

Contrastive Studies in Morphology and Syntax

Edited by Michalis Georgiafentis,
Giannoula Giannouloupoulou,
Maria Koliopoulou & Angeliki Tsokoglou

Strong pronouns as postverbal subjects in Spanish and Italian¹

Manuel Leonetti and Victoria Escandell-Vidal

Although Spanish and Italian share a remarkable number of grammatical properties, some unexpected asymmetries show up in the behaviour of strong pronouns as postverbal subjects. In this chapter we aim to describe these facts and suggest a plausible unified explanation based on the constraints that each language puts on the mapping between syntax and information structure. We consider three sets of data: overt pronouns as postverbal subjects in syntactically induced inversion, overt pronouns as subjects in free inversion, and the special case of polite pronominal forms. In the three cases Italian behaves like a more restrictive language than Spanish; whereas Spanish allows for pronouns to occur inside larger informational units without being interpreted as topics or as narrow foci, Italian requires that overt pronouns be singled out as topics or as narrow foci, that is, they must be pushed out from a larger informational constituent through some kind of split (*topic/comment* or *focus/background*).

1 Preliminaries

Spanish and Italian, as Romance languages, share a significant number of grammatical properties:

1. Both are consistent null-subject languages.
2. Both have the same kind of pronominal system, with a series of strong pronouns opposed to a series of clitic pronouns.
3. Both are SVO languages.
4. In both cases strong pronouns as subjects are in competition with null subjects: null subjects represent the basic, default option, and strong pronouns – either preverbal or postverbal – are used only when certain specific Information Structure factors justify them (either because referent identification requires it or in order to express contrast or emphasis).

Strong pronouns are used to communicate what null subjects cannot convey, and the competition between a marked and an unmarked option results in a balanced division

of labour (cf. for Spanish, Luján 1999; Fernández Soriano 1999: §19.3; RAE 2009; Mayol 2010; Leonetti 2014a; for Italian, Cordin and Calabrese 1988; Benincà 1988; Bocci and Pozzan 2014; Belletti and Guasti 2015). Thus, the behaviour of strong pronouns as subjects can be expected to be almost identical in the two languages. However, there are some intriguing differences, which have received little attention so far. A selection of the most relevant facts is given in the examples in (1)–(4).

- (1) a. ¿Qué habéis comido vosotros? Sp.
 what have.PRS.2PL eaten you.PL?
 ‘What did you eat?’
- b. Cosa avete mangiato {^{*}voi / ^{OK},voi}? It.
 what have.PRS.2PL eaten you.PL?
- (2) a. Estaba ella muy nerviosa. Sp.
 be.PST.3SG she very nervous
 ‘She was very nervous.’
- b. Era (*lei) molto nervosa. It.
 be.PST.3SG she very nervous
- (3) a. Es mejor así, creo yo. Sp.
 be.PRS.3SG better this-way, think.PRS.1SG I
 ‘It’s better this way, I think.’
- b. È meglio così, credo (*io). It.
 be.PRS.3SG better this-way, think.PRS.1SG I
- (4) a. Dígame usted. ¿En qué puedo ayudarle? Sp.
 tell.SBJV.3SG-I.DAT you.FRML. In what can.PRS.1SG help.INF-you.FRML.ACC
 ‘Tell me. Can I help you?’
- b. Mi dica (*Lei). Posso aiutarLa? It.
 I.DAT tell.SBJV.3SG you.FRML. Can.PRS.1SG help.INF-you.FRML.ACC

The examples show four different environments where a subject strong pronoun in postverbal position is grammatical in Spanish, but not in Italian, namely wh-interrogatives, sentences with VSX order, parenthetical clauses and imperative clauses with polite pronominal forms. This is a surprising fact, given the number of important grammatical properties that the two languages share. At this point, two generalizations emerge:

1. The observed asymmetries in the distribution of strong pronouns as subjects concern postverbal positions exclusively. There are no noticeable differences in the preverbal subject position.²
2. Spanish looks like a less restrictive language than Italian: in the examples, the Spanish versions are always acceptable, whereas the Italian versions are excluded.

