifiers and quantified, complex DPs is not an adequate basis for understanding the constraints on ‘fronting without resumption’: on the one hand, bare quantifiers can occur both with and without resumption; on the other hand, quantified DPs are acceptable in the two constructions as well. However, Cinque’s remarks concerning the acceptability of the examples in (5) and (6) are, in any case, accurate.

In addition, we should, first of all, be cautious in considering all of Cinque’s examples as instances of VFF, i.e. equivalent to the Spanish ones in (3). There are at least two reasons to think that constructions with *tutti*, *molto*, *troppo* or *poco* such as those in (5b) and (5c) are not equivalent to core cases of VFF: the intonational contour is similar to the one associated to contrastive focalization (although the interpretation is not really contrastive), with a break between the quantifier and the rest of the sentence, and negation is present, which is impossible in Spanish VFF, as pointed out in Leonetti

and Escandell-Vidal (2009: §5.3) (cf. **Nada no tengo que añadir*, **Algo no debe saber*, **Poco más no te puedo decir*, **Bastante trabajo no tengo ya*). Examples such as (5b) and (5c) should thus be carefully set aside in a discussion of VFF. They suggest that Italian differs from Spanish in allowing for VFF only to a very limited extent and apparently only with certain quantifiers (the indefinites *qualche*, *qualcuno*, *qualcosa* and negative quantifiers like *niente* and *nessuno*). Here I do not intend to deal with the issue of cross-linguistic variation in VFF, but I take it to be partially dependent on certain aspects of the mapping from syntax to information structure (see Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal 2008 for some speculations concerning Romance languages).

Leaving aside this caveat, one should try to offer an account for the acceptability of fronted quantified expressions in Italian that explains why being a bare quantifier or a complex quantified DP is a relevant factor, even though the bare / complex distinction is not only unable to cover the facts in a precise way, but also raises new questions (e.g. Why should a fronting operation be sensitive to such a distinction?). My idea is that being bare or phrasal is not the crucial factor: the correlation that holds between bare quantifiers and the absence of resumption is simply an effect of some more basic property of the construction. Looking for such a basic property is the only way to grasp what the explanation is behind the alleged operator status of bare quantifiers, i.e. why bare quantifiers should behave as operators in Cinque's sense. The key notions are the incompatibility of certain quantified expressions with a topic interpretation and the possibility of assigning them a non-specific / non-referential interpretation: on the one hand, the set of expressions that undergo fronting in (3) in a productive way seems to be equivalent to the set of quantifiers that cannot be topics; and, on the other hand, such expressions are usually interpreted as non-specific. I assume that these ideas are crucial for an account of definiteness constraints in VFF (cf. Barbosa 2009: 12-16). Thus, they need a brief comment before going back to Cinque's original observation.

The ban against certain quantifiers as topics is certainly a well known grammatical phenomenon (see Benincà 1988, Rizzi 1997, Ebert and Endriss 2004, Endriss and Hinterwimmer in press, Barbosa 2009). Benincà (1988: 143, 158) explicitly points out that in Italian quantifiers like *niente*, *nessuno*, *pochi* and *qualcosa* cannot be left-dislocated as topics, but can be fronted without resumption (with the exception of *poco*, *pochi*). The facts are essentially the same in other Romance languages, like Spanish, Catalan and Portuguese. It seems natural to look for a single feature that underlies both facts, and such a feature must be related to the kind of interpretations the quantifiers can have. Non-specificity is a good candidate: if the quantifiers are typically or by default non-specific, they will be unable to give rise to a nominal expression with independent reference, thus becoming incompatible with syntactic positions where a requirement of independent reference is in force, such as in topics. Their incompatibility with topichood is, at the same time, what makes them perfect candidates for VFF, because this kind of fronting is felicitous only under the condition that there is no informational partition in the sentence, i.e. there is no topic (I refer the reader to Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal 2009 for discussion). It is just this property that acts as one of the triggers of the *Verum Focus* reading. In this sense non-specificity is strongly connected at least to the core cases of VFF.

To be more precise, my basic assumptions are that (i) being a topic strongly favours specific / referential readings in indefinites and quantified expressions (although this does not imply that specific indefinites are always topical), and (ii) a construction with no Topic-Comment split blocks the possibility that a quantified DP inside it receives a specific reading: such a reading, in particular in fronted DPs, would typically trigger an informational partition, as the fronted specific / referential DP would be processed as a

processed as a topic. Non-specific and purely cardinal expressions, on the other hand, fit in non-partitioned constructions in a natural way. In addition, I am assuming that some underlying property is common to quantifiers that are unable to occur as topics and quantifiers that are typically non-specific⁷—an issue I do not intend to address here (see Ebert and Endriss 2004 for a formal attempt at defining the basic property of this set of quantifiers). Each of these assumptions deserves a detailed discussion, but I will take them for granted in what follows. This gives us a rationale for the way non-specificity is connected to the core cases of VFF.

Does such a connection shed some light on the ‘bare vs complex’ condition as stated in Cinque (1990)? Intuitively, the main reason why bare quantifiers (or at least certain of them) fare better than complex quantified expressions is, again, that bare indefinites like *qualcuno* or *niente* are non-specific: their lexical meaning favours non-specific readings, and there are no linguistic cues that could guide the hearer toward a specific or strong interpretation.

Another factor that conspires to make bare quantifiers particularly adequate in VFF constructions is the fact that they are obviously ‘lighter’ than complex expressions, in the phonological sense. Given that VFF is characterized by the absence of an informational partition in the sentence, it is dependent on the possibility of compressing a certain amount of information—i.e. of linguistic constituents—inside a construction without forcing any Topic-Comment, or Focus-Background, partition. Languages differ in the limits they impose on the configuration of informational partitions, and I believe that cross-linguistic variation in VFF is essentially an effect of those different limits, both at the phonological and at the syntactic level (cf. Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal 2008 for comparative data). If this perspective is correct, then one should expect that short, or light, expressions fit better when fronted. ‘Heavy’ expressions would tend to trigger some kind of informational partition: on one hand, because they increase the formal complexity of the whole construction, and on the other hand, because they could make good candidates for sentence topics. Italian is a language that seems to be quite restrictive with respect to the amount of structure it allows inside a ‘non-partitioned’ construction, so that all the conditions mentioned in Benincà (1988) and Cinque (1990) could be derived from this restrictive nature: thus, bare quantifiers—actually only some of them—are acceptable in VFF, while complex DPs tend to be excluded. In any case, as we saw in (9) and (10), it is also possible to have fronting of whole DPs in VFF.

To sum up, though the ‘bare vs complex’ distinction seems to be a useful descriptive tool in the case of Italian, it does not represent a core syntactic property of fronting: it is simply an effect of the link between non-specificity and the ‘non-topic’ requirement on the fronted constituent.

2.2. Quer (2002): QP Fronting and focus-affected readings

Quer (2002: 259) points out that strong quantifiers like *all* or *both* are incompatible with this kind of fronting, and that “QP-Fronting seems to create a Definiteness-Effect context”. His Catalan examples are reproduced here, in (10), and the equivalent Spanish examples appear in (11):

⁷ A correlation that is worth exploring is the one between the set of quantified expressions that cannot be topics (i.e. cannot be clitic-dislocated) and the set of quantified expressions that cannot license intersentential pronominal anaphora. The two sets are strikingly similar.

- (10) (a) *{*Cada llibre / *tots els llibres / *ambdós llibres} deu haver comprat.*
 each book / all the books / both books must.PRS.3.SG have bought
 ‘(S)he must have bought {each book / all the books / both books}.’
 (b) **La majoria de llibres comprarà.*
 The majority of books buy.FUT.3.SG
 ‘(S)he will buy most books.’
- (11) (a) *{*Cada libro / *todos los libros / *ambos libros} debe haber comprado.*
 each book / all the books / both books must.PRS.3.SG have bought
 ‘(S)he must have bought {each book / all the books / both books}.’
 (b) **La mayoría de los libros comprará.*
 The majority of the books buy.FUT.3.SG
 ‘(S)he will buy most (of the) books.’

Definite determiners seem to be excluded from the construction as well:

- (12) (a) **Los libros habrá comprado ya.*
 The books have.FUT.3.SG bought already
 ‘They will have already bought the books.’
 (b) **Esos libros habrán comprado ya.*
 Those books have.FUT.3.PL bought already
 ‘They will have already bought those books.’
 (c) **Mi libro habrán comprado ya.*
 My book have.FUT.3.PL bought already
 ‘They will have already bought my book.’

Quer (2002) makes accurate remarks regarding further constraints on the distribution of determiners: bare plurals⁸ and indefinite DPs introduced by the indefinite article *un* are also excluded from the construction. Quer’s example in Catalan is (13a), and (13b) is the Spanish equivalent.

- (13) (a) *{*Llibres / *Un llibre} deu haver comprat.*
 Books / A book must.PRS.3.SG have bought
 ‘(S)he must have bought {books / a book}.’
 (b) *{*Libros / *Un libro} debe haber comprado.*
 Books / A book must.PRS.3.SG have bought
 ‘(S)he must have bought {books / a book}.’

Moreover, certain syntactic combinations inside DPs are impossible in the canonical object position, but acceptable when fronted, which is unexpected, and shows that the

⁸ According to Quer (2002: 259), unmodified mass nouns are unable to enter a QP-Fronting structure, but this observation seems to be too restrictive, in the light of examples like (15)-(16) and the following ones (cf. Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal 2009):

- (i) *Miedo me da pensarlo.*
 (ii) *Vergüenza debería darte.*
 (iii) *Tiempo tendrás de salir.*
 (iv) *Razón tienes, sí señor.*

The acceptability of singular mass nouns may depend as well on the degree of conventionalization of certain expressions. I will leave this issue aside here.

conditions governing the use of quantifiers and indefinites in fronting and non-fronting constructions are in fact different. Quer (2002) mentions the following contrast in Spanish:

- (14) (a) *Poco libro publican, últimamente.*
 Little book publish.PRS.3.PL lately
 ‘Few books have been published lately.’
 (b) ??*Publican poco libro, últimamente.*
 Publish.PRS.3.PL little book lately

Some parallel contrasts are found in ironic utterances like (15) and (16). This confirms that fronting constrains the interpretation of DPs / NPs in particular ways that have to be investigated:

- (15) (a) *Bonita faena me has hecho.*
 Beautiful job me.OBL have.PRS.2.SG done
 ‘Nice job you’ve done on me.’
 (b) ??*Me has hecho bonita faena.*
- (16) (a) *Menudo coche te has comprado.*
 Small car YOU.OBL have.PRS.2.SG bought
 ‘What a car you’ve bought.’
 (b) ??*Te has comprado menudo coche.*

Quer (2002: 260) states that QP-fronting is “the syntactic encoding of a certain kind of reading weak DPs can yield when affected by (semantic) focus” and tries to show how it favours weak / cardinal readings of indefinites, at the same time excluding strong / partitive readings. According to Quer, fronted indefinites in Catalan and Spanish are assigned a focus-affected reading, in Herburger’s (2000) terms. In (17), the focus-affected reading corresponds to ‘Few of the people that Mireia has invited to the party are colleagues’.

- (17) *Pocs col·legues hi ha convidat, a la festa, la Mireia.*
 few colleagues there have.PRS.3.SG invited to the party the Mireia
 ‘Mireia has invited few colleagues.’

This is a reading that cannot be equated with typical weak or cardinal readings of indefinites, because it includes a proportional aspect: “the speaker states that the proportion of colleagues vis-à-vis the invited crowd is relatively small” (Quer 2002: 263). It arises when a focused predicate inside the DP –in this case, the predicate *col·legues*– serves as the matrix or nuclear scope for the determiner and the non-focused part serves as the restriction. Thus, focus-affected readings are created when focus induces a particular quantificational structure in the sentence; they are impossible with strong determiners and in contexts that impose strong interpretations. Quer suggests that the notion of focus-affected reading as a specific property of QP-fronting is the key to understanding the distributional restrictions on quantifiers and determiners: only weak determiners that can yield proportional / partitive readings can enter QP-fronting, as such a condition is essential for getting a focus-affected reading. This excludes, for instance, bare plurals (cf. (13)).

To sum up, Quer (2002) makes the following proposals for Romance fronting

constructions (later on I will address some additional points he mentions):

- The only determiners allowed are weak ones which can receive a focus-affected reading.
- QP-Fronting is the syntactic reflection of focus-affected readings (at least in Spanish and Catalan).

These ideas deserve careful examination and detailed comments. In section 3, I review Quer's descriptive generalizations and present a different perspective on the alleged Definiteness Effect (from now on, DE) in the construction. As for his analysis, I should point out that in my opinion fronting does not trigger focus-affected readings. The basic reading of (17) does not seem to be adequately rendered by focusing on the proportion of colleagues with respect to the invited people, as the sentence could be used as well in a situation where the only guests were a few colleagues, with no proportion involved. I do not deny that a proportional reading like the one just mentioned is possible in (17), but it would simply be one of the available pragmatic values that the indefinite DP can get, and it is not necessarily connected with focus on the common noun. Moreover, there are at least two reasons, one descriptive and the other theoretical, for discarding focus-affected readings as the main feature of VFF constructions.

First, most indefinite determiners that occur in the construction do not exhibit proportional or focus-affected readings when fronted. A quick look at the examples in (3), repeated here, shows that there is no proportional interpretation in indefinite expressions like *nada*, *algo*, *poco más*, *bastante trabajo*, *alguien*, *mucho dinero*, *demasiadas concesiones*, *menos estudiantes* or *tantas quejas*. In certain cases, for instance with *nada* and *demasiado*, proportional readings seem quite difficult to obtain (this holds for all cases where a bare quantifier is fronted).

- (3) (a) *Nada tengo que añadir.*
 (b) *Algo debe saber.*
 (c) *Poco más te puedo decir.*
 (d) *Bastante trabajo tengo ya.*
 (e) *A alguien encontrarás que te pueda ayudar.*
 (f) *Mucho dinero debe tener.*
 (g) *Demasiadas concesiones hemos hecho ya.*
 (h) *Menos estudiantes teníamos el año pasado.*
 (i) *Tantas quejas hubo que tuvieron que suspenderlo.*

The reading that fronted indefinites yield in (3) is a purely cardinal one: they signal a point on a quantitative scale, and other possible referential readings that may involve the individuation of particular referents are excluded.

Second, the idea of focus-affected readings is incompatible with the account of VFF put forward in Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal (2009). If VFF is based on the absence of informational partition in the sentence, there should be no focus-affected readings of the fronted DP, as the DP should never represent the narrow focus –except when it is a contrastive focus, but in that case we have an instance of Focus Movement, a different construction. Of course, this is not a compelling argument against Quer's proposal, but it is worth considering it as long as we do not have a global alternative account of VFF. The fact that our proposal accounts for the discourse properties of VFF constructions and their emphatic nature gives us some support in contrast to Quer's.