Our goal in this chapter is to describe the facts and to provide a unified account for them, including the generalizations in (1) and (2). In doing this, we assume that the differences are not to be located in the semantic features of pronouns, which are the same in Spanish and Italian, but elsewhere. More precisely, we intend, on the one hand, to argue for a more fine-grained account of the relations between the postverbal position of a strong pronoun and its informational status. On the other hand, we would like to provide further support for the idea that *new information* and *contrast* are independent notions.

In the following section, three sets of data will be analysed and discussed. The first group concerns grammatical contexts where subjects are obligatorily postverbal, that is, basically *wh*-interrogatives and contrastive focalization. The second group covers contexts of ‘free’ subject inversion (VS, VOS, VSO). Finally, the third group represents the special case of the polite pronominal forms *usted* ‘you, formal’ and *Lei* ‘you, formal’. Section 3 offers an account of the facts based on the articulation between grammar and Information Structure (IS). Section 4 briefly presents our conclusions.

2 Three sets of data

In order to obtain an adequate view of the behaviour of postverbal subjects in Romance languages, it is useful to start by making a basic distinction between subjects appearing in a postverbal slot by virtue of a general syntactic constraint, on the one hand, and subjects that appear in postverbal position because the speaker freely makes that choice, thus discarding an alternative option with a preverbal subject that would be perfectly grammatical, on the other (cf. Leonetti 2018). This distinction has interesting consequences for the mapping between syntax and Information Structure (IS), and it will turn out to be a crucial piece for a contrastive approach to the occurrence of strong pronouns. Briefly, this distinction, combined with some simple assumptions on the competition between grammatical options, leads us towards a principled account of the contribution of word order to Focus structure: when subject inversion is obligatory – that is, if it is imposed by some syntactic constraint – it does not compete with other possible options anymore (for instance, with the preverbal position in a SVO pattern), and, as a consequence, it is not significant, in the sense that it has no interpretive import. In contrast, when subject inversion is optional – that is, ‘free’, as in the usual term *free inversion* – and competes with other possibilities, it must have some interpretive effect. The main interpretive effect of inversion is marking the subject as focal information. This explains why, at least in Romance, postverbal subjects are not information foci when their position is determined by a syntactic constraint, whereas they are focal when their position is the result of the speaker’s choice.³ With this in mind, we can review the main data corresponding to the two situations just introduced.

2.1 Syntactically induced VS order

In this section, we want to describe the behaviour of subject pronouns in contexts where the VS order is syntactically induced, such as *wh*-interrogatives and focus

fronting (Torrego 1984, for Spanish). The VS pattern for Spanish is illustrated in (5) and (6).

- (5) ¿Qué (*vosotros) habéis (*vosotros) comido (vosotros)?
 what (*you.PL) have.PRS.2PL (*you.PL) eaten (you.PL)?
 ‘What did you eat?’
- (6) PAStá (*yo) he (*yo) comido (yo) (, no pizza).
 PAStá (*I) have.PST.1SG (*I) eaten (I) (, not pizza)
 ‘I ate PAStá (, not pizza)’

As preverbal subjects are banned from the contexts in (5) and (6), the only grammatical options remaining are null subjects and postverbal explicit subjects. There is a feature of subject pronouns in (5) and (6) that is particularly significant for a comparison with Italian, as we will see: the pronouns *vosotros* and *yo* occur in the same intonational phrase as the verb. In (5') the pronoun heads the intonational phrase and carries the Nuclear Pitch Accent.

{	*	}	_v
[*]	_i
(*) (*) (*) _φ

- (5') ¿Qué habéis eaten comido vosotros?
 what have.PRS.2PL eaten you.PL?

A reasonable question arises at this point: given that subject inversion is syntactically induced here (and hence inversion lacks any interpretive effect), and given that subject pronouns compete with their null counterparts, but in (5) the subject is not interpreted as a narrow focus,⁴ why does the subject appear at all? A reasonable answer should be based on the natural assumption that strong pronouns in competition with null subjects must convey some kind of meaning that their null counterparts are unable to express. With this idea in mind, it is worth having a look at the contextual conditions for a felicitous use of strong pronouns. Analysing the contrast between (7) and (8) provides a valuable clue: an interrogative sentence like (5) fits in well with the linguistic context in (7), but sounds odd in (8).