A puzzling point in Quer's analysis is the absence of a motivation for linking the fronting operation and the focus-affected reading. There would be such a motivation if

the target of the movement were a designated position such as the specifier of Focus Phrase, for obvious reasons. The problem is that, even remaining neutral with respect to the nature of the target position, we should bear in mind that it is not connected to a Narrow Focus reading. One of the driving forces underlying VFF is precisely avoiding such a reading on a DP which most probably would be interpreted that way if left in situ. In a few words, assuming that VFF is an instance of movement to a Focus Phrase does not explain why VFF is a different construction from Contrastive Focalization. As for Quer's proposal, the crucial question still is: why should QP-Fronting be associated with focus-affected readings of indefinites? There is no clear answer, as far as I can see. This suggests it would be appropriate to look for alternative approaches to the problem: in particular, approaches that do not include the notion of focus-affected reading.

2.3. Some questions

Groundbreaking studies such as Cinque (1990) and Quer (2002) have brought to light some notable properties of VFF constructions. Although their proposals are not free from problems, as I have tried to show in the previous section, they have contributed to a better understanding of the construction by showing that VFF is associated with certain constraints on definiteness / specificity of the fronted DP, which give rise to a sort of DE. Now the problem is how to obtain a more precise characterization of such constraints, which do not seem to be reducible to either the 'bare' vs. 'complex' distinction, or the notion of 'focus-affected reading'. I believe that a clarification of the issue must include two phases: the first one is mainly descriptive, and aims at an adequate description of the distributional constraints holding in VFF; the second one corresponds to finding a motivated account of the constraints that is compatible with what we know about VFF. Pursuing these goals means trying to give an answer to a number of questions that represent the main lines of the inquiry into VFF:

- To what extent is VFF a DE context? Is there a systematic constraint against strong determiners or strong readings of DPs in VFF constructions?
- What kind of connection is there between the syntax and information structure of VFF and the referential properties of the fronted DP? Is it grammatical or pragmatic?
- If Contrastive Focalization does not impose any restriction on the type of determiner heading the fronted phrase, why does VFF show restrictions on definiteness / specificity?

I will try to give at least a sketchy answer to these questions in the following sections.

3. Determiners in Verum Focus Fronting

The primary goal of this section is descriptive. It aims at presenting enough data from Spanish to ascertain whether there actually is some kind of DE in VFF constructions. Assuming that most indefinite determiners –in particular negative and monotone decreasing quantifiers– are perfectly acceptable when fronted, I will concentrate on the behaviour of strong determiners, possessives, bare plurals, and determiners like *un* and *algún*.

3.1 Strong determiners

There is no systematic restriction against strong determiners in Spanish VFF, despite the fact that the examples in (10) and (11) are ungrammatical. A detailed review of several particular cases is in order here so as to establish what the nature of the constraints on VFF may be. The data will show that there is no DE *stricto sensu* in Spanish VFF.

First of all, it must be emphasised that all constraints on determiners are neutralized and suspended under certain conditions, i.e. when the propositional content has been made accessible in the immediate context and, in particular, when it has been already mentioned as a non-factual and non-asserted situation (as a possibility, a desire, an intention, a belief or a duty). The effect of VFF in these cases, illustrated in (18), (19) and (20), is to confirm and reinforce the truth of the previously mentioned proposition and emphatically assert it as the only true proposition, thus excluding the corresponding negative alternative (Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal 2009).

(18) *Dije que terminaría el libro, y el libro he terminado.*
 Say.PST.1SG that finish.COND.1SG the book, and the book have.PRS.1SG finished
 ‘I said that I would finish the book, and finish the book I did.’

(19) *Dijo que terminaría el libro. Pues el libro ha terminado.*
 Say.PST.3SG that finish.COND.3SG the book. Well the book have.PRS.3SG finished
 ‘(S)he said that (s)he would finish the book. Well, (s)he did finish the book.’

(20) A: - *¿Conociste por fin al presidente?*
 Know.PST.2.SG at last to.the president
 B: - *Al presidente he conocido.*
 To.the president have.PRS.1SG known
 ‘A: -Did you finally meet the president?
 B: - I did meet the president.’

Sentences like (11), (12) and (13), here first presented as ungrammatical, are in fact really odd when uttered out of the blue, with no connection to any previous relevant information. However, given that they can be fully acceptable⁹ in appropriate contexts like the ones in (21), they should best be treated as grammatical strings, although acceptable only under very strict contextual conditions. This leads us to reconsider the nature of the constraints on determiners originally pointed out in Quer (2002).

(21) (a) *Dijo que compraría cada libro que yo recomendase,*
 say.PST.3.SG that buy.COND.3.SG each book that I recommend.SUBJ.1.SG
y cada libro que he recomendado se ha comprado.
 and each book that have.PRS.1.SG recommended CI have.PRS.3.SG bought
 ‘(S)he said (s)he’d buy each book I recommended, and each book I recommended she bought.’

⁹ In building the examples in (21), I have slightly adapted them in order to avoid other difficulties that happen to be in any case independent from the constraints that I am discussing in this section.

- (b) A: - *¿Has leído de verdad ambos libros?*
 Have.PRS.2.SG read really both books
 B: - *Ambos libros he leído, se lo aseguro.*
 Both books have.PRS.1.SG read you.OBL it assure
 ‘- Have you really read both books?’
 - Both books I have read, I assure you.’
- (c) *Tenía que leer {(todos) los libros / esos libros}. Pues {(todos) los libros / esos libros} he leído.*
 have.PST.1.SG that read all the books those books well all the books / those books have.PRS.1.SG read
 ‘I had to read {(all) the /those} books. Well, {(all) the /those} books I have read.’
- (d) *No sabíamos si sería capaz de escribir {libros / un libro}. Pues { libros / un libro} ha escrito.*
 not know.PST.1.PL whether be.COND.3.SG able of write books a book well books a book have.PRS.3.SG written
 ‘We did not know whether (s)he would be able to write {books / a book}.’
 Well, write {books / a book} (s)he did.’

In (21), once a context of previous mention of the proposition has been provided that justifies the relevance of an explicit and emphatic assertion of such proposition, fronted lexical definite DPs, bare nouns and indefinite DPs with *un* are acceptable; the result is always a marked, strongly emphatic utterance. On the one hand, this confirms that some kind of constraint must hold against these kinds of DPs, given that they obey such a strict condition for fronting (i.e. they give rise to anomalous strings in any other discourse context), but, on the other hand, this means that there is no purely syntactic restriction concerning formal classes of determiners, and that examples like (11), (12) and (13) are not strictly ungrammatical, but just difficult to contextualize.

The obvious question is why VFF allows for the insertion of certain types of DP only when a previous mention of the proposition expressed is immediately accessible, while hosting most weak quantifiers in a natural way. A generalization that is worth bearing in mind is that VFF cases of the kind exemplified in (21) can only have a so-called ‘exhaustive’ reading, but not a ‘contrastive’ or ‘refutative’ one (cf. Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal 2009:§4). This means that VFF with definites, based on a previous mention of the proposition, cannot be used to reject or correct another proposition taken from the set of alternatives defined by Focus. It can be used exclusively to choose the affirmative proposition as the only one that is true. VFF with indefinites, on the other hand, may have a contrastive discourse function as well.