- (7) Yo he comido tallarines. ¿Qué habéis comido #(vosotros)?
 I have.PRS.1SG eaten tagliatelle. What have.PRS.2PL eaten #(you.PL)?
 ‘I have eaten tagliatelle. What did YOU eat?’
- (8) ¡Qué rápido habéis vuelto! ¿Qué habéis comido #(vosotros)?
 How quick have.PRS.2PL returned! What have.PRS.2PL eaten #(you.PL)?
 ‘You are back so early! What did you eat?’

In (7) the strong pronoun is needed to establish a contrast between the first person subject in the previous sentence (*Yo he comido tallarines*) and the new subject (*vosotros*) in the wh-interrogative. The occurrence of the strong pronoun triggers the

retrieval of a contextually determined set of alternative referents: *yo* ‘I’, *nosotros* ‘we’, *vosotros* ‘you_{PL}’, *ellos* ‘they’. Since one of these alternative referents is already present in the context in which the *wh*-interrogative is processed, the contrast is easily obtained. The situation in (8) is clearly different: in the two sentences, the subject refers to the addressees, so there is no contrast involved, but continuity. Therefore, the strong pronoun *vosotros* is inadequate in the *wh*-interrogative; only a null subject is felicitous. The same explanation goes for examples involving subject inversion triggered by focus fronting, as illustrated in (6).

This suggests, then, that it is precisely contrast that justifies resorting to an overt pronoun here. This conforms to the basic assumption we rely on: null subjects are unable to convey contrast, and hence strong pronouns are used whenever there is contrast. This is why strong pronouns in competition with null pronouns are typically contrastive, as pointed out by most descriptive grammars.

It is important to draw attention to the fact that in (5) contrast is independent from focus, since the subject pronoun has a contrastive reading without being in focus. The same happens in the default interpretation of strong pronouns as preverbal subjects in Spanish, when contrast is associated with topicality, but not with focus. This supports the idea that contrast must be considered as an independent notion of IS, one that can be combined with either focus or topic, as proposed in Neeleman and Vermeulen (2012).

To sum up, the main points that result from an analysis of subject pronouns in syntactically induced inversion in Spanish are the following:

1. The subject pronoun is a part of the same intonational phrase where the verb occurs.
2. It is not in focus.
3. It is licensed by contrast with other alternative referents in the context.
4. Contrastive readings are independent from focus.

In Italian, in contrast, we find a slightly different situation. In *wh*-interrogatives⁵ with fronted bare *wh*-elements (*cosa* ‘what’, *quando* ‘when’, *dove* ‘where’ ...) subjects are obligatorily postverbal, like in Spanish. However, preverbal subjects are allowed with *perchè* ‘why’ and *come mai* ‘how come’,⁶ and with D-linked and complex *wh*-expressions (Benincà 1988; Rizzi 2001; Cardinaletti 2007; Bocci and Pozzan 2014). Here we consider only those cases where the subjects must be postverbal. Now, as in Spanish, such postverbal subjects cannot be narrow foci:⁷ in Belletti’s (2004) terms, the activation of a left peripheral Focus position with fronted *wh*-words is incompatible with the activation of a low Focus position for the subject. Again, as in Spanish, overt, strong pronouns involve contrast, and hence the choice of a pronoun instead of its silent counterpart triggers the search for a contextually relevant set of alternative referents. Italian, however, differs from Spanish in a specific aspect of the grammar of *wh*-interrogatives, illustrated in the contrast between (9) and (10):

- (9) Io ho mangiato tagliatelle. Cosa avete mangiato, voi?
 I have.PRS.1SG eaten tagliatelle. What have.PRS.2PL eaten, you.PL?
 ‘I have eaten tagliatelle. What did YOU eat?’

- (10) Io ho mangiato tagliatelle. *Cosa avete mangiato voi?
 I have.PRS.1SG eaten tagliatelle. What have.PRS.2PL eaten you.PL?

In Italian the postverbal subject – this holds for pronouns as well as for most lexical DPs – must be pronounced as an independent intonational phrase;⁸ it cannot remain inside the same intonational phrase as the main verb. This condition is obeyed in (9), but not in (10), which, on the other hand, would be acceptable in Spanish (cf. (5')). For Italian, only the prosodic phrasing in (9') is acceptable:

- (9') Io ho mangiato tagliatelle. Cosa avete mangiato, voi?
 I have.PRS.1SG eaten tagliatelle. What have.PRS.2PL eaten, you.PL?
-

The difference concerning intonational phrases reveals, thus, a crucial grammatical asymmetry: in Italian, but not in Spanish, a postverbal subject in a VS wh-question must be either right-dislocated⁹ or destressed *in situ* (Cardinaletti 2001, 2007). Notice that Italian subject pronouns retain their contrastive value when right-dislocated or destressed. Italian behaves, with respect to the behaviour of this type of subjects, exactly like Catalan, as shown in Villalba (2011) and Planas-Morales and Villalba (2013): Catalan makes a pervasive use of right-dislocation for marking background material in interrogatives, whereas Spanish tends to resort to the realization of background material in canonical position (or, alternatively, to ellipsis).

2.2 Subject inversion (VS, VOS, VSO)

In this section we consider data of so-called *free inversion* with strong pronouns as postverbal subjects; this kind of inversion gives rise to verb-initial orders like VS, VOS and VSO. It is well known that subject inversion is more productive in Spanish than in Italian (Lobo and Martins 2017; Leonetti 2017). This is essentially due to the constraints that Italian places on inversion with transitive verbs. On the one hand, VOS is mostly used in Italian with narrow focus – possibly contrastive – on the final subject, whereas it can also be used with wide focus readings in Spanish – though narrow focus on the subject remains the preferred interpretation. On the other hand, the VSO pattern is usually excluded in Italian, as it is in French and Catalan, but is quite common in Spanish, European Portuguese and Romanian (Leonetti 2014b). In VSO order, the subject must be focal, but it does not receive a narrow focus interpretation (unless the object is right-dislocated; we consider only Spanish sequences with no intonational breaks, i.e. without dislocations): VSO is associated to an interpretation that lacks informational Focus/background articulation, typically a wide focus reading.

Significant differences between Spanish and Italian show up when the postverbal subject pronoun is within the focal domain without being a narrow focus. The VSO

pattern is usually acceptable in Spanish, but not in Italian, as shown in the contrasts in (11)–(13).

- (11) a. Estaba ella muy nerviosa. Sp.
 be.PST.3SG she very nervous
- b. Era (*lei) molto nervosa. It.
 be.PST.3SG she very nervous
 ‘She was very nervous.’
- (12) a. No le veo yo la gracia. Sp.
 not CL see.PRS.1SG I the humour
- b. Non ci vedo (*io) niente di divertente. It.
 not CL see.PRS.1SG I nothing of funny
 ‘I can’t see the humour in it. (That’s not funny)’
- (13) a. ¡Vete tú a saber!¹⁰ Sp.
 go.IMPRT.2SG.CL you to know
- b. Vai (*tu) a sapere! (cf. dialectal *Vatte a sapè!*) It.
 go.IMPRT.2SG you to know
 ‘You figure it out/Who knows!’

AQ: the spacing has been amended in these sentences – please check and confirm they are correct

The presence of overt subject pronouns in Spanish VSO raises an interesting question: why do they appear there? They may well contribute to solving possible ambiguities in some cases, when verbal inflection is not explicit enough (Fernández Soriano 1999: §19.3.6), and may also give rise to mild emphatic and contrastive effects in other cases (Fernández Soriano 1999: §19.3.7), but such factors cannot definitely explain all uses, because in many examples the pronoun is neither emphatic nor contrastive (for instance, in (11)a and (13)a). Thus, it is not clear why in VSO an overt pronoun is chosen instead of a null subject.