It seems to me a reasonable idea to try to find a common account for both problems: the contextual restriction on certain determiners, and the corresponding contextual restriction on the way VFF fits into the organization of discourse. Before addressing this issue in §4.4, I have to complete the picture of the distribution of determiners with some more data, now completely independent of the set of contexts that I have just presented.

Let’s look first at the behaviour of *todo* ‘all’. Some acceptable instances of VFF with proposed *todo*¹⁰ are in (22):

¹⁰ Notice that *todo* is usually associated with the insertion of a clitic pronoun like *lo*, as can be observed in several examples. The clitic is due to the particular conditions that license clitic doubling with *todo* in all dialects of Spanish, and should not be confused with real resumptive pronouns. This means that the presence of *lo* is not an obstacle for the analysis of the examples in (22) as proper cases of VFF.

- (22) (a) *Tod(it)o te lo perdono, menos eso.*
 All you.OBL it forgive but that
 ‘Anything I (can) forgive you but that.’
- (b) *Ella es quien todo lo sabe.*
 She be.PRS.3.SG who all it know.PRS.3.SG
 ‘She is the one who knows everything.’
- (c) *A todo dice que sí.*
 Toall say.PRS.3.SG that yes
 ‘(S)he says yes to everything.’
- (d) *Todo lo tiene que controlar.*
 All it must.PRS.3.SG that control
 ‘(S)he has to take control of everything.’
- (e) *Todo se lo gastaba en el juego.*
 All CI it spend.PST.3.SG in the gambling
 ‘(S)he gambled it all away.’

As a further confirmation of the partial adequacy of Cinque’s original remarks on bare quantifiers, all the examples contain the bare forms *todo* and *todos*. Fronting becomes harder to accept when *todo* precedes a full DP, as in (23), but it is not totally excluded (cf. (24)):

- (23) (a) *?Todo el apartamento registraron, y no encontraron nada.*
 All the apartment search.PST.3.PL and not find.PST.3.PL nothing
 ‘They searched the whole apartment and found nothing.’
- (b) *?A todos los testigos (los) habrán interrogado.*
 Toall the witnesses them have.FUT.3.PL questioned
 ‘They will have questioned all the witnesses.’
- (24) *Todo el mundo he recorrido, y nunca he visto nada igual.*
 All the world have.PRS.1.SG travelled and never have.PRS.1.SG seen
 nothing alike
 ‘I have travelled all over the world, and I have never seen anything like this.’

The relevant facts with *todo* are the following ones: 1) VFF is not strongly incompatible with universal quantifiers like *todo*; 2) the bare form *todo* is predominantly non-specific (its distribution closely resembles that of a Free Choice Item), while the complex expression *todo* + DP often has specific readings: it is no surprise that bare *todo* is much more natural in VFF contexts; 3) bare *todo* cannot appear in topic positions,¹¹ which makes it a good candidate for this kind of fronting.

In a nutshell, it seems to be non-specificity –and the absence of an articulated restrictor– that precludes the use of *todo* as a (dislocated) topic, and thus turns it into an adequate host for the initial position in VFF. The ‘weak / strong’ distinction does not seem to play a prominent role, so we do not have a real DE here.

Next, we should check whether a distributive element like *cada* ‘each’ may be

¹¹ Examples like (i) and (ii), with *todo* as a topic, are ungrammatical:

- (i) **Todo, te lo perdono.*
 (ii) **Todo, ella es quien lo sabe.*

The acceptability rate may increase if *todo* is used as a contrastive topic.

fronted. *Cada* cannot appear without a nominal restrictor, except in the complex expression *cada uno*. It is hardly acceptable in VFF, as shown in (25).

- (25) (a) *?A cada uno atendía una enfermera.*
 To each one look.after.PST.3.SG a nurse
 ‘Each one of them was looked after by a nurse.’
 (b) *?Cada cosa archivaba con sumo cuidado.*
 Each thing file.PST.3.SG with extreme care
 ‘(S)he filed everything with extreme care.’

However, it is significant that when *cada* is interpreted as an indefinite determiner, roughly equivalent to ‘such a kind of X / so Y an X’, as in (26), it fits much better the VFF context: the examples in (27) are much closer to the typical intonational and interpretive features of VFF than the ones in (25).

- (26) (a) *Tiene cada reacción... (= ‘Tiene unas reacciones...’)*
 have.PS.3.SG each reaction
 ‘(S)he has such reactions...’
 (b) *Dice cada cosa (que)... (= ‘Dice unas cosas (que)...’)*
 say.PRS.3.SG each thing that...
 ‘(S)he says such things...’
- (27) (a) *Cada reacción tiene... (que nunca sabes cómo tratarlo).*
 Each reaction have.PRS.3.SG that never know.PRS.2.SG how treat.him
 ‘He has such reactions... that you never know how to treat him.’
 (b) *Cada cosa dice... (que valdría más que se callara).*
 Each thing say.PRS.3.SG that be.better.COND.3.SG that Cl be.quiet.SUBJ.3.SG
 ‘(S)he says such things... that it would be better for {him/her} to be quiet.’

Again, an indefinite reading is much more acceptable in the construction than a strong one. The possibility of inserting *cada* in a VFF context is quite restricted, possibly due to several intervening factors. As in the case of *todo*, however, it is not totally excluded as a fronted quantifier: this confirms that the constraint operating on VFF does not work as a ban on the members of a certain formal category (for instance, definite DPs), but rather as a condition on interpretations.

The case of *cualquier(a)* ‘any’ is a bit more complicated, as it is not entirely clear whether it should be classified as a universal quantifier or as an indefinite. *Cualquier(a)* is a Free Choice Item and its distribution is constrained by a number of semantic factors (genericity, non-factuality). When *cualquier(a)* appears as a (part of a) direct / indirect object,¹² fronting is sometimes acceptable, as in (28), but sometimes it is not, as in (29):

¹² If a resumptive clitic appears, it is due to the generalized phenomenon of clitic doubling with indirect objects. The examples are not to be analyzed as instances of Clitic Left Dislocation, but as real cases of VFF.

- (28) (a) *A cualquier cosa llaman 'paella'.*
 To any thing call.PRS.3.PL paella
 'They call anything 'paella'.'
- (b) *A cualquiera que lo necesitara le prestaba ayuda.*
 To anyone that it need.SUBJ.3.SG him.DAT give.PST.3.SG help
 '(S)he gave help to anyone that was in need.'
- (c) *A cualquiera convencerían esas condiciones.*
 To anyone convince.COND.3.PL those conditions
 'Anyone would be convinced by those conditions.'
- (d) *A cualquiera aprueba, este tío.*
 To anyone pass.PRS.3.SG this guy
 'This guy passes anyone.'
- (29) (a) ??*Cualquier tarta puedes probar.* (Cf. *Puedes probar cualquier tarta*)
 Any cake can.PRS.2.SG taste
 'You can taste any cake.'
- (b) ??*Cualquier tarjeta aceptamos aquí.* (Cf. *Aquí aceptamos cualquier tarjeta*)
 Any card accept.PRS.1.PL here
 'We accept any (credit) card here.'