We suggest that the main reason for inserting an overt pronoun is making the VSO pattern ‘recognizable’ for the addressee (Escandell-Vidal and Leonetti 2017), with all its interpretive consequences. Resorting to an overt pronoun is justified because with a null subject the sentence would be interpreted as (S)VO; null subjects typically refer to given antecedents and count as topics in the informational articulation of the clause, so that speakers would not recognize the VSO order with its wide focus reading if the subject were null. This is, therefore, the basic motivation for the use of overt subject pronouns in (11)–(13).

At first sight, the relevance of the data in (11)–(13) might seem scarce, given that the examples simply show the effects of a ban against VSO in Italian, and not a specific feature of the behaviour of postverbal pronouns. However, we think they deserve some attention, for different reasons. First, we intend to connect them with the facts we described in the previous section, so as to treat all of them as manifestations of a more general phenomenon (see Section 3). Second, the contrasts involving subject pronouns

in inversion are not limited to VSO. In (14) we reproduce a contrast that is found in parenthetical expressions¹¹ with verbs like *creer/credere* ‘think’. As in the preceding cases, inversion is fully acceptable in Spanish, but not in Italian.

- (14) a. Es mejor así, creo yo. Sp.
 be.PRS.3SG better this-way, think.PRS.1SG I
- b. È meglio così, credo (#io). It.
 be.PRS.3SG better this-way, think.PRS.1SG I
 ‘It’s better this way, I think.’

Though this seems to be a case of focal inversion, the subject pronoun is not interpreted as narrow focus in Spanish: rather, it is integrated into the parenthetical predication from both a prosodic and an informational point of view. As in several previous examples, the pronoun evokes a set of contextual alternatives, and its occurrence is justified as a means for expressing contrast.

The situation is thus the same in the two sets of contexts reviewed so far, namely, syntactically induced inversion and ‘free inversion’. In Spanish subject pronouns in postverbal position always involve contrast – or some other interpretive effect – independent of their informational status: they may be integrated in the background (the case of *wh*-interrogatives) or in the focal domain (the case of subject inversion), and no other condition has to be satisfied. In Italian, subject pronouns in postverbal position must indicate contrast, but they must also obey a further specific condition: they need to be singled out, either as topics – when right-dislocated in *wh*-interrogatives – or as narrow foci – in inversion.¹² Italian examples in (11)–(14) are ruled out because this second condition is not satisfied, the pronouns being simply integrated in the background or the focal domain. Before reviewing the whole issue in Section 3, we would like to introduce some additional evidence for our comparative generalization, based on the behaviour of polite pronominal forms.

2.3 Use of respect forms – *usted* versus *lei*

Both Spanish and Italian resort to a third person pronominal form – *usted* in Spanish, *Lei* in Italian – to convey deference and respect for the addressee. Both languages belong to the category of so-called T/V (*tu/vous*) languages, that is, those having a pronominal system that makes a distinction between two forms to refer to the addressee, a pronoun of familiarity and solidarity, and another one for respect and distance.

Sánchez López (1993), building on previous observations by Fernández Ramírez (1986), shows that *usted* displays some peculiar properties, with respect to the rest of pronominal forms. The most significant one is that it appears as subject, without any contrastive value, in postverbal positions where other pronouns are excluded, as in the contrast between *usted* and *vosotros* in (15).

- (15) a. Tendrán ustedes que hacer-lo.
 have.FUT.3PL you.PL.FRML that do.INF-it.ACC

- b. #Tendréis vosotros que hacerlo
 have.FUT.2PL you.PL that do.INF-it.ACC
 ‘You will have to do it.’

The distribution of *usted* could be accounted for in strictly syntactic terms, but it seems simpler to assume that it is the set of special features of this form what actually brings about these contrasts. First, its presence can disambiguate between third person readings and polite second person readings, since *usted* shows third person agreement features. In addition, the fact that it always conveys deference and respect – which the rest of forms cannot express – could work as a licensing factor for this form. In sum, its use can be motivated on different grounds, independently of focus structure and contrastivity, which makes *usted* a special, marked form in the Spanish pronominal system.

Now, the point we want to stress here has to do with the subtle contrast between Spanish *usted* and Italian *Lei* that shows up in contexts like the ones in (16) and (17):

- (16) a. Díga-me usted. ¿En qué puedo ayudar-le? Sp.
 tell.SBJV.3SG-I.DAT you.FRML In what can.PRS.1SG help.inf-you.FRML.ACC

AQ: Please clarify if “It.” belongs in the English line above and the exact location for it.

- b. Mi dica (Lei). Posso aiutar-La? It. **OK**
 I.DAT tell.SBJV.3SG you.FRML Can.PRS.1SG help.INF-you.FRML.ACC
 ‘Tell me. Can I help you?’

- (17) a. Pues, mire usted... Sp.
 well, look.SBJV.3SG you.FRML

- b. Beh, guardi (#Lei)... It.
 well, look.SBJV.3SG you.FRML
 ‘Well, look...’

AQ: the spacing has been amended in these sentences – please check and confirm they are correct

The essential difference lies in the fact that Spanish *usted* can occur without bearing narrow focus – that is, integrated in the focal domain in (16)–(17) – and without any contrastive value, whereas Italian *Lei* requires either a narrow focus reading or a topic reading (through right-dislocation). A postverbal *Lei* is excluded whenever it is not singled out from an informational point of view. A clear contrast derived from this condition emerges in (18), where *Lei* needs to be right-dislocated.

- (18) a. No se preocupe usted. Sp.
 no CL worry.SBJV.3SG you.FRML

- b. Non si preoccupi, Lei. / *Non si preoccupi Lei. It.
 no CL worry.SBJV.3SG you.FRML
 ‘Don’t worry.’

The data thus confirm that respect pronominal forms follow the same pattern as the rest of the strong pronouns. This calls for a unified account of the three sets of facts we describe.

3 Strong pronouns and information-structure articulation

At this point, we need to draw a general picture that encompasses our two original generalizations together with the kind of evidence found for a systematic difference between Spanish and Italian in the occurrence of subject pronouns in postverbal position. More specifically, we seek to explain the facts by treating them as particular cases of a basic, more general asymmetry between the two languages. In what follows, we first give a sketch of the mentioned asymmetry and then try to derive the generalizations from it.

Spanish and Italian, despite their evident shared properties, differ in the constraints they put on the mapping between syntax and IS, as discussed in Leonetti (2014b, 2017). Italian, Catalan and French impose a neat informational articulation¹³ (*topic/comment* or *focus/background*) on marked orders – therefore, on inversion patterns – especially when certain factors such as aspect, definiteness or thematic prominence conspire to favour such division. Italian makes pervasive use of syntactic devices such as dislocation, focus fronting and clefting to avoid the formation of complex strings without informational articulation. As a result, wide focus readings in inversion are severely constrained, and non-focal constituents included in the background in interrogative sentences are typically detached. This makes Italian a restrictive language, with a strikingly transparent mapping between syntax and IS (cf. Calabrese 1992 for some ground-breaking observations). In contrast, Spanish, together with Romanian and European Portuguese, shows the opposite tendency: it is less restrictive, and allows for marked orders without internal informational articulation quite naturally. In Spanish, wide focus readings in subject inversion are common, and non-focal constituents in interrogatives do not need to be detached from the core clause, which explains the low frequency of dislocation with respect to central Romance languages. This means that the mapping between syntax and IS is less straightforward, and this language shows low sensitivity to the factors determining informational chunking.

What are the consequences for subject pronouns? We should bear in mind that

1. subjects, in the constructions under examination, correspond to external arguments, and thus are maximally prominent from a thematic perspective; and
2. personal pronouns are definite and deictic/anaphoric, mostly referential expressions and strongly context-dependent.

If this is the case, then it is reasonable to conclude that, due to these factors, subject pronouns are especially suited to being informationally singled out by means of prosodic or syntactic strategies. Their prominence hinders their integration into wider informational units, at least in languages that are highly sensitive to prominence factors. This, combined with the distinction between restrictive and less restrictive languages, provides us with the essential ingredients for an account of the data.