At first sight, the distinction between universal and existential readings of the quantifier seems to be relevant for the acceptability of the fronting operation, as the interpretation of *cualquier(a)* in (28) is always universal and close to the value of *everything* or *everyone*. However, this cannot be the key notion: in the canonical version of (29a) *cualquier* is existential or universal, and in the canonical version of (29b) it is universal, and still fronting gives odd results in both examples. Other semantic factors should be considered in order to capture the contrast between (28) and (29). I cannot offer a detailed account here of the possibility of fronting with *cualquier(a)*, which is in any case rather limited, but the data allow me to conclude at least the following: VFF is possible in some cases with fronted free choice items, and this must be related to their non-specific interpretation.

3.2 Possessives

Possessives behave in many respects as definite determiners. They introduce DPs that can make perfect topics, which leads us to predict that fronted definite DPs with possessives give bad results in VFF contexts (except in contexts where a proposition that has just been mentioned without asserting it is emphatically asserted by means of VFF: the case of (21)). In a few words, we expect that possessive DPs follow the same pattern as any other definite DP. This prediction is in fact confirmed (both examples would be fully acceptable in the usual context in (21)):

- (30) (a) ??*Vuestros libros he leído.*
 Your.PL books have.PRS.1.SG read
 'I have read your books.'

- (b) ??*Tus camisas hay que planchar.*
 Your.SG shirts have.PRS.3.SG that iron
 ‘Your shirts must be ironed.’

However, there is an interesting phenomenon concerning the interpretation of possessives that should be mentioned here. VFF with possessives is acceptable in examples like the following ones:

- (31) (a) *Sus problemas tendrá; déjalo.*
 His problems have.FUT.3.SG leave.IMP.2.SG.him
 ‘He must have his problems; leave him alone.’
 (b) *Sus cuadros venderá, no creas...*
 his paintings sell.FUT.3.SG not believe.SUBJ.2.SG
 ‘He must sell a number of paintings, do not doubt it.’
 (c) *Tus historias podrías contar.*
 Your stories can.COND.2.SG tell
 ‘You could tell a number of stories.’

What is remarkable about (31) is that here possessives exhibit a sort of indefinite reading: the whole DP is not referential, it may follow a verb like *tener* ‘have’ (i.e. a trigger of definiteness constraints, at least in certain uses), and it can be paraphrased as ‘a remarkable or significant amount of...’. It falls outside the limits of this paper to explain how and why such a reading arises in possessives, but it is interesting to realize that it is particularly prominent in VFF: while it is just one of the two possible readings in the sentences without fronting¹³ in (32)-(33) —the other one is the default, referential, one—, it is the most natural reading in (31).

- (32) *Venderá sus cuadros.*
 Sell.fut.3.sg his/her paintings
 ‘(S)he will sell {his / her} paintings.’

- (33) *Podrías contar tus historias.*
 Can.COND.2.SG tell your stories
 ‘You could tell your stories.’

In a few words, again we have a case of a preference for indefinite or weak readings in fronted DPs in VFF. And again we have a confirmation that the constraint on VFF does not put a ban on a certain lexical class of determiners, but rather on a certain class of interpretations. This is a feature it shares with the classical DE in existential sentences (cf. Lyons 1999: chapter 6). It is also an indication that the constraint is of a semantic nature, and not a purely syntactic one.

¹³ Notice that I have avoided a mention of the canonical equivalent of (31a), *Tendrá sus problemas*. In fact, the indefinite reading is still the most acceptable one here, and maybe the only one. Thus, there is no contrast between VFF and the canonical order in this case. However, this is probably due to the presence of the possession verb *tener* ‘have’ together with the possessive inside its internal argument. This is completely independent from VFF.

3.3 Bare Plurals

Bare plurals are supposedly incompatible with VFF, according to Quer (2002) (cf. (13)). Nevertheless, as in the previous cases, it is possible to find acceptable sentences – though marked and emphatic– that contradict this generalization:

- (34) (a) *Cosas veredes, amigo Sancho, que harán temblar las paredes.*
 Things see.FUT.2.SG friend Sancho that make.FUT.3.PL shake the walls
 ‘You will see such things, my friend Sancho, that will make the walls shake.’
- (b) *Motivos hay para desconfiar.*
 Reasons have.PRS.3.SG for mistrust
 ‘There are reasons to mistrust.’
- (c) *Ocasiones tuvo para llenar el sacco.*
 Occasions have.PST.3.SG for fill the sack
 ‘(S)he had occasions to fill the sack.’
- (d) *Amigos tendrás que puedan ayudarte.*
 Friends have.FUT.2.SG that can.SUBJ.3.PL help.you
 ‘You must surely have friends that can help you.’

A striking property of the VFF examples in (34) is the presence of an extraposed modifier after the verb, usually a relative clause. Suppressing it can produce an ill-formed, probably uninformative, construction (cf. ??*Cosas veredes*); the same happens when the modifier is not extraposed but follows the noun (not only when bare plurals are fronted, but in some other instances of VFF, like Negative Fronting; cf. *Nada te he dicho que pueda ofenderte* vs ?*Nada que pueda ofenderte te he dicho*). The possibility of extraposition of a modifier is one of the outstanding features of VFF. As already observed by Bosque (1980: 40) and Quer (2002: 265), extraposition is severely constrained in Spanish, and fronting, together with *wh*-interrogatives, is one of the few contexts that allow for it (Leonetti and Escandell 2008). At first sight, extraposition is motivated by the necessity to optimize processing by pushing heavy constituents towards the end of the string, thus separating them from the noun they modify and keeping the internal complexity of the fronted constituent to a minimum. This is probably an effect of the absence of informational partition in VFF: as complexity increases inside the first constituent, it tends to force a partition, which would give rise to a Topic-Comment structure. In fact, if there were no extraposition, the fronted constituents in (34) would typically receive a contrastive topic interpretation, as in (35).

- (35) (a) *Cosas que harán temblar las paredes veredes.*
 (b) *Motivos para desconfiar hay.*
 (c) *Ocasiones para llenar el sacco tuvo.*
 (d) *Amigos que puedan ayudarte tendrás.*

Thus, under certain conditions related to the defining properties of VFF, fronting with bare plurals is possible in Spanish. The resulting interpretation of the nominal is implicitly quantified and resembles that of fronted indefinites: *Motivos hay* is equivalent to *Suficientes motivos hay* ‘There are enough reasons’, *Ocasiones tuvo* is equivalent to *Bastantes ocasiones tuvo* ‘(S)he had plenty of occasions’, and *Amigos tendrás* corresponds to *Algún amigo tendrás* ‘You must have some friend’. Bare plurals behave like indefinite / non-specific nominals in this context.

As already pointed out with respect to different cases of fronting with strong and

weak determiners, VFF is constrained by a number of semantic and pragmatic factors. When bare plurals are fronted, one of those factors can be a special informativeness requirement that holds in VFF but not in sentences with canonical word order. Consider the following contrast:

- (36) (a) *Películas mejores he visto.* (cf. ??*Películas he visto*)
 Films better have.PRS.1.SG seen
 ‘I have seen better films.’
 (b) *Cosas peores había vivido.* (cf. ??*Cosas había vivido*)
 things worse have.PST.3.SG lived
 ‘(S)he had experienced worse things.’
- (37) (a) ??*Películas de Fellini he visto.*
 Films of Fellini have.PRS.1.SG seen
 ‘I have seen films by Fellini.’
 (b) ??*Crisis bursátiles hemos pasado.*
 Crisis exchange have.PRS.1.PL passed
 ‘We have suffered stock market crisis.’

The contrast suggests that the acceptability of fronted bare plurals partly depends on the nature of the nominal modifier. Comparative adjectives like *mejor* ‘better’ and *peor* ‘worse’ give perfect results, while restrictive and classifying modifiers like *de Fellini* ‘by Fellini’ or *bursátil* ‘relative to the stock market’ give rise to anomalous sentences. Intuitively, this could be due to the fact that comparative adjectives indicate that a certain value has been reached on a scale that licenses some scalar implications: this equals the effects obtained with adnominal quantifiers, usually associated with scales. On the other hand, classifying adjuncts such as the ones in (37) do not allow defining a value on a scale; they do not trigger scalar implications, and maybe this precludes an adequate inferential connection with the context. Emphatically asserting that I have seen better films implicates that there are better films than the one under consideration and that alternative propositions have to be rejected (‘I have not seen any better film’, ‘This is the best film I have seen’, ‘This is a very good film’): this is the general interpretive mechanism of VFF. When saying *Alguna película habrá visto* ‘(S)he must have seen some film’, the speaker communicates that all the propositions obtained by substituting the indefinite quantifier with other quantifiers representing lower values on a scale should be discarded (for instance, ‘(S)he has seen no films’), thus triggering other contextual implications that justify resorting to a marked construction like VFF. The idea is that certain nominal modifiers play a role that is similar to the quantifiers’ in allowing scalar implications, which seems to be relevant for the contextual adequacy of fronting. These are purely speculative remarks, in any case, and should be confirmed in a more detailed study.

3.4 *Un / Algún*

The indefinite *algún* ‘some’ (together with its pronominal [+ animate] variant *alguien* ‘someone’ and [- animate] variant *algo* ‘something’) is one of the elements that best fits VFF contexts. The indefinite article *un*, on the contrary, often gives bad results in the same contexts where *algún* is perfectly natural: some contrasts are presented in (38)-(40) –recall that the examples with *un* would be acceptable if inserted in a context that provides a close linguistic antecedent for the proposition expressed and justifies its

emphatic assertion.

- (38) (a) *Alguna razón debe haber para esto.*
 Some reason must.PRS.3.SG have for this
 (b) *?Unarazón debe haber para esto.*
 A reason must.PRS.3.SG have for this
 ‘There must be {some / a} reason for this.’
- (39) (a) *Alguna película habrá que te haya gustado.*
 Some film have.FUT.3.SG that you.OBL have.SUBJ.3.SG pleased
 (b) *?Una película habrá que te haya gustado.*
 A film have.FUT.3.SG that you.OBL have.SUBJ.3.SG pleased
 ‘{Some / One} film must have pleased you.’
- (40) (a) *Pues sí, algún ordenador me he cargado.*
 Well yes some computer Cl have.PRS.1.SG broken
 (b) *?Pues sí, un ordenador me he cargado.*
 Well yes a computer Cl have.PRS.1.SG broken
 ‘Well, yes, I have broken {some / one} computer.’

This is just one of the puzzling types of contrast between *un* and *algún* that can be signalled.¹⁴ I believe that a promising approach to the facts in (38)-(40) could be based on the fact that ‘*un* + N’ is frequently used as a topic DP, mostly with specific and generic interpretations, while ‘*algún* + N’ seldom appears as topic (though this is not excluded, especially if the DP is interpreted as a contrastive topic). The relevant generalization is that ‘*un* + N’, as a potential topic, easily deviates the processing task towards an informational partition with Topic and Comment, thus being, in principle, incompatible with the interpretive process associated with VFF constructions. *Algún* represents just the opposite behaviour: it is not easily taken as a topic and, consequently, it enters VFF contexts smoothly. An accurate semantic analysis of the two elements should be able to throw some light on this particular aspect of their linguistic behaviour. The characterization of *algún* as an ‘epistemic indefinite’, following Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito’s (2003) terminology, is surely relevant: *algún* signals that the speaker is unable to provide any further information about who or what satisfies the existential claim (s)he is making, and, moreover, that any individual in the relevant domain may be the one satisfying the existential claim (Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito 2003 rightly claim that *algún* is characterized by a ‘free choice epistemic effect’). This makes difficult to assign a referential reading to a DP headed by *algún* (and the same holds for *algo* and *alguien*). The preference for *algún* in VFF can thus be explained as the result of its being in competition with the indefinite article *un* in a context favouring non-referential readings. Of course, as in the previous cases, it is not at all impossible that an indefinite DP with *un* appears fronted, if the context facilitates an adequate processing: in (41), for instance, fronting with *un* is acceptable because the presence of a disjunction (*un libro u otro*) makes clear that the domain of quantification is not reduced to a singleton, thus producing a free choice reading of the fronted DP that is comparable to the typical readings of *algún* (I am grateful to N. Martí and M. T. Espinal for pointing out this fact to me).

¹⁴ Some of them have been recently discussed in Gutiérrez Rexach 2003.

- (41) *Un libro u otro habrá leído.*
 A book or other have.FUT.3.SGread
 ‘(S)he must have read some book or other.’

Another fact that is worth mentioning here (first pointed out to me by J. M. Brucart) is that the singular form *algún* is often preferred to its plural *algunos* in VFF. This is confirmed by the examples in (42), counterparts of some of the previous examples with *algún*.

- (42) (a) ?*Algunos libros habrá leído.*
 (b) ?*Algunas películas habrá que te hayan gustado.*
 (c) ?*A algunos encontrarás que te puedan ayudar.*

The contrast between *algún* and *algunos* is quite subtle and not really systematic. As the plural form *algunos* is devoid of the ‘epistemic’ flavour of the singular form, and is perfectly acceptable in indefinite topics (cf. *Algunas de estas películas, ya las había visto* ‘Some of these films, I had already seen’), the slightly anomalous status of (42) is predicted on the same basis that accounts for the contrast between *un* and *algún*.

3.5 Results

Summing up, the following points have been established in this study on the distribution of determiners in VFF:

- The preference for bare quantifiers in VFF, pointed out in Cinque (1986, 1990), seems to be a combined effect of the informational requirements of the construction —i.e. avoidance of expressions whose internal complexity could trigger an informational partition— and of the non-specific interpretation of bare quantifiers. Both things make them ideal candidates for VFF.
- Weak quantifiers represent the typical determiners that occur in fronted nominals, and their interpretation is systematically non-specific or cardinal.
- Strong quantifiers and determiners are always acceptable when the context provides a previous occurrence of the proposition and a suitable occasion for asserting it. This kind of grammatical environment allows for any type of determiner inside the fronted DP, and has to be given a special, marked, status. The obvious question is why such a context suspends the constraints that are usually in force.
- Some strong determiners (*todo, cada, possessives*) can be fronted even out of the particular context just mentioned. Interestingly, this happens because they are clearly non-specific or because they can receive non-specific, indefinite-like, readings. In such cases the DP cannot be interpreted as a topic.
- The contrast between the indefinites *un* and *algún* is again accounted for by resorting to their different potential for heading topical DPs. Being interpretable as a topic or not thus becomes the key factor in the licensing of fronted DPs in VFF.
- As for bare plurals, they can appear in VFF if certain conditions are met. On the one hand, there seems to be an informativeness requirement on the propositional content that is stronger than in canonical word order and imposes some limits on the acceptability of fronting in these cases; there is often extraposition of nominal modifiers, sometimes even obligatorily. On the other hand, fronted bare

plurals can make good topics: in fact, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish a case of VFF with a bare plural from a case of dislocation with a bare plural as an initial topic. There are no resumptive clitics in either of the two constructions, and only the intonational contour and subject-verb order can help the hearer. The potential ambiguity with respect to dislocation structures acts as a severe limitation on the acceptability of fronting with bare plurals. One of the reasons extraposition may play a prominent role is just the possibility it provides for separating VFF cases from dislocation cases, since extraposition is not allowed from topic positions.