Our first generalization stated that differences between Spanish and Italian are only found in postverbal subjects. This is expected, since the differences follow from conditions on marked orders: Italian needs to create two distinct informational regions in these cases (in particular, when prominence factors favour them), whereas Spanish can do without them. In preverbal position, subjects are usually singled out as topics.¹⁴

The second generalization characterizes the asymmetry as one between a more restrictive language and a less restrictive one. Let's review each of the three contexts.

In *wh*-interrogatives the subject pronoun is a part of the background. In a restrictive language, its referential/discourse prominence forces its overt marking as a singled-out constituent; in fact, in Italian it is detached, or at least destressed, keeping its background nature. In a less restrictive language like Spanish, the subject pronoun stays *in situ*, inside the informational unit that corresponds to the background.

In subject inversion, the subject pronoun is focal – narrow focus, or part of wide focus. VOS is usually associated with a narrow focus reading for the subject, and does not give rise to noticeable differences between Spanish and Italian (except for the fact that Spanish allows wide focus readings much more easily). VSO, instead, together with certain contexts for VS (cf. examples in (14)), is the source of major differences, because it is fully acceptable in Spanish, but not in Italian: as the VSO pattern includes a focal subject that is a part of wide focus and cannot be singled out as narrow focus, only a non-restrictive language is able to accept it. A restrictive language, in contrast, needs to single the subject pronoun out, and that is incompatible with the informational nature of VSO.

One could reasonably raise the doubt that here we are dealing with a general constraint on the position of subjects in Italian, but not with a specific restriction on overt pronouns. However, as our data include not only examples of VSO but also instances of VS with familiarity and respect pronouns, we can safely conclude that the empirical facts are not limited to VSO orders. Moreover – and this is the main point – the account works similarly for non-focal pronouns and focal pronouns: in both cases, Italian forces interpreting the subject pronoun as a singled-out constituent in IS (either through dislocation/destressing or through narrow focus prosodic marking), whereas Spanish allows for the pronoun to be interpreted as part of a larger informational unit. Contrast, as the first licensing factor for strong pronouns, seems to be parasitic on establishing informational units in Italian, not in Spanish. This is just an indirect effect of the basic difference between the two languages, which affects the interplay of syntax and IS.

4 Conclusions

Our aim in this chapter was to give a unified account of the differences between Spanish and Italian in the distribution of postverbal subject pronouns. We put forward three sets of data, which could be actually reduced to two contexts: syntactically induced inversion and 'free' inversion (with either 'unmarked' pronouns or special, respect pronouns). The analysis showed that the contrasts follow a systematic pattern, by which Spanish strong pronouns may occur in positions where Italian pronouns are excluded.

We have come to two main conclusions:

1. Italian subject pronouns in postverbal positions must obey stricter conditions than their Spanish counterparts: they need to be marked either as narrow foci or as topics (by detachment or destressing). Spanish pronouns do not have to

obey such a constraint. This is the result of a basic difference in the mapping from syntax to IS. Languages like Italian are characterized by a strong tendency to make overt the information structure articulation, especially on marked orders. Languages like Spanish, on the other hand, are less restrictive, and do not need to single out phrases that are discourse prominent: such phrases may be integrated into larger informational units.

2. The contrastive value of subject pronouns is independent of other aspects of IS (informational focus, rheme). Contrast is contextually inferred on the basis of the competition between overt pronouns and null subjects, following general pragmatic principles.

The major advantage of this perspective is that the distribution of postverbal subject pronouns follows from the same principles that explain other additional differences between Spanish and Italian (cf. Leonetti 2014b, 2017): the productivity of subject inversion patterns, the use of Clitic Right Dislocation, and the use of clefting in interrogative clauses. The way IS is expressed in syntax and prosody is the crucial factor behind all these phenomena.