- Contrasts in acceptability seem to be due to semantic incompatibility or to contextualization or processing difficulties, but not to the violation of syntactic constraints. Furthermore, there is a particular context that suspends all constraints on the kind of nominal expression that can be fronted: this means that such constraints are not strictly grammatical, but at the same time confirms that something must be said on their nature and motivation, given that they hold in most contexts for VFF.

4. The Nature of the Constraint

Now it's time to look for some way to unify these observations. I will try to do this, as far as possible, by building a model of a procedure for interpreting VFF constructions.

Let's assume that the presence of a fronted constituent, placed in a non-canonical position, is the starting point. Three different possibilities open up for interpreting such a constituent: 1. it is a topic; 2. it is a narrow focus (contrastive focus); 3. it is neither. Possibilities 1 and 2 give rise to Dislocation and Contrastive Focalization respectively. Each of the constructions is unambiguously characterized by a cluster of formal properties (resumption, intonation, word order).

If 1 and 2 are not available, then possibility 3 is the only one remaining. It forces the hearer to process the sentence with no informational partition, and ultimately restricting focus to sentence polarity (*Verum Focus Fronting*). The resulting interpretation is an emphatic assertion of the proposition expressed.

The obvious condition for VFF is avoidance of a Topic or Narrow Focus reading for the fronted phrase. Processing will operate smoothly if a) the phrase is unable to receive a Topic reading (typically, being a member of a certain class of quantifiers), or b) it is assigned a non-referential reading in that particular context, and c) it does not exceed a certain amount of internal structure (it is not a complex, 'heavy', phrase, or alternatively some extraposition process has made the initial element 'lighter' by separating it from its modifier). In these cases a Topic reading will be easily discarded (the same for the Narrow Focus reading, when the intonational contour is not the appropriate one).

The Non-Topic condition should impose a non-referential reading, i.e. a reading that does not involve the individuation of a particular referent, but rather presents a quantitative estimation on a scale (based on the properties of fronted quantifiers), and forces the hearer to infer the corresponding argumentative orientation for the utterance. The hearer has to recover an interpretation that justifies the use of a marked word order and the emphatic assertion of a propositional content that is presented as a part of the background.

In case the fronted phrase is a possible Topic (for instance, it is a definite DP), there are two ways to treat it: a) as a Topic, in a Dislocation structure, thus discarding a *Verum Focus* interpretation; or b) as a part of a VFF structure, only if it reproduces a

previous mention in the preceding sentence, and the literal repetition ensures that there will be no ambiguities concerning its grammatical role and that it cannot be taken as a Topic (cf. (21)). In such a context, processing will not deviate from VFF and the resulting reading will be an emphatic assertion. This is a last-resort mechanism able to rescue the interpretation of the string.

In the following sections I will give an answer to the three questions raised in 2.3.

4.1 To what extent is VFF a Definiteness Effect context?

The question requires a comparison of VFF with the classical DE context, i.e. existential constructions. Such a comparison shows that there are deep similarities, but differences too –some of them have already been pointed out. Let's begin with shared properties.

First of all, both existentials and VFF allow for several violations of the DE: this is a well known fact (see Leonetti 2008 and McNally in press for a revision) that leads us to conclude that the DE is a semantic or pragmatic constraint that rules out certain interpretations, but not necessarily the insertion of strong or definite determiners. It is also possible to claim, along the same lines, that the DE does not operate on formal definiteness, but on semantic definiteness and even on related notions such as specificity. In fact, both existential sentences and VFF impose restrictions on the use of specific DPs. Definiteness and specificity usually go together in their interaction with syntax. In this sense, it is reasonable to say that VFF creates a DE context.

The second major similarity lies in the way the constraints on definiteness / specificity are related to information structure. In VFF the constraints are related to information structure because of the Non-Topic condition on the fronted constituent and the ban against informational partition on the whole construction. At first sight, this is an exclusive feature of VFF. However, as I tried to show in Leonetti 2008 based on evidence from Romance languages, the DE in existential sentences is connected to information structure in just the same way. The internal DP position that excludes definite expressions is typically a non-topic position and requires the insertion of new information. Moreover, the DE manifests itself when the postverbal definite DP does not receive a narrow focus interpretation, in particular in constructions where the unmarked interpretation is one of broad focus (all-focus) or where another constituent following the DP is assigned narrow focus. Thus, the DE shows up in contexts that block the topic interpretation of the DP and at the same time prevent it from being narrow focus: the only option remaining is being a part of broad focus, and this is the key factor for the constraint against definite expressions (of course, it is not the only one that is to be considered). The following examples in Italian illustrate the problem.

- (43) (a) *In Piazza della Signoria c'è la statua di Michelangelo.*
 In square of-the Signoria there-is the statue of Michelangelo
 'In Piazza della Signoria there is the statue by Michelangelo.'
- (b) *??C'è la statua di Michelangelo in Piazza della Signoria.*
 (c) *C'è la statua di Michelangelo, (in Piazza della Signoria).*
 (d) *C'è una statua di Michelangelo in Piazza della Signoria.*

In (43a) the definite DP *la statua di Michelangelo* is in postverbal and final position, and in this case Italian allows for definites in existentials. The locative *in Piazza della Signoria* occupies the preverbal position, presumably as a topic. In (43b) the relative

order of the constituents in the existential construction is inverted, and the two options for assigning an information structure are a) broad focus, or b) narrow focus on the last phrase, the locative; in any case the definite DP is odd. The contrast with (43d), where the DP is indefinite, shows that it is the combination of definiteness and focus structure that gives rise to unacceptability. Finally, (43c) is perfect, because the locative is right-dislocated, as a topic, or otherwise elliptical. Thus, definite DPs seem to resist their incorporation into broad focus inthetic constructions like existentials. They cannot be ‘pressed’ into non-partitioned domains that prevent their interpretation like topics or narrow foci.

VFF is not athetic construction, but its similarity with existentials is quite clear: a DE appears when a definite DP is inserted in a string with no informational partition (in particular, with no Topic-Comment partition). This is the basic property that VFF shares with existential sentences. Again we have some reason to think that the constraint on VFF is after all another instance of the classical DE (provided we take the DE as a semantic / pragmatic restriction).

Let’s turn now to the differences. Some of them are quite clear, though not particularly illuminating for a better understanding of the distribution of definiteness marking. First of all, certain lexical triggers are involved in the DE in existential contexts: the combination of the verb ‘be’ / ‘have’ and some kind of locative in Italian, Catalan, English or French, the lexical competition between *haber* and *estar* in Spanish, the presence of *geben* in German. There is nothing comparable in VFF, as it reduces to an instance of syntactic (A-bar) movement to a preverbal position, independent of the insertion of any particular lexical items. Second, VFF shows interpretive effects (emphasis and argumentative orientation) that are completely absent from existential contexts.

What looks as an important difference is that the constraints on definite DPs in VFF derive from the fact that the fronted position excludes referential expressions that can be interpreted as topics. In a few words, the DE in VFF is entirely based on the Non-Topic condition. The set of determiners typically found in instances of VFF is the set of the determiners that are incompatible with topic status (in particular, with Clitic Left / Right Dislocation in Romance languages). This set crosscuts the classical weak / strong distinction, as shown in table (1).

Table (1): Determiners in VFF

<i>Todo, cada, possessives, (cualquier)</i>	Strong determiners
<i>Algún, poco, bastante, mucho, demasiado, mucho, más, menos, tanto, nada, ningún...</i>	Weak determiners

If both strong and weak determiners are possible in VFF -strong ones only under very strict conditions-, the constraint cannot be exactly the same as in existential sentences. It is certainly true that existential contexts admit strong determiners in a number of cases, but the conditions are not equivalent. The difference lies in the basic requirement that the two constructions impose on the DP: existentials require it to represent new information, VFF requires it to be incompatible with topic status. Therefore, the answer to the initial question (*To what extent is VFF a DE context?*) has to include some qualification: VFF creates a DE context, but not exactly of the same kind as the classical one.

4.2 How are the referential properties of the DP connected to information structure?

The view I want to defend is that the constraints on the referential properties of the fronted DP are not encoded as a part of the grammar, but arise as an effect of the way the syntactic configuration is processed (I have tried to draw a sketch of the process at the beginning of this section). If this is correct, the connection between the syntax and information structure of VFF, on the one hand, and the referential properties of the fronted DP, on the other hand, is mostly pragmatic. The flexible nature of the constraint and the existence of a discourse context that allows for any kind of determiner in VFF (see §4.4) support a pragmatic account. In addition, this view is in accordance with what we know about other constructions imposing conditions on definiteness or specificity: those involving a Topic position (scrambling and object shift, object agreement and clitic doubling, preverbal subjects in several languages) favour definite / specific DPs, while those involving non-Topic positions in non-partitioned domains favour indefinite / non-specific expressions (existentials, VFF). The alternative view should resort to encoding referential conditions in different positions in functional structure, in certain syntactic rules or in the specification of particular constructions. This seems to me an uninteresting and poorly motivated strategy.

4.3 Why do Contrastive Focalization and VFF impose different restrictions?

Information structure constrains the availability of specific and non-specific readings for DPs, but only indirectly: topic positions favour specific readings (without necessarily imposing them –this depends on the language and the particular construction), but focus positions do not force any kind of readings. This is why Contrastive Focalization is free from definiteness or specificity constraints. If the non-specific reading is the default one in VFF, it is because nothing is there to force a specific reading for the fronted constituent, and the Non-Topic condition has to be maintained and obeyed. In my view, non-specificity is an effect of the non-partitioned status of the construction. Contrastive Focalization is obviously a clear case of informational partition, and the stressed constituent is not expected to obey any condition on referentiality. Notice that this asymmetry would be unexpected if we had chosen to analyze VFF as one more instance of movement to the specifier of a Focus Phrase (a solution I would reject mainly on interpretive grounds).

4.4 One remaining puzzle

The main problem for treating VFF as a DE context was presented in §3.1. When a propositional content is introduced in the discourse and it is mentioned or evoked, but not asserted, resorting to a VFF construction is an adequate way to select the positive proposition expressed and emphatically asserting it. Two discourse environments that satisfy the condition of evoking the propositional content are polar interrogatives and non-factual contexts where the content is presented as a possibility, an intention, or a belief. A nice example of VFF in this last environment is in (18), repeated here:

- (18) *Dije que terminaría el libro, y el libro he terminado.*
 Say.PST.1SG that finish.COND.1SG the book, and the book have.PRS.1SG finished
 ‘I said that I would finish the book, and finish the book I did.’

Fronting of the definite DP *el libro* ‘the book’ is perfectly acceptable, in spite of the fact that such an expression could make a good topic. The problem, as already noticed in §3.1, is why fronting with definite DPs is possible in cases like (18), as a restricted option, and why it can only have an exhaustive function, i.e. that of selecting the affirmative proposition as the only one that is true (in the example, ‘I have finished the book’) and discarding the competing negative proposition. The two aspects of the problem must be related.

One of the major implications of the analysis of VFF is that Verum Focus entails a requirement that the propositional content be in the background. VFF constructions fit in a context that provides the set of alternative possibilities as already given content: in (18), the first sentence introduces the alternative set, and the second sentence (VFF) communicates the speaker’s commitment about the truth of the proposition. The exhaustive interpretation of VFF requires an almost literal repetition of the propositional content. This is crucial for explaining the possibility of fronting with definite DPs –with any kind of DP, actually. In fact, the first mention of the propositional content clearly determines grammatical relations, thematic roles and all kinds of syntactic dependencies. Once this is established as the background, emphatic affirmation simply repeats it, with some minor modifications in temporal deixis. Fronting a constituent can hardly hamper the processing of sentential content in such a context, as the fundamental aspects of interpretation have already been set. This frees the construction from the constraints usually associated with it and cancels the Non-Topic condition. In a few words, it is literal repetition that makes it possible that any kind of phrase be fronted in this context. It is worth recalling that VP Preposing in English has exactly the same properties (see Ward 1990 and Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal 2009: §5.2): in examples like (44) the second sentence emphatically affirms the speaker’s commitment about the truth of the proposition expressed in the first subordinate sentence, and the discourse function of the construction is exhaustive.

(44) *We went there to learn, and learn we did.*

The parallelism with VFF is that this is the only possibility to have fronting of a constituent like VP in English. The previous introduction of the propositional content that has to be affirmed opens the door to a syntactic operation that is forbidden in other contexts. Both VFF and VP Preposing are ways of expressing Verum Focus, with an exhaustive discourse function, and both of them allow for fronting possibilities that are otherwise ruled out. I suggest that it is the discourse environment that licenses such a kind of fronting, thus cancelling the general constraint against definiteness / specificity in VFF.

5. Conclusions

The particular kind of fronting construction I have analyzed, VFF, had not been studied in detail before. It deserves a deeper investigation because it can provide us with valuable insights concerning the left sentential periphery, the mapping of syntax onto information structure, and the interface between syntax and intonation, among other issues. Here I have concentrated on the class of determiners that appear in the initial constituent. My aim has been to offer an account of the constraints on definiteness / specificity that characterize VFF in light of our current knowledge of definiteness restrictions. After a brief discussion of two previous studies of the construction (Cinque

1990, Quer 2002), I have reviewed a series of examples of VFF in Spanish. The data show that VFF is in fact a construction that typically rejects definite DPs in initial position while favouring indefinite / non-specific expressions. However, there is a discourse context that makes definite DPs fully acceptable. This has led me to think that the constraint on definiteness is not encoded in the syntax but is rather a result of the interaction of the semantics of the fronted phrase with the informational requirements of the whole construction. The crucial condition is the ban against potential topics in the initial position. This excludes, in most discourse contexts, the presence of fronted definite DPs. At the same time, the Non-Topic condition explains several additional facts, such as the possibility to use strong quantifiers like *todo*, the preference for an epistemic indefinite like *algún* instead of the indefinite article *un*, or the acceptability of non-referential and monotone decreasing quantifiers. Once the nature of the constraint has been ascertained and its theoretical consequences briefly commented on, the problem of the particular context where the constraint is cancelled has been addressed: I have sketched an informal proposal based on how the presence of an explicit mention of the propositional content in the discourse context paves the way for the use of the fronting construction and suspends the Non-Topic condition. Here, as in the previous issues I have dealt with, the explanation is essentially pragmatic and follows a very simple schema: syntax and information structure impose certain constraints on interpretation, and pragmatic inference plays a central role in deriving a relevant interpretation according to such constraints.

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