Notes

- 1 The investigation presented in this chapter is included in the research project ‘The Semantics-Pragmatics Interface and the Resolution of Interpretive Mismatches’ (SPIRIM), funded by the Spanish *Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad* (FFI2015-63497-P). A previous version was presented at the *8th International Contrastive Linguistics Conference* (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, May 2017). We are very grateful to the audience for stimulating discussion and to two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions. Our gratitude goes also to Aoife Ahern for checking the English.
- 2 The relevant facts in the preverbal position have to do with the alternation between strong pronouns and null subjects. Though Spanish and Italian belong to the same kind of null-subject languages, it is actually true that certain subtle differences in speakers’ preferences for explicit versus implicit subjects have been observed in recent research (cf. Filiaci 2011; Filiaci, Sorace and Carreiras 2014). Thus, the scope of the generalization in (a) might be in need of a revision. However, it is not entirely clear to us whether such differences should be explained by means of the same reasoning that we follow for asymmetries with postverbal pronouns. We cannot deal with this issue here.
- 3 Notice that we assume that IS is only partially encoded in syntax; hence, postverbal subjects occur *in situ* in both cases: being focal or not is not tied to specific positions in VP or vP.
- 4 A focal reading of the subject pronoun is, of course, possible, but then the subject has to carry emphatic stress. We are not considering this option here. The default pronunciation of (5) needs neither emphasis nor focalization of the pronoun.
- 5 Subject inversion does not have the same status in Italian and Spanish focus fronting; in Italian, it is not actually obligatory. This point deserves a detailed comparative analysis that we cannot develop here. Our general conclusions, however, are not seriously affected by this particular case.

- 6 This can be observed also in Spanish.
- 7 For different possibilities in *yes-no* questions, see Bocci and Pozzan (2014).
- 8 As shown by the occurrence of typical preboundary processes, such as lengthening of both the stressed vowel and the final vowel.
- 9 We are not relying on a specific analysis for right dislocation, apart from the basic assumption that the right-dislocated phrase is external to the clause.
- 10 The example in (13)a is an illustration of the widespread use of VSO in emphatic and ironic exclamations in colloquial Spanish (cf. Escandell-Vidal and Leonetti 2014).
- 11 Some of the relevant parenthetical expressions are becoming formulaic, but we believe that this does not affect the role of the facts in the overall argumentation. A detailed analysis of this context for inversion and the way it differs from so-called Quotative Inversion is left for future research.
- 12 It is not strictly true that postverbal subjects in inversion contexts must always be interpreted as narrow foci in Italian: inversion with unaccusative predicates, as in *È arrivata lei* 'She arrived', is mostly associated with wide focus readings. This is a general property of unaccusative and presentative constructions, and does not undermine our generalization. We assume that in such contexts, factors like aspect and thematic structure override the natural prominence of subject pronouns. See Bentley (2006: Chapter 8) for an insightful discussion.
- 13 The notion of informational articulation or partition may require some clarification, as our reviewers pointed out. The basic idea is that the two fundamental distinctions in IS *topic/comment*, *focus/background* involve a splitting of a syntactic string into two or more parts. This splitting into informational units is crucial for determining the way a clause fits in a context and can be observed in any language. Under certain conditions, strings can be interpreted as single informational units: this is what happens in *thetic*, all-focus sentences, when information focus extends all over the predication, with no overt constituent singled out as topic. However, the more structurally complex a string is, the more it needs informational articulation in order to be processed, in particular if its internal constituents, due to their intrinsic properties, resist integration into a larger informational unit. If some sort of internal articulation is needed, it is obtained by singling some constituents out either as topics or as narrow foci. Languages differ in their degree of resistance to having large, compact non-split informational units, especially in marked orders (cf. Leonetti 2014b, 2017 for details). This is why we distinguish between *restrictive* and *non-restrictive* languages. As we understand it, the distinction cannot be reduced to specific syntactic rules or to the encoding of discourse-related features in certain positions. We are not assuming a cartographic approach; we would rather favour a model in which IS is viewed as an independent level of representation that evaluates well-formed syntactic structures, thus acting like a filter.
- 14 We acknowledge the possibility of having *thetic*, all-focus readings with preverbal subjects too (in both languages), but we will not deal here with eventual differences in the availability of such readings.

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